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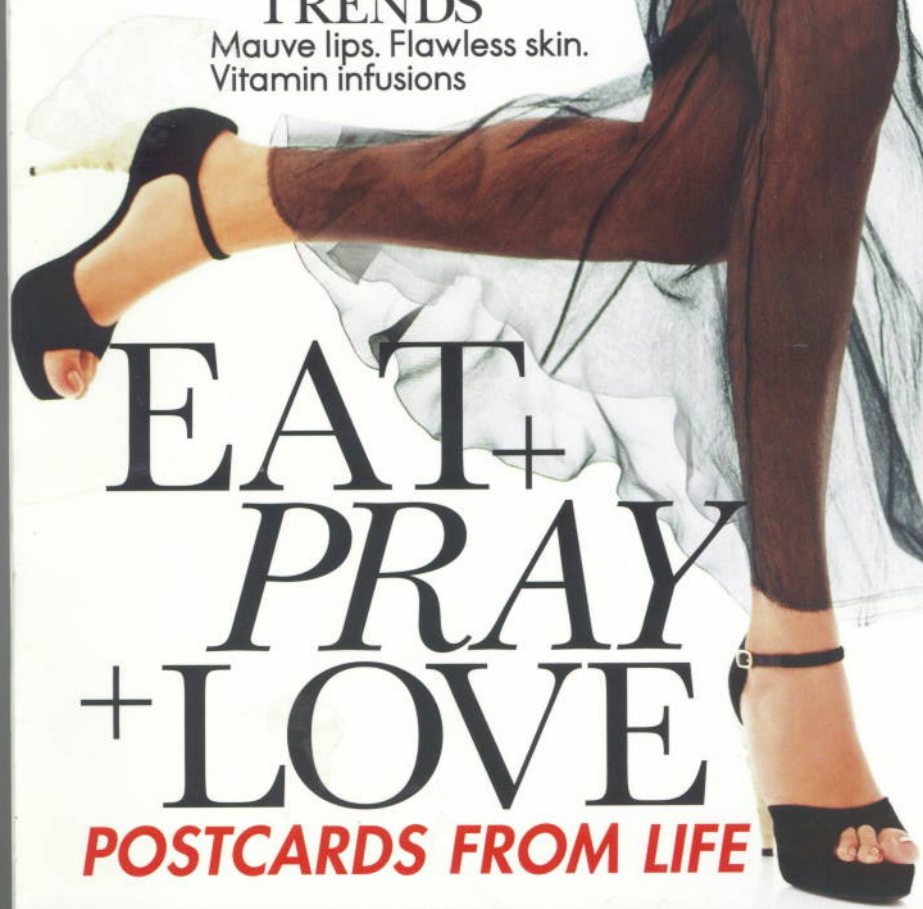
FEBRUARY 2010

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FREIDA

AN EXCLUSIVE

JUST IN
THE SEASON'S
TOP 20
BEAUTY
TRENDS

Mauve lips. Flawless skin.
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EAT+
PRAY
+ LOVE

POSTCARDS FROM LIFE

THE A-LIST
FROM THE
CLASSIC DIAMOND
TO THE IT
BAG & SHOE

FIND
THE PERFECT WEIGHT
FOR YOUR HEIGHT

Or is it that perfect feeling right after the sigh and right before you drift into sleep in your lover's arms – the feeling that has no direction or object really, it could be for that person holding you at that most vulnerable of moments, or it could be for yourself, or for a perfect moment of life itself, and nothing more and nothing less. Sexual fulfilment? Love, surely?

Or is it the grown up love for a partner of decades, co-parent of your offspring, co-habitant of your nest or cave, co-payer of bills and co-cleaner of toilets (someday, you hope), the consistent feeling (liberally peppered with daily annoyances) which prevents you from acting on pheromone rushes for someone other than this partner, the feeling that binds you to each other for all eternity – or at least for this life? Entitlement? Ownership? Love?

Or is it the strength to lend your shoulder for tears, your hand for support, your time and energy to the despondent, the old, the sick, the dying? Is it empathy? Sympathy? Duty? Love?

Attempting to interpret or analyse this world of emotion and cause and effect – to which we have given this paltry label – feels like listing the ingredients of night: Darkness, fireflies, fear, sounds of moonlight and smell of starlight. Inadequate.

The limitless, complex, beautiful, ugly, indifferent, violent feelings we feel all spring from love – like hours in a day, like people in a city, a million forms and expressions of it, impossible to divide or define.

Love is just a name for nothing and everything – for the substance of the soul.

Urmilla Deshpande, author of *A Pack of Lies* (Westland/Tranquebar, 2009), grew up in Mumbai. She now lives in Florida. Her second book, *Kashmir Blues* (Westland/Tranquebar), will be published later this year. She is working on a third novel, and a collection of short stories.

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LOVE THROUGH THE ODDS

By Shazia Omar

Learning at 11

The crisp Canadian autumn air made my breath look like smoke, so I pretended to puff on a cigarette, and that made him laugh. We headed to the lake, me on my cycle, him on his skateboard. A few weeks earlier, he had won, but now, with training from home and hours of practice, I was ready to take him on. We threw ourselves onto the wooden planks of the dock and locked hands. "Three, two, one, go!" he shouted. Sweat droplets on our foreheads, scrawny arms shaking with effort, knuckles white, then finally his hand went down. I whooped with delight and danced in victory. He joined, happy to lose. We sat on the dock throwing stones into the silvery water. He slipped his arm around me and leaned in for a kiss. I pushed him away. Years later, after innumerable love letters and endless hours of flirting on the phone, I let him have that kiss, and it threw us into the intense passion of puppy love.



Living at 21

A sexy stranger seduced me on the dance floor. It was my last night in Manhattan, I had downed two Cosmos. I was ready for an adventure. The interviews had gone well. Perhaps next I'd have a job, maybe a boyfriend, or two. I'd survived the torrential emotions of mercurial college relationships, joy, lust, betrayal, heart break; the works. I wasn't sure what sort of man I needed, or whether I even needed a man at all. I knew banking wasn't the right profession for me, but with all the questions looming ahead – who, what, where – who was I, what should I do with my life, where should I live – I didn't have time to worry about the details. I was willing to sell my soul to the man for some independence and the cash to repay my college loans. I could ponder my choices later, in between shopping sprees on Fifth Avenue and random dates with the wolves of Wall Street.

Loving at 31

My two-year-old daughter wiggled out of my arms, brandishing her toothbrush in the air, off to find teddy, he apparently needed to brush his teeth too. My husband grabbed me by my waist and planted a wet kiss on my lips then scampered off behind her. I rubbed cocoa butter on my belly. The baby within kicked softly, letting me know he was up too. The strategy session was delayed by an hour, so I had a rare moment to pamper myself and reflect on life. I would turn 31 that year and I wondered what the decade would offer. I wanted glamour and fame, time with my family, career growth, and a chance to explore my potential. I was no longer plagued by the existential angst of my 20s, nor cocooned by the absolute certainty of my childhood. I could see before me the possibility of love in abundance, happiness and bliss, but did embracing commitment mean surrendering independence? Moving from self-centred to selfless? Could I balance the many demands on my time and still be the graceful woman I wanted to be, giving love unconditionally to those around me, drawing strength from the ultimate love, the magnificence of God. □

Shazia Omar is a social psychologist. Her debut novel, *Like a Diamond in the Sky* (Zubaan/Penguin, August 2009). She lives in Bangladesh where she works at a development agency and teaches pilates.