

## LITERARY

### A Wrong Pairing

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*Joanna Mok*

One hot, muggy day in a nondescript building in the city, a pigeon-toed boy with a hot temper asked a crooked girl with minor adult acne to marry him.

The time was sluggishly fading from day to night. It might have been evening but the sun was still out. Suspended above the highway by the water, the young couple could just make out the little bulb of heat between the residential building on the left and the high-rise being built on the right. Their sea-view was fading and so was their love.

He called it love anyway, their domesticated version of it. Walking around in the nude, passing gas, popping pimples, cleaning, cooking.

He figured if it's not broken, don't fix it. Or play with it. Or even check up on it under its hood. As the time dragged on, year in and year out, his love for her became a slow and steady habit. It was a dependable love and that was good enough.

She was restless. This love made her squirm. It was old, stale and very late. In the domesticated realm of their cohabiting love, she saw a complacency that disgusted her. She asked for effort instead of flowers, time instead of money and struggled with that same resolution he taunted at her: if it's not broken, don't fix it. Their love left a sour taste in her mouth. But she thought, if she could stomach it - then why not?

The marriage was a certificate of their homely love. To match their unassuming passion, a guileless ceremony was held followed by a rustic dinner at their favourite diner. Dark, dingy but spacious, the two of them dined quietly amongst the chatter. The pigeon-toed boy shuffled in his seat, full from the day's activities and the platter of food he had just engulfed. The crooked girl leaned back into her seat and looked across the table at him, trying to remember her favourite things about this hot-tempered boy.

As in all love stories, their time together dragged on. Like a flower wilting or the same slow, sad way ice cream melts down a cone in the sun, the pair grew less and less in love and more and more automated. They were taken aback by the predictable outcome of their pairing. How could something they wished for so hard turn out so... empty? They found comfort in the loneliness of their silence and drew a bond on their mutual bewilderment and later on, acceptance of their wrong union.

It is another hot, muggy day in the city. The crooked girl and the pigeon-toed boy are huddled in the middle of the flat. There is a murmur in the room. The tension that follows is palpable. When the crooked girl finally leaves, there is a rush of air pushing out of the walls. She feels the same energy as being in a very fast car with the windows down. The pigeon-toed boy is feeling freedom for the first time in a long time and can barely breathe. It is beautiful and wonderful and everything good.