It was a quiet night. The only sounds one could hear as I was lounging on my couch was the purrs of my cat as it napped on my lap, and the sound of pages turning. I was finishing up another novel about the trials and tribulations of a couple as they discover love.

I’ve read a lot of these stories over the years. Somehow, despite the tales being much the same, there’s always a new one out there if I wanted it. Modern stories, fantasy stories, stories between people of different social standings and positions, even stories of forbidden love. You think about it, and someone, somewhere, as probably written it.

Why is it so popular of a genre? I think about it every now and then, but I don’t think I manage to really get close to an answer. After all, it’s not like I actually understand it myself. I know I read these stories to try and feel, even if only vicariously, the emotion itself.

You might read that and go “Well, isn’t that the point?” and you wouldn’t be wrong, but I don’t mean it like you think. I chase the emotion because I don’t know how it feels. Most of my life, I saw it around me, heard the tropes, and got told all sorts of stories. I didn’t feel anything, but I felt it was just that I didn’t meet the right person, or it wasn’t the right time. After all, that’s what everyone says, isn’t it? “You just haven’t met the right person.”

So, I waited. My mother kept making pointed statements about grandkids. She also kept trying to talk up the children of her various friends. I had a fruitless relationship that left both of us heartbroken, as I just couldn’t feel anything, despite knowing there was something there. I focused more on my job in order to get my mind off of it, or maybe to meet someone that way. It happens, right? The “right person”.

Years later, my mom stopped making the comments about grandkids; my sister got married and had her own. Besides, I found out later that I couldn’t have any anyway. I realized that my mom was trying to set me up on dates (clumsily). My life moved on, moved “past”. And still, I never felt like I ever met the “right person”.

Eventually I met some people. Not the “right person”, but some people who helped me learn a new language. And through them, I learned that there isn’t always a “right person”. Or, to put it another way, some people can’t tell who their “right person” is. The tropes? The stories? The signs? It doesn’t happen. They’re left in the dark, not even a light at the end of the tunnel.

But that’s also not inherently a bad thing, either. Sure, I spent a lot of my life being affected by the expectation, but I also lived a good life regardless. But I’m still a curious person by nature, so here I am, reading stories about students and businessmen, knights and maids, rulers and the people who surround them, chasing that feeling, seeing if I can better understand it.

Done with my novel, I close the book and stretch, waking up the sleepy kitty, who also stretches before leaping away. I get up and put the book away, look at the clock, and decide to head to bed. These stories always make me think about this.

It was a quiet night. The only sounds one could hear was a soft sobbing, the sound of one who knows they can’t have what they chase after.