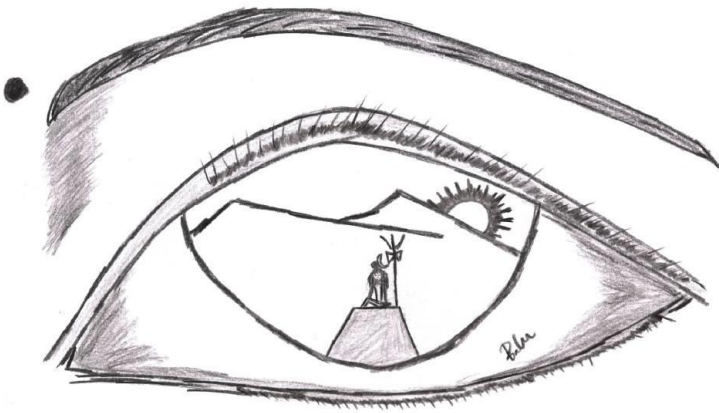


Balu

A Peacock Tale



*To all the peahens, whether short, tall, or
somewhere in between, who carry the
weight of insecurities*

Cover Picture: *Gauri, the daughter of the
King of the Himalayas, fell in love with Shiva,
the ascetic yogi who lived in solitude.*

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*“Dear Peahens gracing this beautiful planet,
I invite you to hear a tale, one that is mine
to share. It is a story that challenges the
silence and calls for courage to rise above
stereotypes”*

“Dear Readers, this book chronicles the journey of my thoughts from the moment I became self-aware to the present day.”

Chapter 1: A Strange Feeling

“Love—a strange feeling I still don’t fully understand. It has the power to make you do the most foolishly brave things, yet also unlock your deepest talents. For me, it was singing and drawing, all in the hope of capturing her attention.”

I was born 34 years ago, in a time when globalization was beginning to reshape the world. As countries opened their doors to one another, business flourished, and with it came the blending of cultures, stereotypes, fashion, and more. The younger generation found itself at a crossroads, uncertain of which path to follow, caught between tradition and the rapidly changing global trends.

Everything was fine until the summer I turned 12. It was playtime at summer camp when I first noticed a girl riding her bike, and I felt something different, 'a strange feeling'—something I couldn't quite understand. I had no idea what that feeling was, but it stirred something inside me, pushing me to seek her attention.

When my attempts failed, frustration took over. Instead of reaching out, I started teasing her, picking petty fights, and eventually, I stopped talking to her altogether. I still don't fully know what was happening in my mind back then, but something had shifted inside me, and I wasn't sure how to handle it.

A year passed, and I entered my teenage years. It was the first day of school, and I was excited to see my friends after the long summer break, eager to spot any new faces in class. In my town, the rainy season always begins with the reopening of schools, and that year, it seemed as though the rain was just as eager to greet us.

It was on that very day I met her—my first love. To be honest, I had never encountered anyone like her before, nor have I since. ***She was always calm, never losing her***

temper, with a soft smile that never seemed to fade. She had a quiet grace that left a lasting impression, even in the midst of a downpour.

I still remember that day vividly. I was watching the rain, noticing how the ground had flooded with red-tinted water. A sleek black car slowly pulled up in front of the school, and I couldn't help but stare as the door opened. A girl stepped out, opening an umbrella as she emerged. She was taller than me, wearing red pants and a yellow top. She wasn't alone—her younger sister was with her. At first, I thought she was just some beautiful girl dropping off her sister at school.

Two days later, I saw her in my class. I couldn't believe I hadn't noticed her before in a room of just 26 students—perhaps I had been too absorbed in my own world, sitting in the front row, blind to everything around

me. But the moment I saw her, my heart skipped a beat. This time, I knew exactly what it was. I wasn't the same confused boy from a year ago. I had learned the name of that feeling: love.

And I hadn't learned it from life, but from all those clichéd movies I'd binge-watched. It's a perfect example of how deeply media sinks its hooks into young minds, shaping the way we see love, even before we truly understand it.

Of course, she was the most beautiful girl in the class, so it wasn't just me. I knew other guys must have felt the same, turning this into a competition. She was tall, and I was the shortest guy in the room. I realized I'd have to work hard, do something different, to get her attention and make my presence known.

But I had no clear plan—this was all new to me. So, I decided to keep it simple and just talk to her. She always brought fancy things to class, like a whitener, something I'd never seen before. When I made mistakes, I'd cross them out and rewrite, but she'd erase them clean and write over it. That's when I had an idea.

Nervously, I walked up to her and asked, "Can I borrow your whitener?" It was the first time I'd spoken to her, and my heart was racing. I thought I had made my move, but before I knew it, the other boys swarmed in, snatching the whitener to scribble their names on their desks. She was clearly annoyed, and my first attempt at getting her attention had turned into a complete disaster.

There are two stereotypes in society that I've always been aware of: the boy should be taller than the girl, and the boy should be

older. I never really cared about the height part, but the age thing stuck with me. The last thing I wanted was for her to say, "Oh, I'm older than you," and start seeing me as a younger brother if I ever worked up the courage to confess my feelings.

So one day, when no one was in the classroom, I sneaked a look at her school diary to check her date of birth. I was relieved to discover she was six months younger than me. With that, there was nothing standing in my way—or so I thought.

A few months passed, and I still hadn't found the courage to confess my feelings to her. With her birthday approaching, I decided I would write her a love letter. I'm not sure if the art of letter writing still holds its charm in today's world, where WhatsApp and instant messaging dominate our lives.

So, I stayed up all night, pouring my heart into an eight-page letter—telling her how I first saw her, how I felt, and all the "bla bla" in between. The next day, I walked into class with the letter in my trembling hands, fear and excitement battling inside me. I didn't have the courage to give it to her directly, so I handed it to the girl sitting next to her and asked her to pass it along before quickly walking away.

I couldn't bring myself to turn around, too scared to witness her reaction. My heart raced, caught between hope and dread, as I waited for what would come next.

For hours, I kept my gaze fixed on the blackboard, too nervous to look back. When lunchtime arrived, I finally dared to glance her way. She seemed completely calm, as if nothing had happened at all. There was no hint of insecurity on her face—so different

from the reactions I often encountered when approaching other girls. It left me feeling both relieved and confused, wondering what she truly thought of my letter.

Finally, I decided to tell her the three great words: "I love you," and I chose her birthday to confess my feelings. The day arrived, coinciding with our school cultural day, a celebration filled with music, dance, and drama. When I reached school, however, I couldn't find her anywhere. I searched frantically, my heart racing.

At last, I spotted her heading toward a nearby chapel. Gathering my courage, I followed her inside. In that quiet space, something shifted within me—I felt an unexpected surge of bravery. With my heart pounding, I confessed my feelings to her.

To my surprise, she showed no change in expression. She remained calm and simply

walked away, leaving me standing there, stunned. I lingered in the chapel for a while, replaying what I had just said in my mind. From that moment on, I never found the courage to propose to another girl in the same way again.

The next day was the second day of the cultural program, and I was set to perform in a group dance. I don't remember the song, but it was a Tamil track that filled the auditorium with energy. As I moved through my steps, I caught sight of her in the back row, watching me intently. In that moment, I felt a rush of warmth—she seemed happy, genuinely enjoying the dance. Her presence gave me a newfound sense of confidence, and I danced with all my heart, hoping to impress her.

Days and weeks passed, and I barely spoke to her. Surprisingly, I found a sense of peace

in the silence. But my studies suffered, and when I failed my math exam, everything shifted. To my shock, the math teacher was replaced by a new one—a real tyrant. He had a knack for discipline that involved a stick, and no student was safe. Scoring 90/100 didn't spare you from his wrath; his "awards" varied depending on your marks.

If you scored above 75%, you'd receive a few taps on the hand; below that, and you could expect a sting on your backside. I endured my fair share of those stick "kisses" until I finally pushed my score above 75%.

Despite his harsh methods, he seemed genuinely pleased with my progress, even if he continued to administer a light smack on my hand. One day, as I turned around after one of those moments, I caught sight of her. She was beaming with happiness—radiating a joy I had never seen before. In that instant,

the pain faded away, overshadowed by the warmth of her smile. It reminded me that sometimes, even in the toughest of circumstances, happiness can emerge unexpectedly.

Months flew by, and I found myself improving in my studies. I pushed through the final exams with renewed determination. But then came the crushing news from my friend: her parents were taking her abroad, and I wouldn't get the chance to see her again. In a time before mobile phones and social media, the thought of losing her felt like a heavy weight on my chest.

I was overwhelmed with sadness, struggling to catch my breath. I didn't even have the chance to say goodbye. The silence that followed was deafening, filled with all the words left unsaid and the memories we never got to create. It felt like a part of my

world was slipping away, leaving an ache that lingered long after she was gone.

But not all good things need to end in sadness; sometimes they can lead to hope. I just had to wait a few more months. A new academic year began, marking a fresh chapter in my life—one without her. I often found myself lost in memories of our time together, feeling a bittersweet ache of longing.

One day in August, after the midterm exam results were released, I went to school with my parents to collect my report. To my delight, I discovered I had performed well, ranking second in my class. After struggling so long, it felt incredible to finally achieve a ranking. My parents beamed with pride, their joy infectious as we returned home.

Around 2 PM, the phone rang. My father answered first, it was for me and when I saw

the number displayed, my heart raced—I recognized it. He called my mother over, and they stood beside me, as if awaiting something monumental.

“Hello,” I said, already knowing who was on the other end. It was her voice, bright and familiar. She congratulated me on my achievement and began asking a flurry of questions: “How are you? How’s your athletic training going?”

But I felt tongue-tied, overwhelmed. I could only manage simple “yes” and “no” responses, the weight of my emotions pressing down on me.

You might wonder why I was acting this way. There was something I hadn’t mentioned before. Remember that love letter I spoke of? Someone had found it and passed it to my class teacher. The letter traveled through many hands until it reached the principal’s

desk—who also happened to be my Physics teacher. She liked me and felt compelled to intervene, telling me that I was too young for such feelings and needed to focus on my studies. She threatened to inform my parents, and I begged her not to.

She agreed, but only if I performed well academically. Unfortunately, I later learned that she broke her word and informed my parents after I failed my math exam. When I brought my answer sheet home, my father slapped me across the face, saying, “I know what you’re doing in school.” In that moment, everything was revealed: my parents were aware of the situation. That’s why they stood beside me, listening intently to every word I spoke.

I wanted to ask her so many things—“How are you? Where have you been?”—but when the moment came, I couldn’t find the

words. I often wondered how she felt about my silence. After that call, she never reached out again, yet I was grateful to know she remembered me after all those months.

There was still one question lingering in my heart, one I hoped to ask her if we ever met again: “Did you ever feel the same way about me, even for just a fleeting moment?”

Years later, after graduating with a degree in Physics and starting my teaching career, I learned that she had married and moved to the USA with her husband. The news hit me hard, leaving me feeling sad and depressed. It was clear I needed a change, so I resigned the very next day, hoping to escape the weight of those memories.

Fortunately, a few months later, I secured a research position elsewhere, where new adventures awaited me. It felt like a fresh start, a chance to embrace new experiences

and perhaps find a way to move on from the past.

Chapter 2: Pursuit of Peace

“Moving on isn’t easy; the past has a way of haunting us. To truly break free, you must keep your mind engaged with new pursuits, especially in the quest for Peace.”

In the previous chapter, I shared the exciting news that I had secured a temporary research position at a prestigious research institute. However, I jumped many years ahead and left out some important details along the way. To provide context for what I'm about to share, let me offer a brief overview of my background and the environment I come from.

I was born into a middle-class family in a village not far from the sea. During the monsoon, if I close my eyes and concentrate, I can hear the sound of the waves crashing in the turbulent waters. My parents were very protective, never allowing me to play with the

other children in the village. Instead, I grew up spending most of my time with my brother. While their intentions were rooted in love, overprotective parents can create a toxic environment. They often don't allow you to choose your own path, instead imposing their dreams and forcing you to follow a journey they were unable to take.

In my village, people seemed more concerned about each other's children than their own. They constantly watched for any missteps, eager to gossip. If we could choose our skin tone and height before birth, we would certainly opt for fair skin and tall stature. If not, we had to brace ourselves for comments from strangers. I once encountered a guy who bluntly asked me, "Why are you so dark? Your grandfather was so fair." I was taken aback by his audacity. I wanted to explain that my maternal

grandfather was dark-skinned, just like me. The village had an undeniable preference for fair skin and height, and unfortunately, I didn't fit that mold.

I hope you remember the day she called to congratulate me on my improved academic status. I'm taking you back to that year. The vacancy her absence created was so significant that I needed something to shift my focus. During this time, I began to develop an interest in learning physics. While I had always been an average student, my curiosity was boundless.

It was 2005, the 100th anniversary of Einstein's groundbreaking theory of special relativity. Fascinated by the articles I read, I told my parents I wanted to become a physicist. However, both were firmly against

the idea. My mother, a postgraduate in biology, warned me against pursuing science, citing her own struggles to find stable work. She had sacrificed many of her dreams to care for our family, becoming a housewife and part-time teacher. I loved her deeply for that.

My father, on the other hand, shared his own unfulfilled dream. "Dear son, I always wanted to be a doctor, but I couldn't. You should pursue that path for me." I firmly told him that wouldn't happen, and this disagreement created a huge rift between us for the next four years. Eventually, my father realized he couldn't change my mind. In a moment of compromise, he took me to meet a nuclear physicist living nearby for guidance.

The physicist's words struck me: "If you want to be a theoretical physicist, don't even think

about a settled life before 35—if you're lucky.” I was ready to accept that challenge, and I enrolled in a bachelor's program after finishing school. Meanwhile, my relatives were deeply concerned, planting seeds of fear in my mind with warnings like, “If you don't score above 90%, forget about doing your master's.”

So, during my bachelor's, my sole focus became securing a future—ensuring I earned a spot for my advanced studies.

I completed my bachelor's degree with over 94 percent, earning the opportunity to pursue a master's at a prestigious central university. While I still considered myself an average student, my curiosity about understanding the world from a physicist's perspective drove me. After completing my master's, I spent a year teaching physics to

children from rural areas. As I mentioned before, one day I made the decision to resign.

After my teaching career, I found myself at a prestigious research institute. I was now doing something entirely different: experimental physics. My research involved using lasers and rubidium atoms to develop a sensitive magnetic field sensor. Two years have passed since then. You might wonder why I never fell in love again. The truth is, there were a few lackluster, one-sided love stories that didn't hold much intensity, and I barely remember them anymore.

It was the beginning of a new academic year, and new researchers and interns had arrived. As usual, I was playing football that evening when I noticed her for the first time. She was sitting at the edge of the field, and I thought it was unwise to be so close to the boundary—she could get hit by the ball at

any moment. Sure enough, she did get hit! Still, I brushed it off and continued playing.

It took me a couple of weeks to realize that she was truly different from the other girls. Some evenings, we played badminton in front of our institute—not on a court, but on the road. I would smash my racket with force to intimidate my opponent. The game was intense when, suddenly, I saw her walking through the center of the makeshift court. A wave of fear coursed through my heart; I was relieved I hadn't accidentally hit her with my racket. I paused the game and watched her, noticing she seemed completely absorbed in her own thoughts, oblivious to us. In that moment, I silently told myself, "I love her."

Love—it's a concept I still don't fully understand, and I realize that different people define it in various ways. Its meaning seems to depend on individual perspectives.

Is it something unconditional and selfless? Is it lust? Or perhaps a chemical reaction happening in our brains? While it might involve brain chemistry, one thing is certain: I'm drawn to intellectually stimulating girls for reasons I can't quite explain.

I began to learn more about her background; she wasn't a PhD student but an intern at the institute for a year, conducting research in theoretical physics. When I saw her, she often walked around the institute lost in her own thoughts, seemingly indifferent to what was happening around her.

Of course, she was slightly taller than me, but I didn't mind. Her mother tongue was different from mine as well. At that time, I believed love was unconditional and selfless—that you could love and care for someone without expecting anything in

return. However, this wasn't entirely true; deep down, I hoped that she would come to understand my feelings and reciprocate one day. You might wonder if that was ever possible—I often did, or at least I hoped.

I always tried to hold onto what Andy told Red in *Shawshank Redemption*: “Remember, Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” I believed that hope was a powerful force that never truly fades, and that we must cling to it until the very end. However, after reflecting on my past, I realize I was wrong about hope. You must also be ready to move on to something else at any time.

But I wasn't as enlightened back then as I am now. My selfless feelings gradually turned into a desire to have her in my life,

which ultimately led to sadness. We had a mutual friend, a classmate from my master's program. Although we used to dislike each other during those days, we eventually grew close. He noticed my sorrow and asked me what was wrong. When I told him, he urged me to talk to her and become her friend, to help her feel secure in my presence. I hesitated because deep down, I feared she would say no to my request. Perhaps I lacked the courage to follow his advice, and that's a regret I carry with me now.

Months passed, and I never found the courage to start a conversation with her, probably because I already knew the likely outcome. Finally, the time came for both of us to leave the institute. She completed her internship and was heading back to continue her master's, while I received a PhD position

in Paris. Even though I never expressed my feelings, somehow she sensed them.

One day, she approached me to congratulate me on securing the PhD position. For a moment, I was taken aback, frozen in disbelief as if I were dreaming. Once I regained my composure, I managed to say, "Thanks." It was the first time in an entire academic year that I had a real conversation with her. She was genuinely nice to talk to, and we chatted for a while. I felt foolish for missing the opportunity to connect with her earlier, all due to my preconceived notions about her.

In the end, we set off on different paths in life, each traveling our own road.

Six years later, I find myself searching for peace in both my life and academia, yearning for a companion in life and a team of like-minded researchers to discuss science. Despite my efforts, I'm still seeking a stable job while navigating postdoctoral research after my PhD. I often feel a sense of incompleteness—a longing for companionship, whether that be a girlfriend or a future wife.

If you were to ask me why I want a companion, I couldn't provide a clear answer. I see everyone around me with partners, looking happy as they travel together and share joyful moments. Meanwhile, I'm living in Paris, caught in a cycle of solitude: home, lab, home, lab. It's a monotonous existence, and I know it. I haven't found the one who shares the same curiosity about life, someone who isn't weighed down by the insecurities imposed by societal stereotypes.

This void leaves me questioning my path,
and I crave a connection that transcends
loneliness—a partnership that inspires and
uplifts, leaving a life worth living until death.

Chapter 3: Pursuit of a Daughter-in-Law

"Once, my maternal uncle asked my mother, 'Why do you want to marry this man? He's crippled and has no job.' She simply replied, 'Because he, too, deserves a companion.'"

This chapter is about my parents' pursuit of finding a daughter-in-law for me, a process known as "arranged marriage" where I come from. It's essential to grasp how parenthood functions in my culture; otherwise, the Western world might mistake it for some kind of utopia.

In my culture, when a child is born, parents often forget about themselves, dedicating their entire lives to their children. Even when the child turns 18, graduates from college, or moves away, the parents still try to maintain control over their lives. It might seem like an act of love, but I believe it runs deeper. Parents often fear their children will gain independence and drift away. Even if you live halfway around the world, they hold on

tightly. Perhaps it's because they expect their children to care for them in old age, as nursing homes are rare and not widely accepted in my culture.

When parents sense their children becoming independent, they often find ways to maintain control, with emotional manipulation being one of the most effective. For instance, after I didn't call my mother for just one week due to an emotional breakdown, she asked, "Are you trying to give me a heart attack?" This kind of subtle emotional pressure keeps you tethered to their expectations, making it hard to break free.

In my experience, when there's a significant generation gap between parents and children, it becomes nearly impossible to share your struggles with them or expect any

real emotional support. They can't grasp the nature of your problems or the situations you're dealing with. Instead, they dismiss your concerns, saying, "We faced bigger challenges than you." Sometimes, it feels like parents view their children as machines—expected to function without complaint. This disconnect is often why children seek comfort and understanding from someone else, someone who can offer the emotional support they never received at home. We aren't taught how to handle life's challenges, nor how to cope with the emotional burden they bring. Instead, parents often load us with their own expectations, leaving us unprepared and isolated when it comes to navigating the difficulties of adulthood.

Let me take you back to 2019 when I landed in Paris, ready to embark on my PhD journey.

My parents, however, had their own plans. They thought, “Let’s find our son the *perfect* girl!” Now, when they say “perfect,” they mean *perfect for them*—not for me. Enter the arranged marriage system!

Back in the day, this matchmaking was done through a middleman, a broker, who had a whole collection of profiles of girls like a vintage record store. You’d invite him over, and he’d lay out all the options for you like you were picking a new vinyl. If you liked someone, he would hop over to her house to see if her parents were interested, charming her in the process. If that didn’t work, he’d just move on to the next home—like a real estate agent, but for your future spouse.

But then came the internet, and oh boy, things changed! Suddenly, we had

matrimonial websites, which my parents eagerly signed me up for. Now, if you're thinking this is like Tinder or Bumble, think again. On these sites, your profile is under total parental control. Forget about swiping right; your love life is like a family board meeting!

The girls you choose undergo serious scrutiny—imagine background checks and family interviews. After a thorough examination, your parents present you with a shortlist. And here's the kicker: in my culture, marriage isn't just about two people; it's about uniting two families.

In the same way that the girls undergo scrutiny, their parents evaluate the profiles they receive from boys. Now, if you're short, dark, and not particularly well-settled, getting

shortlisted by the girls' parents can be a challenge. Even if you pass the initial screening with the girls' parents, there's still a high chance of getting rejected by the girl herself!

Now let me share my experience with the whole arranged marriage process. Living in Paris, one thing was clear: finding a companion was going to be more challenging due to the language barrier, being an introvert and my appearance. So, I decided to try my luck on a matrimonial site.

Initially, my parents never shared the password to the matrimonial site with me. They insisted they would send me a list of girls to choose from. As I mentioned, my father has an obsession with doctors, so naturally, they found a doctor for me.

Fortunately, I managed to qualify in the first stage of scrutiny with her parents. I got her number, and we had a couple of chats. She had no issue marrying a physicist who was doing research to become a “doctor,” but she had one condition: she wanted to meet me in person to make a final decision. A WhatsApp video call just wasn’t sufficient for her.

Meanwhile, my parents were visiting her home while her parents were coming to ours. It felt like a real-life drama unfolding! What made me particularly sad was this incident: I told my parents that if I married a doctor and brought her to Paris, would she be able to work here? I explained that it would be very difficult for her to learn a new language, so it might be better to look for someone pursuing a PhD or from an engineering background. My parents were furious. They were so

invested in making this marriage happen that they didn't give me a choice to say no.

Let me share a funny incident that happened while I was chatting with the doctor. During one of our video calls, she commented on my long hair, saying she didn't like boys with long hair. My parents had never allowed me to grow my hair out, even though I always wanted to, so once I was in Paris and away from them, I thought, "Why not go for it?"

Since it was COVID time, I stayed home and didn't visit a barber for six months, so my hair had grown quite long. I was really enjoying my new look. But after hearing her enchanting mantra about cutting hair, I couldn't resist! The very next day, I got my hair trimmed and sent her a picture. She was thrilled!

Later, when my parents visited her family, she was proudly boasting about the impact she had on me, claiming credit for my haircut. My mother was absolutely delighted, thinking she had worked some kind of magic on me!

We continued our conversations for almost a year, and I started developing feelings for her. However, she still wanted to meet in person before saying yes. Unfortunately, due to COVID, I couldn't visit home, and it was uncertain when I would be able to. Her parents eventually told my parents that they couldn't wait any longer and were considering other prospects.

Feeling a bit down about the situation, I decided it was time to move on.

For a while, I wasn't getting any matches from my area, so I decided to broaden my search and see someone from France. I found a girl on the matrimonial site who was doing her PhD in the south of France. My parents were not thrilled about this, as she was Latin Catholic and we are Roman Catholic. You might wonder what the difference is, but believe me, there's a significant distinction in how they practice in church!!!.

Despite their concerns, they reluctantly decided to reach out to her parents. Fortunately, her parents were okay with it and ended up giving me her number to call.

She was a cool person, and we could talk for hours. I realized we had a lot in common—our passion for science and love for travel. One day, she even told me that we were made for each other. Finally, we decided to

meet in person. I told her I would come to see her, and at last, the day arrived! I took the train with my mind buzzing with excitement at the thought of meeting her. She called me to ask for my location and said she would be at the platform to welcome me.

What happened on the platform is something I will never forget, and I'm sure you're curious too. When our eyes met, I saw her happy expression suddenly shift to one of sadness. I sensed the reason even before we spoke; she didn't like my appearance. Although she didn't mention it directly, I could tell from her behavior.

We spent half a day together, and then I returned to Paris. Just before the train pulled

into the station, she messaged me, saying she had concerns about my height and didn't want to proceed. Strangely enough, I wasn't sad; I had already prepared myself for this possibility.

Let me conclude this chapter by sharing one more incident that helped me realize that arranged marriage is not a solution for finding a companion; rather, it only amplified the insecurities I had within myself.

One day, my mother called and asked me to come home to visit a girl's family. She worked as an engineer at a car manufacturing company in Italy and was currently in her hometown for a short vacation. Having spent over two years in

Paris, I decided to take two weeks off to meet her, specifically her parents.

When I arrived, I quickly realized that her parents had invited us under the pressure of a mutual family friend. My parents, along with my aunt and uncle, went to her home, but I wasn't particularly excited after my previous experience.

Upon arrival, her father greeted us outside but hardly acknowledged me. He was very tall, but from the matrimonial profile, I knew the girl was 5 cm shorter than me. As he invited us into their home and served coffee, he engaged in deep conversation with my parents, seemingly oblivious to my presence. He didn't ask me a single question, and the

girl was nowhere to be found. I thought I might leave without even seeing her!

After a while, my aunt finally asked where the girl was. I think at that moment, her father realized that we were there to meet his daughter, not him. He called her and suggested we go to a more private area to talk. I suspected her sister was observing us from somewhere upstairs. --pass

Given my previous experience and a nagging feeling that something was off from the start, I wasn't eager to open up and engage. I asked her about her future plans and her job, but I found myself more interested in her work than anything else. We talked about cars and the sensors she was working on, even delving into image

processing in MATLAB. However, deep down, I was sure it wasn't going to work out.

After our conversation about cars, we parted ways, and her father mentioned they would let us know their decision in a day. My parents were eagerly waiting for their call, but I knew they would never reach out.

Two days later, our mutual family friend called to inform us that they were not interested.

After four long years of searching, I often find myself grappling with a haunting question: Why am I unable to find a companion through these matrimonial sites? Am I being held back by my lack of a stable job, or is it

my height, complexion, or age that puts potential partners off?

I find my answers pointing toward stereotypes that linger in our society.

In the rest of this book, I will explore these stereotypes and reflect on the courage it takes to break free from them. Together, let's uncover the beauty of embracing our true selves and finding connections that go beyond appearances.

In all these years of solitude, I've learned one important thing: solitude isn't necessarily bad. In fact, it's a rare opportunity to reflect deeply on yourself. It allows you to find answers to the big questions—What is your true passion? What genuinely brings you happiness? You start to uncover hidden potential within yourself. For example, writing this book.

During my research, I often felt envious of my colleagues. They worked in teams, coming from diverse backgrounds, sharing knowledge, and growing together. My work, being unique and fundamental, left me without peers to engage in meaningful discussions—apart from my supervisor. I once told him I felt like a "one-man army," and that feeling left me in a deep depression for a long time.

Then, in the quiet of my solitude, I found an idea: to create a program for beginners to learn Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR). I immersed myself in this project for months, even dedicating weekends to it. This journey became a kind of meditation for me, and through it, I not only honed my own skills but

gained the confidence to tackle any problem in my field.

In the end, I found my peace in academia, and I realized that solitude wasn't a curse—it was a catalyst for growth.

Right now, I'm trying to answer one of the hardest questions that solitude brings: how do I fully embrace it, in case I never find a companion in life? I'll be sharing these reflections in the chapter to come, and I hope you'll continue reading this journey with me.

A word of caution: in the chapter ahead, there's a good chance your ego may feel bruised. But understand, this is part of my pursuit to confront and answer the difficult questions I'm asking myself.

Chapter 4: A Peacock Tale

"What defines a choice?"

There's no such thing as a good or bad choice—there's only *the* choice. This is a mantra I repeat to myself often. For those wondering, a mantra is a word or phrase you mentally chant, helping you focus or make consistent decisions. Take, for instance, a personal mantra like: "I will never choose a partner who is my height or shorter." It guides your thinking and solidifies your resolve, shaping the choices you make.

Let me tell you a story, "*a Peacock Tale*". Long ago, in the thick shrubs of the university campus where I did my master's (our campus was so vast it had three lakes and endless groves of trees and shrubs), there lived a peahen and her children.

One day, one of the children asked, "*How did you meet our papa?*"

The peahen smiled softly and began her tale. “It was just after a heavy rain, when the sun broke through the clouds. I was singing a song of joy when I saw him—a peacock. He was magnificent, with the most beautiful tail I had ever seen. He danced, spreading his feathers wide. His tail was long and glimmered like jewels when the sunlight touched it. I had never seen anything so dazzling. He was so handsome... I couldn’t help but fall in love.”

She paused, lost in the memory for a moment, then continued, “But there were many other peacocks around, too. I remember one in particular. His call wasn’t as grand, and his tail was worn, many of his feathers had fallen. Yet, he sang so beautifully, trying to win my heart. But... he wasn’t a match for your father’s beauty.”

The child noticed a hint of sadness in her eyes as she recounted her romantic past and asked, “When will we see him again?”

The peahen’s smile faded. She had no answer, for deep in her heart, she knew the truth—he had gone to dance for someone else.

I shared this story to spark a conversation about how we make choices. It’s not about judging the choice the peahen made, but understanding why she made it. What drives us to choose one path over another? What shapes those decisions? These are the questions worth exploring.

I believe you should never regret your choices. Instead, reflect on them—consider how and why you made those decisions in the first place.

Sometimes we make random choices in life when the outcome doesn't seem to differ significantly. For example, when I went to buy a sandwich, there were many options—A, B, C, and so on. Since my main goal was simply to satisfy my hunger, I could choose any one of them, unless I had a specific reason to prefer one over the others.

And sometimes, our choices aren't random. We have specific reasons behind them, often rooted in our deeper thoughts and experiences. These reasons can also be heavily influenced by concerns about what others might think if we make a particular choice.

I pity those who can't make their own decisions, or who make choices solely to please others, trapped by stereotypes. True freedom lies in breaking away from these confines and choosing for yourself.

Once, I was having dinner with a few friends, and we were discussing an upcoming trip. Out of the blue, one guy asked, "Should I take a backpack or a suitcase?" I was surprised. Can't he make such a simple choice on his own? Does he really need someone else to decide that for him?

In another instance, a guy was passionately arguing, "The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. We need communism." I told him I preferred capitalism over communism because capitalism, at least, offers choices. But honestly, I wasn't invested in the debate. What struck me was the contradiction: the guy who was against the rich getting richer was decked out in all high-end, branded items—an expensive jacket, branded shoes,

and, of course, the latest Apple phone and laptop.

How can someone advocate for communism while simultaneously enjoying the luxuries of capitalism? It's hard not to see them as hypocrites.

I believe successful brands have managed to create stereotypes in society. For instance, if you don't own an Apple phone or wear branded shoes, you might worry about what others will think of you. We often end up paying a premium for branded products, even when a less-known brand with the same features could serve just as well. This shows how brands influence not just our choices, but also our self-image and social perceptions.

Once, I was looking to buy a new phone because my current one took almost half a day to charge. I noticed that most people

around me were using iPhones, and I started considering buying the latest model, even though it was quite expensive. Since I couldn't afford to pay the full amount upfront, I would have needed to take out a loan to buy it. I hesitated, though, because every phone I've owned has eventually slipped out of my hand, giving me mini heart attacks. I began consulting people about the pros and cons of the iPhone. Finally, one person said, "You'll probably have to carry a charger with you all the time, and the battery performance drops after a while." That gave me second thoughts. I bought another phone at a quarter of the price, and it still works well and serves my purpose.

Allow me to take you to my hometown, where I can illustrate how both local and Western cosmetics companies have capitalized on deep-rooted insecurities

about skin tone, profiting immensely in the process.

When I was a kid, there was an advertisement for a cosmetic cream that claimed to lighten skin. It depicted a girl with dark skin struggling to find a job, despite being well-qualified. No one would hire her because of her skin color. Then, her fair-skinned friend came along and handed her a magical cream called 'Fair & Lovely,' urging her to use it to see the results. Miraculously, within days, the girl's skin became lighter, and she soon landed a good job. This narrative is deeply flawed. I recently heard that such advertisements have been banned, yet they continue to resurface under different slogans like 'Enhance Your Look.' Even in Paris, I've seen numerous ads in metro stations promoting this concept.

It's also worth mentioning another product, 'Complan,' a health drink that promises to help children grow taller. I can't say how much profit they made by exploiting parents' insecurities about their kids' height, but I know my parents gave it to me as well. The only real benefit I noticed was that it made the milk sweet enough to drink. As for gaining height, well, I don't think it quite worked as advertised.

I wonder about the girls in Paris who, despite being born with fair skin, still grapple with insecurities about their appearance. Why do they feel the need to layer on so much makeup and color their hair? Why can't we embrace ourselves as we truly are?

I've often pondered this question since childhood: Why do most girls and women use cosmetics, while boys and men typically do not? I think there are two main reasons,

and I often ignore the instances where makeup is used for self-love or personal satisfaction.

One possibility is that there's intense competition among girls and women over who can be considered the fairest. This echoes the Greek myth of the golden apple, inscribed with 'To the fairest one,' which ultimately sparked the Trojan War.

The second possibility is the desire to attract males—not just any males, but those who are tall, wealthy, and handsome, like a prince. Perhaps I'm being too blunt, but one thing is clear: no girls are interested in attracting the attention of shorter boys.

In my entire life, I've only seen one instance where a bold girl chose a shorter guy as her boyfriend (and yes, I'm ignoring the celebrities). One day on the metro, I found myself traveling with a girl I had a crush on—

who happened to be the same height as me—alongside her very tall boyfriend, who gave me a serious neck ache! Just then, a couple entered our compartment, and as they kissed, I noticed the guy was actually shorter than her. No, she wasn't wearing heels. That unexpected sight gave me a glimmer of hope.

I don't understand why girls hesitate to choose someone shorter than them or even someone of equal height. Perhaps they worry about what their parents or friends might think of their choice.

I did a quick search online for answers and stumbled upon a couple of funny videos on YouTube. In one, a guy asks girls whether they prefer to marry short or tall guys. Some girls replied that they didn't care about height, while others expressed a preference for tall guys for two reasons: they felt their own

insecurities would be less pronounced next to someone taller, and some just wanted to hear the heartbeat of a tall guy. I couldn't help but think, 'What the heck?!'

Let me conclude this chapter with an incident from my family. I was probably doing my bachelor's at the time when my aunt began searching for a suitable match for my cousin. I remember my cousin once saying she would only marry a tall guy, and I didn't think much of it; after all, personal preferences vary widely among girls.

However, I was taken aback when I overheard a conversation between two of my aunts discussing a proposal from a boy who was undeniably tall—so tall, in fact, that my aunt hesitated to move forward because he was too dark. Their discussion unfolded right in front of me, and I could hear every

word. At that moment, I began to realize that something was fundamentally wrong with our society.

I often find it difficult to understand the choices people make; they frequently seem illogical to me. Yet one thing is clear: many prefer to conform to societal stereotypes, becoming prisoners of conventional expectations rather than daring to think outside the box.

Finally, I want to make a heartfelt request on behalf of all the unfortunate short boys in this world to you, the peahens: please give us a chance to show you who we truly are. We are so much more than our height and complexion. We can be funny, compassionate, and protective. We will treat you as equals, lift you up, and offer you warm, caring hugs. We can be your

steadfast companions for life. All we ask for is the opportunity to prove it.

Chapter 5: The Pursuit of Solitude

“It is far better to embrace solitude than to live with the weight of loneliness.”

Let me begin with a story, one many of you may have heard before. But first, let me introduce you to a few key figures from Indian mythology. In this universe, there are three great gods: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer of the universe. Of the three, Shiva is my favorite. He resides on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas with his beloved wife, Sati.

Sati is the human incarnation of the supreme goddess Shakti in Indian mythology. Throughout various ages, she has taken on multiple forms, including Sati, Gauri, Durga and many more, each embodying unique aspects of her divine essence.

This story begins with the tragic death of Sati, Shiva's first wife. In a moment of despair, Sati sacrificed herself by burning her mortal body due to a conflict with her own father. Shiva, overcome with grief, withdrew from the world. He wandered the earth in sorrow, eventually retreating to the Himalayas, where he fell into deep meditation, abandoning his divine duties for an indefinite time.

The gods, feeling sorrow for Shiva but also knowing that the universe needed him to return to his duties, sought a way to awaken him from his meditation. They approached Kama, the god of desire, and asked him to stir desire within Shiva's heart. Kama, with his divine arrows, visited Shiva while he was deep in meditation and released his power to ignite desire within him.

Shiva, sensing a strange stir within himself, opened his "Third Eye" and began to observe his inner state. He realized that desire was beginning to grow inside him, and he understood that if left unchecked, it could consume him entirely. What happened next is legendary in my hometown: in a flash of divine fury, Shiva unleashed a torrent of fire from his Third Eye, burning Kama, the god of desire, to ashes, astonishing even the other gods.

The lesson from this story is clear: we all carry desires within us, and often, these desires drive us to live and pursue our goals. However, if left unchecked, desire can consume us, turning us into its slaves. Uncontrolled desire has the potential to lead us down a path of sorrow and unrest, overshadowing the balance and peace in our lives.

Shiva deeply loved his wife Sati and longed for her presence by his side always. When she left him, he was engulfed by sorrow and loneliness. Yet Shiva was no ordinary being—he is known as Adiyogi, the first yogi. Through the power of his profound meditation, he even impressed the supreme goddess, Shakti, who took human form as Sati to become his wife. Shiva possessed something that set him apart from the other gods: the "Third Eye," symbolizing his ability to look inward, to observe and understand his inner self in a way that few others could.

A couple of months ago, I found myself overwhelmed by desire—the longing for a companion in life and the need for a group of like-minded individuals in academia. This led to weeks of sleepless nights and restlessness. At some point, I stumbled upon a YouTube video discussing Indian philosophy, which helped me regain balance.

The speaker delved into the epic war between the Kauravas and their cousins, the Pandavas, a battle that raged for 18 days, as told in the greatest and longest poem ever written on this planet: the Mahabharata.

On the day the great war began, Arjuna, the Pandava prince and a mighty warrior, stood on the battlefield and looked across at his opponents. Among them, he saw his cousins—his own blood, with whom he had shared his childhood. He saw his revered teacher, Drona, and many others he loved and respected. The weight of this realization sank in, and despite his many past victories, Arjuna was overcome with sorrow. He knew that this would be his final battle, where only one side would survive.

In despair, Arjuna turned to his charioteer, Krishna—the god incarnate—and said, "I cannot fight. I don't want to kill those who share my blood." With that, he dropped his

famed bow, the Gandiva, and declared that he would renounce the battle and become a sage.

If his charioteer had been someone like Jesus, perhaps he would have told Arjuna, "Well done, a wise decision—let's end this war and go home." But Krishna had a different message. He urged Arjuna to look within and see his true nature. "You are a warrior," Krishna told him, "No matter where you go, war will find you. You are not meant to be a sage." Yet, Krishna made it clear that the choice was Arjuna's—he could leave the battlefield or stay and fight.

What followed was the profound dialogue known as the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna guided Arjuna toward embracing his true identity. In the end, Arjuna accepted who he was and chose to continue the battle.

I see a clear distinction between Western religion and Indian philosophy. In Western traditions, much of the focus is on fear and consequences—do this and you'll go to heaven, do that and you'll end up in hell. In Indian philosophy, however, the approach is quite different. You are free to follow whatever path you choose, but you are encouraged to look within and discover your true passion. If you are destined to be a warrior, pursue it. If you wish to be a thief, you can—but strive to be the best version of that, a master of your chosen path.

This pursuit of excellence in whatever path you take leads to what is known as “Moksha.” I define Moksha as the state of ultimate freedom, where you have gained mastery over your desires rather than being enslaved by them. It is not about following rules out of fear, but about understanding and

controlling your deepest urges to reach true liberation.

Indian philosophy offered me a new perspective during my time of loneliness. It gave me the space and clarity to look inward and truly understand what I needed in my life—what my true passion was. That's when it became clear: my passion lies in the pursuit of understanding how things work in this world. This realization led me to create a simulation tool that helps young researchers grasp the intricacies of spin physics in Nuclear Magnetic Resonance. It's something I'm deeply proud of, a product of introspection and purpose.

Now, I feel like a free soul. I experience true happiness, a deep sense of calm, and a readiness to fully embrace my solitude.

The only thing I see within me now is the presence of the "***Great Ego or Great Me,***" something that must be destroyed. Indian philosophy teaches that when this feeling arises, you are ready to be slain by the god Shiva himself—a privilege, to be destroyed by his own hand.

There is a significant difference between the Western concept of God and the Indian deities. In Western tradition, God is often seen as a figure who constantly watches over you, meticulously observing your actions and judging you accordingly on the Day of Judgment.

Indian philosophy defines God as *Nirguna Brahman*, or Brahman without form or

qualities. In this view, the divine you seek is none other than your own true self.

The deities Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, and the countless other gods—over 330 million—are not separate from you; they are reflections of your own essence. The phrase *Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi* beautifully encapsulates this idea, meaning "I am the Absolute."

Unlike Western religions, Indian philosophy posits that we do not possess true free will. You might be surprised by this idea, but I find it profoundly insightful. When someone believes they have complete free will, they may often find themselves spiraling into sorrow, thinking, "I made this choice, and that's why I'm in this situation."

In contrast, if you embrace the belief that life is a beautifully scripted drama and that you are simply a character playing your role—following the director’s guidance—you can perform your part with grace and fulfillment. This perspective allows you to leave the stage with a sense of joy and satisfaction, knowing that what you do is part of a larger narrative.

You’ll realize that there’s no value in believing you are the “Great Me” or that you stand above everyone else. The moment you recognize that you are a manifestation of the divine, you begin to see others as reflections of yourself, merely wearing different skin tones or appearances. This realization fosters a sense of unity and compassion, allowing you to connect deeply

with others rather than viewing them as separate entities.

It seems I've shared quite a bit, and I hope I haven't bored you or offended your "Great Me." I recognize that my journey is far from over, and I still have much to learn before stepping away from this stage of life's drama. Wishing you a wonderful journey ahead!

***For you, "Gauri," to whom I hold the
deepest affection.***