

## Short Story: An Unusual Love Story

Balu

“With time, memories ripen, growing sweeter to recall.”

This love story isn't about my “successful relationship,” but it does have a happy ending. To me, love is an enigmatic force—almost like a fifth fundamental force of nature, a mysterious attraction between two people. I may not fully understand its nature, but I do know its outcomes: pain and confusion.

Where does this story begin? Naturally, in my favorite city in India—Hyderabad—where, at three different times, I found myself caught in the orbit of three remarkable women: a chemist, a biotechnologist, and, finally, a physicist. Of the three, it was the physicist who captured my heart most profoundly. For her, I traveled from the southern part of India to the northern foothills of the majestic Himalayas, to her hometown. I spent two months' salary on that journey, where I saw snow for the first time, walked through it, and took on a few hikes. I never expressed my feelings to her, but somehow, she seemed to know.

Yet, there's another layer to this story, a lingering pull toward someone else—a fourth person, actually, the first girl I had feelings for back in Hyderabad. I wasn't fully within her orbit, more like in a “Lagrange point,” that stable yet distant place of suspended attraction. And ultimately, this story is about her.

Hyderabad truly feels like a second home to me; in fact, I love it even more than my original home. The vibrant culture and delicious cuisine captivate my heart. I spent five incredible years here pursuing my master's degree, followed by three years dedicated to a research project. These experiences have shaped my life and deepened my affection for this beautiful city.

After completing my master's, I joined a prestigious research center renowned for its contributions to fundamental science in Hyderabad, specifically to develop a magnetometer within the NMR group. However, my focus shifted away from NMR as I immersed myself in laser experiments with rubidium atoms, aiming to detect ultra-low magnetic fields for nuclear spin detection. I became part of a close-knit circle of friends, all of whom specialized in working with femtosecond lasers.

One day during lunch, I encountered her for the first time. I had no idea who she was, but I was immediately struck by her smartness and seriousness as she sat at our table. She was a friend of my colleagues, yet no one introduced us. I couldn't help but notice how beautiful she was, especially her eyes; I had never seen eyes like hers before or since. I felt an irresistible urge to engage with her. Suddenly, the leader of our group broke the tension by saying, "Gauri (not her real name), Balu is single—do you want to try?"

I was taken aback by his comment. She turned to look at me with her piercing red eyes and firmly replied, "No." In that moment, I wondered why she was looking at me like that—I hadn't said anything to her. My

attempt to move into her orbit had abruptly stalled at what felt like a “Lagrange point,” caught between attraction and rejection.

I never spoke to her again, as I didn’t want to be scorched by her gaze. A few days later, she left. It was only later that I learned she was a collaborator of my friends and, to my surprise, that we shared the same mother tongue.

A few months later, she returned, and this time her expression was pleasant; she always wore a small smile whenever I glanced her way. I began to talk to her occasionally, and by then, I had already found myself in the orbit of the chemist. A funny incident occurred during this time: one day, while I was standing behind her lost in thought, a guy from our friend circle suddenly shouted, “You’re looking at her ass!” I was taken aback, but to my relief, she didn’t react.

After a short stay, she was preparing to leave, but something significant happened the day before her departure. After dinner, she turned to my friend and said, “Don’t lose your sanity.” A wave of jealousy washed over me, and I couldn’t help but think, “You have nothing to say to me before you leave.” What could I expect? We had only spoken a couple of times and didn’t really know each other well.

Later, I learned that she had left for Paris to pursue her PhD. Two years later, I also secured a position in Paris. When I arrived, I emailed her a couple of times for help with accommodation, and I found out she was living on the outskirts of the city. Despite my curiosity, I never felt compelled to see her. Whenever I thought of her, her words, “Don’t lose your sanity,” echoed in my mind. Then, as fate would have it, COVID-19 hit, and nearly a year passed without any contact between us.

Then, one day, I received a surprising message from her: “Hey, do you want to play badminton?” I was thrilled to see her message and eagerly agreed. We played badminton together, and later, we met a few times in the park. During those outings, I started sharing my past unsuccessful love stories with her in a comedic way. Usually, people would get bored and ask me to stop, but she listened intently, laughing heartily at my tales. I was genuinely surprised that someone was so engaged in my stories.

At this point, I began to develop feelings for her, but whenever I asked if she had a boyfriend, she would reply with a teasing, “Maybe, maybe not,” as if she were referencing the quantum mechanics of Schrödinger's cat. To complicate matters, there always seemed to be another guy with her whenever we met. I thought to myself, “Why be a third wheel?” and eventually decided to stop talking to her for a long time.

But Paris wasn't kind to me; I fell into a deep loneliness, both in my academic life and personally. All my attempts to create successful love stories seemed in vain. When solitude hit me hard and I found myself at a breaking point, I reached out to her, hoping to have lunch together. To my surprise, I discovered she had left Paris and was back home.

To escape my loneliness, I needed a distraction, so I turned to writing during my moments of depression. I wrote a book and sent it to her for proofreading. To my delight, she patiently read it and offered me thoughtful suggestions.

I began to feel that writing wasn't helping me either. Along with my solitude, I had unwittingly drifted into the orbit of another girl, a slow and unexpected situation. I found myself in a complicated predicament, feeling confused and unsure of how to escape my current situation.

I tried to embrace a state of *virakti*—total detachment. Yet, I found myself reaching out to her again, admitting, “My mind is broken.” Perhaps she felt sympathy for me at that moment and decided to enlighten me. I compared myself to Arjuna and her to Krishna, seeking wisdom and guidance. She shared that she, too, was single and planned to remain that way until she felt fulfilled. With passion, she described how she spent her time fruitfully, focusing on her career, pursuing new interests she had always wanted to explore, traveling, and immersing herself in nature.

I felt that the Gauri I met seven years ago had transformed into a remarkable force, a beast. While many people had shared similar insights with me in the past, it was her words that truly made me appreciate the importance of living for oneself.

Finally, I told her, “When you feel fulfilled and are ready for a relationship in the future, consider my application.” She smiled, perhaps reflecting on the mistake she made by mentioning that she was single.

Later, I reflected on what it truly means to be in a relationship. Yes, there are many components: love (that strange force of attraction), “free sex,” sharing living expenses and travel, and providing emotional support for each other. However, I realized that one essential element is the resonance between partners—a deep understanding of one another. Perhaps this is what people mean by being on the same wavelength.

Anyway, I'm waiting for Gauri's message to say my application has been accepted. She may never reach out or accept my application, and while I might feel a bit jealous, I won't be disappointed. She will always hold a special place in my heart.

The End.