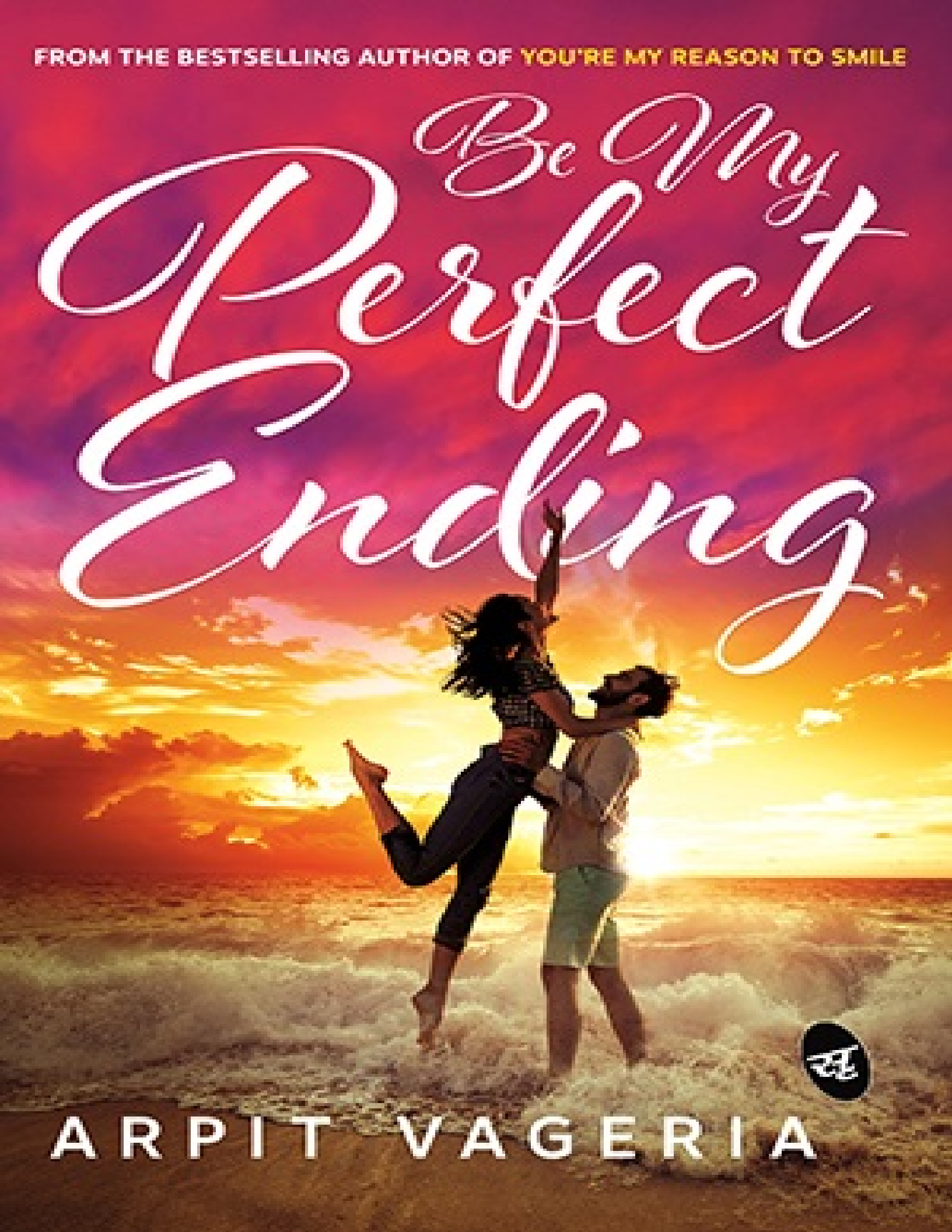
FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF YOU'RE MY REASON TO SMILE

Be My Perfect Ending



ARPIT VAGERIA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About the author

Arpit Vageria is a bestselling author of three romance novels -*You Are My Reason To Smile, I Still Think About You* and *Chocolate Sauce-Smooth.Dark.Sinful.* Arpit also writes for Indian television industry and has written over 500 episodes for many fiction and non-fiction shows for the five leading Indian television channels. Having once worked for companies like The Times of India and HDFC Bank, to name a few, Arpit now also writes digital web episodes.

As someone who loves life's every moment, he enjoys road trips, singing, playing pranks and adventure sports.

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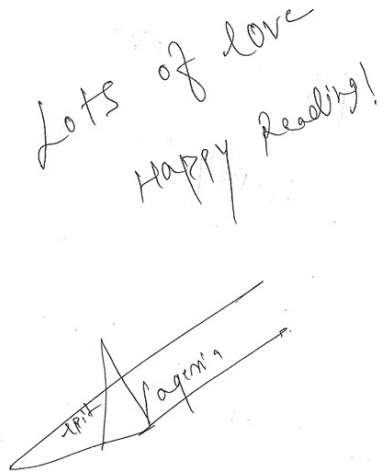

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To each and everyone
who believes in perfect endings.

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And lastly to myself, for being able to complete this wonderful new book…

Be My Perfect Ending.



29th September 2017
7:00 p.m.

In life, we often think that it shouldn't end like this. We expect the sun to shine bright, flowers to bloom, but sometimes the day turns dark and leaves us disappointed. Not because there's no daylight, but because we all want a perfect ending. We forget that in real life, reality is mostly far different from our imagination. Here, verses of life don't always rhyme, and beats of the heart move quicker than the beats of life. Life doesn't begin with a 'happy' new year, nor does it end with the same spirit. What's more, it doesn't even stop when you lose someone you couldn't once live without. Life simply doesn't begin or end. Life goes on. You still breathe, you still care, and you still live.

That night, Armaan looked at the glass of wine, which, though one of the many that he had, charmed him the most. He sighed and looked out of the window again. Armaan and Sara had seen the dawn of their love shining up, and the dusk of their hopes go down from this window. The memories of Sara and him talking, fighting and making out were still fresh. Their meeting was a coincidence, but the mutual liking that sparked after that was not. They had kick-started their relationship almost instantly after meeting, it was so special.

They both were television professionals, and like many other television professionals, they too struggled financially and had shifted in together to share expenses. Armaan was prudent in a way that Sara had never been, thanks to his middle class upbringing. Sara had lost her parents early in life, and Armaan's concern for her made her feel significant. They'd made their vows and promised to love each other forever.

Armaan got up from the couch, not wanting to believe his life's reality… something that had shattered their lives forever. Although his heart refused to believe it, but something deep inside his mind told him that it was real. Till when would he ignore it! There would be people who would offer to help them move on, move on for good, for the future. They all would say how one is lucky to have had love in life. He knew that people would keep giving 'Loving doesn't mean to have the person next to you always, it's much deeper' kind of bullshit. Friends would always try to get your life back on track and make you meet hot

strangers at clubs and parties, also telling you how their own life sucks with their loved ones. But every one of those clichés was no more than an annoyance, because Armaan knew that no matter what, he would never be together with Sara now.

He had lost her some days back, not to anything of this world, but to destiny. No matter how much he wanted to believe that there'd be a way out, deep within he already knew that there was nothing that he could say or do to ever get back together.

Had they been together today, they'd be celebrating his birthday at some of the finest beachside restaurants. It wasn't particularly hard for them to plan a special evening together. Both of them just wanted to get away from the chaos of the city. With the kind of busy schedules they had, they preferred planning things together over cancelling a surprise because of last minute work commitments.

As memories started flooding back, so did the tears. Armaan didn't want to cry anymore, but his dreams had died. He saw the wine glass toppling down to the floor, shattering instantly. But the sound of the glass shattering was way more calm than the storm in his life. He let out a breath he had been holding and fisted his hand to punch the wall – something he was used to doing whenever he was in a tough situation. He just held his hands tight and regretted having met Sara that day.

During the past few months, his thoughts had alternated between his first and last meeting with Sara. He knew that in a situation like this, it's difficult to move on in life. But from the last couple of times, he had seen some friends or colleagues recommending therapists. Armaan knew that it would take some time to get back to normal and hoped that people did more than offering concerned and pitiful glances. Everyone asked what happened that night, but only a few of them actually tried living the pain. And for the rest of them, it was just another story and perhaps subject for gossip.

Armaan watched a guy from the movers and packers walking towards him. He looked around and saw that everything else had been loaded into the truck downstairs.

'Excuse me,' he said, coming towards the couch. 'I have to take that couch.'

The couch where they had talked for hundreds of hours, made countless memories, lied down while watching the full moon in the night, and slept. The guys picked it up and went his way, not realising what that piece of furniture really meant to them.

There was something about this house that made Armaan feel that he was

leaving behind a part of his life with it. He knew well why he felt that way, or why a vacant flat was calling out to him in the voice of his beloved. He was proud of the memories they both had created, but now the same memories were haunting him.

He looked at his flat one last time before the door was locked and keys passed to the owner. He told himself that some doors in life needed to be closed, for they would lead nowhere. He found himself thinking about how it all had started and how time had changed everything. It seemed unlikely, but at the same time, he had the strange feeling of coming back to this flat once again. Or at least he hoped so. He wasn’t sure why, but he tried to think about how his fears had turned into reality. He tried to dismiss his heavy breaths that had guilt, hopelessness and just one little ray of hope. He knew dark clouds had faded his life’s bright sunshine, but believed that winds of change had the power to take away the darkest thunderstorms to bring back the light.

You know, sometimes, the story starts where it actually ends.

Sometimes, not every story has a happy ending. But is a perfect ending all that matters?



29th April 2017

It was Saturday night, and Armaan's flat was thronged with his flatmate Sandy's friends. Sandy and Armaan were two extreme end of a pole. Armaan and his other flatmate Rohit always felt that Sandy was keeping something from them. That night, Sandy and his friends had asked these two to accompany them. They thought it might be fun to have a writer around when they're completely drunk and sloshed, and it probably would've been fun if it hadn't been for rewriting the entire episode of his show which was supposed to be shot the next day itself. It had been a last minute change, as the new supervising producer Sara from the channel had joined the show and she apparently had problems with the way the episode was written.

It was a cruel, sick joke on a weekend. He sometimes loved and sometimes hated his job. He thought it was easy for the channel to shoot e-mails over the weekend and spoil somebody's personal life. And it was also easy to be pointing out loopholes in the script, although very few people who claimed to be so-called creative producers knew how to better it.

Armaan had taken three days to script it, and it took Sara three minutes to give him that feedback. That's what happens when you're new to the Indian television industry; you've to call non-creative people from the channel the creative ones and have to agree to the stupidest of their feedback. They'll just use big words and if you're not a great speaker of the language, they'd shut your logic with their vocabulary. If you try shutting them out with your creativity, you either have to be really experienced and snobbish or they would readily show you the way out of the channel. Then at the end of it all, for mere survival in the industry, you'd have to decide on staying rather than satisfying your creative soul.

Armaan had not always been this wise. He had also stood for his creativity, but then, the producers who had recommended Armaan to the channel in the first place thought he was being macho or brave in trying to question the channel's head. Later, those very producers threw him out of the projects as it was risking their image as an ideal 'suckhole'.

Putting his thoughts aside, he heard the music coming from the other room

and felt the vibes. He wondered whether his unwanted flatmate Sandy had ever faced such kind of troubles. There were times when Armaan needed him as a buddy – a little care for a flatmate wouldn't really hurt anyone – but Sandy wasn't the type. Armaan didn't have any great memories with him.

Sandy's room was located just next to Armaan's. It was larger than the other rooms in the house and had a bathroom that had been designed around a beautiful Jacuzzi and bath tub. As per Sandy, taking a bath relieved one the most. Sandy was a struggling actor, and that allowed him much free time. When Armaan moved into this flat, he hung out with Sandy quite a bit. He had thought it would be a good bonding experience, which turned out to be completely otherwise. Even when Armaan did not want to accompany him, which was most times, Sandy would cajole him into coming.

Right now, Armaan could hear really loud music, and that didn't help in rewriting the episode at all. So he got up and shut his door to avoid any distractions. He read the feedback two more times, and it looked completely illogical and snobbish to him. He narrowed his eyes at the e-mail text that said, *'Script isn't up to the mark. Lead character isn't moving as per the arc and I am not really sure if I'd like to retain even a tiny bit of this script. Major rework needed. I'd expect new script to be submitted by today EOD.'*

He sat at his desk and checked his schedule for the next week. Chock-full. His eyes drifted to a chat box on his laptop screen. His closest friend Bhuvan was getting married and he sincerely expected Armaan to be there. He was specifically asking Armaan to not fail his promise this time.

Armaan walked up to the balcony and took a deep breath. He saw party lights from Sandy's room flickering in a steady rhythm. He noticed shadows of dancing people, happy people. He was not a big fan of such parties, but he thought he hadn't seen himself as a happy man in a long long time.

On other days, he would just call up his mother and talk for long when he felt low, but he had recently started facing network issues in his own room and he didn't want to step outside. Plus, he had a complete script to rework. The more he was trying to focus, the more he was getting distracted.

He glanced at the clock and realised time was running out. When had it not, he wondered. He had barely registered that it'd been five years that he came to Mumbai. This thought inevitably led him to question himself – 'Have I achieved enough in the last five years? What's more important – a balanced personal life or a stable professional life?' For the most part, his conversation with himself touched the questions of his capabilities, and for the time that he interrogated

himself, he realized he wasn’t ready to go any deeper than that.

He was shaken with the sudden breeze that caressed his face and he looked up at the sky. Suddenly, out of nowhere, clouds had started balling together, a breeze had started settling in. This setting made Armaan – who had a history of countless failed relationships – think back on all his exes. He’d always chat for some time over coffee or so for breaking the news of a break-up to his partner, and then amicably separate ways. He kept it so calm and composed that no one had ever shouted or created a scene over the break-up. Break-up expert writing for Indian television, he thought and smiled to himself. In reality, all his ex-girlfriends either wanted to marry him sooner than he was ready for it, or he thought would leave him before he did. To avoid hassle, he ended the relationships himself, in good time, with all honesty. He had been that way, honest, for as long as he could remember. When other parents taught their kids to study their wits out to top their classes, his parents always taught him to be honest and take life a bit easier and not stress out, which was so unlike average Indian parents.

But as he grew older, his parents weren’t always around, and he became a part of the rat race. He just went about his life, doing what needed to be done – that, in fact, is one of the worst things that happen to you when you leave a part of your life behind and move into a city that has many rejections to offer. Now, he had been so moulded into this chaos that he was too scared to change.

It seemed unlikely to finish his script tonight. He somehow wasn’t sure if he would be able to write it better than the previous version. He felt the pressure too, but as he tried to dismiss it, doing his best to convince himself that he can do it, he started rewriting it with all conviction. He thought of his dream that had brought him to Mumbai and told himself that no matter how funny or irritating this new supervising producer may be, he would like to meet her soon and discuss the timelines.



30th April 2017

It was 2 a.m. Their bodies were twirled together, making them one. He had always thought how it would be like to make love to her, and had hundreds of ideas, but when the heat of her body touched his, it made him forget everything except that moment.

His throat was dry with all the panting and his hands were shaking. Moving closer, he rested his hands between her breasts. His manhood felt invigorated like never before; it felt great, it felt amazing, it felt as if two fiery rivers were meeting to merge with the calm sea. Their bodies got hotter; there was not even space for air between them, but they still felt a need to come closer. He heard her exhale in comfort and tightened his grip on her smooth and spotless back. It took him just a movement of his hand to unhook her clothes and set her breasts free.

She arched her mouth towards his and his lips brushed her neck. Her breast pressed into his chest with the raging pleasure. He ran his hands around her hips and his touch gave her enormous pleasure. He implanted a sensuous kiss at the most sensitive point on her neck. It was unreal as the world around them kept fading out. She started breathing heavily and surrendered herself to Armaan. She locked her legs behind his back as he moved upward and brushed his lips against hers. No other girl had made him feel like that – so ignited and wanted. She became his prisoner and he made himself a jailor. A ruthless jailor.

With a swift movement of his other hand, he got rid of the last bit of clothing on him and she knew they couldn't wait any longer. The need to unite was too strong. They moved, they rubbed against each other, and they travelled to a realm yet unexplored. It was painful for her, and Armaan was in mood for mercy. He felt the rhythmical pounding of her vagina over his manhood, as if the prisoner wished to remain imprisoned.

She was pleading with him to stop, but the more she pleaded, the more painful he made it for her. Despite her resistance, he could see the satisfaction in her eyes. Both of them were sweating and the gradual strokes were giving her pleasure. The way she was biting her own lips, he knew both of them would climax soon, and at almost the same time.

'Oh god yes, yes.…I am cumming.' She exhaled and Armaan felt himself

being flooded. He started feeling uneasy and the dream of sleeping with a beautiful girl he doesn't know in real life ended with the light flooding his room. It took him a while to realize that it was only a dream, and some more time to come out of that mindframe.

That Sunday morning, Armaan began the process of making himself believe that he had a day off to himself after working till late last night. When the bell rang and he didn't open the gate out of lousiness, it felt more like a Sunday for himself.

It must be Sandy's friends, he thought. After a while, he got up, ambled towards the living room and realized that it was dusk. He hadn't slept; he had almost died after tiring schedules last night. But what had woken him up was the silence in the flat. The irrefutable proof that he was losing out on all his friends, plus the awkwardness that he shared with Sandy when both of them were home.

Armaan had just about turned towards the bathroom when Sandy walked towards his room.

'Armaan, there's something important that I want to discuss with you,' Sandy said and initiated their first real conversation since many months.

'I'd like to shower first, if that's okay,' Armaan said running a hand through his hair.

'It's fine. I was thinking of going to Zara for shopping in half an hour. Would you like to join?'

'Sure, I don't have anything else planned anyway,' Armaan said.

'See you in a few?'

'Sure,' Armaan replied.

Armaan showered, shaved, and threw on a jogger, a newly bought t-shirt, and loafers. Sandy was already waiting for him downstairs. Armaan caught a trace of rose shampoo that Sandy must have used this morning.

'I hope you didn't mind joining me today,' Sandy said and accelerated the car.

'Not at all. In fact, I was feeling suffocated inside and was planning to go out anyway.'

'I tried to wake you up this morning, but you were a little too tired to respond. You should have joined us yesterday. It was fun.'

'I'm not surprised. There were a lot of your friends at the flat last night. We chilled together in our previous days here. I guess, life got in the way and work kept me occupied. I would have loved to join you guys otherwise,' Armaan said.

‘I am sorry, I should have at least joined for dinner or something,’ he added after a certain pause.

‘Oh, never mind! I am equally at fault. I have been rude at times, my lifestyle and everything… Haven’t really tried spending time with you guys. I guess it’s becoming easier now that I’ve broken the ice,’ Sandy said. Armaan replied with a nod and got busy checking his mobile. Sandy reached out for the music player and put on some music.

Armaan switched it off and said, ‘Both of our voices don’t sound too bad. I’d be happy to keep this radio switched off.’

‘Oh! I wouldn’t mind at all. For a while there, I thought I might bore you. Your expressions said what you didn’t,’ Sandy said and smiled.

‘Oh no! Don’t take me wrong. I’m a little tired after last week’s continuous late night work. That’s all! I was up late working the entire week,’ Armaan answered defensively, the fatigue almost reflecting in his voice.

‘I just assumed that you were getting bored, because you used to do that a lot, you know… Whenever I talked about my auditions and everything.’ Sandy frowned.

‘That’s because I wasn’t doing any work then and it would be impossible for me to sit, do nothing and listen to everyone’s work. I swear it’s nothing more than that,’ Armaan said, almost apologetically.

‘Thank you for being so honest, but we both were out here alone because of certain misunderstandings.’ Sandy exhaled sharply and smiled.

‘It’s never too late to mend things,’ Armaan said.

‘This mind is a terrible thing. At times, it occupies itself with things that never really existed and might never exist,’ Sandy phisolphised. Armaan was not aware of this side of him.

So he added, ‘And it creates its own stories from the vacuum it has created in relationships. After a certain point of time, illusion becomes the only reality and we’ve already moved too far to even check on it.’

‘That’s deep,’ Sandy said wide-eyed.

‘I guess, that’s the job of a writer.’ Armaan shrugged.

‘And you’re pretty good at it.’

‘I so hope that the channel also thought so. I wouldn’t have looked so tired today otherwise.’

‘I heard that channel people are quite helpful,’ Sandy said, unsure.

‘Ah, that’s because you haven’t worked with them. You want me to pass on your pictures or videos? It’s no bother,’ Armaan said and tried hiding his smile.

‘That’s so thoughtful of you, but I don’t want to spoil my life doing that. I am happy doing advertisement modelling and web series.’ Sandy winked at him.

‘Never say never. You might end up doing it someday. After all, it’s all under one roof.’

‘It’s not going to happen for now.’

‘You realize you’re a bad actor.’ Armaan smiled.

‘No, not till now. It will take me some casting couch experiences, some more rejections to realize the same,’ Sandy said with a forced smile on his face. Armaan didn’t like this phrase. He saw something terrible in that smile. He inspected the non-Sandy gesture. With Sandy trying hard to not look towards Armaan, Armaan was trying hard to understand the meaning behind what he had just heard.

Sandy didn’t say anything for the next few seconds, but then, he looked more uncomfortable with every passing moment. He wanted to hide away. He suddenly regretted saying what he had.

‘You wanted to talk regarding something before we left the flat,’ Armaan reminded Sandy, more to get rid of the uncomfortable silence.

‘Let it be. It’ll just be another thing on an already terrible weekend of yours.’

Sandy pressed the steering of the car and covered it all in his fist, willing himself not to cry. As soon as they reached the mall parking, crowds started pressing in around them. His words seemed to fade in and out with the chaos outside.

‘I’m definitely not letting this go. I know that we’re not the thickest of buddies, but our friendship is rather old to just ignore what’s bothering you. Plus, I’d been putting it off for a while and it seemed that you’re hiding something. You better speak it out now,’ Armaan said.

Sandy opened his mouth slightly and closed it before saying anything. As if something was stopping him from saying anything.

‘I am planning on leaving Mumbai and shifting back to Delhi. Leaving everything,’ Sandy said and paused.

‘That’s definitely not one amongst the hundreds of possibilities I imagined in the last few minutes. What’s wrong?’ Armaan was rather surprised.

‘Everything. Everything is,’ Sandy said. Armaan didn’t interfere this time and

waited for Sandy to speak whenever he'd be comfortable. He could see a storm coming. It was a side of Sandy that he had never seen.

'Armaan, my life is going into the darkest of phases, and unfortunately, there's no bright side to it. I haven't been close to much people since my father's death and probably that's the main reason behind my keeping a distance from people I like. I have a fear of losing people and can't really deal with it,' Sandy said with a lump in his throat.

His tone made Armaan feel that there's more to it and that he had not finished yet. He just hoped it to be repairable.

'My mother has been diagnosed with third stage cancer. Honestly, I have been so busy with myself that I barely cared about her. But now, this is killing me. Her death is real. She kept on calling me for years and I always kept her at the bottom of my priority list because I was too busy partying, fucking around…' Sandy said and started crying like a little child. He was roaring with tears and was inconsolable. Armaan let his tears come out. He hugged him and felt the tight hug back as if he wanted Armaan to make everything okay. He was pleading for time for his mother, but as ruthless and inhumane as time has been, it didn't budge. It made a son cry over the untimely probable death of his mother.

After a briefest hesitation, Armaan also let his tears flow. He felt the pain of a son, and unwillingly started thinking if the same would happen to his mother someday. He made a note of calling his parents every day, no matter how busy his life got. Emotions flew by. Sandy sensed his concern. Though Sandy didn't want Armaan to say anything, but the fact that he understood was more than enough for him. It was all that he wanted from him – a sensible gesture, a caring hug. He sensed that somehow Armaan already knew him more than most of his so-called friends.

'When did you get this news?'

'When I told you I wanted to talk about something important.'

Armaan nodded. 'You should be leaving soon.'

'Tomorrow morning.'

'I know it's going to be one hell of a phase, but don't let this break you down, okay? You've to keep going… remember that.'

'Mumma…,' Sandy said still crying. His hands were shaking as he held a bit of his hair in his hands out of helplessness and frustration.

'Sometimes, we just go with the flow of life and let life go. But as we grow, we forget to respect or care about the people who have loved us selflessly. We

spend years ignoring the only people who care for us. I ignored my mother to avoid her stories, like every oldie has. Every time she talked, she just talked about her illness and it irritated me. Many a time I thought she's just doing this to gain sympathy or my time, but she wasn't. All she wanted was to speak to me, even if over a phone call, and I couldn't even give her that.' There was no end to Sandy's sense of pain and guilt.

How long had it been, Armaan wondered since he let his mother or father talk their heart out? Or kissed his mother's forehead? Or sent her surprise gifts. Armaan had never thought about his parents in such a way before and he couldn't deny that to himself.

Sandy cried helplessly, and a little while later, when he settled down, he said. 'My mother wanted to shop from Zara the last time she was in town and I didn't take her there because I thought she would embarrass me. I guess, I was just being a pig. I want to gift her the best of clothes available that she would love to wear,' Sandy said and entered the huge showroom.

After looking around clothes on display, they purchased an evening gown for his mother worth twenty thousant rupees. Though Armaan knew this would in no way lessen Sandy's guilt for not spending enough time with his mother.

They reached home and booked a ticket for Sandy. He looked better than before, but that night, Armaan spoke with his parents for about an hour and booked a surprise gift for his parents through an online store. It was painful to recall what had happened to Sandy's mother and even more painful to think how the memories would lurk somewhere between guilt and hopelessness. Memories would taunt Sandy for years to come, Armaan thought lying down alone at night. As he pulled the pillow below his head, the entire conversation kept repeating itself in his mind like a song he wanted to forget because it brought back bad memories. This world, unfortunately, tells you about the tales that look convenient. No one tells you about the deep secret that's buried inside the unspoken hearts.

His phone tinkled and the light flooded an otherwise dark room. His eyes opened wide as he saw an e-mail from Sara.

Meeting tomorrow evening at 5. Need to discuss the
weekly story ahead. Please be on time.

Regards,
Sara



1st May 2017

The sky was darker that morning, as if in mourning. After dropping Sandy at the airport in a cab, Armaan went to the beach. He had hardly seen Mumbai losing its pace even in the worst of phases. The waves were rolling heavily past the safety mark from the last night and divers warned him against going any closer to the seashore.

He looked around to see if he was the only one there. Water was flying with the wind. It was raining cats and dogs. He was not really expecting to see anyone at the beach in such a weather. Mumbai rains are one wonder – they can make pleasant weather worst in a matter of seconds. He turned around to see if the diver was still there. He wasn't anywhere in sight. He thought about the girl he had seen in his dreams yesterday and tried placing her image in his subconsciousness. As soon as he started, the image of the girl vanished completely, only to be replaced by the girl to his left, who was standing about fifty feet away from him.

Pouring water and the sound of thundering clouds too couldn't budge the beauty standing there. She was doing her exercises, stretching her body to the fullest. Armaan's eyes came to rest on her midriff for a few seconds; it looked spotlessly white and her body looked that of a mermaid from a distance. She backflipped a couple of times and she looked like a mermaid challenging the waves. She would be slightly tall than average Indian girls and looked in her mid twenties. As she played with water, she didn't look scared of the sea at all. Armaan had always been scared of water and that's why he'd always looked at the sea from a distance.

She started skipping quickly and after a while, placed two bricks at a six-feet distance and stretched her legs to place her feet on them. Then she bent her head towards both the knees alternatively. She kept going for the next five minutes and Armaan was all drenched in the rain by now. After a while, she started touching the bricks with her hands. He looked mesmerized and all in awe of her. Last time he saw such flexibility, he was watching some athletic porn on a website. He missed that website after porn ban in India, but what was he thinking of anyway.

The diver shouted from a distance and called out to that girl and Armaan to go off from the shore because of aggressive high tides. She nodded from a distance, slung her duffel bag over one shoulder and sauntered towards the parking area. As soon as she reached closer to Armaan, she looked exhausted but still beautiful. She had sand all over her body. She grabbed one of the bottles from her bag and drank up all the water.

Though Armaan had been continuously staring at her from a distance, she seemed unaware of that. Armaan motioned an auto to stop and hired it. He spent the next few seconds in walking slowly towards it and made sure that she reached close to him, as there wasn't any other auto in sight. Also, there was no possibility of her having travelled by her own vehicle as the parking was empty. The only possibility left was that she had a beachside bungalow which would cost at least a thousand million rupees. Though she had the looks of a rich girl, he doubted if she belonged to either of the beachside bungalows.

Armaan sat in the auto and asked the driver to stop for a while. She kept looking for an auto, but didn't get any.

'Hey there!' Armaan shouted. 'I'm going towards Powai. You want me to drop you somewhere?'

'No thanks. I'll find something in a while,' she replied in a honey-sweet voice.

'Trust me, it's no bother.'

'I live in Andheri east. I guess it should be on your way,' she smiled and said. Her voice was probably the cutest voice Armaan has heard in a while. She put her duffel bag inside the auto first and as she entered, she sat at a distance from Armaan. 'I'm so glad that you asked me,' she added.

'I would have convinced you anyway, considering the rains that are not stopping anytime soon,' Armaan said like a gentleman.

'I agree. There are two things that are difficult to find in Mumbai – flats for singles and autos or cabs in monsoon.'

'I agree, but you missed out on one thing,' Armaan said and the girl raised her eyebrows. So he smiled and added, 'You don't get peace in Mumbai too.'

'I kind of agree with you, but my locality is very peaceful, as outsiders are not allowed to enter into our society.'

'Where do you live? Area 51? Are you some alien?'

'Very funny. I live in JB Nagar,' she said and started settling her hair. She looked even more beautiful from close by. He tried his best to not look at her, but it was just not possible. She was in her sexiest best and he thought he was

looking all nerdy. She adjusted her blue slip, a glimpse of a black bra looked just great on her perfectly shaped body. He noticed that the auto driver was also trying to look at her occasionally. He focused more on her and less on the road. He wouldn't care if Armaan gave him hard looks. He stopped at every red light so that he could get a glimpse.

All of a sudden, that auto driver looked shattered and scared. Armaan looked towards his left to know what happened. That girl was giving him an angry look that he'd remember for his lifetime. Armaan was scared of even looking at her.

'So you look like a peaceful person. Right?' she said with a sudden smile on her face as if nothing had happened.

'No, not really. We've met for the first time and probably that's why I am not talking much,' Armaan said.

She laughed. 'Oh, I didn't mean that. It's because you said it's difficult to find peace in Mumbai.'

'Oh, I am so sorry. It's because I am a writer and I can't write if there's no peace around.'

'Oh, I see! So powai is crowded that way. Not peaceful?'

'Not really. It's quite a peaceful place where I live. My peace is mostly taken away by people I deal with in the channel. You know, they're probably the most useless people I've ever seen and those fat asses just try and justify their job by interfering too much in a writer's work. I am writing this show called 'Cambridge Scholars' and the channel fucked my weekend entirely.'

'Ok, you can grill them as much as you want, but I am sure you agree that they talk sense at times,' she said and shook her head in disagreement.

'Look, I'll explain. Have you seen Aksa beach?'

'Yes, I have.'

'And then have you seen Gorai creek.'

'Yes, that as well.'

'The channel is the beach, writers are a creek. Even though business mainly operates from the creek, channels take the cake away as a beach because they're the telecasters. Trust me, I've met at least a hundred of them and not one out of them made sense. Fat, ugly dumbasses.' Armaan vented out all his pent up anger in his words, feeling slightly relieved. Little did he realise the relief would be short-lived.

'You've met one more today.'

‘Oh, you don’t need my acknowledgment. You know you’re quite beautiful and you sound quite smart and intelligent,’ he said realizing he had spoken too much for the first meeting, which would mostly be his last meeting.

The girl smiled dazzlingly as she said, ‘I mean, you’ve met one more channel employee today and I’m so not glad to know your opinion about the channel.’

‘Oh my god! I am so sorry. You might want to toss it back on writers and make it one all. I’d be more than happy to be at the receiving end,’ he said, almost apologetically, completely thrown by what had just happened and unsure whether to be angry at himself or find new ways to mend the damage he had done. While he was still thinking, the autorickshaw had reached its destination. All he wanted was to buy a couple of minutes to think about what could be the immediate repair. She handed over a hundred and fifty rupees to the auto driver.

‘You don’t need to pay this,’ Armaan quickly said. ‘I’ll take care of it and anyway, your share should be just half… seventy-five. Why did you pay the whole thing?’ he said, looking for some damage control.

‘That’s the least a channel can do for writers,’ she said smilingly. He looked relieved as she smiled. He wanted to hug her and kiss her goodbye, but he knew he was shitting his pants already after what he had just done. Plus, he remembered the look she had given the auto driver just a while ago. She moved away without even a goodbye. He thought it was rude and felt that forbidden thrill of sharing a not so romantic drive with the prettiest of girls he had ever seen. Deep within, he still felt bad for not even asking her name. He could at least stalk her for the rest of his life and tell his grandkids about his love at first sight, but he had just lost that chance.

His phone beeped just then.

Sender: Sara

+918451829595

08:00 a.m. 01/05/2017 ‘It was great meeting you, Armaan. Thanks for the lift, my Cambridge scholar- Sara ;)’

He looked shocked and surprised, his happiness clearly visible. He let out a relaxed breath. His legs were shaking in excitement, he was smiling like a newly-wedded bride, and his hammered heart was healed with one message. Finally, his lingering heart started beating for someone else, and most surprisingly, for a channel person – Sara. He dropped his idea of discussing timelines with her. It took him fifteen minutes to type a perfect reply.

‘*You own me now.’*

‘*Professionally, yes.’* She replied. There wasn’t any wink this time.

‘*That’s what I meant.*’ He texted back and there wasn’t any reply this time. He waited and lost hope of getting a reply again.



Wet and cold, Armaan reached home. He slipped out of his clothes and switched on the geyser of Sandy's room. It was one of those days when he would enjoy his bath in a bath tub. It took a few minutes for the tub to get filled completely. Thunder rolled continuously, like sounds in a fast-moving car on a highway with the windows open. Armaan made himself a cup of coffee before getting into the bath tub and placed it just next to it. It looked as if a romantic date had settled in and he would spend the time of his desires with her.

He opened YouTube and played Amit Trivedi's song list, one that always refreshed him.

Armaan opened the body wash that Sandy used. As soon as he opened it, its fragrance almost ruled the entire bathroom. It was a little feminine fragrance but it sure was a beauty. He always knew that Sandy had a knack for buying great stuff. He made a note of calling him once he got out from the bathroom to ensure that he had reached safely to his mother.

He could hear water dripping down into the tub. He dimmed the light and closed his eyes to think of Sara. There was something sensual in that realization, and he let the beautiful feeling wash over him. Before this weekend, he couldn't have imagined this happening to him, nor could he have imagined that he'd be feeling so strong about anyone just after the first meeting. His life didn't allow him a personal space, not lately anyway.

He wanted to get into a relationship, a serious relationship, but he had seen his friends being left by their girlfriends for someone else and he was scared of those implications. As much as he tried to make a connection, he knew his lifestyle might not be able to carry a relationship for long. But after meeting Sara, he knew that she was the one. She was better in every way and she was worth all the time and effort it would take to please her. He also had to consider the possibilities of rejection and no matter how much he tried to soft-ride what would happen then, he knew that it would be a devastating blow for him to take.

This weekend wasn't only a much-needed break from all his busy schedules, it also had to do with his future and how his life would change. The future was still up for grabs and he definitely didn't want to live the way he did since he started television writing. If he was serious about changing the way he lived, he might as well start it right away.

He took a sip of coffee while bathing and thought about Sandy. He felt the guilt of not trying much to connect, but then he thought about the rent. Thirty thousand rupees of the entire flat which had to be borne by him alone, at least till the time Sandy came back, which looked difficult for now. He looked hesitant enough to continue living there. Armaan looked perplexed as he thought of this. He wished that he could turn back time and undo everything that had just happened. He never felt so close to Sandy before.

It was strange. He hadn't really thought about what might have been going on in Sandy's life before. In fact, he usually didn't think about him at all. Even more strange that he met someone that day and was not able to stop thinking about her. Spending time with Sara made him think about what he'd been missing in his life. He kept on replaying their conversations in his head. He was anxious, but excited too. But now, all he could do was to wait till evening before he met her again, in a formal space though. He could barely keep her off his mind. It had been a long time since he had been in a situation like this. What could he do? Nothing at all, he realized. He wanted more of her and evening looked too far to him. So he immediately picked up his phone.

'So what's on your agenda the rest of the day?' Armaan messaged her and as soon as it got delivered, he regretted having sent it. He thought if he made a move so quickly, he'd look desperate.

'Oh, I am sorry. I was sending it to someone else.' He messaged quickly and sent. Just then, his phone beeped and showed a message from Sara.

'Nothing much. It's raining lots, so I am not even going to the office today. What are you up to?'

He regretted sending the second message to her now.

A second message from her beeped. *'Oh, I am sorry. Carry on. It's a beautiful day. You must have plans with your girl.'*

'I wish I could have one.' Armaan typed and sent.

'Are you gay?' Sara sent a message and Armaan instinctively knew that this was coming.

'Rofl. No. I am not. I mean to say, I am single. There's no time for a relationship with writing.'

'Does writing make you unromantic?' Sara asked.

'Not really. I just didn't think of it lately. What about you, why don't you have any plans with your boyfriend?' Armaan blurted it out in a message and started waiting impatiently for her message. She didn't reply for the next couple of

minutes and Armaan checked his mobile network and inbox at least five times. His mind was waiting for her message frantically.

'I'm sorry if I've asked you something inappropriate.' Armaan sent this and almost thought that Sara had expelled him from her life. His mind was racing like a tracer bullet. He took a deep breath, but that didn't help either. He just felt that he had swallowed a lot of guilt. 'What the hell was I thinking?' he contemplated. He came out of his tub, naked, and started drying himself with a towel. He thought he would call and fix everything up. He was feeling those butterflies he felt when he first fell in love long back.

'*Not at all, I am hopelessly single in this extremely romantic weather. Lol. I broke up a year back.'* Sara replied.

'*Oh, I am sorry.'* Armaan responded, relieved that she had replied.

'*Don't be, I am extremely happy now. There's nothing better than singlehood*.'

'*Roger that.'*

'*Btw, I am not going to office today and we need to finish up this meeting. Let's meet up at some café nearby and pretend we've done a lot of brainstorming over it. We can take lunch later, maybe.'*

'*Haha…That sounds like a plan.*' Armaan agreed over his next message and felt extremely excited. He tried to ignore the feeling of anxiety and as soon as he came out of the bathroom, he could feel the unusual cold waves touching his bare body. He made a note of keeping himself steady and intensely conscious when he met Sara. Despite his best intentions, he was beginning to accept the reality of the attraction he felt for her. It looked like a dreamlike equation to him.

'*See you at 1 p.m. then.'* She replied and he concluded the chat with a simple smiley. He got another message, this time from Sandy.

'*I've reached Delhi. Thanks for everything that you did buddy. Hoping to see you soon.'*

'Take good care of aunty and yourself. I am always here. Miss you. See you soon. Xoxo.' Armaan replied.

'You're the reason I'd bother to come back at all. Thanks. Also feel free to use my stuff in the meanwhile if you want.' Sandy signed off.

Armaan kept his phone aside and glanced over his cupboards. He started trying out options that would suit him best for his meeting with Sara. Leaving his cupboard aside, he moved towards Sandy's cupboard. He selected a yellow tee with Ducati printed on it. This one he had always liked the most.

'Listen, there's an issue. I'll call you in an hour.' Sara messaged him.

‘*Ok. I’ll wait.*’ He replied. He was more anxious, more excited and most importantly, more in love with Sara with every passing minute. He, in the meanwhile, started stalking her on Facebook and not to mention, checked his phone in every two minutes. Deep shit love.



1st May 2017

Wait is always endless. Time flies, people move on, but we get stuck. Stuck in a horizon where the wait is the only hope and in the meanwhile, willingly or unwillingly, the whole purpose of waiting slowly fades away. We get so obsessed with it that we don't want to take any second chance, knowing well that it might not even exist. You wonder if that's what you should do but you know there's nothing else that you can do. People say that time doesn't wait for anyone; it does sometimes, only to make a mockery of whom you've become with the passage of time.

Armaan started doing push-ups to distract himself from the thoughts. It had been two hours and she still hadn't called back. No matter what else he did that afternoon, he kept on questioning himself if he was getting too involved or humiliating himself. He could feel the anxious expectation of Sara as he waited for what would come next. Should I call her? Should I text once again? His thoughts were all about Sara. He didn't want to do something he'd regret and that's when he thought he'd do a hundred push-ups. If he succeeded in doing that, he'd call her. If he didn't, he'd drop the idea of even messaging her.

He continued doing push-ups confidently, despite his anxiety. He was keen on completing one hundred. He kept on picturing her fitness in front of his eyes and challenged himself to finish. He reached fifty push-ups and looked exhausted. He was still far from the goal. He remembered how his father always kept giving him such tasks whenever he was confused. Many times, he failed to achieve the challenge, but it surely gave him enough time to consider the options and then take his decision. He mostly succeeded in it and as soon as he felt he was on the verge of giving up, he chanted to himself, 'Don't give up! Don't give up!'

He did not give up, but finally stopped in the mid seventies of his push-ups. From the looks of him and his uneasy breathing, it was easy to say that between him giving up on push-ups and giving up on calling Sara, he gave up on push-ups.

He lay down on the floor and his mind flashed to one of his friends who had tried committing suicide after his girlfriend stopped taking his calls when she found someone else. Armaan definitely didn't want to get himself there. That

was the same friend Bhuvan who was getting married – although unwillingly – and that was more of a reason why he wanted Armaan to be around. Armaan decided instantly that he'd not call Sara. He realized he was over-thinking, overdoing everything, making himself more vulnerable.

His phone suddenly started ringing. He reached for his phone and saw an unknown number flashing.

'Hello.' Armaan said.

'Hey, I'm so sorry for not calling you in the day,' the girl said and it took him less than a second to realize that it was Sara. His heartbeats started racing a bit faster. He always felt that way when he had beautiful girls around him.

'Oh, that's okay. I was kind of expecting a call from you. I thought the meeting was important for next week's schedule,' He said almost professionally and started playing with a smiley ball.

'Yes, I am really sorry for that,' she said as she winked her eye, squeezing her own cute face.

'Don't be, you must have been caught up with something really important,' he replied.

'Well, yes, a couple of things and that made my head spin for the entire day,' she said. 'I'll tell you more about it when we meet.'

'Of course,' he said.

'I hope it's not too late to meet,' she asked a bit hesitantly.

'Definitely not. A writer is never off duty, Sara,' he said, unable to hide his happiness. Sara smiled over the phone. 'Where do we meet?' he asked.

'Come over to my flat. It's raining, plus I am feeling very cosy and comfortable here. Not feeling like moving out. Flat number 501,' she said and Armaan squeezed the smiley ball out of happiness.

'Give me an hour and I'll be there. See you.'

He took half an hour for getting ready, long enough for any man. He drove Sandy's car and assuming that Sara wouldn't mind a gift, bought a beautiful bouquet for her. 'If I am going to propose to her someday, I might as well start preparing for it now,' he thought, smiling shyly at himself.

He pulled the car into the parking area, picked up the bouquet and locking the car door, looked at himself for one last time in the mirror. A moment later, he walked towards the elevators before a watchman interrupted him.

'Excuse me? Where are you going?' the watchmen asked.

‘Flat number 501,’ Armaan replied.

‘Mr. Agarwal’s flat?’

‘Yes,’ Armaan replied, assuming it to be the owner’s name.

‘Make an entry in the register and then go,’ the watchmen said with fixed looks. Armaan always felt that sometimes security guards use more authority than they need to. They sometimes overdo it. He made a quick entry with the worst handwriting possible and got into the elevator. He reached the fifth floor in a matter of seconds and checked his watch to see how long it had taken him to reach her. It was 9 p.m. sharp. Not bad, he thought.

Running his free hand in his hair one last time, Armaan pressed the bell; it took her less than thirty seconds to open the door. She was wearing pink coloured shorts teamed with a white top, and that looked just perfect on her body. He smiled and thought she was looking even better. Her curves were perfectly reflected in her clothes, her lips formed a heart shape as she yawned. Her confident smile was charming enough to hold his gaze forever. Armaan observed that she looked prettier with that dimple on her face.

‘Hey, I hope I am not late,’ Armaan said and handed her a bouquet.

‘No, you’re right on time! I saw you coming up. What’s this for, by the way?’ she asked, surprised at the bouquet.

‘I was just passing by a flower shop. I thought it would be inappropriate to go empty-handed. So I thought of buying something that would complement you the best,’ he said. She smiled weirdly and accepted the bouquet with a slight hesitation. ‘Thank you anyway. Come on in. Sorry, it’s been a lazy day so you wouldn’t find the flat in perfect shape. If you’re judging me, I don’t live like this at all,’ Sara said.

Stepping inside, Armaan saw that there were a couple of employees from the channel standing before him. He felt awkwardness he hadn’t experienced since a long time. Now, the notion of gifting a bouquet seemed ridiculous to him, and he had the feeling that this was going to be hot gossip in the channel for a long time. They just had to seize their moment. Vikky and Nisha smirked at each other and looked at Sara for some laughter, but she didn’t react to it. She rather arranged flowers in the vase, one by one.

After greeting both of them, Armaan kept staring at the flower vase, unwilling to break the silence by himself, wishing again that he hadn’t done all this. He thought it was just a regular channel meeting with a shift in the venue, and he had thought it to be a friendly casual meeting with Sara alone. He definitely didn’t have a clue that Sara had invited people from the channel as well; she

didn’t mention it at all.

In the silence, Armaan could hear the uneasiness of starting a conversation. He saw Vikky switching on his Apple Mac book as he placed himself on the sofa. Vikky smiled. Better, Armaan thought. A lot better.

‘Okay then,’ Vikky said. ‘I guess we should start our meeting now.’

‘Hard not to,’ Armaan thought. ‘Of course,’ Armaan said.

‘There’s no need to rush,’ Sara said and then looking at Armaan continued, ‘Armaan, you want me to get you a cup of tea or a glass of wine maybe?’ She took her seat and, not to mention, that made Armaan even more uncomfortable.

‘No, that’s okay,’ Armaan replied.

Sara looked at him and asked again, ‘Are you sure?’ Armaan nodded, but she smiled and said instead, ‘Hey listen! You don’t need to feel uncomfortable.’

‘No, I am very comfortable.’

‘I can sense your discomfort with the way you’re sitting… with closed toes, making a fist as if you’ve done something horrible and placing your laptop just above your knees as if you’re trying to finish this meeting as soon as possible.’ Sara finished her sentence and Armaan could hear his own heartbeats. He had never felt so vulnerable before.

Despite the tension, he laughed. ‘I just felt uncomfortable because I’ve never experienced such deep silence on greeting someone with a bouquet.’

‘You never gifted us any bouquet, Armaan,’ Vikky said mischievously.

‘Exactly,’ Nisha said. She was an intern and a level junior to Vikky. If Vikky asked her to eat horse’s shit some day, she would do it. Armaan didn’t feel his best ever interacting with that dumb piece of shit. If there was a toll tax to be paid at the toll plaza and Armaan was short of money in his wallet, he’d rather ask the toll plaza employees to keep Nisha as deposit till he came back. And there’d be a little over 100 percent chance that he would never turn up to get his deposit back. He hated her so much.

‘You never invited me to your home, Vikky,’ Armaan replied.

Sara, smiled and said, ‘Do us a favour, Vikky. Invite all of us someday and we’ll make your home full of flowers.’

‘I might just do that very soon. I love flowers,’ Vikky said, in his typical feminine tone and that raised Armaan’s doubt once again. Armaan always thought that Vikky was gay. Not that he had a problem with homosexuals, but he surely got uncomfortable hanging out with them.

‘This is a nice place that you’ve got, Sara,’ Armaan said. ‘Did you decorate this place all by yourself?’ he added.

‘I would say half the credit goes to my ex-boyfriend; he decided to design it all by himself. He’s an interior designer, so he knows great places around here in Andheri. Plus, I don’t know much about Mumbai. It’s just been a year,’ Sara said.

‘Oh, so you’re not from Mumbai?’ Armaan asked.

‘No, I am from everywhere. I’ve lived in Delhi, Indore, Pune, Bangalore and now, Mumbai,’ Sara said.

‘Is your father into a transferable government job?’ Armaan asked.

‘I don’t have parents. I don’t know who they are. I’ve been raised in an orphanage and I kept on travelling for different experiences,’ Sara said.

Nobody said anything for the next few seconds; it came as a shock for Vikky and Nisha too. ‘It must have been difficult for you,’ Vikky said. Armaan was still quiet.

‘Exactly!’ Nisha repeated.

‘To be honest, it didn’t really affect me. Except for when the police caught me in a drunk driving case and my teachers scolded me. I wanted someone to stand for me – not when I was right, but when I was wrong. I missed that image of someone elder who could safeguard me in any situation. Everything else was fine. The best part is I never got habitual of any relationship, so it didn’t become a habit or necessity of always having someone around. I am a loner and nailing it,’ she said with almost no frown on her face.

Armaan saw Vikky staring at Sara endlessly, as if there was something weird about her. Vikky pretended to clear his throat. ‘That sounds quite strong,’ he said.

‘Exactly,’ Nisha added. Parroting him. Again.

‘But that sounds amazing,’ Armaan said and Vikky frowned, following whom Nisha also frowned. That’s the second activity she’s best at when not humming ‘Exactly’ to Vikky’s tone.

‘I mean to say this is what we need. We were thinking of a storyline that could possibly hit the viewer’s heart. A story of a girl who’s raised by an orphanage misses the guardian in life but never stops heading forward in life. She’s beautiful, sexy, a girl who’s every guy’s dream, a gymnast, knows how to dance, carefree, doesn’t mind getting drowned in rains, and she’s off to Mumbai for her dreams. She’s going to be a new entrant in our show,’ Armaan said it all in one

breath.

Vikky looked convinced and Sara couldn't stop staring at Armaan. He had described her the way she really was. She smiled at what she had just heard. She looked her best – surprised and confused. Armaan looked right into her eyes and traces of her eyeshadow looked just perfect to accentuate the colour of her eyes.

'I am completely sold on this idea,' Vikky said in a jiffy. 'Me too,' Nisha said.

'I kind of like your research, my Cambridge scholar,' Sara said with a smile. Armaan couldn't meet her eyes. He looked shy and he was sure he hadn't blushed like that for a long time.

'And on that note, I think we all should leave,' Vikky said.

'Exactly, it's raining too,' Nisha said.

'Where do you live Armaan?' Vikky asked.

'Powai,' Armaan replied.

'Would you mind dropping us both till Chandivali?' Vikky asked and that ended a chance of Armaan staying at Sara's flat and discussing things over a red wine or something. He saw his dream of talking to her alone fading away.

'Sure. No problem,' Armaan replied and looked at Sara, making sure if she too wanted him to go. Sara wanted to say something, but decided against it. So after the final greetings, Armaan along with Vikky and Nisha reached the car. Sara waved a final goodbye from her balcony and on his way back home, Armaan kept thinking if he had managed to put a good impression on her in any way. He assumed that this evening had been incomplete and it definitely hadn't gone as per his plan, but it was still a nice icebreaker. He felt Sara's hesitation in saying something while bidding goodbyes. As much as he thought about Sara while driving, he couldn't stop the smiles as they slipped silently down his cheeks. He just wished that none of the other two idiots had noticed it.



2nd May 2017

It was quarter to twelve when Armaan reached home and as he settled down on the couch, he was certain that he didn't want to come back home just yet. Thinking about her all the way back home was wonderful, even though he wanted to spend more time with Sara. Armaan drummed his fingers absently on this mobile before he got a message from his landlord.

'Please transfer the rent. Thanks.'

He had no idea if he still wanted to continue living in this flat any further because paying a rent of thirty thousand every month was a little too much for him. He couldn't even ask Sandy to share half the rent anymore, considering the circumstances he was battling. He realized that he hadn't called Sandy in the entire day and immediately called him up. His number was switched off. He called someone else instead.

'Hi Mumma. How are you?' Armaan said lovingly.

'I am good. Is everything okay, beta?'

'Yes, absolutely! Why do you ask?'

'Nothing, you just never call so late, that's why,' she said lovingly, yet sounding a bit worried.

'I hope you hadn't slept off,' Armaan said, feeling a bit guilty.

'Not at all and I am very happy that you called. I was missing you a lot today. I made your favourite Pao Bhaji at home and I just couldn't swallow it thinking whether my son had got a decent dinner or not,' his mother said with a heavy throat. He knew she was trying to control her tears, and they were still rolling down her cheeks.

'Mumma, I've told you so many times, I take good care of my food here. You have to stop torturing yourself like this. Whenever I call you, you just cry,' Armaan said.

'I am sorry that I cried, beta. I miss you at times, and you're sitting a little too far. It's been six months that I haven't even met you,' she said and started crying even more.

A strange, shuttered expression crossed his face, and Armaan immediately

regretted not meeting his mother in the last six months. He saw both hands of his wall clock touching 12, and he said in a loving, sing-song voice, ‘Happy Birthday Mumma.’

At that, his mother’s tears only increased and he quickly added, ‘You thought I’d forget…like the last time?’

‘Thank you, beta. And no. I just can’t remember the last time I spent my birthday with you,’ his mother said and Armaan recognized the tone. It was the same tone in which she had spoken to him when he had left home for the first time.

‘I promise that I’ll celebrate your next birthday with you and call you to Mumbai on my birthday. This television writing occupies every minute of my life, Mumma,’ he said and heard his mother sobbing still. ‘But I promise that I’ll be back to Indore very soon. I am figuring out some options to work from Indore.’

‘Are you serious? You aren’t lying to make me happy, right?’ she said with a sudden excitement.

‘No! Why would I do that! But that’s surely going to take me some time? Maybe a couple of years, but yes, I’ll surely return to Indore. There’s no life here without family,’ Armaan said and felt his throat go heavy.

He missed his mother; he missed his father and his little brother. They had their own house in Indore and were leading quite a comfortable life out there. He didn’t really need to go through all this. He could easily make a good amount of money by staying there, but there was something that stopped him from going to Indore. Maybe the lifestyle that Mumbai gave him. Maybe he was more in sync with the pace of Mumbai and found Indore slower. Or maybe, just maybe, the independence that Mumbai gave him was next to impossible in Indore. He had tried going back there once before, but had returned to the city of dreams in less than a month. That’s what Mumbai does to you if you’ve lived here once – no other city is good enough.

After hearing what Armaan had said, dabbing her tears, his mother asked, ‘Is everything alright, Armaan?’

Armaan didn’t say anything because if he did, his tears would match the rhyme of his voice and his mother would know. That would further upset her. ‘Is everything alright in your flat? Is your flatmate bothering you? Nobody is forcing you into any bad activities, right?’ she prodded.

‘No no, nothing like that, Mumma. Actually he has left the flat,’ Armaan said as slowly as he could.

‘Why?’

‘His mother was diagnosed with cancer,’ Armaan replied and his voice mirrored his sadness.

‘That’s really sad. Such diseases have become so common nowadays,’ his mother said.

‘Mumma, please promise me that you’ll drink a cup of green tea every morning, you’d go for walks and you’d stay away from outside food. Ask papa to follow this as well.’ Armaan broke down and started crying like a baby.

‘Stop crying…stop crying, Armaan. Nothing is happening to us. We are completely fit and fine. We’ll also take extra care as you said, but you stop crying first,’ she said with tears in her eyes and determination in her voice.

‘Yes, Mumma. Sorry I broke down like this.’

‘You’re a strong boy. Your Mumma is stronger. Your papa is…’ she said, paused and asked him, ‘Finish the sentence!’

‘Strongest,’ he said and smiled. ‘Don’t worry about me! I am fine and now you go and cut your birthday cake.’

‘Ok beta. Love you. Take care and stop worrying.’

‘Love you too Mumma. Bye,’ he said and cut the call. He sat on his couch and a minute later he received yet another text.

‘You, my Cambridge scholar, are so good at researching. You were looking at me when I was doing all those gymnastics on the beach, right?’

‘No and yes. No, because I am not really great at doing research. It’s a boring work, to be honest. And yes, because I was there when you were doing all those extraordinary exercises.’ Armaan messaged.

‘Do I detect a note of a stalker here?’

Armaan laughed as he typed his next message. *‘As long as you don’t mind getting stalked by a writer who’s not harmful.’*

‘It doesn’t seem fair.’ She texted.

‘What?’

‘You get to stalk me and I know nothing about you.’ This message cheered Armaan up a bit. He responded, *‘The best you can hope is that you stalk me at Juhu beach someday.’*

‘Same time, same place?’

‘Yes, and preferably same weather too.’

‘Sounds like a plan.’

‘Only one thing I am good at.’

‘Does that make you bad in writing?’

‘You know it better. You rejected my entire script.’

‘Oh my god! I didn’t get a chance to clarify. It wasn’t me; it was my boss Tanuj, and Vikky who put me through this. But this is between you and me; you’re not telling ANYBODY. LIPS SEALED.’

‘That’s what I thought. Otherwise why would a new joiner start nailing my weekend from day one!’

‘Exactly!’

‘You just sounded like Nisha.’

‘Rofl. You’re mean and I am really sorry to have spoiled your weekend. How can I make up for it?’ she asked.

‘Join me for Friday night at the best of the pubs in Mumbai. I can consider forgiving you then.’

‘I might not drink, but yes, I’ll join.’

‘How could I forget that you’re a fitness freak, but a couple of glasses of wine wouldn’t really harm.’

‘Done deal.’ She wrote and Armaan, as he turned off the lights that night, he received one last message from Sara.

‘And listen, I am really sorry for the awkwardness that I might have caused you when you entered the flat. I didn’t mean to hesitate to take the flowers. I loved it, in fact. It’s just that I hadn’t expected Vikky and Nisha to turn up. They were close by and keen on coming over to my flat for a meeting as I couldn’t go to the office today. I couldn’t say no, plus, I informed them that you’d also be coming to discuss the new track so that it doesn’t come as a shock to them. Things got awkward because of those two. I completely enjoyed your company and probably would’ve enjoyed it more if they hadn’t barged in like this. I am really sorry that I had to put you through this. Thanks for the lovely flowers, by the way.’

Armaan heaved a deep sigh of relief and typed back: *‘Thank god you cleared it. I almost choked when I saw those two faces. I never enjoyed talking to them, personally and professionally both. They’re a disaster.’*

‘Exactly.’

‘You seem to be really impressed with Nisha. You’ve used ‘exactly’ for exactly

two times in the last two minutes.

'I need a detox then. Need to take this Nisha thing out of me. :p Btw, sleeping time. Good night, my Cambridge scholar, See you soon.' She messaged.

'Good night, my Executive producer.' He messaged and signed off.

What a fantastic day it has been for Armaan! The girl he had fell in love with this morning was sending her last good night message to him. Making plans already. Was he rushing into this? He thought so, but didn't really care. He liked the sound of him falling in love with her. He liked the sound of those waves that had entered into his life this morning. He liked the sound of Sara wanting to meet him more. He liked the sound of Armaan and Sara becoming Arra. He just couldn't wait to use the #mylove #armaan #sara #arra on his Instagram picture that he would take someday when she kisses him on the cheek perhaps. He wouldn't mind lips though. He was dead sure of one thing before he closed his eyes – he was going to see Sara in his dreams that night.



5th May 2017

Many a time, we look back at our past and realize how everything has changed. The people who once mattered the most aren't in touch; people who don't matter at all are the ones who are in touch. We always keep on blabbering about how everyone has changed; little do we realize that it's a human phenomenon and change is the only constant. Everybody changes physically and mentally every six months. It's like a new birth, but there are some people who would always keep up with you. No matter the pace with which you're moving ahead, they'll always find some reason to stick with you. That little thing in life is way beyond any love in this world. That little thing in life is worth living your life for. That little thing in life is why we believe miracles happen.

Three days after his meeting with Sara, he took his first break from work. He knew exactly where he was going as he walked for about fifteen minutes late in the night. Three hours ago, when he was sitting on his balcony, he thought as quickly as last year had come, it was gone, and as days turned into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, he'd felt a pang of missing something in his life as he sat idle for almost a year now.

He didn't have a count of how many times he had ignored his friend Bhuvan's calls or cancelled meeting plans because of his writing commitments when Bhuvan was in Mumbai. He knew it wasn't fair of him to be so ignorant. All he knew for sure was that he was beginning to feel distant from his closest of friends, who were his life at one point of time and he hated that feeling. Deep down, he knew he needed them as much as they did.

It was 11:45 p.m. and it didn't matter as he reached and called out his name so late in the night. 'Bhuvan!'

Though he wasn't visible as he came out of the dark, Armaan had believed that it was Bhuvan only as he saw his different tight-chest-out walk. To others, it might not be special. But for him, it was. They always made fun of his walk and to everybody else's frustration, he just exaggerated it. He had been together with Armaan from day one of his school, and in all these years, they'd never been so much out of the league with each other. Bhuvan had complained about this to Armaan before, but at that moment when Armaan had explained that he was

busy and hadn’t even met his family for almost a year, Bhuvan had understood.

Now, as he heard his name called out, Bhuvan watched Armaan standing outside. He came out motioning his hands and Armaan watched his happiness after they saw each other. It was in his expression, the glitter of his eye and in his craziest ever smiles.

Bhuvan reached closer and hugged him. The warmth and happiness in it were unlike anything else. ‘Look who is back from Mumbai! Are you sure you didn’t lose your way back to Indore?’ Bhuvan laughed and said.

They were beyond excited to see each other and smiled as they had met after more than a year.

‘Kind of, intentionally though,’ Armaan replied.

Bhuvan smiled and Armaan added, ‘I hoped to lose my way rather than lose my friends.’

‘Nice one! Did you just make that up?’ Bhuvan asked.

‘I’ve always been good with words. That’s why I am a writer,’ Armaan said and both of them laughed. ‘But I am sorry if I reacted rudely by not turning up to meet at most of the occasions.’

Bhuvan smiled and said, ‘Of course not, you were never rude, Armaan. Relax! Yes, we missed you always, but you also missed all the fun. *Hisab barabar!* And you weren’t there for a reason, and the reason was good enough to not argue. I am in fact more grateful that you turned up today. Till when are you here?’

‘Tomorrow morning 6 a.m. I have a flight back to Mumbai in the morning.’

‘What the hell? When did you come to Indore? You didn’t even tell me.’ Bhuvan asked with obvious anger.

‘I reached fifteen minutes back. I came all the way to meet you.’

‘You’ve got to be kidding me,’ Bhuvan said and as soon as Armaan handed him the ticket, Bhuvan hugged him. ‘I am so glad that you turned up,’ Bhuvan said. His tears which were stuck in his eyes spoke of his happiness. In that moment, they both wondered how long it had been since they had talked for this long and like this. Everything around was just so comfortable and Bhuvan suggested taking a walk towards the park nearby and Armaan agreed.

‘Wouldn’t you be meeting your parents?’

‘I wish I could, but meeting them for just half an hour and then going back to Mumbai would hurt them even more,’ Armaan said with finality in his voice. ‘How is everything with you, Bhuvan?’

‘Nothing much, I am serving in the Indian Army now, and I know I have to go all out and serve the nation as per my father’s wish. So, I am trying my best.’

‘I am not surprised. That had always been your dream,’ Armaan added.

‘Yes, that’s the only wish my father ever had from me after pampering me for eighteen straight years and fulfilling all my demands unconditionally,’ he said and Armaan smiled back.

Armaan never figured out whether it was merely because of his father’s wish or simply the fact that he was always a little close to Mother India than anybody else he knew that he had taken this decision.

‘I remember we used to come here daily during school days to check on the beauties around doing yoga here in the park,’ Armaan said, smiling.

‘I used to live right down the road from here, which is just two minutes away, so I ended up catching more chicks than you can ever imagine.’ Bhuvan winked and said as he wandered between his past and present, and both of them laughed.

For an instant, they felt, as if they’d never been out of touch. Armaan thought he’d simply close his eyes and he’ll just go back to his school days.

‘So, how are your preparations for marriage going on?’ Armaan asked.

‘It wasn’t that easy in the starting. I sucked big time in talking with Rashi, but she’s a good girl. I hope I just pass through it.’

‘You will,’ Armaan assured him.

‘You think so?’

‘I know so. I think you’re the kind of person who achieves just about everything you plan to do in life.’

‘You might want to change your statement after knowing what happened to me in my last relationship,’ Bhuvan said with a strange expression.

‘You didn’t fail. She failed, but you still cried helplessly, as if you had seen some ghost running towards you,’ Armaan said and smiled.

‘My boy, you’re making fun of my emotions,’ Bhuvan said as he stared at Armaan, who in turn shook his head in disagreement.

‘No, actually I am not making fun of anybody’s emotions. And I have no idea why, but when you cried in front of me, I was so disgusted at you for crying over that bitch!’ Armaan told Bhuvan.

‘Don’t call her a bitch,’ Bhuvan shot back immediately.

‘Here we go! You’re still not over her and you’re taking a plunge into a new relationship with someone you’ve hardly met a few times,’ Armaan said angrily

and made his worst ever face.

‘We haven’t met till now. It’s all online love, but we speak at least ten times a day,’ Bhuvan said and he didn’t dare to meet Armaan’s eyes.

‘So you’re getting married to the person you haven’t even met!’ Armaan said with absolutely no expression on his face. ‘You know what…that girl was so fucking right in ditching you. You deserve that.’

Bhuvan listened to his every word with eyes wide open and looked at him in disbelief for the next couple of minutes. ‘I am meeting her next month to finalize the dates of marriage, so don’t worry,’ Bhuvan said.

‘But what about the marriage dates you sent me over Facebook?’ Armaan asked confused.

‘So you read that message and still didn’t reply?’ Bhuvan counter-questioned.

‘Because you told me that marriage is happening in a couple of weeks and I didn’t know whether I would be able to attend it.’

‘I knew it so well, that’s why I informed you much in advance. Finish all your work, seduce someone at your workplace if you need to, but you’ve got to be at my wedding. It won’t be soon, you have six months!’ Bhuvan’s smile was almost evil.

‘And what about the invitation card that you sent?’ Armaan thought of clarifying the whole thing.

‘Well, like you were always good with words, I was always good with Photoshop.’

‘Yeah yeah! You better not get your ass fucked by another girl this time,’ Armaan said.

‘I won’t,’ Bhuvan said and started smiling.

‘Oh man! I miss out on all the fun we used to have.’ Armaan started laughing as he imagined it. ‘To be honest, I never thought you’d ever be able to serve in the Indian Army. But I am proud that you did it. You deserved what you got! And you’ve always been unpredictable.’

‘That’s pretty philosophical,’ Bhuvan said with his eyebrows raised.

‘It’s still true, though,’ Armaan said and shrugged.

Armaan nodded, watching him being so happy. He suggested they meet their other best friend Sunny and make the night more memorable. It took them less than ten minutes to reach Sunny’s house. Surprising him and shocking the rest of his family, all of them spent a pretty good time through the night. Mostly talking

and thinking back on life, but everything made them happy.

In time, the night turned to its darkest and dogs started barking in response to the watchman's whistle. When they started talking that night, they knew it would take time. They were talking endlessly, laughing out too loud for the comfort of those who were cosily tucked in their beds, and still… nobody was in any hurry.

Forcing sleep away, they went on till 4:30 a.m. after which Armaan had to leave for his flight. That night, they lived one of their best times, remembering funny school incidents and discussing what all they had been up to. All of a sudden, they had discovered a newfound youthfulness about themselves. They wondered what it would've been like had they all been into the same work, in the same city.

What they shared over a dozen cups of tea, however, were feelings that couldn't be traded with anything. It meant the world to them. They felt a sense of contentment and peace that night.

While Sunny took out his car to drive Armaan back to the airport, they stopped by at Armaan's house. At the corner of his home's street, Armaan stood and waited for his parents to leave for the temple – their usual 5 a.m. routine since he could remember. He saw them coming out of home, smiled to himself after getting a glimpse. They looked happy and perfect. He walked away towards the car with a lump in his throat and didn't utter a syllable on his way back to the airport.

That was a normal night, a night like any other. But most of all, for three of them and nobody else, it was the night in which everything happened as it should have. Everything was just perfect, or if given a consideration, even better than that.



It was mid-May. When the sun had decided to show all its grandeur and burn India to its full potential, unexpected rain one morning had made that evening even more beautiful and pleasant for Mumbaikars.

It was then, while standing in his small balcony, that Armaan knew it was a special day for him. Mostly for three reasons – first, Sandy's mother was showing some improvement; second, his show, which was suffering in TRP charts for some time, was back to number one and the channel had offered him one more show, purely his concept, with Sara as the executive producer; and third, his wait to meet Sara would be over as he'd be hosting her at his flat after three cancelled plans in last three weeks.

Things change, people change and he too changed, not only himself but also his priorities. He convinced himself that whatever he was doing now were only best for him in the long run. For the way he made for himself, for the way he wanted to give an elite luxurious life to himself and his family, he didn't have much time left to get started. Accepting another show was one of the ways to get closer to his dreams.

Twenty-five years. That's how young he was. In all those years, Armaan had seen and experienced much more than what life offered him. Certain things he enjoyed, and a few others, he didn't regret doing, even though they made little sense now. His achievements were quite a lot according to his age. And he very well knew what that meant. He also knew it had been possible because of his parents' support.

He was one of the first writers from Indore to have achieved so much, and that got him a lot of local media attention. So much so that he was a household name amongst youngsters now. Almost everybody who knew him either respected him or was jealous of him for his achievements. His father was very happy and proud when he first saw his son's media coverage. It was gratifying for his father to watch him working so hard and making a name for himself. He made Armaan more comfortable and happier with each passing moment whenever he thought of giving up. It was about the balance between both of them, which they had maintained for years, and both of them hoped that it would continue like this forever. He missed his parents all the time, but in the last five years, he had somehow gotten used to it.

Just before the raindrops started touching his face with the wind, he stood in his balcony, thinking whether life had unfolded exactly like it was planned. Not even an iota similar was the answer. He finished his cup of tea and stood there for some more time. He knew his life wouldn't be the same anymore, but that's what he had chosen, to make it even better.

He had written many lines for his characters, proposing each other, loving each other. In fact, he always chose bold lines. But surprisingly, as he thought about his own ideal proposal tonight, it scared the shit out of him. He could feel a shortness of breath with a shadow of fear and wanted to get rid of that feeling as early as he could. As much as he wanted that night to be the perfect, he also wanted to get over with his proposal as soon as possible.

He closed his eyes for some seconds, his heart still beating really fast. Fear of rejection started flashing in front of his eyes. His eyes were wide open waiting for Sara to arrive, even after knowing well that she would take another one hour. His heartbeats weren't settling down at all and nothing seemed to be working.

With a serious expression, he kept both of his hands on the floor below him and started doing one-hand push-ups. He made a pact within that if he's able to do fifty push-ups without any break, then this universe would conspire for him and Sara to get close to each other. He started off in front of the mirror so that he could meet his own eyes. But yes, there was, still is, a struggle like never before to reach the magical number of fifty. He took his eyes off the mirror and exhaled a heavy breath before staring at himself. That lasted for a little too long and he felt his eyes turning red, darker and more furious.

48…49….50… He lay on the floor, breathing heavily, too tired to do anything else. He did what he should have done. After relaxing for a bit, he got up and started arranging things around the house and started preparing for some starters. He checked in for red wine, and found enough in stock. He checked for tequila and snacks; they both were out of stock. He called up a wine shop and asked them to deliver it as soon as possible. He suddenly started regretting starting up with preparations a little late. He looked at the cute pink wall clock in Sandy's room. It showed half-past seven and Sara was expected to reach any time after 8:15.

He shouldn't have kept himself busy with writing episodes until fifteen minutes back, he thought. He looked a little panicky as he squeezed his own hands.

As quickly as he sensed some pessimistic thoughts playing with his mind, he dismissed them, thinking them to be ridiculous. His preparations were mighty

slow most of the time. Slowness with perfection turned out to be a better combination for him, as he decided to perfect one thing at a time and then move ahead. He did the sofa, bed sheets, aroma candles, light music and his dedication was clearly visible from the look of it, which gave him some more confidence for the evening. His actions in recent months had been an attempt to exceed his own limits, his own potential in every way; and to an extent, he had succeeded too.

Surprisingly, he made the mix for Hara Bhara Kabab and Paneer Nachos in less than fifteen minutes. He made sure to revise the entire listings for the evening as soon as he received the parcel from the wine shop. He suddenly felt a sense of contentment settle upon him with this; it was fair to him expecting a positive response from Sara this evening.

There was something in the quiet way he did everything that evening within such a limited span of time. He knew he would’ve quit it midway had it been for someone else. He tasted the mix and Paneer Nachos and it tasted delicious. That one thing magically raised his confidence and that excited him like never before. Armaan seemed to have unlocked an untapped energy source from this.

He stretched his arms and switched the geyser on. He wanted to take a quick shower before getting dressed up for the evening. He looked at himself and realized he needed to set his uneven beard as well. Last minute thoughts raised the room’s temperature by leaps and bounds.

Ting tong. The doorbell rung and Armaan’s life paused just in the middle of an action. Who could it be? It was 7:50 p.m. Girls are never on time, he thought. He looked at himself for one last time in the mirror and found an absolutely mismanaged Armaan staring back. His body smelled of sweat after the push-ups and even the aroma of the room couldn’t hide it.

His heartbeats were anyway going out of control and he turned to open the door to bring them to normal.



Sara was dressed in a beautiful black crop top and a blue tartan mini skirt with knee-high socks and cream coloured stilettos. The little skin that showed on the midriff looked spotlessly clean and her legs looked longer and sharper. Her neatly done eyebrows were complimenting her skin as bright as the full moon on a clear night. She had a warm mesmeric charm in the way she carried herself.



Ting tong. The doorbell rung just once and she opened the door. There was deathly silence for a moment as soon as she saw who was at the door. Her face was half covered with that person's shadow, and looking at the expression on his face, she felt a sudden chill. It took a moment for Sara to get back to normalcy and then, with a deep breath, she let that person in. Her hands were trembling slightly out of hesitation and fear and she could hear the sound of her own breath. Alone in her thoughts, she wanted him to go away. She thought she wouldn't have had to face him if she had left a little while earlier.

He smiled as he sat on the couch and Sara gave a forced smile back. She knew that her ex-boyfriend Satyam would surely raise the topic of her leaving him. Sara turned towards a wooden cabinet and gave him twenty thousand rupees. Satyam looked up in silence, his eyes filled with anguish. Sara stood there without moving. Watching him fidgeting with his marriage ring and failing to stop her tears, she kept staring at him for a long, long time. She heard his insides roaring and he heard her insides dying, both knowing well how close they had once been.

Both of them had wished innumerable times to talk and convey to the other what had gone wrong, but they hadn't been able to. What they surely didn't know was that one of them had moved on and this gesture had been completed by the extent of pain it had given to the other person. A part of her always wanted to get things working again between the two of them, but as much as she believed in it, she knew it would just unbox dead matters and lead nowhere. They both meant a lot to each other, and it had been close to one year now. She didn't expect him to come back. Not today, anyway. He could have sent anyone if he wanted. Every time they tried sorting things out, it just got worse and she didn't want any discussion happening today. He honestly remembered her saying

that she'd never like to see him again. For months, he kept expecting her to mend things, like she always did, but with time, he too had lost hope. He was still silent, struggling for words, and wondered if it would mean anything if he expressed himself.

She knew that hearing him say anything about them won't be easy. She was still trying to make sense of a lot of things that had happened that night and that was one of the reasons why she never called him back.

'Where are you going?' Satyam asked.

'It's none of your concern, Satyam,' she said and there was something in her eyes, in her expressions, that spoke of the time she has faced in the last few months.

She finally gathered herself and burst out what she had been holding in for so long. 'I never doubted our relationship… not even for a minute.'

'I think you're to be blamed equally,' Satyam shot back immediately.

'If that pacifies your soul in any way, you should just go ahead and go on theorizing as you please. But too bad, I don't have any time left for all this. Not right now. I have to be somewhere in half an hour, so would you please mind?' Sara said gesturing towards the door. No matter how intense it had all been, how much she had loved him before, she didn't feel the same way anymore. She had taken her decision and she was sticking by that. He had made her feel beautiful once, but he had lost her respect the day he got married to someone else. He wanted to continue with the relationship even after his marriage, but she was not the kind of girl who'd like to be a part of an extra-marital affair. Lately, she had just allowed herself to be as independent as she had been before committing to Satyam. She wouldn't have met him at all if she had the faintest hint that he was going to come. She could have done without seeing him.

Nobody spoke for the next few seconds. He knew it'd be the dead end for this conversation. So he gave in to the inevitable and walked away with the twenty thousand rupees in his hands. He left without a word.

Many a time, we have so many things to say, but have no way to say them and we regret it later. Not all the words fit your emotions. Sometimes what is said is not what you mean, and mostly, what you really mean remains unsaid.

Someone wanted to tell his girlfriend how much he'd miss not being with her, how much he wished that they don't break up, how much he wished that she comes back to him for the last time and stays with him forever. Someone wanted to tell her ex-boyfriend just before he was about to get married that she still loved him and wanted to marry him despite their ego clashes, fights or mood

swings as they'd still win the world if they were to be together, or lose everything if they aren't.

Life's a little too short to leave words unsaid. It's difficult to change some equations. We don't go out and express ourselves. We keep killing our inner self by holding it deep within our hearts. We become prisoners of unsaid words, and because of those very words, our love story doesn't turn into scotch; it just gives up as plain whiskey.

Break up. A word that can probably take your life away. It hurts. It surely does, because you can never go from going out to being friends again. As she stepped down those stairs, she kept thinking about their break-up.

You break up for different reasons. Maybe you're already done with emotions and decide to call it off, maybe one of you starts liking someone else and thinks that they are with the wrong person, maybe your priorities don't match now, maybe your loved one thinks that there's not enough warmth in the relationship anymore, or maybe one of you gets a sudden realization that it just wasn't love.

But the thing that is common with most of the break-ups is that you decide to remain friends. Just like that. It's a lie. You do it just to take the permanence out of the break-up because you still can't afford to consider that person going away from your life forever. So you do stupid amendments like that. Also because you know when you'd listen to any music, or visit the park where you jogged together for years, or go for a long drive on romantic evenings, or sit alone, or visit an area where you had been together, you'd miss that person badly.



Ting tong.

Armaan opened the door to find his landlord standing outside with a smile on his face. Armaan had been busy decorating the home for Sara, but albeit unwillingly, invited his landlord inside. Tired of his habit of visiting the flat every month, Armaan avoided smiling. For him, his landlord was that oversized one-ton middle-aged giant who did nothing in his life apart from his passion for photography and rent collection of the flat his father had purchased from his savings.

The landlord looked at Armaan, ensuring he had his attention. ‘So, how are you, Mr. Writer?’ he asked.

‘I am doing well, Pradeep. How are you?’ Armaan replied uninterestingly.

‘Not good yaar. You guys write such shitty television serials and I have nothing to watch after coming back home, tired after a long day at work.’

‘You started working?’

‘I am a photographer. You know that, right? Didn’t you see my wildlife photography on Facebook?’

‘Those were the pictures of cats and dogs, if I am not mistaken.’

‘Yes, but they were very wild. They wouldn’t let me take their pictures. Only a professional and ace photographer like me could manage to take such real pictures.’

‘I am sure,’ Armaan said sarcastically.

‘You’re into the film industry…’ Pradeep started off, only to be interrupted in between.

‘It’s the television industry,’ Armaan clarified.

‘Yes, it’s the same thing only. Every film actor is coming on some television show or the other. Why don’t you ask some fine actor or actress to get their portfolio done from me? I won’t even charge.’

‘But you’re a wildlife photographer, you just mentioned.’

‘Look Armaan! We have to experiment after a certain point of time in life to stand out and that’s what I am also doing. You should see my pictures sometimes. I take the best selfies ever. In fact, you too should try writing

something different.’

‘I get that.’ Armaan nodded, less in agreement and more to get rid of him.

‘So talk to them; I’d do their portfolios for free.’

‘I’ll surely speak with them,’ Armaan said matter of factly.

‘Why don’t you upload your pictures with celebrities?’

‘I don’t like doing that.’

‘Why?’ He looked almost perplexed.

‘Why don’t you stop taking rent?’

‘I don’t think I would like to do that?’

‘That’s exactly my point.’

‘That reminds me of your contract getting over this month. After revision, your rent from next month would be forty-two thousand rupees.’

‘But that’s too much of a hike.’ Armaan was flabbergasted.

‘There’s a lot of demand in Mumbai and not many bachelors manage to get such a beautiful flat with one of the best views.’

‘Ten percent hike is the rule.’

‘Who follows rules?’ Pradeep shrugged.

‘I do.’

‘No, you don’t. I keep getting complaints about late-night parties from your neighbours. We don’t have parking space allotted with this flat, yet you care to park. You guys are late night owls which disturbs the watchmen and this is a strict no-girl flat, but still, lots of girls come here for night stays. What do you have to say about that?’

Armaan tapped his own knees as he had nothing to refute Pradeep’s allegations. He moved inside and got the rent. Pradeep started counting the notes in a typical desi way. ‘Look, I am also young and I don’t like disturbing your plans… as I can see it.’ He said pointing at all the decorations. ‘You should try transferring amount online.’

‘Sandy is no longer living in this flat. His mother has got cancer. I hope you would consider that.’

‘Even if his mother dies, property rates in Mumbai wouldn’t stop going up. Let’s just talk business.’

After hearing what his landlord had said and feeling disgusted on his thinking, Armaan said. ‘I would let you know about this.’

His landlord looked confused all of a sudden. ‘That means you’re thinking of leaving the flat?’

‘I said, I’ll let you know this month,’ Armaan said with finality in his voice. He looked right into his eyes. ‘Ok then! I need to go back to what I was doing. It was nice meeting you.’ Armaan added. ‘And you know what! We write shit because the audience expects shit from us, it’s time for you guys to get matured. The day you guys do that, you’d see India producing the best of television content, which might still be out of some people’s league to even understand.’

His landlord pulled his bag and after doing final formal greetings and a couple of more requests for doing portfolios, he left.

Ting tong.

The next time the doorbell rang, Armaan looked around to check if his landlord had forgotten something and had come back to get it. He didn’t see anything. He went to open the door and looked smitten with what he saw. The ever so beautiful Sara was standing there.

He knew for a fact that Sara was too modest for her beauty. He had never seen her show it off unnecessarily. For now, he gazed at her and kept looking at her for the next few seconds before he invited her inside. She looked extremely charming and he just couldn’t take his eyes off her. How unusual was it to fall in love so quickly? Or maybe it was because he had never really felt like this for anybody else before. He had had his flings during college time, but nothing serious. He would always question himself, would I ever fall in love with anyone? He didn’t know he would, like that, unaware and so quickly.

‘You look gorgeous,’ he complimented her and realized that he hadn’t even taken a shower and his body was all sweaty like a pig in the mud.

‘Thanks,’ she said beaming. ‘You’ve made this evening as beautiful as a dream. It looks beautiful. Thanks for putting in all the effort,’ she said looking around.

‘Oh, that’s nothing. That’s how I generally keep my flat.’

‘With those lanterns, beautiful aroma, dim beautiful lights, candles…? I’ve seen a bachelor’s flat before, and trust me, it’s not even close to what it looks like right now. Either you’re gay or you’ve really done this. Come on! Take the credit,’ she said.

Armaan bowed his head and in a typical *Game of Thrones* style, said, ‘Your grace, I accept that.’

‘You should’ve taken the credit earlier. Not many guys are generous enough to

put in all these efforts,' she smiled and said.

There was something about the way she spoke. He wondered how she could look so elegant, sexy and cute, almost at the same time.

'Don't tell me you haven't met someone who would do all this for you,' Armaan said casually.

'Not in all my life,' she said and all he could think of was if he could say, 'For this entire life of yours, I'll always do that for you.' But on the outside, he smiled and nodded.

'My ex-boyfriend and I were in a relationship for some months. It was quite serious…you know, where you see a lifetime with each other and all. But he got married to someone of his parent's choice.' He could smell the disappointment in her tone that only a person in love would be able to understand.

'Are you still in love with him?' he said and hoped for a big no.

'Love isn't about loving someone till your last breath; it's more about loving someone with each breath of yours. And if I call my love for him my air, he was bringing asthma into it,' she said and Armaan was confused, because her riddle had not answered his question. So he tried asking her in some other way.

'Do you feel like going back to him?'

'If there's an option between losing billions of dollars that I could earn for free or going back to Satyam for this entire life of mine, I would almost immediately choose the first one. Never ever in my life,' she said with finality in her voice and anger in her eyes.

Armaan was quite happy to hear that. After apologising for his shabby looks and smell, he went into the kitchen to get the snacks ready. Once done with it, he served red wine with them.

Nobody said anything for the next few minutes. She was the best person he could be with and for some reason, after knowing about her past, he doubted if she would be ready for a new relationship right away. He wasn't aware that she had been in such a serious affair with someone before, and no matter how hard he tried fighting his thoughts, it slipped always from his tongue, 'Do you still meet him?'

She took a deep breath, looked at him in the eyes and said, 'I met him today… right before coming here. He's my landlord too. We lived together in his house for many months before he got married.' Armaan looked broken, but he tried hiding what he felt through his expressions. 'And why did he come to meet you today?' He gathered himself and asked.

‘To collect rent. It was his first time after his marriage that he personally came to collect the rent. I mostly give it to his father or transfer online.’ She paused and then added, ‘I don’t feel like living there anymore.’

‘Why don’t you change your apartment then?’ he asked.

‘I am not getting any good flat in less than thirty-five thousand rupees, and that’s a whole lot of money,’ she said and he smiled.

‘Why are you smiling?’ she asked.

‘It’s Mumbai. Life keeps getting cheaper and rents keep getting costlier,’ he said. ‘I’m feeling the same heat. My flatmate had to leave midway because his mother was diagnosed with cancer and I am facing the burden of the entire rent. Plus, I guess it’s landlord day today or something. Because just before you came in, he announced a twenty percent hike in the existing rent.’ Sara’s eyebrows shot up on hearing that, but Armaan had more to say, ‘So now, I’ll have to pay a whopping forty-two thousand for this flat from next month.’

She was quiet, but got up to take a tour of his flat. After they came back to the living room, she shrugged and said, ‘Trust me, your flat is still worth it. What did you say to him?’

‘I said I’ll give it a thought, hoping that he decreases the rent by a bit.’

‘He won’t, and you wouldn’t get such a beautiful flat again. I’ve tried my best searching for it and there’s still no hope.’

‘I know, but I can’t afford to pay so much.’

‘You don’t have to!’ Sara said with beaming eyes. ‘I am looking for a change in flat and you’re looking for a flatmate. It’s a big 2BHK flat. If it doesn’t bother you, I don’t mind moving in. We’ll share the rent.’ His heart started kicking with joy. He was unable to catch his excited breath and he imagined looking into the prettiest eyes he’d ever seen every morning. He guessed he was finally figuring out the purpose behind everything – Sandy’s knockout from the flat at such a sudden notice, his meeting Sara and getting to know about the common connection, asshole landlords, and now, the need of having each other in their lives.

As happy as he looked, his worry looked more pronounced the next second.

‘Is there a problem?’ she asked.

‘No, I would love to have you here as my flatmate, but I need to convince my landlord first. This society doesn’t allow an unmarried couple to live together,’ he said.

‘That’s not a problem then. We can say that we’re engaged to each other and

getting married soon. I don’t know anyone in Mumbai, so I can’t risk myself in staying anywhere else,’ she said.

‘That sounds like a plan,’ he said, elated.

‘Give me your landlord’s number,’ she said.

‘No, let me speak with him,’ he said.

‘My voice can do wonders that your voice can’t,’ she said playfully.

She took his number and kept on wandering around the flat, checking bathrooms and smiling after looking at the bathtub.

‘That’s my room,’ her lips moved. She kept on speaking with the landlord and Armaan looked scared, confused, clueless and helpless. She came back after about ten minutes.

‘What did he say?’ Armaan asked, trying his best to not look worried.

‘He welcomed me, so I am shifting within a week. I already told you that I need that room. You’re a selfish person… You never mentioned about the bathtub, otherwise we wouldn’t have cancelled our previous plans of meeting and I would have taken a body spa out there. And most importantly, rent remains thirty-five thousand for another year as I promised him a portfolio with an actress friend of mine. This deal is done and sealed, my Cambridge scholar,’ she said.

Armaan paused, stood still, collecting his thoughts and he just couldn’t stay silent out of happiness. He hugged her and she hugged him tighter. That hug was much more than a friendly hug.

‘You didn’t even take a bath,’ she said and he looked embarrassed.

‘I wanted to, but my landlord came in the way.’ He added with no confidence in his eyes.

‘Don’t worry! For a person like me, a bath in a tub is sexy, but having a sweat after a workout is super sexy.’ She winked as she said that and looked her happiest.

His life changed in that particular minute – everything he had dreamt of, and everything he wished for seemed to have come to him. That day, everything looked perfect, this evening looked perfect and he liked the surprise life had planned for him. Over some glasses of wine and a bunch of delicious snacks, they both talked their hearts out. They had the kind of conversations you remember for your entire life. Even after talking till late in the night, they still wanted to talk more as Armaan dropped her back to her flat.

He came out of the car and Sara hugged him. ‘You mean a lot to me, my Cambridge scholar. Never ever leave me,’ she said in a drunken state and looked her sexiest best as she said this. She kissed Armaan on his cheek and he returned a peck on hers.

There were lots of thoughts in his mind when he was on his way back home. He decided to write his feelings down on this special day. He wrote something from all his heart that day and realized that he had never written anything so beautifully and honestly before.

You know you’re in love when you like everything about her. You know you’re in love when you take long routes to get that one glimpse of her. You know you’re in love when you start liking the things that she likes, you start hating the things she dislikes, you sleep for just a few hours and still feel fresh, you don’t sleep before looking at her profile, you keep re-reading her messages to understand if there’s any deeper meaning to it, you keep imagining the conversations you would have when you’re together.

You know it’s love when you smile after imagining times together, when you are all charged up when you start taking interest in helping people, you try to keep everyone happy, you feel that life is only fair and it just couldn’t get better.

You know it’s love when you get jealous of her talking to somebody else, you know it’s love when you go out of the way to get her out of any possible trouble and you know it’s true love when you keep on doing things with no expectation whatsoever. You know it’s love when you start enjoying your friends teasing you and you miss it when they don’t.

If she has become a part of your personal diary, you’re in love. When she has become a part of all your plans, you’re in love. If you’ve started taking the time to better yourself so that she loves you back, you’re in love.

You’re in love. Deep love. The love that starts from sunrise and doesn’t set with the day’s end. The love that would make you do things for someone unconditionally. The love that will make you a better person. The love that makes you feel glad that you’re in love. The love that becomes larger than life and your life becomes a part of that love.



31st May 2017

In many ways, his life changed after that day, which in many ways seemed to be the best decision for both Armaan and Sara. They decided to share the rent and Armaan just knew that it's only going to get them closer. He always got the feeling of wonder whenever he looked at her, the kind of feeling you get when you see northern lights in Sweden. He hadn't seen it in person till now, but now wished to do that with Sara someday. They would navigate big stars and stare at the colourful lights with their naked eyes under the night sky. He would just see the beautiful sky and Sara both and still wonder why Sara is more beautiful.

His life was changing at a pace he didn't expect it to change, but more or less, looked pleased with it.

He had been acutely aware of the issues society might create and had also been troubled by a couple of society people after knowing that there's a girl moving in with him. Surprisingly, they eventually ended up agreeing after a call from his landlord. Pradeep was in awe of Sara. Watching Sara and helping her with shifting, Armaan wondered about the turn of events in the last some days that had brought him over here and that just made him happier.

Professionally, there was heaps of work to be done in June first week, which didn't stop him from enjoying his life and spending time with Sara. Like always, he sometimes complained about his work to Sara, but for the most part, he accepted the work and gave in his best. In fact, he managed the existing show and responsibility of the new show quite well and had undoubtedly emerged as the most popular writer in the channel for his humour, wit, smartness and patience. All thanks to Sara's faith in him and his capabilities. But all that said and done, Sara and Armaan decided to keep their decision of being flatmates completely confidential at the workplace.

Sara was to shift that night, and even before that, they had began talking over phone more often. Many a time their nights would pass off with careless ease. A man who'd supposedly been just a colleague was going to be her flatmate. He pinched himself at times to confirm if it was happening for real and got scared when he thought of the possibility that all this would just vanish some day as quickly as it happened.

His phone rung and the name flashed ‘Partner in crime’. That’s how he had saved her number in his phone.

‘What’s up, my Cambridge scholar?’ Sara said.

‘Nothing, I was just looking at my flat for one last time,’ he replied.

‘Is somebody ruining your flat after coming there?’

‘Not at all, but I’ll never think of my flat in the same way again. It was a guys’ flat till now. We could put our underwear anywhere, not get the clothes washed until they stank. You know what I mean?! Now, everything will have to be managed just about right and the worst part is, I wouldn’t be able to pee standing at the edge of my bathroom and aim it to reach the pot just about right. Look what all am I already sacrificing for you,’ he said

‘You’re teasing me, right? Don’t tell me you do all of that,’ she replied.

‘99% of the guys in this world do that.’

‘And what do the rest of the 1 percent do?’

‘They lie,’ he said and she laughed with him.

‘And that’s what’s strange about you guys. You give such a good first impression and then completely change yourself after some time. No wonder such boys remain single.’

‘I kind of like the way you’ve conveniently friend-zoned me already, even before moving into the flat,’ he said and she laughed.

‘You gave up so easily. That’s even more disheartening,’ she said with a smile.

‘You want me to?’

‘How does that matter? I know you as a guy who makes his own choices. I don’t want to enforce my choices upon you.’

‘You’re so very cruel.’

‘I joined the channel for a purpose.’

‘And you’re a complete fit.’

‘C’mon, you’ve to admit it’s nice for you as well.’

‘It is. I already believe so. Had it not been you, I wouldn’t have got my second show.’

‘That’s not what I meant. You got your show because of all your potential,’ she said honestly.

‘That matters the least I guess. All you need is some inhouse recommendation,’ he said truthfully.

‘Well, you could thank me for that.’

‘You didn’t let me finish.’

‘There’s more?’ she teased.

‘Do you really want to hear?’ he asked.

‘I’m sorry. Please go on,’ she said and went quiet.

He hesitated before continuing any further. Then he measured up his words and said, ‘It’s not a speech, and in fact, it’s not a cheesy thing to say, but I just want to tell you something. I’ve always been that one guy who’d be extra careful about anything and everything I do, but speak my heart out when it’s needed. Impulsive, many people would say. I am coming from a background where having a girlfriend at an early age isn’t that usual. I, in fact, spent most of my life thinking about how a gorgeous girlfriend would look like by my side. I tried getting into relationships, but it didn’t work out for some reason or the other. Many a time, either of us lost interest and most of the times, the girl moved on with someone else. I believed that I would someday look at the stars with the girl of my choice and in the moment of cosiness there, I’d recite the dialogues I’ve specifically written for her.

‘I grew up reading Romeo-Juliet, Heer-Ranjha, and Laila-Majnu stories and I kept telling myself that I too would have a story like these someday, and that wouldn’t be fiction; that would be a real story, my own love story. The kind of story that people would like to read and believe in; when love would be fading away from the world, these stories would make them believe in true love again. I dreamt of kissing her under the beautiful northern lights when the sky would turn romantic and chilly winds would tickle our bodies. I tried believing in all those stories. I believed they would come true someday, but there’s a huge but… But I stopped believing in them as time faded away and I started heading towards my mid-20. When my friends started marrying the people of their choices or people of their parent’s choices, those love stories made me jealous and arranged marriages scared me.

‘When I saw you at the beach that day… there’s much to say, but I would keep it really short. I kind of liked what I saw first and definitely loved what I felt when we met. There was no looking back from there. Like a speedy sports car, I kept running on the love highway and hoped to meet you midway sometime and find out if you too feel the same way and want to complete this journey together. I know it’s a risk, a big risk of getting a big no, but it’s always better than bumping myself to the road-end without even expressing my heart out. I know that this road would end someday, but I hope we finish it soon. I

guess what I'm trying to tell you here is that I've started believing in love again, and the reason behind is you, Sara.'

Nobody said anything for the next few seconds. He breathed after the so-called sweet proposal but regretted as soon as he said it as there was still no response. He came to a tragic point where he himself didn't know how to control the situation he had created out of overflowing emotions.

'Hey Sara, I'm sorry if you felt bad,' he said and she still didn't respond. He looked at his mobile screen and saw that the call had been disconnected. He received a message almost immediately from Sara that relieved him quite a bit.

'I'm sorry my phone got discharged the moment you said, "It's not a speech…" What were you saying btw?'

'It's not a speech, it's a story that you'd live while you're staying here.' Armaan messaged.

'And that kind of justifies my reason of staying there up to one more notch. I am waiting to live this story with my writer, my Cambridge scholar. See you tonight. ;) ' She messaged.

The full moon had reached its zenith in the sky, making for a beautiful view from Armaan's balcony. He always liked that view; it was a view to die for. He saw some stars that were far far away. They were far away maybe because they lived in a world that's far away from here, but they still shine somewhere, give someone a view, brighten up somebody's life, in a far distant world. And if someone staying in that world would see Sara today in this world, he'd probably feel the same thing. That the sky was lighting up someone's life and his star, Sara was lighting up his life.

Armaan opened up his diary and wrote something that if he'd read someday, he'd know that it wasn't easy to get her and that would make him respect his relationship and efforts even more.

I liked this girl when we talked first. Her eyes, her lips, her smile and her voice – everything was just so perfect. I knew how it was to fall in love at first sight and I knew I was getting into a deep love.

I liked this girl when we talked more, when we shared some more time together and I remember the nervousness within. I liked this girl for her individuality, her sweet talks and her innocent gestures. Words can't say how much I wanted her to be mine. If I know what love is, it's only and only because of this girl.

I liked this girl when we shared some beautiful moments; we got to know each

other better. I loved it when I caught her looking at me, smiling at me and then taking her eyes off just suddenly.

I liked this girl because even a mere mention of her name could lighten me up. I liked this girl because thinking about her couldn't let me sleep. I liked this girl because I've had many crushes in my life, but I experienced love for the first time with her.

I proposed and a co-incidence came in my way. Maybe, just maybe, it's not a great time to let her know about my feelings. But till then, she will remain my secret. My beautiful little secret. If I'd never tell her, she'd never know. My love is secret and my love is eternal. The secret is eternal.



8th June 2017

On Thursday evening, three days after Sara shifted into Armaan's flat, Armaan was on his way back home in a sharing cab, asking the driver to speed up as Sara had planned to cook for them that night. He just wanted to rush home. His show was still at number one in his time slot, but the story he had developed for a new show was rejected by the channel. As much as Sara loved that story, Vikky, Nisha and the fiction head Tanuj didn't look convinced. The conversations with them kept re-playing in his head and he hated himself for that.

'So how did you find it?' Armaan remembered asking after narrating the concept. Tanuj, Vikky, and Nisha kept looking at each other, waiting for someone to start with the feedback.

'I don't know. For a while there, I thought you might come up with an interesting twist in the entire plotline, but I couldn't really connect to it,' Vikky said.

'Exactly!' Nisha said and Sara looked furious, not because she was now Armaan's flatmate, but because she had genuinely liked the story.

'Would you please elaborate, Nisha?' Sara asked keeping her face as calm as she could.

'I mean, the story and everything is fine. In fact, I liked the characters that Armaan tried creating, but there's something missing. Something that'd make me say yes. This is it. That something is missing,' Nisha said looking at Vikky, almost asking for approval. Her fingers were entwined, showing she was either nervous or scared. Or maybe both.

'Now that you said you liked the story and characters, and it's just about that something you feel is missing, why don't you try filling it with your valuable suggestions?' Armaan said, furiously. He always kind of hated when a non-creative person debated on what they're really bad at – creativity. He had always observed that Nisha would make 4-5 entries in any sort of meeting, speak shit and try proving that she was justifying her job.

Lost in her own thoughts and tapping her head, she was quiet for a moment. Tanuj as always was busy with his mobile and would nod formally once in a

while to register his presence in the meeting.

‘You can do something that nobody has even expected. You can make your story very different from all others,’ Nisha said and looked extremely under-confident.

‘You can make it a flashback story, with a parallel plot going on in the present. Make it *Love Aajkal* types,’ Vikky said and saved Nisha from embarrassment.

‘Exactly!’ Nisha said as she took a sigh of relief and asked for a quick toilet break permission from Tanuj. Only after a nod from Tanuj did Nisha leave and returned back in a jiffy. Everybody kept thinking meanwhile. Sara gave Armaan an understanding smile and tried making him laugh by mimicking Vicky’s feminine gestures.

Tanuj was busy talking to his wife and tried convincing her to let him go out with his friends that night. Vikky, Nisha played deaf. Sara controlled her laughter as Armaan looked furiously at Nisha and Vikky.

‘Look, there are certain things that need to be worked out,’ Tanuj said as he kept his phone aside after failing miserably at convincing his wife, who ordered him to plan a romantic dinner the same night.

‘Yes, perhaps your equation with your wife…’ Armaan thought.

‘By certain things, I mean to say, your entire story plot,’ Tanuj said as he started playing with his fidget spinner that he was biting unconsciously sometime back when he was speaking with his visibly dominating wife.

‘Look, there are only eight unique stories in this world, but your creativity comes in place when you make the sub-stories of them different,’ Tanuj added and gave gyan every writer had heard about a thousand times before. ‘Your job as a writer comes in place when you make them look different with a different feel, different set-up, different stakes and a different message.’ Tanuj sneezed a couple of times in between and every time he sneezed, Armaan hoped Tanuj to fall sick badly.

‘You’d have to keep in mind that our audience isn’t progressive; we’re dealing with a bunch of regressive audiences and that’s where the real market lies. People living in Mumbai, Bangalore wouldn’t give a damn about our show. People living in rural, semi-urban areas would love it. Write regressive and package it in a progressive branding,’ Tanuj said what other channel heads hesitate in accepting and he made a lot of sense.

‘Exactly!’ Vikky said, licking his boss’s ass this time.

‘Exactly my point,’ Nisha repeated and did her rituals.

The channel has a weird bunch of people. You get money for not only being non-creative, but also a lot of incentive depends upon how well you're trying to justify your job. It's like a bunch of uneducated ministers who rule the nation's working and you can't speak anything against them too. Here, the channel was the ruler and most executive producers and interns the uneducated, undeserving ministers. But because they were the telecasters, Armaan had no option but to listen to their crap and nod in a yes every single time.

Tanuj and Sara were exceptions, and Tanuj being a fiction head was a well-known figure in the television industry. He had given a lot of hits in past, and recently, when he switched channel, his performance had gone down drastically.

'We would have to come on the same page first…about what exactly do we want. And Sara, Vikky, Nisha, if needed, have more meetings with Armaan and fix it. I expect the story one-liner, rough six-months arc and character sketches by next week,' Tanuj said and got up from his seat immediately before moving out of his room.

'So, this is what we need, for now. Let me know if you need any help from me. I am always available from Monday to Friday, between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.,' Vikky said, almost uninterestingly. 'If you want, we can meet at Sara's place as well any day,' he added as it was closer to his own residence.

'Let's meet in your office only. Let's keep it professional,' Armaan said. 'Also, it would be great Nisha, if you could contribute a little more than just agreeing to whatever Vikky says. You can consider yourself a part of this team. That's how you'll learn,' Armaan looked straight into Nisha's eyes and she visibly took offense to it, but said nothing. Armaan did the final greetings before moving out and took no more than a minute to leave the channel's office.

'It's fine; just forget about it. I'll take this up in a meeting and esnure that this doesn't happen again. Okay? I'll prepare a lovely dinner for you tonight, my Cambridge scholar. Just finish your other meetings and meet me at home as soon as you can.' Sara messaged him.

'Thanks to my Executive producer cum flatmate… that really helped. I'll see you tonight.' He replied with a smile and that took away all his anger.

Sitting in the cab that evening on his way back home, Armaan thought about Sara. And looking at the traffic around, he doubted if he'd be able to reach home anytime soon.

'*When are you reaching?*' Sara messaged.

‘I hope in this lifetime. There’s a crazy traffic jam on the Western Express Highway. Maybe it would take me half an hour more.’

He messaged to which Sara replied with a sad smile and a message. ‘*:(Come soon. I’m hungry*.’

‘I am sorry. Trust me, I hate to keep you waiting. I just hope this clears out soon.’ Armaan messaged and he always sent the last message of the conversation. That was his way of telling himself that he loved Sara more. He put some music on and just when he was getting a bit relaxed, his phone buzzed again.

It was a message from Sandy. *‘Armaan, my mother is fighting the last stage of cancer. The doctor said she might lose the fight soon. I regret not spending time with my mother when she badly wanted to. I regret being a selfish child.*’

One more terrible news on an already terrible day.

Armaan was unable to respond. He breathed heavily. His heart started pounding fast, thinking of Sandy and his mother. He typed, cancelled, retyped his message again and again, but even after being a writer, he was short of words to write a message for Sandy, considering the pain his family was going through. He called him up instead, but Sandy didn’t respond. He finally messaged. ‘*Know that I am always there for you whenever you need me. We know it’s a tough phase and there’s no other option but to face it. Do not keep any regrets; she is a proud mother to have you as her child. My prayers are with your mother*.’

Regret. We all regret certain things at a certain point of time in life. We regret taking some decisions and then we regret not taking some important decisions. We all do certain things that we definitely regret later.

You might regret not taking your girl seriously, or not spending quality time with your family. You might regret not preparing good enough for your d-day at corporate, you might regret not studying to the best you could, you might regret missing out on the best ever trip your friends have been on, you might regret sharing your feelings with the person who never understood you and made fun of you, you might regret not attempting music, sports as your career, you might regret not visiting the best of places in the world, you might regret being so insensible and lazy in your life …

You might regret most of the things in your life. You’ll regret them all because you didn’t take many chances in life, you didn’t take your mother’s calls, or never told your father how much he means to you. Maybe that was the only thing they were waiting for.

You’ll regret everything that you could’ve done when you had a chance of doing it. You’ll regret every chance you didn’t take, every person you didn’t respect, everything you ignored, every moment you wasted and every person you lost.



There are some mornings that bring hope with it and then there are certain evenings that end everything with it like it never existed. Hope is a slut; you can't expect it to stay loyal to you. It might look perfect when it becomes a reality, but then you realize you need it again and again and it's nothing but an unreal wish. When hope surpasses, reality catches hold of you and becomes so adamant that it doesn't let you hope again.

Sandy knew that his mother wouldn't live long and it was time for him to break up with hope and join hands with reality. It was a tough thing to come to terms with, to see your mother dying in front of your very eyes and not being able to do anything about it. Everything looked unfair. The doctors treating her were the only gods he knew and he was regretting and thinking about the what ifs.

'Call your close relatives,' the doctor said as he looked extremely stressed after checking up Sandy's mother. 'The infection has spread to over 95% of the body,' he added.

'How many days?' Sandy asked, almost broken.

'It's just some hours. Her condition has fallen drastically after showing improvements initially,' the doctor said sympathetically.

Sandy's jaw dropped. He seemed to have frozen in the moment of shock. The terror was getting real and this night was going to be full of shocks and last moments. The person who loved him so much was never loved back the way she deserved; the person who taught him to walk, made him smile endlessly, was going to stop walking the race of life with tears in her eyes and would still hope the best for her son. No matter how much this world would says that she'd be in a better place, she'd be looking at you and she would want you to be happy, that's all bullshit. The kind of bullshit we keep giving to people around when they lose someone close, and turn on our sudden disbelief when something similar happens with us. Death is a reality, yes, but all he hoped for was to let his dream stay a little longer. Let his mother stay for a little longer.

The thought of what tomorrow would look like left him with a sense of dread. Why didn't he come here before? Why did he miss all those calls? Why couldn't he be a little more sensitive towards his parents? Why is it ending like this?

He wiped away all his tears and moved towards his mother, doing his best to hide the tears. It should have worked all the other time, but for his hammering heart, shaking hands with which he sat caressing her forehead, and the realization of having one of the last moments together, his mother eventually found that the day had come and she'd have to leave soon, leaving her son behind. As much as she tried staying for her son, her body fought, fought hard and her body started giving up in her last few minutes.

'Wouldn't you like to say anything?' his mother took the pain and said with the utmost difficulty.

'Yes. That the world is cruel and you're a fairy, but I can't tell you how happy I've been to have a mother like you. You've gone to the end of the world to make me happier at times and best of all, you still smiled. Maa, this world is a dark day and you're heading to a bright night, but I can't tell you how happy I've been to have a mother like you. When people say I look exactly like you and I have the heart of my mother, I know they're exaggerating, but that's a little part of my life I wouldn't want a reality check for. You've been the most beautiful lady I've been with. That's an ongoing forever date which doesn't start or end merely with life or death. Maa, this world is hell and now you're going to heaven, but I can't tell you how happy I've been when you spoke about my childhood memories and how I loved never leaving you. But now, you're leaving me and I want you to be happy. This world ends somewhere and you're going to be there soon enough, only to realize that Papa is waiting for you, the man who loved you the most. This race is finally coming to an end, and you've won it. This day of life is ending with a beautiful night. You'd be one of those stars that I'd see every night and the moment that star blinks, I'd know that you're smiling at me. As you close your eyes here, you'll be opening them in some other better world, and as you take your last breath here, just know that it's a painless breath of independence and it wouldn't hurt you anymore. Go, Mumma, go! Set yourself free without any worry.'

His mother closed his eyes finally and eventually, her heartbeats stopped with ease. He looked at his mother go away from everything that was hers, from everything this world gave her and everything she thought was hers. This world smirked a selfish smile and when he looked around, he noticed that time hadn't stopped moving for anyone, but only for him. He could hear the loud cries of his soul as his mother rested in peace and happy cries from the next room as someone there gave a birth to a new soul. In that moment of realization, he realized that life is a circle of cries that starts with happy tears and ends with sad tears.

Sandy’s life was filled with the void that absolutely nobody else would be able to fill.

People come and go, but they never stop hoping.

Sandy sat motionless in the hospital lobby and talked to himself, perhaps saying what he had not been able to say then. Perhaps putting his love in words to calm down his tumultuous soul.

‘If I believe for just one moment that this is your last day, I’d not cry over anything. I’d embrace and know that these moments have all been real for once.

‘I’d tell you that I may not be the best child, but you surely were the best mother because you’ve always understood me better than I could understand myself. I’d apologize for whatever arguments I’ve had with you, which must have hurt you. I’d tell you that I couldn’t meet your expectations, but I surely tried my best. I’ll bend down, touch your feet and hug you for one last time. The hug that you’ll always remember. I’d ask you to not cry as you don’t deserve even a single tear. You deserve the best and I’d ask god to give my mother only the best and nothing less.

‘I’d tell you that no matter how much I fought with you, I always knew that you were the best and I could never match up to your excellence and sincerity. I always tried to be like you, but failed miserably.

‘I’d tell you that you were, are and will be the only love I’ve ever had in my life and nobody possibly could make me happier the way you do. I’d tell you that I gave up on myself because I knew you’d always take care of me. I’ll tell you that I unnecessarily got angry with you at times, but I checked my mobile frequently and didn’t sleep the night you didn’t send me a good night message. I might have failed in many of these things, but I tried hard. Really hard.

‘If I believe for just one moment that this would be your last day, I’d hug you for one last time and ask you to wait for a few seconds because I’ve written an amazing eulogy for you so that you can show off up there in heaven and boast about your ignorant but ever so amazing son.

‘If I think for just one moment that this would be your last day, I’d ask you to give me a forever smile I could spend my life with and go away happily, with no regrets.’



The weekend brought the first air of celebration in Armaan and Sara's life as their show 'Cambridge Scholar' completed a hundred episodes successfully. To grace the occasion, the channel threw a party at a place called The Little window at Andheri.

It was half-past eleven when they dressed up, and as they stepped outside, Sara was certain that they should go together while Armaan thought against it, later agreeing to it. Armaan thought he should propose to Sara before taking too long. He'd been thinking about it on and off the entire day. He knew that he'd been thinking about it a little too much. For Sara, it was just another party and for Armaan, it was a date.

'You're looking great, Armaan,' Sara smiled and said.

Armaan took a deep breath and said, 'You look gorgeous as always.' Armaan was driving and Sara bent towards him and Armaan too bent towards her thinking that she was trying to hug him. He figured out soon, as she motioned towards his right side, that she actually needed a bottle which was kept close to his right side. He felt embarrassed at his assumption and couldn't even look at her.

She sensed the weird situation. 'The way you look right now, you'd grab eyeballs from many girls tonight,' she said and complimented him.

'Probably,' Armaan said with a wink. 'But I might let that pass.'

'Why? You have a problem with girls checking you out?' she said.

'Yes, I do,' he said.

'That's strange. Almost every other guy I know would have a boner just on the thought of it,' she replied.

'You'd be happy to know that I'm not just any other guy,' he replied, seriously.

'Do I get a note of sarcasm here?' she said and Armaan didn't reply to it. 'What's wrong, Armaan? What's going on in your head?'

'Too many things,' he said.

Halfway down the street of the venue, Sara asked him to stop the car and he did. She saw in the rear that Tanuj and Vikky were going to the venue together

with some more people from the channel.

‘Armaan, tell me what’s up with you?’ she said and despite the unusual behaviour from Armaan, she smiled.

‘Nothing.’

‘Look Armaan, it’s a game. I would ask you the reason behind your awkwardness and you’d just keep repeating this word…“nothing”. We have never argued before and I’d like to keep it the same way. I know there’s something bothering you from within and you too want to speak about it. Let’s pretend that we’re best friends and you don’t mind sharing it,’ she said.

It was strange. He hadn’t really thought of behaving this way. He usually just thought about her and would feel good about it. Somehow, spending time with Sara made him think about their probable separation too someday. He had always been that kind, less optimistic, more pessimistic. He replayed their conversation in his mind, realizing that he needed her more than ever. But now, all he could do was wait till the party’s end and see, and just hope that she is in a good mood so that he could finally make his long-pending proposal.

Someone tapped the window from outside and it was Vikky.

‘Look who has come together? The legends behind TRPs,’ Vikky smirked and said. Armaan could hear the gossips already. ‘But what are you two doing here far away from venue?’ Vikky added.

‘We were looking for the parking area and it looks all full from a distance. Now that you’re already outside, could you please help us park the car?’ Sara said as she pointed out at haphazardly parked cars.

‘Oh sure,’ Vikky said and helped them. Armaan didn’t mind Vikky joining both of them; what bothered him was the timing of it. He was just about to speak his feelings when she was in one of her best moods. Being an impulsive person, it was a difficult job for him to carry the burden of feelings for long and not let it out, which inevitably left him feeling as if he was being too submissive in expressing what probably could’ve been the best of expressions.

They entered the party venue and it looked jam-packed. Lead actors from shows were giving interviews to different media groups. There were rumours of both leads, Kartik and Ronita breaking up sometime back. They had been in a relationship for about three years. They’d been each other’s counterparts in a super hit show previously, which is where they started their relationship. As soon as the camera switched off, Kartik and Ronita parted ways without even looking at each other. So it wasn’t just a rumour; it was for real. Kartik went ahead and hugged the producer of the show and both their bodies looked one from a

distance. He grabbed her butt and she winked at him. This too wasn't a rumour; it was for real.

Sara and Armaan could hear loud music coming from inside. They both grabbed themselves beer and red wine and before they could make it their personal toast of happiness, Tanuj came from behind and hugged Sara. She turned and hugged him back. Tanuj looked all cheered up. In fact, he had never looked this happy before.

'Are you having a good time?' Tanuj asked Armaan and Sara in the loud noise. He shouted so loudly that it sounded more painful than the Honey Singh tracks playing inside the bar.

'It's quite noisy,' Armaan shouted back.

'So I take it as you're having a good time. Parties are noises but noises aren't parties.' Tanuj said and started laughing his ass off. 'Look, such a good one-liner, I guess I am also becoming a writer,' he added and looked completely sloshed.

'I wish it was so easy.' Armaan thought and just a look at Sara was more than enough for her to understand that he was not enjoying the conversation. Sara signalled for him to relax.

In the background, he heard a woman's voice asking if she could have another beer; she kept on repeating it a number of times before Vikky said, 'Yes Nisha. You can.'

If Armaan had been honest with himself, he didn't like the entire party thing at all. There were heavy-built women in mid 40s wearing skimpy dresses, and kissing any random person dancing with them. There were high profile business ladies getting their bums grabbed by steroid bodies. There were juniors and interns doing their part of ass licking and then there were fake people all around who were pouting, giving poses and in the dark somewhere, they believed that they were living the glamorous life.

Tanuj asked to stop the music and in his completely drunk tone, he shouted, 'I want to thank the entire team of my show 'Cambridge Scholars' for giving such a spectacular, never-seen-before show. This show is up high on the TRP charts everywhere and it would be my bad if I don't invite my dream team to cut the cake as a part of the celebrations. Three cheers to Vikky, Nisha and Sara. Please come guys and cut the cake.'

Sara looked confused as Tanuj didn't even mention Armaan's name. Vikky and Nisha immediately rushed in like in-house puppies, but Sara didn't move. Armaan was the one who had made it the number one show. Rest of them did absolutely nothing when it came to creativity.

Sara signalled Tanuj to mention Armaan's name and he quickly realized that he had forgotten to mention it. Armaan felt dejected, though he didn't let it show on his face. As Tanuj announced Armaan's name, Armaan refused to move. With a smile on his face, he asked the others to continue the celebration. Sara looked at Armaan as she asked him to join, but there was certainly no guilt detected in Tanuj's tone.

'You're just being awfully nosy about me coming here,' Armaan whispered in her ears as they cut the cake that was followed by loud applause and cheers from the drunken people in the den.

'To get the credit right, one has to be nosy and you would learn that from me soon.'

Nisha cut the piece of cake, took it in both hands and offered them to both the asses she licked the most – Tanuj and Vikky.

Music restarted, the party restarted and everyone started dancing to the tunes of not only music but also alcohol. Tanuj held Ronita's hand in the dim lights, brought her close and in the dark, squeezed her boobs and started feeling her like a hungry dog. He kept kissing her and though almost everyone around saw it, nobody dared to keep looking at them. 'Are you having a good time?' he asked Ronita. She just smiled, but didn't reply. 'Speak up,' he shouted over the music.

'I am having the best time of my life,' she replied.

'Are you sure?' he said.

'Yes,' she replied. She looked uncomfortable the way Tanuj was taking his hands inside her, but she didn't utter a single word, rather went on kissing him.

'Let's go to a hotel nearby after the party.'

'Which hotel?'

'I'm not sure of the name, but I know people out there.'

'I have to go back home early. It's my mother's birthday.'

'I guess there is a new show waiting. Never mind, I'll offer it to someone else.'

'My mother's birthday can wait. Just take a room with jacuzzi. Bill it on the channel.' She winked as she said it.

'That's my slut!' Tanuj said.

Armaan looked into Sara's eyes and smiled gently as if trying to make a point that he was enjoying the party.

Sara, on the other hand, knew what Armaan would ask her next. It was, she

thought, the only question hovering over his mind and that's what Armaan had in his mind. 'Is Sara really proud of the people she worked with?' he thought.

What appeared to have been the celebration party for the show actually turned out into complete crap. Actors, directors, producers and channel people, everyone, apart from Armaan and Sara, looked completely out of their senses. Tanuj kept forcing drinks on people and Vikky suddenly came out of his closet and started dancing on cheesy songs like *'Sheila ki jawani', 'Bharo maang meri bharo'* and '*Jalebi bai*'. Armaan didn't have anything against homosexuals but the way Vikky danced was hideous. He looked ridiculous. He kept slipping over junior actors from the show and they had no other option but to dance. There's one simple rule in Indian television shows – if an actor doesn't get well along with people in the channel, their character in the show would die. It's an easy way of asking an actor to kindly fuck off.

Tanuj and Ronita appeared from nowhere and joined Armaan and Sara on their peaceful table. Vikky and Nisha were dancing together, and out of the two, Vikky looked more feminine. He was showing off his man boobs to the others around and there were some actors who were recording it.

'You're seeing Sara, right?' Tanuj slipped his tongue and said. Armaan smiled back at him and said nothing.

'I think you're too drunk, Tanuj,' Sara replied.

'I know, I know, but I'm glad that you're having a good time here,' Tanuj said and kept his hand over Sara's hand.

'I'm not Ronita. I am Sara. You held the wrong hand, Tanuj,' Sara said with finality in her voice and warning in her eyes.

Armaan got up from there. 'I am getting some drink for myself. You need another drink, Sara?' Armaan asked.

'No, thanks. I've got to go. I'll leave after you finish your last beer.'

'Can you please get one for me?' Tanuj asked Armaan.

'One for both of us as well. We feel like drinking more,' Vikky said.

'Exactly!' Nisha replied.

Sara signalled Armaan to not do that.

'Sure, I'll get beer for you guys,' Armaan replied and carried his big glass of beer. This was the moment he was waiting for since forever. It was his time to throw back the disgust he had faced today. He was thinking about every humiliation he had faced today, starting from Tanuj not mentioning his name in the credits till asking for a beer from him. Everything. Those long channel

meetings and useless discussions. All those ego massages Armaan did previously. It was time to give back just in the right amount. Or maybe more.

He picked up a pitcher from the bar and spotted the lead actor humping the female producer in one of the closed cabins that by mistake was left open.

He was here to make them taste their own medicine and he was here to do an act of bravery. He opened the door of the washroom with one hand, carried his pitcher jar in the other hand and as soon as he went inside, he pissed in the jar and kept pissing till the last drop. The jar was half full and as he came out, he mixed three beer pints in that jar. He thought there's still some space so he spat in that too. It was now a perfect cocktail to be served.

He put the pitcher jar on the table, signalled Sara to not try it at all. Sara tried her best hiding her laughter; she was a little high but Armaan was in his senses. Armaan didn't leave till the last drop of the jar had been finished. Some of them found the taste different, some of them found it salty, but Tanuj and Ronita loved it.

He saw everything that night and as he revved up his car, he was disappointed that Sara had asked Tanuj for a favour, to mention Armaan's name and he didn't quite like it. Armaan had some questions that needed to be asked from Sara and then there were certain things that needed to be discussed tonight. His heart started beating faster once again.



Sara was on the phone checking chats. Armaan waited. And waited. And waited. On their way back home that night, he felt ridiculous that Sara spoke nothing. As they reached their flat, Armaan contemplated keeping his words to himself till he calmed down and walked out from his car after parking. He didn't even wait for Sara to get up.

Finally, as he opened his flat's door, she too stepped inside.

'I'm sorry. I know why you're mad at me,' she said with a puppy face.

Armaan looked at her, thinking that Sara had grown even prettier with that puppy look on her face. He looked away to keep himself away from getting distracted.

'No big deal!' he replied.

Watching tonight's party and Tanuj's attitude kept him wondering again what she was doing in the channel and this pretty much occupied his mind for long. He willed himself to stop thinking about it. He took a step towards his room. 'I should be sleeping, Too tired today.'

A moment later, Armaan changed his clothes and still looked visibly disappointed.

'Where are we going with all this?' she asked.

'Definitely not to some people where they don't know how to rightly credit people who worked their soul out in making this show number one,' Armaan said.

'Explain to me how that was wrong,' Sara asked.

'I am working in this industry for some years now and I've seen the best and worst of people. But today I realized that I haven't seen anyone as clever as Tanuj,' he said.

'It's just the way he is. But then, he didn't exactly do it intentionally. Half the time, I got the impression that he didn't like me, my work, anything…but it turned out to be completely different. He trusts me more than any of his old existing employees,' Sara said thoughtfully.

Armaan crinkled his nose in confusion. 'I have no idea what you're talking about. From where I was standing, I believe he intentionally missed out on my

name.’

‘That’s what you think, and I know it’s a little strange, but Tanuj never does that intentionally. He’s not that kind of boss,’ Sara explained.

‘I’ve seen what kind of boss does it make him when he tried squeezing her lead actress’s boobs, played with it for a long time in front of the guests and almost forced her into sleeping with him for a new show. That’s casting couch. Your boss is making decisions on behalf of the channel and that’s how he decides it?’ Armaan said, louder this time and a strange expression crossed his face.

‘Ronita was his ex-fiancée and that’s how she marked her name in this industry. Tanuj introduced her to people and transformed a management graduate into an actress that she is today. Ronita cheated him with the lead actor Kartik who keeps fucking around with every woman and when she realized that Kartik has only gained and she has only lost in this relationship, she shamelessly came back to Tanuj.’

‘But Tanuj is a married man,’ Armaan countered.

‘From the last one year, yes.’

‘And now he’s cheating on his wife! How does that make him any different from Ronita?’

‘He loves his wife a lot,’ Sara said softly.

‘That looked a little blurry when he squeezed her boobs, doesn’t give him that right anyway. Neither does touching your hand,’ Armaan was furious.

‘I made it clear in front of you. Look, we’re here to work and this industry has its dark side that we all are aware of. We just need to search for our brightest sunshine in this dark and I guess that’s what I am focussing on.’

‘So you found your brightest sunshine in Tanuj?’ Armaan asked.

‘You’re putting too much mind into it. Don’t you think so?’ Sara was aghast.

‘Probably, but you still haven’t answered my question till now,’ he said and Sara kept quiet for the next few seconds.

‘Are you proud of the people you’re working with?’ Armaan simplified it for her.

‘Armaan, I am not proud of the people I am working with, and I don’t need to be. I am not sure if you too would be proud of everyone with whom you’ve worked till date, but does that make you right or wrong? I don’t think so. I am not proud of who I am, my identity in life is itself a toss. I don’t even know who

my parents were. In a lot of ways, I am not really proud of myself, but I don't regret any of it. That doesn't stop me from moving ahead and that's what life is all about. Trust me, it's great. It's great to be surrounded by a bunch of idiots. I like it when Nisha makes stupid comments; I like it when Vikky tries to prove himself the boss of the show. It makes me believe that I am better than the set of people I am working with and that's reason enough for me to keep working. And the day nothing seems to be stirring, I know that I would have my brightest sunshine in that dark, my Cambridge scholar. I would have you.' She paused and looked deep into his eyes.

'You bring me love, peace, humour and there's nothing more I would've asked god to give me. I am able to transmit and express my emotions whenever we speak. You know why? Because you can be the sincerest and stupidest person when needed. You understand me every day, every hour, every moment. You don't judge me. Love seems more real and makes more sense than I thought it ever would.' Armaan's eyes lit up, and she went on.

'I know that we'll have our fights like anybody else, and it will make us think sometimes that we can't take it anymore, but I am also sure that we'll be able to fight it out and come out of it even stronger. I waited for a special occasion to tell you this. And I guess, there's no better occasion than this day, today, your birthday. I am willing to stick to your good and bad times.' As Sara said this, her eyes looked deep, her talks sounded deeper and she looked gorgeous as ever. And more than anything, she expected Armaan to say something.

He was knocked over by what he had just heard. The girl he loved so much, the girl he was planning to propose tonight, had proposed to him indirectly. Had he been blind all the way to even notice that? He met her steady gaze as he reached her. He looked confident as he stared right into her eyes. She looked hot and ready to surrender as Armaan played with her lips and she closed her eyes.

Was it alcohol or real love that led to this moment, they didn't know, but whatever it was, it surely took off a lot of burden from Armaan's head that night.

Sara saw sweating. The AC was off, and they hadn't bothered to even switch on the fan. A drop of her sweat started travelling from her head onto her face, it then slipped downwards to her body.

He gently pulled her hair free and then ran his finger on her soft rosy lips. She looked hypnotized already as he saw her demanding lips and started kissing her fingertips one by one, feeling her warmth, smelling the sweat that was rolling through her body. He rubbed her lips with his hand and the moment her eyes asked for more, they lay down close to each other. He caressed her shoulder and

started massaging them a bit. She sighed with relief. She looked tired but sexier. She kept closing her eyes in pleasure and kept opening them when she needed more. There was absolutely no wall between the two.

He moved his lips towards hers, and as he kissed them slowly and steadily, he kept his hand on her perfectly shaped breasts. But it didn't satiate them; their bodies wanted more. He was all sweaty, she was all sweaty, and they looked extremely comfortable in that. They were breathing hard as Armaan held her in his lap and squeezed her breasts after unbuttoning her and setting her free. He undid his pants, and she did the rest.

With every kiss, she breathed hard and pulled Armaan closer towards her body. Her breasts touched his chest and with every kiss, moving towards each other, they enjoyed the intimacy. He bit her lower lip and the pain was sweet and most awaited. Armaan grabbed her hips and their kiss went deeper as their tongues met. In turn, Sara pulled back and bit his neck, with one hand not hesitating to explore Armaan further. Without taking eyes off each other, they kissed each other everywhere possible.

There was something different about this moment, something that more closely reminded them of love, happiness, and togetherness. He grabbed her bums and kept feeling the shape of her hips and she entwined her body with his. He couldn't stop himself, not anymore. The way he looked at her was enough to show the way he felt about her. Everything looked unreal. He felt the moisture of her body and kissed where it would give her the maximum pleasure. Her body was a spotless beauty and it looked milky white and pure. Their chemistry was electric. As he made his space into her, she breathed hard; her eyes that looked intoxicating kept closing down. Their heartbeats went up quickly and the way her body allowed him to be a part of it, he felt something very pure.

As they climaxed together after a mix of sweet and hot lovemaking, she looked just as beautiful to him as she always had, and he looked just as handsome to her as he always had. It further confirmed to them that theirs was much more than attraction; it was perhaps the love they had been looking for.

As Sara slept in peace that night, Armaan decided to write something that he'd read someday and cherish this memory of their first kiss together.

We kissed our first today and I can't forget it for many reasons. I was all dead until our first kiss. Our first kiss was magic, or at least I thought so. There's never been anything like it. It was such a wonderful moment. You wait for your first kiss and it comes at the most unexpected time and blows away your mind totally.

You'd remember every detail of your first kiss. You'd remember that distinctive feel, you'd remember your lips melting in an exquisite way, you'd remember that tight hug, you'd remember that touch of lips and first contact of your eye before you closed it and surrendered yourself to the other, you'd remember your hands travelling, you'd remember your tongues twisting, you'd remember those eyes that asked for more, you'd remember those long minutes, you'd remember your heavy breath and awkwardness that followed later. You'd remember every minute detail about it.

The best part about our first kiss was that the very second before our kiss, when I saw love in Sara's eyes and thought she didn't say anything, it was only later that I understood every gesture of her eyes. That was the best moment. You work so hard for your first kiss and a heart doesn't forget something like that so easily.

Your first kiss might have happened at the weirdest of places. You might have experienced it in a cinema hall, a cafe, at your home, your school, your college, your car on a long drive, in the middle of the rain, at your school terrace during farewell, while swimming, in the train or bus while travelling, while you're calling someone, maybe just in the middle of a sentence or may be in front of hundreds of people. Mine came after an argument.

Truth is, we remember it in style; we remember it forever and keep thinking about our first kiss. There's a different happiness in remembering it again and again. That stays with you forever!

With that first kiss, you get hooked to each other and know that you'd never be able to get the same love back with anyone else. Thanks Sara for such a beautiful memory.



A little before 6 a.m., Armaan got up, showered, dressed in gym casuals and looked ready to go for a workout. Sara was still asleep. Seeing her by his side made him realize how lucky he was to have her. His neck and thighs were paining, all thanks to the rigorous workout of the past night. It was a surprise for him to have spent so much time. Plus, he had always felt scared of his performance in bed. He had heard such horrible sex stories where mostly the man couldn't last long enough to make the partner enjoy just as much and it scared him no end. He thanked his stars that the fear had been baseless.

It was a cold morning. He rubbed both his hands, warmed his body up and soon, started tying shoelaces. A moment later, Sara appeared and said. 'Weren't we supposed to go together for beach jogging?'

'Hey, you were fast asleep, so I didn't bother to wake you up.'

'You can stop being so kind to me when it comes to an early morning jog,' Sara said lovingly as she came up to him and gave him a peck on the cheek.

Sara's daily routine wasn't a surprise, but her kind of routine could wear anyone down. Running, gymming, dancing and a very strict diet with just one cheat day – there was a reason why she looked so lovely. You don't get such a perfect figure without no trouble. She had devoted her life to fitness. Consciously or unconsciously, she'd made Armaan a fitness freak too. Gone were Armaan's relaxing late mornings, or untimely food habits, or anything. Armaan believed that Sara helped him keep his life orderly this way. Spending time with her had definitely made him a better person.

They walked along the beach in the morning, talking a little less than last night, but definitely sharing some kisses yet again. After they had finished up their jog and walk, they sat on a park bench for quite some time. As she gazed around, she realized how deeply Armaan was in love with her. Maybe he looked happier because he still had the thoughts from last night going on in his head.

Suddenly uneasy, she looked anywhere but at Armaan, but she found Armaan staring at her, waiting for her to start a conversation. Finally, when the silence between both of them started to feel oppressive, he moved a bit.

'Are you okay, Sara?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said, not meeting his eyes.

‘You’re unusually silent today.’

‘I generally don’t speak much in the mornings. It helps me save energy for the rest of the day,’ she said.

‘I’ve heard your days are an exact replica of how you start your morning,’ he said.

‘I guess, I would love to have a peaceful, non-talkative day to myself,’ she said and left no option open for a conversation. No one said anything for the next few minutes.

‘Is it because of last night?’ Armaan asked.

‘Uh, what?’ she asked.

‘Your silence. Does it have anything to do with last night?’

‘How did you feel last night?’

‘It was one of the best.’

‘More?’

‘It was probably the best time of my life. It was a lot more than just love making. I felt complete and I’ve never felt so happy in my life before,’ he said.

‘And?’

‘I found my happiness in sharing that private moment with you. I am glad we could do that and I would…’ he paused.

‘What?’

‘And I would love to experience it again,’ he said and Sara smiled. ‘Why are you smiling?’ he added.

‘Nothing,’ she replied.

‘Please tell me, why did you smile?’

‘You wouldn’t want to know that.’

‘I would.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘More than ever.’

‘I smiled because those were the exact words of my boyfriend when we first made love and that’s exactly how he felt.’

‘Oh!’ Armaan said. He felt bad and he tried his best to not let it come on his face. He had wondered at times if Sara was physically engaged with her boyfriend, but he always withdrew just before he could reach his answer. There was nothing wrong about it, but he didn’t just want to accept that Sara had

considered anyone else as her love before him.

‘Do I remind you of your boyfriend?’

‘Yes, a lot of times.’

‘Is it a good thing or a bad thing?’

‘Good, it tells me what I don’t in my life.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean, you’re not exactly like him, but there are certain things which are exactly like Satyam.’

‘I would like to take away that impression. I don’t think I am like your boyfriend at all,’ Armaan said.

‘How can you be so sure? You don’t even know him.’

‘There are certain things we would always be sure of, even if we don’t meet some people.’

‘Were you sure of us meeting when you first saw me?’

‘I was sure of wanting to meet you and something deep inside told me that it’s going to be a forever thing.’

‘Forever… it’s such a good thing to talk about, and such a difficult promise to adhere to. We all want forever, right? We all talk about forever love, we all want stories to end on a forever note and we all like making plans about forever. We’ll do this when we reach 30s, we’ll do that when we reach 40s. We’d die in each other’s arms. You can probably have the best of conversations upon forever and it’d make you feel good from inside. But you’d probably realize that forever wasn’t really as long as you imagined it to be. Forever sometimes serves as a temporary satisfaction and a life-long regret.’

Armaan felt a little unsettled as she talked her heart out. It took him less than a moment to realize that her thoughts closely resembled that of his fear. It wasn’t just what she spoke, but the way she spoke it all, it looked so real, it looked so painful. He realized how serious his relationship had become, for him at least.

‘Forever is definitely a good thing to talk about, but it isn’t as bad as it seems to you. Forever starts with today because two people like each other and it’d reach its forever if they don’t mind being the same person they once were,’ he said, almost on her face.

‘Fancy definitions, aren’t they?’

‘They surely are. Someone sometimes believed upon something and it became a definition for generations to come.’

‘Good for people. They get things to talk about when silence makes people uncomfortable.’ Sara shrugged.

‘Were you uncomfortable just before this?’

‘I wouldn’t lie. I was.’

‘That means it has something to do with last night.’

‘It wasn’t about last night. It had a lot to do with both of us.’

‘Good things? Bad things?’ Armaan was confused.

‘Depends on who’s answering it.’

‘Will you stay this way the entire morning?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Like… just leaving conversations in between. Not giving definite answers.’

‘Why is that a problem?’

‘Because I want to know what’s going on in your head.’

‘There are a thousand things going on in my mind right now and not even a single percent of it is anywhere related to it. Out of those, only a minuscule bit of my mind would be thinking about anything bad. If there’s anyone in my life right right now who’s keeping me happy, that’s you Armaan, and no one else. Reason enough for you to be happy as well?’

‘I guess I could live my life with that,’ he said with a smile.

‘You are back with your forever,’ she said and smiled.

‘Defines me, I guess,’ he told her.

And then, there was silence once again. Maybe a lot has been talked about or maybe this conversation, in particular, had reached its point. Armaan kept looking at the sea, the waves, the winds coming from it, as if waiting to see something that was unseen by the world. At times he failed in capturing it, at times he made it his secret, and this time, he just let it go. Maybe he withdrew himself from the possibility that was there.

All of a sudden, Sara started running towards the water to just play with it and she asked Armaan to join her. Armaan said no and she moved towards the water without saying anything. At times, you need to know an urgency with which a person wants you in your life and that urgency wasn’t visible at all when it came to Armaan for Sara.

Sara was looking happier as she reached the seashore. He took out his phone to capture her secretly and he noticed a message from last night.

‘She’s no more. She left the world with a lot of pain and a part of that pain still stays in my heart. I would never regret anything more in my life. She was my forever person. There’s no one else who would be able to understand me better.’

Armaan’s heart started beating faster as he read this message from Sandy. He looked helpless, sad and many thoughts started hovering over his mind.

‘Now that there’s nothing for me here, I’ll be back to Mumbai soon.’ Armaan read another message from Sandy and he looked confused. More helpless as he suddenly realized that he hadn’t even informed Sandy about Sara till now.

Often in our lives, we search for the one who understands us. You want to find someone who you don’t have to explain things to; it’s so comforting to know that they would understand. It’s hard to find someone like that. Really hard.

You want someone who can understand that you’re not perfect, that you too have mood swings, you too had your past and it’s impossible to get it off from your head till your last breath, you cry in your washroom remembering your past, you too loved someone so much that it’d always be a shadow in your relationship, you too want to be happy but you just can’t. You expect them to understand your journey without having them walk by your path. You too want somebody who never objects when you talk about your ex when you want to meet her as a friend. You too want to be the same person as you once were, but you just can’t.

We all need that someone who’d go out of the way to understand us. You search for that one person in your friends, your beloved or a stranger too. Often in our lives, you search for that one person who has all the above qualities, but unknowingly keep overlooking all throughout your life because you’re just too busy playing with the tides life is throwing at you without even realizing that there’s a person just behind you, waiting to get noticed by you because he/ she thinks that they’re also an important part of your life. The kind of part that you don’t just throw away for personal benefits.



After Armaan had left for some meetings, Sara too boarded a cab and left for her office. Her thoughts kept returning to Armaan. She found herself wondering about her ongoing equation with him. Curiously, Armaan hadn't asked her much about her past, whatever may be the reason. It struck her that maybe he was trying to avoid her past. No question, she was definitely interested in him, but it was strange being with him. She hadn't really thought of even having a relationship with him, but now she was definitely seeing it in some light. It was all impulse last night, but also with a pinch of emotions.

He didn't seem like a particularly nagging boyfriend material, over possessive or controlling, and that seemed to attract her more towards him. The whole day was packed with Armaan's thoughts. She wondered if her feelings for Armaan or his feelings for her could go on forever like this.

Her past relationships and their climax had been one of the downfalls and that's what was stopping her from accepting Armaan in her life completely. Usually, she'd end up alone only to recover her life later. That part did bother her, but what bothered her more was the other person's fate. The one-sidedness of the commitment inevitably worsened the situation later.

She usually tried avoiding any thoughts about Armaan and spending time with him made her feel this was what she'd been missing all these years. She felt satiated after making love to Armaan and it was wonderful discovering Armaan physically. That had given her a lot to remember, with many pleasurable moments. She had buried those feelings for someone else some months back and it was hard to get over it.

Had she gone too far in judging Armaan, she asked herself. She wanted to talk about the things that were happening, but knew that no matter how much she wanted to talk about it, she wouldn't be able to find befitting words. How could she describe that she loved him but was scared to commit because of the fear of separation! Or how much she loved it when Armaan kept looking at her and she caught him staring? Or how much she loved it when their breath and body became one while making love? Or that she still wanted to talk after they made love? Sweet talks… romantic talks.

She wouldn't be able to speak of those things because as much as she was scared of the longevity of this relationship, she was also scared of being left

alone in her own space. She needed an approval that it's okay, that they had so quickly come to love.

She looked out of her cab and saw that the sky had turned an angry black already. The rain was very unusually usual this season. Mumbai can surprise you with its weather sometimes. As beautiful as the city is, it's difficult to cope with the angry side of the weather at times.

The lift was all full and it could take a little more than ten minutes going by her daily experience, so she decided to climb up the stairs. She took off her jacket as the warmth of the building got to her. She had reached office an hour later than usual. Employees were rolling in till late and she quickly fixed her gaze at Tanuj, Vikky and Nisha doing a meeting in a conference room. In less than a minute, Sara found Tanuj and Vikky staring at her. She usually didn't think about such looks at all, but it looked serious right now and she moved inside the conference room.

'I'm sorry. I know I'm a little late, but last night's party took over my head and it's some crazy traffic out there.'

'That doesn't make any sense to us,' Tanuj said.

'Why?'

'We all were partying till late, even after you and Armaan left, and we too live in Mumbai so please stop cribbing about Mumbai traffic stories,' Tanuj said and Sara realized that it was not going to be the best of days. So she kept quiet.

'What's going on?' Tanuj asked. Vikky and Nisha waited for Sara to answer.

'Let me just get my thing straight. No one in this company ignores my messages. Get that?' Tanuj said harshly.

'But I didn't ignore any of it.'

'I asked Nisha to call you regarding this urgent meeting. Why didn't you pick up the call?'

'I never got a call from Nisha,' Sara said truthfully.

'Sir, you can check if you want. I called her thrice,' Nisha said as she handed over her mobile to Tanuj.

'I can see the call getting placed,' Tanuj said, showing the mobile to Sara.

'If I call you and cut the call immediately, it will still show as a call being placed,' Sara countered.

'You never told me you were a law student, Sara?'

'I never was.'

‘Then why giving so many evidence. Just apologize and move on,’ Tanuj shouted.

‘From whatever degree that I’ve done, if not law, it definitely doesn’t teach me to apologize for no mistake,’ Sara shouted back.

‘Don’t build it up so much. It’s your workplace, not your home where you live with Armaan. You can shout all that you want here, but not in front of me, Sara,’ Tanuj replied back angrily and just in that moment, Sara looked completely shocked and answerless. She didn’t know who told him about her sharing a flat with Armaan, but it surely weakened her case.

‘That’s my personal life and you’re no one to comment on that.’

‘Is that how you’re running a show? Making it an inhouse game?’ he replied.

‘Or is that how you’re finalizing female leads by sleeping around with them and offering them a new show? Would you like to give a justification for her poor performance?’ Sara shot back without hesitation.

‘I am not answerable to you… you’re not my boss. I work for this channel and you better stop maligning my character here.’ Tanuj flushed.

‘Same way, I am not answerable to all the personal bullshit that you’re raising here and I too work for a channel and not for you personally. So you better not touch me without my permission, like you did yesterday.’

‘What would you do?’

‘I would fucking slap you on your face and kick the balls that you keep giving in all those actresses’ mouths, Mr. Tanuj. You better don’t fuck with me and you better know the laws in our country which now highly stand to safeguard women, even at their workplaces,’ Sara said as she looked into his eyes.

‘I give you one month to leave the company,’ Tanuj said.

‘You’re just my reporting boss, not the one who hired me. You better get that in writing and I better show the entire recordings of the heated up conversation we just had to our HR head,’ Sara said. ‘Last thing – I live with anybody, I sleep with anybody or I do meetings from anywhere… Till the time my show is giving you ratings, you better shut the fuck up,’ she said aggressively and smashed the notebook she had in her hands to the wall.

Everyone in office could hear the anger in the sounds coming from Tanuj’s cabin. No matter how sound proof the glasses were, they weren’t anger proof and some sound did filter out eventually. She took a seat and waited for her breath to calm down. Everyone looked at her. She could hear people speaking about her and Tanuj in hushed tones and had no idea about what was going in

her mind. She contemplated getting up and taking a walk in the big balcony. She still looked furious and unlike Sara, she threw away an empty cup to relax.

She got a message from Armaan who was on his way to another meeting after finishing his first meeting.

'I love you, my executive producer.' His message read.

'And what all do you know about love, Mr. Armaan?' She replied angrily.

'I don't know anything about love. I don't. I probably just think that it's the world within this world where everyone wants to stay. I don't know anything about love. All I want in the world is to keep talking to you and still have that craziness to talk some more. I want to know how your day was, where you want to eat, what made your day best and what upset you. I want to argue with you on anything.

'I want to hear your logics that are just completely, you know, wrong. I know it's not simple. I don't know, I just think that if you believe that I am the one for you and you're the one for me, we can sort everything else out. Lately, I know that there have been much voices competing for attention that I feel I can't even hear myself at times. I see you and the way you tuck your hair and that smile you give me blows my mind away. It's a difficult situation to react as I know that's what I want to see always and have this fear of losing it.

'I don't know anything about love. I don't. But I do know certain things. I know that I want you to be a part of all my long drives. I want you to dance with me whenever I am drunk. I want to be by your side whenever you're upset and I want to see you as much as I can in my life. Because I don't know anything about love and I hope you teach me that someday.'

She smiled as she read this long message from Armaan. A moment later, she was standing calmly on the balcony, wondering if the argument with the channel had taken the better of her senses. Not surprisingly, but Armaan's image appeared in her mind and she broke into the tiniest of her smiles and looked certain that there was someone who could make her smile even in the most difficult of situations.



After finishing the meetings, Armaan reached back home, noting that Sara still hadn't returned. He took a quick shower and got for himself a big glass of wine, then dialled Sara's number. He let his thoughts drift to Sara. He always thought that Sara shied away from discussing her past and that's why he had never forced her. He didn't know what to make of it, and wondered if she had a dead serious relationship with Satyam and she was having a hard time facing it. He wondered what the guy was like or what he had done to make Sara fall in love with him. In his imagination, he built up a figure of Satyam in his mind – tall, athletic, flexible like Sara? Nerd? He must be humorous, he thought. He let his imagination flow in all directions and started searching for him on Facebook. He had a hard time finding his profile with just the name 'Satyam'.

He now started searching his name through Sara's profile pictures. He went on to search his name on all the likes that Sara must have ever got. After fifteen minutes of intensive research, he finally got a profile named 'Satyam Arora'. His profile privacy was quite high and he couldn't even see his picture.

Noting the time, he saw that it was half-past ten and Sara was still not home. He tried calling her and she didn't answer the call. He messaged her to call him back whenever she saw his call. He was worried for her.

He wondered if Sandy must be up after a tiring day. Moreover, he found it odd enough to call as he still had no idea of what he would actually say to him. But he also knew it was important for him to talk to Sandy; he needed all possible support. He dialled his number.

'Hey,' Armaan said as Sandy picked up the call.

'Hi!' Sandy replied.

'How are you bhai?'

'I am feeling a little better than the last couple of days.'

'I know it's going to be hard,' he replied.

'It's harder than you can imagine,' Sandy replied after a deep sigh.

'Why are you saying that?' Armaan said and then heard a loud roar of cries from behind Sandy.

'I hope you heard that,' Sandy said.

‘I can sense some real grief at your place.’

‘How I wish this grief was real. Those loud cries are not of pain or grief. They are from my mother’s sister. They didn’t visit her even once when she was suffering. There’s a sudden drama for all the properties. As much as the death of a near one can make anyone sad, it makes the opportunists grab the opportunity from both hands,’ he said and his sarcasm sounded the most real.

‘That’s worse. What are you up to now?’

‘I’ll be here for some more days. I’ll get some formalities done. As soon as I get about everything ready, I’d come back to Mumbai. There’s no life here without Mom.’

‘I know.’

‘I missed out on a lot of things while she was alive and I’d always regret that.’

‘I know,’ Armaan murmured.

‘I’ve missed more than I would ever be able to recover. I just hope I make my parents proud someday.’

‘You surely would,’ Armaan said and he saw Sara’s call waiting. She was calling him continuously. For a moment, he thought that he would cut the call as he wouldn’t be able to ask Sandy to cut it. He needed to talk to him right now. Sandy needed him. So he asked, ‘What about your aunt?’

‘They’re useless. My mother and I weren’t on any terms with her. We haven’t talked more than some lines in the last few years. The last time she exchanged some words was when my mother called her for some family emergency. She said, “Oh! Are you alive?” It’s so suffocating to have her here. My uncles are discussing the properties over some drinks. I am not letting them have anything… not because I want it, but because my mother would have never wanted this.’

‘Once you’re here, everything will be alright. I am so looking forward to seeing you. Just take care of yourself,’ Armaan said, half his mind still occupied with Sara.

‘I’ll do ok. It’ll take me some time. The feeling is still sinking in. The moment I carried her on my shoulders, it made me realize that if I was with her all this while, I could be carrying her in my arms and not over the shoulder,’ he said with a lump in his throat. ‘There’s no weight heavy enough than the dead body of your parent.’

‘This too shall pass, Sandy. Time heals everything.’

‘It’s not that easy this time,’ Sandy said. ‘She died with a hope and I am living

with guilt.' Sandy said as he almost cried. Sara started calling Armaan continuously now. He couldn't ask Sandy to cut the call and was extremely worried about Sara's safety too.

'I think you're being a little too harsh on yourself unnecessarily. You didn't realize it for long, but you were there with your mother when it mattered the most… when she was breathing her last. Don't make it tough for yourself. Stay strong as you've been till now. You mother needed it then and now you need it yourself.'

'I wish I could be as ideal a son as you are. She would have died happier. You have always had a pretty good touch with your parents,' Sandy said and that made Armaan question him. 'Am I doing enough?' he thought to himself.

'Not really. I guess I'd still have to do lots to not repent like you,' Armaan said and realized that he, in a way, had questioned Sandy as a son. 'I am sorry. I shouldn't have said that. That's not what I meant.'

'You need not be sorry, it's the reality. It's not something I'm really proud to admit anyway,' Sandy replied. 'Anyway, it's time that I go off. Talking to you was a stress-buster, brother. I'll see you soon,' Sandy added.

'Take care,' Armaan said.

'Yes, you too.'

Armaan immediately called Sara, but her mobile was switched off. She had read all the messages but hadn't replied to any of them. Armaan looked worried. He tried calling the channel and got a response that she had left already.

Armaan didn't know anyone else who he could ask. He had never heard about her friends or family or acquaintances. At best, he could call Tanuj, Nisha or Vikky. He thought it might be too late to call Tanuj, so he called up Vikky.

'Hey Vikky.'

'Hi Armaan! What's up?'

'How are you?'

'Let's already get done with all of the formalities and come straight to the point. Is everything alright?'

'Oh yes, everything is alright. I just wanted to do a meeting around next week sometime for a new show pitch,' Armaan said and sounded just too unsure of what he was saying.

'That's great, but what's the urgency? You called up so late?' Vikky asked.

'No, I was trying to call Sara and her number was switched off so I just

thought of informing you,' he said.

'Ok,' Vikky replied and no one said anything for a few seconds.

'Have you heard back from Sara by any chance today?'

'You should know more, she's your flatmate now,' Vikky said in a complete feminine tone with clear sarcasm. Armaan looked completely shocked.

'Well, I can't trace her and she has still not reached home, so I was just concerned. Thanks for making it more difficult, Vikky,' Armaan said.

'Last time I saw her, she was with Tanuj,' Vikky added.

'In a meeting or something?'

'I'm not sure, they had a bad fight today in the morning and I just saw them talking from a distance.'

'Okay, thanks,' Armaan said and hung up. He looked more worried than before. He knew the kind of person Tanuj was and he had seen the kind of things Tanuj was doing at the party last night. He couldn't be trusted. Plus Vikky told him something about their fight; it looked uglier than he had imagined it to be.

He kept searching all her luggage and diaries but unfortunately, got no clue about her contacts. He stood straight, trying to compose himself, and then made his way out of the door.

As he switched on the car's engine, he tried calling her again, but her mobile was switched off. He called Tanuj but his mobile was switched off as well. He was scratching his head, feeling terrible for not having taken her calls. 'This is just getting worse.' Armaan thought. His legs were shaking out of anxiety and all other inappropriate thoughts. He couldn't even find his voice and looked wordlessly at himself. He started wandering aimlessly with a hope of getting a glimpse of Sara. As much as he tried sorting himself through the jumble of emotions, he just found himself more vulnerable to the situation.

Armaan followed his gut feeling and started driving towards Juhu beach, that one place where he had seen Sara apart from her office and their flat. He had never felt so anxious before. His head was spinning and he could imagine nothing but the worst. He was gulping neat rum to keep himself distracted from the biggest devil, his own mind.

He has seen Tanuj feeling Ronita last night and it was just so inhuman of him. He had worse thoughts. What if Tanuj does the same with Sara? What if Sara isn't safe? What if Sara gives up unwillingly in front of Tanuj? What if Sara tries fighting him out and he does something to her? His mind paced at jet speed, his thoughts were all gutter. As soon as he reached Juhu beach, he parked the car

and rushed towards the beach. Police were trying to get the people off the beach because of the high tides and he kept looking for her. After searching for almost fifteen minutes, he found her nowhere. As a last option, he showed her picture to a Dosawala standing there and asked if he had seen her. He shook his head.

All he could see was some hookers, some old age prostitutes and some people expecting cheap thrills standing there. A hooker approached him and the way Armaan looked into her eyes, she turned away immediately. Another one eyed him with interest as Armaan turned away to get back to his car.

His head was pounding by now and he felt a severe headache that had more to do with Sara's sudden disappearance than anything else. He tried calling Tanuj and Sara again, but yet again, no help. He revved up his car again and even though the AC was as its coolest, he was sweating profusely. He looked almost on the verge of tears. It looked like someone had grabbed his heart in a fist and pulled it out from his body. He felt helpless and in order to punish himself, started slapping himself.

Armaan sped up his car and was stopped by the bunch of cops in Juhu who were doing alcohol tests. A police cop signalled at Armaan to roll the window down. He knew he was going to get into big trouble.

'What's your name?' A cop asked as soon as he turned down the window.

'Show me your license,' another cop asked and Armaan handed over the license to him.

'Armaan,' he answered as he purposely inhaled trying to control the alcohol smell

'What do you do?' the cop asked again.

'I am a writer,' he replied.

'Then you have one more story to tell,' the cop said and laughed.

'Come out and take this alcohol test. Park your car on the side,' the cop said with finality in his voice. He was a 2-star officer. As Armaan parked the car on the side, the cop took away the keys.

'Exhale into this,' the cop said holding up a device for testing his breath.

'I am drunk and I admit it already. Please let me go,' Armaan pleaded.

'You should've thought about it before drinking,' the cop said strictly.

'I am already in trouble. Please understand.'

'Show me your vehicle papers,' the cop asked and Armaan showed him the vehicle papers.

‘You are Armaan, It’s in the name of some Sandeep. Who’s Sandeep?’

‘He’s my flatmate.’

‘Does he know that you’re drunk driving his vehicle?’

‘No.’

‘What sort of a friend is he to have trusted you then,’ the cop said sarcastically.

Armaan stayed quiet. ‘You have to pay a challan of thirty thousand rupees and come to the police station with us,’ the cop said. Armaan read the name on his badge.

‘Please let me go Gaitonde sir.’

‘How can I leave you just like that? There are 600+ road accidents that happened because of drunk driving. I’ll have to make the receipt.’

‘Sir, please don’t make a receipt. I’ll give you three thousand rupees, please let me go,’ Armaan pleaded again.

‘Nothing happens in that amount. It’s just peanuts.’

‘Take five thousand. I am already tensed as a friend of mine is lost.’

‘Your generation has lost everything your parents taught you,’ the cop said, assuming to write down something in his receipt copy.

‘Sir, this is all I have. Please take it and let me go,’ Armaan said and handed over five thousand rupees to the cop.

‘I am letting you go because you look like coming from a good family, but behave yourself from the next time onwards,’ the cop looked happier, and as he accepted the money offered, he handed over the license and keys to Armaan.

‘Sir, I need your help,’ Armaan said.

‘I can’t help you anymore.’

‘My friend is lost.’

‘He must be partying with his friends. Wait for him till morning; he’ll be back home drunk,’ the cop said casually.

‘I am talking about a female friend who was last seen having a bad fight with her male boss. The boss heads a television channel and keeps sleeping with girls in lieu of offering them roles in TV serials. I am scared if…’

‘What?’

‘If he tries to molest my friend and she never comes back…’ Armaan said with all sincerity, pain, and anxiety in his voice.



The cop reached for his bike and collected certain documents in his bag. The words from Armaan had given his actions a certain urgency. Gaitonde didn't remember anyone saying something like this before. With time running out, he quickly got into Armaan's car and started driving it.

'I'm sorry I didn't believe you at first,' Govind Gaitonde said. Armaan nodded in gratitude. 'Why do you think your friend is in danger?' Gaitonde asked and Armaan explained the whole story.

'You should've picked up her call. I'll need their pictures,' Gaitonde said after he had heard the entire story and Armaan forwarded it to him.

'I regret not picking her call up. I just couldn't hang up on my friend who had just lost his mother,' Armaan replied. 'Where are we going?' he added as he saw Gaitonde making some important calls for Sara.

'With time running out according to your probability, I am just making a few calls that'd track Sara's and Tanuj's last location and we're visiting some hotels.

'Why are we visiting hotels?' Armaan asked, though his scared mind was going crazy thinking of the worst.

'There are some hotels where it's easy to get a bed after getting a woman drunk, if you know what I mean,' Gaitonde said and Armaan didn't even want to think about it.

Gaitonde missed some continuous calls from his wife, while he loosened his shirt and unbuttoned it to take it off. For a while, Armaan looked confused, but then he saw Gaitonde wearing a half sleeve t-shirt inside.

'And why is that?'

'I would have to hide my identity before getting into the lane of those hotels.'

'Why so?' Armaan asked as he kept on trying calls to both Tanuj and Sara.

'We're going to track them as a commoner and not as a police officer. In many of those areas, even a policeman isn't allowed to enter.' He said and his statement gave a thrilling start to the search, this time, a more focused and targeted one. The police officer knew exactly what they wanted and he was sure of it. Having reached this level of anxiety, Armaan decided it didn't matter what the method of finding her was, but her safety was surely the biggest concern.

As quickly as he sensed some pessimistic thoughts playing with his mind, he'd dismiss them, thinking them to be ridiculous. But he was unable to turn away from the fear and in that, he couldn't even find his voice as he wordlessly kept observing everything that Gaitonde was doing. His action in recent months had been an attempt to win over Sara and up to an extent, he had succeeded too. But tonight, he was fighting for his love. He was fighting the worst possibility this night could turn out to be.

After fifteen minutes of driving, Gaitonde received a call from the department and his eyebrows rose slightly as he heard someone over the call. He mostly spoke in Marathi and Armaan looked completely clueless. He wanted this phone call to end as soon as possible.

'They haven't been spotted in any bar, restaurant or a public place nearby,' Gaitonde said.

'What does that mean?' Armaan asked anxiously.

'It could mean anything.'

'There must be some definition of anything.'

'I am sure you already know it, but if you don't, it's better you don't know it until we find some clue.'

'You're confusing me even more,' Armaan said helplessly.

'I hate to do that part of my duty,' he said, trying his best to make his voice sound natural and calm.

'I'm tense and anxious.'

'It wouldn't help.'

'Do you think that he must have done something to her?'

'Do you have this tendency of asking some loaded questions occasionally?'

'No, I am just really tensed right now.'

'As I said, it wouldn't help and you need to shut up because I am as worried as you are,' Gaitonde said with a certain anger and frustration.

'Why would you be worried? It's just another case for you.'

'I lost my sister to a group of goons who raped and murdered her ten years back. I was quite young, but not tough back then. They raped, killed and flew away in front of my eyes and I couldn't do anything back then. Every girl now who's getting raped, getting murdered or facing domestic violence is my sister and I'd fucking beat the shit out of the person who even thinks of doing any of these in his wildest thought and you better shut the fuck up because the person

who’s missing is someone I consider as my sister now, and trust me, I am as worried as you are,’ the cop said it in one breath, making Armaan even more tensed.

Armaan nodded, and in the silence, he wondered about what to say next. ‘I am sorry,’ Armaan said but Gaitonde didn’t reply. ‘Is that the reason you joined the police?’

‘I had no other reason,’ he said and he was almost on the verge of tears that he controlled really well.

‘But aren’t you a traffic policeman?’

‘No, I am in the police force. I was there to have a regular check tonight,’ Gaitonde said as he entered the lane of those hotels where the cars of many top-notch businessmen and film industrialists were parked, who came here to quench the thirst of their infidelity by sleeping with aspiring models and actresses. Armaan saw a couple of faces he always aspired to become and it broke his heart into pieces to see the way they were behaving with the girls.

Gaitonde parked the car and asked Armaan to stay put and roam around the street to spot Tanuj’s car or anything that gave him any hint. Armaan looked for Tanuj’s car as he kept on walking the street, but he couldn’t find it.

He saw Ronita with one of the film producers. Guess she was doing all that it needed to get there. Armaan quickly moved away from there. He took a quick glance on the road away and he got shocked at what he saw. He saw someone getting out from the car with a rich person by the side. He looked like a swagger and she looked equally beautiful. He doubted if he was right at what he saw and he wanted his eyes to cheat on him, whatever it may take.

He could hear the faint sound of that familiar voice from a distance. He was bundled and tossed with shock. He kept staring at both of them and as much as he wanted to go there and talk, he hesitated and stood still with shaky legs. He knew that he’d never be able to forget this and as much as he was crying from within, he looked confused and agitated.

He returned to the car and met Gaitonde.

‘They aren’t here. Could you find some clue?’ Gaitonde asked.

‘No, I too didn’t get anything,’ Armaan said with the slightest of hesitation and just then, Gaitonde received a message.

‘We’re unable to track their current location, but they were last traced at Bandra,’ he updated Armaan. ‘Look there are good chances of them coming back tonight and maybe we’re just overthinking, but I am going to keep my

investigation open and will inform you as soon as I know something,' he added.

'Okay. Is there a need for an FIR?' Armaan asked unsure.

'No, there's no need of it till morning. We're doing everything without an FIR already. You better go back home and I'll go back to my duty,' Gaitonde said and they exchanged their numbers. 'Don't worry! She'll be back. We've searched for her at the darkest of places and she hasn't been found anywhere till now. If she's not here, she's safe,' he added.

'I hope so.' Armaan said and his mind was somewhere else.

'Give me Tanuj's contact details and his address. I'll also get the information collected if he has anything to do with it.'

'Thanks,' Armaan said as he sent over the details over a message and Gaitonde handed him the five thousand rupees that he had charged him for drunken driving. Armaan gave a formal smile back.

Armaan reached the beach again and as he walked on the shore, he knew that he was going to have a sleepless night. He had already started missing the way Sara made him feel. He had started missing their walks together. He missed Sara's smile that gave him his life.

He was asked to send a sample episode for a new show today, but as he had almost stopped living his life in the last six hours, his focus on work had gone for a toss.

Sometimes life is just unbelievably unfair to us and the person who's in our mind as our first and last thought is the sole reason for our happiness or sadness. He tried telling himself that he was stronger than what he thought himself to be. He wanted to get a reason to get back to normalcy and he got that as he got a text from Sara.

'Hey love! I'm really sorry, my mobile got switched off and I forgot that I was carrying a power bank. You must have tried calling me and you were busy over call when I called you. You must be tensed. We'll talk it out once I am home in an hour. Right now, I am out with Tanuj. I am having dinner with him. There is lots to talk about once I reach home. See you.'

Armaan finally breathed with relief after reading the message from Sara. He smiled after reading this, but there was an air of tension as he smiled.

'I too have a lot to talk about once you reach home. See you,' Armaan replied.

Armaan called up Gaitonde and gave him the update. He sounded relieved and Armaan thanked him for his unconditional support throughout the last few hours. Despite that, Armaan couldn't stop thinking about what he had seen on that

street As if his life had come to a still after watching that. He couldn’t clear the blur of his thoughts and felt cheated, broken, but sad and confused at the same time.



The same evening, a little after 10 p.m., Sara was busy watching the episodes that were going to go on air in the week ahead. She heard someone knocking at her door. She thought everyone must have left office by now and she too would leave after finishing the episodes. Part of her didn't want to see either Vikky, Nisha or Tanuj.

It was Tanuj. Sara looked around and saw Vikky leaving the office; she tried looking as far as she could, but there was no one else apart from her and Tanuj in the entire office.

He crossed the door, carrying his bag. After setting his bag on the table, he reached for Sara's water bottle that was kept on the table. Sara saw him drinking the entire bottle.

Sara felt the sudden urge to retreat and run away from there. She noticed that there was no one in office, still she called up the reception and no one picked it. She looked up to see if the cameras were working. They were not blinking red colour like they usually did. Off.

Tanuj took the canteen knife out from his bag.

Tanuj looked worse than she thought he would be. She heard some footsteps walking towards her. They were loud and clear and suddenly she was sweating in a cold room. She waited for Tanuj to say something, but he didn't say anything.

Footsteps were louder and clearer now and those footsteps had a face. It was their watchman walking towards Sara's cabin and as soon as he knocked on the door, Sara got up to run. But stopped herself midway as she saw him delivering a cake by Baskin and Robbins. A childlike smile suddenly appeared on Tanuj's face. The watchman also gave them a couple of plates.

'You need a knife, sir?' the watchman asked as Tanuj handed him a fifty-rupee note.

'I already took it from the canteen. Thank you,' Tanuj replied.

'What's that?' Sara replied.

'That's definitely not something with which I'd kill or rape you,' Tanuj replied and almost burst into laughter.

‘You scared me to death, Tanuj. Why the fuck would you do this to me?’ Sara sighed with relief as she said this.

‘It’s because I know I was wrong and I had to apologize.’

‘You’re forgiven for all that you’ve said today and for all that that you’d say later, but never ever apologize if you have a knack for doing it this way.’ Sara burst into laughter as she said this.

‘I think that’s my way of saying sorry.’

‘You must have played a rapist in a dress drama competition back in school, I am sure.’

‘What sort of compliment is that?’

Sara merely shrugged in response. Tanuj unboxed the cake. It was a pineapple cake, one of Sara’s favourites. There was something written on it that took her heart away.

‘I am sorry, Sara.’ He read the message written on the cake. She noticed the genuineness with which he said it.

‘I shouldn’t have said all that today. I didn’t mean that. I later realized that I was trapped into thinking likewise. No matter how evil I might be, I would never demean you or anyone else ever in my life. I was so wrong to have shouted and said all those things today. There are only a few genuine people that I meet on daily basis and I am so surrounded by bootlickers that I stop respecting the genuine ones unintentionally. Next time I do that, just slap me.’ Sara’s eyebrows shot up and Tanuj hastily added, not looking at her, ‘Maybe when no one is around.’

Sara was touched by this gesture. She got up and hugged him. He looked ashamed of his act. His gesture was of a guilty person. They cut the cake and ate a couple of pieces.

‘Thanks for keeping my trust in you alive, Tanuj. I couldn’t afford to lose you to some devil that you looked today. You’re the only hope in this office,’ she said and smiled and he smiled back.

‘I am a devil just for Ronita and for no one else.’

‘I bet you have a story behind this.’

‘She was my ex. She promised to marry me before she started dating an actor.’

‘Kartik?’

‘Kartik was her third. She slept around with many others for work.’

‘With you too?’

‘I wouldn’t deny, and yes, that’s how we met, but I seriously loved her.’

‘You should stop seeing her. You’re a married person and you have a beautiful wife who loves you a lot.’

‘That’s what you think,’ Tanuj said and Sara looked confused. ‘She is in a relationship with someone from many years.’

‘Why did she marry you then?’

‘Because he was also married to someone,’ Tanuj said. ‘At times, in life, you’re a little too late to love anybody or get loved by anybody. Lust plays a reliever then.’

‘Why don’t you try spicing up your marriage?’

‘I’ve done enough and I still do. I like fooling myself into a thought that eventually everything gets fine and this life is not a bitch always.’

‘Well, if you need anything, let me know. I am always around,’ Sara said as his voice sounded tight. For a moment, Tanuj seemed lost in thought and in the silence that was left, Sara realized that Tanuj had left his biggest support in the form of love behind to start a new life here in the channel as a mask, which wasn’t in any form the best of feelings.

Okay, maybe he wasn’t being entirely fair to himself, but she surely didn’t want him to live his life by being an irresponsible person like many others who break up. She too had broken up with Satyam, but eventually moved on and that’s the thing she liked about herself. She had no motto to live for previously, just like Tanuj.

Suddenly, she felt anxious at the thought of the future. What was going to happen to her? What if she couldn’t be the ideal girl for Armaan, He had already dug himself too deep with her. Every second thought was bothering her and there was an air of tension in her thoughts which Tanuj broke by an unusual reply.

‘You and Armaan look great together.’

‘Thanks.’

‘You’re happy with him, right?’

‘I’ve never had this kind of feeling before. I like talking to him, being with him and more.’

‘So tell me what kind is it?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Is it a long-term thing?’

‘There are very few people who have reached close to me in such a short span

of knowing each other. He looks straight into my eyes and speaks his heart out. It's kind of a lost art these days. I like the fact that it takes him only a few minutes to make me smile. It's a beautiful feeling, and for the most part, I think I'm learning to appreciate the feelings and taking life at a slower pace than usual.'

'Are you sure it's love?' Tanuj asked.

'What do you think?' Sara counter-questioned.

'It's much more than that. You look completely in awe of Armaan.'

'I guess that's the answer. Naming it anything would still be a little less,' Sara said as she packed her bag for the day and Tanuj saw a letter on Sara's table. He picked it up to read.

'Resignation letter?'

'Now that I've got my super cool boss back, you can tear it off and throw it in a dustbin maybe.'

'That's strange.'

'After your behaviour in the morning, this isn't strange at all.'

'No, I mean you're not the kind of person who'd in any way hand over a resignation letter before leaving. You'd just fly off,' Tanuj said and Sara smiled as they walked their way down towards Tanuj's car.

'Would you like a dinner with me?' Tanuj said. Sara didn't reply for next few seconds. 'My wife is out with her boyfriend, so I thought you might not want me to sleep hungry.' Tanuj smiled.

'I'd love to join you.'

'I'm glad you said that. I have a tendency to slap myself if anyone says no to me.'

'You must be slapping yourself every night then when you sleep with your wife,' Sara laughed as she said.

'Then I guess, to avoid any no, I should go back to Ronita,' he said.

'If only you want to get fucked for the third time in your life,' she said and got into Tanuj's car.

'I am not really sure of what you'd want for dinner. Any suggestions for a restaurant?'

'I am sure whatever restaurant you choose will be fine. I'm not really that picky when it comes to Mumbai restaurants. As long as it's a good place, I don't mind anything.'

‘There’s one good restaurant in Bandra that I know of. Let’s go there,’ Tanuj said and after getting a nod from Sara, they drove off.

Sara, in silence, called up Armaan to inform him, but his phone was continuously coming busy on another call. She kept calling him for the next ten minutes but he didn’t respond and as she typed a message to inform him, her mobile got switched off.

Unfortunately, Tanuj’s mobile too got switched off. As they entered Bandra, she saw big residential apartments and bungalows. She kept staring at them in awe. She always wanted to live in one of those homes. She saw people gathering opposite Shahrukh’s and Salman’s bungalow. She kind of liked it.

That night, Tanuj and Sara bonded over some drinks and yummy food. Sara was aware that Armaan might be really worried and as much as she enjoyed her time with Tanuj, she wanted to rush back home as it was 4 a.m. already. As they got into the car after dinner and a long walk, she realized what a fool she was to not notice the power bank that was kept in her bag. She charged her phone and messaged Armaan.



After Tanuj dropped Sara home, she opened the door and almost crashed on the couch. She looked extremely tired. Armaan made his way to the living room, and saw Sara sitting there.

‘I need to talk to you.’

‘What’s there to talk about?’ Armaan said.

‘You must be mad at me. Aren’t you?’

‘I don’t know. Do I look like I am mad?’

‘Not only do you look that way, but you sound that way too,’ she said as she stared at him feeling the crackle of tension between them.

‘So you had a good time?’ Armaan asked as he kept playing something in his mobile, hoping she could sense his feelings for her.

‘It was good. Had a bad fight this morning with Tanuj and he decided to take me for dinner to mend ways and apologize.’

‘And your mobile got switched off?’

‘Yes, unfortunately.’

‘And Tanuj’s mobile too got switched off.’

‘Yes.’

‘Isn’t it too much of a coincidence?’ Armaan murmured. Sara wasn’t sure she’d heard him right, but when she saw him staring at her, she knew he was serious. And with that, she felt the tension building up between the two. Just when she was about to get sure of Armaan, she felt as if he didn’t trust her.

The phone rang, shattering her thoughts and it was from Tanuj to just check if she has reached upstairs safely. After that call, Armaan said, ‘What’s been going on here?’

The situation was too surreal to absorb. She held her head, resisting her words and yet her frustration was clear from her expressions.

‘I’m sorry to hear about your thoughts here.’

‘You’re reaching at 4 a.m. and feeling sorry about my thoughts here?’ Armaan said. Hearing his angry tone for the first time, she tried concentrating on her calmness as she leaned back on the sofa, wishing her mobile hadn’t switched off,

wishing she could speak with him, wishing he could understand her and wishing that he hadn’t behaved like Satyam.

‘Why aren’t you saying anything?’

‘It’s because I’m scared.’

‘Scared of what?’

‘Scared of myself. Though thanks for getting back some memories in my life that I wasn’t missing.’

‘You stop comparing me with Satyam,’ Armaan said.

‘I guess, there’s no comparison anyway,’ Sara shot back.

‘Why? Am I even worse?’

‘Did I say that?’

‘But that’s what you meant, right?’

‘Not even in the weirdest of my dreams,’ she said putting a brave face as she drew a deep breath and turned away, trying her best to hide her discomfiture, willing herself to keep focused on all good things that he had done. It was shaping up to be first of those days when she wondered why she’d decided to move in with Armaan. For her, it would be a daily, humiliating ritual to face him if he didn’t trust her. It was possible to be washed away in emotions yet again, but the wave wasn’t strong enough this time to make her forget her past experiences with Satyam.

The sensation was a strong one. Not knowing whether to believe her eyes, she felt a knot form in her stomach and kept thinking about everything that he had said, his voice rattling through her brain like bouncing balls. She would have blindly ignored him if he was somebody else, but it shocked her this time. She’d stumbled into problems when she’d least expected to.

Once again, silence descended. This time, however, the silence was tainted with anger too.

Satyam. The last time she had seen him, she had promised herself to not see any guy ever again. As it ended the same way for her always, and it was still going the same way with Armaan.

And Armaan was there finally, and it hadn’t kept him quiet enough as he started moving towards the zone that lies very well between over-possessiveness and doubts. He had come back home just thirty minutes back, after a night of turmoil, and he saw Sara playing calm and still not responding to his questions. He’d been strangely thinking a lot about Sara and that only intensified his

feelings for her. As soon as he saw Sara moving quickly towards her room, he stopped her.

He said, ‘Listen, I’m sorry. We couldn’t talk much today and then I didn’t hear back from you. I got worried. I trust you more than I trust myself, but I don’t trust Tanuj. After you went missing, I tried calling you and your number was switched off, so I called Vikky and got to know that you had a fight with Tanuj and you were last seen with him. I got caught driving drunk when I went out looking for you. I finally convinced the police to help me in searching for you. For you, it’s just the six lines in which I’ve explained my last night, but for me, those were the longest six hours of my life… because I got scared for you.’

It took a moment for Sara to respond and as he looked tense; she wasn’t sure if she wanted to talk about it. But Armaan surprised her by telling her the story and this not only surprised her, but also scared her. She got scared of the moments that Armaan had gone through because of her. She wondered why she hadn’t thought of it before. It was easy to blame it all over Armaan for setting such a tragedy in his mind, but deep within, she realized that he was right.

The storm, pressure, and stress between both of them were real. He’d never faced something like this before. All this while, he kept telling himself that he wanted to be prepared for everything that life had to offer. But, he soon realized today that it was impossible; he couldn’t face this stressful situation.

Lost in thoughts, he was disappointed that he had questioned Sara and remained quiet for a long time. He was feeling sluggish. His shoulders dropped down in resignation, each moment more difficult than the last.

A rush of guilt washed over Sara, yet she reached out to Armaan and hugged him. He hadn’t made a single sound and she could feel his body getting tensed. She ran her hand over his hair and he smiled back.

‘There’s a lot of satisfaction in knowing that someone loves you so much. I’m sorry to have unintentionally kept you tensed. I’d take care of it the next time and I am being serious about that.’

She leaned on his chest, neither of them speaking for long and the night was completely silent. A moment later, she started telling Armaan about the entire day, her fight with Tanuj, Armaan’s message as a reliever and his apologies. Armaan seemed to have enjoyed most of it, apart from Tanuj’s way of apologizing that got her scared.

‘You too had lots to talk about. Anything good or bad?’

‘Worst.’

‘I am not ready for it, but I am still all ears.’

‘I went to this lane in Saki Naka today where a lot of top-notch people hire hotel rooms to get laid.’

‘What the fuck were you doing there?’

‘That was a part of the things that I’ve done in searching for you today. We thought there might be a probability of Tanuj taking you there,’ he said and Sara laughed.

‘You’ve got quite a criminal’s mind.’

‘That wasn’t my suggestion though. The cop took me there.’

She nodded and gestured for him to carry on. ‘I saw Ronita there,’ he told her.

‘Is that what’s worrying you?’ she asked.

‘No. I saw my flatmate Sandy there too. He just lost his mom some days back.’

‘He must be looking for some fun in his life. What’s so wrong with that?’

‘I see a lot of wrong with that.’

‘Apart from him shelving out thousands of bucks, I don’t see anything wrong,’ Sara said.

‘He was the one getting paid, he was the one at service, he was the one who played prostitute that night for a young rich snobbish lady who was hitting on his bum all the way. She was the client,’ Armaan said with all sincerity and pain in his voice. ‘Is that the choice he made for his life? What about his mother who died and what about the conversation we had on the call just a few hours back?’

‘I guess he made a choice that if not stopped now is going to mark his life forever.’

Choices. You’re free to make your own choices and feel proud or ashamed about it, but you can’t choose the consequences to it. You choices confuse you so much sometimes that it gets difficult, hell difficult to choose one of it.

You choose to sleep outside the relationship; you choose to leave your parents behind because they’re old, outdated and they sneeze without keeping a handkerchief in front of their nose; you choose to break contacts with your old friends because they talk raw and you talk polished now because you’re masters, works with one of the best companies of the country and have a six digit salary to flaunt on their innocent faces. You choose to insult your boss when you leave because you don’t worry about him now as you just got a better offer from another company; you choose to do everything that you felt was worth doing in

that moment.

But what you don’t know is that when you were making those choices, your girl might just face the worst shock of her lifetime and starts hating herself and stops trusting you; your parents might not have more life remaining already and you crushed their last wish by throwing them out of your house; your old raw friends might take you out of that trouble for which your super cool friends could never offer you a helping hand; you might soon go jobless and cry about that, you might meet that boss again in your life and this time he would remember your farewell speech very well and you might regret everything you did in that moment.

Your choices make you who you are today and what you will be tomorrow. Choose your words, actions, and close ones very carefully, for all of this might make or break you forever.

At times, you have to make choices, not because you want it, but because you have no other option left and while making some important choices for life, you choose a wrong road for yourself. And by the time you realize it, it’s a dark night and there’s no turning back. Because the sun has set you down with your choices and no matter how much you try travelling back, you’d lose all the hope, knowing that the path was wrong, the road was wrong, the choice was wrong.



There are two things we have in our lives – questions, and their answers. The problem starts when you stop getting answers to the questions, or even worse, when you yourself can't question your answers. Armaan was looking for an answer to what seemed to be the biggest question at the moment. Sandy and his presence in that lane last night.

Lately, it seemed to him that he didn't know a lot of things. There was something weird about Sandy's visit last night, but if there was one person who could answer it, it was Sandy himself.

Thinking back, he wished he could change certain things in life so as to live over again. One thing was certain: he should have been a better friend and as soon as he questioned himself on meeting Sandy, he immediately knew the answer to it. And as soon as he made his decision clear, he dialled Sandy's number that morning after Sara left for office. He didn't pick up his call for four times straight in a row.

The doorbell rung and Armaan opened the door. Bang! It was Sandy. He was standing in a pair of pyjamas and Armaan looked at him before Sandy hugged him.

'I saw you calling me and I was anyway coming here, so I didn't pick your call,' Sandy said.

'We spoke last night and you didn't tell me about your plans of coming over,' Armaan said and gave back a formal smile.

'I got an urgent project for which I had to fly down, plus it was getting all the more suffocating with all the cries there,' Sandy said and as he moved into the flat. He saw that a lot had been changed in the flat.

'Was there a girl here last night?' Sandy asked.

'Why?'

'Because otherwise, you would never care to clean the flat,' Sandy said as he entered his room and looked surprised.

'Or someone has moved here already?' Sandy said. 'I'm sorry that I didn't inform you before coming. It looks like someone else has joined you already,' Sandy said and hesitated in even sitting.

‘I wasn’t sure about your plans of coming back, plus thirty-five thousand was too much for me to take care of. I needed someone who could share the expenses,’ Armaan said with no expression on his face.

‘Or maybe share some love as well,’ Sandy said as he saw two pillows and just one bed sheet lying on the single bed.

‘I’m sorry, I should be going now. This flat isn’t mine any longer,’ Sandy said.

‘No, don’t be silly. It’s been long that we have met anyway,’ Armaan said.

Sandy didn’t say that he was upset, but then, he didn’t have to. Armaan knew what he meant. Armaan was being quite cold to him today.

Sandy gave him a short sarcastic laugh and picked up his bag to go.

‘Sandy, tell me one thing. Did your mother really die?’ Armaan said.

Sandy threw his bag, turned and banged Armaan against the door. He looked full of anger, frustration and his hands were shaking. His eyes were red. ‘You were the only person whom I considered my friend here, and you doubt if I would lie about my mother’s death. If someone would ask you that someday after your mother’s death, do let me know how it feels,’ Sandy said angrily as he grabbed his collar tight and the comment on the mother didn’t go well with Armaan. As he pushed Sandy to the other side of the wall, he slapped and punched him mercilessly for the next ten seconds.

After that, he tore off Sandy’s shirt in anger and scratched him in anger and didn’t stop till Sandy’s back started bleeding. He slapped him again in anger and they both were breathing heavily. Sandy saw right into Armaan’s eyes. His eyes were full of anger. Armaan looked back in Sandy’s eyes. His eyes were full of tears, disappointment, guilt, and hope that he had from Armaan.

‘I was hoping you’d hug me and say that you missed me; you hit me instead,’ Sandy said. ‘I thought I only had you after my mother’s death, but I seem to have lost you too.’ Sandy cried as he said.

Armaan looked everywhere else, but at Sandy. He tried composing himself.

‘My father was dead, my mother too died, I don’t have relatives who care for me and now I don’t have the friend who cared for me once. I too should die. There’s nothing left for me anyway,’ Sandy said and his cries got louder as he got up.

Armaan hugged him and said nothing for a few seconds. ‘You shouldn’t have said that about my mother,’ Sandy said.

‘You too shouldn’t have mentioned my mother. What you said was wrong,’ Armaan said a little more calm now.

‘I was mad at what you said. I told you everything and you doubted me.’

‘I trusted you till last night, but not after what I saw at Saki Naka.’ Armaan said and Sandy’s worry got more pronounced. He stopped, said nothing, knowing that a few minutes to collect his conscious won’t hurt anyone.

Armaan moved slowly towards the discussion as he said. ‘What was the need?’

‘Money.’

‘Is it really so important?’

‘Yes, it becomes more important when the mother who was taking care of all your expenses dies in the middle of life and you have relatives ready to snatch every single penny of what your mother had saved for you.’

‘You could’ve asked me.’

‘You’ve already done a lot for me by not asking for the monthly rent,’ Sandy said.

‘Does that justify your action?’

‘Probably not, but I couldn’t ask you for more and I had to earn anyhow. I was completely out of money. I knew a few people who could help me make some quick money.’

‘And quick money means a quick end to your career as well,’ Armaan said as he still didn’t look convinced. ‘You’d have nightmares for all your life if you keep doing what you’ve done last night.’

‘Can you please stop talking about it?’

‘You became a gigolo for one night,’ Armaan said and he saw guilt and worry in Sandy’s eyes.

‘Why aren’t you talking? Did you have fun last night selling your body to rich women? Who made you her servant for her lust? You mind talking about how you felt when she paid you some thousands in exchange of some deep blowjobs and kisses. How did you feel sucking the vagina that borrowed your respect in just some thousands? How did you feel kissing the lips that named you a prostitute?’ Armaan said in one breath.

‘Shut up. It’s one of those things I don’t want to think about. Never ever in my life,’ Sandy said looking away.

‘Then you better make sure that you don’t do the things you don’t want to remember,’ Armaan said and as he got up. Nobody said anything for next few minutes.

‘Well, we are never alone. There are people who have endured experiences similar to ours, and survived; so can we. The universe is full of such stories. No one wants you to give up on this life like this. Not tonight. Not tomorrow. Not ever,’ Armaan added.

‘I am sorry, I won’t do it again,’ Sandy replied.

Armaan went into his room and came out after a few minutes. ‘Here are thirty thousand rupees that I have. Return whenever you can. Ask me if you need more, but be careful of what you do next,’ Armaan said, almost like a big brother would. Sandy looked up at Armaan with love and gratitude as he accepted the cash.

‘I should head back. I have a flight in two hours,’ Sandy added.

‘Would I see you again?’

‘I hope so. I wish to come back here. I miss you, I miss my work, I miss Mumbai,’ Sandy said. ‘But don’t worry. I’d take a different apartment and not disturb you and your girlfriend. I would take my car back though.’

‘You would live here whenever you’re back,’ Armaan said and hugged Sandy.

‘Thanks, brother,’ Sandy said emotionally.

‘I hope to see you soon. Goodbye. Thanks for everything,’ Sandy bade him goodbye.

Things change, people change and he too changed, but Sandy didn’t change. His choices did, but the fact that he jumped into a dark world that looks bright in money would kill him from inside. He ought to have thought about what he was doing, he had to have considered the possibilities and consequences. And no matter how much he fought with Sandy today, he felt, as if his own brother was doing this. Yes, it would take a lot of efforts to fix whatever was going in Sandy’s mind, he decided that he would do it. He was his family away from family and he wanted to be his home away from all the negativities he had stepped into. He wasn’t merely his flatmate, he was his brother. A brother who had lost the right path, a brother who deserved to come back to life, a brother who was not related by blood but definitely related from the heart, a brother who needed another chance in life.

Flatmates. They live with you, they cry with you, they laugh with you, and they laugh at you. They dance with you, they sing with you, they do every crazy stuff with you. When you plan your girl’s surprise birthday party, they surprise you by decorating the house and doing arrangements. When you break up with your girl, they give their shoulder to you so that you can speak your heart out

without any fear of being judged. When you share your funny stories of college or office, they laugh with you and make it the most memorable moment ever. When you look angry, frustrated and lost, they laugh at you and make you laugh at your stupidity as well. They dance on the weirdest of songs, they sing after a couple of pegs. They cry when you cry and hug you when you need it the most. They understand you without you even saying a word.

They’re family. You share every possible emotion with them over the years. They’ll get up for you at 2 a.m. when you want to go out on a long drive. They’ll wear your clothes and wouldn’t even ask you. They’ll make some amazing food for you and surprise you when you’re fed up of having tiffin. They’ll fight, they’ll hit you, but they’ll come back for you just when you need them.

This story of flatmates is all about love, memories, sacrifices, moments, fights, patch-ups, fun, laughter and a time which you’ll never ever forget in your life. They’ll make you cry when they separate from you. They’re the most amazing thing to happen in life.



It was well after dark when Sara left office. She kept thinking about certain things. Ridiculous things. She remembered the day when she had met Armaan and that brought a smile on her face. Sara knew that even if she spent the rest of her life looking, she'd never find a person better than Armaan. That realization often hit in the strangest of times – when she received a long message from Armaan that day, the way he looked at her. In the beginning, she doubted if it was something that was real, but especially after last night, when he took impossible efforts as he reeked some probable trouble she might be in, she realized that his care was real, his words were real and his love was real.

She'd always been that one person who'd never take a chance in relationships until she was very sure, but maybe he was the right guy. Maybe she needed to accept that she was also in love with him… the kind of love that doesn't start with lust and ends at moving on with someone else. Maybe the love that starts with hesitation but ends with…. No, it never ends. Whatever ends midway isn't love, and if it ends, it never was love.

She knew they liked each other and the fact that she felt strongly about Armaan had done strange things to her mind lately. She wanted to be certain that it would last. It just seemed a little unreal to her. She just trailed off her mind as soon as she started over-thinking. She dialled Armaan's number.

'Have you reached already?' Sara asked and got his response. 'Ok, I'll be there soon,' she added.

She realized that she had changed a lot in the last few months and she knew that she was not the same person anymore. She didn't know if she'd keep changing just like this and if at all, Armaan would keep up with her still. She kept questioning herself if she'd be the right choice for Armaan. She had always been a loner, never had any family. Would she be a perfect fit for his family because as far as she could see, Armaan was downright serious for her.

Sara's eyes looked tensed. She tried smiling casually as if trying to make herself comfortable before she met Armaan. As soon as she reached, she paid the cab driver and her face filled with questions to which she didn't have any answers. But she had her hopes intact.

'Why did you call me at the beach today?' Armaan asked.

‘There’s a good beachside pub and I just wanted to feel the breeze,’ she said as she took off her sandals and walked down from the beach and felt the wet sand beneath her feet. No one said anything. It looked like a high tide today. Monsoon was on its verge in Mumbai.

‘Hey,’ he said breaking the silence. His voice sounded in a bunch of emotions.

‘Yeah?’ She said.

‘Is everything all right?’ He asked.

‘Yes, kind of.’

‘Look, whatever it is, just know that I’m always going to love you,’ he said as he comforted her.

She nodded and said, ‘I believe you.’ She leaned her head against his shoulder. She could remember his pained expression from last night. She barely thought about anything else after that. She tried busying herself with work, but thoughts kept running all over her mind. Eventually, after work, she decided to meet Armaan as she needed this time with him.

They reached the beachside pub and as they took their seats, Armaan ran his hand rhythmically through her hair. She always looked beautiful in open hair.

‘What is bothering you?’ Armaan asked.

‘A lot of things, to be frank.’

‘I can see you’ve been giving this a lot of thought, but I’ve already apologized for my behaviour last night,’ Armaan said. ‘I’m sorry if you’re still hurt and angry.’

‘I know you well and trust me, it only made me sure of you as a person. Of course, I felt bad initially, but as soon as I learned about the efforts that you put, I was glad that I have found you in my life.’

‘Then what’s keeping your mind occupied?’ Armaan asked after they placed an order for a few tequila shots and raw nachos.

Sara leaned back in the chair and took a deep breath.

‘I know I haven’t absorbed the fact completely that we like each other, but distance does strange things. I’ve seen it happening with people around me. Forget everyone else; I’ve seen it happening with myself when I was with Satyam. I’ve seen it affecting at least two lives, if not three. It takes you some guts, some unusual decisions to get back to life after that,’ Sara said and she was sure of what Armaan would say next.

‘That’s a long distance relationship and we’re probably not even going to have

it. We live in the same city, the same flat and work for the same industry. Why do you assume that it'd do something like this to us?'

'You can never rule out any possibility. I've seen your urge of going back to Indore, your hometown, and I've seen the affection that you have for your family,' Sara said lovingly.

'I am not an exception; everyone has such affection for their family.'

'I don't.'

'You're an exception. Your childhood and mine, your growing up and mine had a lot of differences. We have been brought up in very different circumstances,' Armaan said.

'One of us was luckier.'

'I don't deny that. I feel lucky to have been brought up by both my parents.'

'I was talking about myself. I was the luckier one,' Sara said as they emptied their first shot together and signalled the waiter to get one more.

'Would you care explaining how having no parents around makes you the luckier one?' Armaan asked confused.

'I wouldn't mind, but you have to answer my questions.' Sara said as they drunk up their second shot together and signalled the waiter to get the third one.

'I am up for it.'

'Tell me, what do you love the most in the world?'

'Nights like these with you.'

'Let me reframe, whom do you love the most in this life?'

'That goes without saying - my parents, my family and you.'

'What do you like the most about your parents?' Sara asked.

'I like the way they brought me up, how they cared for me which they still do. I liked the way they've been there with me in each step of my life, I like the beautiful moments that they gave me since my first memory and I appreciate the pain that they've taken to make sure that my demands, my desires gets fulfilled. There are a thousand reasons more and this life is a little too less to tell you or anyone that. It's not an objective answer; it's a subjective feeling. I can write many books on it and still not get done with praising them,' Armaan said as they finished their third shot and signalled the waiter to get Jager bomb shots.

'What's your best memory with me?' Sara asked.

'From the first time I saw you at this very beach till now, you've given many

moments one can spend a life with. That rickshaw ride, my first visit to your flat, your first visit to my flat which eventually became our flat, our morning jogs, the party that night and the first ever time we made love.'

'Do you still think about that?'

'That night was beautiful and I think about it every moment, Sara.'

'I asked about everything that you mentioned and not just about that night in particular,' Sara said with a smile.

'Oh, oh… I am sorry. I meant yes, I think about everything else as well and that's the reason I mentioned it to you.'

'What if you lose everything that you have one day?' Sara asked.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, what if you lose your parents, me and everything that you mentioned someday?'

'I would be a living dead. I can't imagine my life without any one of you. I mean, I am not ready to accept that it could happen someday, Maybe in some years, decades, but no, I can't think about it.'

'What about the memories you created with them?'

'They'd haunt me.'

Sara heaved a deep sigh. 'But they wouldn't haunt me. I am a parentless kid, a friendless human and a loveless bird. I haven't created any memories in my life and neither do I want to. I delete messages, pictures on a daily basis so that I never let them turn into a memory. I am aware of the damage memories can do to one. You get my point when I say I am luckier? I have nothing to lose and you have everything to lose,' Sara said.

They both gulped down their Jager bomb shot, the fourth one in total in the last fifteen minutes.

'Here's a hint, then. Would you want to break up with me just because someday someone of us would die and would make the survival of the other person even more difficult and the remaining someone might just die as well?'

'I didn't mean to say that,' Sara shook her head as she said it.

'Love gives you the reason to live and fears itself become the reason for death – not just human death, but death of emotions, death of hope and a death of certainty in any relationship,' Armaan philosophized.

'Fear gives you the reason to get detached from all that's going to cause you pain, later on. It gives you a sense of individuality. It gives you a lot less pain

when you live or die.’

They both were high by now; they were speaking their hearts out.

‘It’s important to give life some chances,’ Armaan said.

‘Life itself is a chance to discover yourself and you can’t afford to lose your track midway.’

‘Does falling in love make one lose the track?’

‘Does coming out of love make one find the track?’

‘You didn’t answer my question, you’re making it complicated. It won’t reach us for an answer.’

They signalled the waiter to get Sambuca shots. By now, they weren’t ordering anything, their conversations were adding up the bill.

‘I thought you must have guessed it by now that I might not want to answer it then. Let some questions be open in the air. If they get their answers by themselves, it was a good question, but if they don’t find an answer by themselves, let them float in the air, in the open. That’s because someday someone is going to ask it again with the hope of getting a correct answer to it and guess what, the day someone reaches the correct answer is the day you’d know that there are more liars and less honest people in the world because the question was a trick that didn’t have any answer to it. ’

‘But someone tried answering it still.’

‘And someone lied finding the answer to it.’

‘I would never lie to you,’ Armaan said as his eyes were full of love, full of Sara.

‘You can say that you’ve never lied, you can’t say you won’t lie. That makes you a probable liar already.’

‘You’re giving too many theories to it already.’

‘It’s because I want you to understand something.’ She said and took a pause before starting again. ‘You can be loved by many people at many times but you’ll never be loved the same way twice.’

‘What’s love according to anyone anyway? Some kisses, some close moments?’ she added and looked disappointed for some strange reason.

‘It’s not kisses in public that binds you forever, but those hugs in private when you were crying. That’s real love,’ Armaan said and Sara smiled.

‘I’ve always wondered what made you fall in love with me,’ Sara asked as she raised her eyebrows.

‘I fell in love with you when you were doing many things you didn’t even notice you were doing,’ Armaan replied.

‘That’s quite a writer’s answer.’ Sara almost laughed but Armaan looked dead serious.

They ate their first Nacho for the night and Sara saw Armaan’s eyes filled with hope, anxiety, and love. His eyes were telling stories that had a deeper meaning to it. His body language was asking her to not go, and his silence was letting her know the vacuum it would create if she decided to walk away. The waves were reaching close to the restaurant along with the winds that were touching their faces; it complimented Sara today.

She sounded much like a wind that doesn’t have a family or becomes a family wherever it goes. The wind that never turns back and can bring a storm in the calmest of waters and can sweep away the most furious of fires. The wind that can make or break your life, but is free. Sara was free, and no matter how much the wind loved staying by the shore, it pushed the best of things when sailed through on full moonlight.

It was a full moon night, but the calm moon was hiding somewhere between the dark clouds and ferocious winds. Armaan wasn’t scared of the dark clouds as much as he was scared of the ferocious winds that night.

They kept silent for a lot of time that night. It looked as if the drinks and its effects were now slowing down. After some time, Sara said, ‘We’re still going well, Armaan. Those were just some thoughts and that came out. Blame the shots, not me,’ she said and smiled. Armaan looked directly into her eyes; it was difficult for him to believe that it was just drinking’s effect and nothing else.

‘You sure it was only drunken blabber?’ Armaan asked.

‘I am sure it had most of the drinks in it,’ Sara said and Armaan looked confused.

‘What do you mean to say?’

‘Nothing.’

‘It’s so dark, so deep, the secrets that you keep. Listen, everyone has dark places and times in their life. They may surprise you, hurt you and crack you. But I want you to know something. During these times… you’re not alone and you’ll never be. It’s not that you’re not strong enough to move on, it’s your vulnerability of not letting the beautiful past go,’ Armaan said.

‘Hey, I am sorry. I mean, I told many things from my past experiences and it might have sounded as if it was for you, but it wasn’t. You are my man. I am

sorry if I let you think something else by my words or gestures,' Sara said as she got up from her seat and scooped Armaan into her arms, kissing him passionately. She wasn't conscious of the crowd sitting close; she didn't look bothered by their raised eyebrows. She looked right into Armaan's eyes and kept kissing him for long.

They settled the bill and reached home in a jiffy, and then they made love. Armaan felt it was better than anything till date. 'It's not whom you sleep with, but who is in your dreams when you sleep,' he said to himself.

As she slept next to him, she circled her little finger into his index finger as if her subconscious didn't want him to go.

'Listen! Don't get serious about little things in life,' she said as she closed her eyes.

'The most important things in our life aren't things,' he said and started thinking about Sara's behaviour that day. Most of it came out of her last relationship and Armaan too believed so, but her last relationship was hampering his equations with Sara in some ways that he couldn't take. He looked out at the sky and noticed a lot of thundering and lighting outside. But the thundering outside was much calmer than the storm going on within his life.

His eyes gazed at a diary, a diary like his but not his. That was Sara's diary where she talked, wrote and expressed herself. The pages looked dull and pale yellow, but those pages carried many secrets he would never ask from Sara and she might never share herself. He never turned pages of someone's personal life, but he thought of reading this one today because his life very much depended on it. He turned the first page and read.

Give me all the strength I need to carry on. Give me strength when I stand and faith when I fall. Be my strength. Be that somebody I can turn up to during my downs and be the first person I hug when I am happy.

Be my strength when my boyfriend breaks up with me; be my strength when I decide to end my life. Be my strength when my closed ones distance themselves from me and be my strength when absolutely no one understands me.

I need you. I just need you totally. Because when I laugh out loud, I need someone to accompany me in the craziness. I need you because when I cry, I need one person to slap me and advice that life isn't over and there are better things waiting for me. I need you because when this world doesn't understand any other relationship between boys and girls, I want to prove to them that they were so wrong all this while. I need you because I need one real relationship in my life.

Give me all the strength I need to carry on because I have a life to live, dreams to accomplish, people to make happy and I still haven't lost the hope of meeting that one person who understands me more than myself.



29th August 2017

The story of life is quicker than the heartbeats sometimes. A lot of things happen that make you feel right and feel wrong at different times. You expect your life to be rip-roaring spectacular, but it pleases you and disappoints you at times.

Those experiences just mature you as a person and that stays with you until the very end of your life. Such experiences strengthen your belief upon love, hope and make you see magical things happening while you're at your very low in life.

We all like the idea of forever because it's quite a nice thing to say and discuss, but we also know that not everything that came into your life would be there to stay. We need to put certain things behind and move on for betterment when needed.

No matter how much you try to get everything in your life, there's something that you'll always leave behind. And the thing you left behind would keep tickling you throughout your life.

Guess Armaan just wanted to be surprised in this relationship. For him, getting surprised or surprising someone was magical. For some strange reason, he thought that surprises were much better than promises as Sara didn't seem ready to promise him anything and he too didn't want to expect anything. But he surely wanted to be someone who's not expecting anything but still gets something in return. He did all that he could, but it was only human that he expected to see the same love reciprocated from Sara in a similar fashion some day.

If someone would ask him about his prediction for future, he'd say nothing and he'd let his life surprise him with all that it has, maybe a beautiful journey.

He remembered how surprises felt like… He had surprised his parents on their birthday by lighting up a beautiful cake and decorating that small room they lived in. He remembered getting surprised by his old friend as he came knocking the door at midnight after climbing up his terrace like a thief. He remembered calling up his first crush to say sorry for the first time to mend things between the two when she least expected it. He remembered surprising his grandfather

after five years to wish him a happy birthday that brought tears in his eyes. He remembered surprising his teacher after twelve years of visit at his place. He remembered surprising himself by jumping from a height of ten thousand metres to do skydiving for the very first time.

He remembered his habit of surprising people to give them what they deserved when they expected it the least. And now, for the first time, when he didn't expect anything, he expected some magical surprise in his life.

As soon as he opened the window that evening, he realized that it was raining. It had been raining terribly since the morning. He tuned in to a news channel and saw some panelists shouting at each other as Mumbai witnessed the heaviest rain of the past decade that day. Mumbai's health always has a bearing on the rest of the country and people everywhere seemed affected by it and involved in it. It was prime time news on all the channels. There were journalists hovering around different parts of Mumbai, showing floods and local transport stopped completely. Worst pictures of the flood were doing its rounds on social media. Mumbai had received 450 cm rain in the last 12 hours.

Mumbai needed to come to a grinding halt. Gutters were blocked, and the state government was still talking about the water pumps that they were using. The opposition was busy finding loopholes, forgetting that when they were in power, they didn't do anything great themselves. Ministers were doing air tours to ensure that everything was fine, which apparently wasn't. Local trains stopped due to flooded tracks on western, harbour and central lines. City taxis, Ola and Uber cabs and autos went off waterlogged roads. Calls were hardly getting connected and people were scared of their dying mobile batteries. The authorities seemed to have cared little. Television anchors were shouting their throats out. People who had stayed back home considered themselves to be lucky.

Many school kids waited in schools, unaware of when they would meet their parents next. Passengers at local train stations parked themselves in Mumbai's lifeline, i.e. the local trains, which were the only safe and dry place they found. Relatives were calling everyone to ensure if they were fine and people were still saying that this rain wasn't as bad as July 2005, as nobody had died till now.

Many cars that were stuck in rains wouldn't start and mudslide everywhere across Mumbai was a common thing to watch. It was destroying the traffic badly. There were just spectators watching each other in rains. RJs were busy giving updates about rains. The Mumbai government declared a holiday the next day for schools and colleges, though not for office-goers. According to some

logic in India, students from schools and colleges can’t survive in heavy rains, but office-goers can. That is some random logic that every Indian is still trying to figure out.

This rainy morning as usual started with gushing praise for Mumbaikars in Mumbai rains and that followed by pictures of waterlogging filled social media feeds. An hour later, people were fighting with the rain and doing their best to manage traffic on roads so as to reach home safely. After getting relatable pictures, news channels got the headlines that once again boasted about the Mumbai spirit.

Mumbaikars were serving food and offering shelter to those stranded. Internet was full of help as almost everyone announced their phone numbers, their addresses. A lot many strangers became good friends that day. Everyone prayed for the rain to stop. There were loud cries somewhere and then there were genuine hopes somewhere. Not bothering about all that and the city’s spirit, the rain became worse in the evening.

The so-called India’s work capital was once again shattered into pieces. People always wanted to see Mumbai as Shanghai, but the situation at present was that of a rural village that’s flooded because of dam water overload. A city that asks for millions to buy one apartment was out of shelter today.

As night fell, the rains just got worse. Nobody knew if it’d stop. It was nature’s way of telling people to stop playing with it. There were oldies crying in local trains, there were beggars on the streets who found no better place to hide, there were people stuck in traffic and waiting for the network to show some hope so that they could call up their family and at least inform that they were fine. Google Maps was showing seven hours delay in traffic. Cab services were charging a thousand rupees for shortest distances.

News channels started showing death numbers and it got scarier from there. Armaan dialled Sara’s number and her number wasn’t getting connected. He dropped her a message and it didn’t get delivered. Clouds were roaring out in anger. He could see lightning flash in the sky. He had never seen nature any angrier before this.

He received a call from his mother.

‘Armaan, are you okay beta?’ His mother asked with concern.

‘Yes, I am completely fine.’

‘Where are you?’

‘I am home.’

‘That’s great,’ she said as she breathed a sigh of relief. ‘Just don’t go out at any cost and keep us informed. Okay, beta?’

‘Yes, I won’t,’ he said but his mind was all occupied with the thoughts of Sara.

‘Hope you’ve enough ration with you?’ she asked.

‘I am not going to die Mumma,’ he said and she started crying over the call.

‘Never ever say that in your life again,’ her mother said inconsolably.

‘I am sorry Mumma, but can you please stop asking me so many questions?’ he said softly.

‘Sure. Just take care of yourself,’ she said and hung up.

He kept calling Sara but still didn’t get through. He called up Tanuj and Vikky. Tanuj said he was also trying to reach Sara’s number for the last two hours as she had left office at 2 p.m. Tanuj sounded concerned. Vikky’s number was out of reach.

Armaan was scared of water. In fact, most of his dreams too were about someone suffocating and dying under water. Someone he loved a lot. It was an unknown face asking for help, and scared people all around in his dream who did not wants to risk their lives. He could just see the person’s face every time he/ she tried jumping out of the water, but the waves were taking that person away. And in less than two minutes, that person was far out of sight. He cried, cried and he woke up crying, always. He had lost count of the number of times he had seen that dream till now. Maybe a little more than a hundred times, or maybe even more than that. Every time he saw that dream, it took him a reasonable amount of time to get over it. His breath got tough, his lungs choked as if it wasn’t a dream but a reality that could shake the shit out of his life.

He tried calling Sara again and it still was out of coverage area. He picked up her personal diary and decided to read the second page from it.

If only you could accept me for one last time, our lives would’ve been so much different. If only you could hear what all I had to say, we would’ve shared so many more beautiful moments. If only you could let me speak for that one last time, you never would’ve regretted our love.

I remember every little detail about our love. How it started, how it grew, but I am just not sure about how and why it ended. Is there any comeback? Is there any possibility of reliving those moments? Is there any hope of travelling back in time to fix up those arguments, those fights, those misunderstandings and those silent moments where I should have said something?

We can never forget our first love, I’ve heard. But it’s a little too tough to

experience it now. I'm not scared of losing you; I'm hell scared of not being with you ever again. The thought of never being with you ever again, the thought of never fulfilling those unfulfilled dreams, the thought of never being happy with all my heart and the thought of never being able to live our love again leaves me hopeless. If ever I had one more day to live with you, if ever today was our last day, I would've apologized for everything. I would've surprised you with all the happiness. I would've kissed you to never leave you. I would've made love to you and then hoped of you never leaving me.

Your love won me once when we met first and I gave up on myself because I knew you were the one I wanted to live this life for. I'll tell you that I surely got angry with you at times, but I checked my mobile every one minute and didn't sleep the night you didn't pick up my call.

If only you could accept me for one last time, I'd come and tell you that you're the only love I've ever had in my life and nobody possibly could make me happier the way you do.

I might have failed in many of these things, but I tried hard, really hard. My heart says you should be here, my heart says you'd be happiest with me, my heart says a miracle would happen. But how deep is your love? If only you could come back, you'd know how amazing this love is.



Armaan tried her call for the tenth time in the last thirty minutes and she was still not in the network area. He started flipping through the pages of her personal diary yet again.

Satyam,

You know that I've had an upbringing that's different from yours or anyone else's. I tried telling you many times that I have fewer issues with the world and more issues with myself. In an attempt to find love or understand what it actually means, I've developed love phobia and you still didn't try to understand me.

All I wanted from you was to understand me once and you failed to do that.

If only you could understand me for once, things could've been really different. If only you could understand me when I said I keep my feelings to myself because it's difficult for anyone else to understand me. You forced me, again and again, to know all those buried secrets with many promises of understanding me. What you did was just another of many unfair things.

If only you could understand me when I said don't judge my choices without knowing my options. If only you could understand my secrets, reasons and my helplessness with it rather than asking me to change myself again and again. Before you'd lose me, I would rather lose myself in an attempt of being the love of your imagination.

If only you could understand me when no one else did, I would've proved that I am not that bad a person as you think of me. If only you could understand my anger and its logic. You would've understood that it was an expression and not an effort to put anyone down. If only you could take a stand for me when I needed it the most, I would've made sure that I stand by you when you need me the most without ever judging you. If only you could keep even half of those many promises you made on the first day we met, I would've made sure that you never regret them in your life.

If only you could understand me when I did cross many ego miles just to mend those fights, I meant a commitment and nothing else. I just needed some time to be sure of my decision, to be sure of where I was going and to be sure of not breaking hearts, and you couldn't even give me that.

If only you could live my life for a day and know how difficult it is to keep

pleasing any and everyone including you, you would've understood why I am incapable of doing it sometimes. If only you could understand why honesty and space mean so much to me, you never would've complained about my sounding rude. I would try to surprise you someday by standing up to your expectations rather than making false commitments and never attempting it.

If only you could know that love is less about the texts and a little more about the subtexts behind emotions, care, attempt and those honest eyes.

If only you could understand me, you never would've lost me.

Once yours,

Sara



Armaan kept Sara's diary aside and switched on the television again. All he could see was disturbing pictures from throughout the day from across the city. There were many helpline numbers flashing on various channels, but none seemed to be working. Armaan tried calling them many times. He dialled Sara's number again, and it luckily got connected.

'Hello,' Sara said and Armaan felt relieved.

'Are you okay, Sara?' he asked.

'Yes, Armaan. Don't worry. My number isn't working and though I am stuck near Juhu beach, I am fine. There's a lot of traffic that looks impossible to clear, plus it's raining like last rains of humanity and doesn't seem like it's stopping anytime soon.'

'Where are you standing exactly?'

'I am standing under a shelter in the parking area, the place where we met for the first time. Remember?' Her voice had strain owing to the situation, but he didn't miss the smile that flashed on his face and hers.

'There are certain things I'd never forget in my life and that spot, my dear, comes first in that list,' Armaan said. 'You mind if I come over?'

'I always knew that you're silly. But the good kind of silly for me,' she said laughing lightly. 'Mumbai is dying to cross waterlogged roads to reach home, and you want to get into one willingly. How stupid is that!'

'It's good to do stupid things together.'

'It makes memories and I don't mind making one today,' Sara said happily.

'You are sounding very un-Sara today,' Armaan joked.

'There's no harm in changing yourself for good sometimes, right?' Sara said. 'Listen, my phone battery is low as usual. I would wait for you to reach before tomorrow's dawn.'

'I'd very much brave the rain tonight and reach sooner than the others.'

'Have you got some supernatural powers like you showed off in bed?' Sara teased and Armaan was taken aback for a second.

'Your mood is quite a delight tonight,' he said.

‘Trust me, nothing makes me happier than rains and water.’

‘How can I let this opportunity go. I just saw that the Metro train is operational, and I shall reach there soon,’ Armaan told her.

‘Perks of living in Andheri. Waiting for you, and if my mobile switches off, you know where to find me,’ she said and hung up. She sounded happier than yesterday, but that’s what always happens. You spend a good time together and all of a sudden Sara becomes unsure of the relationship she’s into. Thanks to her diary, Armaan now knew it was love-phobia, a phobia of getting attached to anyone because of the fear of losing them someday.

Armaan took the umbrella and stepped outside home, literally into a flood. There were cars which wouldn’t start and everyone stuck was standing under some shelter to save themselves from the angry clouds. The Metro station was flooded, and the ticket counter seemed unreachable. As Armaan waded through the sea of people, he realized people stood there not to buy tickets, but just to hop into trains. He too didn’t bother to buy a ticket and managed to grab a seat after two stations had passed. He was still two stations away from D.N. Nagar Metro. He decided to read Sara’s personal diary further. The chapter was titled as ‘A day after break up’.

Dear Satyam,

If I need to give you one last gift before we depart, I’d firstly ask for one last hour to spend with you.

I’d start by telling you why I could never leave you, I’d tell you that I don’t mind you going away from me, but also know that you’d take away an important part of my life away with it. I’d never ask you to come back to me, but I’d definitely hope for you to come back. I’d never ask you to let me love you for one last time, but I’d play back a thousand memories thinking about every moment we enjoyed together. I’d never ask you to reconsider your decision, but I’d definitely pray that you never regret it.

If I need to give you one last gift, I’d make you the happiest person on earth in that one hour. I’d myself be the saddest person who’d know that he has just that one hour to live his life. I’d make sure that you remember this last hour of our relationship, if nothing else. If I need to give you one last gift, I’d give you the reason to be happy. I’d make sure that you stay happy for all your life. If I need to give you one last gift, I’d give you that diary where I wrote all our beautiful conversations from the day we started this beautiful relationship till today where we’re breaking it now. If I need to give you one last gift before we depart, I’d get this world to your feet, give

you everything that you ever thought of and a promise too with that, a promise to never disturb you ever again.

But if you need to give me that one last gift before we depart, would you dance with me for one last time? Would you kiss and hug me for one last time? Would you promise me to never regret being with me? Would you give me just that one real reason behind this break up?

If you need to give me that one last gift before we depart, would you please take that one last walk across the beach with your hand in mine?

If you need to give me that one last gift, would you please turn around one last time before you finally go?

One last time…because 'I still think about you' and I'll always think about that one last gift.

Once yours,

Sara

The train stopped at Azad Nagar for longer than usual and the announcement 'Next Station, D.N. Nagar' kept repeating in Hindi, English and Marathi.

Armaan got up from his seat and made his way closer to the door. He thought of reading as much as he possibly could before he reached D.N. Nagar. With that hope, he turned the page and started reading the next entry.

Dear Satyam,

I miss you a little. I miss you when I see a couple walking hand in hand, a couple laughing their hearts out at roadside eateries. I miss you when I see a couple planning their lives with each other and I miss you the most when I see a girl who's upset being pampered by her boyfriend.

I miss you a little because I loved you a lot. I miss you a little because there's still a part of me that would never stop loving you and I miss you a little because I heard someone saying that miracles do happen when you expect them the least.

When I miss you, I just want to listen to your old voice notes, read your old messages and see all the gifts you ever gave me apart from your precious time.

I miss you a little too much when no one understands my joke and I miss you a little too much when I have to explain every little thing I say to people. Gone are the days when you just needed an eye contact or a minimal gesture. I miss you a little, a little too much and a lot when I think we're not together. It's as difficult to admit as it once was, when we were together, but there are certain things that will never change – the way you made me feel, the way I made you feel and the truth that we were happiest with each other. It will never change and I am glad

about it.

It will always be treasured to never ever be revealed – our meetings, our talks, and our moments. They are somewhere still there around us and that makes me feel that once you're loved by someone, it becomes a forever thing and nothing possibly in this world can change that.

I still turn around to see if you're around when someone takes your name. I still believe that it's some random clue that is drawing me towards you when I see those vehicle number plates that are your birth-date in numeric. My instinct won't cheat and it won't ever change.

No matter what, those dialogues still make me cry; those songs, those people, those rains, those streets, those lines and those promises remind me of you. It won't change. I won't change and I am glad that certain things never change. I am glad that I still miss you.

Once yours,

Sara

'Next station D.N. Nagar.' The Metro started moving he decided to not read any further. He looked less happy than when he had started from his flat. He had many questions running in his mind. Despite the short time that he had spent with Sara, he saw a forever with her. He knew with certainty that his story with Sara was full of twists and turns, and he just didn't want to be one of those halts. He wanted her to be sure of what she was getting into. He didn't want her to let her guard down; he wanted her to love him the way he loved her.

Armaan reached the station and as he walked out, he saw something that stopped him in his tracks. He got scared at what he saw and with a deep breath, as he cursed nature, he kept the diary inside to save it from the water pouring from the skies above.



Mumbai rains had taken many lives since morning and Armaan saw an old man's dead body floating on the road in front of his eyes. It looked more of a river than a road anyway. Armaan had always been scared of water and he started cursing himself for having come out in such a weather. That too to a beach. But it was about Sara.

For a second he thought of going back and dialled Sara's number to ask her to come to the station somehow. But her phone wasn't in the network area again. So he decided to move on and meet her so that she doesn't keep waiting for him. He got a call from Sandy, but he didn't pick up and then he got a call from his father and he avoided that as well. How would he explain why he was here when he had told his mother a while ago that he was at home. Plus, if he took out his phone to talk again, it'd definitely shut down because of all the water pouring.

He was walking towards the Juhu beach carefully and the clouds were roaring and behaving like an angry brat who'd do anything to spoil your life. Mumbai had never looked so miserable to him. The dream city was a living hell today. He preferred walking on sideways to avoid manholes. He thought about the money that the government claimed to have invested. The official figures were in thousands of millions, but that too didn't save the city from trouble. Mumbai had lost its electricity in half the areas and the meteorological department had declared heavy rains for another twenty-four hours.

As he walked in the water, his heartbeats kept getting faster. He was never as scared of fire as he was of water. The havoc was real, the fear was real and his walking into almost four feet deep water was real.

Sara was waiting for Armaan to reach her. Armaan was tired after walking for forty-five minutes straight. He was still about fifteen minutes away from Juhu beach. It was dark, it was hell and he could hear the sound of his own breath. He had never walked so much in his life. He wanted to go get some help, but when he looked around, he saw people who needed more help than him. After a while, he put the umbrella back in his bag and started running.

He covered the distance most of Mumbai had failed to that day. As soon as he reached Juhu beach, he saw Sara standing close to the parking area. Eating some chocolate, she looked her happiest as she saw Armaan. She came running to hug him and kissed him on his cheeks.

Sara folded her arms in front. ‘Okay, so someone loves me so much that he has braved the rain and risen as a hero tonight. I’m already getting used to you doing so many things for me, and that at the very least would increase my expectations from you.’

‘I wouldn’t mind any.’ Armaan asked as he saw genuine happiness on Sara’s face. ‘But what’s up with you…you sound like a completely different person today.’

‘So I’ve been thinking a lot about you constantly… ever since I left our flat this morning, and questioning myself on why the journey I’m on seemed to be moving towards you, why the roads that were blurred seem to be having a meaning to them, and why my journey, my actual journey looks less interesting than what’s going on. For the very first time in my life, my journey looks a little less important than the person who’s accompanying me in it. That’s how I think of it now. You belong to me, I belong to you,’ Sara said confidently as she looked right into his eyes. Armaan saw tears in her eyes as she said this, happy tears, tears of realization. The way she looked into his eyes told him that she needed more of him, all of him, for now and forever.

‘I am sorry. I haven’t been fair to you,’ Sara said.

‘If it was fair, it wasn’t loving; and if it was love, it would never be fair,’ Armaan replied.

‘You are the favourite word, favourite line, and favourite chapter of my life, Armaan.’

She knew that it wouldn’t get better right away and she was ready to wait. She knew she hadn’t been really involved in the relationship till now. She had her own doubts, less about anything else but more about herself. For days, Armaan kept expecting Sara to not behave coldly at times and she hardly bothered about it. They didn’t fight like couples, but there were tensions between the two that needed to be talked about. He never complained about her behaviour still.

What she appreciated the most about Armaan was that he didn’t pretend to be the bossy boss boyfriends and he never tried to change her mind.

She had seen Satyam changing, and little by little, she began to think that there was something about him trying to rush into the finality of relationship with marriage that didn’t deserve a second chance. It took her some months to get over him and it’s only after Armaan came into her life that she moved on completely.

‘Are you entirely convinced that you love me?’ Armaan asked.

‘I would trade anything in my life today to promise you that,’ Sara said as she hugged him tighter. A part of her already knew that Armaan had his doubts because she had talked nicely previously too, agreed to be in love with him, but her hesitation at times had raised certain questions in his mind. Not that he didn’t love her anymore. He loved her still, more than anything else in this world, but Sara’s diary had raised some serious questions about the longevity of the relationship she could get into. She didn’t write all that with her hands; it was her bleeding heart writing those feelings. They felt too real to have faded away with time.

‘Somehow, you changed me, and only because of you, I wouldn’t let myself doubt my sincerity in this relationship again. I don’t know how you did it, but you made a dead heart beat once again. You respected my feelings, you respected me, and by doing so, I guess, you won me. I guess I never loved anyone as much as I love you right now and I am terribly sorry for not understanding its worth before,’ Sara said and Armaan still didn’t say anything.

‘You walked down an entire stretch of five kilometres to see me safe Armaan, and that’s not something anyone would be able to do for their love. You did what you’re best at. Impressing others. You have impressed me and now it’s my time to impress you. Would you give me one last chance? Would you allow me to be yours forever? Would you please make some memories I’ve been craving to make with the right person my entire life. Would you be my perfect ending?’ Sara said and Armaan kissed her, never wanting to leave her. In the heavy rain, these were like two twinkling stars ready to explore their own universe. There were people around who started hooting, and Armaan and Sara were dragged back to their senses. They moved towards the beachside to avoid people’s attention and give vent to the overflowing love. In no time, they were kissing passionately and getting rid of the clothes that were already clinging to their wet bodies. Waves rose, the rain continued, and they kept making love to each other with the same intensity. The kind of love you make when you’re crazily in love with each other. As much as the rain kept touching their almost naked bodies, their love for each other kept increasing.

The way they looked into each other’s eyes after making love was the happiness they both were waiting for. Armaan knew there was no scope for any doubt now and Sara knew she had found her forever. Sara put on her dress in a jiffy and like a small child, started chanting and shouting Armaan’s name in pleasure as she walked down the sea shore. She asked Armaan to join her but as scared as he was of water, he looked scared of even Sara being there.

Water, the darkness of the night and heavy rains – they looked lovely alone,

but when together, it turned out to be the deadliest of combinations.

Sara faced Armaan from a distance and shouted. ‘I love you, Armaan. Will you marry me?’ She had never looked so happy in her life. She was standing right where Armaan had seen her for the first time in his life, and that’s the place where Armaan had fallen in love with this beauty. And as soon as Armaan could give any answer to her question of love, his expression transformed from happiness to fear. His eyes looked visibly in fear, scared; his eyes looked hopeless and his voice got stuck in his throat.

A gigantic wave about five metres high was moving towards a clueless Sara. It could take hundreds of people to death and there was only one girl standing just ten feet away from there. Armaan shouted, but it was too late to react. He looked around for help but saw no one in sight who could help. People were shouting, but no one was ready to risk their lives for strangers.

Armaan feared water the most; he was shouting and shouting louder, but no one seemed to be of any help. One fisherman was running towards the beach, but he was still a minute away. He could just see Sara’s face every time she tried jumping out of the water, but the waves were taking her away. In less than twenty seconds, she had gone far from his sight, from everyone’s sight.

See you again. See you again, before it’s too late as my thoughts echo your name. Loving you is a battle and I won’t surrender. See you again, because you make my best times better and my hard times easier. See you again, because I know this isn’t where it ends.

I just kind of want to be with you and it’s just that I am counting time before I see you again, as it’s never too late to live happily ever after. See you again, because this life isn’t as amazing as it is with you and we always kind of did things that were amazing. Right? I did what I do well, loving you. With that hope of seeing you again, see you again, because my soul feels like it’s born again every time I see you and I don’t want to be dead so soon.

I want to see you again because I am selfish and I love you. I want to see you again because I wouldn’t be able to make it to my destiny alone on the road that I can see from here. I want to see you again because I would miss the sound you are to my words… because I would miss you being the reason behind my smile… because I miss the life at this time.

And when I see you again, I’ll hug you to never leave, kiss you to never go back and will look into your eyes to see if you too wanted to see me again.



Armaan immediately jumped into the sea, doing everything he could think of to save Sara. Water security forces were coming running from behind. He could hear the muted sounds of his only fear, water. He kept looking at Sara, signalling at her to hold on and he'd be there to save her. His eyes were filled with unspoken fear. He wanted Sara to survive. He wanted them to survive. He wanted their love to survive.

He was trying to recall all the swimming lessons he had seen online to survive when struggling under water. His dream and the fear had made him do that. Sara's hand was still giving him some hope. But his dream was also flashing in front of his eyes. He could see the waving hands deep down in the water. He could see people shouting for help, but not doing anything to help them. He could see his most loved person being swallowed by high waves and he could see himself trying his best to save her. He was crying, crying under water, pleading to gods to show some mercy, but the high tides now took them in two different directions. He saw security forces getting in the water with their boat to save them. There were two life guards, one boat, two people in two different directions and a distance of a hundred metres, killing the possibility of the survival of both.

He saw the obvious confusion and sense of restlessness as lifeguards were riding the boat. They knew that they could save just one of them, and they had to save the one who had the best chance to live in the next one minute.

Armaan saved them from the confusion and gave them an easy choice. He stopped his breath and took a deep dive in the ferocious tides, right in the middle of the sea. He knew he had the last minute of life left in him.

All memories of his mother, his brother, his father and his childhood friends started flashing right in front of his eyes. He regretted not talking to his mother for one last time. He knew his mother wouldn't be able to take this. He knew his father will have tearful nights throughout his life. He knew that his brother would go numb forever. He knew that Bhuvan will get mad at him for dying before his marriage. He knew that Sunny would miss his blabbering and he knew that Sara would know that the person who died loved her the most. Sara would know that I braved the rain to save her, but couldn't save myself for her. He knew that Sara would never be able to love anyone ever again and he knew that

even though he was dying, Sara would always be his perfect ending.

If you need to give me that one last gift, would you please turn one last time before you finally go? He thought and Sara turned to look at him. With a smile on his face, he breathed his last.

Sometimes, the story ends where it actually starts.

Epilogue



29th September 2017
7 p.m.

In life, we often think that it shouldn't end like this. We expect the sun to shine bright, flowers to bloom. But sometimes the day turns dark and leaves us disappointed. Not because there's no daylight, but because we all want a perfect ending. We forget that in real life, reality is mostly far different from our imagination. Here, verses of life don't always rhyme, and beats of the heart move quicker than the beats of life. Life doesn't begin with a 'happy' new year, nor does it end with the same spirit. What's more, it doesn't even stop when you lose someone you couldn't once live without. Life simply doesn't begin or end. Life goes on. You still breathe, you still care, and you still live.

Later that night, Sara was having one last glass of wine, in the glass that had made special hundreds of their drinks together. She looked out of the window again; they had seen the dawn of their love shining up, and the dusk of their hopes go down from this window. The memories of Armaan and her talking, fighting and making out were still fresh.

Sara got up from the couch, not wanting to believe her life's reality… something that had shattered her life forever. She refused to believe it, but something deep inside told her that it was real. Till when would she ignore it! She had friends who would offer to help her move on, move on for good, for her future. They kept telling her that she was lucky to have had such a love in her life. She kept hearing that 'Loving doesn't mean to have the person next to you always, it's much deeper' kind of bullshit. Her friends tried making her feel good all the time by making her meet hot strangers at clubs and parties, also telling her how their own life sucks with their loved ones. But every one of those clichés was no more than an annoyance.

She wanted to believe that she was over Armaan, but deep inside, she knew she wasn't and she would never be able to. She knew that there was nothing that she could say or do to ever get him back in her life. She knew that dead people don't return and though she felt Armaan's presence around her a lot many times, she hoped to still talk to him.

Had they been together today, they'd be celebrating Armaan's birthday at some of the finest beachside restaurants. It wasn't particularly hard for them to plan a special evening together. Both of them just wanted to get away from the chaos of the city. With the kind of busy schedules they had, they preferred planning things together over cancelling a surprise because of last minute work commitments.

Despite efforts to stop them, Sara felt tears coming. She didn't want to cry anymore, but her dreams had died with Armaan.

Armaan's soul was there. He saw Sara throwing the glass from the windowsill, and its toppling down to the floor, shattering instantly. But the sound of the glass shattering was way more calm than the storm in her life.

Armaan let out a breath he had been holding and fisted his hand to punch the wall – something he was used to doing whenever he was in a tough situation. He just held his hands tight and regretted having met Sara that day. He wished he hadn't met her and that wouldn't have led them to make love at the beach and she wouldn't have gone close to the seashore and he wouldn't have drowned himself under the high tides.

During the past few months, Armaan's thoughts had alternated between his first and last meeting with Sara. Bunch of times before, when he was alive, he had seen some friends or colleagues recommending the name of therapists or past life regression experts to someone who broke up to get over their troubles and he wanted Sara to visit one of those. He wished if there was any way he could tell her the same.

Armaan knew that it would take Sara some time to get back to normalcy and he was pissed with the looks of formal concern everyone offered Sara in response, which hindered her from moving on completely. Everyone asked her what had happened that night and how did she survive when Armaan jumped into the sea after her. Only a few of her colleagues actually tried feeling the pain. And for the rest of them, it was just another story and a new piece of gossip.

Armaan watched a guy from the movers and packers walking towards her. He looked around and saw that everything else had been loaded into the truck downstairs.

'Excuse me,' he said, coming towards the couch. 'I have to take that couch.'

'Sure,' Sara said and got up from the couch, allowing him to pick it. The couch where they had talked for hundreds of hours, made countless memories, lied down while watching the full moon in the night, and slept. The guy picked it up and went his way, not realising what that piece of furniture really meant to

them.

There was something about this house that made Armaan and Sara feel that they were leaving behind a part of their lives with it. They knew well why they felt that way, or why a vacant flat was calling out to them in the voice of the beloved. They were proud of the memories they both had created, but now the same memories were haunting her.

She looked at the flat one last time before the door was locked and keys passed to the owner. Armaan told himself that Sara needed to close some doors in life, for they would lead her nowhere. They found themselves thinking about how it all had started and how time had changed everything. It seemed unlikely, but at the same time, they had the strange feeling of coming back to this flat once again. Or at least she hoped so.

Armaan wasn't sure why, but he tried to think about how his fears had turned into reality. He wanted Sara to dismiss her heavy breaths that had guilt, hopelessness and just one little ray of hope. She knew dark clouds had faded her life's bright sunshine, but believed that winds of change had the power to take away the darkest thunderstorms to bring back the light.

You know, sometimes, the story starts where it actually ends.

'People still breathe, they still laugh and they live their life. You should too,' Armaan's soul whispered and with the air that touched Sara's face, he knew she had got his message.

Sometimes, not every story has a happy ending. But is a perfect ending all that matters?

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