



... wanted the Heavens to fall!

The bougainvillea

By Mini

HAVING lived in first and second floor flats in the north, the experience of staying in the ground floor is, well, really elevating. And to have a garden all to yourself is nothing short of luxury. When we got transferred to Bangalore we were blessed with this luxury—about 500 sq. ft. of virgin soil.

One of the first plants that my husband acquired was the bougainvillea. He took to gardening with gusto and was particularly partial to this plant. It grew up rather fast and the skimpy plant soon became the cynosure of all eyes. With its octopus branches laden with flowers this scion of the nyc-taginaceae order gave a flam-boyant appearance to the house. My husband used to spend a few minutes morning and evening, tying up its rampant branches, giving bamboo support and fertilising and watering it more often than seemed necessary.

"Does this plant which will grow unasked require all this attention," I asked my husband.

"What do you know about gardening," retorted the horticultural expert of six weeks standing, rather witheringly. And he added archly, "Are you jealous?"

Shift it!

How I laughed! The more I laughed the more annoyed he became. I thought I will reason with him and told him of the problems of lebensraum which the thorny bougainvillea was creating for the roses.

"Let us shift it, that is all I ask," I said.

"I don't tell you how to run your kitchen, do I?" he asked irrelevantly.

I gave up, or rather I almost gave up. The very sight of the predatory bougainvillea was keeping alive my anathema towards it. To top it all was an article in the Sunday Magazine Section devoted entirely—yes entirely, believe me—to bougainvillea. Has the world run out of useful subjects, I mused to myself. I tore up the paper in rage.

An opportunity presented itself when my husband went away on tour. I went for my pet aversion with hammer and tongs. I hired the neighbour's Ma! for this operation and he chopped off its branches as if he hated the plant. After the operation it was but a stub of its former self. Only the epitaph remained to be written.

Having done something hastily I was plagued with fears. My husband would fly off the handle. Perhaps he will go to court on grounds of mental cruelty! Or worse, he may refuse to talk to me for life.

I decided to break the news gently and slowly to him and pacify if possible. I met him at the station, something which I hadn't done before.

On seeing me he said "You needn't have come all the way". The poor dear! "I could hardly wait for you. I wish you don't go away on such long tours," I started. He smiled endearingly.

Opening gambit

I knew that the time had come for me to broach the subject. Having made a glorious opening gambit I came to a dead-end rather suddenly. Try as I would I could not muster enough courage. The words got stuck in my throat. He gave me another chance. Even when he asked me if I had read the article about the bougainvillea, all that I could say was "no" and no more.

The taxi reached home and I had still not broken the news. Without even dismissing the driver my husband headed towards the bougainvillea or rather what remained of it, attracted perhaps by the vacuum that showed.

He turned back and I almost fainted waiting for the heavens to fall. I wished that the taxi driver was not there to witness the dressing down I was about to get.

My eyes were still closed when I felt an arm round my waist. I started breathing again. "So, you have read the article," he asked. I couldn't understand what he was talking about. He continued.

"It says in that article that this is the right month to hard-prune the bougainvillea and I am glad you have done it. You will see it sprouting again and in a couple of weeks it will be back in all its glory."

There are moments when one doesn't know whether to cry or laugh. I did both!