



*Love,  
Kisses and  
All Things  
Warm*

PREETI SHENOY

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and  
All Things Warm

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*w*

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## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

‘Is it easier to love or to be loved?’ asked a good friend. I had no answers for him. Love is a topic that is as vast as, and more expansive than the cosmos and the entire universe. It means different things to different people, entirely depending on what stage of life they are in. If you asked a teen, a middle-aged person, a mother, a single person who hasn’t found ‘The One’, and someone in their sixties to define love, you would get different definitions from each of them.

This little collection consisting of five pieces is my attempt to explore what love is really about. A couple of them were written for my column in the *Financial Chronicle*. It also has some illustrations that I have hand-drawn, which express what love means to me. It also has two true love stories: that of Margaret and Cyril, and my very own.

You may believe in love or you may be cynical about it—but if you are left with a fuzzy warm feeling after you read these, I shall consider my job done.

Much love (and not just on Valentine’s!),

*Preeti Shenoy*

*Feb 14th 2015*

## LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

If you are an adult, chances are that you have been in love at least once, and you know how it makes you feel like Superman minus the costume. When in love, the dopamine—a neurotransmitter in your brain—goes on overdrive, releasing a lot of feel-good hormones, like oxytocin, phenylethylamine and a few other unpronounceable names. The chemicals combine to give you a natural high, making you see only what is great in the relationship. Everything instantly seems brighter, larger than life, and has clear, sharp, high-definition focus, like suddenly discovering clarity with new glasses after viewing the world through myopic, hazy vision for many years. The newly chosen one is perfect in every respect, and even the quirks are adorable.

Talks on the telephone stretch on for hours, the conversation flowing smoother than the finest silk with a phone-bill to match. There is nothing that can go wrong in this relationship, this one's for keeps, and you describe to those of your friends who aren't already bored of listening to you droning on, how perfect it is and how very fortunate you are.

Experts say that this stage can last anything from two months to two years. If things have gone smoothly during this time period, you find yourself living together, or in most cases, married. (After all, what is the reason to wait? This is undoubtedly 'The One' you want to spend the rest of your life with.)

Then creeps up the stage where the blinkers dissolve. Gradually, the neurotransmitters slow down, taking a break, and the brain stops producing the happy-hormones. This is when reality sets in and the fights start. Living together leads to the discovery of many hitherto unknown aspects of the 'perfect person', the newly-discovered traits not always in sync with your way of doing things. The earlier 'Sweetie, wet towel on the floor, don't worry I will get it', changes to 'Grrr ... I always have to clean up after you'.

If the relationship survives the assault of harsh reality and the not-so-harmonious adjustments that come with living together and the blinkers-off stage, then the couple is on its way to sturdier grounds. However, one cannot be complacent that it is now a happily-ever-after, as this part comes with its dangers too.

Sometimes the dangers are in the form of attractive colleagues with whom out-station trips on work are unavoidable, and sometimes they are in the form of an old flame you presumed had been relegated to history, but who has now reappeared with a casual 'Hey-didn't-we-go-to-college-together' message thanks to social media which allows people to track down almost anybody, except perhaps Rip Van Winkle (and perhaps him too, if you care to look hard enough).

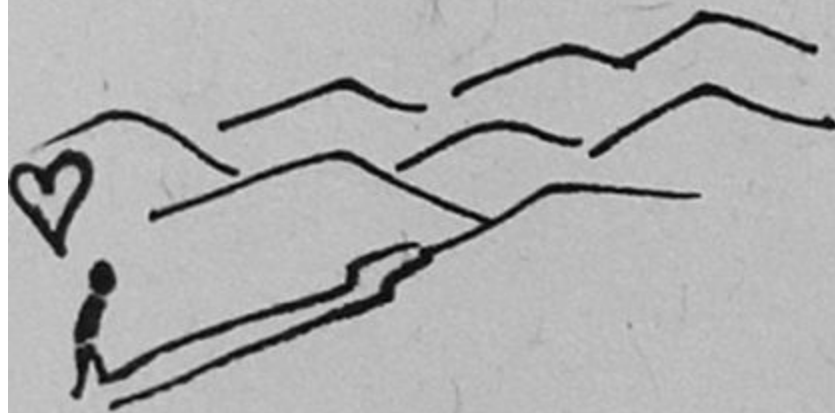
Whether you decide to go amber, green or red with these distractions or remain true-blue to your now not-so-perfect chosen one, with whom you have to spend the rest of your life, will be a decision you agonize over. If you ignore your call from the past, you would be left with an unfinished longing of what-if, and if you proceed there is a very real danger of it exploding into something far beyond your control and you risk losing what you have nurtured and built up over several years. Sometimes

you discover that the clear blue stream of the youth existed only in your imagination. The waters are muddier and murkier than ever before and it was safer to stay on known shores than to risk exploring. If your little amorous adventures are discovered by the spouse, the relationship faces another storm and is put to further tumultuous tests.

Statistical studies reveal that, globally, the chances of a divorce are highest between the fourth and eighth wedding anniversaries. These stages are not clearly demarcated, rather they are fluid, with each stage blending into another, learning lessons from it, coming back and moving on. Also, the possibility of a divorce is very much prevalent in all stages, much like the sword of Damocles.

If all the above are navigated safely, congratulations are in order, as you have made it to the 'we-are-a-team' stage. At this point, you have accepted your partner with all his/her flaws and weaknesses and you understand that you are never going to succeed in trying to change them. Yet you choose to be with the person, and for the first time the clichéd saying 'Love changes everything' begins to make new sense.

If I had to cross  
a hundred  
mountains...



I'd still do it with  
a smile if I knew  
you were waiting  
at the other end.

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## NOTHING OFFICIAL ABOUT IT

In 1989, in a law firm in Chicago, a young man, a summer intern, asked his mentor out. She turned him down but he was persistent. She finally relented, and they watched a movie together on their first date. Three years later they were engaged. They got married the following year, and are married to this date. The pair was none other than Michelle and Barack Obama. This is perhaps one of the most famous workplace romances that led to the altar. There are other equally well-known couples, like Bill and Melinda Gates, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, and Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao—if you want a couple who are closer home—who met at work.

More often than not there is nothing official about office romances. Once cupid strikes, you tend to linger longer at water coolers, coffee vending machines or the photocopying area, depending on where you are likely to run into your object of interest. If you happen to work on the same project together, chances are you will be passing ‘You look awesome’ and ‘Meet me for a cup of coffee?’ notes discreetly—or not so discreetly, depending on how alert your colleagues are—during boring company meetings.

Given the extra-long working hours which demanding careers require and the kind of amenities that most modern-day offices interested in retaining talent flaunt, right from fully-equipped gyms, cafeterias and snooker tables, it is no surprise that offices are fertile grounds for relationships to bloom. After all, here is a large selection pool where you are likely to meet someone who has a similar background and educational qualifications and a lot more in common than anyone you would meet on a matrimonial site (if your intentions are to get married) or a dating site (no matter what your intentions are or your marital status is).

Sometimes, even when people are in committed relationships, there develops an affinity for a certain co-worker. This has given rise to a new phenomenon called ‘office spouse’. It is an American term that has been coined to describe a relationship that develops between members who work in close proximity with each other for long hours. There is an unwritten understanding between the two that they will be there for each other throughout their careers, providing support from a demanding boss, impossible deadlines, unbearable colleagues or targets that are higher than the combined heights of Mount Everest and Kangchenjunga.

One may or may not be romantically involved with the office spouse. The relationship may be platonic, but there is a very real chance of it developing into a full-blown affair. When two colleagues work closely enough, they face similar pressures, deadlines and targets. They have a couple of meals together and slowly start sharing stuff that is personal. The line between official and personal gradually blurs over messages exchanged on BBM and WhatsApp. They become clever, funny and border on the slightly flirtatious, without really crossing any lines. Time spent with the co-worker suddenly seems fun, especially when you have to go back home after a long, hard working day to discuss children’s report cards, mundane domestic chores or due dates of electricity bills. Your co-worker probably understands you more than your spouse does, because your spouse just doesn’t grasp what you face at work. The



emotional connect happens unnoticed (after all it is not like you are having a relationship; hey—this is just a co-worker, remember), and before one realizes, it has transformed into a full-blown physical affair. Most people who are in one swear that they never intended for it to happen, and claim to be in happy marriages (or relationships) too.

Many corporate offices have a policy on workplace romance. While some companies say that it is okay as long as the two are not in the same department, other companies have clauses that require employees to declare any such relationship, if it develops during the tenure of employment. The reason is not hard to see. If the manager gets involved with a subordinate, it would be hard to rule out favouritism. Between two people in the same department too, it could lead to distractions that affect work.

If you decide to embark on an office romance, as unromantic and clinical as it might sound, it is always wise to check the company policy on the same before throwing your heart in. After all, as demonstrated when Harry met Sally, a man and a woman can never be ‘just friends’, without that little thing called sex getting in the way.

And whether it leads to marriage, unemployment or divorce is something that only time will tell.

I text you



to discover hours  
later that you  
had forgotten  
your phone.

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## THE KISS OF LIFE

A kiss on the lips has always been a subject guaranteed to quicken pulse rates and hold anybody's interest. This ultimate symbol of passion and romance has been depicted for many centuries now in several celebrated works of art, each one an image of an unforgettable love story.

Francesca was an Italian aristocrat who lived in the 13th century. She fell in love with her husband's brother Paulo and they managed to carry on an affair for about ten years till her husband walked in on them in bed. He instantly killed them both. Dante later used her as a character in one of his works, *The Inferno*. The story of Francesca and Paulo has inspired several theatrical and symphonic adaptations, poems and many artworks including Auguste Rodin's most famous sculpture, 'The Kiss', where the lips of the lovers never actually touch, denoting the tragic end to the love story.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses of Pygmalion*, a sculptor envisions the ideal woman and she is brought to life by Goddess Venus. Overjoyed, hardly believing his luck, swept by passion, he kisses her on the lips. The New York Metropolitan Museum houses the artwork inspired by the story—'Pygmalion and Galatea', painted by Jean-Leon Gerome in 1890.

'The Kiss' by Gustav Klimt, which is one of my favourite works of art, is an erotic masterpiece that depicts a couple in a tight embrace, the man bending down to plant a kiss on the welcoming cheek of a lover, shown with eyes closed, a close-lipped smile and a look of pure rapture. If ever put up for sale, it is likely to be the most expensive piece of art in history, as Klimt's earlier work sold for a record 135 million US dollars.

Sometime back, a short film by Tatia Piliieva released on the internet went viral, gathering more than 70 million views on YouTube, the number burgeoning every day. It was purportedly a candid recording of twenty people, complete strangers to each other, being asked to indulge in an intimate kiss on the lips for the camera. They are awkward and shy at first and then turn very intimate, the chemistry sizzling. It turned out that the film was actually an advertisement for a new clothing line, and the 'strangers' were in fact models, actors and musicians. Most people who were initially floored by its candidness—for they believed it was a slice of real life magic—felt duped to discover it was just hot models making out, and they poured out their disappointment on Twitter and Facebook.

In the recent Bollywood movie *Queen*, a kiss on the lips with a sexy Italian chef becomes the ultimate symbol of liberation for a middle-class Indian girl, raised with 'proper-Indian-values' and 'proper-Indian-culture'. She leaps gleefully, having broken a taboo, and leaves him, even though she has a chance to pursue a relationship with him if she had so wanted.

However, among all the kisses immortalized, whether through paintings, sculptures, movies or the internet, my personal number one favourite remains René Magritte's painting 'The Lovers', which shows a man and a woman kissing. What is unusual is that the heads of both are covered completely in grey fabric. On first glance the painting may look absurd and surreal, but with a little reflection, it could be interpreted in many ways. Perhaps it is a relationship shrouded in secrecy because of societal

norms, or maybe it illustrates that all relationships come with a lot of grey areas and there is never a clear-cut black and white. And even while you are with the person who is everything to you, perhaps deep down, there is always something that is not revealed, and hence the shrouds. It is a painting which makes you stop in your tracks, think and reflect about the relationships we form with the ones we are closest to, the things that we do not even dare think, let alone voice.

Maybe this unattainable something is what causes poets and musicians to compose soulful renditions. Adele sings about how a kiss set fire to the rain. Seal sings about a kiss from a rose on the grey, which gives him pleasure and power and yet it is also his pain. But it is Elvis Presley who gets it right in the song *Kiss Me Quick*, in which he asks for a kiss while the feeling still remains, because the future comes with uncertainties and love can vanish, leaving one hurting, longing and with an emptiness that refuses to go away.

When the rest of  
the world does not  
understand...



.. I know I always  
have a place I can  
escape to — Your  
thoughts.

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## A RELATIONSHIP THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

How can one meeting with a guy, who isn't even your type, dramatically alter your life? I met him one hot, sultry night, and forty days later we were man and wife. I chucked my job in Mumbai, moved to a tiny town, and in one swift move, fuelled by a love that can only be termed, in retrospect, summer madness, I had gone from high-flying career girl to a housewife.

And I was happy as a lark.

Before I met him, I always presumed chartered accountants were boring, taciturn geeky nerds with stiff buttoned-up shirts. He shattered the stereotype.

His Air Force upbringing, polished manners, love for reading, terrific sense of humour, combined with a slight shyness and good looks, were an irresistible package. When I met him, he had a splendid job with a chocolate manufacturer, but his life wasn't all sweet and he had faced its blows, losing his mother to cancer.

There was a very palpable chemistry between us, and I hoped as hell that it wasn't just in my head. The first time we met, we hit it off so well, we talked all night. Till he proposed, I died a hundred deaths. I had heard of brides having second thoughts and pre-wedding jitters. I had none. I was so certain about him.

If people were songs, all the guys I had dated were thirty-second ad jingles on a radio spot, while he was *November Rain* played on thousand-watt speakers.

And fortunately for us, the music has lasted nineteen years and is still playing.

Each word from  
you is worth...



... a hundred  
flowers.

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## A TIMELESS LOVE STORY

During the Second World War, the 617 squadron of RAF, also known as 'The Dambusters', was set up for the specific task of attacking three major dams in Germany. Its accomplishments have become legend in the annals of military history now. Margaret was a very pretty twenty-three-year-old who served with this squadron. Cyril was twenty-two years old when he became a leading air craftsman with the RAF Dutch Spitfire squadron during the same war.

If you think this is a war-time love story, you're wrong. But a love story it is. A remarkable one at that, which demonstrates the endurance of human spirit and that love can indeed strike at any age.

Margaret and Cyril got married a few years ago. Margaret was ninety-three, and Cyril ninety-two. They had met each other five years before at an RAF care home. Both never expected to find love at this stage in their lives, but they did. The *Sunday Express* in Britain carried their story and it quotes Margaret as saying, 'I never thought this would happen again but I love him with all my heart.' Their wedding took place in an 11th century church in the UK. Both the bride and groom were surrounded by their respective families and RAF airmen.

When I first read their story, I was moved. I admired their courage and their decision. I couldn't help comparing them to the elderly in India and how differently a piece of news like this would have been treated. Firstly, such a thing would probably never happen. The Indian societal norms would ensure that. Secondly, even if it did, the older people who dared fall in love would be labelled many things and such a relationship would be frowned upon.

In India, most people think that if you are above fifty, your life is over. Sex? Don't even talk about it! Older folks exist to merely take care of young toddlers whom the working parents conveniently thrust at them. They convince themselves that their lives revolve around temples, bhajans and other such 'elderly activities', and they convince themselves that they are happy doing it. (How can we even think of love? What will others say?)

The 2007 movie *Cheeni Kum*, directed by R. Balki, tackled these ideas and prejudices wonderfully. In the film, Paresh Rawal personified the 'conventional elderly' in India, while Amitabh Bachchan broke the stereotypes associated with age. Stories like these infuse, inspire and succeed in reinforcing the fact that age really does not matter. What matters is attitude and courage to really do what your heart tells you to.

Love can strike at any stage in your life. It might be just around the corner waiting to happen. It might happen when you are at the grocery store picking vegetables, least expecting anything out of the ordinary to occur. It might happen at a parent-teacher meeting. It might happen during a tennis match. It might creep up on you slowly, without you even realizing it, and might totally engulf you, sweeping you away, making you a mute spectator to its whims and fancies.

What you decide to do with it is your business. You might let it flourish—or you might brush it aside to pursue whatever it is that you are chasing at that point in your life. You might accept it with open



arms or you might refuse to catch it, and it may drop down right beside you and shatter into pieces.

You cannot escape it, this love. It is the driving force of life.

It exists—and if you have it, you are fortunate. If you have found it once and lost it, or if you are still waiting for it, be patient.

Love always knocks again.

OUCH... why does  
it feel like a



million pins when  
I do not hear  
from you?

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*It Happens for a Reason*  
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Preeti Shenoy is among the highest selling authors in India (Source: Nielsen scan). *India Today* has named her as being unique for being the only woman in the best-selling league.



Photograph by Nilotpal Baruah

In the past she has written for various publications such as *Times of India* and *Reader's Digest*. She currently writes a regular column in *The Financial Chronicle*. She has given several talks in many educational institutions such as the IITs and IIMs. She is an avid blogger, very active on the social media and has an extremely popular blog. She is also an artist specialising in portraiture. Her other interests are travel, photography and yoga.

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