

A Tale of Misplaced Love and Irony by Pavithra Mehta

WHEN THE WORLD BEGAN, there was a place for everything in the human heart, and everything was in its place. This meant one never, ever had to look for anything. Which sounds awfully convenient, and that is exactly what it was. Awfully. Convenient. In this impeccable order of things everything happened on a schedule. Serendipity, for instance got the 2 pm slot on Tuesday afternoons (which meant of course that humanity invariably snoozed through it). Everything under the sun was reliable and remarkably tedious.

People soon began to devise little games for themselves to make things more interesting. To this end, they banished love to the rainforests and perched happiness high on a craggy mountain top. They left contentment in the middle of the sea and buried fulfillment somewhere in the desert. They also devised elaborate disguises of masks upon masks, until no one was quite sure of who they really were any more.

All this activity spawned a genre of writers, who began to write prolifically about how to discover oneself. They also devised a dubious series of 10-step shortcuts to true love, purpose, enlightenment and the like. A few of them actually knew what they were talking about, but most just made it up as they went along. This resulted, as you might expect, in many millennia of misunderstandings, multiple wild goose chases and widespread confusion.

Meanwhile love got lonely in the rainforest and happiness suffered vertigo on the mountaintop. Contentment never quite found its sea legs and fulfillment grew claustrophobic underground. So they all crept back home one day, furtively and unannounced. With their spare keys they let themselves back into the chambers of the human heart, taking up their old residence with sweet sighs of relief. Their return however, went unnoticed. Each person, by this time, was consumed with his or her own seeking. They were off plowing through rainforests, scaling mountain ranges, leading deep sea diving expeditions and caravanning through the deserts in search of that which had already come home. It was at this juncture that irony entered the world.

Very soon technology began to serve as a substitute for all that was hard to find. When meaning could not be located, humanity consoled itself with wonders like the GPS. One could always rely on being able to pull up directions to the nearest mall. Text messages and tweets began to stand in for conversation and communion. Who had time anyway for more than byte-sized helpings of relationship and reality? People searching for answers to life's Big Questions began to turn increasingly to Google (who, it must be admitted, on average, had a faster response rate than God).

And so the years rolled on, like wave upon wave. People's lives got bigger, brighter, faster, louder. And an unfathomable number of ice cream flavors appeared in the market. Yet underneath the frenetic pace, glittering exterior and the availability of all that ice cream, people were more exhausted, frightened and lonely than they had ever been since the dawn of history. And every so often one of them would grow so sick and tired of the whole charade that they resorted to drastic measures. They shut off their cell phones and turned away from the screen. They stopped talking and tweeting and shopping and seeking and fell back suddenly and sweetly into the skin of their skin, and the heart of their heart.

At which point love would rush over to greet them with a hug, happiness would put on the kettle for a cup of tea, contentment would tend to the fireplace and fulfillment would begin to sing.