



Special Lecture Series, Chapter 1: Transcript

“Just Good Friends”: The Floating Signifier of ‘Friendship’

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Today I have chosen the topic of friendship, because I think what I intend to state at the very beginning is that sometimes friendship need not necessarily happen between two individuals or three or four, sometimes it can happen between one individual and an institution. I think this is exactly what seems to have developed between me and The Bhawanipur. So, thank you, The Bhawanipur Education Society College, for accepting me as a friend.

The first part of the title, “Just Good Friends”, is suggested by something that we are all very familiar with, which is when two people are suspected of having a romantic relationship. I think what has not worried me is the “friends” part, or the good part, but the “just” part. Therefore, when you are actually using “just” to define friendship, you are denigrating it, you are putting it on a slightly lower pedestal. And what you are creating is a binary, a Manichaeian binary, where relationship is above friendship. In one of my YouTube videos I talk about what is more than friendship, that is what the video is called “What is more than friendship?” What is it that a relationship offers you that friendship does not? It is a very important and a very searching question for me. I came up with the answer that relationships offer you something that friendship does not. Relationships offer you ownership of the person. Therefore, you are not going to ask your friend, why was your mobile phone engaged at midnight? You will ask that to the person that you are in a relationship with. There is a certain notion that a relationship is exclusive while friendship is not. Why is it that this exclusivity is so much more attractive to us? That is really where it begins. Was it always like this? Was a romantic/sexual relationship always meant to be exclusive? Was friendship meant to be more expansive, more generous, more nonjudgmental? It is also self-contradictory, because that person is supposedly offering you unconditional love with a number of conditions applicable. However, it will be framed in the discourse of love. Having said that, let me go a little further back, and let me talk about friendship, to 1500 BC. So, I start at the very beginning.

You know, we Indians, have a tendency to go to the Vedas, especially in these troubled times, when we start anything. The people in the West, they don't go to the Vedas, they have Plato. But we will start with the Vedas over here. Let me talk about what the Vedas say. This is the way in which Ruth Vanita talks about it in her book, *Same Sex Love in India*. She says that the Rig Veda presents an ideal of friendship as a very sacred relation. While it represents the man-woman relation as oriented towards procreation, it constructs friendship not as reproductive, but as creative. Therefore, there is a binary that is already being held over there. What is interesting is, in that binary, friendship is seen to be superior to marital monogamy.



This is something which I have a lot of time, a lot of fun with, because my students, who are all very well trained in patriarchy (as indeed we all are), are horrified when I read out the words from the *Mahabharata*. It's from the *Shanti Parva*.

Brahma says that, once upon a time, human beings could reproduce through a fiat of the will. So, you could imagine that you want a child, and there was a child. This is something that at least one God did very successfully, which is Brahma. Then Bhishma says, in Kali Yuga, people began to have sexual intercourse to reproduce. Therefore, there is a hierarchy, with sexual reproduction occupying a lower rung. The best kind of childbirth is when you just imagine a child into existence.

So, what's really happening then is that sexual reproduction is clearly being taken a very dim view of. Therefore, sexual reproduction is being tied with a debased form of life. Now, you can read it in various ways, but the basic point over here is that whether you look at the *Mahabharata* or whether you look at Plato, there is a very covert, incipient binarisation that is happening. It is the binarisation of the mind and the body where the mind is being held as being superior to the body. Now, it may seem to be wonderful, except for the fact that all binarisations are problematic. This binarisation is problematic as well in the sense that the mind is regarded as being superior to the body. No problem there. However, what begins to happen is that the body gradually begins to be feminised and the mind begins to be masculinised. Therefore, the mind becomes male and the body becomes female. And that is where I think there is a problem. Just a slight deviation over here:

We are all familiar with Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds". Every heterosexual wedding that happens in the West, there is a possibility that someone is going to get up to make a speech referring to Sonnet 116. What they are actually doing is that they are focussing on the word "marriage". However, what Shakespeare wants us to focus on is "true minds". Now, remember that Shakespeare is writing during the Renaissance, the time when there is a revival of classical learning. During the classical Greek period, the primary purpose of women's existence was procreation. Therefore, friendship was exclusively almost framed as the friendship between men. Hence, when Shakespeare is talking about "the marriage of true minds" he is possibly talking about gay marriage because women were not allowed to have a mind!

In short, the only way in which a marriage can happen of true minds is between two men. So, it seems that in a very queer way Shakespeare is repurposing ancient classical learning to bolster this idea. This is why Shakespeare is quite subversive - he will appear to be patriarchal, but then he is not quite patriarchal, but then he is patriarchal. So, you never know where you are with him. I think that is the most annoying part of Shakespeare because had he been so easy to read, I don't think he would be such a great playwright. It's the fact that meaning in Shakespeare is so amorphous, so undecided, such a floating signifier that you just don't know where you are with Shakespeare.

This talk is going to be very poststructuralist because I'm going to not pay any attention to chronology. I'm not going to pay any attention to time and space. So, we move back to the *Mahabharata*. I think there is an extraordinary line that Arjuna says to Krishna when he wants Krishna to show him the Vishwarup.



And after seeing Vishwarup, Arjuna pleads with Krishna to bear his faults as a father bears his son's, a friend, his friend's, a lover, his beloved's, *Priya* and *Priyaya*. Both nouns are masculine. Therefore, Arjuna is being very clear about exactly what kind of relationships he is talking about. He is talking about the relationship between a father and son, a friend and a friend, but he is also talking about the relationship between a male lover and his male beloved. When you are talking about *Priya* and *Priyaya*, remember that this is something that Arjuna is extremely aware of. Now, what I want to point out is not just this *Priya*, *Priyaya* part, but the fact that friendship and being a beloved or a lover, are put on the same plane. It's almost as though there is an oblique. Therefore, they are all of equal value. This is the sort of univalence of these three relationships that I would want you to keep in mind, because this is something which is going to haunt us in the later part of the talk.

Moving on to the West, going to ancient Greece.

These are just a few of the people who wrote about friendship. Empedocles wrote about it. Archytas wrote about it. Aristotle, of course, is very famous for having said "a true friend is your second self, as it were" in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. When he is talking about a true friend, he puts our mind to various ways in which we regard the friendship. But, looking eastwards, when we talk about the husband and the wife, the wife is always spoken of as *Ardhāngini* - half of my body. Now, what is important for us to remember is that when Krishna talks about Arjun, he uses the term *Sharirārdha*, again, half of my body. Whether we talk about a heterosexual relationship or about the friendship of two men, it is the same idea that is being impressed on them, which is to say that I am your other self or I am half of you.

This is a very powerful idea because it travels all the way down, into 1970s Bollywood where we have *Ye dosti hum nahi todenge* (*Sholay*, 1975). If you look at that song, if you change one voice to a woman's voice, it becomes a romantic song because all the tropes of romance are there. However, it is two men who are singing it, and we are automatically conditioned to think that they are just good friends. Therefore, what is really going on is that we have been conditioned to read certain friendships in a heteronormative way. That is something which popular culture banks on.

The queer theorist therefore comes in and says, no, there could be other versions of this going on as well. A true friend is your second self, as it were. When I first came upon Plato's *Phaedrus*, I could not believe my eyes. I have never read a text that is so completely hysterical. Plato frames the entire text as a conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus. Plato makes Socrates say the most extraordinary things, collapsing the boundaries of a friendship and a sexual relationship. Therefore, he genuinely does not see any difference between the two.

If we take a proper look over here, the lover becomes a friend. That is the point that I am trying to impress upon. Therefore, there is really no difference between a friend and a lover. We are going to get back to this notion very soon in the 19th century, because that seems to be very much the focus of the journal as well. Or at least of this special issue.

Now, we come to Roman times.



We come to Cicero and *De Amicitia*, which is written around 44 BC. This is where we begin to notice something very strange that is happening - friendship so far has been indistinguishable, as far as discourse is concerned, from the state of being in love. There was no difference between the two. Now, what begins to happen is that there is a separation. Friendship becomes more practical. Understandable, because every civilisation that we have is a protest against the previous one.

So, friendship had been romanticised and also, sexualised. This was the way in which ancient Greeks were working. The Roman idea of friendship, however, was something different. Cicero says it's about virtue, calculation, reasoning, and judgement. Therefore, the very strange thing that happens is that the emotional part of friendship somehow gets denigrated. So you are not emotionally invested in the friendship at all. It is purely a calculation - pretty much like marriage. Therefore, you are looking at friendship the way in which people do matchmaking these days. The friendship does not have any emotional component left anymore. Of course, you can later on give it an emotional colouring, which is what marriage does. We have managed to give this purely capitalist, practical act a romantic colour, and that is the way in which patriarchy works. What has happened is, and of course, we all know, that according to some Hindu wedding rituals, you have the *saath phere*. Let me remind you that there is an original Sanskrit line, which is *saptapadam hi mitram*, which means seven steps taken together constitute friendship. Or *pada* also means word. Therefore, seven words spoken to each other constitute friendship. What patriarchy has done here is that it has taken the definition of a friend, what constitutes a friendship, and applied it to marriage. What we have managed to do is to give this incredibly hierarchical relationship, the relationship between the husband and the wife, which I don't think is equal the last time I checked, and they have managed to give it the colour of friendship.

Therefore, a term that is meant to be generous, nonjudgemental, and open-minded is being constricted, and it is being applied to this toxic relationship and is being called partnership. So, what is really going on then, is the subversion. This is related to the concept of deep structure. Deep structure is basically something that patriarchy is a dab hand at because patriarchy has been consistently undermining and subverting whatever progress feminism has made. Therefore, every time you try to make some kind of a feminist progress, patriarchy is going to undercut it, and it is going to somehow co-opt it and make it about themselves. For instance, there are a lot of Women Studies Departments in the universities but if you check the syllabus, there are significant exclusions - no lesbian narratives, no trans women's narratives and no hijra narratives. Why? Why aren't they there? I believe what is really going on there is that there is this extraordinary way in which we have managed to take a generous term, and totally constrict it and constrict it and apply it there.

So, Cicero says friendship is based on virtue and virtue attracts virtue. So, what happens if virtue is attracted to virtue, and attraction turns to love? According to Cicero, when two men fall in friendship, it is virtue that attracts virtue. Now, it's not a coincidence that virtue often happens to be very good-looking as well! Attraction turns to love. I think Cicero is very well aware that *amor* is the root word that is present in *amor* and *amicitia*.



Therefore, whether you look at *amor*, which is sexual love, as in *amorous*, and *amicitia*, which is friendship, the root word is *amor*. This is the point that I am trying to make: you cannot entirely divorce the romantic and the sexual from a friendship. What then happens is that these friendships, especially those between men, struggle with this anxiety to de-sexualise friendship.

Girls are constantly tactile with each other, holding hands, hugging each other, kissing each other. No problem. As for the men, there is an actual code for men hugging men. I don't know whether you are aware of this or not. So, you hug each other, you give each other three pats, and then you disengage because if there is a fourth pat, you are apparently gay. Also, when you are shaking the hand, give it a firm handshake. What we really are looking at, is this very peculiar anxiety regarding friendship, just because the ancient Greeks confused it and made it about love. Since we are Romans, we are rather going to make it all about the mind. It is going to be about judgement.

Then you come to Montaigne and 16th century friendship. This is what Montaigne said: "Finally, all that can be said of the Academy is that it was a love which ended in friendship, which well enough agrees with the stoical definition of love".

What is the stoical definition of love? Love is a desire of contracting friendship arising from the beauty of the object. So, you are choosing your friend depending on how good-looking he is. It's still friendship, right? Montaigne uses the word "pulchritudinous", which clearly means beauty. So, what he is actually talking about is that love is a desire of contracting friendship arising from the beauty of the object. I don't know how many of you have copies of my translation of Krishnagopal Mallick, but if you have it, the book is all about this. And what is peculiar about these men – Krishnagopal Mallik and, before him, Shibram Chakraborty who are circulating (remember Chakraborty is setting his narrative sometime just after the Jallianwala massacre) is that they are apparently becoming friends exclusively with only good-looking men. And when they become friends, their friendship takes an amorous turn.

So, Shibram Chakraborty wrote this book called *Chele Boyoshe* (never a more misleading title). He wrote this book sometime in the mid-1920s. Whenever he was asked about it, he would deny that he ever authored the book. He used to constantly claim that his first book is *Bari theke Paliye*. Factually incorrect! Can you imagine how horrible it must be to disown your first-born child! But that is what Shibram Chakraborty did.

So, I return to Montaigne. And this is when Montaigne says that only those are to be reputed friendships that are fortified and confirmed by judgement and the length of time. Do you see how Montaigne is doing this sort of tightrope thing? There is a very peculiar sort of indeterminacy. Montaigne is trying to be true to the ancient Greek way of looking at friendship, but Cicero has come before him. So, he has to pay tribute to that as well. Mind you, I have not mentioned Francis Bacon over here, but if you look at Bacon's essay "Of Friendship", it is virtually a reproduction of what Montaigne says. It is all about calculation, while Montaigne gives you this sense that it is all about judgement.

Bacon is very explicit about it - the benefits that you are going to get from friendship. So, that I think it is very important, the way in which Montaigne appears to be confused. But this is where



Montaigne reveals himself. He tries very hard to be as intellectual as possible, but it does not hold much water beyond the point. He says, "If a man should implore me to give a reason as to why I loved him [a friend of his], I find it could not otherwise be expressed except for the reason that it was he, it was I". All that talk about judgement and calculation goes out of the window. So, you see, and I believe that these are Montaigne's own words, this is where he is not riding on the shoulders of the ancients or anybody. What is wonderful is that all the time when Montaigne was talking about friendship and judgement, calculation and reasoning, it somehow wasn't getting across to us.

Shelley was so impressed with the statue of Young Bacchus and Ampelos that he wrote an actual note on it. He describes how Ampelos with his left arm embraces the waist of Bacchus, "yet how seldom from this disturbing and tyrannical institutions do you see a younger and an elder boy at school walking in some remote grassy spot of their playground with that tender friendship towards each other, which has so much love". Again, what Shelley is doing is he is merging friendship with love. He goes on to say, "...Like the pleasure of love with one whom we most love, which having taken away desire, [this is where he is very careful] leaves pleasure, sweet pleasure". So, this is again, something that Shelley is doing, a balancing act on the one hand is that there is no desire. But what is weird is that he is talking about a relationship where there is no desire by talking about a statue, which is about desire, because Ampelos and Bacchus, they are absolutely positioned in mythology as lovers.

I will switch over to the late 20th century and talk about Michel Foucault. Foucault and Derrida - who are both primarily poststructuralist theorists - are much more interested in language and words, and they believe that our identities constitute entirely of words. Without words, we don't have an identity. And then they go on to say - especially, Derrida - that words are floating signifiers.

Therefore, this whole myth of having a stable identity is a lie, because you are building your identity on words, but the words themselves don't have a consolidated meaning. Then where is your identity? I think that it is a very poststructuralist turn that our understanding of language takes and which is why I talk about queer theory as poststructuralist feminism, Queer theory is poststructuralist feminism, because it takes feminism away from the body, unlike the first and second wave feminists, who were still (whether they like it or not) pretty much tied to the body. And what poststructuralism does, which is why Judith Butler gets a lot of flak, is that, you just sort of sit in academia, and talk and play with words, what about the on-ground happenings? What people do not realise is that you try to talk about what is happening on the ground without using language. Sorry. So, this incredible sort of misunderstanding of Judith Butler is something that I have got no patience for.

Anyway, what Foucault is talking about here is not sex, but affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship among homosexuals which is troubling to the larger society. The point that Foucault is making is that the larger society, the heteronormative society, is extremely happy with gay men having random sexual encounters with strangers. For, if gay men get to have random sex with strangers, without any kind of affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, companionship, then the heteronormative majority gets to claim that they are better because they understand affection and tenderness, while for the homosexuals, it's just sex.



So, what is really going on there is Foucault is trying to say that look, that is not really subversive. What would be really subversive is if all the gay men got together, and they created this kind of camaraderie and companionship. He uses the word fidelity, which I am going to deliberately interpret to mean fidelity, in a broader sense. Therefore, fidelity to the idea of camaraderie and companionship, rather than a sort of monogamous fidelity. Therefore, affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, companionship to be precise. Remember, Foucault is talking about it in 1997, which is 16 years after the first reports of AIDS came to light. The AIDS crisis did two very contradictory things. One is that it decimated a very large part of the gay population in the West. In Africa, it was a different story. But in the West, a large part of the gay population was decimated. But okay, so that you may regard it as a terrible thing. It also brought those surviving gay men who were still alive together and it politicised them in a way in which that politicisation still had not happened even after the Stonewall Riots of 1969. So, there was some kind of a politicisation that had happened post-1969, which is to say that, we should get together and we should fight patriarchy. And then the notion amongst a lot of gay men was that sex was political.

Of course, the unfortunate ramifications of this led to the outbreak of the AIDS crisis. And then gay men again came together. But this time, it was all about how do we protect ourselves? So, how can we have safe sex? Therefore, a discourse on almost compulsory usage of condoms, and being more careful, not only about the pleasure that I am providing myself, but also to the others. Foucault posits that homosexuality was one of the conditions in the armies of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, especially in the trenches of World War I, on which was predicated soldiers' ability to follow their captain into danger, living in close quarters for weeks at a time. Well, of course, we have examples of that. I mean, those of us who have read poetry of the First World War may be aware - Rupert Brooke was bisexual, Wilfred Owen was gay, and Siegfried Sassoon was also gay.

If you look at the poetry of Wilfred Owen, for example, his affection for his fellow men in the trenches, it's couched in friendship. So therefore, what is happening is that there are two kinds of love, right? So, there is one kind of love, which is the erotic love, and then there is this other kind of love, which is agape, which is sort of much more expansive, which is something that W. H. Auden writes about in "Lullaby". So that kind of love is there. What Wilfred Owen is doing is sort of creating a poetry, which seems to be about agape. But within that agape, there is also preserved that sense of emotional, sexual bond that may have existed between his fellow men in the trenches. So that, I think, is something which I would want you to take note of.

Now, by the time we come to Derrida, he makes a very interesting separation between Greco-Roman friendship and Judeo-Christian friendship. He says that Greco-Roman friendship was public and political, while Judeo-Christian friendship was private. I am not quite sure how tenable that binarisation is, but this is something that he suggests. Also, he recommends another politics, another democracy, a democracy to come, not requiring the trace of birth or family for membership. It's another type of politics. Therefore, what I have been trying to lead up to in this presentation all along is that, whether you like it or not, friendship is political. And you can make it as spontaneous as you can. But ultimately, consciously or unconsciously, you are being political.



It's another matter that you may not acknowledge it, but it is always there. 19th century. Walt Whitman. Look at the number of times he uses phrases like "my dear friend, my lover", "a friend, a lover", "dear love of comrades", "brotherhood of lovers". And this is in poem after poem after poem. You know, open up your copy of *Leaves of Grass*. It's all there. Walt Whitman is very smart. He is aware of ancient Greek philosophy. He is also aware of Plato and Aristotle. He knows it. He was a journalist and he went to war. Therefore, he has seen all of that stuff, and this is what comes out of it.

I am reminded of Professor Jasodhara Bagchi, who used to be my teacher at Jadavpur University, and taught us "In Memoriam". And she says, "You see, the relationship between Tennyson and Hallam", and I'm taking it down, it was, see, "When Hallam died, it was a kind of widowhood". What? It was all there. Anybody who has even given a cursory reading of "In Memoriam" will know. Again, just good friends.

So therefore, the first lines of "In Memoriam" are not so much powerfully assertive, but an extrapolation, religious idealisation of the poet's earthly love for Hallam. You read the poem, it's very clear. And this is something which also the 19th century allowed. I would like you to pay attention to the work of one of my favourite figures from the 19th century, this complete madman called Edward Carpenter. And Edward Carpenter is very important because he had become something like a guru. And you know, he used to live there in the village, an aristocratic man, but completely idiosyncratic like most Brits are. He was living out there in the village. He had got a lot of money from his family with which he bought a cottage. He lived there with his boyfriend called George Merrill, who was from the working class. A lot of people were paying homage to him. So, they would go and visit him, people that you and I know about, people like D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster.

The first time that E.M. Foster visits Edward Carpenter, Edward Carpenter looks at E.M. Foster, a very long moment. And then he says, at very long last, "Do sit still". Foster was so excited. At the second meeting, E.M. Foster was about to leave, when George Merrill touched E.M. Forster at the bottom of his spine, just like that. And this is the only example that we have of the immaculate conception of a novel, because at that touch, a novel formed in his head. He came back home and he wrote the novel in one sitting. It was *Maurice*. So, *Maurice* was written literally by touch.

So, we now move on, now what is going on between Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac? I will simply read out, not my words, but those of Sunil Ganguly:

"Madhu answers instead of Gour, "No Gour won't leave right now. He's going to spend the day with me." [*perhaps implying the night too*]

Gour was sitting with his head bent and his cheeks aflame. Madhu ran to him, seized him within his arms and rapidly gave him a number of smacking kisses saying, "Oh, there's just you and me. Me and you. Gour and Madhu. Madhu and Gour. Ah, what bliss!"

Just friendship. Just good friends.



Further, Michael Madhusudana Dutta used to write these poems and all of them were dedicated to Gour Das Bysac, which was quite annoying to him.

This is not quite the standardized Michael Madhusudana Dutta that we were taught in school, is this? I don't think so.

Going back to Sunil Ganguly, I quote

"I heard you're often around Keshto Banerjee's these days".

"Yes, I've been there a couple of times".

"Why? Has some pretty daughters, does he, whose faces you hope to glimpse?"

"Gour, you are jealous. Yes, I'm right. You're blushing. Why don't you tell me you dislike me visiting a woman?"

Madhu drew Gour into his arms, covering his face with kisses, more kisses. He murmured, "But I love you best, Gour. Please don't be angry. Please don't".

Madhu dragged Gour into the bedroom, pushed him down on the bed and said, "Thou have forgotten thy promise of honouring my poor cot with the sacred dust of your feet. Fulfil that promise today. Bless my bed with the dust of your feet."

Just good friends.

"Unable to tolerate these excesses, Gour gave Madhu a violent shove. Losing his balance, Madhu fell spread-eagled on the floor. Gour was truly incensed. He didn't try to give Madhu a hand.

After a while, Madhu got up and said in a desolate voice, "Even you push me away, Gour. I shouldn't bother you anymore. One of these days I'll suddenly disappear, and you'll search and search, but never find me."

Therefore, you know, what was going on in the 19th century? What is going on between Michael Madhusudhan Dutta and Gour Dass Bysac? Is it friendship? Is it love? Is it both? Is it neither? We don't know. And I think the fact that we don't know is where the queer lies.

The fact that we don't know, the fact that it is so inchoate, the fact that it is so amorphous, the fact that it is so polyvalent, that I think is where literature draws its power from. You see, people very often ask me, what is the difference between literature and other discourses like legal or medical? I think literature blossoms in lack of clarity, and that is what gives literature its power.

And finally, we come to *Cheler Boyoshe* by Shibram Chakraborty.

So let me establish the context. So, there is this character called Debenda. Now Debenda is about 17, 18 years old. There is also a character called Ashanto. And Ashanto and Mohan, they are the lovers in the novel. They are the central, sort of romantic pair in the novel, Ashanto and Mohan. And Debenda has met Ashanto once before when Debenda was standing outside a theatre. He had



two tickets. Because that's what one does. One always gets two tickets. And mysteriously one is spare, because the ticket that is meant for the other friend never turns up. So, Debenda is standing there with two tickets, thinking. And then he immediately looks at a boy, approaches him and says, you know, I have got a spare ticket. You know, would you mind? And the boy is like, oh, sure! Then they go to watch the play together. And, you know, he falls onto Debenda's shoulder and all of that happens. And then they lose contact. And then at a later point, Ashanta is dripping wet in the rain, is lost and he takes shelter in a random house. Now, that random house turns out to be the house of Debenda.

And, you know, so I tell you, that novel is hysterical. It's like you can't stop reading because you think, what was Shibram Chakraborty thinking? I mean, he was in his late teens when he was writing this. So, you can tell, a very early book.

And so, what is really going on is they meet again. And then, of course, as conveniently as possible, it starts to rain.

You know, what is amazing about this novel is that there is one woman character. She appears for one scene and then she is gone. It's like this token woman.

It's an extraordinary book.

And so, you have this boy who's lying in Debenda's bed.

And Debenda, having finished his housework, comes in.

Ashanta says, "you're late, Debenda".

"What's this? You're still awake?"

"I'm not sleepy".

"Tell me a story."

"A story this late in the night? I'm stroking your head. You go to sleep."

"I won't be able to. My eyes are burning."

"Right. I'm taking away the burn."

He kissed his eyelids and said that he would definitely be able to sleep now.

Ashanta wrapped his arms around Debenda's neck. Debenda drew him closer into his chest, mesmerised by the taste of an entirely unfamiliar joy that coursed through their hearts, faces and entire being. They saw the dawn after a showery January night."

Look at the way in which friendship is getting used as a frame and it is used as a very shapeless frame, so it can accommodate so many things. And I think that is really what I basically wanted to leave you with today.



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