



Love, Life & Fiction

A collection of short stories

Uttej Goparaju

LOVE, LIFE & FICTION
(A Collection of short stories)

Uttej Goparaju

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An Afternoon Dream

“**U**nlike miracles and tragedies, love is simple. How hard is it to believe?” I smiled and answered her as she looked into my eyes and asked me how I could shower love upto so much lengths. The lady’s voice was very sweet and soothing to my ears. It was so gentle and calming that it kept me intact inside the dream.

“Okay, now tell me why do you love me?” she asked me another question blinking her eye. “You know what they say, love or hate for the right reasons.”

“Is it a “why” now? Okay! I don’t know. Maybe I feel that I can turn to you any place, any time and you would respond back.” I replied casually.

“How do you know that I am the one?” She asked me again.

“Many forms of love reach us and bind with our life. Every form is a special one and has its weight. Until another form of love finds us and beseeches us to surrender to it, we keep loving like we never had. We stop it when we find the one and when we stop, we know that we have reached the destination.” I smiled wide.

“These words that you speak, they float in the air around me like the jasmine fragrance and slap me romantically. You are just too good at this.” She opened the pulpy grape bottle and drank a little.

“So, of all the people that you have shared a certain medium of love, who do you think changed you?”

When she continued and asked me this question, I got confused and my mind went blank. Suddenly, her form was fading

away. I couldn't get hold of it as it flew away into the sky as a group of flocking little birds. Right then, the dipping of the rain water over my window disturbed my sleep and that was when I realized that it was all nothing but a dream. I couldn't recollect the lady's face nor nothing that she wore. I only knew that her voice was sweet enough even to melt my sleeping mind. I got up to see my entire glass window was covered with rain droplets. It did look cool but obstructed my view to the evening sky.

It was a lovely rainy day in the city. There was a thick and heavy shower in the afternoon and post the rain, it looked like the roads were taken to a parlour by the rain. As the evening began, the sky was still dark but there was enough light not to be called it a night. The green trees contrasted themselves rising on the either sides of cleaned black roads. There were small twigs to the end of the road and the start of the pavement which couldn't take the swaying due to the heavy breeze. Too much perfection isn't nature's way anyhow. The people started coming out with their umbrellas expecting another shower any hour sooner.

The next day, I reached my home after my early morning jog, smoked a couple of cigarettes and called my friends if they had reached home from their long weekend's Goa trip. My friends had a trip to Goa after their well paid internships were done. My friends cum roommates and bloody rascals who never appreciate my long speeches. They brought binoculars as my birthday gift which took place a couple of months back during which all of them were broken. And hence they repaid me with a late surprise of buying me the binoculars. It was a professional Nikon Aculon A211, 8x42 zoom and had a large objective lens. The mix of violet and green shades when light falls on the lens always surprises me. As soon as they gave me it, while they rested after a long trip, I went to the window and kept my new gift into practice. At the old worn out bus stop that was across our home and could be seen through our window, there sat a girl. The bus stop was usually far away and nor did I intentionally point my lens, it just focused on her as soon as binoculars stood before my eyes. I stared at her. The way in which the breeze tickled her earrings gave an ease to my heart. She wore a red t-shirt and a

denim short. She had her hair cup cut. She was a natural beauty. She wasn't too fair nor too dark. I knew I shouldn't use binoculars for which I have been using. I could see none other than her in that place. As I stared through the lens, I observed that she wasn't moving at all. She was so still like a mannequin. Then, I zoomed a bit and tried to guess what she was doing. Within a couple of seconds, tears flowed on her cheeks like an irrigation pipe back in my village. She kept crying hard, placing both hands on her forehead. I didn't understand what was wrong. So, it was the quickest and sensible of the decisions I had to take, I kept the binoculars on the table and rushed outside towards the spot.

I took my bike and raced towards her. I parked the bike on the road and awkwardly staggered there for a while. She raised her eyebrows and looked at me. Her eyes became red out of crying and her cheeks, pink. I tucked my right hand in the pocket and raised the other trying to say, 'Hi'. She was confused and partly raised her hand too in reply. Then I decided to sit beside her and console her. I went and sat at a little distance from her.

"Are you both taking turns? You and sky?" I asked slowly with a smile trying to look into her eyes while her head was down.

"What?" She replied slowly. Her voice was phlegmy as she was breathing from mouth rather than nose due to the continuous weeping.

"You, sky, crying, raining?" I put an exclamation in my face.

She smiled a bit. I was relieved. Her tears slowly stopped. Her tissue was already soaked in water. I took my handkerchief and gave it to her. She wiped the left out tears with it and gave a large smile to me. Her smiling face was as good as a green tree's texture just after the rain.

"May I ask you why you were crying?" I asked her

"The funeral didn't go the way it should have been." She replied. I understood the fact of the moment that she has lost

someone dearer to her.

“So, who was it?” I was trembling to continue the conversation out of embarrassment in bringing out the topic.

“My father” She slowly murmured. I was utterly shocked, realizing that I was sitting beside a girl of my age who had just lost her father. I couldn’t imagine myself. Thinking myself on her feet would turn my world upside down.

“Do you want to talk about it?’ I asked her.

She shook her head in disagreement. We sat there for the next one hour without talking. She restarted her crying after a while and slowly controlled herself. She asked me if I could get her a water bottle. She rinsed her face with water, cleansed the wet face with my hand kerchief. She stood upright before me and smiled at me.

She offered her hand, “I am Keerthi and you are?”

“Manohar”

“Thank you, Manohar. I wish we could meet again. I am not in a mood to spend time in this city anymore. See you.” She said and walked away from the bus stop with her black travel bag on her shoulders.

That event passed away like a flash. The binoculars, her tears and the sight of her, walking away from me, everything took a swift run on the clock. I couldn’t understand what made us meet that day. It was a strange feeling that dwelled inside my heart. It created an impeccable zeal to seal our next meeting anyhow. I tried to search social media with her name. I couldn’t get her. There were thousands of accounts under her name. I wasn’t thinking of asking for her phone number. I asked the tea-seller that ran a small shop near the new bus stop that was built a few hundred metres away. He had not gotten the slightest idea about her. I told my friends what happened that day and how I got struck on her. One of them even made fun that if someone would give a kerchief to another, they would

eventually break away. The day of meeting her again didn't seem to come any sooner.

After many years, I found myself busy with building my career and riding the roller coaster, ups and downs, in the professional ladder. One day, I received a call from an unknown number. I checked my true caller to make sure it wasn't from the bank which has been after me for the credit card bill. After all, it was my bills and loans that made me force myself into this corporate chaos. I never wanted to work with any firm that supports consumerism but those are the ones which pay more and eventually draw me in. The call was from a mail delivery agency. As I reached the reception of my office on the ground floor, a thin guy with a cap on his head which read "CityPost" approached me with an envelope. The envelope looked small and weighed very less as it seemed to contain a letter. He smiled and asked me to rate the CityPost logging onto their homepage. I replied with a "See you" and let that guy off and ran to catch the elevator which was about to shut its doors. I quickly opened the envelope and pulled out the letter from it. The handwritten letter didn't even fill a page. I went to the cafeteria, poured down hot coffee, picked up a table near the glass wall that gives the employees a view into the concrete forest and started reading the letter.

"Hi Manohar,

It's been long. Isn't it? I hope you are doing well and haven't changed your name since then. Just kidding. Sorry for stalking you a bit on facebook and getting your whereabouts and thereby pulling your address and sending this letter. By now, you would've guessed who it is. I am Keerthi. You met me on an old worn out bus stop beside the road exactly 6 years ago. I was on a medley of feelings whether to post this letter to you or not after writing it. I wanted to meet you but didn't want to come back to the same city which took my father away in unforeseen circumstances. I'm running a confectionery on the shore near Om beach in Gokarna. It's a wonderful coastal place in Karnataka. If you haven't seen yet or have seen, in fact it couldn't matter less as I really want to catch up with

you on the seaside and get to know you. I hope you shall find some time, come and meet me. I ain't going anywhere because I live in a place which feels like everywhere.

Cheers, Keerthi

After reading the letter, there was a rush of feelings inside me. I went back in time to that meeting at the bus stop. I replayed in my mind, the tears on her face and how pink looked so beautiful on her cheeks. Her tear-sunken face still reminds me of how painful that day was to her. I remembered how I tried to move on from her. Thereafter, I have dated a couple of girls. One of them didn't find me interesting and the other was searching for a magical connection which sounded unusual and dramatic to me. Both the relations lasted not more than 6 months. I felt better without relations finding calmness being single. I thought of Keerthi many times. It gave me a sense of relief that I yearn for something pure other than the materialistic successes and failures in my career. Every time, I try to enjoy this relief, a twitchy pain struck me which pointed out her absence beside me. For more than any consequential expectations that may rise against meeting her, I need to get freed from the thought of not meeting her again. It came in the form of an invitation from her itself. And hence, I didn't look back, packed my bag. after reaching home from the office for which I waved goodbye for the rest of the week.

I have reached Gokarna, the bus hissed at the entrance of the om beach. The wooden arch that welcomed the tourists all over the world stood tall over my head as I saw the wide sun opening itself far away at the edge of the sea. The pale orange colored dawn and the light blue sea refreshed my senses with their contrasting colors. The hot but subtle breeze hit me to wake me up from the travel nap. I walked alongside the beach to reach a boulder onto which people were climbing to watch the OM shaped islands a few kilometers away from the coast. I wasn't interested much referring to the curiosity that was to be met in meeting her. I kept walking for the next one hour but not a single confectionary could I recognize. The sand gripped my feet and decelerated my walking pace to death.

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