

READER SUBMISSION

An Incomplete Love Story



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The lotus bloomed slowly.
 She breathed in the free air.
 Bathed in the cool water of the pond.
 Spread a mild fragrance everywhere.
 It was as if a mellifluous song.
 As if that lotus were the abode of the goddess
 with nectar-speech.

High above was the sky; an outstretched, blue
 canvas.

Lightened by thousands and thousands of
 stars.

An abode of joy brightened by the Creator's
 auspicious light.
 Enshrouded by mysteries.

The lotus was crazy in his love.
 She had an indomitable desire of embracing
 the blue sky.
 She was abashed in the dream of kissing him!

In spite of being born in the muddy layers of
 the pond
 She dared to touch the sky!
 Such temerity of a mere mud-born!

Indeed! That lotus was audacious.
 Breaking the chains of the family
 She desired to lead an independent life.
 Wished to turn her dreams into reality.
 She refused to lead such an imprisoned life.

She extended her petals to the sky
 And said—"Oh beloved! Oh darling!
 Please accept me!"
 But she still could not reach the sky.
 That lotus had forgotten that
 The heartless pond had chained her in mud.

Then all her struggles failed.
 All her affection went in vain.
 The lotus was defeated.
 Is this the cruelty of fate?
 Was it destined to happen?
 None of the fifteen lakh species of this planet
 could then understand
 That the lotus was crying silently.

With acute sorrow in her heart,
 The lotus died one day.
 Then, the mild aroma was lost.
 The goddess with nectar-speech disappeared.
 The love-story of the lotus and the sky
 remained incomplete
 And her dreams were lost forever.



SPELLBOUND

MASTER OF PING PONG

"Conscientious," came the announcement, amidst a little feedback and hush-hush from the audience.

"Conscientious?" I asked. "That's right. 'Conscientious'," nodded the pronouncer.

I wondered if I should ask any further or go straight for the money. "Conscientious" was a word I was confident about; it was in my "top 100 difficult words to spell" list and I had practiced thoroughly. However, being in the top 2 of the spelling bee and enjoying my time under the spotlight, I thought "Why not?" Also, I needed to act smart.

"Can you use it in a sentence?" I smiled. Someone let out a sigh from the back. I could tell it was my mom.

"He was not merely earnest and conscientious, but of incisive intellect, and unfailingly cheerful and witty," announced the man in the half-moon spectacles again. This time he seemed annoyed.

"Ah, 'conscientious'," I said as I proceeded to clear my throat. "C-O-N-S-C-I-E-N-T-I-O-U-S".

The pronouncer gave a nod of approval and the audience broke out in applause. I took a step back and turned to walk to my stool. And there she was, in the seat beside mine, nervously smiling and scratching away at her name tag. The pretty Number 578.

I wished her good luck under my breath as she breezed past me to the mic. I felt a rush of blood to my head upon taking my designated seat among the tens of empty ones lined on the stage. I was relieved, surely, and had managed to buy some more time to be around Number 578. I was her final competition; I was also her first cheerleader.

My eyes had caught Number 578 last morning, back in the cafeteria. My parents had accompanied me to the regionals of the spelling bee competition and hundreds of 5th graders from around the country congregated at this very venue for a weekend of fun-filled "what's the definition, language of origin, use it in a sentence" contest.

When I first saw her she was being chased by her parents with what looked like a ginormous deck of flash cards. Her dainty figure in a floral knee-length dress couldn't keep up, and they sat with her food on a table opposite to ours. All the fries her mother fed her wouldn't do much for her skinny wrists; she kept sift-

ing through the cards delicately, one at a time, like an accountant busy at work. She had looked up once and our eyes met, with a half-smile, as if to surrender and say, "Parents, huh?" At least we agreed on one thing.

And who knew we'd be the last two fighting it out for the trophy?

I reeled back to the present thanks to thunderous clapping from a thousand expectative parents. As I looked up, 578 was shakily returning to her seat having correctly spelled her word, which I had missed in my daydream. It was my turn again.

"Saudade," the pronouncer announced. I felt something inside me churn.

"Uhm, can I have the language of origin?" I asked, my fists trembling. The pronouncer coughed silently and spoke into the mic, "Portuguese. 'Saudade.'"

"Portuguese!" I repeated, baffled. "What does it even mean?"

"The feeling of intense longing for a person or place you love," he paused, and probably scoffed as well, to say, "But is now lost."

I needed to calm down. "Okay. Sawdaje...Saudaje? Ugh." It was bad enough that I'd lose, but to make matters worse I'd be losing to Number 578. Or would it? Should I be the anti-hero in our story – the knight who sacrifices his life to save his queen? Perplexed as I was, I was also running out of time. It was now or never, incorrect or worse.

"S-A-U-D-A-J..." my eyebrows raised with every letter I muttered, and finally, "...E?"

DING

"It's 's-a-u-d-a-d-e'," the pronouncer said as a matter-of-factly, and I sulked away to my seat to the sound of a pitiful applause.

The next few moments went by in frenzy. Of course Number 578 spelled "pulchritude" without a hiccup and lifted the golden trophy. All this time, I stood behind her holding a silver disk with my name done in some inexperienced engraving. Quite a celebration.

As I searched for my over-enthusiastic parents among the photographers, a gentle tap on my shoulders rattled me. It was 578. She smiled and put her arms around me, whispering something in my warm ears, something I couldn't decipher.

She walked away with the trophy and my heart, and I stood motionless and smitten, falling for her like the confetti over my head.