

Love in the Time of WhatsApp  
and Other Stories



Juggernaut presents

Love in the Time  
of WhatsApp and  
Other Stories

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## Introduction

A girl is waiting at an airport lounge, and out of boredom, starts peeping into the WhatsApp conversation of the boy sitting next to her. He seems to be chatting with his girlfriend, and she's quickly immersed in their romantic exchange. She's in for a rude shock, however, when he suddenly puts his phone away and embraces another woman who has just arrived – his fiancée. What happens next?

*Love in the Time of WhatsApp and Other Stories* is an anthology of short love stories with a twist. Some of these stories feature a digital element, while others are simple love stories that will amuse and delight you. This is Juggernaut's first digital-to-print collection, bringing together the finest short stories published on our app, with one unifying theme – the many faces of love.

## Introduction

Some of these stories are from the Juggernaut writing platform – a digital space where upcoming writers can publish their work. The editors at Juggernaut read the entries and chose the ones we felt most excited about. We also organize writing workshops across the country and the story ‘Love in the Time of WhatsApp’ was discovered at one such workshop. Through contests, workshops and unsolicited submissions, we were able to crowdsource all these stories in the truest sense of the word.

*Why Love in the Time of WhatsApp?*

When the history of the twenty-first century is written, it will be dominated by how the Internet changed every aspect of human life. How it changed the ways people interact with each other, get to know each other and love each other. While for hundreds of years love was expressed in coy letters that took days, sometimes even months, to reach the beloved, conversations now warrant instant replies. One of the stories in the anthology, ‘TTYL: Talk to You Later’, shows the intense restlessness of the protagonist while waiting for a reply on her phone, the sheer torture of it. Changing social structures also dictate that the means of finding a partner are changing: one of the stories is based on a Rent a Husband app.



## Introduction

In 'The Glitch', the winning story of our short story prize in 2018, in a speculative future, a man tests out a beta virtual reality device which allows him to experience the life of an unknown girl on the far side of the world, who shows him moments from her life. He's soon lost in the life of this girl, falling in love with someone he has only ever watched in virtual reality.

In 'Wi-Fi Love', the protagonist's neighbour uses the name of her Wi-Fi network to communicate with him.

Short, funny and exciting, these stories show us what love in the time of WhatsApp looks like. They stayed with us long after we finished reading them, and we are sure they will do the same to you.



# Love in the Time of WhatsApp

*Liji Narayan*

The boarding gate near which I sat had the least number of people waiting. In fact, the area around it was practically empty save for an elderly couple. The flight had been rescheduled and I had more than an hour to kill. But I had promised myself I would fight the urge to check WhatsApp – it was high time I took a break from it.

Instead, I took in the decor, the food outlets and the quiet and still length of the traveller. My phone rang, it was my cousin enquiring my arrival time. On learning about the long and monotonous wait that lay ahead of me, he said, ‘Don’t worry. You have your phone to kill time.’ We laughed but I couldn’t help thinking, why depend on technology to while away

some 'me' time? I did have a book to read. And what was wrong with good old daydreaming?

Forty and single, I had better things to do than stare at my phone. I was suddenly overcome by pangs of guilt. Of late, I had been spending a lot of time texting Vismay on WhatsApp. So much so that I had developed a crick in my neck. Now, my hand itched to check whether there was any text from him. Suppressing the impulse, I let my eyes wander. Two youngsters were walking in my direction, both busy on their phones. Brother and sister, I assumed from their strikingly similar features. It was amazing how they could text with one hand, wheel their suitcases with the other, and also walk, all at the same time.

Seeing them so engaged in the virtual world, I was reminded of Vismay again. Failing to resist the temptation any longer, I was soon reading the messages that he had sent in the last half-hour. He had just finished a painting and wanted my honest opinion. But instead of replying to that, I found myself typing out a message about my delayed flight and my vow to eschew texting for a change. Part of me expected him to ask 'Whatever for?', but the other part knew better. And this part wasn't the least bit surprised when he suggested, 'Just look at the people around you. Surely there will be some face worthy of

your interest.’ I looked around and found nobody else except the elderly couple, of which the gentleman had dozed off, while his wife was immersed in a magazine. They seemed content, quite reassured by each other’s presence. Will we ever get to be like them, Vismay and I?

Vismay was an extrovert and could talk to any stranger, especially if it was a woman. He would work his charm and have her feeding off his palm, and then vanish, probably forever. But I wasn’t anything like him, not even close. I took my time to warm up to people. He could talk about everything with equal interest, whereas my knowledge was limited. He seemed like a thorough romantic and I was more of a realist. He was forty-one, but looked almost boyish. We were completely mismatched, yet we connected at some level. Maybe it was because he could play with words and managed to stimulate me intellectually. His splendid gift of repartee had got me addicted to WhatsApp.

By now, the waiting area was full of people and the brother–sister duo were seated near me. The boy, who seemed to be in his early twenties and the elder of the two, sat right next to me on the left. What caught my attention was the extra care he took to keep his screen facing away from the sister, which made it

quite visible to me. I decided to throw my head back and stretch my back a bit, and then I could view his screen perfectly. 'I hate the wait,' he was writing. Was he talking about the flight that he was waiting for? Or was he trying to say that he couldn't wait to see his friend? Was he talking to a girl or a boy? A girlfriend, I guessed, not known to his sibling, which explained his cautiousness. He also kept looking ahead at the traveller, as if he was expecting somebody.

I casually shifted in my seat a little to settle in a position comfortable enough to gaze at his screen.

He: *Your smile lights up my day.*

Friend: A smiling emoji

He: *What r u up 2 rt now? Other than missing me, of course.*

Friend: *Drinking coffee. Want some?*

He: *It is you I want.*

Friend: A blushing emoji

He: A kissing emoji

This was getting interesting, but my posture was not comfortable enough. I leaned forward as if to fetch something out of my bag. What emerged was a travelogue I had been reading, and I hoped to use it as a prop. Oblivious to the world around him, his fingers flew as he texted. He seemed not to notice

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me. I continued to hold it open, feeling almost guilty for intruding on somebody's privacy. He should have been more discreet, I thought, justifying my crime.

Friend: (An image of a coffee mug with something on it. Could it be a lipstick stain?)

How I wished my sight was sharper!

He: *Prefer feeling the real thing. Haven't got over the last time our lips met.*

Friend: *Me too.*

It was a lipstick stain all right. An intimate love story was unfolding right before my eyes. The one at the receiving end of this barrage of textual endearments was clearly a girl and the two seemed smitten.

Suddenly he turned towards me, but I was quick enough to bury my face in the book. I guess my glasses made me look just the sort who could get lost in a book anywhere – a no-nonsense person who liked to be left alone. He seemed convinced that I posed no threat and got back to texting.

He: *Wish I'd kept my eyes open at that moment. Next time I'll remember to.*

Friend: *There will be no next time.*

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He: *Wl b for sure. Gives me a reason to wake up every morn.*

Friend: *Itz been 10 days precisely n nothing has been normal ever since.*

He: *Who needs normalcy? Luv this dreamy state right now. Hope it lasts forever.*

This guy was quite the romantic. I shamelessly adjusted my posture and glasses to get a clearer view, surprised at my own restlessness when ‘her’ reply got a little delayed. Wish I knew their names. I felt like I had started watching a romantic flick from the middle.

Friend: *True. The past two months hv bn like a dream. How I wish we hadn't met at that party.*

He: *Am so glad we did. Am in a happy space right now. Thnx 2 u.*

Friend: *Yeah, space! Thatz where we wl b when our parents get to know.*

He: *U r funny, u know.*

Friend: *Shut up.*

He: *Luv pulling your leg. Wish I cud save these chats somewhere. We cud revisit this exchange in the future and laugh.*

Friend: *Whr do u c urself a year frm now?*

He: *In your arms.*

Friend: *C'mon, seriously. I'm worried about the future.*



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He: *Simi, I'm sure I wanna grow old wth u.*

So that's what she was called. Sounds like a simple, cute girl.

Simi: *I want a job that I cn write home about bfr I cn tell them of a boyfriend.*

He: *Don't worry abt the future. Live in the moment.*

That's exactly what Vismay always said. He only believed in 'living in the moment'. That explained his impulsive and sometimes reckless behaviour. He almost bragged about his spontaneity and ability to throw caution to the winds. His confidence annoyed me. Or was it jealousy? I would have loved to be like him. I consciously got back to lover boy's mobile screen.

Simi: *Cnt afford 2 b so reckless! Am alrdy nervous about the interview day after.*

He: *You will ace it, babe.*

Simi: *Wish u wr here.*

He: *A kiss is all u need for ur nerves.*

Simi: *Not funny.*

He: *Chill. I'll take u there myself.*

Simi: *Is ur seminar over?*

He: *Yup. I'll b back tmrw night. What time's the interview?*

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Simi: 10.

He: *Wl pick u up at 8. Happy?*

Simi: *Isn't that too early?*

He: *I thot we cud hv breakfast together n then maybe u cud visit the temple, seek your fav Ganeshji's blessings?*

Simi: *How thoughtful. That'd be gr8. U may turn out 2 b my lucky charm.*

He: *Anything for you, sweetheart, but I won't do it for free.*

Simi: *Kya matlab?*

He: *I wanna be paid in kind ;)*

Simi: *There you go again!*

He: *Wud luv 2 go again!*

Simi: *An angry emoji*

He: *U look yummy when angry.*

Simi: *Uff! Impossible 2 hv a normal conv wth u.*

He: *Luv annoying u.*

Simi: *Can't blv we've only known each other for 2 mnths.*

He: *Feel lk I hv known u all my life.*

Simi: *My roommates keep complaining about the light from my phone disturbing them all night. We'd better stop chatting after dinner.*

These two spoke every night. But Vismay hardly ever called. He probably called when he had nothing

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better to do. Or maybe when none of the other interesting people (women) in his life were available to have a conversation with. I was probably the last resort. That would explain the spells of inactivity on WhatsApp, which were almost always attributed to work. And all he said was 'Just because I did not text doesn't mean I wasn't thinking of you'. Was this lover boy anything like Vismay?

He: *I'd rather buy eye patches for your roommates.*

My neck was tired. I just had to get up, stretch and move my arms and shoulders a little. I did so half-heartedly, swung my arms around, looked right and left a few times, bent forward to touch my toes and then immediately returned to my seat to see what happened next.

He: *You know, I still remember how they felt.*

Simi: *What?*

He: *Your lips when we first kissed!*

Simi: *Was too taken by surprise then to remember anything.*

He: *Will gladly refresh ur memory and the experience, but rt now need 2 rush.*

Before I could read Simi's response, lover boy suddenly switched off the phone and started walking

towards two approaching figures. I felt like somebody had snatched away my novel just when things had got interesting.

What made him end the chat so abruptly? And that too when he was clearly dreaming of a physical union with his sweetheart?

I watched lover boy now. He approached the two ladies who had just arrived with a small suitcase each. He quickly bent down to touch the feet of the elder of the two and proceeded to give a quick and hesitant hug to the younger, petite figure, who lingered behind in a shy fashion. Taking their suitcases despite their protests, he walked back towards the waiting area.

His sister immediately got up and offered her seat to the older lady, while bending as if to touch her feet. The lady patted the girl in a gesture of blessing and plonked herself on the chair. The teenager then turned to embrace the other girl, who had just arrived, in a long warm embrace. 'Bhaaaabhi!' she said and giggled, adding, 'I guess I can call you bhabhi now. Or would you prefer I wait till you tie the knot next month?'

My eyebrows furrowed in shock. Was she talking about lover boy?

He looked on disinterestedly as the two girls chatted. Much to my disappointment, his phone,

which had kept him, and me, busy a while ago stayed tucked in the back pocket of his jeans.

Soon, the elderly lady and his sister were seen deep in conversation, while lover boy and his alleged fiancée strolled towards the cafe. They did not hold hands, although they walked as close to each other as the limits of public decency allowed. He sure was well versed with the moral dimensions of playing the good, would-be son-in-law. Were the two really engaged?

Now the sister sat next to me, making polite conversation with the lady. Their exchange more than confirmed that this lady was the mother of her brother's fiancée. So, lover boy had a secret that could shake two worlds; a secret that probably I alone knew. Strange that I should walk into a couple's love story, by chance, unknown to the lovers themselves! Had I been a character from a Bollywood potboiler, I would have probably used the situation to my advantage, maybe even managed to blackmail him into paying up a handsome amount to keep my mouth zipped.

Before long, lover boy's sister dialled a number and handed over the phone to the lady. I didn't have to strain to hear what the vociferous lady said. She thanked 'samdhanji' profusely for allowing her kids to accompany her to Guruji's ashram. No auspicious event in her family could take place without the

Guruji's blessings apparently. She went on to say how she had promised Guruji that she would introduce her daughter's groom-to-be the moment the wedding was fixed. The ashram was a few hours' drive from the city she said, but the hotel would send a car for them. So that was the 'seminar' Simi thought her guy was attending.

Meanwhile, the old lady, whom the girl called auntyji, went on and on about the preparations that seemed to have started in earnest at her house, since they had zeroed in on the beautician for her precious daughter and also ordered the lehenga; that she had to be careful not to get overexcited lest her already weak heart began to play up again. I wondered what would happen if she were to learn of her darling son-in-law's girlfriend? Her fragile heart would stop forever.

My own heart went out to Simi who was waiting for lover boy to accompany her to the interview. Would he keep his promise? Would he continue his relationship with her? Who was he cheating on? Simi or the fiancée? Actually, both, I thought.

I was sure he would take Simi to the interview and they would probably continue to meet till a day before the wedding when and if at all he decided to spill the beans. Would he even bother to come out

with the truth? Or would he just disappear without a trace? My own negativity shocked me.

Maybe he would not ditch Simi, but avoid getting married to this girl. He didn't look quite interested in the girl, despite her doe-eyed and dainty face that most guys would fall for.

I found myself worrying about the conclusion to this love story. Was Simi pretty? Had she given herself up to him, heart, soul and . . .? Surely they hadn't stopped at just a kiss. How would I ever know whether lover boy grew old with Simi or settled down with this one? How I yearned to learn how this ménage à trois would play out.

I walked towards the washroom and was pleasantly surprised to see lover boy's fiancée follow suit. She was talking on the phone. She sounded rather loud and bold, in sharp contrast to her coy demeanour outside.

'Akash, I cannot tell him about us now. This isn't a good time. But don't worry, I'll disclose all before the invitation cards go to print next week. I have to tell Mom about you first. Please be patient.'

This was more exciting than I had ever imagined. My hands quivered as I unlocked the door of the washroom.

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I couldn't wait to call Vismay. But I wondered what he would have done if he had been in lover boy's shoes. Given his inherent flirtatiousness, he would have maintained two parallel relationships; kept both women happy and moon-eyed. I forced myself to stop thinking about him.

As the flight took off, I found myself feeling happy and relieved for Simi, although she seemed to trust lover boy too much. I dozed off, but not before sending out a silent prayer for Simi. Her wait would surely come to an end. The outcome would be more than pleasant, of that I was very sure. As for me, I didn't have to wait for a Vismay to walk in and out of my life at his own will. I could refuse to let him in. But I didn't know what I wanted.

Maybe I needed to wait to find out what I really desired as well. I could only hope that my wait too would end in something pleasant.

### **Reader Reviews on the Juggernaut App**

'Interesting take on the meaning of relationships in our technology-driven times.' **Sriparna Basu**

'A mini lady Chetan Bhagat!' **Anup Rajasekharan**