

Misadventures, With Love

Have you ever thought about the geometry and feel of love? A line, a blob, an arc may be? Soft as candy floss; squidgy as jellybeans or effervescent as a fizzy drink? These questions left me without any answer. In my tireless pursuit for love, almost like hide-and-seek, I felt completely exhausted. Each time I was just about to touch love, it vanished! “Was love a reality or illusion?” I wondered. When three, I moved with family across continents, from India to UK. As the plane touched rainy Heathrow, mum said, “It’s raining cats and dogs!” I looked out of the window. Not one wet animal was in sight! The outlandish language and alien landscape left me confused. The warmth of a tropical home surrounded by loving grandparents was no more. Skype sessions overpowered geographical distance at the click of a button but lacked the feel and touch of those close. Love bred from familiarity; proximity mattered too. I did not let this pull me down but decided to explore the world around in blooming spring crocuses, sailing canal boats and picnics on lazy summer afternoons. In the library, I discovered love in glossy board books and rhymes. That nature, books and music could substitute companionship, left me overwhelmed. In playschool, I befriended Hayden. Shy, autistic, and quiet, he spoke little. Yet love was not lost in the unspoken and untold. Unlike Hayden, my Chinese friend Ling was loud and confident. She missed her family in China and its stories of exotic fire-spitting dragons and emperors in silken robes with pet nightingales. In Ling, I discovered that opposites attracted love.

Just as friendship blossomed, it was time for departure. A change in location from dad’s job unfolded a new life in brown paper boxes, goodbyes and handshakes and a new home. The new school and adjustments with friends in the classroom and playground left me exhausted. When Ben asked, “where are you from?” it left me feeling rootless, a wandering gypsy with misplaced identity. Dad was stressed, impatient and always time pressed. Thankfully, Mum’s love was the only constant. Even love needed nurturing, I felt. Thankfully, the neighbourhood had interesting folks, always caring for a chat. One was Milo, tad eccentric to the world for his unconventional lifestyle and love for Africa. He was my window to the continent – its rainforests, national parks, crocodile infested rivers, deserts, waterfalls, and craters. A teacher of zoology at a local college, he inspired in me a love for the wilderness. We had happy times building dens, watching squirrels gather nuts and frogs jump in the backyard pond. Milo brought me my first bird feeder, a stick insect kit, David Attenborough DVDs and together we adopted a Namibian baby rhino. Milo was a storehouse of folktales, his favourite being Anansi, the spider, narrated with a finger puppet. Sadly, Milo lost his job, cocooning in his bachelor pad, depressed. In such times, Deb arrived with all the attention I was craving for. Octogenarian, widower with wrinkled skin, dimpled cheeks and toothless smile, she lived by the Christian philosophy of ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’. Sunday Mass and Coffee Mornings were her excuses for socializing over black coffee, remembering Churchill, her war hero. Very English in her hats, pearls, afternoon tea and Sunday roasts, her evenings smelled of steaming casseroles over Scrabble and television soaps. Deb pampered me with Easter cupcakes and hand-knitted Christmas jumpers. She taught mum to bake her first chocolate cake for my 3rd birthday and how proud she was when it arose! Eventually, the unknown evolved as family. After all, people make a place! However, happiness was short-lived. Deb passed away, like a helium balloon, flying off at the slightest excuse. Her playful cat Penny cried for nights, scratching the front door. The pearl necklaces gathered dust, knitting needles their polish. With Deb’s exit ended love defying boundaries of nationality, culture, religion, and age. By now, I believed that love was ephemeral, lasting long enough only to be lost. It could be a tangent, a chord, or an arc, but certainly never a complete circle.

Be divine intervention or sheer good luck, a new English teacher, Mr. Carney, arrived in school. Tall, well built, with circular glasses and neatly combed hair, he smelled of dad's aftershave. His humour enlivened the most boring lesson making everyone feel good. Mr. Carney was a great listener and so sympathetic to even my silliest problems. In no time, he was my favourite teacher and friend. He helped me nurture my love for English, especially poetry. With barriers in communication waning gradually, I could express myself, felt understood and loved once more. But all good things come to an end. Mr. Carney announced leaving for greener pastures in New Zealand, where sheep outnumbered people. I consoled myself believing Mr. Carney was contributing his bit to the lopsided human statistics! A formal send-off followed; Mr. Carney's photograph replaced from the school board. No one brooded over his exit and life continued normal, as before. However, for me, life went out of sync, I felt lost and unhappy, downed in the fear of relationships made to be lost. To sum it all, my morale was at its all-time low and I was finding it hard to cope. However, in school one day, magic unfolded in circle time, as Ling sang aloud:

*"Make new friends but keep the old,
one is silver, the other is gold.
A circle is round, it has no end
that's how long I will be your friend"*

No song had made more sense before. It seemed my life's story, penned in the simplest words, totally comforting and solution to my adventures (or misadventures) with love. Everyone lost friends but moving ahead was the key! Life would be simple if old friends were remembered, and new ones made. "So cherishing love is important and, when timely, in letting go", I muttered, feeling less cynical. Head held high, I arose, a phoenix from the flames.

1000 words