

**UNLOCK YOUR INNER POWER AND LOVE YOURSELF UNAPOLOGETICALLY**

# **SELF LOVE**

**IS THE NEW GLOW UP**

**SHABNUM RASHID KHAN**



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S t o r i e s   M a t t e r  
New Delhi • London

## BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

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BlueRoseONE  
Stories Matter  
New Delhi • London

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+91 8882 898 898  
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ISBN: 978-93-7139-441-3

Cover design: Daksh  
Typesetting: Tanya Raj Upadhyay

First Edition: August 2025

ALSO BY SHABNUM RASHID KHAN

FRIENDS BY DESTINY

HOPE, ONE DAY LIFE WILL CHANGE

TOTALLY ENDLESS

OVERTHINKING YIELDS NO RESULTS.

## Dedicated To

All the wonderful individuals out there who sometimes feel that no one cares for them, who experience the weight of being overlooked, judged, or treated poorly. It's vital to recognize the importance of self-love and to savor the time you spend with yourself. Imagine embarking on a journey where you prioritize your own happiness and embrace who you truly are. You don't need others to define your worth; love yourself fiercely. When you begin to shower yourself with kindness and appreciation, you'll discover that life becomes more vibrant and meaningful. Self-care can take many forms—taking long walks, reading your favorite book, or simply enjoying a quiet moment of reflection. Explore the art of self-love. If you possess the ability to love yourself wholeheartedly, contemplate why external validation feels necessary. Remember, you entered this world unaccompanied and will leave it the same way; thus, it's crucial to cultivate a rich inner life. Loyalty is a rare treasure in this world, often found only within yourself. As you navigate the various chapters of your life, it's you who will remain constant, your own steadfast companion. So, nurture the kind of love and compassion you desire from others. You are worthy of that love, deserving of every ounce of kindness you

bestow upon yourself. Embrace it fully, for you are truly deserving of love and happiness.

### **In cherished Memory of My Grandmother**

Whom I affectionately called Boba, I reflect on her incredible spirit. She was an extraordinary woman, radiating warmth and compassion in every aspect of her life. Despite facing numerous hardships and challenges, she maintained a remarkable grace that illuminated her smile, making it a source of comfort for those around her. Boba had a unique way of caring for others; she would often spend her days cooking hearty meals infused with love, or sharing stories that brought joy and laughter to our gatherings. Those who had the privilege of knowing her fondly recall her as a true angel—an embodiment of kindness who never harbored negative thoughts about anyone. Her gentle nature and unwavering love served as an inspiration, reminding us all of the power of empathy and compassion. In a world increasingly filled with strife, it feels as though individuals like her are becoming scarce—a poignant reminder of the deep impact one kind soul can have on the lives of many.

## About Author



Shabnum Rashid Khan's formative years unfolded against the breathtaking vistas of Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, a region that captivates with its tranquil landscapes and vibrant cultural tapestry. Immersed in this enchanting environment, Shabnum cultivated a profound fascination for storytelling, drawing inspiration from the rich narratives shared by her family and the diverse history that surrounded her upbringing. This passion for the art of storytelling not only shaped her early life but also directed her educational pursuits toward the field of Journalism, prompting her enrollment at the esteemed CMRIMS in Bangalore. At CMRIMS, Shabnum rigorously honed her journalistic skills, diving deep into the intricacies of impactful storytelling. She balanced demanding academic coursework with invaluable hands-on experiences in reporting and writing, mastering the nuances of the craft. Her dedication and commitment to her studies propelled her into opportunities where she gathered first-hand accounts and crafted engaging narratives that resonated with her audience. After earning her undergraduate degree, Shabnum took her ambition further by attaining a Master's in Journalism

and Mass Communication from the renowned Indira School of Communication in Pune. During her time there, she distinguished herself not only for her diligence and tenacity but for her intuitive ability to weave captivating stories that drew readers in. Her exceptional contributions culminated in her being awarded the prestigious "Best Student Award" in Journalism, a testament to her extraordinary talent and unwavering commitment to her chosen field. In her quest for knowledge, Shabnum also pursued a Master's degree in English Literature, which profoundly enriched her understanding of language, narrative arc, and the power of words. This literary exploration deepened her passion for the written word, allowing her to delve into diverse literary styles and genres, thus significantly impacting her own writing journey. Although her initial aspiration was to enter the medical field and bring tangible change to people's lives, destiny redirected her path, leading her to the fulfilling realms of journalism and creative writing—domains where she found her authentic voice and true passion. Beyond her academic achievements, Shabnum engages in a variety of creative hobbies that nurture her artistic spirit. Drawing has become a powerful outlet for her imagination, enabling her to visually express her thoughts and emotions. She often immerses herself in the world of music, finding comfort in singing, which serves as both a refuge and a means to articulate her feelings. Reading remains one of her most cherished pastimes; through the pages of

countless books, she explores intricate worlds filled with intriguing characters and captivating scenarios, helping her escape reality while sparking inspiration for her own narratives. Yet, it is writing that stands as her ultimate passion, a craft that allows her to articulate her innermost thoughts, share her unique stories, and forge deep connections with her readers.

Shabnum's enduring love for literature has fueled her ambition to ascend as a celebrated author, one who not only garners acclaim but also leaves a lasting impression through her writing. Her debut novel, **“Friends By Destiny,”** showcased her extraordinary storytelling prowess, captivating readers with its relatable themes and well-developed characters. The positive reception of her first book emboldened her to release her second work, **“Hope, One Day Life Will Change,”** which struck a chord with a broad audience and established her foothold in the literary world. Her third book, titled **“TOTALLY ENDLESS,”** also received warm acclaim, further solidifying her reputation as a burgeoning talent in writing. Her fourth publication, **“Overthinking Yields No Results,”** resonated well with readers and garnered excellent reviews, illustrating her ability to connect with audiences on multiple levels. Now, she eagerly anticipates the release of her fifth book, **“Self-Love is the New Glow-Up,”** hoping for a positive response that will elevate her status among readers. Shabnum envisions herself not only as a beloved author but also



as a rising star in the literary realm, determined to leave an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of her readers.

## Acknowledgement

Writing has been a deep-seated passion of mine, illuminating my path and steering me toward the realization of my lifelong ambition: to become a published author. I am elated to announce that I have successfully brought to life four distinct books: “Friends by Destiny,” a heartfelt exploration of the bonds that unite us; “Hope, One Day Life Will Change,” a poignant tale of resilience and transformation; “Totally Endless,” which weaves an intricate narrative about the limitless possibilities of love; and “Overthinking Yields No Results,” a contemplative work addressing the anxieties that often hinder our progress. Each of these titles holds a special place in my literary journey, but I am particularly proud of my latest release, which represents the pinnacle of my aspirations and unwavering dedication to the art of storytelling. From a tender age, I discovered solace in the pages of books, diving into narratives that transported me to extraordinary realms that sparked wonder and introspection. Among the most treasured moments of my childhood were the evenings spent listening to my grandfather recounting captivating tales from his youth. His rich, vivid storytelling, filled with life lessons and vivid imagery, inspired me deeply, reinforcing my love for literature. This profound connection to the written word has

continuously fueled my desire to craft narratives that resonate and inspire others. Above all, I owe my heartfelt gratitude to the Almighty Allah, whose infinite wisdom and strength have guided me on this transformative journey of creating my novels. I am immensely thankful for the inspiration that has illuminated my path, encouraging me to pursue my dreams with fervor. My family has been my unwavering support system, serving as both my anchor and greatest advocates. My father, Mr. Abdul Rashid Khan, stands as a beacon of strength; his constant encouragement and unwavering belief in my abilities have propelled me toward my goals. My mother, Atiqah Rashid, enveloped me with nurturing love and support, fueling the fire of my ambition from the very beginning. My sister, Suraya Rashid Khan, has played an essential role as a source of inspiration and motivation, always nudging me to chase my dreams with fervent determination. I also wish to acknowledge my brother, Dr. Sadat Rashid Khan, and my wonderful sister-in-law, Kousar Sadat, whose thoughtful insights and unwavering support have been invaluable during my writing endeavors. They remind me each day that this journey is one I do not have to walk alone. Additionally, my beloved nephew, Ashhad Sadat Rashid Khan, deserves special recognition; his unwavering faith in my talent has uplifted my spirits on numerous occasions. He often tells me, "Rani, you are a good writer, and I believe you can become the best because you have the potential." His encouraging

words resonate in my heart, urging me to reach for greatness. My niece, Rutba, also deserves a shout-out for her spirited passion for reading. As an avid bookworm, she has devoured all four of my published works, offering insightful and constructive feedback that has enriched my writing process. The anticipation of her reaction to my fourth book fills me with immense joy, as it warms my heart to witness the younger generation in my family embracing literature and celebrating my creative achievements. Moreover, I am profoundly appreciative of my enthusiastic nibblings—Areeba, Maisa, and Aatif—whose uncontainable excitement to delve into my stories serves as a constant reminder of the joy that storytelling can inspire in readers of all ages. Special recognition must also go to my cousins, Uzma, Mariya, and Dr. Quanain, who have selflessly dedicated countless hours to reading my books and providing invaluable, constructive feedback. I fondly remember Mariya exclaiming how she couldn't bear to set down **“Totally Endless,”** finishing it in a single, exhilarating day—a true testament to the connection readers can forge with a well-crafted tale. Their words of encouragement—“You are very talented at writing, and we love your books”—energize my passion and affirm my commitment to pursuing my dreams.

My friends, too, have played a crucial role in this journey; their enthusiasm for reading my work has motivated me to persist in my writing endeavors. Their

eagerness to recommend my books to their friends and family has created a beautiful ripple effect of support that drives my inspiration further. Lastly, I cannot forget the many readers who have graciously shared their insightful feedback with me. I aspire to attract even more readers with my captivating stories, hoping to draw them into the worlds I've created. Your heartfelt appreciation for my work has been a remarkable source of encouragement, igniting my determination to produce even more thought-provoking writing. In sha Allah, I hope to leave a lasting impact on my readers, forging connections through relatable stories that touch hearts and elevate spirits. With each new book, I aim to broaden my reach and cultivate a vibrant community of readers who find joy, inspiration, and a sense of belonging within the pages of my narratives.

*“Until you Love  
yourself, you will  
never know who  
you really are and  
you won’t know  
what you are really  
capable of.”  
Louise Hay.*

## A Message from the Author

Dear Reader,

I truly appreciate that you chose this book and invested your time and resources to read it. My deepest hope is that its pages help you navigate your journey of self-discovery and empower you to redefine who you are. As humans, it is natural for us to seek recognition, validation, and love from others. However, we often overlook the most important source of affirmation: ourselves. This tendency often stems from a fundamental lack of self-love. Many of us find ourselves yearning for external approval, mistakenly believing that we will be fulfilled once we receive enough praise. Yet, if we do not cultivate love for ourselves, no amount of compliments—no matter how well-intentioned—will lead to lasting happiness. I have walked this path myself. In my past, I often found myself feeling unworthy and unappreciated. However, I have come to realize that the foundation of true happiness lies in our ability to love ourselves first.

When I learned to value and respect who I am, I discovered a profound sense of joy that radiated outward, allowing me to spread happiness to those around me. It's a transformative experience—one that has enabled me to evolve into a better version of myself. I am committed to this ongoing journey of

self-improvement, taking steps each day to enhance my emotional and spiritual well-being. Recognizing the importance of self-love has been pivotal, and I have begun to truly enjoy my own company, finding solace and strength within myself. I encourage you to embark on this journey too; it has the potential to create miraculous changes in your life as well.

Wishing you abundant love and happiness on your path,

**Shabnum Rashid Khan**



“The glow-up isn’t always visible to others; often, it involves a profound transformation that occurs within you. It might be about recognizing your inherent worth and unique abilities, embracing your wholeness, and understanding the value you bring to the world. Perhaps it’s a newfound capacity to disengage from toxic drama and consciously choose a path of inner peace and tranquility. Always remember that the relationship you cultivate with yourself lays the foundation for every other relationship in your life. A strong sense of self-worth enables you to connect more genuinely with others. Embrace your flaws and strengths alike, practicing self-acceptance without judgment. Prioritize your mental, emotional, and physical well-being by incorporating daily habits that nurture you, such as mindfulness practices, physical exercise, and healthy eating. Moreover, actively challenge negative thoughts that undermine your confidence, replacing them with powerful self-affirmations that reinforce your abilities and worth. For instance, remind yourself daily of your accomplishments and the qualities you value in yourself, fostering a more positive and resilient mindset. This journey towards self-discovery and self-love is not just about outer appearance but about nurturing your inner spirit and fostering a life of fulfillment ”.

# Prologue

The only person who truly knows you inside and out, aside from your parents, is yourself. It's essential to start loving yourself and becoming your own best friend before you can genuinely connect with others. Ask yourself, if you have the capacity to love and care for those around you, why not extend that same love to yourself? Prioritize self-care and pampering; these acts can significantly boost your confidence and illuminate your inner glow.

As you navigate your life, be your own constructive critic. Hold yourself accountable when your actions don't align with your values or aspirations. It's through self-critique that you can identify areas for improvement and make necessary corrections. Why wait for others to recognize your worth or to correct your mistakes when you have the power to do so yourself? Ultimately, you hold the key to creating a happy and fulfilling life.

Remember that it's common for people to voice negative opinions, regardless of whether you are doing well or struggling. No matter your achievements, there will always be someone who finds fault with what you do. Therefore, take it upon yourself to be your own cheerleader; celebrate your victories, no matter how small, and encourage yourself through challenges.

Embrace the idea of being your own competition, constantly striving to be a better version of yourself. In doing so, you'll cultivate a life filled with joy, resilience, and authenticity.

People will scrutinize your life choices, whether you're married or single. They'll cast judgment on your decision to have children or remain child-free. They'll weigh in on your body shape and size, drawing conclusions about your worth based on appearances. They'll evaluate your life against their own expectations and timelines, often with little regard for your unique circumstances.

In a world teeming with opinions, it's easy to feel pressured to conform to someone else's idea of success or happiness. But remember, it's your life to live—a deeply personal journey that deserves to unfold at your own pace, shaped by your individual choices and values. Embrace this truth: you are your own best critic. Focus on personal growth and self-correction, for ultimately, you are the architect of your existence, not a mere character in someone else's story.

When you prioritize self-love and acceptance, the weight of others' negative comments diminishes. Nurture your spirit, and you'll find that no one will have the audacity to diminish your worth. Honor your journey, and let your authenticity shine.

We often find ourselves trapped in cycles of self-doubt, questioning our abilities and discouraging ourselves even before we take the first step towards a task. This internal struggle can prevent us from accomplishing the specific goals we've set for ourselves. Instead of allowing negativity to dictate our mindset, we should consciously embrace self-love and consciously shift away from self-doubt. When we cultivate a genuine appreciation for ourselves, we can experience profound transformation in our lives. Take inspiration from the iconic Bollywood Movie **“Jab We Met,”** particularly the moment when Kareena Kapoor's character confidently declares, **“Mai Apni favourite hoon”** (I am my favorite). This declaration embodies a radiant self-love that we all should aspire to emulate. By learning to become our own biggest fans, we can foster a positive and empowering mindset that propels us forward. Some may contend that self-love borders on selfishness; however, there is a vital distinction between the two. Being selfish fundamentally involves focusing solely on oneself without regard for others, whereas self-love teaches us to nurture our well-being and, in turn, enhances our capacity to care for others. When we prioritize our own health physically, mentally, and emotionally—we gain insights into the expectations and feelings of those around us. This self-awareness ultimately transforms us into kinder, more compassionate individuals, as we recognize that the love we extend to ourselves paves the way for genuine connections with

others. Instead of chasing after external validation or desperately searching for someone to fulfill us, we must first acknowledge that we are already complete. Embracing our own worth and nurturing a sense of wholeness within allows us to enter relationships rooted in mutual respect and the desire for growth. True love blossoms when two whole individuals come together, choosing to embark on a shared journey while building and nurturing something meaningful from a foundation of self-awareness and love. In our lives, we encounter various perceptions of who we are: the person we believe ourselves to be, the persona we think others see, and the reality of how they actually perceive us. Ultimately, the only version that truly holds significance is the first one—our authentic self. By embracing and celebrating this genuine identity, we empower ourselves to continually evolve and genuinely enjoy our own company, creating a fulfilling and vibrant life.

Have you ever considered who will always be by your side, no matter the circumstances? It's you. Recognizing and nurturing the most profound and genuine relationship we have—this one with ourselves—is paramount. Before seeking companionship from others, it's essential to cultivate a strong partnership with yourself. The idea that a partner from outside can complete you is a common misconception; in reality, you are already whole and complete as an individual. When you embrace your

own value and cultivate self-love, you create a solid foundation for any relationship. The right partner will not fill a void but rather enhance your life. They will inspire and challenge you, acting as a catalyst for your personal growth and helping to elevate your consciousness. This way, together, you will explore new dimensions of life, encouraging each other to evolve and thrive in ways you might never have imagined alone.

Self-love is not a selfish indulgence; rather, it is a fundamental necessity for our well-being. Loving ourselves is the foundation upon which we build relationships with others. After all, at the end of each day, the one person who remains steadfast by our side is ourselves. No one else has a more intimate understanding of our preferences, dreams, strengths, and vulnerabilities than we do. To truly embrace self-love, it's crucial to embark on a journey of self-discovery. Take the time to reflect on your values, interests, and what makes you unique. This exploration reveals the remarkable qualities that often go unnoticed in the hustle of daily life. As you delve deeper into your self-awareness, you may begin to notice the stark contrast between how you speak to yourself and how you interact with others. You might realize that, while you would offer compassion and encouragement to a friend facing a tough situation, you often fall into the trap of self-criticism and negativity. This can take the form of disparaging

comments about your appearance, capabilities, or choices, which only serve to diminish your self-esteem. Recognizing this pattern is a pivotal moment in your journey toward self-love. It highlights that, rather than being a supportive ally, you have sometimes acted as your own worst enemy. This awareness ignites a powerful call to action, to shift your inner dialogue and treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you readily extend to others. By cultivating self-compassion, you can transform your relationship with yourself and, in turn, enhance your capacity to love and support those around you.

# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER : 1

### INTRODUCTION

The First Act of Love is Self- Love..... 1

## CHAPTER 2

Dare to Love yourself..... 15

## CHAPTER : 3

Raindrops and Family Bonds..... 31

## CHAPTER 4

Friendship's Bitter Truth..... 50

## CHAPTER 5

A Farewell Full of Futures ..... 80

## CHAPTER 6

Together From Here ..... 95

## CHAPTER 7

Forever Isn't Always For Everyone ..... 107

## CHAPTER 8

The Unchosen Journey to her Future..... 121

## CHAPTER : 9

Tomorrow Demands Adjustment ..... 141

## CHAPTER :10

Betrayal Of The Bond ..... 170



CHAPTER : 11

From First Place To Background Noise ..... 190

CHAPTER :12

The Mirror's Wordless Reply ..... 218

CHAPTER :13

Becoming Her Own Safe Space..... 245

CHAPTER :14

Glow and Unstoppable is the Side Effect of

Self-Love..... 263

Conclusion..... 285

Piece of Advice ..... 291





## **CHAPTER : 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The First Act of Love is Self- Love**

Self-love isn't about constantly striving for more, attaining perfection, or seeking the approval of others. Instead, it revolves around the profound understanding that every human being — including you — is inherently deserving of love, respect, and care, exactly as they are, without needing to change or meet unrealistic standards.

We all have an innate desire to feel loved and valuable, yet many of us struggle to cultivate this sense of worthiness. In our quest for validation, we often turn to external sources—such as achieving high grades, attaining career milestones, or garnering likes and comments on social media platforms. However, relying on these fleeting measures of success can lead to disappointment. They often fail to fulfill our deeper

emotional needs and can leave us feeling more inadequate than before. The question we must ask ourselves is does this pursuit truly lead to genuine self-acceptance and love?

### **What is self-love really about?**

Self-love is fundamentally the acceptance of who you are and what you are, devoid of self-judgment or criticism. It goes beyond merely boosting your confidence; rather, it is “a state of appreciation for oneself that grows from actions that support our physical, psychological, and spiritual growth”. This means that self-love encompasses taking deliberate steps to nurture and care for your body, mind, and spirit.

Self-love involves recognizing your inherent value as a human being, understanding that you are deserving of love, respect, and kindness—not only from others but also from yourself. It

encourages individuals to set healthy boundaries, prioritize their needs, and cultivate a positive inner dialogue.

**"Self-love weaves a magical thread through the tapestry of our lives, transforming the way we perceive ourselves and interact with the world around us. It fosters a deep sense of self-worth and respect, mirroring the respect we seek from those we encounter. Embracing self-love does not equate to arrogance; rather, it signifies a healthy mindset**

**grounded in reality. It's not about striving for unattainable perfection but about celebrating our authentic selves, with all our strengths and imperfections. When we nurture ourselves, we thrive in ways that we never thought possible, just like a flower that flourishes when its roots are nourished. By shifting our focus inward, we liberate ourselves from the dependency on external validation, realizing that we have the power to 'water' our own growth. The deeper our self-love, the less tolerance we have for negativity and disrespect in our lives, allowing us to cultivate a supportive environment filled with positivity and genuine connections."**

When one practices self-love, it has a transformative effect on various aspects of life.

Relationships tend to flourish as you engage with others from a place of self-acceptance and respect, thereby fostering deeper connections. Furthermore, your overall well-being experiences a significant boost; mental clarity improves, stress levels decrease, and emotional resilience increases. Ultimately, self-love is a vital foundation for a fulfilling and balanced life.

Remember, you are profoundly unique. Only you and no one else on this vast planet—know what it truly means to traverse the landscape of your life, to navigate the intricate paths that shape your experiences

and perceptions. Your DNA is a singular blueprint, and your thoughts, feelings, and personal narratives form a tapestry that is entirely yours. Embrace the truth that you are complete just as you are, and recognize that you are enough, exactly as you exist in this moment. Take a moment to reflect deeply: do you treat yourself with the same kindness, compassion, and understanding that flow so naturally when directed toward your loved ones? Often, when we lack awareness of our own completeness and exceptional nature, we fail to acknowledge that we are deserving of the same love, praise, respect, and validation that we so readily offer to our closest friends and family members. Learning to love oneself is not merely a fleeting emotion; it is a transformative journey that requires a fundamental shift in how we view and treat ourselves each day.

Unconditional self-love is about wholeheartedly embracing what makes you distinctive and celebrating your unique strengths—those remarkable qualities that set you apart from others. However, just as crucial is the ability to approach your flaws with gentleness, extending to yourself the grace to be imperfect and flawed, much like every human being. This journey of self-love opens the door to liberation from the burdens of self-criticism, unhealthy habits, and the heavy shackles of shame. Each of us holds intrinsic value, whether we are a gifted writer crafting stories that resonate, a painter splashing vibrant colors, a

dedicated physician healing others, a soulful musician stirring emotions, a nurturing teacher guiding minds, an inquisitive scientist unraveling mysteries, a passionate student absorbing knowledge, or a loving parent cherishing every moment. We each deserve love, simply for the mere fact of our humanity. Love is not a privilege bestowed upon those who achieve greatness; rather, it is a primal gift of life that resides inherently within each of us, waiting to be recognized and embraced. Picture the vivid image of a child precariously dangling from the edge of a cliff, clinging with only one hand—how much raw strength and unwavering determination would that child summon in the face of danger to save their life? This poignant scenario illuminates a powerful truth: it is not only possible but vital to cultivate that same fierce, unwavering love for yourself. Embrace your extraordinary journey, and allow yourself the same intensity of love and compassion that you would wholeheartedly extend to someone you hold dear. In this way, you can truly honor your unique existence and the incredible being that you are.

**“Rise above the need for external validation and create a life that honors your unique spirit. By loving, encouraging and prioritizing yourself, you will unlock a profound sense of happiness and self – fulfillment.”**

**“Love yourself profoundly and acknowledge your self – worth by saying, God is truly ingenious. I**

**mean , just look at me. You will radiate confidence differently and never require anyone else's compliments".**

Self-love is the cornerstone of a joyful and fulfilling existence, influencing every aspect of our lives. It equips us with the confidence to trust in our own decisions and instincts, enabling us to embrace our unique identities without fear. This essential practice also empowers us to establish healthy boundaries, ensuring that even our closest relationships respect our needs and values. Moreover, self-love cultivates the courage to live authentically, expressing ourselves openly and truthfully in a world that often encourages conformity.

Yet, let's acknowledge a harsh reality: many of us grapple with self-doubt, pervasive low self-esteem, and an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. The internal dialogues we hold, shaped by past experiences and negative beliefs, often drown out our innate self-worth. The incessant pressure to meet societal standards—whether in terms of appearance, success, or social status—further complicates our journey toward self-acceptance. We find ourselves constantly questioning our worth, engaging in futile comparisons with those around us, and, in the process, we may forget that we deserve the same love, compassion, and kindness that we so readily extend to others. By confronting these challenges and nurturing a deeper



sense of self-love, we can unlock the potential to truly embrace who we are.

Treating yourself with kindness and love sets a powerful example, teaching others how to approach you with care and consideration. Opt for relationships with those who genuinely choose you. Transforming yourself to fit someone else's desires may not only drive them away; it could lead you to lose sight of who you truly are. The urge to pursue individuals who show little interest is a form of self-betrayal that stifles your spirit. By prioritizing self-love and embracing your uniqueness, you naturally draw in connections that are based on mutual respect and appreciation. This shift in focus enables you to cultivate meaningful relationships that enrich your life.

You are uniquely crafted, with talents, abilities, and experiences that no one else possesses.

Learn to love and appreciate yourself, just as you are. You have everything within you to succeed and live a fulfilling life.

This is your life, and no one else can live it for you. So, take ownership of your journey. Find joy in the little things each day, and you'll discover beauty in everything.

“The most important relationship you will ever cultivate is the one you have with yourself. This foundational bond influences every other connection in your life. It’s essential to trust your instincts and

decisions, allowing yourself the confidence to navigate challenges. Motivate yourself to pursue your goals, no matter how large or small they may seem. When faced with obstacles, remember to take your own advice, utilizing the wisdom you've gained from your experiences.

In moments of doubt or despair, be your own source of inspiration; encourage yourself to see the light at the end of the tunnel and visualize a brighter future. When sadness creeps in, take the time to pick yourself up, acknowledging your feelings while also reminding yourself of your resilience and strength. Engage in conversations with yourself, fostering an inner dialogue that maintains positivity and reflection. Most importantly, wholeheartedly believe in yourself and your abilities, as this self-assurance is the key to unlocking your true potential.”

There is so much freedom in taking nothing personal.

Someone doesn't like you? Okay.

Someone is judging you? So what?

Someone doesn't want to be a part of your life anymore? Say bye to them and forget.

Too much time is spent worrying about what others think of us, when in reality you are the creator of your own life.

The relationship you cultivate with yourself is undoubtedly the most significant connection you'll

ever have in your life. It serves as the foundation upon which every other relationship, whether personal or professional, is constructed. No matter how much love, attention, or validation you receive from family, friends, or colleagues, it can never fully fulfill you unless you first learn to truly love and accept yourself.

Self-love isn't about striving for perfection or constantly feeling elated; rather, it's about treating yourself with kindness, understanding, and respect—even in moments of failure or disappointment. When you acknowledge your imperfections and embrace them, you foster a deeper connection with your true self. The way you perceive yourself profoundly influences your interactions and relationships with the world around you.

When you place value on your own worth, you're more likely to attract positive, healthy relationships, because you establish and communicate the standard for how you expect to be treated by others.

Building a strong, loving relationship with yourself creates a sense of inner peace and unwavering confidence that external circumstances cannot diminish. This self-assuredness enables you to confront challenges with resilience, equips you to overcome obstacles, and encourages an ongoing commitment to personal growth and self-improvement.

Your worth isn't dictated by the perceptions of others, but by your own self-assessment and appreciation. Therefore, it's essential to dedicate time to nurturing your inner self, trusting in your abilities, and celebrating the unique qualities that make you who you are. When you cultivate genuine self-love, the world transforms into a brighter, more welcoming place, and as a result, every other relationship in your life has the opportunity to thrive and flourish. Embracing this journey of self-discovery and acceptance not only enriches your life but also enhances your ability to connect meaningfully with those around you.

“We spend so much of our lives searching for love in all the wrong places, don't we? Whether it's through our relationships with friends, siblings, and relatives, in fleeting moments of happiness like a night out or a spontaneous adventure, or in material possessions that we think will fill the emptiness we feel, we often overlook the one place where love truly resides: within ourselves. If we can't be loyal to ourselves and genuinely appreciate our own worth, how can we expect others to value us in the same way? It's essential to nurture our self-esteem and practice self-compassion. Nowadays, when we confide in others about our struggles, we often seek solace and understanding, only to find that many people don't listen with the intent to truly help us overcome our challenges. Instead, they may listen just to feel better

about their own lives, or to gain a sense of satisfaction from knowing that we experience pain. This lack of authentic connection can leave us feeling even more isolated and misunderstood, highlighting the urgent need to cultivate love and acceptance from within.”

To fall in love with yourself is the first and most essential secret to achieving true happiness. Embrace the unique journey of your life and celebrate every aspect of who you are. Nobody knows the intricate battles you face and the strength it takes to be you. Constantly remind yourself, “I am mine before I am ever anyone else’s.” This affirmation reinforces your individuality and self-worth. The way you perceive and think about yourself directly impacts the choices you make in your life. Instead of sinking into negative self-talk such as, “I am unworthy,” “I can’t do this,” or “I will never move on from this,” shift your focus to recognizing your growth and resilience. Acknowledge how far you’ve come; even the smallest steps matter. Instead of dwelling on limitations, tell yourself powerful affirmations: “I can do this. Even if I fall, I have the strength to get back up and try again. This difficult moment is just a chapter in my life; it is not the conclusion of my journey.” Embrace the mindset of transforming “I can’t” into “I can,” and witness how this shift fosters significant, positive changes in your life forever. Life is fundamentally about exploring who you are, cultivating trust within yourself, and actively creating the version of yourself that you aspire

to be. Ask yourself, why is it necessary to seek validation and approval from others? The real challenge lies in proving your worth to yourself. You owe it to yourself to pursue your dreams and aspirations—not to others, but to honor your own potential and journey.

If we truly loved ourselves, we wouldn't settle for anything less than what we genuinely deserve. We would refuse to allow negativity or toxic influences into our lives, instead surrounding ourselves with positivity and support. Our self-respect would be a radiant crown upon our heads, a visual representation of the high esteem in which we hold ourselves. Anyone who offers us less than what our crown symbolizes—true respect, love, and appreciation—would find themselves swiftly removed from our lives, as we prioritize our well-being. Self-love sharpens our intuition, guiding us away from people who detract from our happiness and growth. It empowers us to set and enforce healthy boundaries, preventing us from welcoming harmful behaviors or negative energies that undermine our self-worth. By embracing self-love, we learn to identify and reject empty promises and half-hearted attempts at affection, recognizing that we deserve authenticity and sincerity in our relationships. This proactive approach shields us from unnecessary heartache and allows us to focus on nurturing our own needs and desires, ultimately directing us toward fulfilling and nourishing connections. When we

prioritize ourselves, we cultivate a life free from toxicity, inviting only those who truly uplift and support us.

Self-love isn't about striving for perfection; it's about embracing your authentic self. It's the intentional choice to nurture your heart, mind, and soul each day, even when you're feeling low or overwhelmed. Loving yourself means committing to your own well-being and showing up for yourself daily, ensuring you prioritize your mental and emotional health. Learn to appreciate solitude. You don't need a companion for every single experience; instead, discover the joy that comes with doing things independently. Challenge yourself to go to the gym alone, where you can focus on your workouts without distractions. Consider taking a solo trip to your favorite café, where you can savor your meal at your own pace and indulge in your thoughts or a good book. Enjoy a meal at that restaurant you've always loved, relishing each bite while soaking in the ambiance around you. Getting comfortable with your own thoughts—especially the positive ones—is an integral part of self-discovery. Reflect on your experiences, aspirations, and dreams without the influence of others. This self-management leads to a clearer mind, helping you find clarity in situations that may have once felt overwhelming. You'll learn how to be productive on your own terms, allowing you to develop a sense of autonomy. Stop relying on others to shape your life's activities.

Venture out to unexplored places and enjoy the freedom of discovering new environments at your own convenience. This independence is crucial; it teaches resilience and fosters personal growth while building your confidence in making decisions. Each new experience is a valuable lesson in understanding yourself better, revealing strengths and passions you may not have recognized before. Taking that leap may seem daunting, but remember: being alone does not equate to being lonely. Instead, it's an empowering journey toward self-reliance and inner strength. Embrace the solitude as a powerful tool for self-exploration and personal development.





## CHAPTER 2

### Dare to Love yourself

No other love, no matter how sincere or profound, can truly fulfill one's heart as profoundly as the unwavering embrace of unconditional self-love. So continue to carve out dedicated time for yourself until you rediscover your true essence and vibrant spirit.

Always remember **“To fall deeply in love with yourself, with all your flaws and strengths, is the first secret to unlocking genuine happiness and contentment.”**

We should dare to love ourselves first, as it is crucial for our overall well-being and personal growth. Embracing self-love helps us to recognize and appreciate our inherent worth. It is about accepting ourselves just as we are, without constantly yearning for change. Self-love is the practice of being comfortable in our own skin, allowing ourselves to

experience every pain and worry from the past and the future without letting them define us. It involves achieving a state of total acceptance of our current life circumstances, acknowledging where we are without becoming mired in dissatisfaction. This doesn't imply a lack of desire for improvement; rather, it's about being at peace with our present situation, even when that situation is less than ideal.

It's essential to shift our focus away from perceived flaws. Remember, everyone has imperfections, and those flaws are part of what makes us uniquely human. Embrace yourself as a complex being who is navigating life and its challenges. The concept of responsibility may seem overwhelming at times, but it doesn't have to be. Instead of getting consumed by it, prioritize and take care of the essential tasks that impact your day-to-day life. Simple routines, like getting out of bed, showering, and dressing well, can significantly boost your mood and confidence, ensuring you feel good about stepping outside.

It's important not to dwell on the judgments of others. When you walk down the street or travel on public transportation, remember that strangers will quickly shift their focus elsewhere. Concentrate on your current goals, no matter how small they may seem. Each step you take can lead to positive outcomes, particularly for things you genuinely care about, making it easier to excel in those areas.

Moreover, be mindful of your energy. Invest your time and resources into what truly matters to you, while reserving minimal energy for things that hold little significance. Nourish your body with healthy meals at least once a day, recognizing that just as your body needs to be clean on the outside, it also deserves wholesome foods internally. Avoid filling yourself with too much junk—both physically and mentally.

By integrating these fundamental principles into your daily life, you will undoubtedly begin to feel more valuable. This self-worth will facilitate the journey toward making every aspect of your life easier and more fulfilling. You have the power to create a positive change within yourself by simply choosing to prioritize self-love and acceptance.

We often yearn for the comforting presence of those who love us; however, we frequently overlook the most consistent companion we have—ourselves. No one understands us quite like we understand ourselves. We are intimately aware of our own preferences, the activities that spark joy within us, and those that bring us down. With this self-awareness at our disposal, why do we continue to seek love and validation from others? The truth is, our own company can provide the deepest fulfillment. When we place expectations on others to meet our emotional needs, we set ourselves up for disappointment. People are inherently imperfect and will inevitably let us down. In contrast, we have a

unique ability to nurture and support ourselves, ensuring we are never truly alone in our journey.

Life is a singular experience—each of us enters this world on our own and will leave it the same way. This realization invites us to consider why we might feel the need for external validation to navigate our lives. Why not cultivate the courage to love ourselves fiercely and appreciate every fleeting moment in this world? When we embark on a journey of self-admiration and personal growth, we can illuminate our lives with a unique glow that attracts positivity. This life belongs to us, and we must embrace the role of its owner fully. Surrendering that ownership to others can lead to disappointment and disillusionment. Just as respect must be earned through actions and integrity, love too must be cultivated—it is not simply something we receive for free. Only when we learn to love ourselves wholeheartedly can we truly open ourselves to the love and admiration of others. In recognizing our worth and treating ourselves with kindness, we lay the groundwork for deeper connections and more meaningful relationships with those around us.

### **Steps to Achieving Total Self-Love**

Even if you don't feel particularly powerful, take a moment to reflect on your journey. Consider how far you've come and the countless obstacles you've navigated to arrive at this moment. You're here, alive,

and inherently powerful beyond what you may recognize. Embrace patience with yourself, as growth takes time.

### **1. Stop Comparing Yourself to Others**

In our society, competition is deeply ingrained in us. It's only human to compare our lives with those of others, but this habit can lead to feelings of inadequacy and frustration. Remember, there is only one you with a unique path. Instead of measuring your worth against someone else's success, redirect your focus towards your own journey and personal growth. This simple shift in perspective can unburden your spirit and foster a sense of freedom.

### **2. Don't worry About Others' Opinions**

It's easy to become preoccupied with societal expectations and the opinions of others. Remember, it's impossible to please everyone, and trying to do so can derail you from your path to becoming your best self. Embrace your individuality and pursue what makes you happy without being shackled by others' judgments.

### **3. Allow Yourself to Make Mistakes**

From a young age, we're conditioned to strive for perfection, but the truth is, everyone makes mistakes — and that's part of being human. Give yourself permission to err, as it's through these experiences that we learn and grow. Each misstep shapes your journey

and contributes to your evolution. Let go of the incessant need to be flawless; every mistake is a valuable lesson waiting to be grasped.

#### **4. Remember Your Value Doesn't Lie in Your Appearance**

This is a fundamental truth that is often overshadowed by societal pressures. Your worth is defined not by your physical appearance but by who you are as a person. Challenge the internalized messages that make you feel inadequate. Wear what makes you feel confident and comfortable, regardless of trends or expectations, and reclaim your sense of self-worth.

#### **5. Don't Be Afraid to Let Go of Toxic People**

Toxic relationships can drain your energy and stunt your personal growth. If you find that someone consistently brings negativity into your life and refuses to acknowledge the impact of their behavior, it might be time to distance yourself. This act of self-care is not selfish; rather, it is a crucial step in protecting your emotional well-being and creating a nurturing environment for yourself.

#### **6. Process Your Fears**

Fear is a natural part of the human experience. Instead of pushing your fears away, lean into them and strive to understand their origins. Engaging with your fears can help clarify what truly matters to you and reveal underlying issues that cause anxiety. This critical self-

reflection can provide you with insight and ultimately alleviate stress.

## **7. Trust Yourself to Make Good Decisions**

Self-doubt can easily cloud our judgment, but deep down, you often know what's best for yourself. Remember that your feelings and insights are valid. Cultivate the confidence to advocate for your needs and make choices that align with your authentic self.

## **8. Take Every Opportunity Life Presents or Create Your Own**

Life's timing may never feel perfect for the next big step you wish to take. However, don't let fear of imperfections prevent you from seizing opportunities. Take initiative and create the moments you desire, as they may not always present themselves again. Embrace both the challenges and the possibilities that come your way.

## **9. Put Yourself First**

Women, in particular, are often conditioned to prioritize others before themselves. While there are times for selflessness, make it a priority to care for your own mental and emotional health. Dedicate time to recharge, whether that means enjoying solitude, spending time in nature, or indulging in your favorite activities. Recognizing your needs is essential to maintaining balance in your life.

## **10. Feel Pain and Joy as Fully as You Can**

Life is a spectrum of emotions. Embrace your feelings, whether they bring pain or joy. Allow yourself to fully experience these emotions rather than suppressing them. Understanding the depth of your feelings can lead to greater self-awareness and will help you realize that your emotions do not define your entirety.

## **11. Exercise Boldness in Public**

Speaking your mind is a skill that can be developed. Boldness acts like a muscle; the more you practice it, the stronger it becomes. Don't wait for permission to express your thoughts or take a place at the table. Join discussions, share your ideas, and take action, knowing that your voice is just as valid and essential as anyone else's. **12. See Beauty in the Simple Things**

Make it a point to notice at least one beautiful thing in your surroundings each day, whether it's the vibrant colors of nature or a simple act of kindness. Take a moment to appreciate it and express gratitude. This conscious practice cultivates a sense of joy and perspective, enhancing your overall well-being.

## **13. Always be Kind to yourself**

In a world often filled with harsh critiques, ensure that you're not perpetuating negativity towards yourself. Speak to yourself as you would to a friend — with compassion and encouragement. Acknowledge your



achievements, both big and small, and celebrate your personal growth often, not just on special occasions.

Self-love is a gradual journey that unfolds over time. You may face struggles along the way, but when you reflect on these experiences, you'll recognize them as stepping stones toward becoming your best self. Remember, each day is an opportunity for growth and affirmation of your inherent worth.

### **This is Your Journey**

Finding self-love is an intricate journey that unfolds over time. Like any other existential path, this one presents a myriad of challenges, setbacks, and transformative opportunities for growth and healing. It is completely normal to encounter difficulties and make mistakes along the way. During this transformative process, you may also face negative feedback or criticism from others who may not understand your journey. It's crucial to remember that self-love is a transformational process, and experiencing doubts or struggles is a normal part of it. Approach yourself with kindness and gentleness as you navigate this intricate landscape. Be open to what resonates with you and find inspiration in the possibility of envisioning another way of being.

Self-love is fundamentally about recognizing and accepting your inherent worth and value as a unique human being. It involves cultivating a deep sense of self-respect and self-acceptance, which is reinforced

by a conscious commitment to caring for and nourishing your overall well-being—both physically and emotionally. Importantly, self-love does not feed into the ego or foster self-aggrandizement; it does not place you on a pedestal above others nor diminish their worth. Rather, it means acknowledging that your needs and well-being are just as important as those of the people around you. This recognition prompts you to take intentional and conscious steps to prioritize and nurture yourself amidst life's demands.

Self-love is essential for cultivating a healthy, fulfilling life, serving as the foundation for developing a loving relationship with yourself. However, the journey toward finding self-love doesn't necessarily begin with actively seeking it out; it isn't a destination you can find, but rather an ongoing process of evolution and self-discovery where patience, compassion, and understanding are imperative. To embark on this journey, you must develop a sincere willingness to learn, grow, and evolve.

Each person's journey is unique, with its own set of challenges and revelations, yet it is profoundly rewarding. The initial step on this path involves identifying and dismantling the barriers you have constructed within and around yourself. These barriers can take many forms—such as pervasive self-doubt, negative self-perception, or limiting beliefs—each acting as an obstacle to fully embracing your worth. By addressing and breaking down these barriers, you

allow yourself the opportunity to foster self-love and open the door to a more compassionate and joyful existence.

The best thing you can do for yourself today is to embrace kindness. It's all too common to be overly critical, especially during moments when life deviates from your expectations. Remember, the most significant relationship you will ever have is the one with yourself. Treat yourself with the love, patience, and grace you deserve. Acknowledge that you are doing your best, and that effort is more than enough.

You are worthy of the same compassion that you readily extend to others. Sometimes, it's the smallest things that carry the most weight in our daily lives. Take a moment to appreciate the way your morning coffee envelops you in warmth, those fleeting quiet moments where you can gather your thoughts, and the little victories that accumulate into something substantial over time. Even on days that feel mundane, recognize that you are contributing to a life rich in meaning.

Continue to show up for yourself, taking each challenge one step at a time. Life may often consist of routines, but it's within those routines that you are laying the groundwork for a life filled with strength, growth, and purpose. Even in the simplest of moments, you are doing great.

You are doing amazing work, even when it feels like progress is elusive. Remember that not all growth is marked by significant leaps; oftentimes, it's the small, steady steps that create the most profound impact. Each challenge you encounter is an opportunity for you to evolve into a stronger and wiser version of yourself.

Trust that during the tougher days, you are exactly where you need to be, learning and growing. Keep pushing forward and have faith in your potential, for you are capable of far more than you might ever realize. You've got this—and brighter days lie ahead.

Moreover, it's crucial to understand that other people's opinions of you don't have to dictate your reality. You are not annoying just because someone feels annoyed; you are not wrong solely based on someone's disagreement with you; you are not unlikable merely because a few people don't mesh with your personality. You are a complex individual, far too intricate to be defined by the biased and subjective opinions of others—and it's vital that you don't allow their views to shape your self-worth. Remember, you are much more than anyone's fleeting judgment.

Each of us holds the key to our own experiences, shaping the tapestry of our lives through our thoughts and perceptions. Every moment we live is woven with possibilities, and the true point of power resides in the present—where transformation begins. Beneath the

surface, many of us grapple with feelings of self-doubt and guilt, often echoing the relentless mantra, “I’m not good enough.” However, it’s vital to realize that these sentiments are merely thoughts, and as our minds are capable of creating them, they can also transform them.

We are the architects of our own well-being, conjuring every so-called illness that manifests in our bodies. Patterns of resentment, criticism, and guilt can become deeply entrenched, yet by releasing the grips of the past and embracing forgiveness—both for ourselves and others—we can embark on a journey toward self-love. The foundations of self-approval and self-acceptance, nurtured in the present moment, serve as the gateways to profound positive change. When we truly learn to love ourselves, we unlock the potential for everything in our lives to flourish.

Life, at its core, is beautifully simple. The energy we put into the world is reflected back to us, echoing our thoughts in tangible ways. What we conceive about ourselves shapes our reality—both the joy and the suffering. I believe that each individual, myself included, bears responsibility for every facet of our lives, celebrating the highs and confronting the lows alike. Each thought is a building block of our future, manifesting into the experiences we either cherish or endure.

We create our realities through the thoughts we entertain and the words we express. The scenarios we encounter are not separate from us; rather, we often relinquish our power by blaming external circumstances or people for our frustrations. No individual, location, or object holds sway over us—ultimately, we are the sole thinkers of our lives. When we cultivate peace, harmony, and balance within our minds, we will begin to see those same qualities flourish in our outward experiences.

Life may seem unpredictable, but one truth remains certain: we all have an expiration date. The only mystery lies in the timing of our departure from this world and our eventual return to our Creator. In the meantime, embrace the love within yourself. Don't wait for others to affirm your worth; be the source of warmth and compassion that inspires others to believe in the power of beautiful souls, kind hearts, and positive energy.

Always strive to remain a good person, even when the world around you attempts to harden your spirit. In a time when so many individuals are losing their sense of kindness, your light holds immense significance. Even if it feels like your efforts go unnoticed, understand that someone, somewhere, acknowledges the goodness you bring into their life. They cherish the memory of your kindness, and it offers them hope on dark days.

Being a good person doesn't mean you won't experience moments of feeling unappreciated or heartbreak. But despite those feelings, you choose to be kind. You consciously decide to nurture love within yourself and extend it to others. That inner strength is a rare gift, and it's precisely what makes you extraordinary. Continue to show up in the world with love, understanding, and patience; it is essential now more than ever.

There are countless people who will remember the small yet profound moments you shared—how you made them smile unexpectedly, how your attentive listening made them feel heard, and how your comforting presence provided them solace during tough times. These seemingly minor gestures are anything but small; they encompass everything meaningful in human connection. So remain genuine in your interactions. Give love freely, without the expectation of receiving it back in the same measure. You are planting seeds of kindness in people's hearts, even during quiet moments.

The world is in desperate need of individuals who preserve their soft-heartedness, regardless of the struggles they've faced. Let your presence be a reminder to others that kindness is not just possible, but vital. That empathy still holds significance, and that a truly good soul can illuminate even the darkest of days.

One day, someone may approach you and say, “Because of you, I didn’t give up on kindness. You taught me the importance of self-love and the joy of simply existing.” When that moment arrives, know that it will mean more than anything else; it will be a testament to the impact you’ve made and the light you’ve shared.

**“When you truly embrace and love yourself, you set a powerful example for those around you showing them how to value and appreciate you in return. This Self-Love cultivates an environment where healthy relationships can flourish, as it teaches others to recognize your worth, respect your boundaries, and reciprocate the kindness and compassion you offer”.**





## **CHAPTER : 3**

### **Raindrops and Family Bonds**

Kainat was deeply engrossed in her studies, as it was Sunday, and she had a Biology class test scheduled for the following day. However, the soothing sound of rain gently tapping against the window soon captured her attention. The melody of raindrops had always enchanted her, evoking memories of her childhood spent splashing in puddles and inhaling the rich, earthy scent of wet mud that filled the air whenever it rained. Unable to resist the allure of the rain, she decided to take a break and slipped out to the balcony with her biology textbook in hand. Settling comfortably into a wicker chair, she stretched her arms out, attempting to catch the cool, silvery droplets as they fell. With her eyes closed, she allowed herself to drift into a vivid imagination of dancing joyfully in the rain, feeling truly alive and carefree. Just then, her brother Kiyan's warm voice interrupted her reverie. He was calling out

to her, offering a mug filled with his famous coffee. Kiyān had perfected the art of making coffee, a blend so aromatic and rich that it was adored not only by Kainat but also by their parents. He was not just her elder brother, six years older than her, but also her closest confidant and friend, with whom she shared countless adventures and secrets. As he approached her, balancing two steaming cups, Kainat's eyes lit up. She eagerly took one mug from him, thanking him with a bright smile that reflected her affection. Within moments, their parents joined them on the balcony, eager to share in the cozy ambiance brought about by the rain. The family shared stories and laughter as they enjoyed the moment together, creating lasting memories. Kainat turned to her dad, expressing how much joy the rain brought her. "It just makes me so happy! I feel so refreshed after studying all night," she exclaimed, her face radiating contentment. She cherished these moments—she believed that time spent with family was invaluable, a treasure that surpassed all material joys. Sipping her coffee, she stood up and inched closer to the railing. She inhaled deeply, savoring the intoxicating smell of the wet earth. "See, bhai, this fresh scent of mud is my absolute favorite! Right now, I feel an overwhelming urge to dance in the rain and taste that mud!" she declared with enthusiasm.

Kiyān chuckled, shaking his head fondly at her playful spirit. "Then go ahead and dance, but remember, you

always catch a cold when you get wet, you delicate girl,” he replied with a teasing smile. Kainat, undeterred, shot him a cheeky grin. “I’m not worried about getting sick; I just don’t want to miss my test tomorrow! Otherwise, I’d be out there in a heartbeat!” Her passion echoed in the air, a blend of determination and joy, as she watched the rain continue to fall, each drop reflecting her vivid imagination and zest for life.

She had always taken her studies seriously, diving deep into her textbooks and notes as if they were treasures waiting to be uncovered. Even when there was a small class test looming, she would buckle down, turning every page with determination to ensure she achieved the highest marks. Losing even a single mark felt like a punch to the gut, leaving her disheartened. Her family was compact but filled with warmth—her mom, dad, and older brother made up her world. Her father, Faheem Ahmad, was a dedicated engineer who spent his days solving complex problems, while her mother, Nahida, inspired students as a passionate teacher in one of the govt school’s in Srinagar, Kashmir. Her brother, currently pursuing an MBBS degree in Turkey, was often miles away, but whenever he returned home for vacations, their time together brought her immense happiness. He had a knack for playfully teasing her, which always led to laughter, but she was also quick to feel emotional over small things. Yet, even the simplest acts of kindness—from a comforting word to a shared

joke—could turn her sadness into joy. After hours of focused studying, she found herself drained and decided it was time for a well-deserved break. Sometimes, just lounging around with family felt like an energy boost, refreshing her spirit. At the halfway point in her 10th-grade year, her brother suggested they sit down together for a chat. He shared some insightful tips on how to tackle the upcoming final board exams, breaking down challenging topics into manageable chunks. Though she excelled academically, having her brother guide her felt comforting; it was a reminder of their bond and his genuine wish for her to reach new heights.

As they tossed around study ideas, the tempting aroma of onion pakoras frying in their kitchen wafted through the air. Their mom, with her signature touch, was preparing a steaming pot of ginger tea—perfect for cozying up on a rainy day. When she called them to the table, their dad couldn't help but feel a wave of emotion as he watched his children interact. He turned to Kiyan with a heartfelt smile and said, "I truly admire how you both discuss things so openly. Always treasure your sister. She misses you dearly when you're in Turkey." Kiyan looked at his dad, his eyes sincere, and replied, "Dad, I promise I'll never change. She's not just my sister—she's like a daughter to me. I really miss her too, and I'm thankful to Mom for raising such a wonderful girl." Their dad beamed with pride, saying, "That's exactly the kind of brotherly

bond I hope for. Always be there for her, no matter where life takes you.” Kiyan nodded firmly, “I will, Dad.” Just then, their mom jumped in with a cheerful tone, “Oh, don’t get too emotional! Let’s focus on the delicious tea and pakoras I made with so much love!” In perfect unison, both Kainat and Kiyan exclaimed, “Mom, your tea and pakoras are amazing! Thank you!” Kiyan’s dad glanced at Nahida, clearly admiring her cooking skills, and added, “Honestly, your mom is the best cook. No one can compete with her.” Mom laughed lightly and said, “Oh really? Well, it’s not just raining outside; it seems to be pouring compliments as well! I’m so happy you all enjoy my cooking. It really makes my heart swell with joy.”

In today’s fast-paced world, where technological advancements dominate our lives, it often feels like many have become prisoners to their mobile phones and the relentless tide of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

Gone are the days when a simple phone call to check on a friend or loved one was the norm. Instead, people now opt for quick messages on WhatsApp. If a friend responds, they are quickly deemed "alright"; if they don’t, they fade into obscurity, as if their silence warrants little concern. These digital exchanges often serve more as a formality rather than a genuine inquiry into someone’s well-being. Reflecting on the past, it’s easy to see how relationships have shifted. People would confide their deepest problems to trusted friends

or family members, leaning on one another for support. Nowadays, however, it seems that sharing personal struggles has become a public affair—many prefer to air their grievances on social media threads, seeking validation from strangers rather than solace from those closest to them. Platforms like Snapchat have turned sending spontaneous snapshots into a widespread trend, further detaching us from authentic moments. Even during family gatherings, the scene can be disheartening: individuals lost in their own worlds, their eyes glued to screens, scrolling through the endless feeds of Instagram reels or engaging with Facebook updates. The truth is, social media often portrays a curated version of life, one that is more façade than reality. The real treasures in life lie in the connections we nurture with family and friends—relationships that are rich, meaningful, and irreplaceable. Time is an ever-elusive element; it ceaselessly marches on, never pausing for anyone. Once it slips away, the regret of missed moments lingers like a shadow. Kainat, however, recognized the profound value of her family. She consistently prioritized spending quality time with them, fully aware that these moments would become cherished memories. While diligently pursuing her studies, she would only borrow her mom's phone when she needed to look up specific topics on Google, keeping her focus on the people who mattered most. Her actions reflected a deep appreciation for the irreplaceable bonds she shared with her loved ones, showcasing the

importance of nurturing those connections amidst a world driven by digital distraction.

Faheem Ahmad, Kainat's father, often found himself buried in the demands of his official duties, his days filled with meetings and deadlines that left little room for relaxation. Yet, whenever he managed to escape the clutches of work and return home, he made it a priority to immerse himself in the warmth of family life. Those moments were precious to him, brimming with laughter, stories, and shared experiences that strengthened their bond. He frequently reminded his son, Kiyan, of the importance of their sibling relationship. With a gentle yet firm voice, he advised Kiyan never to alter himself for Kainat. Faheem was acutely aware of the transient nature of sibling bonds, especially as life unfolded. He understood that as siblings grew older and embarked on their own journeys—often culminating in marriage—their priorities could shift dramatically. One moment, they were inseparable playmates; the next, they could become distant echoes, caught up in the whirlwind of partners and the responsibilities of their new families. The thought of Kainat and Kiyan drifting apart filled Faheem with a sense of urgency. He envisioned a world where his children would support each other, no matter the circumstances life might throw their way. His hope was that Kainat and Kiyan would nurture their relationship, carrying the heartwarming connection they forged during their childhood into

adulthood. He yearned for them to understand that the bond between siblings is not just a fleeting phase but a lifelong treasure, one that brings solace, laughter, and unwavering support through the ever-evolving journey of life.

The moments shared between family members often create deep connections and lasting memories that bridge the gap across generations. For Kainat, the bond she shared with her father and brother was profoundly special, overshadowing her relationship with her mother. She would eagerly share snippets of her school life with them, cherishing those moments of connection. In her eyes, her father was not just a parent but her very first male friend, while her brother held the position of her second. At school, Kainat was quite reserved. She had a singular close friend, Shifa, who she thought understood her well. In a co-educational setting, where the dynamics between boys and girls could often be complicated, Kainat chose to keep her distance from the boys in her class. Despite her quiet demeanor, her classmates misread her reserved nature; they often labeled her as proud or even rude. However, Kainat knew that being reserved was not synonymous with arrogance. It pained her to think that others could not see the warmth and kindness she held within. She was, in fact, a girl with a heart of gold. Whenever a classmate found themselves in need, Kainat was always the first to lend a helping hand. Her willingness to assist others was unwavering,



regardless of how they perceived her. Yet, her interactions with boys remained minimal and often curt. Kainat was conscious of the fact that her friendliness might be misconstrued, leading her to feel uncomfortable. To her, her father and brother provided adequate companionship as male friends, and she preferred to focus on what truly mattered to her—her studies.

Kainat approached the concept of friendship with a unique perspective. She believed that while we are chosen by our family through divine will, friendship is something we actively choose ourselves. This belief led her to carefully select friends who resonated with her values and outlook on life. For Kainat, finding those individuals who matched her vibe perfectly was a priority, reinforcing her understanding that true companionship is built on mutual respect and understanding.

The following day, as Kainat stepped into the bustling school hallway, she spotted Shifa chatting with other girls from their class. With a warm smile, Kainat approached them. "Good morning, Shifa! Did you prepare for the biology test?" she asked, her voice laced with eagerness. Shifa turned to her, a hint of disdain in her eyes. "No, I didn't bother," she replied dismissively. "I spent the weekend visiting my uncle and cousins. After all, it's just a class test, and I doubt Sir remembered about it. I don't understand why you're so obsessed with studying. You really need to

find something better to do at home. You're such a bookworm!" The laughter that erupted from the other girls stung Kainat like a sharp jab. Hurt but determined, Kainat responded, "It's important to take this seriously! We need to be prepared for our finals." Shifa rolled her eyes, her tone dripping with sarcasm. "Oh, so you're saying you're the only one who studies in this class? What about the rest of us? Are we not capable?" Kainat quickly interjected, "No, I didn't mean that at all!" Shifa glanced over at the boys sitting a few rows away and shouted, "Hey, has anyone actually prepared for the biology test?" The majority of them nodded in affirmation, causing Shifa to scowl. "Please, don't remind Sir about the test," she urged them playfully, but her anxiety was palpable. One boy hesitated, "But what if Sir knows?" Shifa shrugged nonchalantly. "Then I'll just have to wing it and still manage to score well," she replied with an air of misplaced confidence. Despite Shifa's frequent attempts to belittle her, Kainat remained unfazed, always willing to share her notes and help her understand the material. Many classmates urged Kainat to distance herself from Shifa, cautioning her about the gossip that often circulated, but Kainat chose to overlook their warnings. As the day progressed, the afternoon finally brought them to biology, which was the second-to-last subject before dismissal. The classroom buzzed with anticipation. When their biology teacher Mr Zahid entered, he immediately announced, "I hope you're all ready for your test today

because I'll be administering it in this period and the next!" Kainat's heart raced, her palms sweating slightly with the weight of expectation. Shifa abruptly whispered to Kainat, "Please help me out during the test, okay? I'm counting on you." Kainat nodded, viewing her as a friend despite the tension between them. However, as the teacher called students to their seats by roll number, Kainat, with her roll number 3, found herself seated far from Shifa, who took her place at roll number 26. As the teacher distributed the answer sheets and question papers, Kainat felt a surge of determination. The test paper appeared difficult, filled with intricate diagrams and challenging questions, but she felt ready and confident in her preparation. Meanwhile, Shifa sat frozen, her mind blank as she glanced nervously at her empty page, cursing herself internally for her last-minute decision not to study. Kainat powered through the exam, finishing in record time. She handed her paper to the teacher, a sense of accomplishment washing over her.

As time ticked by, other students gradually submitted their work, but Shifa desperately wrote, her anxiety written all over her face. Just before the teacher collected the final sheets, he issued a stern warning, "I hope you all realize that only a few of you took this test seriously. Tomorrow, I'll return your answer sheets during assembly. Good marks will be rewarded, but those who didn't give their best will face severe consequences." When the bell rang, signaling the end

of the period, Kainat couldn't help but turn to Shifa, concern etched in her features. "How do you think you did?" Kainat asked gently, her voice soft with empathy. Shifa snapped back, her irritation boiling over. "How sad that you're trying to rub salt in my wounds! You know I didn't prepare! Why would you even ask?" Kainat blinked in disbelief, confusion swirling in her mind. "I was just concerned; what's your problem?" Shifa shot back, "Nothing is wrong. I won't stoop to your level," and with that, she turned away, leaving Kainat feeling like a fish out of water—the unfairness of their friendship gnawing at her insides.

As students filed out of the classroom, Kainat stood rooted to her spot, the overwhelming emotions she had kept at bay crashing over her like a tidal wave. Tears began to stream down her cheeks, her heart heavy with the weight of Shifa's unkindness. It wasn't until a peon noticed her lingering in her seat that he gently urged her to leave, reminding her that school had officially ended for the day. When Kainat returned home, her mother and brother greeted her with their typical questions about how her day went. "It was fine," she mumbled, though her brother quickly detected the sadness in her eyes. Following her into her room, he asked with genuine concern, "Why are you sad, Kainat?" Overwhelmed, she hugged him tightly, the tears spilling over as she shared her ordeal—the hurtful words, Shifa's jealousy, and her own feelings

of exclusion. He listened patiently before finally responding, “You did well on your exam, and that’s what truly matters. Shifa’s failure to prepare is her own problem. If she chooses to treat you this way, she isn’t a true friend. You deserve better.” With comforting sincerity, he continued, “If she respects you, give her respect in return, but if she hurts you, it’s okay to maintain some distance. A real friend would never envy your success. Instead, she should strive to uplift you. Now, why don’t you change, and we’ll go out for ice cream? Promise me you won’t cry over someone who doesn’t value you. Your happiness doesn’t depend on anyone else. Don’t give people the power to use you as a doormat.”

Siblings are often our truest companions, bound by blood yet also friends by choice, with a unique connection that can’t be replicated. Kiyan and Kainat exemplified this bond perfectly; they were like two peas in a pod, growing up together with an unbreakable link that went beyond mere family ties. No one knows us as intimately as our siblings do; they have a deep understanding of our personalities because we share the same parents, grow up in the same household, and have the same blood that runs through our veins.

Kainat, however, was mistaken in her perception of Shifa. Shifa didn’t truly grasp Kainat’s essence. Instead, she harbored jealousy and never viewed Kainat as a genuine friend, which colored their

interactions. True friendship is a profound connection between two individuals, filled with unconditional care and affection. It's a relationship where both parties feel a deep sense of loyalty toward one another. Typically, friendships blossom between people with shared interests, passions, and values. Throughout life's journey, we encounter a myriad of individuals, but only a select few remain steadfast, authentic at their core. The foundation of friendship is built on trust, compassion, honesty, and the willingness to make sacrifices for one another. It's a bond that is as monumental as the trust placed in a higher power, as expansive as love, and as invaluable as family ties. Unfortunately, in the case of Kainat and Shifa, their friendship lacked these vital elements. Shifa repeatedly demonstrated her disloyalty, while Kainat continued to extend olive branches and offer second chances, clinging to the hope that their bond could be salvaged.

Kiyan and Kainat decided to treat themselves to ice cream on a warm summer afternoon. As they drove along, the car was filled with the upbeat melodies of their favorite songs, transforming the mundane journey into a joyful adventure. As they savored their cones, Kainat turned to Kiyan with a hint of sadness in her voice. "Bhaiya, after one week you'll be heading back to Turkey, and I'll be all alone here. Dad will be swamped with work, and Mom will be preoccupied with household chores. Sometimes, I just feel so left out."

Kiyan, sensing her distress, wrapped his arms around her in a comforting hug. "My dear sister,"

he reassured her, "I am always just a phone call away. No matter the distance, I'll be there for you." He paused for a moment, collecting his thoughts before continuing, "But remember, it's crucial to let go of the wrong people in your life. Holding onto those who don't truly value you can keep you from experiencing genuine relationships. These wrong people can drain your energy, waste your precious time, and make you feel inadequate. They might lie to you, take advantage of your kindness, or sow doubt in your mind about your worth."

He looked into her eyes earnestly. "As long as you allow them to stay in your life, you won't have the space to welcome those who truly care for you. There are wonderful people out there—people who will respect you, uplift your dreams, and love you for the unique person you are. But you can't find them if you're too busy clinging to those who bring you down."

Kiyan took a deep breath, then added, "Sometimes, letting go is the first step toward discovering something better. It may be painful at first, but it paves the way for true peace, happiness, and meaningful connections. Don't be afraid to walk away from what's not right for you. Only then can what's truly meant for you come into your life."

Kainat couldn't help but smile as she glanced over at her brother, her eyes twinkling with affection. "Alright bhaiya," she announced, a playful determination in her voice, "from now on, I will follow your advice." Kiyan chuckled and replied, "That's more like my sister!" As they continued their journey home, dark clouds gathered overhead, and a heavy rain began to fall, creating a symphony of pitter-patter against the car roof. Kainat eagerly rolled down her window, feeling the cool droplets dance on her skin as she stretched her hand out to catch them. With her face beaming in childlike wonder, she suddenly noticed a cozy little coffee shop just a few steps away. Turning to Kiyan, she exclaimed, "Look, bhaiya! Can we stop for coffee while we wait for the rain to ease? It's really coming down out there, and I know it's tough for you to drive." Kiyan smiled and nodded in agreement. "Sure, let's go!" He deftly maneuvered the car to park along the roadside, and they both hurried into the welcoming warmth of the coffee shop, where the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee enveloped them like a comforting blanket. They settled into a corner table, and Kiyan ordered two frothy cappuccinos paired with delicious chicken sandwiches. As they savored each bite, the blend of flavors created a perfect harmony, enhancing the cozy atmosphere. Kiyan stole a glance at Kainat, who was relishing the moment with a radiant smile that lit up her face. "You know," he said with a warm tone, "you should always keep that smile. It really suits you." Kiyan then leaned back,



reminiscing about their time together, and added, “This will undoubtedly be the best drive of my stay at home.” A hint of nostalgia crept into his voice as he continued, “I’m really going to miss you, especially those moments when I tease you.” Kainat’s expression softened, and she replied, her voice tinged with sincerity, “I’ll miss you too, bhaiya. You have no idea how much you mean to us. When you’re away, home feels so lifeless—everything just seems to lack a spark.” Kiyan reached across the table and smiled reassuringly. “Dear sister, don’t get too emotional. It’s just a matter of one year. InshaAllah, next year I’ll finish my degree, and then I’ll be around all the time, with you, dad and mom.” After they finished their delightful meal, they paid the bill, and Kiyan drove them back home, the rain slowly tapering off.

As they made their way, Kainat looked out at the raindrops still clinging to the windows and said, “Bhaiya, there’s something truly magical about rain. It gives me this calming sensation, and having you here makes it that much better. I know I’ll miss you even more when the next rain comes.” Kiyan couldn’t resist teasing her and joked, “So you’ll miss me, or is it ice cream or coffee?” Kainat grinned mischievously and replied, “All three of you!”

On a cozy afternoon, while raindrops rhythmically tapped against the windowpanes, Mom and Dad sat at the dining table, savoring warm cups of aromatic tea. The atmosphere was filled with the comforting scents

of brewed leaves and freshly baked treats when Kiyan and Kainat entered, their cheeks still flushed from the adventure. Curiosity sparked in their eyes, they asked the siblings where they had ventured off to during the downpour. With a proud grin, Kiyan eagerly explained that he had taken his baby sister for an exciting long drive, splashing through puddles and feeling the thrill of the rain. Mom, always the caring and warm-hearted one, invited them to join her for a cup of tea, hoping to share some pastries and laughter together.

However, Kainat chimed in, her voice full of excitement, that they had just indulged in delicious ice cream, rich coffee, and sandwiches from their favorite café, leaving them completely satiated. Mom, with a hint of playful disappointment, suggested that they could have taken her along for the adventure as well. Kiyan, sensing the longing in her voice, instantly brightened up and promised that next time, they would all embark on a long drive together, creating memories that would last a lifetime, followed by a delightful coffee date. After all, as they say, family isn't just an important aspect of life; it's the very essence of everything.

“Family is a nurturing haven where you can embrace your true self without fear of judgment. It’s a space filled with warmth, where each member is cherished for their unique quirks and traits, and even during conflicts, love prevails. Picture cozy gatherings around the dinner table, filled with laughter and lively

debates, yet always ending in hugs and understanding. In moments of personal struggle, whether facing career setbacks or emotional turmoil, your family stands by you, serving as unwavering pillars of support. They remind you, through their comforting presence and kind words, that no matter the storms you encounter, you are deeply loved and never alone on your journey”.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Friendship's Bitter Truth**

Following day, as Kainat stepped into the bustling corridors of her school, she exchanged cheerful greetings with her classmates. Her eyes fell on her close friend Shifa, who was animatedly conversing with a group of girls from their class. Kainat placed her bag down on her bench with a soft thud, its colorful design contrasting against the plain wood. After gathering their things, Kainat and Shifa joined the line of students heading toward the auditorium, where the familiar sounds of rustling papers and chattering voices filled the air in anticipation of the morning prayer. Once the prayer concluded, the Principal approached the podium, his authoritative voice resonating throughout the auditorium. He began discussing the importance of the upcoming board exams, emphasizing the need for dedication and a serious approach to studies. A wave of nervous energy

pulsed through the students as they listened intently, aware that their futures hinged on these preparations. As the Principal wrapped up his speech, Mr. Zahid, the biology teacher, took the microphone with an air of gravitas. He announced that the results of a recent biology class test would be shared during the assembly, and a ripple of anxiety spread among the students—especially those in the 10th grade. The classroom dynamic shifted as he called out the names of those who had scored poorly, each name feeling like a weighty judgment. When he announced Shifa's name, the murmurs of disbelief echoed softly through the crowd; she had scored a mere 12 out of 50. In stark contrast, five students had emerged as top scorers: Rameez with 35, Bilal with 33, Zubair with 31, Rafiya with 30, and leading them all, Kainat with a remarkable score of 47. Mr. The Zahid beamed with pride as he highlighted Kainat's achievement, urging everyone to applaud her. The sound of clapping resonated warmly in the auditorium, but the joy was bittersweet for some. Kainat, glowing with accomplishment, received a sleek pen and a Cadbury chocolate as a reward, while the other successful students were handed Dairy Milk bars as well. However, the atmosphere shifted abruptly as Mr. Zahid turned to address those who had performed poorly. He chastised them sternly, and the Principal joined in, delivering a scathing reprimand that left them feeling humiliated in front of their peers. Laughter bubbled up among the other students, their

amusement cutting deep into Shifa, who sat there with furrowed brows, the sting of failure washing over her like a cold wave. As congratulations circled around Kainat, turning her moment of glory into a celebratory affair, she couldn't ignore the sight of Shifa in the corner of her eye. Tears glistened on Shifa's cheeks, anger etched on her face, not just from the score or the public reprimand, but from the overshadowing feeling that Kainat's success had somehow belittled her own struggles. Instead of allowing herself to share in Kainat's joy, Shifa's feelings of frustration and betrayal simmered beneath the surface, creating a tension that neither friend could ignore.

As Kainat settled into her seat beside Shifa, a warm sense of camaraderie washed over her, prompting her to share a piece of her favorite chocolate. She held out the sweet delicacy with a hopeful smile, eager to bring a bit of joy to her friend's day. However, the moment Kainat offered the chocolate, Shifa's reaction took a dark turn. In a swift motion, she hurled the chocolate across the room, its bright wrapper glinting in the light before it landed forgotten on the floor. With a sudden surge of aggression, Shifa shoved Kainat hard, sending her crashing against the wall. The impact was jarring; Kainat's hand struck the unforgiving surface, pain blooming immediately as she caught her breath, her heart racing with shock and hurt. Rafiya, who had been watching from a distance, rushed over, concern etched across her face. "What is wrong with you,

Shifa?" she exclaimed, bewildered. "How could you push your friend like that? What did she ever do to you?" Shifa's response was chilling in its indifference. She crossed her arms defiantly, her expression devoid of remorse. "She's not my friend," she declared bluntly. "I never considered her one. Her only fault is flaunting her marks like they mean something."

Shifa crossed her arms defiantly, a smug expression spreading across her face. "I'm more intelligent than you, Kainat, and I'll definitely score more marks than you in the final exams," she boasted, her voice dripping with arrogance. Kainat listened silently, the sting of Shifa's words cutting deeper than any physical pain. She winced slightly, feeling the lingering ache in her hand from where it had struck the wall, but it was the harshness of Shifa's words that truly pierced her heart. Each taunt felt like a knife, digging into her self-worth and amplifying the hurt she already felt. In that moment, the pain in her hand faded to the background, overshadowed by the emotional turmoil swirling inside her. How had their friendship devolved to this? As Shifa continued to belittle her, Kainat felt a heavy weight pressing down on her soul—a mixture of sorrow and betrayal that was far more difficult to bear than any physical injury.

Kainat stepped forward, her heart racing as she faced Shifa, a mix of confusion and hurt etched across her features. "What do you mean I'm not your friend?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly. Shifa turned to

her, the corners of her mouth curling into a mocking smile that sent a chill down Kainat's spine. "Honestly, what do you think you are?" she scoffed, her tone dripping with disdain. "You're always parading around, flaunting your wealthy father's name like it defines who you are. Just because you have money doesn't make you better than anyone else. I am not in any way lesser than you." The air between them crackled with tension, and Kainat felt a wave of humiliation wash over her. It was painful to hear such venomous words from someone she had once considered a close companion, and in that moment, the illusion of their friendship shattered completely. Kainat's heart ached as the reality of Shifa's jealousy and bitterness became painfully clear, leaving her to grapple with the betrayal that had loomed over their relationship for so long.

Kainat took a deep breath and finally spoke up, her voice trembling with a mix of frustration and hurt. "Enough is enough! When have I ever flaunted my father's wealth? Why do you insist on dragging him into this? For so long, I've heard whispers about how you've been talking behind my back, but I chose to ignore them. Today, however, you've truly crossed a line." She paused, her eyes searching for understanding. "I've always been there for you, helping you with your studies, staying up late to explain concepts you struggled with. Whenever you needed assistance, I was by your side, offering support



and friendship. But let's be clear—I never begged for your friendship. It was you who approached me, wanting to be my friend." Shifa, with a sneer, retorted, "Just shut up! You think you're so impressive, you proud and ugly girl." In that moment, a wave of disbelief washed over Kainat. She knew, deep down, that she was far more beautiful than Shifa, whose jealousy often manifested in cruel remarks. Kainat was simply a reserved girl, preferring to keep to herself, while Shifa thrived on drama and arrogance. Kainat realized with a heavy heart that Shifa had always taken advantage of her generosity. She had often accepted pricey gifts and borrowed notes without a hint of gratitude. It was a hard truth to swallow, especially after Shifa's public humiliation. Not only had Shifa insulted her in front of the entire class, but she had also shoved Kainat against the wall, leaving her feeling both physically and emotionally bruised. Kainat felt the warm tears beginning to overflow, cascading down her cheeks like a river of sorrow. This was supposed to be their final year of school, a time filled with memories and growth. She had always been aware of Shifa's true nature but hoped that kindness would prevail. It pained her to see how low Shifa could stoop, yet Kainat was determined not to lower herself to that level. She wanted to rise above, even as hurt and betrayal threatened to pull her down.

Rafiya and several other girls from the class rushed over to console Kainat, but her sensitive nature made it

difficult for her to stop the flood of tears streaming down her cheeks. She looked up at them, her voice choked with emotion. "I've been such a fool! For so many years, I thought Shifa was my best friend. But now I see she never regarded me as anything more than a friend with benefits. I've worked so hard to earn my good grades—none of it was stolen or dishonest. How dare she treat me like this?" Naziya, one of the girls, gently tried to reassure her. "It's not your fault, Kainat. You were feeding milk to a snake. She was never your friend; you just chose to ignore what everyone else saw in her. Listen, it's only a matter of two months until our final exams, and after that, we all move on to different schools. Life is a journey, and you need to be cautious about the people you bring with you." Kainat, wiping her tears, asked through sobs, "Aren't we supposed to become friends naturally?" Naziya shook her head, her expression earnest. "Those days are gone, Kainat. Open your eyes and recognize who the true friends are and who the fakes are. We now choose friends as carefully as we choose our clothes. Trust is not something we give freely anymore. Forget what just happened, but don't forget what Shifa did to you. Don't repeat that mistake in the future. Choose wisely, and I promise you'll find the best friends because you deserve nothing less." The other girls listened intently, giving Kainat their support as they looked toward Shifa with disdain. Even some of Shifa's so-called friends, who had passively supported her behavior in the past, joined in

the chorus of disapproval, telling her she was wrong for how she treated Kainat. Grateful for Naziya's insightful words, Kainat pulled her into a heartfelt hug, overwhelmed with appreciation. In that moment, Kainat began to understand that what she had thought was friendship with Shifa had only been a façade—an illusion of camaraderie cloaked in superficiality. Shifa's true colors had been unveiled, and Kainat felt a pang of regret for having forged a bond with someone so toxic. Rafiya urged Kainat to report the incident to the principal, especially since Shifa had physically hurt her. But Kainat shook her head resolutely. “No,” she said with quiet strength. “I don’t want to spread hatred like Shifa. I’m not raised that way. My parents taught me the values of forgiveness and forgetting.” Deep down, Kainat realized she could forgive Shifa for what had transpired, but she knew she could never truly forget the betrayal. As she began to pick up the pieces of her heart, she resolved to move forward, stronger and wiser, ready to embrace a future filled with genuine friendships.

Friends like Shifa are precisely why many people become disillusioned with the concept of true friendship. If someone does not genuinely value the bond, there’s no need to masquerade as a friend. Playing with another person's feelings is not just cruel; it's a betrayal of trust. Instead of reveling in her friend Kainat’s achievements, Shifa’s envy was palpable. Her disdain was transparent—each dismissive glance and

snide comment revealed the ugliness of her jealousy. It's important to recognize that friends like Kainat, who are supportive and uplifting, are incredibly rare gems. In contrast, individuals like Shifa are all too common, capable of hardening the hearts of those who are naturally compassionate and kind. Such toxic behavior can transform a once-sweet spirit into someone guarded and distrustful. **“In the past, friendships seemed to blossom naturally, with bonds formed effortlessly and without too much thought. People would easily connect over shared experiences or mutual interests, resulting in a rich tapestry of relationships. But today, the landscape has dramatically changed. We now approach friendship with a more discerning eye, carefully assessing who we allow into our inner circle. Loyalty has become a key factor in our friendships; we seek out individuals who demonstrate unwavering commitment and support. Through my own experiences, I've learned a profound lesson: loyalty cannot be commanded or controlled. It is an intrinsic quality that varies from person to person. No matter how abundantly you may show kindness and understanding, it does not guarantee that others will reciprocate with the same level of care and compassion. Even those who hold a special place in our hearts can at times fail to appreciate our value, leaving us feeling insignificant. It's often the case that the people we confide in and rely on most can become the ones who betray our trust.**

**Instead of camaraderie, we might encounter unloyalty masked by outward appearances, revealing a hidden current of animosity or indifference. These stark realities can make navigating friendships complex, reminding us to tread carefully in our choices of companions”.**

Kainat swiped at her tears, feeling a heavy silence settle around her as she sat in class. It was tough for her to engage in conversation with anyone, and she moved through her classes like a ghost, unnoticed yet still present. The teachers who came in to teach recognized her efforts and often praised Kainat for her diligence, encouraging her to push herself even harder in her studies. Meanwhile, Shifa’s jealousy boiled beneath the surface; she couldn’t stand that everyone admired Kainat, and she didn’t feel a lick of remorse for the unkind actions she’d taken against her. On the other hand, Rafiya and Naziya, who were a tight-knit duo, held Kainat in high regard. They often wanted to befriend her but found her shy demeanor hard to break. Kainat had always kept her distance from most, sharing her thoughts only with Shifa. Despite her reserved nature, Kainat’s caring spirit shone through during moments that really mattered.

During a lively school picnic filled with laughter and excitement, an unfortunate event unfolded when Naziya suddenly fell victim to motion sickness and lost her lunch right next to Rafiya on the crowded bus. With disgust, Rafiya turned away and blurted out,

"Eww, I can't sit here; I'll throw up too!" Those words stung Naziya deeply, and her eyes filled with tears, feeling abandoned by her friend just when she needed support the most. Kainat, who had been seated a few rows back with her cousin Saba, couldn't overlook the scene. Hearing Rafiya's hurtful remark pierced her heart, and she made the decision to intervene. "Hey, why don't you sit with Saba?" she suggested to Rafiya, before quickly switching seats to sit beside the distressed Naziya. Kainat offered her ondansetron tablets to help with the vomiting and handed her paracetamol to ease her painful headache, all while gently offering her water from her blue, patterned bottle. Just as Naziya was about to take the medicine, she experienced another wave of nausea and vomited again. Without hesitation, Kainat cradled her classmate's head, guiding it to rest on her shoulder, providing a comforting presence amid the chaos.

That day, not only did Naziya find a true friend in Kainat, but all the girls in the class realized how genuinely kind and pure-hearted she was. From that point on, Naziya's relationship with Kainat shifted; she began to appreciate her more deeply. In a moment of reflection, she told Rafiya, "My mom always said that to find out how real your friend is, you should look at how she acts when you're traveling together and when you need her most. If she shows care and support, she's a true friend. You, on the other hand, just proved you aren't one, while Kainat, who's

merely a classmate, treated me like a sister." Rafiya, realizing her mistake, quickly apologized to Naziya, and from that moment forward, they became loyal admirers of Kainat. They confided in her, sharing stories about how Shifa spoke badly of her behind her back, but Kainat chose to brush off the negativity. When the school day ended, Kainat returned home and called out to her maid, asking where her mom had gone. The maid informed her that her mom was out picking up groceries with her brother, Kiyan. After changing out of her school uniform, Kainat stepped into the shower, the warm water cascading over her, yet the turmoil in her heart seeped into her quiet moments. She cried softly under the water, letting the steam and droplets wash away some of her sadness. She decided not to tell anyone about Shifa's hurtful actions, especially since her brother had previously advised her to steer clear of people who didn't contribute positively to her mental health. Once she finished showering, Kainat felt slightly refreshed, having released some of her pent-up emotions through tears. She asked her maid to brew her some ginger tea to soothe her aching head. After savoring the warm, spicy drink, she took a deep breath, feeling a bit more settled, and finally settled down to study.

Her mom and brother finally returned home after an hour, and as her mom opened the door to Kainat's room, she was greeted by the sight of her daughter hunched over her textbooks, surrounded by scattered

notes and highlighters. Kainat's eyes were puffy, hinting at more than just fatigue, and her mom's intuition kicked in immediately. With a mother's keen sense, she asked, "Why are your eyes so swollen? Have you been crying?" Kainat, wanting to brush off the worry, quickly replied, "No, mom, I'm just really tired from studying since I got back from school. I was so focused on my biology test that I didn't even notice the time!" As if to lift the mood, she added, "But guess what? I got the highest marks in the class!" Her mom's face lit up with joy. She rushed forward and enveloped Kainat in a warm embrace. "That's amazing! I'm so proud of you! But remember, don't get too carried away; it was just a class test. You'll need to aim even higher for your board exams. We want you to shine, my dear." Kainat nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, mom, I will do my best, insha'Allah." Despite her cheerful response, her mom's expression remained serious as she probed further, "Now, sweetie, please tell me what's really bothering you. I can see something's not right." Before Kainat could muster a response, her older brother Kiyan entered the room with a casual demeanor. "She's fine, mom," he said playfully. "Why don't you go whip up something delicious for dinner and maybe a cup of coffee for me?" With a hint of reluctance, their mom replied, "Sure, but I still think something's bothering her." After she exited, Kiyan turned his full attention to Kainat and raised an eyebrow. "So you aced your test. That was expected, but your eyes tell a different story. Did that girl Shifa



say something to you?” Kainat sighed heavily, feeling a wave of frustration wash over her. “No, bhaiya, please don’t ask questions like mom. I’m just exhausted. Why would Shifa say anything mean?” Kiyan locked eyes with her, his tone serious yet caring. “Look, I know you inside and out. Don’t lie to me. You usually tell me everything.” Finally, Kainat opened up, recounting the moment in class when Shifa had belittled her in front of everyone, leaving her feeling humiliated and hurt. Kiyan listened intently, shaking his head. “If she doesn’t value you as a friend, why do you even care what she thinks? You’ve got me—I’m not just your brother, I’m your best friend. You don’t need fake friends like her dragging you down.” Feeling uplifted by her brother’s words, Kainat nodded. “You’re right. I won’t let Shifa bother me any longer. I need to concentrate on my studies and not waste my energy on pointless drama.” “Exactly,” Kiyan encouraged her. “Whenever you need to talk or share something, I’m always here to listen.” Kainat smiled, feeling a surge of gratitude for her brother’s unwavering support. “I know. Now, could you help me with these physics problems? They’re driving me nuts!” Kiyan grinned and agreed, diving into the heap of notes and textbooks with her. He patiently worked through the numerical problems, explaining concepts clearly, and even helped Kainat balance tricky chemical equations, transforming the study session into a productive and supportive time together. When Kiyan finished helping his sister with her numerical

problems and chemical formulas, he took a moment to gather his thoughts. “Listen, sister”, he began gently, his tone serious but caring. “In just a week, I will be heading back to Turkey as my holidays are coming to an end. Although I won’t be physically present, I want to share something important with you that I hope will help you”. He paused, choosing his words carefully. “I urge you to learn to accept that there are some things in life that are simply out of your control. It’s vital to understand that you can’t compel others to behave in ways that meet your expectations or to do things you want them to do for you. Each person has their own way of expressing themselves. The only thing within your power is to allow them to reveal who they truly are”.

Kiyan continued. “Stay genuine and open, and let people show you their true intentions. While communication is indeed crucial, there comes a point where you need to recognize when to stop trying to explain how you wish to be treated. Remember, begging for recognition or appreciation is unnecessary. Some people don’t treat you well not because they don’t comprehend your needs, but simply because they choose not to”. He leaned in closer, his expression earnest. “No matter how many times you plead for someone to value you or how desperately you convince yourself that they will eventually change for you, true change only happens when they decide to make that choice on their own. You can express your

feelings and let them know when you are hurt or disappointed, but you can't force them to give you the love and respect that you rightfully deserve”.

Kiyan took a deep breath, reflecting on his own experiences. “You have always tried your best to support Shifa, and I am not saying you shouldn't help her when she needs it. Absolutely help her, but also acknowledge the significant differences between you. Our parents raised us with strong moral values, and it's important to stand by those principles. However, when your self-respect is at stake, you must prioritize yourself and move forward”. He concluded with a reassuring but firm note, “If someone doesn't appreciate you, let them go. It may sound easier said than done, but the greatest thing you can do for yourself is to stop clinging to people who do not choose to be in your life, who don't love you as you deserve, and who fail to recognize your worth. Focus on those who do value and cherish your presence”.

Kainat listened attentively to her brother's wise words, soaking in every piece of advice he offered. Once he finished, she turned to him, her eyes shining with appreciation. “Bhaiya, thank you so much for such thoughtful advice! I'll always remember it,” she said, her voice filled with sincerity. The week that followed was a vibrant tapestry of shared experiences for Kainat and Kiyan. They embarked on long, exhilarating bike rides along scenic routes, where the wind whipped through their hair and the sun warmed their faces.

They stopped at their favorite local eateries, delighting in mouthwatering dishes that made their taste buds dance with joy. Together, they laughed heartily and exchanged stories, creating memories that would linger long after Kiyan's departure. However, as the week drew to a close, reality set in when Kiyan had to leave for Turkey to continue his college journey. Upon his departure, a wave of solitude washed over Kainat; the house felt emptier, and she missed the warmth of his presence and his comforting advice. Yet, he made it a point to call her nearly every day, his voice a soothing reminder that he was always there to support her, cheering her on through her studies and encouraging her to stay positive. Back at school, Kainat resolved to completely ignore Shifa, the source of her recent troubles. She maintained a low profile, choosing to be as reserved as possible in the bustling corridors filled with gossip and cliques. With only two months left until her board exams, she focused intently on her studies, her brain a sponge soaking up every bit of information during lectures. In her free time, she frequented the library, surrounded by the comforting rustle of pages turning and the soft whispers of students deep in concentration, diligently crafting detailed notes to prepare herself for the important exams ahead.

Meanwhile, Shifa was flanked by friends who mirrored her negativity—jealous, backbiting, and utterly self-focused. Not once did she extend an olive

branch to Kainat, refusing to acknowledge her hurtful comments and impeccable behavior. It was disheartening how some people could be so ruthless and ignorant of the pain their words could inflict. Shifa, in particular, was a prime example. She floated through her studies like an empty vessel, putting in just enough effort to pass, with no real desire for knowledge or growth. Instead of seeing Kainat as a motivator, she reveled in her own self-importance, constantly boasting about her trivial accomplishments. Kainat, drawing strength from her brother's supportive words, resolved to block out the negativity that surrounded her. She recognized the excellence she was destined to achieve and remained resolute, ready to tackle the challenges head-on with unwavering focus and determination.

As the days dwindled down to just two weeks before the board exams, the atmosphere in the library was charged with an underlying tension. Kainat was firmly entrenched in her studies, surrounded by stacks of books and highlighters, meticulously making notes in her notebook. The library was quiet, aside from the soft rustle of pages and the faint clicking of keyboards. Suddenly, Shifa stepped into the library, her expression frazzled and her eyes darting around as if searching for something elusive. She had no clear idea which reference materials to seek. After a year spent undermining Kainat with mean comments and gossip, Shifa now found herself unprepared and filled with

dread at the thought of failing. In a frantic attempt, she wandered from shelf to shelf, eyeing various tomes in hopes of finding useful information to salvage her studies. Then she spotted Kainat, whose focus was unbroken as she wrote down key concepts. Gathering her courage, Shifa approached, hopeful to mend their fractured relationship. "Hi dear, can I sit here?" she asked, her voice slightly shaky. Kainat, taken by surprise at Shifa's sudden warmth after months of hostility, simply looked up and replied, "Yeah, sit." She turned her gaze back to her notes, her mind racing with curiosity and skepticism about Shifa's intentions. Shifa cleared her throat, the tension hanging in the air palpable. "Listen," she said, trying to sound casual, "whatever happened before, let's just forget it. Such things happen in friendship." A nervous smile crept onto her face. Kainat couldn't help but respond with a bemused smile of her own. "Who is a friend here?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. Shifa answered earnestly, "You and me." Kainat shook her head, her voice steady and firm. "Do you think everything can hinge on your mood? One moment you're insulting me, and the next you want to be my friend? Listen, Shifa, I don't harbor any bitterness, but we are just classmates. I can't afford to let you be my friend." The desperation in Shifa's expression intensified as she asked, "So if I were to ask for your help, you wouldn't help me?" Kainat scrutinized her, intrigued but cautious. "What kind of help?" Shifa took a deep breath, mustering the courage to lay bare her vulnerability. "I need your

notes. There are only a few days left before the exams, and I haven't prepared anything. I really might fail." Kainat regarded her with a mixture of surprise and disappointment. "But you're intelligent enough to ace the exams! How could you possibly fail?" Shifa responded, her voice tinged with a hint of desperation, "You always helped me in the past by sharing your notes." Kainat's expression softened slightly at the memory. "Oh, you remember that? That's great," she said, the tension between them briefly dissipating. Shifa seized the opportunity, "You're such a kind person, always willing to help others. Can't you do it this time too?" With a resigned sigh, Kainat responded, "Please, I don't need this flattery. I'm exhausted by all of this. However, I will help you because my upbringing has instilled in me the importance of helping others." She reached into her bag and pulled out a well-worn notebook filled with neatly written notes, signifying countless hours of effort and dedication. Handing it over to Shifa, she instructed, "Please make a copy and return it to me by tomorrow." Shifa's relief was palpable as she exclaimed, "Thank you so much, Kainat! You truly are a lifesaver. May Allah bless you for this. You have no idea how much you've helped me right now." Kainat simply replied, "Welcome. May Allah bless you too." With those words, an understanding hung in the air, a hint of hope for a different kind of relationship in the future.

Shifa epitomized the characteristics of an opportunist and selfish individual. She had a knack for exploiting those around her for her own gain, often leaving a trail of emotional turmoil in her wake. In stark contrast, Kainat embodied generosity and kindness, always willing to lend a helping hand, even to those who had wronged her or humiliated her in front of her classmates. While people like Shifa can be found lurking in every corner of society, individuals with Kainat's compassionate spirit are truly rare gems. However, in today's unforgiving world, having a soft heart can be a liability. Kainat often found herself on the receiving end of mistreatment, as her trusting nature made her vulnerable to exploitation. She was a deeply emotional person, one who had yet to experience the harsh realities of life. Kainat held on to the belief that helping others would lead to divine rewards, thinking that Allah would grant her countless blessings in return for her generosity. Yet, life requires a more pragmatic approach. It is essential to assist others but equally important to establish boundaries to prevent them from taking advantage of your kindness. Kainat was truly a one-of-a-kind girl; her positive mindset and caring demeanor set her apart, making her a beacon of light in a world often overshadowed by self-interest.

**“Don’t be fearful of standing apart; instead, be wary of losing yourself in a sea of sameness. Celebrate your individuality, for it's the quirks and**



**distinctions that truly define you. True courage lies in daring to be different, while conformity leads only to a dull existence.”**

Shifa got the notes photocopied and happily returned the notebook to Kainat, thanking her once again. Sitting beside Kainat, Naziya raised an eyebrow, trying to understand the unfolding situation. She found it puzzling that Kainat would offer her notes to Shifa, especially considering the tension that had existed between them. Just as Naziya was about to probe Kainat with questions about her decision, Shifa extended her hand towards Kainat with a hopeful expression. “Can we be friends again?” The atmosphere in the classroom shifted, and Naziya exchanged puzzled glances with a few other students, all intrigued by the unexpected turn of events.

Kainat responded with a knowing smile but firmly replied, “I’ve already mentioned this to you before. I’ve decided to step away from this friendship. I helped you out because you’re my classmate, and lending a hand is simply part of my nature. But remember, once you lose access to someone, don’t expect the same person you had originally. The version of me you’ll see now will reflect the energy that you’ve created through our interactions.” With a gentle yet encouraging tone, Kainat continued, “Now that you have your notes, it’s time to buckle down and start studying. There are just a couple of days left until the exams, so make the most of it! I wish you all the

best.” Shifa absorbed Kainat’s words, feeling a mix of gratitude and unresolved emotions. “Thank you! And good luck to you too!” she replied, returning to her seat with her notes in hand, determined to make the most of the time left before the exams. The classroom buzzed with anticipation, the air thick with the promise of hard work and new beginnings.

Naziya turned to Kainat, a frown etched on her face, her voice laced with disbelief. "How could you be so naive?" she asked, her tone a mix of frustration and concern. “After everything, she doesn’t deserve your kindness, yet here you are offering your help without a second thought. Don’t try to play the saint; just be human and look after yourself for once.” Kainat held Naziya’s gaze, her expression calm and unwavering despite the weight of her friend's words. “I’m not trying to be a saint,” she replied softly, her voice resolute. “I helped Shifa because I genuinely believe in showing compassion. I can’t bring myself to hurt others or take joy in anyone’s struggles. That goes against who I am.” Naziya let out a deep sigh, shaking her head as she ran a hand through her hair. “You really are one of a kind, Kainat,” she said, a mixture of admiration and worry filling her voice. “No one can match your generosity. But please, just be cautious. You have such a big heart, and I worry that someone might exploit that kindness.” Her eyes softened as she looked at her friend, hoping Kainat would understand

the importance of protecting herself while still being the remarkable person she was.

“I will never let that happen; nobody can take advantage of me now,” Kainat replied confidently, her voice firm and resolute. Naziya nodded, relief washing over her as she listened. “I truly wish nothing but the best for you in the future,” Naziya said, her tone warm and supportive. “And I’m really glad you didn’t accept Shifa’s offer of friendship again. You deserve friends who reflect the same qualities you embody—someone loving, caring, and genuinely helpful. Not selfish and mean like Shifa.” Kainat smiled, appreciating Naziya’s words. It comforted her to know that she had someone who recognized her worth and stood by her side. The bond between them felt even stronger, rooted in mutual respect and understanding as they both navigated the complexities of friendship together.

Individuals like Shifa often exploit the kindness and trust of people such as Kainat, whom they view as gullible and generous. They see these traits as weaknesses, making their targets particularly vulnerable to manipulation and deceit. The motivations behind such exploitation can vary widely, including a profound lack of empathy, an insatiable need for control, or deep-rooted insecurities that compel them to dominate others in their relationships. This pattern was vividly evident in the way Shifa consistently took advantage of Kainat.

Kainat, with her inherently optimistic nature, frequently assumed the best in those around her. Her trusting disposition made it hard for her to detect any malicious intent, leaving her susceptible to Shifa's manipulative tactics.

While Kainat saw the good in people, Shifa's emotional detachment allowed her to overlook the harm she was inflicting on Kainat, rendering her blind to the psychological toll of her actions. This dynamic showcases a troubling reality where harmful individuals thrive on the generosity and compassion of others. It serves as a reminder that it's essential to recognize and distance oneself from such exploitation, as people like Shifa cannot genuinely cultivate friendship or support in any meaningful way.

Kainat dedicated herself wholeheartedly to exam preparation, spending countless hours both day and night immersed in her studies. Only one week remained until the exams, and during a particularly focused session in her classroom, she and her classmates gathered around their mathematics teacher, eager to clarify any lingering doubts they had about complex equations and geometric concepts. Just as they were deep in discussion, a group of brightly smiling juniors entered the classroom with an invitation card in hand. They respectfully asked for permission from the teacher and excitedly presented an invitation for a farewell party planned for the very next day. This gathering was more than just a goodbye; it

symbolized the end of an era, marking the last day of their school life. The juniors had organized an elaborate celebration that included a delightful skit, melodic singing, and vibrant dance performances—all crafted to honor their seniors. As the buzz of excitement filled the air, Kainat found herself experiencing a mix of emotions. Unlike her classmates, who were eagerly looking forward to the farewell festivities, Kainat was preoccupied with the thoughts of leaving the school itself. She felt a sense of hope about transitioning to a new school for the 11th grade, where she envisioned making new friends who would treat her kindly. Yet beneath her exterior of calm anticipation lay the pain of her recent experiences with Shifa, a classmate whose actions had deeply hurt her. Sensitive by nature, Kainat struggled to let go of these feelings, and even minor incidents could trigger tears.

Surrounding yourself with the right people can make a world of difference in your life. Imagine being constantly surrounded by individuals who thrive on gossip, lack ambition, and seem to drift aimlessly without any clear goals. Over time, that influence can seep into your own attitude and aspirations. Take, for example, the girls in Kainat's class who dedicated endless hours to lighthearted conversations, their laughter echoing as they exchanged stories and opinions. Their discussions often turned to the latest crushes, with giggles erupting as they shared secrets

about boys who caught their attention. The girls excitedly debated the merits of the newest makeup trends, debating the latest shades of lipstick and how to perfect the winged eyeliner look. They also admired the exquisite details of their favorite dresses, discussing colors, patterns, and styles that would enhance their individual personalities. Shifa, too, found herself drawn into these whimsical conversations, enjoying the camaraderie that came with them. She would share her own thoughts on the best ways to accessorize an outfit or the perfect hairstyle for a party, fully embracing the playful nature of their interactions. These lively exchanges, though seemingly trivial, formed the core of their friendships, creating a vibrant tapestry of shared experiences and youthful exuberance.

Kainat, however, felt a sense of disconnection from this scene. Unlike her peers, she didn't find herself drawn to those shallow conversations. Instead, she harbored significant dreams of making a meaningful impact in the world, aspiring to become either a doctor or a scientist. In her pursuit of knowledge, Kainat noticed that the boys in her class were more serious about their studies, but even then, she rarely interacted with them. She had a clear vision for her future and preferred to focus on her ambitions rather than engage in idle chatter. This highlights the importance of surrounding yourself with those who inspire you; a little healthy competition can ignite your drive and

push you to excel even further. Unfortunately, not everyone has the luxury of choosing their family members, and toxic influences can sometimes pervade our homes. However, we do have the power to choose our friends, and this choice holds significant weight. It's vital to forge connections with individuals who genuinely uplift your spirit, share your passions, and actively support your dreams. True friends are those who light up in celebration of your happiness, who respect and cheer for your achievements rather than harboring jealousy or gossiping about you. They are the people who will motivate you during tough times and offer a helping hand to guide you towards your goals. Conversely, if you find yourself feeling emotionally drained or in a low mood after spending time with specific friends, that's a strong sign that they may not be the best company for you. It can indeed be difficult to detach from those you've known for a long time, as it might feel disloyal or harsh to cut ties. However, the true unkindness lies in neglecting your own well-being by clinging to relationships that don't serve you. Remember, your happiness and personal growth are paramount, so choose your circle wisely and seek out those who will nurture your journey.

After school let out, the students of class 10 embarked on a mission to select heartfelt gifts for their favorite teachers, each item reflecting their gratitude and admiration. Kainat carefully chose a crisp white shirt for her principal, who had instilled in her a passion for

English and history—subjects she cherished more than any others. She also picked out a stylish wallet for her biology teacher, whose enthusiastic lessons brought science to life, and a beautiful handbag for her Urdu teacher, who always encouraged her creativity. In a touching act of kindness, Kainat decided to buy a vibrant salwar suit for the school's beloved peon, a warm-hearted woman who devoted herself to the well-being of the students. This lady treated every child with the affection of a caring mother, always ensuring the school environment was clean and safe.

When Kainat returned home and shared her choices with her parents, their faces lit up with pride. They praised her thoughtfulness, particularly for remembering the peon who played a vital role in their daily school life. Kainat explained her reasoning, "It's wonderful that everyone is giving gifts to their favorite teachers, but we must also think of the peon. She keeps our school spick and span and looks after us when we're feeling unwell." Her words radiated her genuine compassion and reflected her unique ability to empathize with others, showcasing a level of kindness that truly set her apart.

**"It's important to remember the value of being good and kind to those who show us care and support. While your acts of kindness may not always receive the recognition they deserve, they can bring a profound sense of joy to individuals who have often gone unappreciated for their**



**efforts. Think of that warm smile that spreads across someone's face when they feel valued—it's a heartwarming sight that can brighten even the darkest of days. The fulfillment you gain from making someone smile is a treasure far greater than any material possession. It can create a ripple effect of positivity, fostering deeper connections and enriching lives in ways we may never fully comprehend. Let's cherish these moments of kindness; they create an invaluable bond that lasts longer than any fleeting luxury".**



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **A Farewell Full of Futures**

The last day of school for Kainat and her classmates was not just an end but a grand celebration filled with laughter, nostalgia, and the sweet taste of childhood memories. As the 10th-grade students stepped onto the school grounds, they were met with a warm and cheerful welcome from their excited juniors, who showered them with colorful chocolates, a delightful gesture that instantly brightened the atmosphere. The school auditorium, adorned with vibrant decorations crafted by the juniors, set the perfect backdrop for the event. As the seniors settled into their seats, a montage of cherished moments flickered to life on the projector—pictures capturing their last picnic, sports events, and countless activities that they had shared over the years. Each image stirred a wave of nostalgia, bringing smiles and bittersweet tears as the memories flooded back. Kainat, sitting amongst her peers, found

it impossible to hold back her emotions; tears streamed down her cheeks as she contemplated the beauty of their shared journey. The cultural program began with an electrifying energy. Students leaped onto the stage, dancing joyfully to the infectious beats of their favorite Bollywood songs, their movements filled with enthusiasm and camaraderie. After the dance performances, the juniors entertained the audience with lively skits, showcasing their creativity and humor. The auditorium erupted with applause and laughter, creating an atmosphere brimming with joy. Principal Sir took to the stage, his demeanor inspiring as he delivered an encouraging speech. His words resonated deeply, urging the outgoing students to work diligently in their upcoming board exams and strive for greatness in their future endeavors. His heartfelt message served as a beacon of motivation for the entire class. Following his address, the seniors were invited to share their thoughts with the juniors. One by one, they stood up to offer advice, advocating for hard work and participation in both curricular and co-curricular activities. When Kainat took the microphone, her heart swelled with a mixture of gratitude and melancholy. She captivated everyone with her soulful rendition of a beloved Hindi song, **“Chalte Chalte mere yeh geet yaad rakhna Kabhi alvida na Kehna.”** Her voice, clear and melodious, resonated in the auditorium, leaving the audience enchanted. The moment was a celebration of gratitude, and the seniors presented heartfelt gifts to their

favorite teachers. However, it was Kainat's gesture that truly touched everyone. She chose to give a meaningful gift to Appa, the cherished school peon, who had long been a silent guardian of their school memories. As Kainat called Appa to the stage, her face radiated warmth and respect. Appa, visibly astonished by the recognition, folded her hands in a gesture of thanks, but Kainat quickly embraced her, expressing, "Appa, don't fold your hands. You deserve all the respect for your unwavering service. I owe you so much." The room erupted into applause, the air thick with admiration as Appa showered Kainat with blessings, her eyes glistening with gratitude. As the emotional segment concluded, the Principal ceremoniously cut a large, beautifully decorated cake, a symbol of celebration and new beginnings. The juniors then served an array of delicious dishes, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, filling the room with mouthwatering aromas. Laughter and chatter filled the air as students relished the feast, their joy palpable with each bite, all while capturing countless photographs to immortalize these precious moments. With lunch finished, the time for emotional farewells had arrived. As the seniors gathered for one last goodbye, hugs and well-wishes were exchanged. Kainat felt the weight of these fond farewells when Rafiya and Naziya enveloped her in a heartfelt embrace, tears spilling as they expressed how much they would miss her. Other friends came up to say their goodbyes, and when Shifa approached Kainat,

her expression turned serious. “I know I hurt you unintentionally, and now that we’re leaving, I hope you can forgive me,” she said, her voice filled with sincerity. Kainat, with her trademark kindness, responded with a gentle smile. “I am nobody to forgive; only Allah has the power to do that. But I promise you, I don't hold grudges. If I did, I wouldn't be talking to you now.” They shared a warm hug, Kainat wishing Shifa luck in her future endeavors. Shifa replied, “I hope we meet again and can talk more nicely.” Laughing together, they promised to reconnect during the exams. As the day concluded, they departed with hearts full of joyful memories, already looking forward to the next chapter and the inevitable reunions it would bring. In their classroom, it was an open secret that Shifa harbored jealousy toward Kainat, manifesting in subtle yet hurtful ways. It was as if a shadow loomed over their interactions, marked by Shifa's pointed remarks and dismissive gestures. Yet, in an unexpected twist, Kainat found herself wrapped in a warm embrace with Shifa, her arms encircling the source of her pain. While striving to embody kindness, Kainat understood that extending that kindness to someone toxic was ultimately detrimental to her own well-being. Deep down, Kainat had resolved not to cross paths with Shifa again in the future. However, she yearned to part ways gracefully, free from the bitter weight of grudges or resentment. In that moment, as they stood together, Kainat focused on the importance of closure, hoping to leave behind a

chapter of their lives with a sense of peace, even if it meant letting go of the darker emotions that had clouded their friendship.

Kainat was acutely aware that closure isn't merely about forgetting the past; it is an ongoing journey of acceptance and comprehension of what transpired between her and Shifa. She reflected on the many times Shifa's words had stung, leaving her with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Despite being treated poorly and often made to feel small, Kainat chose to rise above the pain. She understood that harboring grudges would only weigh her down further, especially since Shifa had never shown genuine concern for her feelings. With a heart full of grace, Kainat decided to keep her silence, allowing Shifa to drift away from her life without an ounce of blame or bitterness for the wrongs that had been inflicted. In her quiet strength, she embraced the idea that letting go was a necessary part of her healing journey.

A week had slipped by in a flash, and suddenly, the day of the exam was upon Kainat, almost like a fleeting moment. As the sun peeked through the clouds, Kiyan took a moment to call Kainat, offering her warm wishes and encouragement for the big day. Despite her thorough preparation, Kainat couldn't shake off the wave of nerves that washed over her. Her father, with a reassuring smile, dropped her off at the examination center, advising her to take a few deep breaths and read each question carefully before diving

into her answers. Upon entering the school premises, Kainat was greeted by the bustling energy of her classmates who were gathered in small groups, nervously flipping through notes and discussing last-minute strategies. Among the crowd, she spotted Naziya waving at her from a distance, her face lighting up with excitement. Kainat waved back, feeling a surge of camaraderie as she walked over to join her friends. The girls were all gathered, chattering animatedly as they anxiously awaited the start of the exam. “Hey Kainat, how’s the preparation going?” Shifa asked, her eyes wide with curiosity. Kainat hesitated for a moment before responding, “Honestly, I can’t judge until I see the questions and figure out how much I can actually attempt.” At her response, Shifa exchanged knowing glances with one of her friends, and they both burst into a fit of giggles, playfully mocking the seriousness of the situation. Just as the school bell rang – a sharp sound that echoed through the hallways – all students were instructed to leave their notes outside. The atmosphere turned tense as they formed a line to enter the examination hall. It felt almost surreal with police officials, both male and female, stationed at the entrance, carefully checking each student to ensure that no one brought forbidden study materials inside.

Kainat leaned toward Rafiya and whispered, “I have this odd feeling like we’re about to take some monumental exams, considering all this security.”

Rafiya chuckled lightly but quickly added, “I feel the same! Yet, I’m a bundle of nerves. It feels like I’ve forgotten everything I studied.” Kainat reassured her, “Just take a moment, close your eyes, and say a little prayer. Allah will help you remember.” As they entered the bustling examination hall, lined with long wooden desks and flickering lights overhead, Kainat and Rafiya found their seats marked with their roll numbers. The invigilator, a tall woman with glasses perched on the edge of her nose, walked in and read the instructions for writing the answer scripts aloud with a firm yet calming voice. Their first paper was mathematics – a subject that stirred a mix of panic and excitement within Kainat. The teacher distributed answer scripts for them to fill in their roll numbers and details, and the anticipation grew thicker in the air as they received the question papers. Before peering at the questions, Kainat closed her eyes, inhaling deeply and whispering a quick prayer for clarity and focus. When she finally opened her eyes to scan the sheet, an immense wave of relief washed over her; the questions were manageable! With a determined “Bismillah,” she began to write, her pen dancing across the paper with newfound confidence. On the contrary, Shifa glanced down at her paper only to feel the weight of anxiety creeping in. She couldn’t shake the feeling that the questions were more challenging than she had anticipated. Stealing a glance at Kainat, who was immersed in her work, and then at her fellow students who seemed equally engrossed, Shifa decided to tackle



the questions she found simpler first, hoping to build some momentum. After three intense hours that felt like both an eternity and a fleeting moment, the examiner began collecting the answer scripts, signaling the end of the test. As students spilled out of the hall, a chorus of relief and chatter erupted, with everyone eager to discuss the questions and share their experiences. Shifa quickly approached Kainat, her expression a mix of curiosity and admiration. “You look so pleased! Did you find the paper easy?” Kainat smiled brightly and replied, “Yes, it went really well! How did you find it?” Shifa exclaimed proudly, “I finished it in just an hour and a half—it was a breeze for me!” Kainat chimed in, “That’s fantastic! I took the full three hours since some questions needed a bit more thought.” In that moment, Kainat spotted her dad waiting for her at the main gate, standing by the car with an encouraging smile. She turned to Shifa, saying, “Alright, I have to go. Dad’s waiting for me.” As her father inquired about how she felt about the paper, Kainat responded enthusiastically, “It was good, Dad! I attempted every question!” They drove home amid the fading sun, the sky painted in hues of orange and pink. Exam days are notorious for creating stress among students—whether they are brilliant, average, or struggling, everyone feels the pressure. Kainat had dedicated long hours to her studies, often burning the midnight oil. Her mother had prepared nourishing almond milk each night, believing it sharpened her daughter’s memory. As each exam came and went,

confidence blossomed, and dreams of achieving high marks were whispered among them like a shared secret. Finally, the last day of the exams arrived, and the collective tension lifted, leaving behind a palpable sense of relief. Students exchanged heartfelt wishes for one another, hopeful for the best results and excited about the new journeys awaiting them in different schools. The reality of their paths diverging began to sink in, yet an overwhelming sense of optimism filled the air as they envisioned bright futures ahead.

Kainat found herself immersed in a world of novels, movies, and solo singing sessions in her cozy room as she eagerly awaited her exam results. When her mother suggested a change of scenery by spending a few days at her maternal grandmother's house to enjoy time with her cousins, Kainat politely declined. She gazed out her bedroom window, affirming that her heart belonged to her home and she wasn't ready to leave it. Her father, aiming to redirect her energy in a productive way, proposed that she enroll in coaching classes for the upcoming 11th grade instead of wasting time in idle pursuits. The coaching center was situated a good forty minutes from their home, but Kainat felt a surge of determination and agreed to join a reputable center known for its skilled faculty. On the first day of her new classes, Kainat stepped into the bustling classroom, her heart racing as she scanned unfamiliar faces—both boys and girls—sitting at their desks, engrossed in conversations. A wave of nervousness

washed over her, heightening her anxiety about finding a place to sit. Just then, a warm and friendly girl named Neemat noticed her hesitation and shifted in her chair to create space. "Come sit here," she smiled, and Kainat felt a rush of relief as she thanked her and took a seat beside her. "What's your name, pretty girl?" Neemat asked, her eyes sparkling with friendliness. Kainat blushed, realizing she was grateful for the kindness extended to her. "My name is Kainat. And you?" she replied, offering a shy smile. "Nice to meet you! I'm Neemat," she said enthusiastically. Kainat found Neemat to be strikingly elegant, tall, and fair, with an aura that radiated warmth. As they began discussing their interests and school experiences, their conversation flowed effortlessly. They discovered that both had chosen science subjects along with additional mathematics, fueling their connection further. As the physics lecturer entered and introduced himself, the classroom atmosphere changed, eager anticipation enveloping the students. One by one, they took turns sharing their names, and Kainat felt her nerves quiet as she settled into the rhythm of the class, buoyed by Neemat's supportive presence. After class, they exchanged phone numbers, and the bond that formed from their shared enthusiasm made the first day of class feel less intimidating. When Kainat returned home, she excitedly recounted her new friendship with Neemat and how engaging the lectures were. Her parents reveled in her happiness, and as a month passed, Kainat and Neemat's friendship blossomed

into one of genuine care and support—it was apparent they shared common goals and aspirations, including the desire to attend the same school after their results were released. As the day of the 10th-grade exam results approached, their lecturer announced that the results would be declared that very evening. A palpable tension hung in the air, and Kainat felt the weight of expectation bearing down on her. Later that evening, amidst the comforting aroma of chai wafting through the home, Kainat engaged in a moment of reflection and prayer, seeking guidance for her efforts in the examination. With a calming cup of tea beside her, Kainat's parents encouraged her to stay calm and assured her that all would work out. Then, as the clock struck 8:30 PM, her phone buzzed with a call from Neemat, urging her to check the official results on the J&K board's website. When Kainat logged in, she felt a mix of nervous anticipation and prayer—her heart raced as she entered her roll number and registration. After a brief moment of anxiety, she saw her score: 479 out of 500—equivalent to an impressive 95%. She had expected a higher number, perhaps a 98%, and for a moment, disbelief froze her in place. Just then, her mother entered her room, her expression eager. "What's your result?" she asked. Kainat replied with a hint of disappointment, "Mom, it's 95%." Her mother swept her into a tight embrace, exclaiming, "Congratulations, my dear!" Soon, her father joined in, kissing her forehead, but an unsettling dissatisfaction lingered in Kainat's heart. "But Dad, I was expecting

98%,” she lamented, her brow furrowing as she tried to reconcile her feelings. Her phone rang again, this time it was Shifa, another classmate, who cheerfully declared that she had scored 338 out of 500, which was 67%. Shifa’s over-the-top enthusiasm struck Kainat as odd, especially since she took pleasure in announcing that Rameez, a boy from their class, had topped with 490 out of 500, or 98%. Shifa crowed about Rameez’s accomplishment, making Kainat feel small. “He’s got such a brilliant mind!” she proclaimed, as Kainat felt the sharp pang of betrayal; hadn’t she shared her study materials with Rameez? “But he studied from my notes,” Kainat protested, stunned that someone she had helped was now her competitor. As the conversation ended, Kainat felt a weight of sorrow settle in her chest, especially after hearing Shifa’s remarks. Disheartened, she confided in her brother, Kiyan, about feeling inadequate and how she had helped Rameez succeed. He comforted her with reminders that this was only the beginning of her academic journey and encouraged her to sever ties with Shifa’s toxic influence, reassuring her that she would have more opportunities to shine. Later that evening, Kainat’s mother came in carrying a beautifully decorated cake. With a gentle smile, she encouraged Kainat to celebrate her achievements. Her parents urged her to focus on the positives, reminding her that success would come with perseverance.

When Neemat called again, she exuberantly asked about Kainat's result. Kainat shared her score but revealed her disappointment about not topping. Neemat quickly responded, "Oh, come on! You have outperformed me! Aim to top in 11th and 12th! I'm genuinely happy for you—congratulations, my brilliant friend!" Kainat couldn't help but smile, her spirits rising with Neemat's kind encouragement. "Thank you, dear. I feel blessed to have you in my life," she replied warmly. As she lay in bed reflecting on the events of the day, the stark contrast between Neemat and Shifa resonated within her. Neemat's sincerity and support stood in sharp relief to Shifa's petty rivalry. Kainat realized that true friendships shine brightly in times of joy and darkness, while superficial connections often revel in negativity and competition. In this moment of clarity, she vowed to cherish the authentic connections she had with friends like Neemat and to distance herself from those who brought her down.

The following day dawned bright and cheerful as Kainat and Neemat embraced each other tightly, their faces glowing with joy as they congratulated one another on their remarkable achievements. Eager to celebrate, they ventured to one of the most popular coffee shops in the city, known for its cozy atmosphere and delicious treats. As they settled into a charming corner table, the rich aroma of freshly brewed cappuccino wafted through the air. They

eagerly ordered their favorites: velvety cappuccinos topped with a sprinkling of cocoa powder, decadent brownies that looked like little squares of chocolate bliss, and savory chicken sandwiches filled with tender slices of chicken, crisp lettuce, and tangy sauce. With a warm cup in hand, Kainat took a deep breath and began to share her troubling experience of having a fake friend named Shifa. She recounted the moments of betrayal and disappointment, her voice filled with a mix of frustration and relief as she unburdened her heart. Neemat listened attentively, nodding in understanding, her eyes reflecting empathy. Once Kainat finished her story, Neemat leaned in closer, her voice steady and reassuring. "Let her be," she said with conviction. "What matters is that I'm here with you. We will both get admission into the same school, and together we will work harder than ever to achieve our dreams. I'll always stand by your side. With us together, no one would dare to harm you. I promise we will become the epitome of friendship." Kainat's expression softened as she felt a wave of gratitude wash over her. "I am truly blessed to have you as my friend," she replied, her heart swelling with hope. "In Sha Allah, we will support each other as we grow our bond and strive for greatness in life." Their eyes sparkled with determination and the unspoken promise of a future filled with shared successes and unwavering friendship.

“Occasionally, you encounter someone with whom you instantly connect; it's as though a hidden thread ties your hearts together. You find a remarkable comfort in their presence, reminiscent of a bond nurtured over a lifetime. In this journey of life, you come to understand that every person you meet plays a distinct role. Some may challenge you, others might take advantage of your kindness, while a few will impart valuable lessons along the way. Yet, the truly exceptional individuals are those who inspire you to shine your brightest. They remind you of your worth and the beauty of existence. For Kainat, that extraordinary person was Neemat. With her unwavering love and nurturing spirit, Neemat consistently encouraged Kainat to embrace her true potential, bringing out the best version of herself. It's essential to recognize our place in the tapestry of others' lives, acting with intention and grace. This understanding isn't about arrogance; it embodies the essence of self-respect. There are two priceless treasures that we should never need to fight for: authentic love and genuine friendships. These bonds form naturally, blossoming effortlessly when nurtured with sincerity and trust.”





## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Together From Here**

Kainat and Neemat embarked on a new chapter in their lives by enrolling in the same prestigious girls' school, renowned for its academically gifted students from affluent families. From the very first day, they clicked, forming an unbreakable friendship that quickly flourished. They would sit side by side in class, exchanging notes filled with colorful doodles and clever hints, sharing not just their lunches but also snippets of laughter and personal stories. As days turned into weeks, their bond deepened, and Kainat's infectious kindness seemed to draw more and more girls into their circle, creating a lively group of friends. Kainat was beloved by her classmates for her generous and warm-hearted nature. She had a knack for making everyone feel included, and as a result, her popularity soared. However, Neemat, who cherished Kainat immensely, began to exhibit possessive tendencies.

She would often express her discontent whenever Kainat talked to other girls, declaring with a firm voice that as her best friend, Kainat shouldn't entertain anyone outside their friendship. Neemat's behavior fluctuated between affection and domination, often trying to manipulate Kainat's social interactions to keep her by her side. Kainat struggled with this aspect of Neemat's personality, as she found the demand for exclusivity stifling. After all, Neemat herself had numerous friends, and Kainat believed that they should be free to befriend others. In her heart, she thought, "She is my friend, not my possession." Yet there was an undeniable loyalty within Neemat as well. She fiercely defended Kainat, never allowing anyone to speak ill of her. If anyone dared to say a harsh word, Neemat would confront them with fiery determination, warning them that if they didn't respect her friend, they would face severe consequences. One memorable incident occurred when a girl named Ambreen approached Kainat during lunch. Ambreen, equally friendly with Kainat, was taken aback when Neemat, upon seeing their interaction, stormed over and pushed Ambreen away. "Why are you invading my space? Stay away from my friend!" she demanded, her voice laced with authority. Ambreen, visibly shocked, tried to explain that she was also Kainat's friend, but Neemat would hear none of it. She insisted that Kainat was hers alone, and Ambreen, feeling unwelcome, gradually distanced herself from Kainat following that confrontation. When Kainat tried to

reason with Neemat about the whole situation and suggested that Ambreen deserved the same friendship, Neemat made a bold ultimatum: "You have to choose between me and her." Torn and feeling cornered, Kainat reluctantly chose Neemat, which led to Ambreen ceasing all communication with her.

The school year sped by, and before they knew it, Kainat and Neemat found themselves in the 12th grade, preparing for their final exams. Kainat consistently achieved higher marks than Neemat, a fact that Neemat accepted with grace because she always believed in her friend's potential. Yet, Kainat felt a pang of loneliness whenever Neemat was absent. Despite having other friends, none could fill the void left by her best friend, with whom she shared daily jokes and deep conversations. Neemat's whimsical attitude regarding school attendance became increasingly worrying. One day, during chemistry class, their teacher addressed Kainat directly, urging her to ensure Neemat's regular attendance, as the girl was at risk of falling short on attendance, jeopardizing her eligibility for the crucial board exams. Kainat took this warning seriously and vowed to talk to Neemat about it. Later that afternoon, Kainat found Neemat at their coaching center, sitting comfortably beside Riza, sharing giggles and stories. Excited to see her friend, Kainat rushed over, enveloping Neemat in a warm hug. After the brief reunion, Kainat inquired about Neemat's absence from school that day. Neemat

casually replied, "Oh, I just woke up late; my alarm didn't ring." Kainat laughed, shaking her head at the absurdity of the excuse. "Come on, you know we're facing the 12th boards this year! Chemistry Ma'am warned me that if you keep skipping classes, you'll be facing some serious consequences," she urged, concern etched on her face. Neemat shrugged playfully, her confidence unwavering. "Don't worry about it! I'll just get a medical certificate from my dad, you know he's a doctor," she joked. Kainat couldn't help but roll her eyes, chuckling at Neemat's defiance. "That's not going to work all the time! Besides, I feel so lonely in class when you aren't around. You've scared all the other girls away!" Neemat's expression shifted. "I can't share my closest friends, Kainat. You're special to me; I can't split my time with anyone else," she insisted with sincerity in her voice. Kainat laughed again, teasing, "I'm not a boyfriend! I'm your friend, and it's okay for me to have other friendships." "But that's just how I am! I can't help it," Neemat replied, a hint of vulnerability peeking through her facade. Understanding the depth of her friend's feelings, Kainat took a more serious tone, "But I want you to focus on your studies too. Promise me you'll start coming to school every day." With a playful smirk, Neemat relented, "Okay, okay! I promise I won't miss any more classes." Kainat's face lit up with joy, "That's the spirit! I need my best friend back, thriving in school with me!" As both girls shared a genuine laugh, Kainat felt reassured that their

friendship, albeit complicated, had the potential to grow into something even more supportive and understanding.

Kainat had a special routine that revolved around her older brother, Kiyan, who was engrossed in his medical studies. No matter how busy he was—buried in textbooks or preparing for exams—he always made time to listen to her enthusiastic updates about her daily life at school. The moment the phone rang, Kainat would light up, eager to share every detail, from the mundane to the magnificent. Kiyan, with his calm demeanor and attentive ear, never interrupted her flowing chatter. He understood how much these conversations meant to her, providing her a comforting outlet for her thoughts and feelings.

Recently, Kainat had expressed concerns about her close friend Neemat, whose possessive and dominating nature sometimes weighed on her. Kiyan patiently reassured her, reminding her, “Don’t overthink it. Neemat cares about you and just wants you around. Her attachment shows how much she values your friendship.” He elaborated on the importance of appreciating the loyalty of true friends, emphasizing that it’s not the number of friends that matters, but the depth of those connections. “If you have one solid friend with good qualities, that’s all you need for a lifetime.” This conversation sparked a realization in Kainat—she didn’t need to replace Neemat. Other girls were simply classmates who would fade away

after school, but Neemat was her best friend, someone who would stand by her side for years to come. Determined to support her friend, Kainat took on the role of Neemat's unofficial alarm clock. Each morning, she made it her mission to ensure Neemat woke up on time for school. This involved an early phone call, filled with warmth and encouragement, followed by her own morning routine of prayer and preparation that she had honed to perfection. Kainat's parents had instilled in her the value of good manners and selflessness, making her naturally considerate of others. However, Neemat often chided her, saying, "Listen, dear friend, you need to think of yourself first sometimes. You're not a child anymore; you should at least try a little makeup to enhance your beauty." Kainat would laugh and reply, "I don't need makeup to impress anyone. I believe I look good just the way I am, and right now, my focus should be on achieving my goals. I still have a lot to accomplish." While Neemat appreciated Kainat's sincerity, she warned, "Being too good-hearted might lead to trouble if people take advantage of you." Kainat would firmly respond, "I believe kindness is important. Don't let negative thoughts cloud your judgment about others. Let's just focus on our studies and the bright future ahead." This unwavering stance defined their friendship—two girls navigating the challenges of school life together, supporting each other with encouragement, laughter, and love.

Kainat had often been cautioned about the perils of being too kind. The first piece of advice had come from Naziya, her classmate, who had observed how Kainat's generous nature sometimes led to her being taken advantage of. Despite the warnings, Kainat dismissed these concerns, firmly believing that her kindness would be recognized and valued by others. However, the reality painted a different picture. She slowly came to realize that one of the downsides of having a big heart was that people often mistook her compassion for naiveté. They would treat her with indifference or even disrespect, all the while knowing that she would inevitably forgive them and remain by their side. It was disheartening to see how easily some could dismiss her feelings, as if her kindness were merely a given rather than a precious gift. Caught in this cycle, Kainat sometimes felt a deep-seated frustration. She had hoped that her warmth and generosity would bolster her relationships, yet she often found herself disappointed. As she reflected on her experiences, she acknowledged the truth in the advice she had received: keeping her circle small and building her emotional walls high was essential. The importance of being treated with the same respect she offered others began to resonate with her more deeply. She had to learn to assert her worth and not allow herself to be underestimated. Fortunately, amidst all this confusion, Kainat formed an unbreakable bond with Neemat. Over the months, they became not just friends but two bodies sharing a single soul. Their

evenings spent together studying felt like a sanctuary, where laughter and camaraderie replaced any lingering doubts. They often gathered around the kitchen table, surrounded by textbooks and notes, exchanging ideas and encouraging one another. Their families, too, grew close, forging friendships that echoed the strength of Kainat and Neemat's connection. Weekend dinners often turned into blissful gatherings where parents shared stories and laughter while the girls huddled in a corner, deep in conversation about their dreams and aspirations. This sense of reliance on one another was not just comforting; it was a beacon of hope in Kainat's journey to understanding her own heart, teaching her the balance of kindness and self-respect.

The long-awaited timetable for the 12th board exams had finally been announced, setting a whirlwind of excitement and determination into motion. Kainat and Neemat, best friends and study partners, swiftly organized their study schedules, ready to tackle the challenges ahead. They would often spend late nights together, surrounded by textbooks and notes, energized by the thrill of preparing for their futures. Their study sessions were interspersed with laughter and lighthearted discussions, as they took breaks to call each other and delve into key topics that could appear on the exams. As time sped by, the day of the first board exam for class 12th arrived. Kiyan, a mutual friend, would often reach out to Kainat on her days off to check in and see how her preparations were



unfolding. Both girls felt a wave of optimism wash over them, confident in their abilities to secure the grades necessary for their aspiration to enter prestigious medical colleges and become doctors.

On the final day of exams, Ambreen, noticed a stark change in Kainat. She seemed frailer, her complexion slightly pale, and her eyes appeared heavy-lidded as if sleep had become a luxury of the past. Concern etched on her face, Ambreen asked, "Kainat, why do you look so worn out? It seems like you haven't slept in days!" Kainat offered a thoughtful smile as she responded, "I've been pouring my heart and soul into studying for these exams. But I promise, once they're over and I secure the grades I need, I'll regain my strength and celebrate by indulging in some delicious food." Ambreen's face brightened, and she encouraged Kainat with best wishes, "You've got this! Today is our last exam; we can finally unwind and enjoy ourselves afterward." Just then, Neemat walked in, her presence infusing the room with a sense of chumminess. She cheerfully greeted both Kainat and Ambreen, immediately apologizing for her earlier behavior. "I'm sorry, Ambreen! I just struggle to share my close friends, and that's why I acted the way I did," she explained, her honesty restoring the warmth between them. Ambreen smiled reassuringly, responding, "No worries; Kainat already took care of that by apologizing on your behalf." Neemat turned to Kainat, her expression curious and slightly puzzled.

“But why did you apologize? It was my fault,” Neemat said, a hint of confusion in her voice. With a cheeky wink, Kainat replied, “We’re friends, and I didn’t want anyone to hold grudges against you. Now let’s go in there and conquer our last exam together!” With tears of joy welling in her eyes, Neemat embraced Kainat tightly, gratitude overflowing in her heart. “I owe you so much, Kainat! You’ve truly opened my eyes about the importance of studying. If I excel in these exams, it will be all thanks to your encouragement.” Kainat chuckled lightly, playfully responding, “Don’t get too emotional on me—I expect you to treat me to an ice cream later!” “Absolutely!” Neemat replied enthusiastically as they made their way to the examination hall, nervous energy mingling with anticipation. Seated for their Physics paper, the two friends focused intently on their test papers. The exam proved to be daunting, filled with lengthy problems and challenging numerical questions. Neemat, sitting just behind Kainat, felt a wave of panic wash over her as she grappled with a particularly difficult problem that seemed insurmountable. Sensing her distress, Kainat leaned back slightly and began dictating solutions, her quiet yet confident voice guiding Neemat through the tough spots. With Kainat’s whispers of encouragement, Neemat managed to work through her challenges, her initial anxiety slowly transforming into relief. Once the final bell rang, signaling the end of the exam, they exchanged their answer scripts with the teacher and stepped out into

the sunshine, their faces illuminated by smiles of accomplishment. “We did it! Ice cream time!” Neemat squealed happily, feeling a rush of gratitude for Kainat’s assistance. “With me by your side, you have no reason to worry!” Kainat laughed, her spirit unburdened now that the exams were behind them. They chose to indulge in cassata ice cream, a delightful treat that happened to be Kainat’s favorite, savoring the sweet victory as they walked leisurely back home. When Kainat arrived at her house, her mom was waiting to ask how her exam had gone. Beaming with confidence, Kainat exclaimed, “I crushed it, Mom!” Her mother suggested they share a cup of tea together as the evening approached, but Kainat humorously begged for some rest, saying, “I feel like I haven’t slept in ages! Please, let me change and recharge.” Understandingly, her mom nodded and gave her space.

Later that evening, as Kainat’s dad returned home, he inquired about his daughter’s exam performance. Her mom assured him she was peacefully sleeping in her room. Her dad chuckled, impressed by her confidence when he heard she said she ‘killed it.’ He tiptoed to her room and opened the door to find her fast asleep, nestled in her blankets like a serene little baby. A smile crossed his face as he realized that this was the blissful rest that followed a period of hard work and dedication, marking the end of a challenging yet rewarding chapter in her academic journey.

The exam may have come to an end, but it was merely a stepping stone in the vast landscape of life's challenges. Our parents often tell us that reaching class 10th is a pivotal moment; they urge us to work hard, insisting that once we get through it, everything will fall into place. Then, of course, there's class 12th, followed by the advice to pursue a professional degree. "Just a few years of dedicated effort," they say, "and then you'll be free." After graduation, the mantra continues: "Just complete your Master's, and then a job is yours; you'll start earning in no time." However, the truth is that the journey of education never truly ends. One can pursue knowledge endlessly and accumulate as many degrees as they desire, fueled by sheer willpower and patience. A person becomes like a restless bird—always wanting more. Meanwhile, Kainat and Neemat basked in the joy of their friendship, exploring the vibrant streets of the city with carefree laughter. They felt as though they had conquered Everest, blissfully unaware that this moment of joy was just the beginning of many hardships and experiences to come. While schools and colleges provide structured lessons, they often fail to impart the most profound teachings that life itself offers. It is through our experiences, the trials we face, and the unexpected challenges we overcome that we truly learn the invaluable lessons we never thought we'd encounter.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Forever Isn't Always For Everyone**

Kainat and Neemat, two inseparable friends found themselves dreaming about a shared future in the medical field. They were excited about the prospect of applying to the same prestigious medical college, whether it be in their home country of India or in a far-off land filled with new experiences. As they sat together, sketching out their plans, they imagined the long nights of studying, the laughter in their shared dorm room, and the challenges they would overcome side by side. They felt a deep connection, believing that their bond was so strong that they wouldn't need to make new friends. In their eyes, having each other was a stroke of luck, a treasure they were unwilling to jeopardize. They envisioned a life where they would constantly support and uplift one another, forging a path filled with shared accomplishments and memories. Yet, amidst all their planning, they

overlooked an important truth—the unseen hand of fate orchestrated the world around them. As the saying goes, **“Man proposes, and God disposes.”**

Kainat and Neemat, with their heads full of dreams, were blissfully unaware of the twists and turns that life had in store for them. Their aspirations were grand, but the future held its own secrets, and only time would reveal how their journeys would unfold.

They had always believed that their friendship would last a lifetime, but Kainat and Neemat soon discovered that forever isn’t guaranteed for everyone. In the vast world of school friends, precious few are lucky enough to maintain such bonds throughout life.

Unfortunately, Kainat and Neemat realized they might not be among that fortunate few. The day the results for class 12th were declared, a mix of anxiety and trepidation hung in the air. Neemat learned the news from one of her father’s friends and, despite her racing heart, summoned her courage to check her roll number online. The moment she saw her score—415 out of 600, translating to a 69%—she felt a wave of relief wash over her, albeit tinged with nervousness about how Kainat would fare. After sharing her results with Kainat, she urged her friend to check her own scores. When Kainat looked up her results, disbelief painted her face. A 385 out of 600—a mere 64%—was not what she had anticipated. Overwhelmed by a cascade of shock and despair, she felt tears streaming down her

cheeks as despair settled heavily on her heart. The dreams she had nurtured were unraveling before her eyes, leaving her feeling utterly numb. Kainat hesitated to approach her parents, who were absorbed in a television show in the living room, laughing and chatting blissfully unaware of her turmoil. In a moment of desperation, she picked up her phone to call Neemat, but her friend's voice was met with silence. It was her father who eventually answered the call, and after Neemat shared her own score, a sense of urgency flooded through her as she sought to know Kainat's fate. Curiosity mingled with concern as he checked Kainat's score but chose not to reveal it. Knowing his daughter was reeling, he left the call thinking it would be best to comfort her directly. He made his way to Kainat's room, where he found her enveloped in tears, her face buried in her hands. Panic gripped him, and he gently asked what was wrong. Choked with emotions, Kainat could only whisper, "Dad," before breaking down further. She lamented, "Why does my luck never favor me? Why does my hard work always go unrewarded?" Her father, confused yet concerned, pressed her for more information. Finally, through sobs, she declared that she had scored just 385 out of 600, a disheartening 64%. He, too, was perplexed. He had seen her study tirelessly, putting in long hours and showing remarkable determination. "How is this possible?" he asked, bewildered. In that moment, Neemat's name surfaced in their conversation. "Your friend Neemat

got 415 out of 600, 69%," he added. Hearing this caused Kainat to cry even more violently, her heart feeling like it was shattering. Just then, her mother stepped in, instinctively reaching out to comfort her daughter, but Kainat was inconsolable. As emotions escalated, the doorbell rang, interrupting the tense atmosphere. Kainat's father went to answer it and found Neemat standing at the door with her father, worry etched across her face. "Uncle, where's Kainat?" she asked, a hint of urgency in her voice. Upon entering the room, Neemat saw Kainat in a state of distress, tears streaming down her cheeks. She rushed to her friend, wiping her face with the sleeve of her shirt. "Kainat, please listen to me. I know something's wrong here. There must be an explanation. You're far too bright to get just 64%," Neemat insisted, her voice steady but filled with concern. Kainat shook her head, continuing to sob. "I didn't even achieve distinction," she lamented, her heart heavier than ever. Neemat wrapped her arms around her friend, trying to instill hope. "Calm down," she urged gently. "You haven't failed. I'm here for you, and I know how hard you've worked for this." Feeling completely shattered, Kainat couldn't comprehend how her dreams could crumble so suddenly, leaving her empty and heartbroken. Yet Neemat remained steadfast at her side, a true friend amidst a storm of emotions.



Outside in the late afternoon sunlight, Kainat's father stood with his arms crossed, his expression a mix of disappointment and concern. He had envisioned a much brighter future for his daughter, and now, facing her after the exam results, he felt a deep sense of letdown. "You've let me down, Kainat," he said, his voice laced with a heavy disappointment. "I had such high hopes for you. Were you truly studying, or just pretending to engage with your books?" Kainat looked up at him, her heart pounding, and replied with a tremor in her voice, "Dad, you've watched me grow since I was little. I've poured my heart into my studies, but somehow, the results never reflect my effort. I know you're upset, and I get it—really, I do—but I promise I did my best during the exams." A surge of anger churned within him, yet he fought to contain it, recognizing the fine line between disappointment and concern for his daughter's feelings. His wife, Kainat's mother, stepped closer, her gentle voice cutting through the tension. "Now is not the time for anger, sweetheart. Kainat really needs our support," she softly urged him, reaching out to place a comforting hand on his arm. Feeling the warmth of her mother's embrace, Kainat leaned in, her lips quivering as she whispered, "Mom, why did Dad say those things? Doesn't he trust me?" Her mother, with a reassuring smile, replied, "He does trust you, my dear. He's just frustrated at the moment. Give him some time; once he reflects on everything, I'm sure he will come around." The reassuring words wrapped around Kainat like a

warm blanket, though the ache of her father's disappointment lingered in the air.

In the soft glow of the evening light, Kiyan dialed his dad's number, concerned about Kainat's disappointing exam results. After hearing the news, Kiyan felt a wave of disappointment wash over him. He knew that Kainat was an exceptionally bright and diligent student who had poured her heart and soul into her studies. The grades did not reflect her true potential, and his frustration mounted as he thought of the injustice of it all. In a bid to alleviate their worries, Kiyan suggested to his dad that they explore the possibility of having Kainat's exam papers re-evaluated. At first, Kainat's dad was resistant, thinking it might be a waste of time, but Kiyan, with unwavering determination, engaged him in a heartfelt discussion. He reminded him that Kainat's track record spoke volumes and that this unexpected setback didn't align with the hard work she had consistently demonstrated. Later that night, Kiyan reached out to Kainat, who was feeling deflated and disheartened. Drawing upon their close bond, he offered her comforting words of encouragement. "Be strong, Kainat," he said gently. "These small storms in life can't shatter your spirit. I believe that your grades will increase after the re-evaluation." Kainat, with a hint of anxiety in her voice, asked, "But Bhaiya, what if they don't go up?" Kiyan reassured her, "Even if they don't, you passed with 64%. You still have a solid foundation to build upon for the MBBS entrance

exams. Remember, this is just the start of your journey, not the end. Don't lose hope.” His words wrapped around her like a warm blanket, and as they spoke, a flicker of hope ignited within her. The following day, Kainat’s dad firmly decided to proceed with the re-evaluation. They were informed that they would have to wait a week for the results to come in. The anticipation hung in the air, and Kainat found herself praying fervently, pleading for a miracle. However, the outcome was ultimately disheartening; her marks remained unchanged, leaving her grappling with a mix of sadness and determination.

With no other option, Kainat’s dad urged her to begin preparing for the MBBS entrance exams. However, Neemat, her best friend, took a different path. Having always been more inclined towards engineering than medicine, she resolved not to risk her chances with the entrance exams. She swiftly gathered her documents, including her passport, and secured a spot in a prestigious medical college in the UK. As the days passed, Neemat prepared to embark on an exciting new chapter. Once her visa was approved, she visited Kainat to say goodbye. The two friends had imagined studying together and living side by side, but fate had charted a different course for them. In that bittersweet moment, as Neemat prepared to leave, Kainat struggled to hold back tears, feeling a profound sense of loss for the friendship and the dreams they had shared. “I’ll miss you so much,” Kainat said, her voice

trembling with emotion. “Please stay happy wherever life takes you, but promise me you’ll keep in touch.” Neemat wiped away a tear and responded warmly, “Of course, dear! How could I ever forget you? Just promise me that you’ll stay connected and excel in your exams.” With those heartfelt reassurances, they embraced tightly, knowing that while their paths may diverge, their friendship would always hold a special place in their hearts.

**“Life is a journey filled with unexpected twists and turns, so don't get too caught up in meticulous planning. Often, the most beautiful and memorable experiences arise spontaneously, catching us by surprise. Keep in mind that nothing that occurs in your life is truly random; everything unfolds according to the intricate design of an expert planner. Every setback you encounter, whether it's a failure on an important project or a door that closes just when you thought it would open, serves a purpose. Every obstacle you face, every achievement that gives you joy, and even the moments of deep disappointment contribute to shaping who you will ultimately become. As you navigate through this tapestry of experiences, take a moment to express gratitude to the Almighty for guiding your path, especially when life veers away from your original expectations. Those divine plans, often hidden from our immediate understanding, are crafted with wisdom and**

**foresight, providing you with opportunities for growth and transformation that you may not have envisioned. Trust in this process, for His plans are always the most profound and fulfilling.”**

Neemat embarked on her journey to the UK, excited yet determined to maintain her close friendship with Kainat. Initially, she called Kainat every weekend, sharing stories of her new life and experiences abroad. However, as time passed, those weekly calls turned into alternate weekends and then dwindled to a mere occasion, like once in a blue moon. Neemat became immersed in her studies and quickly developed new friendships, leaving her with less time for her old ones. Meanwhile, Kainat was engrossed in her rigorous preparations for her MBBS entrance exams, pouring all her energy into her studies. The day of the exam arrived—a day filled with anticipation and hope. Kainat gave it her best shot, deeply invested in her dream of becoming a doctor. But when the results were announced, her heart sank; she hadn’t made the cut. The disappointment hit hard, shaking her self-confidence to its core. She found herself questioning not just her abilities but also her faith in Allah, feeling betrayed by her hard luck. As despair crept in, she slipped into a dark cloud of depression. Kainat’s father, witnessing her struggles, began to lose faith in her potential as well. In an effort to guide her away from stagnation, he suggested she think about enrolling in a BSc or a BA LLB program to make the most of her time. However, Kainat felt lost; none of

those paths resonated with her desires. She longed only for the white coat of a doctor, not willing to entertain any other possibilities. On one quiet weekend, she decided to reach out to Neemat. In their conversation, Neemat thoughtfully suggested engineering as an alternative career path, but Kainat rejected the idea vehemently, asserting that she was determined to be a doctor or nothing at all. Even the thought of pursuing a career as a scientist didn't cross her mind anymore. Despite her own hectic schedule, Neemat showed time and again that she was a true friend. She encouraged Kainat to reconsider her father's advice, emphasizing that time was precious, and she didn't want her friend to waste it. Neemat's strong friendship served as a reminder that real connection isn't defined by constant communication or spending every moment together. It's about the profound bond that exists, no matter how much life pulls them in different directions.

Life became busy for Neemat as she focused on her engineering degree, but she still made it a point to reach out, maintaining a thread of connection with Kainat. A genuine friend is someone who stands by your side, even when life pulls you apart. They celebrate your achievements, provide comfort during your struggles, and are there when you need them most, without demanding your time or attention. Even if weeks or months pass without contact, when they reconnect, it feels as if no time has elapsed at all. True friendship is built on trust, loyalty, and mutual respect.

It reassures you that despite life's twists and turns, there's always someone who cares deeply. A simple message, a spontaneous phone call, or even a shared memory can reignite the warmth and connection between true friends like Kainat and Neemat. It's important to cherish those rare friends who hold a special place in your heart, even when circumstances keep you apart. They are the ones who matter most, proving that real friendships are fortified by love and understanding, not by constant presence or availability.

Kainat sank deep into a well of despair, the weight of uncertainty pressing heavily on her chest. Nights dragged on, her sleep elusive, as her mind spiraled into a cycle of self-doubt and frustration. Every whisper of wind seemed to carry her complaints to Allah, her voice laced with a sense of unfairness as she bemoaned her misfortunes. Her heart yearned to don a white coat, fulfilling her dream of becoming a doctor, but the daunting financial burden of an MBBS degree loomed ominously over her aspirations. Her father, worn down by the realities of their situation, had already invested significant resources into Kiyan's medical education—his eldest son, who was now trudging through the demanding final year. “Why not explore other professional paths?” Kiyan suggested, his voice both practical and soothing. He spoke of the arduous journey through medical school—the relentless hours of study, the sacrifices, and the unwavering focus required. It felt to Kainat that trust

in her intelligence and determination was in short supply; even her support network seemed to falter in her darkest moments. She couldn't shake the feeling that when times were tough, even the most cherished relationships could add to one's turmoil. On one fateful evening, while flipping through channels, Kainat's attention was ensnared by a counselor—a compassionate figure on the screen, skillfully guiding a despondent patient through their emotional labyrinth. The counselor's calm demeanor and supportive words lit a flicker of hope within Kainat. It was a spark that ignited a critical conversation with Kiyan later that night. "Bhaiya," she began tentatively, "what's the landscape like for counselors? What subjects do I need to study?" Her brother's response was encouraging; he described how a degree in Psychology could lead her toward becoming a psychiatrist—a role that could make a genuine difference in people's lives. With newfound clarity, Kainat approached her father over dinner, her voice steady yet filled with determination. "Dad, I want to pursue Psychology and become a psychiatrist." The initial hesitation in her father's eyes transformed into cautious consideration before he finally said, "If you're certain, then let's move forward." Within days, he had arranged for her admission to a prestigious college in Chennai, celebrating her achievements even as he prepared her for an imminent journey. However, as the days dwindled down to her departure, Kainat felt a tempest of emotions swell within her.



The thought of leaving the comfort of her home—where warmth and familiarity enveloped her—was daunting. “But where will I stay, Dad?” she had asked, her voice trembling. “You’ll reside in the college hostel,” he replied matter-of-factly. Panic took root in her heart; Kainat had never spent a night away from her family. She wrestled with the notion of living alone in an unfamiliar city, far from the safety net provided by her parents. Her father, sensing her apprehension, urged her to embrace this opportunity for growth, drawing upon the stories of her friend Neemat, who had successfully carved out a life for herself in a different country. “You’re going to study in India; I’ll always be just a phone call away. I’ll visit whenever you want,” he assured her, though Kainat felt that her limits were being tested. That night, she lay in bed, tears silently escaping her eyes as she found herself wrapped beneath her blanket—a cocoon of comfort in a world that felt suddenly vast and intimidating. “How will I manage on my own?” she thought, the shadows of uncertainty creeping closer. The notion of handling life’s basic tasks, from buying stationery to finding her way around campus, left her feeling helpless. In the midst of her tears, Kainat recalled a piece of wisdom: “Sometimes you need a good cry to reset and start fresh.” As her emotions flowed, she found solace in the release, understanding that venting her frustrations could ultimately pave the way for hope and clarity. In that moment of vulnerability, Kainat acknowledged her fears and

began to envision a new beginning—a path illuminated by the possibility of overcoming the challenges that lay ahead.



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **The Unchosen Journey to her Future**

Kainat sat on her bed, enveloped in a cloud of uncertainty and sadness. The reality of moving to a new city, Chennai, to pursue a degree she had never once envisioned for herself hung heavily in the air. Her mind raced with worries about the drastic change, her heart aching at the thought of leaving her familiar surroundings behind. Just then, her mother entered the room, balancing a colorful plate piled high with a steaming omelette, golden-brown toast slathered with creamy butter, and a steaming cup of fragrant tea. “Kainat, my dear,” her mom gently called, “Why didn’t you come down for breakfast? Your dad and I were waiting for you.” Curiosity sparked within Kainat as she asked, “Did Dad leave for the office already?” Her mom nodded and replied, “Yes, he left a while ago for an important meeting. But I wanted to make sure you had something to eat before you start

your day. Please, have a bite.” With a heavy heart, Kainat shook her head, her voice small, “No, Mom, I’m really not hungry. Please take it back.” Her mother, concern etching her features, countered, “I made this for you, filled with love and care, and you’re turning it down? That doesn’t seem fair.” Tears began to well in Kainat’s eyes as she looked down at her plate, her voice trembling. “Mom, I don’t know how I’m going to manage by myself in Chennai. I’m already feeling so homesick. I’ve spent years dreaming of becoming a doctor or a scientist, and now I’m being pushed into an unchosen journey. Why does it feel like my life is filled with struggles?” Her mother approached her, taking a seat beside her on the bed, her voice softening. “Sweetheart, sometimes what we think we want isn’t what Allah has planned for us. Everything is written for us, even before we draw our first breath. I know you’ve worked tirelessly, but this is His will. Life is filled with trials, and those who navigate through them are the ones who have faith in Allah. Just remember, after rain, there’s always sunshine. You will find your light, you just need to be patient. And you’re not facing this alone; we are with you in spirit, and Allah is always by your side in that new city. You will discover new experiences and forge friendships that will feel like family over the next three years. Now, let me take care of you and feed you breakfast because in just a few days, I won’t be here to do this for you.” A flicker of hope ignited in Kainat’s heart as she listened, her mother’s words a

gentle balm to her fears. With a small smile, she picked up her fork and took a cautious bite of the fluffy omelette, savoring the comforting flavors. As her mom wiped away her tears and pressed a tender kiss to her forehead, Kainat felt a momentary sense of reassurance. It's never easy to step away from the warm embrace of family, which represents her comfort zone. Yet a saying echoed in her mind: "**Kuch paney ke liye kuch khona padta hai.**" To achieve greatness, one must sometimes leave behind their comforts. Kainat resolved to put on a brave face, assuring her mother that she would manage just fine on her own. But inside, a storm of fear swirled. In her quiet moments of solitude, she longed for her parents to truly understand the depth of her struggles. She wished they could see her vulnerable side, to recognize that she was still figuring things out, still grappling with uncertainty. Although she was now considered an adult, she yearned for their comfort, their wisdom, and their unwavering love. More than anything, she wanted them to see her for who she truly was; perhaps if they did, it would ease the weight of her silent battles.

The afternoon sun streamed through Kainat's bedroom window, casting a warm golden glow across the room as she meticulously organized her belongings. Only two days remained before she embarked on her journey to Chennai, and with it came a bittersweet blend of anticipation and trepidation. She had made a

resolute decision to leave her hometown in pursuit of higher education and a promising career, yet a lingering whisper in her heart still yearned for her childhood dream of becoming a doctor. Kainat had always believed that hard work was the key to success, but lately, she found herself grappling with a new perspective. A creeping doubt had emerged in her mind—perhaps everything that happened in life was preordained, beyond the realm of her control. This realization left her feeling conflicted; while she was somewhat prepared to embrace her new path, the thought of abandoning her medical aspirations weighed heavily on her. Her mind was caught in a tempest of emotions, oscillating between hope and despair. She reflected on the idea that sometimes, in order to welcome what destiny had planned, we must release our grip on what we desire but cannot attain. Yet, the sorrow of potentially losing her dream haunted her, a shadow that loomed larger as departure day drew near. Just then, her father entered the room, his presence offering a comforting familiarity in the midst of her chaos. "So, is your packing done?" he inquired, his voice warm and concerned. "Yes, Dad, everything is carefully packed and ready to go," she responded, though her tone lacked the enthusiasm she wished to convey. He studied her for a moment, noticing the uncertainty that clouded her eyes. "Are you happy?" he asked gently, his concern palpable.

Kainat glanced down at her hands, feeling tears prickling at her eyelids. It was hard to mask the emotional turmoil she felt inside. Her dad stepped closer, kneeling beside her to offer a reassuring hug. "Kainat, I know you've put in your best effort," he said softly. "But remember, you will only receive what Allah has chosen for you. Now focus on your studies and make me proud of your journey ahead." With a shaky breath, Kainat replied, "Dad, I've always tried to be the daughter you can be proud of, but I can't shake this feeling of failure." He wrapped his arms around her, comforting her as tears slipped down her cheeks. "You must promise me that you'll take care of yourself while you're away. Prioritize your well-being first, and then your studies," he said, planting a gentle kiss on her forehead. "Always remember that your dad wants only the best for you, and I love you more than words can express." A flicker of a smile broke through Kainat's tears, a sense of warmth spreading through her chest as she responded, "I love you too, Dad." In that moment, she felt a little lighter, fortified by her father's unwavering support as she prepared for the next chapter of her life.

Kainat felt a wave of excitement wash over her as her dad confirmed their flight tickets had been booked well in advance for their journey to Chennai. The anticipation of the new adventure ahead was palpable, especially since her mom had also gotten involved in the packing process. In addition to her own clothing,

she meticulously included her dad's favorite outfits, ensuring they were well-prepared for the week-long stay. This trip was crucial for Kainat; it would give her the chance to acclimate to her new environment before diving into her studies. Before they left, Kainat picked up the phone to call her brother Kiyan. The sound of his voice brought her comfort as he wished her the very best in this new chapter. He reassured her that no matter the distance, he would always be just a call away if she needed him for support. Next, she called her trusted friend Neemat to share the thrilling news that she would be studying Psychology in Chennai. Kainat eagerly asked her to send over her new contact number as soon as she acquired a Chennai SIM card, so they could remain connected despite the miles that would separate them. At long last, the day of their departure arrived, and Kainat, alongside her parents, set out for the bustling city of Chennai—a place where she would plant her roots for the next three years to carve out her career. Dressed casually yet stylishly in a crisp white T-shirt paired with faded blue denim jeans, she looked effortlessly charming, with her long, brown hair neatly pulled back into a clutcher. Her parents beamed at her, showering her with affectionate compliments and heartfelt blessings as they made their way to the airport. The family boarded their flight from Srinagar International Airport, taking off for Delhi at precisely 2:30 PM. After a smooth flight, they landed in Delhi at 3:45 PM and faced a lengthy layover of three hours. To make the most of their time,



they explored the airport café, where they indulged in freshly made sandwiches and steaming cups of coffee. Kainat couldn't resist picking up a couple of gripping novels by Sidney Sheldon and Colleen Hoover, eager to immerse herself in their captivating stories and pass the time. As she dove into her book, her dad flipped through a magazine he had found at the airport, while her mom, lacking a similar distraction, found herself growing restless as the hours dragged on. Finally, the much-anticipated announcement for their connecting flight echoed through the terminal, prompting them to gather their belongings and head towards the departure gate.

By 7:45 PM, they were onboard, with Kainat's mom quickly claiming the window seat to enjoy the views. Kainat settled between her parents, her heart racing with excitement as they soared above the clouds, marveling at the breathtaking vistas below. The flight lasted nearly three hours, and as they touched down in Chennai around 10:35 PM, the night was still vibrating with life. Upon collecting their luggage, they booked a cab that whisked them away to the hotel her dad's friend had arranged for their stay. Stepping into the hotel, they were greeted like VIPs with a refreshing welcome drink and led to a spacious room that exceeded their expectations. With elegant furnishings and soft lighting, it boasted a chic design that felt both welcoming and luxurious. The bathroom, with its elegant fixtures and plush ambiance, exuded a

cinematic charm that excited Kainat and her parents alike. Fatigued from the day's travel, they quickly freshened up and decided to order dinner. Unfortunately, the culinary offerings did not quite meet their hopes; they found themselves with South Indian masala dosa and chutney, a dish that, while popular, fell a little flat in flavor. After the meal, which they deemed somewhat insipid, they settled into their cozy beds around 1:30 AM, ready to recharge for an early start the next day—one that would lead them to Kainat's new college.

They woke up early that morning, just around 5:30 AM, greeted by the soft light filtering through the curtains. After freshening up, they gathered for Fajr Namaz, bringing a sense of peace and spirituality to the start of their day. Following their prayers, Kainat's dad placed an order for breakfast to be served in their hotel room. The aroma of freshly made bread omelettes wafted through the air, accompanied by steaming cups of fragrant tea. Kainat's mom enjoyed her South Indian tea, appreciating its rich aroma and unique taste, which reminded her of home. Once they finished their delightful breakfast, they prepared to leave for the college. Kainat chose to wear her stunning blue Kashmiri suit adorned with intricate white embroidery that showcased the region's artistry. The fabric draped gracefully around her, enhancing her fair complexion and tall stature, making her appear even more like a graceful Kashmiri girl. Her mother,

dressed in a maroon Pakistani salwar suit decorated with elegant patches, looked equally stunning, her beauty complementing her daughter's. Kainat's dad, tall and handsome, donned a casual blue T-shirt paired with classic blue jeans, exuding a relaxed charm. When Kainat playfully remarked, "Oh my God, Dad, you look like a handsome hunk, Masha Allah," he chuckled and responded, "Thank you, my beautiful daughter. Now, let's head out!" The hotel cab arrived to transport them to the college, and as they stepped into the well-kept campus, Kainat was struck by the vibrant atmosphere. The college was beautifully decorated with colorful banners and flowers, and on one side, there was a spacious basketball court, while a lush garden filled with blooming flowers lay on the other. Behind it all was the bustling cafeteria, buzzing with students enjoying their morning. They made their way directly to the Humanities Department to meet Mrs. Savitha Iyer, the Head of Department. A warm and welcoming figure, she confirmed Kainat's admission into the Psychology program and took the time to introduce Kainat to the Director, Mr. Rama Rajaya Reddy. He was a tall man with a dark complexion and an air of discipline. After a firm handshake with Kainat's dad, he greeted Kainat warmly and said, "I wish you good luck, Kainat. Make sure you aim to be among the top ten students in our college." With determination, Kainat responded, "I will try my best, Sir." Mr. Reddy smiled, gently correcting her, "Instead of saying you will try,

confidently say you will definitely do it.” Kainat quickly adjusted her response, replying, “Yes, Sir, I will definitely do it.” His encouraging smile conveyed approval, and he added, “That’s the spirit! Now, go attend your classes, as you’ve already missed a week.” As they were about to leave, Kainat’s dad expressed his concern, “Sir, my daughter will be staying here for three years. This is her first time away from home, and she tends to get homesick. I kindly request that you ensure she feels safe and happy during her time here.” Mr. Reddy reassured him, “No worries, Sir. Now your daughter is our responsibility. She is in a secure environment, and she will have a wonderful experience here. My faculty members and I will treat her like our own daughter, providing a friendly and supportive learning atmosphere.” Relieved, Kainat’s dad thanked him earnestly, “Thank you so much, sir. This is exactly what I hoped for.” As they stepped out of the Director’s office with Mrs. Iyer, she spotted two girls passing by and called them over. “Here’s Kainat, your new classmate! Please show her to her classroom,” she instructed them. Kainat’s dad encouraged her, “Go on, attend your classes. We’ll pick you up when college is over,” and with a heartfelt goodbye to her parents, Kainat walked alongside her new acquaintances. One of the girls, a bright and cheerful personality, asked, “Where are you from, Kainat?” With a smile, she replied, “Jammu and Kashmir.” The two girls exclaimed in unison, “Wow! You’ve come from Kashmir, the Paradise on Earth!”

Kainat felt a bit of pride swell in her heart, and she then asked them their names. “I’m Neeta, and this is my friend Ashika. We’re from Uttarakhand,” one of them responded with a friendly smile. As the trio entered the classroom, they chose seats at the front. Both Neeta and Ashika proposed, “So, friends?” Kainat easily agreed, feeling a spark of companionship forming. To her surprise, she noticed students from a kaleidoscope of backgrounds—some hailed from China, Bhutan, Serbia, and Korea, while others were locals, mostly South Indians from Chennai. A few girls came over to Kainat to offer compliments, warmly remarking, “You are very pretty.” Having primarily studied alongside Muslim peers before, Kainat felt the excitement of meeting students from such diverse cultures. Ms. Katherine, the lecturer, entered the room and began taking attendance. She looked at Kainat and asked, “Are you feeling comfortable, considering this is your first experience here?” Kainat replied with a nod, “Yes, Ma’am, I’m fine,” though internally she grappled with the challenge of adapting to her new environment filled with such different backgrounds. When she leaned over to ask Ashika, “Aren’t there more Indian students here?” Ashika replied, “Yes, there are students from various parts of India—Assam, Karnataka, Manipur, Mizoram, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, and Bihar.” Curiously, Kainat inquired, “How many are from Jammu and Kashmir?” Ashika’s sad gaze met hers, “Only you.” Kainat felt a wave of loneliness

wash over her, realizing how far she was from home amidst this diverse sea of new faces.

During the psychology practical session, Kainat found herself in an unexpectedly challenging situation. As the new girl in a co education college, she had little experience interacting with male classmates, having graduated from a girls' school where such interactions were rare. The task at hand was to partner with Sonam Dorjee, a Bhutanese student whose friendly smile was meant to ease her nerves. However, as he introduced himself, Kainat could only manage a tentative response, her voice barely above a whisper. With her mind racing, Kainat felt a wave of dread wash over her. She had missed an entire week of lessons due to unforeseen circumstances, leaving her completely unprepared for the practicals that were entirely new territory for her. Sitting across from Sonam, she struggled to shake off her sense of unease, staring blankly at him notebook, desperate for clarity about what was expected of her. Noticing her plight, Sonam leaned in closer, his tone gentle yet encouraging. "Don't worry, Kainat," he said, "I'll guide you through this." He explained the task step-by-step, instructing her to jot down their discussions for the records they needed to submit to their instructor. Despite his efforts to be supportive, Kainat's discomfort was palpable; he could feel her face flush with embarrassment. She cast a glance toward her friends Neeta and Ashika, who were engaged in their own practicals, laughing and

scribbling notes effortlessly with their partners. Their ease only amplified her sense of isolation.

Inside, Kainat thought, Oh Allah, what am I going to do? Was this scenario really necessary? I tend to be harsh with boys; how will I navigate this situation? Just then, Sonam's voice broke her concentration again. "Hey, Kainat, where's your focus? We need to write this down and show it to Ma'am, so let's get moving!" His casual tone was encouraging, but Kainat could only muster a distracted, "Yeah, I'm working on it," as she struggled to find her footing in this new dynamic. Each tick of the clock amplified her anxiety as she braced herself for what lay ahead.

As the clock struck 3 PM, the halls of the college buzzed with excitement as students spilled out, their faces radiating joy after enduring long lectures. Kainat, with her heart racing, waved goodbye to her new friends, Neeta and Ashika, before making her way down the wide staircase. There, she spotted her parents standing at the entrance, waving eagerly. A smile blossomed on her face as she hurried toward them. "How was your first day, sweetheart?" her dad inquired, his voice warm with curiosity. "It was really good, Dad, but I'm absolutely starving!" Kainat replied, her stomach rumbling in agreement. "Alright, let's grab a bite at a restaurant near the hotel. But first, we'll check out your hostel room," he suggested, leading the way. They walked through the bustling campus, eventually reaching the modest yet

welcoming building of the hostel. Mrs. Ramiya Murthy, the hostel coordinator, greeted them with a friendly demeanor, guiding them to the third floor where Kainat's room was located. Two other girls already occupied the space, and Kainat was excited to meet her future roommates. Mrs. Ramiya knocked gently on the door, and one of the girls swung it open, offering a bright and friendly smile. "Hi! I'm Jyoti," she introduced herself, stepping aside to let them in. Kainat entered the room, which was filled with sunlight streaming through the window and adorned with posters and personal touches that made it feel homey. Preeti, the other roommate, was seated on her bed, flipping through a textbook. "A new roommate! Is this Kainat?" Jyoti asked enthusiastically. "Yes, it is. This is her mom and dad," Mrs. Ramiya confirmed, gesturing toward Kainat's parents. "Namaste," Jyoti and Preeti said in unison, bowing their heads slightly in respect. Kainat soon learned that Jyoti was pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biotechnology, while Preeti was her classmate enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts Honours program in Clinical Psychology. "I saw you in class today! Was it your first day?" Preeti asked, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. Kainat

nodded. "Yes! It was my first day, although I didn't notice you." Jyoti then asked, "Where are you from, Kainat?" "I'm from Jand K. What about you?" she inquired. "I'm from Kolkata," Jyoti responded, her accent hinting at her roots. "And Preeti is from the



Andaman Islands.” “Can you show me around the room?” Kainat asked, eager to settle in. “Of course! This is the biggest room in the hostel,” Jyoti responded, proudly displaying all the essentials: the neatly made beds, sturdy study tables, and a spacious cupboard for clothes. They even checked out the attached bathroom, which was surprisingly large and well-kept. Kainat’s parents had brought an assortment of essentials for her stay: a cozy blanket, a firm mattress, a bucket, a mug, a tea mug, and a water bottle, along with glasses and spoons—all neatly packed into colorful bags. “Could we keep her belongings here? She’ll be staying with us for five days before moving in,” Kainat’s mom asked kindly. “Absolutely, aunty. There’s plenty of space. You can lock her things up in that cupboard,” Jyoti replied with a sweet smile. Mrs. Ramiya handed Kainat the keys to the cupboard, and she quickly stored her items inside, placing the mattress atop the bed. As she looked around the room, a sense of comfort washed over her, and she hoped her new roommates would be pleasant and friendly.

After exchanging pleasantries and a few laughs, Kainat bid her roommates farewell, promising to return in five days. “See you in class tomorrow, right?” Preeti asked before Kainat exited. “Of course! Bye!” Kainat replied, her anticipation growing as they headed out for lunch. Her parents shared beaming smiles, clearly proud of Kainat’s new arrangement at

the hostel. Once they reached the cozy restaurant nearby, Kainat eagerly perused the menu, only to discover that it was dominated by South Indian dishes. After much deliberation, they decided on an order of fragrant fried rice. When the waiter brought out the dish, it was accompanied by crispy papad, zesty coconut chutney, and a bowl of steaming sambar, enhancing the experience with delightful aromas. As Kainat took her first bite, she exclaimed, “Dad, everything here tastes similar, and this bitter papad seems to come with its lifelong companion, sambar!” Laughter erupted at the table, filling the air with warmth and joy as they shared stories about her day. “Funny enough, there are more international students here than Indians. I feel like an alien,” Kainat remarked, casting a glance at her dad, “and I’m the only Kashmiri student in this entire college.” Her dad chuckled, responding, “So what? You’ve always studied alongside Kashmiris; now you’ll get a chance to meet people from diverse backgrounds. Embrace it!” Kainat sighed, expressing her reluctance. “I mean, I don’t have a choice—I have to figure this out.” “You’ll gain invaluable exposure and experience here. You’ve always been a bit sheltered,” her father encouraged gently. “I don’t need exposure. Can we just go home?” Kainat countered, her tone light but firm. Her mother interjected, “You need to learn independence. This is part of growing up.” Kainat rolled her eyes playfully, saying, “I am standing on my feet, Mom, not my hands!” Her dad chuckled at her

clever joke but added seriously, “You can’t return home without finishing your degree.” “Okay, Dad, but can we talk about the real challenge? I need to learn Tamil just to communicate with auto drivers and shopkeepers. It feels like a completely different language!” Kainat expressed her frustration. “That’s actually a great opportunity! Learning a new language is a skill that will benefit you throughout life,” he assured her with confidence.

Kainat's exhilarating five-day journey in Chennai was a whirlwind of academic commitments and vibrant city explorations. Each morning, she attended her college classes with anticipation, immersing herself in a new learning environment. However, it was the afternoons that filled her with joy as she would set off with her parents to discover the breathtaking sights of Chennai. Among the city's treasures were its stunning beaches, with Kainat experiencing the vastness of the ocean for the very first time. They wandered along the iconic Marina Beach, where the golden sands stretched endlessly and the waves danced merrily against the shore. Besant Nagar Beach offered a more tranquil atmosphere, with cozy cafes lining the beach, while Elliot Beach, known for its serene ambiance, became another favorite spot. They even took a short trip to the picturesque Kovalam Beach, where the coconut palms swayed gently in the breeze. Kainat, enchanted by the beauty surrounding her, captured countless photographs – each snap a memory of her coastal

adventure. After long days filled with exploration, the family indulged in the rich flavors of South Indian cuisine, savoring aromatic dishes like idli, dosa, and vada, paired with spicy chutneys. Their shopping escapade at Phoenix Market City and Express Avenue Mall added to the experience; Kainat excitedly picked out fashionable tops, well-fitted jeans, colorful kurtis, and dainty bracelets that sparkled in the vibrant mall lights. Each purchase was not just a wardrobe addition; they represented a new chapter in her life. As the final night in the hotel approached, a bittersweet heaviness enveloped Kainat. With tear-filled eyes, she embraced her mother tightly, pleading silently not to be left alone as she felt a growing sense of anxiety about her journey ahead. Her mother, with warmth and wisdom, reassured her, emphasizing the importance of courage and resilience in achieving her dreams and becoming her true self. The following day, after classes, Kainat's parents dropped her off at the hostel. They encouraged her to keep a positive outlook, focus on her studies, and not dwell on the emotional weight of their departure. Her supportive roommates, Jyoti and Preeti, quickly came to her side, assuring her that she wouldn't feel alone in this new chapter because they were there for her. They brightened the evening by cooking instant noodles and preparing Bournvita, sharing laughter and stories to ease her anxiety.

In the days that followed, Kainat began forging friendships with several female classmates and even

international students, each connection a ray of hope against her feelings of homesickness. Neeta and Ashika became allies in her new world; they shared late-night conversations and laughter in their cozy dorm room. However, her shyness held her back from interacting with the boys in her class. This reluctance led to unfortunate misinterpretations; some peers labeled her as proud and arrogant, unfairly judging her based on her quiet demeanor. Little did they know, Kainat was grappling with significant adjustment issues as she transitioned from her previous path in Science to the vast realm of Humanities. Beneath her calm exterior, she was wrestling with self-doubt and sadness over her choice, feeling the pressure of new expectations. Her classmates, perceiving only surface-level behavior, misread her quietness as aloofness, forming a barrier that isolated her further. Kainat's experience serves as a poignant reminder of the depth hidden beneath the surface of every individual. What may appear as weakness is often a form of strength, and what looks like emotional distance might simply be a protective measure. It encourages us all to take a moment to cultivate understanding before rushing to judge. Everyone carries their own stories, full of challenges and hidden struggles that are not readily visible. A sprinkle of kindness and a grain of patience can dramatically shift someone's day, reminding us that we all yearn for a little understanding. Rather than leaping to conclusions, we should aim to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. After all, everyone deserves

the grace to be human in a world that often rushes to make judgments.

It's all too easy to leap into judgment, but the path to understanding is far more challenging and rewarding. To truly grasp the complexities of another person's situation, one must cultivate compassion, practice patience, and embrace the idea that even the kindest individuals can sometimes resort to misguided methods. When we judge others, we create barriers that divide us; however, when we strive to understand, we open the door to growth and connection. Consider someone who appears withdrawn, who may struggle with feelings of inadequacy or anxiety. If you possess the unique ability to reach out and engage, take the initiative to approach them. You may discover that they are silently wrestling with their own battles, longing for support but unsure of how to ask for it. Before jumping to conclusions about someone's actions or emotions, take a moment to uncover the facts that lay beneath the surface. When the urge to judge arises, slow down and reflect on the reasons behind someone's behavior. If you're on the verge of hurting someone with your words or actions, pause and try to empathize—feel what they might be feeling. And before expressing your thoughts, give yourself a moment to think critically about the impact of your words. By embracing this thoughtful approach, you foster a deeper, more compassionate understanding of each other.



## **CHAPTER : 9**

### **Tomorrow Demands Adjustment**

Kainat was determined to fit in with her classmates and roommates, yet the gnawing feeling of homesickness clouded her ability to focus on her studies. Her teachers had noted that, while she possessed a sharp intellect and could grasp complex concepts with ease, her disinterest in lessons led to frequent reprimands. She would often find herself silently weeping in the classroom, her heart aching for the comfort of her home.

One day, her Psychology teacher, Mrs. Katherine, invited her into her cozy office adorned with inspirational posters and bookshelves filled with texts on human behavior. The gentle teacher observed Kainat's downcast eyes and the sorrow etched on her face. "Kainat," she began kindly, "I know you have the potential to excel. It's clear you're smart, but I'm concerned about your lack of engagement in class.

Several classmates have mentioned feeling that you come off as aloof and proud.” Kainat’s gaze fell to the floor, shame rushing through her. “Ma’am,” she replied in a soft voice, “I’m not proud. I just miss my family so much. I’m trying to adjust and make friends, but it seems like no one wants to reach out to me.” Mrs. Katherine leaned forward, her expression warm and understanding. “I can imagine how tough this adjustment must be for you. Remember, this is your first time away from home, but you’re not alone in this experience. Every student in this hostel is facing similar challenges for the first time. If you keep withdrawing and crying, it’ll be difficult for others to approach you. Is there something deeper bothering you? I’m here to listen and support you.” Kainat took a deep breath, feeling vulnerable but safe in Mrs. Katherine’s presence. “Honestly, I’ve always dreamt of becoming a doctor, and now I find myself studying Psychology. It’s hard to let go of that dream, and I feel lost and uncertain.” Mrs. Katherine paused thoughtfully before suggesting, “If this environment is making you unhappy, perhaps you should consider going home. I could contact your father and discuss this with him.” Kainat’s eyes filled with tears at the thought of leaving. “No, Ma’am, please don’t call my dad. I promise I will take my studies seriously from today onwards; I won’t cry anymore, and I will try to make friends.” Mrs. Katherine smiled gently, “Kainat, try to shift your perspective. Forget about your previous dreams for a bit and focus on the path you’ve



chosen. You're pursuing a degree in Clinical Psychology now. If you embrace this opportunity with an open heart, you may discover a new passion within it.

Approach your classmates; you might be surprised at how much you could learn about each other. This hostel, for the next three years, is your home, and we're all part of your new family. Show everyone, including yourself, that you can thrive." Feeling a spark of hope, Kainat nodded earnestly, "Yes, Ma'am, I will take your advice seriously." "If you ever need assistance, remember that I and the other faculty members are here for you," Mrs. Katherine encouraged her. "Now, you can return to class with a fresh outlook. Have a wonderful day." "Thank you, Ma'am, I wish you a lovely day too," Kainat replied, a newfound determination rising within her. As she left the office, Kainat made her way to the washroom. Staring at herself in the mirror, she let her emotions spill out, tears flowing freely. After a good cry, she splashed cold water on her face, feeling refreshed. Looking back at her reflection, she whispered resolutely, "Kainat, yesterday is behind you. Focus on living in the present and shaping your future. This is your journey now. Don't let your father down; you must overcome every hurdle. This moment demands your resilience, so prepare yourself to make it happen. This is your world, and it's time to embrace it." With that thought in mind, she walked into her classroom.

Her friends Neeta and Ashika noticed her and asked curiously, “Why did Mrs. Katherine call you?” “She just wanted to check if I’m settling in,” Kainat replied, a small smile forming on her lips. From that day forward, she immersed herself in her studies, actively participating in discussions, engaging with her teachers, and smiling at her classmates. The transformation was remarkable; her classmates and teachers were taken aback by her newfound enthusiasm and confidence. It was as if someone had cast a spell of positivity over her. Empowered by Mrs. Katherine’s encouragement, Kainat actively sought connections with her fellow students. She introduced herself to classmates in her lectures, opened up during group activities, and found herself forging friendships. On weekends, she cherished calls from her childhood friend Neemat, who was studying abroad in the UK. They exchanged stories about their school experiences, bonding over their adventures and challenges. Kainat even picked up some Tamil from her classmates, and she made it a point to talk to her brother Kiyan and her parents daily, sharing snippets of her life and listening to theirs. Faced with the challenge of adjusting to a new environment, Kainat tackled it with unwavering determination. Though the journey was difficult at times, she found the strength to navigate through it.

My grandfather, Abbaji, had often said, “**Khuda Jab Husn Deta Hai Nazakat Aa Hi Jati Hai,**” meaning that when God places you in challenging situations,

you learn the art of overcoming them through perseverance and dedication. Kainat embodied that wisdom as she embraced her new reality, transforming her struggle into a triumph of self-discovery and resilience.

Kainat had successfully forged connections with her classmates—budding friendships that included both girls and boys. Yet, despite this, a sense of isolation frequently washed over her when she returned to her room. Though she got along well with her roommates, Jyoti and Preeti, she couldn't shake the feeling that there was an invisible barrier keeping them apart. While they laughed and shared inside jokes, Kainat couldn't help but wonder if the divide stemmed from their different cultural backgrounds. She was a Muslim girl, and her roommates were Hindu; she couldn't understand why she felt more included with her other friends, Neeta and Ashika, who were also Hindus. She thought religion wouldn't be the reason—maybe her vibe just wasn't matching with them.

On one particular afternoon, as they sat in their classroom, a group of upperclassmen entered and made an exciting announcement. They revealed that a fresher's day event was planned for the following day and encouraged everyone to come dressed in their best attire for what they described as a "crazy introduction." Kainat looked at Neeta with a puzzled expression, her brow furrowing. "What exactly is a crazy introduction? Are we supposed to act mad?" she

asked. Neeta giggled and replied, “I was thinking the same! Maybe we’ll have to dress like we’ve just come from a mental asylum!” Ashika chimed in with laughter, adding to the lighthearted banter. After class, they made their way back to the hostel, which was split into buildings on either side of the road. Kainat turned to her friends and remarked, “You both are so lucky to have each other. It must be nice to have that bond in the same room.” Neeta, noticing Kainat’s wistfulness, inquired if something was bothering her. With a heavy heart, Kainat confided, “I feel like my roommates don’t enjoy my company. They’re so close with each other but distant with me.” “Oh, come on,” Neeta said reassuringly, “we’re here for you. You can always come to our room if you’re feeling down.” Kainat’s face lit up at the gesture. “That’s so sweet of you,” she said, her heart swelling with gratitude. “It’s important to have a friend who understands without needing words. You really get me.” Back in her room, Kainat found Jyoti fast asleep while Preeti was still out. A wave of loneliness hit her as she realized she had so much to share—just like she did with her family back home, recounting stories to her mom, brother, and dad. It felt odd to sit in silence between two people with whom she shared a living space.

After refreshing herself with a shower and offering her evening prayers, she plopped down on her chair with earpods in, immersing herself in her favorite Hindi songs. As the melodies surrounded her, she reclined on

her bed, her thoughts drifting. She mused, “One day, I’ll find myself in the right place, surrounded by the right people.” Overwhelmed by the temporary nature of her current environment—fleeting songs, moments, feelings, and even the people she shared her room with—she yearned for something more enduring. “Why does everything feel so transient?” she pondered. “It’s like everyone comes into my life just to leave.” She wished for moments to stretch on indefinitely, for the music to never fade. Kainat fantasized about being a character in a film she adored, someone who remained constant as others began to disappear. Yet, gradually, she was coming to terms with the importance of change and the necessity of letting go. She realized that being lost among the wrong people or in the wrong places was a crucial part of her journey. It was an essential step towards her growth and transformation, so that when the time came, she would embody the best version of herself. With this realization, she finally fell asleep, her thoughts settling. She was jolted awake by Jyoti’s cheerful call for evening tea. “Where’s Preeti?” Kainat asked, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. “She called and said she’d join us for dinner because she’s out with friends,” Jyoti replied, slipping on her jacket. Kainat nodded, “Alright, let’s go then.” She splashed water on her face, wiped it with a towel, and grabbed her tea mug as they headed out. The two girls crossed the road and made their way to the charming Rajasthani bakery, where the delightful aroma of

freshly baked goods wafted through the air. They picked up savory veg patties, their mouths watering in anticipation, before returning to their room with steaming cups of tea. As they settled in, Kainat voiced her anxieties about the upcoming fresher's day, her nerves bubbling to the surface. "What if the seniors start ragging us? What if they really put us on the spot?" she fretted. "Don't worry," Jyoti reassured her, sipping her tea calmly. "Ragging isn't allowed in this college. They might just ask you a few questions, but if you're confident and bold, you'll be fine." Still, Kainat couldn't shake off her apprehension, particularly because, when Preeti was around, she often felt invisible, overshadowed by the dynamic duo. Despite Jyoti's kindness when they were alone, Kainat sensed that when the three of them were together, she faded into the background, leaving her feeling painfully alone even in their company.

It was dinner time at the college mess, a bustling hub of chatter and laughter. Kainat and Jyoti, were making their way to the dining area when Preeti, who had been waiting, joined them. As they settled down at a table, Jyoti playfully asked Preeti, "What took you so long?" With a smile, Preeti replied, "It was Sritija's birthday! She invited me and some other classmates who are her close friends for a little celebration." Curious, Jyoti turned to Kainat and asked, "Isn't Sritija in your class too?" Kainat nodded, "Yes, she is." Jyoti followed up, "Then why weren't you invited?" Preeti shrugged,

casting a quick glance at Kainat. “Because she’s not part of our friend circle. Sritija always hangs out with Neeta and Ashika. Besides, who would invite Kainat? She’s way too boring, always with her nose in a book.” Her laughter mingled with Jyoti’s, the sound echoing in the mess. Kainat felt a pang of disappointment but chose to stay quiet, focusing on her plate of food. She had learned over time to ignore unsavory comments. As they returned to their room, Preeti, eager to talk about the fresher’s party planned for the next day, asked Kainat, “So, what are you wearing tomorrow?” Kainat replied, “I’m going with the white kurti and blue embroidery my mom gifted me, paired with denim jeans. What about you?” “I’ll be wearing a stunning black gown,” Preeti said proudly. “By the way, there are a lot of foreigners in our class, so gowns are the trend. You should wear one too! If you don’t have one, I’ve got a beautiful blue gown you can borrow.” Kainat hesitated, as she had never worn clothes that weren’t her own—never mind borrowed clothes from someone else. “No, thank you. I’m fine, really. I just don’t wear anyone else’s clothes,” she said firmly. “I’m allergic to used clothes.” “Oh, come on,” Preeti laughed, rolling her eyes. “It’s brand new, not used. Besides, what is it with you?” “Whatever it is, I just don’t borrow clothes from others,” Kainat replied, her tone calm but resolute. Preeti and Jyoti exchanged glances, their laughter resuming, but Kainat felt a sting in her chest and decided to vocalize her feelings. “What’s so

funny? I've noticed you both making fun of me even in the mess earlier. Just because I choose to be quiet doesn't mean I don't have opinions or feel hurt. Just because I respect you doesn't give you the right to cross boundaries. I'm not a joke," she insisted. Jyoti, sensing the tension, replied, "Chill out! We were just pulling your leg." Kainat looked at her sternly. "It doesn't feel like teasing when it happens so often. I'm not a comedic relief in your story." With that, she grabbed her favorite book and retreated to the terrace to study, seeking solace in the quiet of her surroundings. The next morning, Kainat embraced her routine early, finding comfort in the familiar. She took a refreshing bath, offered her Fajr prayers, and then shared breakfast with her roommates. As they finished, Preeti was immersed in her makeup routine, showcasing her artistic flair with a spectrum of colors. Kainat calmly ironed her kurti, its white fabric highlighted by delicate blue embroidery that bloomed like fresh flowers against the cloth. She paired it with well-fitted denim jeans and clean white sports shoes, opting for a minimalistic look. After applying a touch of moisturizer and a line of kajal to accentuate her eyes, Kainat admired her reflection, appreciating her simplistic elegance. Preeti adorned herself in a glamorous black gown, complete with a shimmering silver chain and dangling earrings. She turned to Jyoti and asked, "How do I look, babe?" "You look ravishing, darling! Unlike Kainat, who looks like she's headed out for a stroll," Jyoti teased, playfully nudging



Kainat. “You really need to learn how to dress up at least for the fresher’s party.” Kainat, maintaining her composure, simply responded, “I know what I should wear.” As they arrived at college, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement. Jyoti wove through the crowd towards her department, offering a cheerful goodbye to both girls. Kainat soon noticed the stark contrast around her; the other girls had piled on layers of makeup, and nearly every girl had opted for extravagant gowns. Neeta and Ashika, both sporting knee-length gowns, spotted Kainat and approached her, curiosity twinkling in their eyes. “Hey Kainat, why aren’t you wearing a gown?” they asked in unison. Kainat replied, “I don’t like those kinds of dresses. I feel comfortable in what I’m wearing.” Ashika chuckled, “Oh right, you’re a Muslim. You people are so orthodox.” With poise, Kainat countered, “I’m proud to be a Muslim, and I’m not orthodox.” This only propelled Ashika to mock further, “But you really look like an alien compared to the rest of us,” eliciting a laugh from her friends. Kainat felt the sting of their words as she stepped away, seeking refuge on a nearby bench, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. The weight of their judgment resonated in her mind, a torrent of emotions welling up inside her. Thoughts circled around her: “Some people want you to act out of character. They’ll push and poke, waiting for you to play the role they’ve assigned you. If you explode or lash out, they win.” Just then, Sangey Wangyel, a fellow student from Bhutan who had been observing

the interaction, approached her with an understanding smile. “Hey, why are you so sad, sitting here all alone? Come on, let’s go to the auditorium. Everyone’s heading there.” Kainat hesitated, wanting to stay in her cocoon of solitude, but his persistence won her over. “Alright, I’ll come with you,” she replied, rising from her seat. As they walked towards the auditorium, Sangey complimented her sincerely, “You look stunning, even in your simplicity.” As they entered the auditorium, more classmates expressed their admiration, telling her she was the “real diva.” Kainat felt a flicker of happiness amidst the shadows of self-doubt. “Thank you, but I still think you’re just being nice,” she said, still unsure. Taking her seat next to Preeti, who was glowing with excitement, they shared nerves while the seniors welcomed everyone with cheerful spirits and white roses. The atmosphere was alive, buzzing with energy as the seniors put on energetic Bollywood performances to make everyone feel at ease.

When the time came for introductions, students showcased their talents—some through dancing, others through singing, mimicking, or acting. Preeti dazzled the crowd with her dance skills, earning applause, while Kainat remained anxious about her ‘lack of talent.’ When her name was called, the audience erupted in playful shouts, singing “Kashmir Ki Kali Hoon Mai, Mujh Se Na Rutho Babuji.” The wave of confidence and fear crashed together in her

mind, and she froze, forgetting even her name. However, Sidharth, the senior in charge, stepped in supportively. “It’s okay! We’re all friends here, just take a breath and tell us something about yourself,” he encouraged her gently. With that supportive presence, Kainat found the courage to introduce herself, albeit with a hint of nerves still lingering. When asked to showcase her talent, she admitted, “I’m talentless,” earning laughter from the crowd. But with a push from Sidharth, she finally agreed to sing. She began with a beautiful Kashmiri song, her voice ringing out sweet and clear, capturing the audience’s attention. As she sang—“Dupta Gumah Abas, Daryawas Taran Taran”—the room fell silent in awe, and she saw smiles and admiration in their eyes. Even as she transitioned to a Hindi song, “Mujhe Teri Mohabat Ka Sahara Mil Gaya,” she felt the warmth of acceptance enveloping her. When she concluded, voices of encouragement erupted, “Kainat! Kainat!” The appreciation surprised her, and cheers filled the auditorium. Even faculty members were impressed, urging her to sing another Hindi song, as they basked in the beauty of her voice. Once she sat back down, Preeti wrapped her arms around Kainat, exclaiming, “Your voice is out of this world! You were incredible!” Kainat flushed with joy; she had always considered her singing merely a bathroom hobby.

After performances concluded, the seniors took the stage once more to announce Mr. and Miss Fresher.

Sangey Wangyel became Mr. Fresher for his outstanding dance performance, while Marvey Johnas from Chennai earned Miss Fresher for her captivating Bharatnatyam performance. Applause filled the room once more, but Kainat's moment had yet to arrive. Then, a moment she never expected happened—Kainat was awarded “Best Looking Diva.” Stunned silence fell over her as the director praised her for her simplicity, stating that it takes real courage to embrace natural beauty amidst a sea of make-up and extravagance. The declaration left those who mocked her speechless. He added, “Wearing bold dresses and piling on lots of makeup won't make you a diva. It's how you carry yourself in authenticity that matters.” The air felt heavy with realization, and Kainat, receiving her trophy, felt a rush of triumph and validation wash over her. With the cold stares of her once-mockers now replaced with looks of astonishment, Kainat finally felt proud of her individuality. Instead of feeling superior, she realized that everyone has their own journey. As the event closed, the seniors engaged them in games where Kainat, with her natural charm and wit, won multiple rounds, further solidifying her newfound appreciation among her peers. They all enjoyed a festive fresher's day cake, welcomed by their Head of Department, followed by a delightful South Indian meal of lemon rice, papad, sambhar, and chutney, filling the mess with aromas that mingled with laughter. Seniors praised Kainat for her poise, encouraging her to keep

working hard in her studies while offering wise tips and support. As she embraced a nurturing friendship with Preeti, who apologized for her earlier comments, and even Ashika, who expressed her regret, Kainat felt her heart lighten. "It's okay," she said, forgiving them with open arms. Preeti shared her perspective, "You know, Jyoti is just jealous of your looks, which is why she makes those ridiculous comments and drags me into it." Kainat smiled gently, "That's alright. With time, she'll come around too. We just need patience." They all shook hands, sealing their newfound friendship, and Kainat humorously added, "Friends or just roommates? I prefer both!" With this, a bond began to blossom, one that would endure the storms of college life and beyond.

Kainat had successfully forged a bond of friendship with one of her roommates, Preeti, but the other, Jyoti, remained hesitant and skeptical about her character. While Kainat had earned Preeti's trust and admiration, she sensed that Jyoti still held onto negative assumptions. It was evident that Jyoti recognized Kainat's academic abilities; her exceptional performance in class and unwavering commitment to her studies clearly stood out. Kainat was known for her meticulous nature, often submitting assignments well before the deadlines, demonstrating her strong work ethic and dedication. In contrast, Preeti was an average student whose interests swayed more toward makeup tutorials, fashion trends, and the latest gossip

about boys, rather than academic pursuits. With deadlines for assignments drawing near, she frequently turned to Kainat for assistance, often relying on her to help her complete projects, sometimes even copying Kainat's work directly as a shortcut to avoid putting in the effort herself. As July approached, there was a palpable excitement in the air—Kainat's birthday was just around the corner, set for the 21st. One afternoon, while Kainat was engrossed in her note-taking at the library, Preeti seized the opportunity to discuss Kainat's upcoming birthday with Jyoti. "It's Kainat's birthday next week, and it'll be her first celebration with us. I really think we should get her a thoughtful gift and a cake!" she suggested, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm. Jyoti considered the idea for a moment before reluctantly agreeing, "Alright, let's chip in for a cake and a gift." However, Preeti, filled with excitement, proposed, "Why don't we buy her separate gifts? After all, she's our roommate and deserves something special from each of us!" But Jyoti quickly shot back, "Why waste money on separate gifts? Honestly, she's not that close to me." Preeti, wanting to defend the friendship she had cultivated with Kainat, replied, "But she's my friend! She always helps me study when I'm struggling. I want to show her I care." Jyoti, unfazed, snickered dismissively, "Do you really think Kainat would give you a separate gift on your birthday? Never! She seems cunning and selfish." Preeti hesitated, feeling torn. "But Kainat is not like that at all! She's genuinely sweet and always

thinks of others.” Despite her instincts telling her otherwise, Jyoti’s words lingered in Preeti’s mind, clouding her judgment. Eventually, influenced by Jyoti’s arguments, Preeti reluctantly agreed to their initial plan, deciding to pool their money together for a joint cake and a single gift for Kainat instead of separate ones. In her heart, she wished they could celebrate Kainat with the individuality she deserved, but she felt the pressure of conforming to Jyoti’s perspective. Thus, they set their plans in motion, ready to celebrate Kainat’s special day, albeit in a way that didn’t quite reflect the gratitude and warmth Preeti truly wanted to express.

On the 20th of July, after a grueling day at college, Kainat returned to the hostel, feeling the weight of exhaustion draping over her like a heavy blanket. She quickly performed her Asar Namaz, finding solace in her prayers, and then sank onto her bed, yearning for a refreshing afternoon nap. Preeti, her ever-energetic roommate with a bright smile, announced that she was heading out with Jyoti to run some errands and promised to return before evening. Kainat eventually stirred from her peaceful slumber and noticed that her roommates were still absent. Just then, Jiya, a cheerful girl from down the hall with an infectious laugh, peeked into her room and cheerfully invited her to join her for a cup of tea. With a grateful smile, Kainat splashed some cold water on her face, shook off her drowsiness, and gladly followed Jiya to the common

area, where the comforting aroma of brewed tea filled the air. When Kainat returned from sharing a cozy afternoon with Jiya, her heart fluttered with joy to see that Preeti and Jyoti had finally come back. “Where have you been?” she playfully probed. With a mischievous twinkle in her eye, Preeti replied, “We went to buy loose sheets for our assignments since Jyoti needed them for a submission in just three days. She didn’t want to go alone, so I decided to tag along.”

Little did Kainat know, the two had conspired with Jiya to keep her entertained until midnight, all while transforming their room into a surprise birthday wonderland. Oblivious to the secret excitement surrounding her, Kainat had her own little surprise ready; she had purchased bottles of chilled drinks, savory patties, and crunchy chips for her roommates, stashing them neatly in her cupboard. With a sly smile, Jiya cleverly invited Kainat to help her with some Biology sketches, knowing that Kainat’s artistic flair went a long way. “Bring it here!” Kainat exclaimed, eager to dive into the task. However, Jiya insisted with a playful glint in her eye, “Please come to my room,” winking at Preeti and Jyoti, who were struggling to contain their giggles. Trusting her friends’ intentions, Kainat followed Jiya into her room, where they engaged in lively discussions and artful endeavors, entirely unaware of time slipping away. Before they knew it, the clock struck midnight. Jiya, glancing at her watch, said, “Alright, Kainat, it’s late. You should



really head to bed now.” Just as Kainat turned to leave, her phone buzzed in her pocket. It was Kiyan, her brother, calling to wish her a happy birthday. His warm voice filled the line as he sang, “Happy birthday to you, my darling sister Kainat.” A wave of happiness washed over her, and with her heart full, she thanked him while making her way toward her room, appreciating the love and warmth from her family.

As Kainat opened the door to her room, an unexpected wave of darkness greeted her. She instinctively reached for the light switch beside her bedside, illuminating the room to reveal an enchanting scene. A chorus of voices erupted in jubilant song: “Happy Birthday!” Friends surrounded her, their faces shining with joy. A kaleidoscope of colorful balloons and fragrant flowers adorned the space, while a beautifully decorated chocolate cake sat on the table, the words “Happy Birthday Kainat, our Roomie” elegantly scripted across the top. Kainat's face transformed into a radiant smile as surprise and delight washed over her. She swiftly embraced Jyoti, then Preeti, her heart bursting with gratitude. “Did you know today is my birthday?” she asked, her voice laced with excitement. Preeti grinned and replied, “Of course I remember! We wanted to make this special for you.” With a sparkling gaze, Preeti explained, “This is why we went out to get the cake and all the decorations. Jiya kept you entertained so we could pull off this surprise!” Surrounded by the warmth of friendship and laughter,

Kainat reveled in the love that enveloped her, knowing this birthday celebration would be etched in her memory forever—a treasure trove of joyous moments and cherished friendships.

Kainat's birthday celebration was a heartwarming event that overflowed with laughter, friendship, and a sense of togetherness. As she stood in the cozy living room adorned with colorful balloons and streamers, her friends encircled her, their faces beaming with excitement as they sang a cheerful birthday song. The sweet aroma of a freshly baked cake filled the air, its rich chocolate layers promising a delightful treat. Kainat, with a joyful smile, cut the cake, making sure to share generous slices with her roommates, Preeti and Jyoti, who had gone to great lengths to bring along a special gift to mark her day. Despite Kainat's humble suggestions that the delicious cake itself was more than enough for celebration, Jyoti insisted on the importance of honoring her birthday with a thoughtful gift. Curiosity peaked when Jiya, unable to contain her excitement, eagerly opened the small, wrapped box herself. A hush fell over the room as everyone's eyes widened in surprise at the sight of a delicate, simple bracelet. Its understated elegance appeared rather inexpensive, making Preeti and Jyoti exchange shy glances, feeling slightly embarrassed in front of their friends. In a moment that showcased her gracious spirit, Kainat quickly transformed the atmosphere with her warm demeanor. She took the bracelet, a gentle

smile spreading across her face, and praised her friends for their thoughtfulness, noting how beautifully the bracelet complemented her outfit of a light blue dress. Her heartfelt words resonated with everyone, reminding them that the essence of a gift lies not in its price tag, but in the love and effort poured into it. Understanding the intentions behind the gesture, Kainat genuinely appreciated her friends' effort, knowing they had gone out of their way to make her birthday unforgettable. Her thoughtful reaction even melted Jiya's heart, prompting her to step forward and present Kainat with her own gift—a stunning pen set, adorned with intricate designs, perfect for a budding writer. Once the gifts were exchanged amidst laughter and cheers, Kainat brought out a tray filled with chilled drinks, savory chips, and mouthwatering patties, ensuring a delightful spread for her friends. The celebration reached a joyous peak as the girls danced and laughed together, their hearts light and full of joy, creating precious memories that would stay with them long after the candles were extinguished and the music faded into the night.

As the days and months went by, Kainat and Preeti blossomed into good friends. However, Preeti's penchant for late-night outings with her other friends often resulted in her skipping classes, which in turn made her reliant on Kainat for assignments and lecture notes. Kainat was always willing to help, sharing her meticulously organized notes and assisting Preeti with

her studies, but this consistent lack of responsibility on Preeti's part began to wear on her. In their shared living space, Jyoti watched this dynamic with growing jealousy. Most evenings, while Kainat and Jyoti spent their time studying or discussing their day, Preeti would be out and about in Chennai, often returning late at night. One day, upon returning from college, Preeti casually informed Jyoti that she would be spending the night at her friend Sritija's place. After hearing this, Kainat, feeling tired and in need of a break from her studies, decided to head to a nearby bakery. She picked up two vegetarian patties and some steaming tea to enjoy with Jyoti. Upon entering their room, she discovered Jyoti lying on her bed, looking distressed. The moment Jyoti saw Kainat, tears began to spill down her cheeks. Concerned, Kainat rushed to her side and asked, "What happened, Jyoti?" Jyoti replied between sobs, "I have a fever and my head is pounding." Kainat made her sit up and handed her the warm tea and a patty, reassuring her, "You need to eat something. Have you had lunch?" Jyoti shook her head helplessly. "I couldn't get out of bed. I took a half-day leave and came back to the hostel." Kainat sighed, "Why didn't you call me for help?" Jyoti explained that she had reached out to Preeti, hoping for company to visit the hospital, but was met with indifference. Preeti had brushed her off, saying she was busy enjoying her time with Sritija. Kainat felt a mix of frustration and sadness at Preeti's negligence. "You should have called me instead. I'm here for you, and

I'll take you to the doctor," Kainat insisted, though she was unsure where the hospital was, having only traveled the route between their hostel and college. In a moment of inspiration, she decided to call her brother, Kiyan, who was a medical student. After telling him about Jyoti's condition, he thoughtfully prescribed some over-the-counter medications and suggested using a wet cloth on her forehead to lower her temperature. Acting quickly, Kainat ventured out again to a nearby pharmacy, purchased the necessary medicine, and assisted Jyoti in taking them. Concerned for Jyoti's well-being, Kainat then attempted to reach Preeti, hoping to convince her to return and help her friend. However, Preeti's flippant response, "So what can I do? I'm not a doctor. Don't bother, she never does anything for you anyway," stung Kainat deeply, revealing the disparity in their friendship dynamics. Feeling disheartened, Kainat ended the call. With the medication kicking in, Jyoti began to feel drowsy and soon fell asleep. But Kainat couldn't shake her concern; she sat at her bedside, now focused on her notes, her mind still occupied with Jyoti's condition.

As dinner time approached, another hostel mate, Jiya, knocked and asked her to join the others in the mess hall. Kainat's stomach growled, reminding her that she hadn't eaten yet. After dining with Jiya and their classmates, Kainat took a plate of food back to Jyoti's side, determined to ensure her roommate ate. As they chatted about Jyoti, Jiya wondered why Kainat would

go out of her way for someone who seemed to take her for granted. "Kainat, why stress over a girl who never acknowledges you?" Jiya asked. Kainat replied earnestly, "I may be away from my family, but these girls are here with me. They're my family in this place. I can't ignore Jyoti when she's unwell. I may not be perfect, but I refuse to be heartless." Jiya beamed with pride, "You truly have a big heart, Kainat." After making sure Jyoti ate her dinner and took the prescribed medications, Kainat urged her to rest while she returned to her studies. Around 1:30 a.m., exhausted, Kainat climbed into her bed, but only an hour later, the sound of Jyoti's cries roused her from sleep. Switching on the lights, Kainat rushed to Jyoti's side, who lamented, "My head is burning, and I can't sleep!" Without a second thought, Kainat ran to the washroom, soaking a handkerchief in cold water before gently placing it on Jyoti's forehead. Throughout the night, despite her own fatigue, Kainat remained by Jyoti's side, repeatedly refreshing the compress until the fever began to subside.

When the clock struck 4:30 a.m., Jyoti, feeling somewhat better, looked at Kainat with tears in her eyes. "I'm so sorry, Kainat. I never gave you the respect you deserve. I prioritized Preeti over you and yet, you cared for me like a sister." Kainat wiped Jyoti's tears and reassured her, "Don't apologize. You're more than just my roommate; you're family to me. It's my duty to care for you." Jyoti, feeling

emotional, vowed, "From now on, I won't let you be alone. I'll always support you, no matter what." Kainat smiled gratefully, "Thank you, dear. But for now, please try to sleep. You need rest." As both girls drifted off, the previously strained dynamic between them transformed into a nurturing friendship filled with mutual respect and understanding. In stark contrast, Jyoti's perception of Preeti changed drastically. Where she once prioritized Preeti and their friendship, the disinterest Preeti had shown in Jyoti's time of need created an insurmountable divide. Jyoti now recognized that most of the people she had considered friends were merely acquaintances with whom she shared a past, not true companions who genuinely cared for her well-being. This realization reinforced the notion that true friendships are defined by support and love in times of need.

Jyoti's concern for Kainat deepened significantly as she noticed how often Kainat was putting others' needs before her own. She began to call Kainat regularly to check in if she was late returning from college, always feeling a sense of protectiveness. Much of Kainat's time was spent helping Preeti with her assignments, Xeroxing notes for her, and even explaining complex concepts. However, Jyoti could sense an unhealthy dynamic developing, where Kainat's kindness was being taken for granted. In the absence of Preeti, Jyoti would pull Kainat aside, her tone serious and protective, urging her not to allow

Preeti to exploit her generosity. “You work so hard, Kainat,” Jyoti said firmly, her eyes steady. “You prepare the notes meticulously and invest so much effort into your assignments, while she just coasts along, relying on you. It’s not fair that she gets good marks so easily while you toil for them.” Jyoti emphasized the importance of valuing her own contributions, noting that by constantly helping others, Kainat was inadvertently placing herself at a disadvantage academically. With a concerned expression, Jyoti cautioned her about her friends, Neeta and Ashika, reminding Kainat that true loyalty and trustworthiness were often hard to come by. “You deserve to top your class,” she said earnestly. “Don’t let them bring you down. You shouldn’t be serving everything to them on a silver platter.” She continued, “Keep your eyes and ears open, Kainat. The world may appear inviting, full of charm and beauty, but many people can be deceiving, hiding their true intentions behind a friendly facade.” Jyoti’s words were meant to empower Kainat to recognize her worth and stand firm against the pressures of those who might not have her best interests at heart.

Kainat had yet to grasp the lessons from her past mistakes, particularly the hurtful experience with her childhood friend, Shifa, who had shamelessly exploited her trust and then turned around to insult her. Despite the betrayal, Kainat remained the same naïve and innocent girl, clinging to the belief that kindness



would eventually be rewarded. Her grandmother's words echoed in her mind: “Zarurat Se Zyada Acche Banoge Toh Istemal Kiye Jaoge” (If you become too good, people will take advantage of you). This adage served as a caution, a reminder of the fine line between generosity and vulnerability, yet Kainat struggled to see the truth behind it, living in the hope that her goodness would ultimately triumph over the treachery of others.

Since the day Preeti returned from Srijita's place, Kainat had been grappling with a question that nagged at her: why hadn't Preeti checked on their roommate Jyoti, who had been sick and always cared for her? Despite her growing concerns, Kainat hadn't found the right opportunity to discuss it with Preeti. The unresolved tension was bothering her, and she wished to see her roommates support one another and maintain a friendly atmosphere. It was tea break at college, a time when students often networked and relaxed, but Kainat preferred solitude. She sat alone in the quiet classroom, jotting down notes from her last lecture, the soft rustle of pages the only sound. Suddenly, Preeti burst in, a bright smile on her face. “You bookworm! I've been looking for you,” she exclaimed, her voice cheerful. “Let's go grab some tea. I've noticed you've been buried in your books lately. You need to take better care of yourself—how about some fresh juice or a shake? Your health should come first!” Kainat looked up, her expression shifting

to one of dry humor. “Look who’s talking. Since when did you become so concerned about others?” she replied pointedly. “Weren’t you the one who didn’t bother coming back even after hearing Jyoti was unwell? Why do you suddenly care about me?” Preeti defended herself, “Kainat, you’re my friend and roommate. Jyoti is just a roommate to me. You know you help me in my studies, and when I needed money, you are there for me too.” “Does that mean if I don’t help you, you’ll treat me like you did Jyoti?” Kainat shot back, a sharp edge in her voice. Preeti’s eyes narrowed. “Jyoti never treated you well! She always looked down on you. You’re still defending her after everything?” “I might be here for my studies too, but I can’t ignore being humane and reckless in the process,” Kainat said firmly. “I don’t know where life will take me in three years, but I want people to remember me fondly—to say, ‘We knew Kainat, a girl who was kind, helpful, and gentle.’” “You really do think differently,” Preeti admitted, softening slightly. “People will definitely see you that way. You’re good with everyone. But not everyone deserves that kindness. I can’t be good to those who are two-faced and fake.” With a sudden, playful tug, Preeti grabbed Kainat’s hand and pulled her towards a nearby juice shop. “Come on, let’s get that mango shake.” As they walked, Kainat reflected on the conversation. She couldn’t shake the belief that the idea of not owing anyone anything diminishes the importance of our shared humanity. In her perspective, the essence of life

lies in interconnectedness and the bonds we build. At the very least, she felt that every person deserves basic human kindness and respect. These fundamental values, she believed, are the building blocks for a harmonious society—a place where empathy, compassion, and understanding can thrive. By recognizing our responsibility to one another, we foster a culture of mutual support and dignity. It is through small acts of kindness and respect that individuals feel valued, heard, and appreciated in a world that often overlooks these traits. Kainat concluded that embracing the idea of owing each other basic decency is not a burden but a privilege, one that enriches our lives and strengthens the connections that bind us. It was this belief that made her long for a peaceful coexistence among her roommates and for a more compassionate world beyond the walls of their college.



## **CHAPTER :10**

### **Betrayal Of The Bond**

Those who betray you once will likely betray you a thousand times. There's no need to drink the entire sea to recognize its saltiness. This brings forth an important question: Why do loyal individuals often find themselves betrayed? The answer lies in their abundance of love and care; they possess so much to give that their generosity can be taken for granted. Betrayal often serves as a wake-up call, a painful reminder that they deserve far better than those who do not appreciate them. If you've been cheated on, remember this: don't feel disheartened or fault yourself; it's not your failure. Rather, it signifies that you're one step closer to discovering someone who will truly cherish you for who you are. Take Kainat, for example. She makes a conscious effort to cultivate loyalty in her friendships, yet time and again, she finds herself confronted with betrayal. Her closest friend,

whom she lovingly refers to as her sister, Neemat, abruptly stopped reaching out. Neemat underwent a dramatic transformation, shifting like the seasons in a foreign land. One moment, she was there, and the next, she vanished, leaving Kainat in emotional turmoil.

Now, in Chennai, Kainat's situation grows increasingly complex with Ashika, a once-close friend who excels academically. Initially, they shared a supportive bond, but as their first semester exams approached, Ashika's competitive nature began to surface. Although healthy competition can motivate individuals, the line was crossed when Ashika started to view Kainat as a rival rather than a friend. During exam preparations, Kainat kindly shared her meticulously organized notes with Ashika, hoping to foster collaboration. In an unfortunate turn, Ashika chose to conceal her own notes, driven by an intense desire to outperform Kainat. She not only refrained from helping Kainat but actively discouraged others from offering assistance, even warning Neeta not to share any resources with her. Ashika meticulously orchestrated situations to ensure Kainat faced difficulties, all while maintaining a facade of camaraderie in front of their classmates. Despite Kainat's genuine efforts to nurture their friendship, she found herself increasingly isolated and vulnerable. It was heartbreaking to witness how someone she cared for deeply could undermine her at such a critical time. Kainat's experiences served as a stark reminder of her

unluckiness in friendships—a theme that seemed to follow her, leaving her wondering if true loyalty was merely an illusion.

As the semester exams began, Kainat felt well-prepared, her hard work and determination shining through. Yet, she faced fierce competition, particularly from Ashika, a close friend who had always been her rival in academics. Preeti, meanwhile, was more laid-back and less serious about her studies, but Kainat was determined to support her, ensuring she at least achieved passing marks. The exams stretched over a grueling month, and Kainat poured her heart and soul into each paper, utilizing every moment to study. She often spoke with her parents and brother, alternating between calls for encouragement and comfort, reminding her of the sacrifices they had made for her education. As the final week of exams approached, Kainat and her classmates excitedly booked tickets for a month-long vacation, a well-deserved break after the stress of examinations. On the last day of exams, drained and sleep-deprived, Kainat and Preeti returned to their room, collapsing into bed without a second thought. In the meantime, Jyoti was bracing for her own exams starting the following week. Wanting an uninterrupted environment to focus on her studies, she opted to work in a classmate's room, eagerly awaiting the day when Kainat and Preeti would leave, allowing her the quiet she craved. Although she appreciated the friendship she had developed with Kainat, there was

an undercurrent of jealousy regarding the close bond the two girls seemed to share, which deepened daily. The next day, Kainat and Preeti embarked on a shopping spree, eager to purchase stylish new outfits to wear when they returned home. They picked out trendy jeans and vibrant shirts, excited to present themselves well to family and friends. Kainat meticulously selected a few thoughtful gifts: branded shirts for her father and brother and a stunning Louis Vuitton bag for her mother. She couldn't contain her excitement about seeing her brother, Kiyan, a recently graduated doctor specializing in Endocrinology, who had just returned home after years of dedication to his studies. Their bond was incredibly strong, and Kainat eagerly asked him to pick her up from the airport. That evening, Kainat bid farewell to friends Neeta and Ashika in the mess, playfully joking about Ashika's competitive spirit. Ashika teased that she would outscore Kainat in the exams, but Kainat brushed off the comment, feeling a twinge of disappointment that Ashika couldn't drop the competitive attitude even in farewell. Preeti, always the optimist, urged Kainat to focus instead on their exciting vacation ahead.

Early the next morning, Kainat awoke before dawn, her alarm ringing at 3:00 AM. With a flight at 4:30 AM from Chennai to Delhi and a connecting flight to Srinagar, she was eager to begin her journey home. Preeti, who had a train to catch at 10:30 AM, accompanied her along with Jyoti to the airport gate.

Although this was Kainat's first time traveling alone, the apprehension faded as her friends encouraged her, reminding her that she was growing up and needed to embrace new experiences. Upon arriving at the bustling airport, Kainat swiftly maneuvered through the check-in process, collected her boarding pass, and notified her roommates and parents that she was safely inside. As she boarded her flight, luck was on her side—a window seat! She adored being able to gaze out at the clouds and landscapes below. With the headphones provided by the flight attendant, she immersed herself in the Hindi movie "Bhoot Nath," losing track of time as she devoured the story. The two hours and 45 minutes flew by until the pilot announced their approach to Delhi. When they landed, Kainat had a three-hour layover at Delhi airport. Feeling hungry, she treated herself to a steaming cup of coffee and a juicy burger, sitting down at a nearby chair to enjoy her meal. As she savored each bite, a smile crept across her face; she had successfully navigated this part of her journey all on her own. With just over an hour left until her next flight to Srinagar, she felt a wave of anticipation at the thought of being reunited with her family. After finishing her breakfast, Kainat settled near her gate with her phone. She chatted with Preeti, who had made it to the railway station, and surfed through Facebook, posting an update about her exciting travels. She expressed gratitude and relief for successfully completing her exams and looking forward to a month of relaxation.



Her friends and relatives filled her notifications with warm wishes for her safe journey, making her feel cherished and loved. Suddenly, an announcement for boarding her flight to Srinagar prompted her to pack up quickly. Kainat grabbed her bag and hurried to the gate, her heart racing with excitement. Upon boarding the plane, she took her seat, this time next to a stranger at the window. She quickly called Kiyan, letting him know she was on the flight, then fastened her seatbelt. As the plane took off, she flipped through the magazine left in the seat pocket, barely able to focus, overwhelmed by her eagerness to return home.

When the flight landed at Srinagar airport, Kainat rushed to switch on her phone. Almost immediately, Kiyan's name appeared on her screen—he was waiting at arrivals for her. After her luggage finally appeared on the conveyor belt, she wheeled it toward the exit, scanning the area for her family. Her heart soared when she spotted her dad and brother waving enthusiastically. She ran towards them, throwing her arms around her dad and brother, thrilled to be home at last. “You both came to receive me!” she exclaimed, grinning from ear to ear. Her father replied warmly, “Of course, our princess was coming home. We had to be here.” Kainat couldn't help but express her pride in Kiyan's accomplishments, congratulating him on becoming a doctor. He beamed back at her and complimented her looks, making her blush. “Mom is waiting for you at home,” Kiyan said. “Make haste; I

can't wait to see her!" She informed her father of her successful solo journey, a sense of pride swelling in her chest. He nodded approvingly, "You managed it beautifully. With time, you will gain even more experience and maturity, my dear. It's wonderful to see you growing, Kainat." Once they reached home, the warmth of her family enveloped her like a familiar blanket. Kainat rushed out of the car, flinging open the gate to find her mother standing there, arms wide open. Kainat sprinted over, enveloping her mom in a tight hug, showering her with kisses. "You look tanned; what happened?" her mother teased. "Mom, the weather in Chennai is scorching! I feel like the sun burned me," Kainat laughed, her heart full after being reunited. "Don't worry; you'll be back to your lovely self in no time. Now, go change and come for lunch!" her mother instructed, ushering her inside. After a fantastic spread of delectable Kashmiri dishes—Tabakh maaz, gushta, chicken rishta, and her all-time favorite butter chicken—Kainat couldn't contain her delight. "Mom, this is the best meal ever! I've missed your cooking so much; no one can compare," she chimed, savoring every bite. After lunch, Kainat offered her Zuhar Namaz, and her parents beamed with pride; they were happy to see that their daughter had not forgotten her prayers. Later, in the living room, Kainat settled down with Kiyan, excitedly sharing stories about her friends, professors, and life in Chennai. As the clock struck 4 PM, fatigue set in; she had woken up so early. Her mother noticed and

suggested she take a short nap. Kainat didn't hesitate. She dashed to her room, leaping onto her bed, feeling an overwhelming sense of calm and security. The moment she closed her eyes, she slipped into a deep sleep, reaffirming the old adage: "East or west, home is best." Home is not merely a physical space; it embodies a profound feeling of safety and tranquility. It is a haven filled with love, laughter, and a comforting atmosphere where cherished memories are created with family and friends. This special place is where you always feel a sense of belonging, surrounded by those who appreciate you for who you truly are. In this sanctuary, you can express your true self without reservation, knowing that you are loved unconditionally. Home is the place where emotional connection flows effortlessly, and you don't have to strive for affection—you are simply cherished for being yourself.

Kainat was relishing her time at home, truly embracing the feeling of being treated like a princess. Each day was filled with memorable outings alongside her mother and younger brother as they explored the breathtaking landscapes of Kashmir, visiting enchanting places like Gulmarg, with its snow-capped mountains, Pahalgam, known for its lush greenery, and picturesque Sonmarg, surrounded by serene valleys. Despite being away from hostel, Kainat maintained a close connection with her roommates, Preeti and Jyoti. While Jyoti was preoccupied with her exams, Kainat

would often spend hours chatting with Preeti on the phone, sharing their day-to-day experiences and supporting each other emotionally. Occasionally, Neeta would reach out to Kainat as well, but Ashika's lack of interest in conversation was particularly evident. Kainat had once tried calling Ashika, hoping to engage in friendly banter, but was met with a disheartening sense of indifference. One evening, while enjoying a cup of warm tea with her mother, Kainat felt a sense of contentment, especially as her father and brother attended to their respective duties. Her brother, being a Junior Resident in a government hospital, had his own busy schedule.

As Kainat's vacation began to dwindle, with only ten days remaining out of the twenty she had already spent at home, her mother noticed the bond Kainat had formed with her new friends. Curious, she inquired about Kainat's friendships, particularly with Ashika. With a tinge of disappointment, Kainat responded, "Yes, Mom, but Ashika is different. She often tries to dominate me and Neeta, treating us more like competitors than friends." Kainat explained how Ashika, as the class representative, hoarded class notes provided by their teachers and seldom shared them. "She didn't even share notes with Preeti, even though she is my roommate. If Preeti had received those notes, she would surely share them with me too," Kainat lamented, her voice laced with frustration. The more she described Ashika's behavior, the clearer it

became that Kainat felt betrayed. “She’s also unkind to Neeta. I just don’t like her attitude at all.” Kainat’s mother listened attentively and responded wisely, “Then you should not waste your energy on her. If she chooses not to respect you, then you owe her nothing in return. Respect is a two-way street; if she cannot treat others with respect, she doesn’t deserve your kindness.” Kainat nodded in agreement, feeling validated. Her mother continued, “You must prioritize your self-respect. If you’re ever made to feel inferior, simply walk away. Such friends can be more damaging than enemies. True friendship fosters healthy competition, not betrayal.” Kainat considered her mother’s insights and acknowledged, “I thought Ashika was just overly ambitious, but Neeta mentioned that Ashika speaks well of me when I’m around, yet says terrible things about me behind my back.” Kainat felt the weight of the situation even more keenly, especially as she struggled with her psychology coursework—something new for her, particularly difficult because Ashika was already well-versed in the material from her previous studies in the 11th and 12th grades. Sensing her daughter’s unease, her mother reassured her, “If you put in the hard work, nothing is truly impossible. Keep your focus—determination will help you overcome any challenge.” Inspired by her mother’s encouraging words, Kainat felt a renewed sense of motivation to face her academic challenges head-on and rise above any negativity in her friendships.

Her mom was right: friends who try to pull you down are often more dangerous than enemies. In the midst of the first semester, it was too early for anyone to have established their academic prowess; no one really knew who would rise to the top. Kainat, however, was already garnering praise from her teachers due to her remarkable dedication and relentless hard work. She devoted countless hours to studying in the library, surrounded by stacks of books that bore the marks of her diligence, often losing track of time as she immersed herself in her studies. Her teachers admired her commitment, frequently showering her with encouragement and admiration. In stark contrast, her so-called friend Ashika was scheming behind her back, determined to outshine Kainat in the upcoming exams. This betrayal felt especially painful, as Ashika had always pretended to support her. Instead of lifting her up, she was crafting plans to undermine Kainat's efforts. Ashika's jealousy ran deep; it wasn't just Kainat's academic success that irked her, but also her effortless beauty and impeccable style. Kainat frequently received compliments from both girls and boys in their class, drawing attention and admiration wherever she went—something Ashika found increasingly difficult to bear. The tension between them grew, casting a shadow over a friendship that was quickly revealing itself to be rooted in envy rather than support.

Kainat decided to go shopping on a sunny afternoon to find thoughtful gifts for her roommates, Preeti and Jyoti and friends Neeta and Ashika. After browsing several stores, she chose an assortment of vibrant Kashmiri Salwar Suits, each intricately embroidered in different colors, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Kashmir. Although Kainat hoped that these gifts would help strengthen her bond with Ashika, her older brother observed the situation with concern and remarked, "Why do you feel the need to be so accommodating? It appears that Ashika doesn't truly value your friendship; she likely sees you as a rival, and here you are investing in gifts for her." With a hint of determination, Kainat replied, "Bhaiya, I have just completed my first semester of college, and I still have five more semesters to navigate. It's essential for me to maintain a positive environment and to avoid any feelings of rivalry with Ashika." Acknowledging her perspective, her brother offered some advice, saying, "While it's wonderful to be kind-hearted, don't forget the importance of establishing and upholding your boundaries. It might be beneficial for you to reconsider how you approach relationships without compromising your self-worth." Kainat considered this and added, "Bhaiya, Ashika tends to misinterpret my kindness; she might believe that I think of myself as superior to her." Her brother reassured her, "At the end of the day, her misjudgment of you isn't your concern. Let her form her own opinions. It's important to remain kind and true to yourself, and continue to shine brightly,

despite any external judgments you may face." In the following days, Kainat soaked up the joyful moments spent with her family, participating in lively conversations over home-cooked meals and sharing laughter in the cozy living room. On the last day of her visit, as she meticulously packed her belongings, her mother lovingly filled her suitcase with an array of homemade treats—spicy samosas, sweet laddoos, and tangy pickles—for her friends at the hostel, ensuring Kainat would share a taste of home with them. Overwhelmed with a sense of nostalgia, Kainat expressed her feelings, saying, "I really don't feel ready to go back just yet." Her mother sought to comfort her, stating, "One semester has already flown by; before you know it, the rest will pass just as quickly. You may feel sorrow in leaving now, but soon, you'll likely find yourself missing the excitement of college life and your friendships." Her mother reminded Kainat of her brother's academic journey, explaining, "He spent eight long years away, working tirelessly, and now his dedication has transformed him into a successful endocrinologist." Kainat smiled, realizing that her mother's insights held considerable wisdom. Her mother continued with gentle guidance, "You must avoid becoming overly focused on pleasing others. Instead, prioritize your own happiness and personal fulfillment. Concentrate on the blessings in your life rather than your challenges, and on your strengths rather than your perceived weaknesses. Authenticity is crucial, and



seeking validation from others often leads to disappointment. Above all, strive to maintain a positive and humble mindset, regardless of the challenges you encounter. By recognizing and appreciating your blessings, you'll uncover the inherent beauty in your everyday life." Kainat nodded thoughtfully, saying, "I appreciate your advice, Mom; I promise to take it to heart." Her mother added, "Remember, while your dignity may be challenged by others, it can never truly be taken from you. You possess the inner strength to redefine your boundaries, restore your self-image, and move forward, leaving behind past experiences." Kainat reflected on her efforts to build friendships, understanding that fostering positive connections is worthwhile, yet it should never come at the expense of her self-respect. She recognized her inner strength and ability to thrive independently, grounded in self-confidence and determination. Ultimately, she knew that the most loyal companionship one could possess is with oneself.

Kainat returned to Chennai after a month-long vacation, feeling a mix of excitement and nostalgia. Upon her arrival, she was warmly welcomed by her roommate Preeti, who had just returned the day before, and their friend Jyoti, whose semester exams had concluded, allowing her to go home for a short vacation in just two days. As a thoughtful gesture, Kainat handed over beautifully wrapped gifts—vibrant Salwar suits—specifically for Preeti, whose birthday

was just a month away, and for Jyoti, whose birthday had unfortunately passed during the vacation. Both friends were delighted with the gifts, though they felt a twinge of guilt at having given Kainat a modest bracelet for her own birthday, realizing the disparity in their gifts. Preeti excitedly revealed that she had brought home a delightful treat—twelve ripe mangoes from their family's garden, six for each of them. Kainat and Jyoti couldn't help but share a laugh at the uniqueness of the gift, and Preeti, with a mock-pout, playfully feigned hurt at their amusement. Kainat reassured her, saying, "No, silly! We're just impressed you thought of us with such a creative gift!" They unpacked their suitcases, sharing various snacks and delicacies from home, but as they headed to the mess for dinner, their spirits dropped. The tasteless food served there only heightened their longing for the comforting flavors of home-cooked meals prepared by their mothers. The following day at college was a flurry of cheerful greetings as classmates embraced one another, happy to reunite. Kainat distributed Salwar suits to Neeta and Ashika, who appeared to enjoy the gifts but didn't reciprocate with anything for Kainat. When Preeti asked them what gifts they had for Kainat, Ashika shrugged and said, "We brought ourselves, of course!" To which Preeti quipped, "Oh, so Kainat brought herself too. Do you not value that?" Ashika, slightly defensive, replied that while they admired Kainat, they didn't expect her to have brought gifts. As the semester progressed, the results from the

first examinations were eagerly anticipated. Kainat achieved a commendable third rank, while Ashika secured second place, and a boy named Jyanth from Chennai topped the list. When Kainat congratulated Jyanth, he graciously returned the compliment, but Ashika, brimming with competitive spirit, remarked, “You scored fewer marks than me, sweetheart. You can never reach my level.” Feeling the sting of Ashika's words, Kainat retorted, “You only have fifteen marks more than me, and we both know you’ve been hoarding important notes from our lecturers. You’re not just an unfair class representative but also a disloyal friend. If you think I’m here to sweep the ground, you’re mistaken. From next semester on, I won’t let you walk all over me.” Their mutual rivalry ignited a fire within Kainat, who resolved to channel her frustrations into diligent study. Kainat called her parents to share the news of her third rank, but she also expressed her determination to outshine Ashika, whom she now saw as a rival. Meanwhile, Preeti received a call from her father, who was upset about her failing two subjects. He scolded her, insisting she study harder and urging her to seek Kainat’s help instead of wasting time with friends like Srijita, who had also flunked. Preeti’s father implored Kainat to mentor her, and Kainat agreed, promising, “Don’t worry, Uncle, I’ll help her study hard.” Preeti, visibly upset by her father’s anger, cried as Kainat consoled her, “You need to take your studies seriously, or your dad will send you back home and arrange for you to be married

off.” Preeti managed a smile and vowed, “I will study harder now.” She expressed her happiness that Kainat stood up to Ashika, and Kainat agreed, noting that Ashika’s overconfidence needed to be checked. “Everyone has a limit,” she said. “I will no longer tolerate her nonsense.” With newfound resolve, Kainat began to study harder than ever before, shedding her previous reputation as a quiet and shy student. A more assertive and determined side emerged, which even surprised herself. Preeti, intimidated by Kainat’s transformation, also began to buckle down and prioritize her studies. When Jyoti returned from her vacation, she was thrilled to see Kainat’s assertiveness and encouraged her to continue standing up for herself. As the semesters rolled on, Kainat consistently outperformed Ashika, eventually eclipsing Jyanti as well. By the end of her degree program, Kainat was celebrated not just for being a top student but also for her kindness and supportive nature, which endeared her to her classmates.

Ashika, realizing her shortcomings, acknowledged Kainat’s talents and even offered an apology for her previous behavior. However, Kainat understood that while friendships can mend, the scars of betrayal often linger. Graduating with top honors, Kainat and her friends made plans to pursue an M.A. in Clinical Psychology at the same college, with Neeta joining them. They transitioned from hostel life to a cozy North Indian paying guest accommodation, where the cook prepared mouthwatering Aloo parathas that

became their new favorite meal. Kainat excelled in her master's program, and after two rewarding but challenging years, she earned her degree. The academic journey had been a rollercoaster, filled with sacrifices and triumphs, but she emerged as a compassionate friend.

After completing her Master's in Clinical Psychology, Kainat eagerly embarked on the job placement process at her college, where she secured a coveted position as a clinical counselor at a well-renowned hospital in Delhi. Her decision to choose Delhi was influenced not only by its illustrious reputation in the medical field but also by its manageable distance from her family home in the picturesque valleys of Kashmir. As the day of her departure loomed closer, the atmosphere became heavy with emotion. Preeti, her closest friend, was overwhelmed, tears streaming down her cheeks as she clung to Kainat. "Promise me you'll stay in touch," she sobbed, her voice thick with emotion. Kainat smiled, vowing they would remain lifelong friends, lightening the moment with teasing words about breaking that promise only if she chose to. "Shut up, girl!" Preeti retorted, managing a smile through her tears. "I will never let this friendship fade. You are a true gem in my life."

The reality of their impending separation cast a shadow over their farewell, as Neeta and Jyoti, who had secured positions in Chennai, joined in the bittersweet moment, tears glistening in their eyes.

Together, they had navigated the hurdles of academia, and leaving that camaraderie behind was heart-wrenching.

After a month spent at home celebrating her brother Kiyan's engagement to Dr. Nawal—a talented and kind-hearted dermatologist from the same hospital—Kainat felt an overwhelming sense of joy. Kiyan had chosen Nawal for not just her striking beauty, but for her compassionate nature and dedication to her profession. After having a heartfelt conversation with Nawal, Kainat was reassured that she would be a perfect match for her brother. Nawal hailed from a well-off family; her father was a successful businessman, her mother a dedicated housewife, and her siblings were high achievers, with her elder brother also in the medical field and her sister working as a teacher.

Observing Kiyan's radiant happiness as he stood next to Nawal, who looked stunning in a pale pink lehenga adorned with intricate embroidery, filled Kainat with delight. Kiyan himself was dashing in a perfectly tailored gray suit that emphasized his fair complexion, setting a charming tone for the engagement ceremony. Kainat, who wore an eye-catching golden gown that shimmered under the lights, felt like a princess amid the joyous celebrations filled with laughter, traditional music, and the warmth of family and friends. However, the joy was short-lived as Kainat soon made her way to Delhi to start her new job. Initially, she was

excited but quickly found herself inundated with a heavy caseload of patients seeking her guidance, which led to irregular meal times and a relentless work schedule. The stress of her new responsibilities began to take a significant toll on her health, manifesting in recurring episodes of low blood pressure and fainting spells. After six exhausting months, Kainat's father intervened, expressing deep concern for her well-being. He urged her to consider the risks of living alone in a bustling city like Delhi, particularly as a young woman navigating its complexities. Realizing the truth in her father's words, Kainat made the difficult decision to resign, recognizing that her health and safety needed to come first. With her brother's wedding approaching on the horizon, she felt a strong desire to assist her family in the preparations for this important occasion. Although her career had barely begun, she paused her ambitions, uncertain of what the future would hold. Throughout this journey, Kainat learned profound lessons about personal growth, resilience, and the vital importance of self-care. She developed a deeper appreciation for the friendships that had shaped her identity, believing firmly that those bonds would endure, irrespective of distance and life's circumstances. Returning home, she immersed herself in the joyous chaos of wedding preparations, from selecting floral arrangements to organizing family gatherings and shopping for her brother's new life ahead, cherishing every moment as a treasured part of her own unfolding story.



## **CHAPTER : 11**

### **From First Place To Background**

#### **Noise**

Kainat was bubbling with excitement as her only brother, Kiyan, was set to embark on his new journey of marriage. This day was pivotal not only for Kiyan but also for his bride, Nawal, and Kainat wanted it to be an unforgettable occasion filled with joy and grandeur. Kiyan had always treated Kainat with a depth of affection akin to that of a father, providing guidance and support throughout her life. She had longed for an older sister figure, and in her heart, she viewed Nawal as that missing piece—welcoming her into the family with open arms, she didn't see Nawal as merely a sister-in-law but as a sister. As the wedding day dawned, the atmosphere was electric with anticipation. Kiyan looked exceptionally dapper in his meticulously tailored white and silver Sherwani,



complemented by matching Jutti that highlighted his stature. Kainat, radiant in a deep maroon gown, exuded grace with her natural beauty, having chosen to enhance her features only with a touch of kajal and moisturizer. Her belief in her inherent beauty made any additional makeup unnecessary. Their parents mirrored the day's significance, looking their finest as they celebrated their son's union with a loving partner. Nawal, dressed in an enchanting cherry red lehenga, resembled a fairy about to step into a storybook. Her makeup, applied flawlessly, contributed to her ethereal glow. In preparation for their new sister-in-law, Kainat had taken the initiative to decorate Kiyan's room with an array of fresh flowers, meticulously arranged in vibrant colors. Heart-shaped red balloons were scattered throughout the room, each inscribed with the names of Kiyan and Kainat, adding a personal touch to the romantic atmosphere. She had even replaced the curtains and bed linens, transforming the space into a dreamlike retreat for Nawal, ensuring it felt like home from the very beginning. A subtle hint of room freshener filled the air, creating an inviting scent that completed the ambiance. Kainat was eager to welcome her new Bhabhi with sincerity and a desire to make Nawal feel cherished. The wedding festivities were a lavish affair, with Kiyan's father generously spending on a sumptuous feast featuring a diverse selection of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. The guests indulged in the culinary delights, with sweet treats of various kinds artfully displayed across the table. The

entire house was adorned with twinkling lights and fragrant flowers, creating a festive spirit that was palpable. As Kiyan made his way to Nawal, accompanied by a traditional band baja, he looked every bit the prince charming, and the scene felt like something out of a fairytale.

During the Nikkah ceremony, held under a beautifully decorated canopy, Kiyan and Nawal pronounced "Qabool hai" three times each, confirming their commitment in accordance with Islamic traditions. Family members exchanged warm congratulations, their hearts swelling with joy as Kiyan and Nawal transitioned into their new roles as husband and wife. Nawal's father, having made thoughtful arrangements for Kiyan and his entourage, reflected the love and care that every father holds for his daughter, ensuring that the in-laws were treated with utmost respect and respectability, a gesture meant to solidify their daughter's happiness in her new life. However, emotions ran high during the Ruksati, the poignant moment when Nawal was to leave her parental home. Tears streamed down the faces of her parents and siblings as they physically and emotionally let go of their beloved daughter. Nawal herself was inconsolable, expressing her heart-wrenching reluctance to leave. Her mother wrapped her in a comforting embrace, gently explaining that Kiyan's home was now her true home, and that her new family would love and care for her just as much. It is

challenging for any parent to witness their child transition into another family, a bittersweet reality that is often accompanied by nostalgia and heartbreak. Upon Nawal's arrival at Kiyan's family home, she was enveloped in warmth and love. Kainat's mother served her Doodh Kahwa, a traditional Kashmiri tea, adding a touch of cultural warmth to the occasion. She also presented a beautiful gold chain as a welcoming gift, showcasing the rich traditions of hospitality. Nawal, appreciative and thoughtful, reciprocated with a finely-crafted gold coin for her mother-in-law. Kainat and her cousins gently guided Nawal to her newly decorated room, a place filled with warmth and intimacy. Kainat beamed as she said, "Bhabhi, welcome to your room! You look absolutely stunning tonight," planting a tender kiss on Nawal's forehead. Nawal felt her heart flutter at the warm welcome and smiled, replying, "Thank you, Kainat. It's so beautiful here." Kainat, noticing Nawal's enchanting blush, leaned in with a touch of mischief in her voice. "Do you need anything? Just say the word, and I'll be at your service!" Nawal shook her head, feeling content enough to settle in, but Kainat insisted, "Alright, but if you need anything at all, don't hesitate to call me. Now, relax. I'll go fetch bhaiya." Outside, Kiyan was pacing impatiently, his excitement palpable as he awaited his bride. Kainat and her cousins exchanged knowing glances and teased him, calling out, "Oh bhaiya, it seems you are dying to see your bride! But we won't let you in until you pay us 25000 Rs." Kiyan

raised an eyebrow, half amused and half incredulous, "Are you asking for a bribe?" Kainat laughed lightly, "No, no, bhaiya, it's not a bribe. We've decorated your room so beautifully; we just want a little reward for our efforts!" Kiyan sighed, rummaging through his pockets. "I don't have 25000 Rs right now; I only have 10000 Rs." Kainat wagged a finger playfully, "Alright then, wait until you have the full amount. Only then can you enter your own room!" Desperate, Kiyan pleaded, "Come on, you're my baby sister! Let me go in; I promise to pay the rest tomorrow!" After a moment of teasing hesitation, Kainat relented, "Okay, but don't forget!" Kiyan assured her, "I won't forget, I promise." She took the 10000 Rs from him, allowing him to enter. As Kiyan stepped into the room, his eyes lit up at the sight of the exquisite decorations: twinkling fairy lights and fragrant flowers adorned every corner. He turned to Nawal, grinning widely. "Honestly, 25000 Rs is a small price to pay for this beautiful setup." Nawal raised her brow in mock disbelief, "Wait, your sister charged you money for this? I thought she did it out of love. Your sister is so money-minded!" Kiyan chuckled, "No, it's not like that. It's a tradition; a sister decorates her brother's room on his wedding night and expects a reward for it." Nawal made a face, "That's such a stupid custom." Kiyan smiled fondly at her, "My beautiful bride, you look absolutely top of the world tonight." Nawal's expression suddenly shifted as she inquired with feigned seriousness, "Where's my muh dekhaiyi?" This

traditional gift, meant for the bride from her husband, was now a playful demand. Despite her earlier critique, Nawal couldn't resist the excitement of receiving a special gift. Kiyan retrieved a small, intricately designed box from the drawer of his side table and offered it to her. As Nawal opened it, her eyes sparkled with delight upon seeing the stunning golden bangle set inside. "Oh wow, Kiyan, this is beautiful!" she exclaimed, her face lighting up with joy. "Thank you so much!" He replied, "My pleasure, Nawal! This is just the beginning; I will spoil you with so many gifts and fulfill all your desires. You are now my responsibility and my priority. I'll do anything just to keep that beautiful smile

on your face." Feeling cherished and valued, Nawal responded sincerely, "I am truly blessed to have you as my husband." Kiyan smiled, deep affection shining in his eyes. "No, I'm the one who is more blessed to have you as my wife." The morning light streamed into Kiyan's room as Kainat entered, balancing a beautifully arranged breakfast tray. Kiyan was in the shower, the sound of water cascading in the background while Nawal was sitting at the vanity applying her makeup, her heart still glowing from the evening prior. Kainat knocked softly on the door, and Nawal rose to open it, a warm smile on her face. "Asalamualikum Bhabhi," Kainat greeted her, and Nawal replied warmly, "Walikumasalam." Kainat, her eyes sparkling with energy, asked, "How are you?"

How was your night?" Nawal responded, "I'm good, and my night was wonderful, thank you." Setting the breakfast tray on the side table, Kainat glanced around and asked, "Where is bhaiya?" "He's in the shower," Nawal replied, feeling a subtle apprehension. Kainat smiled, taking in Nawal's pink salwar suit. "You look so pretty in that!" she complimented, and Nawal smiled gratefully. Kainat made herself comfortable beside Nawal on the sofa, glancing at the door expectantly. "Can I serve you tea?" she offered. Nawal shook her head, "No, let Kiyan come. I will have tea with him." Kainat's heart sank a little; she felt an unfamiliar sense of being unwelcome in her brother's space. This was once a room she could freely enter, looking fondly at Kiyan's old photographs while reminiscing about his time in Turkey. Now, she found herself knocking on the door, sensing that her bhabhi was hesitant about her presence. The dynamics were shifting, and Kainat wished to preserve her bond with her brother while embracing this new chapter of his life.

Before Kainat could rise from her seat and voice her thoughts, Kiyan emerged from the washroom, droplets of water still clinging to his hair. Kainat greeted him with a bright smile, her heart swelling with affection for her older brother. He returned her greeting with warmth, his eyes twinkling with familiarity. "Bhaiya, breakfast is ready. You and Bhabhi can eat now; I

need to help Mom in the kitchen,” she said, her tone cheerful and nurturing.

After a brief period, Kiyan's friends arrived at the house, their laughter echoing through the halls. Kainat approached her brother, announcing, “Bhaiya, your friends are here! Come down and meet them.” Pausing for a moment, Kiyan replied, “I’ll join them shortly, but I need you to sit with Nawal and keep her company until I’m back.” Kainat nodded, agreeing to his request. She settled onto the plush sofa, turning to Nawal, who was still adjusting to her new surroundings. “Did you like the decoration of the room, Bhabhi?” Kainat asked, her curiosity shining through. Nawal glanced around, taking in the carefully arranged flowers and soft lighting. “Yes, I did; it’s lovely. But charging your brother 25000 Rs for this decoration? That’s really disappointing. What kind of sister does that?” Kainat felt a pang of defensiveness but responded calmly, “I did it out of love; it’s just a custom to take a little something from him on his first night.” Nawal crossed her arms, her brow furrowing slightly. “My sister and I didn’t ask anything from our brother when we decorated his room for his wedding; we did it simply because we love him, not for his money,” she retorted, her voice firm. Kainat, feeling a mix of hurt and frustration, reiterated, “I love Bhaiya too.” Sensing the conversation taking a tense turn, Nawal quickly said, “Could you please go and send Kiyan? I want to spend some time with him.” “Sure,

Bhabhi,” Kainat replied, forcing a smile, but inside, she felt a deep hurt from Nawal’s earlier comment. When Kiyan returned to find her, he asked, “Why are you down here, Kainat? Nawal is alone in the room.” Kainat swallowed her emotions and replied, “She’s calling for you; go and spend time with her.” Once alone, she retreated to her room, tears streaming down her cheeks as she muffled her sobs with her hand, not wanting anyone to hear her anguish. In her heart, she battled a whirlwind of thoughts: “So now my love for my brother is being questioned? Have his priorities changed so dramatically in just one day?” As she reflected on Nawal’s words, Kainat felt both anger and confusion. The day had revealed a side of Nawal that made her heart sink with concern. Kainat had always known that sibling dynamics shift after marriage, a reality driven by new commitments and the creation of a separate family unit. The natural process often left the unmarried sibling feeling sidelined, as affection and attention were redirected. When Kiyan returned to his room, he found Nawal with a pout, complaining, “I called Kainat because I was bored; your sister just sat there in silence.” Kiyan turned to Kainat, and with an uncharacteristic sharpness in his voice said, “This is your responsibility to make your Bhabhi feel comfortable here, but you leave her alone to feel bored.” Nawal, sensing an opportunity, added, “Leave it, Kiyan. She’s just a kid. She doesn’t understand how to make a new member of the family feel welcome.”



Kiyan quickly changed the topic, telling her to get ready for a drive they had planned.

Kainat could feel the seismic shift in their relationship even before it was fully realized, and she feared where it might lead, the warmth of her bond with Kiyan now tinged with uncertainty. Kainat felt a deep sense of hurt when her brother, Kiyan, scolded her for the first time, especially since it was unjustified. With five years of psychology studies under her belt, she had honed her ability to read people's feelings and intentions. It became evident to her that Nawal, Kiyan's wife, was attempting to manipulate her husband's opinions about her. Kainat sensed that Nawal wanted to establish herself as Kiyan's top priority, and she was determined not to allow that to happen without a fight. As time went on, it was impossible for Kainat to overlook the growing bond between Kiyan and Nawal. Their shared moments seemed to create an invisible barrier separating Kainat from her brother. Whenever Kiyan was engaged in conversations with Nawal, Kainat felt as if her words dissolved into an incomprehensible hum. The warmth of her brother's affection, once directed at her, was now entirely consumed by Nawal's dominating presence. Kainat's feelings of exclusion intensified, especially during family gatherings where she once felt at ease. The laughter and camaraderie they used to share were replaced by an awkward silence that fell over her whenever she entered the room. She could see

the subtle shifts in Kiyan's demeanor, as if he prioritized Nawal's opinions over her own, which fostered a growing sense of isolation. Nawal's insecurities, likely stemming from her professional identity as a successful doctor and her higher education, led her to perceive Kainat as a threat. Kainat recognized that Nawal would go to great lengths to ensure her influence remained unquestioned, making it clear that she would not be easily sidelined. Kainat resolved to reclaim her place in Kiyan's life, knowing that she deserved to be acknowledged and valued just as much as Nawal in their family dynamic. Kainat understood that above all, her brother Kiyan needed to prioritize his relationship with his wife, Nawal. Despite her best intentions, Kainat never wanted to undermine their marriage. However, she couldn't help but feel it was unjust for Nawal to create a rift between her and her only sibling. Before Nawal entered their lives, Kainat and Kiyan shared a deep bond, filled with countless memories from their childhood, making their sibling relationship particularly special. Kainat had always seen Kiyan as not just a brother but also a confidant and an ally. When Nawal joined their family, Kainat welcomed her with open arms, affectionately hoping to cultivate a sisterly bond. Nawal was older and undeniably more mature, which initially gave Kainat hope that she would be a guiding figure. Yet, from the outset, Kainat sensed that Nawal harbored intentions that were less than kind. Instead of embracing their growing family

dynamics, Nawal seemed more focused on pushing Kainat to the sidelines, insisting that Kiyan's loyalty should solely lie with her. The adage "blood is thicker than water" resonated deeply with Kainat; it reflected her belief that no one could sever the strong ties of siblinghood. Yet, despite this, she found herself grappling with heartache as Kiyan seemed all too willing to accept Nawal's disparaging comments about her. This behavior led Kainat to feel increasingly isolated, questioning whether their once-solid brother-sister bond could withstand the strain. When Kiyan shared the news of Nawal's pregnancy a year into their marriage, Kainat's heart leaped with joy. He approached her with a mix of excitement and nervousness, aware of the complexities of their family dynamics. The moment he shared the news, Kainat's face lit up with genuine happiness. She rushed to share this wonderful news with their parents, who responded with cheers and congratulations, thrilled to welcome a new member into their family. Kainat's anticipation to become an aunt was palpable; she practically began a countdown to the baby's arrival, joyfully imagining all the moments she would share with her niece or nephew. Despite Nawal's sometimes chilly demeanor toward her, Kainat remained committed to treating her with kindness, embodying the belief that true sisters support each other, even in challenging circumstances. Kainat held steadfast to the principle that one should strive to treat others well, yet also acknowledged the importance of maintaining distance from those who

display negativity. Her unwavering commitment to family, even in light of adversity, illustrated the depth of her character. Kainat hoped that love and understanding would ultimately prevail, reminding herself that being a genuinely good person often shines brightest in the darkest times. It's genuinely disheartening to continually extend kindness to those who consistently treat you poorly. While kindness is a commendable virtue, it should not come at the expense of your own emotional well-being. Recognizing your self-worth is crucial, and establishing boundaries becomes a necessary act of self-care. In the face of repeated mistreatment, it's important to reassess the dynamics of your relationships. Sometimes, stepping back can provide clarity and insight, allowing you to see who truly values your presence. Surrounding yourself with those who appreciate and respect you is vital for your mental and emotional health. It's perfectly acceptable to distance yourself from negativity, even if it means letting go of certain people in your life. Ultimately, you deserve to be treated with the same kindness and respect that you so generously extend to others. Your well-being should always take precedence, and cultivating positive relationships will lead to a more fulfilling and joyful existence.

I remember a particular day in school that left a lasting impression on me. My English teacher had just finished reading a poignant short story about a person who devoted their life to helping others, only to

receive ingratitude and negativity in return. With curiosity, he turned to me and asked, “What do you think the moral of the story is, beta?”

Reflecting on the narrative, I replied earnestly, “Sir, I believe we should always do good to people, even if they treat us poorly.” He paused for a moment, then smiled wryly and said, “Oh really? So they can start dancing on your head?”

His words lingered in the air, a hint of humor masking a deeper truth. At the time, I didn’t fully grasp his meaning, but today, as I navigate relationships and interactions, I realize he was right, and I was misguided. It’s essential to offer kindness where it is valued and to recognize when it’s best to keep our distance from those who take advantage of our goodwill. This lesson, once lost on me, now resonates deeply as I seek to surround myself with those who uplift rather than drain my spirit.

After nine long months filled with anticipation, Nawal joyfully gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. The entire family was elated, and Kainat, her sister-in-law, felt as if she were floating on air, overwhelmed with happiness at the prospect of becoming an aunt. Once Nawal was discharged from the hospital, she returned to her parental home, where she took a much-needed break to bond with her newborn during her six-month maternity leave. When the time came for her to return to her job, she moved back to her husband Kiyan’s

home, bringing along their precious daughter, whom they named Adab. Baby Adab was enchanting with her fair complexion and sparkling eyes, resembling her aunt Kainat in both looks and spirit. Family and friends alike couldn't help but fall in love with the little girl, showering her with affection. Meanwhile, Kainat struggled to find a job despite her impressive qualifications, leading her to spend most of her days at home. She eagerly volunteered to help her mother care for Adab, cherishing every moment with her niece. However, Kainat quickly sensed that her contributions were not valued by her Bhabhi. Despite her affection for both Nawal and Adab, she felt increasingly like a servant in her own home, rather than a supportive family member. Kainat had once been the darling of the family, but as events unfolded, she began to feel isolated and invisible. Her brother Kiyen, who used to be her confidant, seemed to drift further away, especially after the arrival of his daughter, leaving Kainat feeling overlooked and unimportant. Despite this change in dynamics, Kainat maintained her kindness and continued to support Nawal. Unfortunately, her good nature was often taken for granted, leading to further resentment and feelings of neglect. Kainat's mother watched with a heavy heart as Kiyen treated his sister with increasing indifference, worrying about the growing rift within their family and the toll it was taking on Kainat's self-worth. The love that once bound them together now felt strained, leaving Kainat in a state of confusion and longing for

the warmth of her family's affection. Whenever Kainat's phone chimed with calls from her close friends—Preeti, Jyoti, or Neeta—her Bhabhi, Nawal, would seize the opportunity to voice her discontent. “Kiyan,” she would say with an edge of annoyance, “your sister is always busy on the phone, never doing anything productive. Most of the time, she isolates herself in her room, oblivious to her responsibilities.” With a smug expression, she would continue, “It’s high time she learned how to manage household chores. As a girl, her primary duty will soon be to marry and move to her husband’s home. Just imagine what her in-laws will think if they see that mom and I have done nothing to prepare her for that life.” Nawal’s words dripped with manipulation, effectively planting seeds of doubt in Kiyan's mind about his sister while conveniently ignoring her own failures as a daughter-in-law. Living in her own comfort zone, Nawal enjoyed a life where every need was met, but she expected Kainat to labor tirelessly as if she were a maid in the house.

One afternoon, Kiyan stepped into Kainat’s room, where she was absorbed in typing on her laptop, her brow slightly furrowed with concentration. The soft glow of the screen illuminated her face as she worked on a project. “Kainat,” he said, his voice firm and authoritative, “instead of sitting idle and chatting with your friends, you should be in the kitchen helping Mom and Nawal. Your college ended two years ago,

and it's high time you focus on what truly matters. You need to learn how to manage household responsibilities; after all, you'll be getting married soon. What will everyone think?" Caught off guard, Kainat looked up, surprise and indignation flashing in her eyes. "But none of my friends are married yet, and they're all pursuing their careers. Why should I be rushed?" she replied, her voice rising slightly. "I want to build my career, establish my independence, and not be reliant on anyone for my future." Kiyan's expression hardened as he shook his head in disapproval. "Stop arguing, Kainat. You've tried long enough to find a job. It's been fruitless. Girls your age are settling down—do you expect us to wait forever?" His words hung heavily in the air as he turned and left her room, his footsteps echoing in the silence that followed. Heartbroken and overwhelmed, Kainat felt tears streaming down her cheeks as a tempest of emotions swirled inside her. How could her brother, someone she admired and looked up to, think of her in such a dismissive manner? The weight of his harsh words pressed down on her, preventing sleep from taking her. As she lay in bed that night, thoughts raced through her mind, forcing her to question her own worth. She felt a twinge of anger; she was not dependent on Kiyan—her father was the one providing for her. How could her brother disregard her dreams and aspirations so easily?



When Kainat woke up on that bright morning and found her baby cousin Adab peacefully nestled in her mother's lap, all of her pent-up anger and frustration from the previous night seemed to dissolve like mist in the sunlight. A warmth filled her heart as she began to play with Adab, showering her with kisses on her tiny feet and hands, wrapping her in affectionate hugs. The innocent, cherubic expression on Adab's face melted away the remnants of her edginess, and she felt a genuine smile replace her frown. Yet, Kainat's mother, adept at reading her daughter's emotions, noticed a flicker of sadness lurking behind that smile. Concern etched on her face, she gently asked, "Kainat, beta, why do you look so low? What's bothering you?" For a moment, Kainat hesitated, biting her lip as tears welled in her eyes. Finally, she whispered, "Mom, isn't this my home?" Her mother's brows furrowed slightly as she replied, "Of course, this is your home, as it is ours." Kainat took a shaky breath. "From day one, Nawal bhabhi has manipulated Bhaiya against me. It feels like he's trying to push me away by arranging my marriage. He used to love me unconditionally, always saying that I was his firstborn. Now, though, he seems like a complete stranger. Right now, I'm playing with Adab, but whenever she's in her parents' room, I hesitate to even knock on their door. I can't bring myself to go into my brother's room—the very room I used to meticulously clean and spend countless hours in, waiting for him to return. I can't even remember the last time he hugged me or

had a heart-to-heart conversation. It's like we're residing under the same roof, yet I feel like I'm living in a different world. I feel barred from talking to my friends, too." Kainat's mother's eyes glistened with unshed tears as she consoled her, "He's under the strong influence of his wife. Unfortunately, we can't say anything too harsh because he loves her. But remember, this house belongs to you just as much as it does to your brother Kiyan. Your father and I love you dearly; that love is enough for you. Your brother loves you too, but right now, his priorities have shifted to his wife and daughter—the family he has created. It's human nature for people to change, but that doesn't mean your life should come to a standstill. You have to ignore what he or Nawal bhabhi say. Live your life fully, talk to your friends; no one has the right to dictate how you should live it." No matter how good you are or how many positive contributions you make, there will always be a certain set of people in society who won't appreciate you. They will complain about you, talk ill of you behind your back, and criticize your every action. Instead of feeling disheartened by their comments, try to adopt a healthier perspective: as long as you know you are doing good, that's what truly matters. Their negativity often says more about them than it does about you; it is merely a reflection of their own inner struggles and dissatisfaction. Take the case of Neemat Kainat, for instance. When her close friends entered into love marriages, Kainat found herself grappling with feelings of isolation. Soon after,

her other friends, Neeta and Ashika, also tied the knot, leaving Kainat feeling increasingly detached from them. As time went on, Kainat began receiving marriage proposals. However, they came with their share of criticisms—some suitors deemed her too slim, while others expressed a preference for a working wife. The rejections piled up, and soon, Kainat's own family joined in the chorus of pressure, with her parents and siblings making stinging remarks about her age and appearance, suggesting she was lagging behind her peers. Being subjected to such judgment, especially from her own family, cut deep. Kainat started to spiral into depression, her self-esteem plummeting as she internalized the hurtful comments. She found herself overthinking even benign remarks, leading to severe anxiety that manifested physically—her health suffered as she battled low blood pressure, persistent stomach aches, and debilitating migraines. Once a vibrant and naturally beautiful woman, her struggles began to take a toll on her appearance; she lost weight and her once-bright sparkle dulled, garnering concern from those around her. Amidst all her turmoil, Kainat's only source of genuine joy was her niece and nephew, Adab and Azan. The mere act of playing with the children brought her solace, allowing her to forget about her worries, if only for a moment. Adab, at four years old, required little but love and attention, and Kainat cherished every laugh-filled second spent with him. Then one day, while Kainat was engaged in a phone conversation with her

friend Pretti, Azan was playing in the garden with Adab. In a split second of distraction, Azan slipped on the pathway, resulting in a small but distressing fall that caused his nose to bleed. Panic-stricken, Kainat threw her phone aside and rushed to comfort him. Just as she gathered him into her arms, Kiyan and Nawal entered the gate, and upon seeing Azan crying, Kiyan immediately accused Kainat of negligence. He snatched Azan from her embrace and hastily wiped his nose with a handkerchief, then demanded to know how the incident occurred.

Kainat explained that Azan was simply playing with Adab and slipped—there was no malice involved. Yet, instead of understanding, both Kiyan and Nawal launched into accusations, implying that Kainat—who had willingly and lovingly taken care of the children—was somehow to blame. Kainat attempted to defend herself, but their harsh words felt suffocating. Just then, her parents returned from a grocery run and found Kainat in tears, desperately trying to justify her actions. Her father stepped in, firmly telling Kiyan to stop, reminding him that if Kainat was looking after his children, he should be grateful rather than accusatory. He emphasized that Kainat was not their maid or babysitter but an aunt who cared deeply for them. Azan's fall was an unfortunate accident, and blaming Kainat was both unfair and ungrateful. Despite her father's support, Kiyan remained obstinate and ordered Kainat to stay away from his children,

retreating into the house. Kainat, heartbroken and feeling betrayed, turned to her parents with tear-streaked cheeks full of disappointment. Her father embraced her tightly, assuring her that she had done more than enough. He urged her not to dwell on Kiyan's unfair treatment and to realize that she was worth more than their unkind words. Although the incident weighed heavily on Kainat, her innate kindness prevailed.

A few days later, she decided to approach Kiyan's room and apologize for a mistake she hadn't committed, hoping to mend the rift between them. Kiyan responded with more harsh words until Nawal intervened, suggesting that he forgive Kainat since she was his younger sister. Nawal, ever perceptive, skillfully navigated the situation, ensuring she emerged as the peacemaker while maintaining her facade of benevolence. Kainat felt a glimmer of relief when Kiyan agreed to forgive her. She wrapped her arms around him in a hug before gathering Adab and Azan to play in her room, rediscovering a sense of happiness through their innocent laughter. In a world fraught with judgment and harsh criticisms, these moments with her beloved niece and nephew reminded Kainat that love and kindness often triumph over negativity. After several months of waiting, a marriage proposal finally arrived for Kainat. Her sister-in-law, Nawal, enthusiastically shared the news, revealing that the prospective groom is an engineer, the youngest of

three brothers who are both married with families of their own. Nawal painted a picture of a kind and humble family, mentioning that his parents would be visiting in just two days. She encouraged Kainat to make an extra effort to look her best for their arrival, advising her to wear something flattering and perhaps try a new hairstyle. Kainat, however, had no interest in marriage and firmly responded, “I don’t want to get married, so there’s no chance of me meeting them.” Frustrated, she confided in her brother, Kiyan, saying, “Your sister thinks she’s some Miss World and always creates unnecessary drama.” Kiyan, visibly frustrated by her attitude, entered her room with a sense of urgency. He said, “All the boys your age are either married or already committed. If you keep rejecting these proposals, you risk ending up single and alone. Who will take care of you in the future? I have my own family to think about—our parents are aging, and it’s high time you consider getting married and starting your own life. Spare us from this tension.” His harsh words struck a chord with Kainat; she felt misunderstood and pressured. A brother is traditionally seen as a protector of his sister, and this felt like an attack rather than guidance. Tears filled her eyes as she considered her predicament. Her parents were still alive, yet her bhaiya and bhabhi treated her in ways that made her feel isolated. What would happen if, God forbid, her parents were no longer around? She knelt down, performed wudu (ablution), and prayed earnestly to Allah for guidance and clarity about her

potential future with the suitor. She asked for a clear sign: if the man and his family were truly good for her, then let it be; if not, then kindly close the door on the proposal. On the day of the meeting, Nawal escorted Kainat to a salon for a makeover. Despite the makeup and styling, Nawal couldn't help but comment, "I just hope they find you attractive. Look at you—so slim and delicate, it's concerning. You cry all the time; just see what you've done to yourself. You look like a walking skeleton." Nawal's words weighed heavily on Kainat as they prepared to meet the suitor and his family. When the man and his parents arrived at their home, the atmosphere was tense but formal. They were served tea and an array of snacks, from savory pastries to sweet delicacies. After some small talk, Nawal suggested that Kainat and the young man step outside to talk privately in the garden, hoping it would allow them to connect. As they settled onto a bench surrounded by blooming flowers, the groom began asking her questions. "What are your expectations from your husband? Why aren't you working right now?" His tone was friendly, but Kainat couldn't shake the feeling that he was scrutinizing her. Toward the end of their conversation, though, his comments shifted in tone. "Look, I'm healthy, but you look a bit too thin; almost sick. To be honest, I prefer a more robust partner." Kainat felt the heat of anger rising in her chest but, taking a deep breath, managed to respond assertively, "Yes, I'm slim, but I'm not sick! Being thin doesn't equate to being unhealthy." The

young man persisted, adding, "But I want a healthy wife. And honestly, your nose is quite prominent." At this, Kainat could barely contain her irritation but chose to remain composed. "If you're just here to insult me, you can go find someone else—perhaps a heavier girl," she replied, standing her ground. Later that evening, when Kainat sat down with her family to recount the day's events, she shared everything candidly. However, Nawal quickly interjected, "You need to stop being arrogant. I told you before, your slim figure might be a concern for him. He could easily reject you." Kainat felt a surge of frustration; she had remained quiet for too long. "Who is he to reject me? I reject him! You all are more concerned about getting rid of me than about my happiness. This is my father's house, and I have every right to live here until my last days!" Kiyan, who had been listening intently, felt compelled to chastise her. "You are speaking out of line. How can you talk to your bhabhi like that? She genuinely wants what's best for you!" Kainat shot back, "I don't care for anyone's 'good wishes' if they don't prioritize my happiness!"

From that day onward, Kiyan chose to distance himself from Kainat, his silence stretching on for days. Then, one afternoon, a colleague approached him with alarming news. "You know that guy whose marriage proposal came for Kainat? I've heard he's mentally unstable, and his family isn't good either. You should be grateful Allah saved your sister from a potential



disaster. You were about to send her into a living hell with your own hands,” he cautioned. Kiyan felt a wave of guilt crash over him. The realization hit hard; he had been pushing Kainat toward a future fraught with uncertainty and danger. Returning home, he searched for Kainat, but she had gone out with her cousin. When she finally returned late in the evening, he approached her with a heavy heart. “I’m sorry, Kainat,” he said, stepping closer. “You were right. Unintentionally, we were forcing you into a marriage with someone who isn’t mentally well.” Kainat, sensing the sincerity in his voice, replied, “It’s alright, bhaiya. It’s not your fault. You just want what’s best for me. Allah saved me, and I have faith that He has something good planned for my future. I believe that death, birth, and marriage are determined by Allah and occur at the right time. When He wills it, I will marry. But let me make one thing clear: I love you and your children more than my own life. I’m not here to disrupt your family.” Her words carried weight, and Kiyan listened intently as she continued, “I know you may not see me as part of your family since you got married. But think about it: Nawal Bhabhi got married too. Did she forget her parents and siblings? Do you have the courage to speak ill of her family?” Kiyan shook his head, “No, I would never do that.” “Then how could you forget me and our parents?” Kainat pressed, her voice steady but filled with emotion. “Why does Nawal bhabhi always seem to manipulate your thoughts about me and our family? This isn’t just

her fault; you allowed it. You granted her the authority to speak poorly of us. Being a girl, she still maintains the same ties with her family post-marriage. Why did you change?" Kiyan felt cornered by her questions, unable to find the right words. Kainat paused for a moment before adding, "You're fortunate your first baby is a daughter. She will always prioritize you, just as your wife does with her parents and siblings." Kiyan fell silent, his guilt weighing heavily on him. His sister's words cut deep, stirring a realization within him. He stepped closer, searching for forgiveness. "Kainat, I'm truly sorry," he said softly. "Don't be sorry, bhaiya," she replied, her tone warm despite the tension. "I love you, and I will always love you, no matter what you do to me." Her unwavering affection melted the walls he had built, reminding him of the bond they shared—a bond that, despite the turmoil, remained unbreakable. Kainat gazed intently at Kiyan, her eyes reflecting a blend of sorrow and determination. "You know, Bhaiya," she began, her voice steady yet tinged with emotion, "one of the biggest lies I've ever been told is that blood makes you family. Blood merely establishes a connection. What truly forges a family is loyalty, love, and trust. And I can't help but feel that trust slipping away between us; your love for me seems to have faded into the background, overshadowed by other priorities." She took a moment, letting her words sink in, before continuing with conviction, "From this day onward, I've resolved to live for myself. I've come to

understand that blood isn't thicker than peace of mind. Family isn't just about shared DNA, Bhaiya. It consists of the people who choose to have you in their lives, the ones who accept you wholeheartedly for who you are, without any pretense. These are the individuals who would go to great lengths to see you smile, who will stand by you and love you unconditionally, regardless of the circumstances." Her heartfelt words hung in the air, heavy with significance, as Kiyan absorbed the depth of her feelings. Each phrase cut through the emotional distance that had formed between them, rediscovering the essence of what family genuinely means. Kainat's unwavering determination to prioritize her own well-being resonated within him, nudging him to reflect not just on their relationship but also on his own understanding of family in a world that often confuses ties of blood with emotional bonds.



## **CHAPTER :12**

### **The Mirror's Wordless Reply**

One by one, all of Kainat's friends had gotten married, and now, even her beloved roommate and confidante, Preeti, had tied the knot with her long-time boyfriend, Akhil. Kainat, at 28, felt like a relic in a world that seemed to be moving on without her. She was now the only single one left among her close circle, which left her feeling isolated and desolate. Her phone, once a buzzing hub of activity, now only rang sporadically, often only when friends or relatives needed favors, deepening her sense of loneliness. Amidst this emotional turmoil, Kainat frequently encountered marriage proposals from various suitors. Each time, they would come to meet her, their polite smiles masking indifference. Afterward, she would wait anxiously, hoping for a phone call or message, but the silence that followed was deafening, leaving her to dwell on their lack of feedback. Her attempts to find

employment were equally fruitless; she had applied for numerous jobs, including positions as a counselor, but the responses were always the same—a bland assurance that she would hear back within a few days, which never materialized. Each rejection chipped away at her confidence. Nawal, a "friend" who had been quick to judge, often mocked her, saying, "You're a jinx; wherever you go, rejection follows." These words stung deeply, echoing in Kainat's mind and adding to her feelings of inadequacy. During the day, she would distract herself by playing with her cheerful young cousins, Adam and Azan, but once night fell, the weight of her solitude crashed down on her, and she would find herself sobbing into her pillow, her grief mingling with weariness. In her search for companionship and support, she had reached out to her friends, asking for help finding job leads or advice, but their hurried reassurances—that they would let her know when an opening arose—left her feeling more lost. The friends she had invested so much time and care in seemed indifferent to her struggles. As the days turned into weeks and then months, she felt the walls closing in, exacerbated by her growing sense of despair. She started questioning her worth during her prayer sessions, crying out to Allah, "Why, when I've performed so well academically, am I jobless? Why are the marriage proposals failing? Are my friends truly more attractive than me? Am I really a jinx?" With each passing day, her body began to reflect her inner turmoil. She lost

her appetite, causing her to grow thinner and more frail, resembling a shadow of her former self. Once a bubbly, caring girl full of life, she had now become sensitive, crying over trivial matters. Concerned for her well-being, her father took her to a doctor, who prescribed medication for depression. Meanwhile, relatives often commented insensitively about her situation—"Even girls younger than you are getting married! And look at you, still single. You've lost your charm; you look like you're 80!" One particularly haunting evening, Kainat locked herself in her room and stood before her mirror for what felt like an eternity. She examined her reflection: fine lines had formed on her forehead, dark circles under her eyes were stark reminders of sleepless nights, and the bags beneath them only deepened her sense of despair. "This cannot be me," she thought, frustration and sadness washing over her. She had once been the girl who could light up a room with her smile, the girl who was often compared to a princess or a doll. As she leaned closer to the mirror, she felt a shiver run down her spine; the reflection revealed the truth she had been avoiding. This was her reality. In that moment of clarity, she realized why others commented on her looks. She had neglected herself, abandoning the self-care and self-love that once defined her. Kainat whispered under her breath, "From now on, I will love myself and live for myself." But deep down, she knew she hadn't truly believed those words. How could she expect anyone else to love her if she didn't even love

herself? It was time for a change. Kainat understood that to gain respect and love from others, she needed to prioritize her own well-being first.

The mirror, often a tool of self-criticism, transformed into a conduit of revelation, restoring her belief that self-love was essential. Cameras might lie, offering the illusion of beauty through filters and edits, but the mirror always reflects the unvarnished truth. Kainat resolved to embark on the journey of self-rediscovery, determined to reclaim her identity and nurture the radiant girl within.

She once again stood before the mirror, the soft glow of the bathroom light illuminating her face as she began to talk to herself. "I miss the version of me who could laugh effortlessly," she whispered, her voice barely above a murmur. "The one who could light up a room without even trying, radiating joy from every pore." Somewhere along the way, life had dimmed that vibrant light, leaving behind a quiet ache that echoed within her. But deep down, she knew she owed it to that brighter version of herself—to find that glow again, to reclaim her true self. As she continued staring at her reflection, memories flooded her mind. She recalled the countless times she had been the one to reach out to her friends, always ready to lend an ear or a shoulder to cry on. Yet, when she dialed their numbers, she was met with hollow excuses: "We're busy at the office" or "We'll call you back later." Each rejection pricked at her heart, making her feel as if she

was insignificant and unproductive, while they seemed consumed by the demands of their careers. Specifically, she thought back to a conversation she'd had with Preeti just days ago. They had barely managed to speak for ten minutes before Preeti abruptly cut her off, saying, "I have work to do. Not like you, who's jobless. I'll call you when I'm free." It stung sharply; Kainat remembered the late nights she had spent helping Preeti study, sacrificing her own time for her friend's success. Preeti graduated, secured a job, and now, it felt as if their friendship had unraveled, replaced by a condescending attitude that left Kainat feeling discarded. In that moment of reflection, Kainat came to a profound realization. No matter how much she tried, she could never replicate the deep connections she once had with those friends. She understood that sometimes, even the most cherished friendships fade. Perhaps it was time to stop seeking validation from others and instead nurture the relationship she had with herself. It was better, she concluded, to be her own friend and learn to embrace her own company once again.

She stepped into the warm cascade of the shower, feeling the water wash away the weight of her emotions. As the steam enveloped her, she cried her heart out, releasing a torrent of frustration that had built up over the years. With each tear that streamed down her face, she reflected on the countless hours spent loving and caring for others, often neglecting her



own needs. In return for her devotion, all she received was disrespect and scorn—an experience she felt was entirely undeserved. Determined to reclaim her self-worth, she made a vow to herself: from that moment forward, she would treat people exactly how they treated her, establishing boundaries and prioritizing her own well-being. The next morning marked her father's birthday, a day she had decided to make special despite the clouds of distress hanging over their family. Kainat ordered his favorite vanilla fruit cake, adorned with fresh berries and whipped cream, hoping to bring some joy into their lives. They were all still reeling from a recent betrayal that had deeply affected her father. His closest friend, whom he had trusted implicitly, had borrowed 2 lakh rupees with the promise of returning it soon. Yet, when her father approached him to discuss the debt, the man vehemently denied ever borrowing the money, accusing Kainat's dad of lying and tarnishing his reputation. This betrayal had cast a shadow over her father, who felt not only financially strained but emotionally shattered. When she entered her father's room, cake in hand, she noticed the slight weariness etched on his face. Lowering her voice, she said, "Happy birthday, Dad!" He smiled but quickly glanced at her mother, whispering for her to keep the cake a secret. He didn't want to burden Kainat with his own sorrow, believing she was already struggling with her own problems. However, her cheerful demeanor pierced through the heaviness in the room. Kainat

placed the cake on the table and watched his face light up as he realized it was a celebration made just for him. Alongside the cake, Kainat presented a stylish pair of sunglasses she had chosen for him—something she thought would suit his personality and give him a little extra flair. His eyes sparkled with appreciation, momentarily lifting the weight of betrayal from his heart. Just then, Kiyan and Nawal arrived, along with their lively children, Adab and Azan. They filled the room with laughter and warmth, extending their birthday wishes to their father. The trio presented him with a sophisticated suit, a crisp shirt, and a matching tie, all carefully selected to ensure he looked sharp and dapper. Seeing the joy on her father's face as he opened each gift filled Kainat with a sense of accomplishment. Despite the lingering troubles, the sight of her family united in happiness reminded her that moments like these are what truly matter. For a father, there is no greater blessing than witnessing his children come together, celebrating not just a birthday, but the unbreakable bond they shared. In that moment, all the hurt and betrayal faded away, and the warmth of family brought new hope and joy to their lives.

Kainat embarked on a transformative journey of self-care, consciously prioritizing her well-being in subtle yet impactful ways. She made a point to savor her mother's comforting meals, taking pleasure in the aromas wafting from the kitchen and the love that infused each dish. Each evening, she established a

routine that included warm baths, dressing thoughtfully in outfits that reflected her evolving sense of style, and indulging in the ritual of capturing her daily selfies.

These snapshots served as both a record of her progress and a means to reflect on the gradual changes in her appearance – a way of celebrating her journey. Yet, despite these earnest efforts to cultivate positivity, Kainat often found herself revisiting the painful memories of her past. The harsh words from so-called friends, the judgmental glances from relatives, and particularly the biting remarks from her brother Kiyan and his wife Nawal would invade her thoughts. These echoes of her past left emotional scars that occasionally overwhelmed her newfound confidence.

In recent days, Kainat's father had been keenly observing her struggles. A wise man, known for his gentle demeanor and warmth that could melt away the chill of life's hardships, he had filled their home with profound life lessons. One sunny afternoon, as golden rays filtered through the curtains, he sat down with Kainat and offered her a valuable piece of advice, "If they hurt you, forgive them, but don't ever forget what they have done to you." This mantra, simple yet weighty, lodged itself in Kainat's mind, offering both caution and comfort in her interactions. However, the challenge of consistently extending kindness, only to face pain in return, felt both exhausting and maddening. One evening, fueled by frustration and

confusion, Kainat approached her father, her brow knitted with worry and uncertainty clouding her expressive eyes. "Father, do they really deserve my forgiveness?" she asked, her voice tinged with desperation. Her father paused thoughtfully, gently setting aside the newspaper he had been reading—a leisurely part of his routine accompanied by his morning coffee ritual. He let out a soft chuckle, intertwining his fingers as he regarded her with eyes full of understanding. "Child," he replied, his voice calm and steady, "everyone deserves forgiveness. If they made a mistake once, they deserve a second chance. If they err again, give them another opportunity. But if they betray your trust a third time, then it's time for you to forgive not just them, but yourself." Kainat sat in contemplative silence, the enormity of his words settling in. A myriad of emotions flickered across her face, a silent question mark forming in her mind. Noticing her bewilderment, her father's laughter rang out, a sound that resonated with warmth and alleviated some of the burdens she carried. He reached into his pocket and produced a vibrant, colorful candy, offering it as a tangible gesture of affection. As he gently clasped her hands in his, the warmth of his grip soothed her troubled heart. "Forgive yourself for believing in them, for the disappointments that followed," he advised, his tone imbued with tenderness. "Forgive yourself for placing your trust in people who didn't honor it. Forgive yourself for daring to hope for a better outcome. Most

importantly, grant yourself the freedom to move forward—free from the shackles of bitterness and the weight of revenge, liberated from the shadows cast by your past.” The following morning brought with it an unexpected scene. Kainat stumbled upon her father in the living room, tears streaming down his cheeks as he faced her mother. His heart was heavy, burdened by the revelation that a friend of ten years had committed a grievous betrayal. Hesitant yet compelled, Kainat approached him and asked, “Doesn’t this betrayal fill you with hatred?” With a soft smile breaking through his tears, he shook his head, embodying grace under pressure. “My heart does not have space for hatred,” he assured her, his voice unwavering despite the sorrow that lingered in the air. “I will not let his actions dictate my happiness. I have forgiven him, but that doesn’t erase the memory of what he did. The next time he sees me smiling, he will understand who truly suffered more between us.” Wiping his tears with a cherished handkerchief—a beautiful gift she had lovingly chosen for his birthday—he continued, “You know what the best gift is for someone who has hurt you? It’s for them to witness you thriving and living a beautiful life after their betrayal. Remember, my dear, we only have one life to live. Don’t waste your precious time on those who have left scars on your heart. Let them see what they missed out on; allow them to realize how their actions inadvertently helped you grow.” In that moment of profound clarity, Kainat’s understanding deepened. She realized that her

father's wisdom had the power to liberate her spirit. Had it not been for his heartfelt guidance, she might still be shackled by the weight of others' mistakes—haunted by burdens that were never truly hers to carry. This transformative revelation ignited a flicker of hope and resilience within her, setting her on a path toward healing and newfound strength. The mirror had become her unwavering companion, a steadfast presence in her daily routine—morning, afternoon, evening, or night. Each day, she would stand before it, examining her reflection to check her appearance, finding comfort in the familiar lines of her face. In those quiet moments, she would engage in lengthy conversations with herself, sharing thoughts and aspirations, often feeling uplifted by her own words. As part of her transformation, she delved into a vast array of literature, immersing herself in novels by celebrated authors from India, America, and various other cultures. With a plate of rich, velvety chocolates by her side, she would curl up in a cozy nook of her favorite armchair, a steaming cup of freshly brewed coffee within reach, losing herself in the worlds created by her new literary friends. Her family became an important part of her life; she cherished the time spent with her parents, laughing and reminiscing over dinner. Playful afternoons spent with her niece, Adab, and her nephew, Azan, filled her heart with joy and innocence, reminding her of the simple pleasures of life. Yet, as she became more comfortable in her own skin, she began to withdraw from social gatherings,

often choosing to forego texts and calls with friends. It dawned on her that her only dependable friend was herself, and she embraced this revelation, turning her inner critic into a source of strength. The girl who once feared loneliness now sought solace in solitude, embarking on solitary walks through blooming parks, browsing through local shops, and treating herself to coffee dates. She would sit in quaint cafes surrounded by the buzz of life, a book cradled in her hands, sipping her coffee and savoring each moment of self-discovery. The timid introvert had evolved into a vibrant extrovert, reveling in her own company, enriching her understanding of her flaws, strengths, and the nuances of her character she had previously overlooked. In this newfound relationship with herself, she began to "date" herself—free from judgment, taunts, and the turmoil often associated with relationships. She embraced her fierce, unapologetic side and cultivated a sharp wit that intimidated those who might have once tested her patience. No one dared to cross her anymore; she had discovered her voice and a newfound confidence, not hesitating to stand her ground and respond with assertiveness when challenged. Kainat found herself often at the mercy of her Bhabhi, Nawal, who never missed an opportunity to taunt her about her single status. "Kainat," she'd say with a mocking tone, "you're dragging your feet on marriage. If you keep this up, you'll end up alone forever, unable to create a family of your own. The older you get, the harder it will be to find a perfect

partner.” Kainat had come to understand that Nawal thrived on her discomfort, deriving pleasure from her tears and hurt. Throughout the years, Kainat had learned to navigate Nawal's toxic behavior with resilience. Instead of succumbing to her Bhabhi's snide remarks, Kainat calmly replied, "Look, Bhabhi, you're just a human, not Allah. Only He knows what is written in my destiny. I trust that He has crafted the perfect partner for me, and He will send him at the right time. So please, spare me your worries. Focus on your own life with my brother; after all, you've found your ideal partner. If you can find yours, why can't I? We share the same Allah, who loves all His believers equally.” This assertion seemed to dampen Nawal's incessant need for negativity, at least for the moment. Recognizing Nawal as a toxic presence in her life, Kainat made a conscious decision to limit her interactions with her, though it was challenging to avoid someone living under the same roof. She also knew that out of respect for her brother, she should extend courtesy to Nawal despite her hurtful behavior. Kainat adopted a strategy of detachment, mentally tuning out Nawal's barbs. There's a poignant story that resonates with Kainat's experience. Once, a young boy was playing by the riverbank with his friends when he noticed a baby scorpion struggling and drowning in the rushing water. Without hesitation, he jumped in, scooping up the creature and bringing it safely to shore. The boy cared for the scorpion, nurturing it and showering it with affection. However, as the scorpion



grew, it bit the boy's hand during a playful moment, causing him immense pain. Confused and hurt, he chased after it, asking, "Why did you bite me when I saved you?" His mother intervened, saying, "Let it go, my son. You can care for it, but you cannot teach it to love you back. Its inherent nature is to sting." Like the scorpion, Nawal's behavior reflected a nature that Kainat couldn't change. The kindness she extended wouldn't transform Nawal's inclination to taunt and belittle. Thus, Kainat learned to take Nawal's words lightly. If Nawal insisted the sky was black, Kainat simply replied, "Yes, the sky is black." If Nawal claimed the grass was blue, Kainat would agree, "Yes, it is blue." This approach became Kainat's best strategy for preserving her peace of mind, allowing her to maintain her dignity while also diffusing Nawal's negativity.

One day, Kainat had to go out for shopping, and Kiyan asked her where she was going. She replied, "I am going to shop for some books to read." Kiyan offered, "Wait! I'm going that way; I'll drop you." However, Kainat insisted, "No Bhiaya, I will manage myself." She was striving for independence and attempting to maintain distance from her brother due to his past misbehavior. Kiyan's father observed this interaction but chose to remain silent. He understood how Kiyan and Kainat had grown apart. The rift stemmed primarily from Kiyan's blind trust in his wife, who had poisoned him against his parents and sister. Had he not

heeded her words, he might still have enjoyed a close relationship with Kainat and their parents. Kiyan often felt that his parents favored Kainat over him, which was a misconception; they actually loved him just as much, if not more. Kiyan's father wanted to offer him advice but found it challenging to find an opportune moment. Eventually, one day while in his study, Kiyan walked in and apologized, "Dad, I'm sorry for whatever I did to you all." His father responded, "If you truly feel sorry, then be the loving son and brother you once were." Kiyan's father sat him down for a serious yet compassionate conversation. "Kiyan," he said, "now that you're married and have started your own family, it's vital to remember something important. You must nurture your new family, but don't let that come at the expense of your relationship with your old family—your parents and sibling who have supported you through everything." He paused to ensure that Kiyan grasped the significance of his words. "Balancing both families is crucial. If you allow misunderstandings or tensions to arise, it could lead to regrets that will affect everyone involved." Kiyan nodded, realizing that balancing loyalty and love was not easily understood by all, but it was a lesson he was determined to embrace.

Kainat, once vibrant and connected with her friends, gradually began to withdraw into her own world, filled with the pages of novels and the endless scroll of the internet. Hours would pass as she lost herself in stories

and online content, distancing herself from the laughter and companionship she once cherished. When her friends attempted to reach out—whether through phone calls or text messages—she often met their efforts with a quick disconnect or ignored notifications, a wall she erected to shield her tender heart. The reality of her situation sharply contrasted with the days when she would eagerly plead for attention, hoping to engage in meaningful conversations. Now, though, her friends appeared like phantoms from her past, attempting to reconnect just as she started to embrace solitude and the joy of her own company. One sunny morning, as rays of light streamed through her window, casting soft shadows in her room, Kainat busied herself rearranging her wardrobe, organizing clothes that reflected her evolving self. At that moment, her phone buzzed with an incoming call from Preeti. The sight of her friend's name flashing on the screen prompted a wave of ambivalence, leading Kainat to quickly disconnect, relegating the phone to the side of her table as if it were a bothersome reminder of her past connections. Undeterred, Preeti sent a flurry of urgent messages on WhatsApp: "Please answer my call. I really need to talk to you. It's important." Despite her resolve to ignore, something stirred within Kainat as she read those words, pulling at the corners of her heart. In a moment of reluctant concern, she decided to answer when Preeti called again. "What's wrong? Are you okay? What's so urgent?" Kainat inquired, a cautious

tone laced with concern. Preeti's voice came through, laden with emotion. "I've been trying to reach you for two months! You've been avoiding me! I miss you and really need to talk." Kainat's heart sank at the truth of Preeti's words, but a lingering bitterness surfaced. "Oh, really? You miss me? I called you that day, and you brushed me off harshly, saying you had too much work while I sat jobless and idle. That felt incredibly hurtful," she replied, each word tinged with the pain of past rejection. Preeti, taken aback, asked, "So why did you answer now?" Kainat hesitated before answering, "Because I read your desperate messages and it worried me. I can't afford to be careless about our friendship like you were." "I'm really sorry, Kainat. That day, I'd just had a huge fight with Akhil, and I took my frustration out on you," Preeti confessed, her regret palpable. Kainat sighed deeply. "If I had done something like that to you, how would you have felt? I'm not here to be your punching bag just because you're feeling overwhelmed," she stated firmly. "You've really changed, Kainat. You never used to talk to me like this," Preeti remarked, a hint of disbelief lacing her tone. Kainat paused, a contemplative expression crossing her face. "Changed? No, I've learned. I've learned that not everyone who claims to care for you genuinely does. I started to understand that immersing myself completely in relationships that only offered me piecemeal affection would ultimately leave me feeling empty and unfulfilled. I've realized that I don't owe

anyone an explanation for prioritizing my own well-being, for setting boundaries that protect my interests, and for nurturing myself in ways I once neglected. Growth isn't an act of betrayal; it's a necessary part of my journey toward survival. If this evolution means I've drifted from the person I once was, then I embrace that change with open arms. Each scar I carry and every setback I've faced has imparted lessons that mere strength could never provide, especially without the accompanying struggle. I'm still my authentic self, but now, I have a richer wisdom that strengthens me. I've softened in areas where compassion is needed and have developed resilience in places where I once felt vulnerable. My transformation wasn't about seeking validation from anyone; it blossomed as a protective mechanism for the tender parts of myself I once gave too freely, often without acknowledging their intrinsic value. So, no, I haven't changed; I've learned how to walk away from draining environments, how to uphold my worth, and how to stand tall without shrinking to fit into spaces that never acknowledged my true value."

I came to a significant realization, Preeti: I must cultivate strength within myself because, in the midst of chaos, there is often no one I can truly rely on. When waves of sadness come crashing down on me, I find myself without a kindred spirit to turn to. There's no supportive shoulder for me to lean on when I feel overwhelmed, no warm embrace to provide solace

when I long for comfort, and no lifeline to pull me back up when I feel like I'm drowning in despair—other than my parents. Yet, I hesitate to burden them with my struggles, fearing that I may only add to their own worries. Thus, I have made a conscious decision to tackle the tumultuous nature of my life independently, focusing on nurturing and pampering myself in ways that bring me joy. After all, this is my journey, and it is ultimately my responsibility to carve out my own happiness. Why should I place that enormous expectation on others? It's striking how, in moments of solitude, I've noticed an unexpected shift. When I was surrounded by chaos, it seemed as though my friends had their own lives to tend to. Now that I've embraced my solitude and learned to navigate my own feelings, suddenly they want to reconnect and stay in touch. But I don't feel the need for that companionship right now. I've come to understand that nobody is intrinsically bad; rather, it's often the case that people exploit the kindness and generosity of others, wearing them down until they are forced to harden their hearts. Then, those same people ask, "Why did you change?" It's a stark reminder of the delicate balance between kindness and self-preservation in relationships.

It's never too late to transform into the person you've always dreamed of being. No matter how winding your journey has been, or how many times you feel you've veered off course, there's still ample

opportunity for change. Each day presents a fresh slate, a blank canvas ready for you to paint with new hopes and aspirations. The past, filled with its share of failures and setbacks, does not dictate your destiny; rather, it provides valuable lessons that can aid your growth and resilience. You have the remarkable ability to chart a new course at any given moment, whether that means revisiting the youthful dreams that once excited you or forging entirely new ambitions that ignite your passion today. The beauty of life lies in its endless possibilities; you can start anew as often as your heart desires. There are no constraints that bind you to your current situation if it no longer resonates with you. You possess the power to meticulously reshape your life—little by little, one deliberate decision at a time. Remember that some of the most inspiring tales emerge after enduring hardships, and many of the most formidable individuals are those who persevere even when the path is steep and arduous.

Embrace the idea of starting afresh, regardless of how 'late' you feel; take pride in the very act of beginning. Your individual journey is uniquely yours, needing not to mirror anyone else's. You have every right to dream passionately, no matter your age or circumstances. Yearn for more from life, and pursue those aspirations with an unwavering spirit and a hopeful heart. No matter the baggage of your past or the shadows of your fears, the present moment is bursting with potential.

Trust in your abilities, keep moving forward, and never forget that your life story has countless pages yet to be written. I have learned these vital lessons through my struggles; many people I held dear have distanced themselves, and those I believed truly loved me turned out to harbor resentment instead. In response, I chose to embrace self-love and to rely less on the expectations of others. Preeti, perhaps it's essential for you to pause and recognize that this path of reinvention isn't solely about seeking a significant other or romantic love. Right now, it may be crucial to cultivate a deep and nurturing love for yourself, embracing the serenity that solitary moments offer. Instead of hastily chasing what lies ahead, take time to reflect on why you might feel compelled to rush your journey—some things in life genuinely deserve the grace of patience and time. This could be the perfect opportunity to master the art of gently drifting into sleep without anticipating a comforting goodnight whisper. Imagine waking the next day not just with a soft smile gracing your lips but with a heart overflowing with forgiveness and self-acceptance.

By prioritizing your personal space and attending to your emotional needs, you will unlock the gateway to pursue your passions in an authentic way, allowing your dreams to blossom without the relentless ticking of the clock overshadowing your every step. Perhaps this moment is teaching you that nurturing your soul can be done independently, strengthening your



understanding that your happiness isn't tethered to others for validation or support. Today might just be the beginning of a transformed version of yourself—one who grows and embraces inner strength and comfort instead of seeking reassurance from the hearts of others. Dear one, you possess the power to create your own sanctuary; a safe haven that encompasses all your needs and desires, always within your reach, steadfast and dependable. I genuinely hope that as time passes, you will learn to embrace and believe in this profound truth. In a heartfelt conversation, Preeti said, "I am truly sorry, dear Kainat. I should have reached out when you were feeling alone and needed my presence. You are right; we shouldn't place expectations on others, yet you were always there for me. I was able to complete my graduation thanks to your unwavering support and kindness. I realize now how selfish I was to forget you once I achieved my goals." Kainat responded with grace, "It's perfectly alright, Preeti. Whatever successes you achieved were part of your destiny, and the hardships I experienced were simply mine to bear. I harbor no hard feelings toward you." Preeti insisted, "Despite what you say about having changed, Kainat, your heart remains the same—caring, loving, and pure. People like you are rare gems in this world. You truly deserve the absolute best that life has to offer." Kainat replied with a warm smile, "Thank you, dear. Insha Allah, I believe that I will receive the best blessings; I have unwavering faith in Allah." Every morning, Kainat made it a ritual to

stand in front of her ornate, vintage mirror, which had seen better days but still held a special place in her heart. As she gazed at her reflection, she would take a moment to assess her appearance, running her fingers through her hair and smoothing out her clothes. With a confident smile, she'd often say to herself, "Hey Kainat, you're looking good today!" This daily practice became a cornerstone of her self-care routine and played a pivotal role in rekindling the confidence she had once lost amidst life's challenges. As Kainat devoted time to nurturing herself, both physically and emotionally, she noticed positive changes in her body. She began to gain a healthy amount of weight, which contributed to a noticeable boost in her energy levels and marked improvement in her immune system. Feeling stronger, she felt empowered to make essential changes in her social life. One of the first and most important steps she took was to distance herself from those toxic individuals who drained her spirit. She found solace and peace in her own company, cherishing moments of solitude rather than engaging in draining conversations or negative interactions. Despite her newfound self-assurance, there were still acquaintances, friends, and even family members who couldn't help but ask the persistent, and often intrusive, question, "When are you getting married?" It became a test of her patience, but she had crafted a thoughtful response. With a patient smile, she would say, "I'll marry when I find the male version of myself and when it's Allah's will." People continually

bombarded her with questions that felt more like societal pressures than genuine curiosity. They would transition from "When will you finish your degree?" to "What job will you secure?" Then came the inevitable question about marriage. Once she tied the knot, they would shift their focus to when she would have children. And as surely as the sun rises, the queries would flow into whether she was planning to have a second child. The relentless cycle of expectations felt suffocating at times, and it astounded her that individuals would even ask, "When are you planning to die?" as if life were a schedule to be managed. Kainat often wondered why people felt compelled to ask such personal and, in some cases, insensitive questions. What joy or satisfaction could possibly come from prying into the timeline of someone's life? With each encounter, she found an increasing resolve to share answers that might make them reconsider the familiar, and often tiresome, line of questioning. In doing so, not only did she feel a sense of empowerment, but she also hoped to challenge the curiosity that weighed heavily on her spirit, shifting the focus back to herself and her own journey.

No one in this world is without purpose; each person possesses unique abilities and qualities that contribute to the greater tapestry of life. It's vital to remember that you hold intrinsic value — don't diminish your self-worth. Bestow upon yourself the same level of respect and importance that you desire from those

around you. The influence you have on others is often far more profound than you realize. Consider this: there might be someone who still chuckles at a witty remark you made during a casual conversation or perhaps recalls the compliment you offered on a particularly tough day, bringing a smile to their face. There are individuals who admire you in silence, appreciating the wisdom behind the advice you've selflessly shared. Your kindness and encouragement have likely brightened someone's day, leaving echoes of positivity that you might not even be aware of. You are not insignificant or forgotten; your existence plays a vital role in creating a positive impact, even if it's not immediately obvious. It's imperative to honor and uplift those who radiate love and kindness. Take the story of Kainat, for example. She was a girl brimming with love and compassion, yet her surroundings and the behavior of those closest to her profoundly affected her nature. The hurt inflicted on such a beautiful soul can lead to drastic changes — just like a stunning mirror can transform into a sharp weapon if shattered.

Kainat, once gentle and nurturing, grew to appear blunt and unapproachable due to the pain she endured. Though she suffered immensely, Kainat eventually learned the importance of setting boundaries and prioritizing her own well-being. You, too, are presented with a crucial decision: to evolve into a better version of yourself or to remain entrenched in

your current circumstances. Should you choose the latter, you may find that the same challenges, routines, and storms continue to persist until you learn from them and develop enough self-love to assertively say, "No more." However, if you decide to embrace evolution, you will connect with the untapped strength residing within you. You will step outside your comfort zone, explore new horizons, awaken to a deeper sense of love, and ultimately discover who you are meant to be. Remember, everything you need to flourish is already within you. Choose the path of evolution, embrace change, and cultivate a profound love for yourself.

You have the unique opportunity to converse with your mirror, a reflection that embodies honesty without any pretense. When you flash a genuine smile, it returns that joy gracefully, brightening the space around you. Yet, if tears well up as you gaze into its depths, it too reflects that sorrow, mirroring the weight of your emotions. This surface not only shows your face but reflects your entire emotional landscape; if you look at it with a heavy heart, you'll see that sadness staring back at you, while a look of pure happiness reveals the radiant, uplifting version of yourself. Your mirror provides a canvas for exploring every aspect of who you are, reminding you that beauty and self-worth come from within. It's essential to engage with this reflection thoughtfully. You have the power to choose how you perceive yourself—

whether you allow an ugly self-image to prevail or embrace the beauty that resides in every flaw.

Nurturing a friendship with your mirror can lead to profound changes in your personality and outlook on life. It's an invitation to practice self-love and self-acceptance. Your existence might seem trivial to the outside world, but it carries immense significance in your own story. After all, you have just one life to live. Make it extraordinary by valuing and loving your unique self, discovering the beauty in your life.



## **CHAPTER :13**

### **Becoming Her Own Safe Space**

After enduring countless trials and tribulations, Kainat finally discovered the importance of prioritizing herself and indulging in self-care. She came to the profound realization that the person responsible for her happiness was none other than herself. It was a long journey of self-discovery, but she ultimately understood that true contentment resided in her own company. As the saying goes, "better late than never," and there was an ironic twist: just when Kainat began to revel in her solitude, the friends who had long ignored her suddenly bombarded her with calls and messages, wanting to reconnect. Determined to sever ties with those who had not been genuine friends, Kainat made a bold decision—she formatted her phone, keeping a select few contacts that mattered most. Her list included her loving parents, her supportive brother Kiyan, her kind sister-in-law

Nawal, and a handful of cherished cousins. Gone were the names of school and college friends who had failed to support her in times of need. With a fresh start ahead of her, Kainat embarked on a transformative journey, almost as if she had been reborn into a new life. She enrolled in a PhD program in Clinical Psychology at Delhi University, choosing the distance learning mode, which allowed her flexibility. Occasionally, she made trips to the bustling city to meet her academic guide, a wise mentor who provided invaluable insight into her studies. When not in his presence, she found herself engrossed in online lectures and motivational speeches by renowned counselors and life coaches on YouTube. This diverse learning experience enriched her knowledge and fueled her ambition. Though she didn't complete her PhD, Kainat's journey took a different, yet fulfilling path—she blossomed into a motivational speaker and relationship coach. She launched her own YouTube channel, where she shared her insights and experiences, quickly gathering a large following. Men and women alike were drawn to her message of resilience and self-love. As her confidence skyrocketed, Kainat distanced herself from the negativity and toxicity that had once surrounded her. Intriguingly, her brother Kiyan and his wife began to exhibit a change in their behavior towards her. They started recognizing and praising her hard work and achievements. Kainat found joy in spending time with her adorable nephew Azan and niece Adab, who



looked up to her with admiration and affection. It didn't escape Kiyan's notice that he had misjudged his sister; she was indeed a diamond in the rough, worthy of every ounce of happiness life had to offer. Through her setbacks and imperfections, Kainat learned to embrace herself fully. She realized that her tendency to complain to others only fostered feelings of ridicule and shame. Instead, Kainat commenced a dialogue with Allah, pouring out her heart and sorrows, finding solace in the fact that her Creator would listen without judgment or mockery. The once-timid girl transformed into a fearless woman, dedicated to helping others embrace their true selves and live fulfilling lives. We often underestimate our potential, failing to recognize that our happiness can impact not only our own lives but also those around us. Too frequently, we wait for external validation and approval, forgetting that we hold the pen to our own life stories. Why should we relinquish our narrative to those who may not appreciate it? We have the absolute power to shape our destinies and write beautiful tales of triumph and joy. People's opinions hold power only if we grant them that ability. Kainat understood that sharing her secrets with others was a misplaced trust; if she couldn't guard her own confidences, it was unreasonable to expect others to respect them. Oftentimes, those who harbor animosity toward us unite with others who feel the same, conspiring to bring us down. This revelation illustrated the extraordinary power we possess; our lives can inspire unlikely alliances, even among our

detractors. Much like how butterflies are unaware of their own exquisite wings, we frequently fail to recognize our inner strengths, beauty, and loyalty. It's essential to remember that while others might see our worth, we should not allow their judgments and assumptions to shape our self-image. Kainat initially permitted the opinions of friends and family to cloud her perception of herself until she realized her capacity to make the world a more beautiful place. Life is, in fact, a breathtaking journey, but we often mar it by worrying about how others perceive us. We are not on this earth to seek the approval of others; rather, our aim should be to please Allah, the Almighty, who has granted us the precious gift of life to cherish every moment. He never promised a path devoid of obstacles; life encompasses both joy and sorrow, and every experience serves as a trial. Ultimately, we must rise above every challenge, treating each day—whether good or bad—as a teacher. It is crucial that we maintain our goodness in the face of negativity. If others choose not to value our efforts, we must find comfort in knowing that Allah sees and cherishes our good deeds. When we genuinely love ourselves, we radiate a distinctive glow that brightly illuminates the world around us. We must never dim our light for the sake of those who fail to appreciate it.

Kainat sat comfortably on her couch, completely absorbed in the Hindi movie "Queen." The film follows the charismatic Kangana Ranaut, who embarks

on a self-discovery journey after her fiancé abruptly calls off their wedding. Alone in Europe, Kangana experiences thrills and adventures, reigniting her joy, forging new friendships, and embracing her newfound independence—each scene resonating deeply with Kainat. Just as a poignant scene unfolded, dark shadows of the past began to loom as her brother Kiyan knocked on her door. With a quick rise, she opened it with a warm smile, exclaiming, “Bhaiya, you don’t need to knock! You can walk in as you used to. I’m still your same sister.” Kiyan stepped inside, his expression a mix of nostalgia and concern. “You’ve changed,” he remarked softly, a hint of sadness in his voice. “You’re not like you used to be; you seem distant, a little colder, and lonelier.” Kainat shook her head vigorously, determined to clarify her feelings. “No, Bhaiya! I haven’t changed in who I am. I’ve simply found myself. I’m done trying to please everyone, waiting for someone else’s love to validate my existence. I no longer crave approval, validation, or those artificial smiles that never reached my heart. I’ve learned to say no. I’m learning to prioritize myself, to step away from anything that tires me and from people whose energy drains mine, from places where I don’t feel like I belong.” Her voice softened, tinged with emotion. “This feeling isn’t rooted in anger; it’s about peace. This is wisdom, an awakening of sorts. I’m not aging as you used to joke; I’m becoming more authentic, more selective, and finding greater peace within myself. I’ve realized that solitude

can often be more fulfilling than being surrounded by negativity and that serenity and self-love are invaluable.” “But you’ve changed too, Bhaiya,” she noted, the warmth of her sentiment evident. “You were my best friend, my soul mate through childhood, my lifeline amidst struggles. I depended on you, but you seemed to believe I was a jinx in your life.” She felt a wave of emotion crashing over her. “I’ve missed you every second of every minute, every day—searching for you in our childhood photos and reliving the moments we once cherished together. My times have been challenging, but my intentions towards you, your wife, and your kids have always been filled with love and prayers.” Kainat paused, her gaze locking onto Kiyan’s eyes. “What if I were your daughter instead of your sister? Would you have treated me differently?” The question hung heavily in the air as she continued, “It was incredibly difficult for me to cope with your accusations of ruining your home.” A glimmer of vulnerability appeared in Kiyan’s eyes as tears welled up, and he held his ears in a gesture of remorse. “I’m sorry, Kainat. Your Bhaiya is not a good person. Please forgive me.” With heartfelt compassion, she replied, “No, you’re a good father and a loving husband, but you haven’t been a good son or brother. You used to be the best at both, so why did you drift away from me?” Seeing tears stream down his face, Kainat rushed to comfort him. “Don’t cry, Bhaiya. I can’t bear to see you in pain. I would do anything to protect you.” Wiping his tears gently, she enveloped

him in a warm hug. In that moment, a comforting sense of peace surrounded them. Kiyan felt an overwhelming relief wash over him, understanding just how much he had hurt her while realizing her unwavering forgiveness rooted in love. Curious about his sudden visit, Kainat asked, “Why are you here today?” Kiyan’s eyes brightened as he replied, “I wanted to spend some quality time with you, just like we used to.” A glimmer of excitement lit up Kainat’s face; “I was watching a movie. Let’s watch it together! It’ll be just like old times!” She added with a playful smile, “Wait here; I’ll be right back with coffee for both of us.” Meanwhile, in her room, Nawal was busy entertaining Adab and Azan, ensuring they felt at ease. Kainat made her way to the kitchen, expertly brewing coffee and slicing sandwiches that her mother had lovingly prepared earlier. Carrying the aromatic coffee and freshly made sandwiches back, she served Kiyan, and together they settled in for the movie, laughter spilling from their lips as they reveled in each other’s company. As the movie played, Kainat felt a shift in the air around them, their relationship slowly beginning to heal. The laughter and joy seemed to weave the fabric of their bond anew. Even Nawal recognized her past mistakes as she watched Kiyan and Kainat rediscover their connection. She started treating Kainat with warmth and care, slowly earning the sister’s trust back. Though it took time for Kainat to fully embrace Nawal again, she opened her heart out of love for Kiyan. The bond between the three of

them began to flourish, proving that even amidst the pain of their past, reconciliation is possible. It's often said that when dark times shift into light, even those who once treated you poorly can realize their mistakes and find their way back to goodness. It's often said that while it's relatively easy to extend forgiveness, the true challenge lies in the act of forgetting the past transgressions. Although wounds can mend over time, the scars they leave behind often remain as lasting reminders. Kainat, for instance, managed to find it in her heart to forgive both her brother and Bhabi Nawal for their misdeeds. Yet, despite her attempts to move forward, she continues to grapple with deep-seated trust issues that may persist indefinitely. There's wisdom in the saying that when you notice yourself shedding tears more frequently than sharing laughter, or when the anxiety you feel consistently outweighs the happiness and tranquility in a relationship, it might be time to reassess that connection. If you find that your life is becoming overwhelmingly difficult and burdensome, it's crucial to take stock of the situation and liberate yourself from that toxic relationship. The act of letting go can be profoundly challenging. You might feel as if a vital part of your very existence is being wrenched away. However, I assure you, after navigating through the unsettling initial phase of separation, the inner peace and contentment you will discover are priceless. This sentiment is something only those who have undergone similar struggles can fully appreciate. Many individuals convince

themselves that escaping from such unhealthy dynamics is nearly impossible; they feel trapped, as if they have no other choice. In these moments of despair, it's vital to pause and ask yourself: Is it truly harder to step away from these damaging relationships, or is it even more daunting to remain tethered to those who rob you of your tranquility and devalue your worth? Can you really endure a life filled with daily sorrow and suffering? Prioritizing your mental and emotional well-being, as Kainat ultimately chose to do, is imperative. We exist in this world not to endure depression, anxiety, and abuse, but to embrace joy and cultivate healthy, fulfilling relationships. The journey to inner peace may be fraught with challenges, but it is undoubtedly a path worth traversing.

On a bright and sunny Sunday morning, Kainat accompanied her mother to the bustling grocery store. The cheerful ambiance was filled with the sounds of chatter and the scent of fresh produce as Kainat meticulously checked items off her grocery list. Suddenly, a familiar voice echoed from behind her, calling her name with enthusiasm. As she turned around, she recognized a face she hadn't seen in years, though it took her a moment to place her. To her surprise, the girl rushed forward and embraced her in an unexpectedly warm hug. "Long time, Kainat! How have you been?" she exclaimed, her voice bubbling with excitement. Kainat looked at her curiously,

realizing that it took a second for her to fully recognize her childhood friend, Shifa. A smile spread across her face as the memories flooded back. "Oh, it's you, Shifa! How are you? Honestly, I couldn't believe my eyes; you look different!" Shifa beamed, her eyes sparkling with joy. "Different? You mean more beautiful," she teased. Kainat's smile widened as she nodded in agreement. "Yes, definitely prettier than ever!" Shifa chuckled with delight, then added, "Well, the secret to my newfound beauty is my husband, Nadeem." Kainat's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "You're married?!" "Yes, it's been two wonderful years, and we have a seven-month-old daughter now," Shifa replied, pride evident in her voice. Kainat's heart warmed at the news. "Congratulations! That's fantastic. You must be so happy!" With a beaming smile, Shifa called over a tall, handsome man who stood by the fruit section. He had an athletic build, chiseled features, and a friendly demeanor. "This is Nadeem, my wonderful husband," Shifa introduced, and Kainat greeted him warmly, noting how perfectly suited they looked together. Shifa then turned the conversation toward Kainat. "So, what about you? Are you married yet?" Kainat shook her head with a smile. "Not yet! I'm still waiting for the right moment." At that moment, her mother approached them, a warm smile on her face. Shifa greeted Kainat's mom with enthusiasm and asked playfully, "Why isn't Kainat married yet?" Kainat's mother chuckled. "We've had many proposals, but we're looking for the perfect



match. After all, my Kainat is one in a million, and she deserves someone equally special.” “Good luck, Kainat!” Shifa encouraged. “Just don’t take too long because as the years pass, it can get tricky to find a good match.” Kainat confidently replied, “Don’t worry; I’ll find the man of my dreams.” “Choose wisely,” Shifa advised, her tone seemingly serious. “Absolutely,” Kainat agreed. “You made a wise choice, and look at how happy you are.” Yet, as Kainat engaged with Shifa, she couldn’t shake the feeling that some things hadn’t changed over the years. Shifa still seemed to carry an air of competition. “I feel so blessed with Nadeem; he’s the best husband in the world!” she boasted, a hint of rivalry creeping into her voice. With a smile, Kainat responded, “I’ll find the best too, but right now, my focus is on developing myself and enhancing my personality.” Shifa suddenly asked, “Could I have your contact number?” Instead, Kainat suggested, “Why don’t you give me yours? I’ll send you a missed call.” After a quick exchange of their numbers, Shifa chirped, “I’ll save it and reach out to you,” before she waved goodbye and left the store. Kainat and her mother continued their shopping as they moved through the aisles filled with vibrant fruits and vegetables. Once they had gathered their groceries, Kainat’s mother turned to her and asked, “Do you actually want to keep in touch with her? She hasn’t changed a bit, has she?” Kainat shook her head, a knowing smile on her face. “People like her rarely change, Mom. I have no desire to stay connected.

Instead of saving her number, I blocked it .” Though Kainat had once entertained the notion of friendship with Shifa, their connection always felt ephemeral, like a wisp of smoke fading into the air. Shifa seemed more like a distant echo than a true companion, a figure she could easily overlook in the busyness of her life. In an act of conscious choice, Kainat refrained from saving Shifa’s number in her phone—an intentional omission that mirrored her fading memories of their time together, like photographs left in the dark to fade away. In stark contrast, her relationship with Nawal, her bhabhi, was rooted in a deeper complexity. Nawal was undeniably woven into the tapestry of Kainat’s family life, a constant presence at family gatherings, celebrations, and even the quiet moments that threaded through everyday existence. Ignoring Nawal was simply not an option; she played a significant role in the familial dynamics, binding them together with shared laughter and whispered secrets. Kainat understood a profound truth: while one might attempt to distance themselves from the familiar ties of family, the bonds they shared could never truly be severed. Family was like a well-worn path that, no matter how many obstacles were placed in its way, would always find its way back into one’s heart, lingering there as a steadfast reminder of belonging and connection. She has a negative energy that I find draining, and life is so much better when you distance yourself from negativity and drama. You don’t realize how addictive their ups and downs can be until you

take a step back. Life shines so much brighter when you keep those who aren't genuinely happy for you at bay." Her mom nodded, pride reflected in her eyes. "Finally, you've learned how to safeguard your happiness. I always hoped you would learn from your experiences, and it's uplifting to see this positive change in you." With eyes sparkling at the thought of a sweet treat, her mom then urged, "Now, let's hurry! I'm craving an ice cream!" Kainat grinned widely. "Absolutely, Mom! Today, you're getting a big bucket of ice cream!" They both laughed, excited to wrap up their shopping and indulge in a delightful treat.

Kainat understood a profound truth: negativity acts like a poison, invading our lives in various forms such as toxic behavior, hurtful words, and actions filled with betrayal. It is essential to shield yourself from this negativity, refusing to allow it to disrupt your inner peace simply because others lack awareness. This struggle isn't an indictment of your character or your destiny; rather, it's a reminder that some individuals may never change, and accepting that can be liberating. We often unwittingly choose our own poison, whether it's the intoxicating yet destructive allure of love, the cold embrace of wealth, a lonely existence, or entanglements in unhealthy friendships and family dynamics. Our intuition frequently sees these dangers looming ahead, yet despite that awareness, we sometimes allow ourselves to succumb to our own destruction, akin to digging our own

graves. Others might merely assist us in our downfall, but the choice ultimately lies with us. Consider Kainat's experiences with her Bhabhi, Nawal. On the surface, Nawal may seem amiable and welcoming, often behaving kindly in public. However, Kainat is acutely aware that Nawal's words can cut deep, igniting feelings of frustration within her. In response, Kainat has learned the art of silence and the power of ignoring the provocations. She chooses to tolerate Nawal's shortcomings, reminding herself that engaging in conflict would only breed resentment that could poison her own happiness. There are times when Kainat accompanies Nawal on shopping excursions, all while consciously setting aside any hard feelings. She recognizes that holding onto hatred towards her Bhabhi would ultimately harm her. Instead, Kainat embraces the wisdom of letting go and moving forward, understanding that not every relationship can be transformed but can be navigated with grace. Kainat finds her greatest joy in solitude, cherishing the moments she spends in her own company. In those quiet hours, away from the draining energies that no longer resonate with her, she discovers an unparalleled sense of happiness. While some may criticize her for choosing to spend time alone, she subtly revels in that tranquility. It offers a freedom and serenity that cannot be replicated in the chaotic external world; true peace must come from within. Driven by a mission to make the world a better place, Kainat relies on her unwavering faith. To protect her spirit, she immerses

herself in the captivating world of books. These silent companions, rich with wisdom and stories, do not demand anything from her, providing a comforting presence filled with potential. Unlike human interactions, which can be unpredictable and fraught with emotional complexity, the world of literature invites her to open their pages, offering solace and companionship whenever she needs it. In the stillness of the written word, Kainat finds a refuge, knowing that she's never truly alone.

There are moments when you might feel like you have lost your value or that those around you might be growing weary of your presence. In those times, let me reassure you: people like you are truly one-of-a-kind, and rare individuals do not come along often. You possess a warmth and kindness that makes you a sweetheart—how could anyone ever tire of that? Remember, it's essential not to let self-doubt creep in. Embrace and cherish yourself as you rightfully deserve, for you are worthy of love, admiration, and acceptance just as you are.

Kainat often found herself receiving messages from her college friends, a reminder of her past life that felt distant now. Ever since she formatted her phone, her contact list was wiped clean, leaving her to identify senders by their display pictures. If a message came from a recognizable face, she would respond with ease; however, if it featured a flower or a landscape, she would have to clarify who it was. Her friends

would often tease her, asking if she had deleted their contact numbers. Kainat would shrug it off, attributing the situation to her phone being formatted, though the truth was that she had little interest in rekindling those friendships. One day, her phone rang with Jyoti's name flashing across the screen. Hesitant at first, Kainat took her time to answer since she was cautious about picking up calls from unfamiliar numbers. Jyoti, persistent and eager to connect, called several times until Kainat finally relented. As she answered, a sense of casual indifference colored their conversation. Jyoti's voice, once familiar and warm, now felt foreign. She remarked, "Why do you sound so different? It feels like I'm talking to a stranger." Kainat reflected on that—I mean, how could she revert to the person she once was, especially when so much time had passed without even a message exchanged between them? Learning to be alone had reshaped her entirely. Jyoti lamented, wishing for Kainat to return to her old, loving self. Kainat firmly replied, "It's unrealistic to expect a person to stay the same. Time changes everything—days, months, and even seasons evolve, leading to changes within us. The person you knew has faced trials that have transformed her. Change isn't synonymous with brokenness; it's a sign of growth. I can be softer, stronger, or more open—whatever my journey demands of me. This version of me is authentic and worthy in its own right." When Jyoti asked if that meant Kainat was living a perfect life, Kainat shook her head, even though Jyoti couldn't

see her. “Being okay doesn’t mean life is devoid of challenges. I still have days that feel achingly empty. It’s a battle some days to fill the emotional void with positive thoughts,” she explained. “Sadness lurks just around the corner, waiting for the moment I let my guard down. Yet, I’ve learned to embrace those feelings when they come. I might feel hopeless at times, but I’ve gotten better at pressing pause, taking a breath, and sorting through my thoughts.” Curiosity piqued, Kainat inquired about the purpose of Jyoti’s call. Jyoti enthusiastically revealed, “I saw your videos on YouTube! You’ve become a relationship coach and counselor. I’m genuinely proud of you!” Then, Jyoti admitted she wanted to share her own struggles, but not in the usual friend-to-friend fashion—she was looking for guidance from Kainat, the counselor. “What happened?” Kainat asked, concern etched on her face. Jyoti took a deep breath before responding, “I got married last year to a wonderful man named Prithvi, who is an engineer. Life felt perfect until three months ago when I lost my dad unexpectedly to a cardiac arrest. It’s a massive void in my life.” Kainat’s heart sank as she listened. “What happened to Uncle?” she inquired gently. Jyoti’s voice trembled as she detailed the suddenness of the loss. “Navigating this grief is immensely challenging. My younger sister and mom are now alone. I try to be strong when I visit them, along with Prithvi, but behind closed doors, I often collapse in tears. It feels like my world ended when my dad left.” “I’m incredibly sorry for your

loss,” Kainat replied softly. “Life is so unpredictable. We’re all just passing through this world. You have to take the time to cope with this loss. It’s tough, especially since you were so close to your father. But now, you need to step up and be your mother’s support and your sister’s pillar of strength. Keep yourself occupied and embrace the reality that the time has come for you to become their anchor.” Jyoti’s voice was filled with appreciation as she said, “This is why I respect you, Kainat. No matter your struggles, you continue to motivate me. You still have that golden heart, able to empathize with the pain of others.” Kainat felt a warmth in her chest at Jyoti’s words. “I’m always here for you. Whenever you need help, don’t hesitate to call. I’m sorry I’ve been out of touch; I had to clear out all my friends’ numbers after feeling neglected in my time of need.” “I totally understand, dear. If anyone should be apologizing, it’s me,” Jyoti admitted, guilt lacing her tone. “After you left Chennai, I hardly checked in on you. I neglected our friendship.” Kainat responded with grace, “It’s okay. Just focus on overcoming this difficult period like a warrior. Keep your spirit high and don’t let anything dim that smile. I’ve learned that my expectations should come from Allah and myself, not from others.” Feeling uplifted by their conversation, Jyoti expressed her gratitude before disconnecting, filled with renewed spirits and praise for her brave, resilient friend, Kainat.





## **CHAPTER :14**

### **Glow and Unstoppable is the Side Effect of Self-Love**

When Kainat finally came to terms with her true worth, she underwent a remarkable transformation. It was as if a vibrant light radiated from within her, illuminating every room she entered. Her newfound sense of self-love instilled a powerful confidence that made her feel invincible, ready to tackle any challenge that came her way. This enchanting glow was not just a physical manifestation; it reflected the joy and acceptance she had cultivated within herself. Everyone around her noticed this stunning change, and it inspired them to seek that same beautiful side effect of self-love in their own lives.

Self-love is a transformative journey that cultivates compassion, emotional balance, and deep empathy for ourselves. This foundational practice empowers us to

extend that same compassion and non-judgment to those around us, strengthening our connections with ourselves and others. When we embrace self-love, we allow ourselves to release burdensome negative thoughts and to accept our genuine selves—flaws and all—as perfectly imperfect beings. Take, for instance, Kainat, who decided to become her own biggest fan. This conscious choice invites reflection: Why shouldn't you be your own favorite? What stands in your way? I believe that when you genuinely appreciate who you are, it becomes much easier to recognize and cherish the qualities in others. In contrast, if you struggle with self-acceptance, you may find it difficult to celebrate the achievements and strengths of those around you. A profound truth I hold is that self-judgment often sets the stage for judgment of others. Life is rich with lessons, and I see two pivotal ones that we must learn: First, the Golden Rule—treat others as you wish to be treated. This principle is vital and can cultivate a more compassionate environment. Second, dedicate time to spend with yourself, particularly during moments of sorrow or after setbacks. Life is a landscape of experiences, often marked by more failures than triumphs. During times of struggle, remember to be receptive to the voices of those who care about you—friends, family, or mentors—acknowledge their insights, especially those who support you through thick and thin. Let their words of encouragement and lessons guide you. Yet, amidst this external input,

carve out a sacred space in your day—at least 1.5 to 2 hours—where you can sit quietly in solitude. This could be a period of reflection, meditation, or simply being present with your thoughts. This intentional time away from distractions is vital; there truly is no one who understands you better than you do. Embrace this opportunity to connect with your inner self, for it is in this nurturing space that you can foster self-acceptance, growth, and ultimately a more profound connection to the world around you.

Kainat earned her metaphorical wings through a profound journey of self-love and acceptance. These wings, emblematic of unwavering confidence and deep admiration for herself, became her most prized possessions—untouchable and resilient against the harsh criticisms of the world. She discovered her true worth by intentionally carving out time to nurture her own company, cultivating a friendship with herself that was rich and rewarding. Hours spent in introspection, journaling her thoughts and aspirations, helped her to understand her emotions and values deeply.

Her dedication and expertise in the field of Clinical Psychology did not go unnoticed; Kainat was frequently invited as a guest lecturer at prestigious universities, where she shared her insights and experiences with eager minds. Furthermore, she established her own counseling clinic, a safe haven for young individuals, particularly students grappling with

the weight of unmet expectations and the sting of failure. Kainat's compassionate approach and relatable stories of her own struggles became a beacon of hope for those around her.

Not only did Kainat learn to embrace life in its entirety and navigate through its challenges, but she also dedicated herself to helping others find their footing. She guided her clients towards self-love, instilling a sense of resilience and purpose in their lives. Her ability to empathize stemmed from her own personal experiences; it was this profound understanding of life's complexities that allowed her to truly connect with and uplift those she worked with.

Kainat had mastered the art of tuning out negativity, learning to rise above the judgments of those around her. Yet, despite her best efforts, there were still persistent individuals who pried into her personal life, constantly inquiring, "When are you getting married?" Each time the question was posed, an inner irritation surged within her. She often imagined responding with a sharp retort, asking them when they planned to leave this world, but she always held her tongue.

What compels people to intrude on the lives of others so brazenly? Initially, the murmurs centered on her employment status. The whispers of concern regarding her lack of a job had faded, only to be replaced by an incessant barrage of questions about marriage. This shift felt bewildering to her. At her cousin's wedding, a

vibrant celebration filled with laughter and joy, she hoped to immerse herself fully in the festivities. Yet, as she navigated through the crowd, she was cornered by a group of well-meaning but intrusive aunties, their faces brimming with expectation. “Beta, when are you getting married?” one chirped, her voice laced with urgency. Kainat felt the familiar wave of annoyance wash over her, but she forced a serene smile. “Aunty,” she replied, her tone calm yet firm, “when Allah wills. As soon as I find the right partner that Allah has set aside for me, I will marry. Until then, please let me savor my freedom.” Kainat wondered why certain individuals felt it was their duty to interrogate others about their personal journeys. If someone was single, they were already keenly aware of it; if someone struggled with their weight, they certainly didn’t need reminding. Why, then, push such sensitive buttons? Did they seek to be reminders of insecurities or cause unintended hurt? She pondered the effects of these questions, recognizing that everyone faces their own challenges; by probing into such personal matters, they only added to the burden. Imagine standing before Allah on Judgment Day, reflecting on the impact you had on others’ lives—how your words or actions may have contributed to their misery. Kainat had endured a myriad of hardships, and through those trials, she had unearthed a deep sense of self-worth. No one had the right to invade her personal space or disrupt her newfound happiness. After all she had weathered, the thought of changing further filled her with frustration.

In her moments of despair, when she longed for companionship and understanding, where were those same people? They had been quick to judge and criticize during her struggles, even some of her closest friends and family had distanced themselves. Now, as she stood independently strong, they attempted to draw her back into their web of expectations. She was certain that marriage would arrive at the divine moment ordained by Allah—there was no need to answer questions when the timeline remained unknown to her. Living wholly in the present and placing her faith in Allah, Kainat knew He would lead her to the right life partner. Those who trust in Allah's plan tend not to concern themselves with when or how events will unfold. Life is too fleeting; it's essential to embrace the moment and grant others the freedom to do the same. The past had faded away, and the future remained veiled in mystery, so why not celebrate the present while allowing others the same privilege?

Kiyan's wife, with a tone of excitement, informed him about Kainat's recent success as a counselor, flourishing in her professional life. She suggested that it was about time for Kainat to consider marriage. Kiyan, always inclined to support his wife's insights, found himself nodding in agreement. However, a question lingered in his mind: was Kainat truly to blame for postponing her marriage? She had indeed received several proposals, but none of them met her standards. Kainat had been the focus of discussions

among family and friends, all urging her to accept any offer and compromise on her expectations. Yet, Kainat stood firm, seeking a partner who embodied understanding, kindness, and respect—qualities she deemed essential for a loving relationship. She was willing to overlook superficial traits like physical appearance or financial status, firmly asserting that these were not the criteria she valued most. One evening, as the family gathered around the dinner table, Kiyan decided to address the issue directly. He turned to Kainat, genuinely curious, and asked her why she felt unprepared for marriage. Kainat looked him in the eye, clearly unperturbed, and replied, “When have I ever said I’m against marriage? The proposals I’m receiving simply don’t hold value to me.” Kiyan, leaning back in his chair, reiterated that perhaps she should learn to compromise a little. With a calm yet assertive tone, Kainat responded, “Bhaiya, when we go shopping for something like a dress, we explore different stores until we find the ideal one, right? Why should it be any different when choosing a life partner? This is a momentous decision that will shape my future. I’m not willing to settle for just anyone.” She continued, sharing her thoughtful perspective on life and relationships: “Marriage will happen when Allah decides; why should I be the one to bear the blame? Allah has designed everyone to be in pairs, and in His time, He will grant me the perfect partner. I understand this is your home, and I will eventually leave to start my own life. For now, I am

focusing on my personal growth and happiness. I have spent too long feeling lost, but now I am beginning to glow again.” Kiyani exchanged glances with Nawal, sensing the weight of her words. Determined to get his point across, he remarked, “But Kainat, you’re growing older. Isn’t it time for you to settle down?” Kainat’s eyes narrowed slightly, a look of disappointment shadowing her features. “Bhaiya,” she replied, her voice steady yet emotional, “I thought you understood me better. This is not my decision to make; it’s in Allah’s hands. If I’m aging, it’s not on me—it’s all part of Allah’s divine plan.” Kainat continued passionately, “If someone were to ask me about the most profound lessons I’ve learned or the experiences that have shaped my life so far, I would resolutely say that, ultimately, there is no one besides Allah. The true treasure we possess is the relationship we nurture with Him, as our time here is fleeting and will conclude when we meet Him in the Hereafter. All the complexities, friendships, and even the most cherished relationships will inevitably fade away.” No longer the girl who shed tears over petty issues, Kainat had transformed into a woman of resilience and self-love. Embracing this newfound strength, she realized that when you truly start to love yourself, life begins to love you in return. After finishing her dinner, she excused herself, retreating to her room. There, she picked up her favorite novel, immersing herself in its pages. Reflecting on her growth, Kainat had learned to walk away from any environment that suffocated her



with trivial talk or unsolicited opinions. She understood the importance of self-preservation: when something makes you uncomfortable, you must take action to protect your peace. In one-sided relationships or friendships, she urged herself—and others—to remove their presence from those situations. “You don’t owe anyone an explanation,” she reminded herself. “You have the power to choose your own path. Block those who disrupt your peace, disengage from negativity, and lead your life without looking back. Let others interpret your choices however they wish; what truly matters is that it's what’s best for you.”

Kainat nestled comfortably on her bed, the rich aroma of her favorite novel filling her thoughts as she turned each page. Suddenly, a gentle knock interrupted her reverie. She glanced up and opened the door to find her mom standing there, a glass of warm milk in her hand, the steam curling upward in delicate wisps against the soft afternoon light. “You forgot to drink your milk, sweetheart,” her mom said, a hint of concern in her voice. Kainat sighed, crossing her arms defiantly. “But Mom, I’m full! I don’t want to drink it. I’m not a baby anymore!” Her voice edged with frustration, as she desperately sought to assert her independence. Her mom chuckled softly, shaking her head. “Oh, shut up with that! Don’t take your brother’s words to heart. It doesn’t matter what he or his wife or anyone else thinks about you. To your dad and me, you will always be our little Kainat, no matter how

much you grow up." In that moment, the warmth of her mother's words melted away Kainat's irritation. A broad smile spread across her face, and she lunged forward to envelop her mom in a tight hug. "I love you, Mom," she whispered, feeling a wave of affection and security. "I love you even more, my little girl," her mom replied, a sparkle in her eyes. With a newfound sense of clarity, Kainat continued, her voice imbued with sincerity. "Mom, life is too short to be consumed by negativity. I refuse to spend my precious time fighting, blaming others, or clinging to hate. Whatever time I have left, I want to embrace it fully—living passionately, loving deeply, and chasing true happiness." She paused as memories flooded her mind, reflecting on past moments that had once troubled her. "There was a time when the smallest things would unravel my peace. I was endlessly worried about the opinions of others, held onto grudges like they were treasures, and allowed anger to steal my serenity. Over the years, I've come to understand that none of it truly matters. Holding onto bitterness only weighs down my heart and soul." "I've chosen a different journey now. I consciously choose peace. Embracing self-love has illuminated my life in ways I never imagined. I choose to be content with what I have and where I am at this moment. Each day, I strive to awaken with a spirit of gratitude, surrounding myself with those who uplift me rather than drain my energy. I've come to the realization that arguments, unnecessary drama, and negativity are merely thieves of joy, stealing away the

beauty of life." Kainat smiled dreamily as she recounted the simple pleasures she now cherished. "I want to savor the little things—taking leisurely walks under the warm sun, receiving a thoughtful message from a friend that brightens my day, enjoying a steaming cup of coffee as I watch the world go by, and feeling the comforting embrace of loved ones, especially you, Dad. Those are the moments that truly make life beautiful." "I aspire to live with love—not just in my relationships but also portrayed through my attitude, my choices, and the words I speak. I yearn to care for my family, appreciate my friends, and fiercely protect my peace. In the grand tapestry of life, it isn't about proving who's right or wrong—it's about cultivating love, preserving peace, and treasuring the moments that define us. That is the kind of life I wish to lead." "I'm beginning to understand the need for solitude among those who occasionally withdraw during difficult times, only to return once they've found their balance. Sometimes, everyone needs a break from the chaos of life, and that's perfectly okay. Mom, I truly believe that Allah has something greater in store for me, that it will arrive perfectly timed when I'm ready. I'm not rushing; I'm trusting the process." Her mom gazed at her proudly, tears glistening in her eyes. "I love the confident, optimistic person you've become, Kainat. You're absolutely right—Allah has something wonderful written just for you."

Kainat's face lit up with a radiant glow whenever she played with her two adorable nephew and niece, Adab and Azan. Their laughter and innocent antics were like a breath of fresh air, melting away the stresses of her day. Nawal, her sister, could clearly see the depth of Kainat's affection for the boys. Every weekend, Kainat turned into a culinary magician, whipping up their favorite treats—extravagant pizzas topped with gooey cheese and pepperoni, mouthwatering burgers piled high with all the fixings, and bags filled with colorful chocolates that delighted their taste buds. Nawal would often tease her, playfully shaking her head and saying, "You're spoiling them!" But Kainat would simply chuckle and respond, "That's exactly what aunts are for—it's in the job description!" As these moments rolled into memories, Nawal found her bond with Kainat blossoming like never before, all thanks to Kainat's sweet, nurturing spirit that drew them closer together in a warm embrace of love and laughter.

In a tranquil clinic filled with soft colors and serene decor, Kainat was busy tending to her patients when the door swung open, revealing a woman accompanied by her young son. The woman smiled nervously and said, "Ma'am, I have an appointment. This is my son, Rayeem." Kainat welcomed them with a warm smile and motioned for them to take a seat. Kainat quickly noted the tension in Rayeem's shoulders and the sadness in his eyes. "What brings you here today?" she asked gently, her tone inviting. Rayeem shifted

uncomfortably and replied, “I’m pursuing a law degree, but recently I’ve been feeling very depressed. I get angry over the smallest things, I sometimes break things in frustration, and then I just burst into tears.” Kainat gestured for him to sit on a plush couch, its soft fabric contrasting with the hard reality he was facing. “What seems to be bothering you the most?” she inquired, her voice filled with genuine concern. With a heavy sigh, Rayeem began to share his story. “My parents always dreamed of me becoming a doctor. But I’ve never had any interest in medicine,” he confessed, his voice laced with a mix of disappointment and defiance. “I studied hard for the MBBS entrance exams but failed miserably. When I finally decided to pursue law, I cracked the entrance test on my first go, and I was ecstatic because it felt like my dream was finally within reach. But instead of celebrating, my parents were disappointed, thinking I deliberately failed the medical entrance exam. Now, my relatives keep telling me what use is a law degree, saying lawyers are just liars and calling me useless. Those comments weigh heavily on me.” Kainat listened intently, nodding along as he spoke. “Are you happy studying law? Is it truly what you want?” she asked, leaning forward slightly. Rayeem’s expression softened as he replied, “Yes, becoming a lawyer is my dream.” Kainat smiled warmly, her eyes shining with encouragement. “You know, not everyone’s dreams come to fruition in the way they expect. You are fortunate to be living your dream, yet you’re letting

others' negativity cloud your happiness. People will always have something to say. The most important opinion is your own. If you are genuinely happy, focus on your studies, and don't let the negativity from others hold you back." Rayeem frowned and posed a troubling question. "How can I be happy?" "First, you must learn to love yourself and embrace your career," Kainat advised. "When you truly appreciate who you are, others will be drawn to you as well. It's vital to distance yourself from negativity." Rayeem's brow furrowed as he continued, "I try to be kind to everyone, but it feels like they treat me as if I don't even exist. I feel like no one loves me, no matter how much kindness I show." Kainat offered him a soft but firm look. "You need to start by being kind to yourself. The world may not always treat you as you wish it would, but you have the power to change how you treat yourself. It's crucial not to expect others to return the kindness you extend. Often, people are too caught up in their own lives to notice your efforts. Be gentle with yourself, especially on the days when it feels like you've been forgotten." Feeling a sense of camaraderie growing in the conversation, Rayeem shared, "My so-called friends just use me and betray my trust." Kainat responded thoughtfully, "Then consider becoming your own best friend. Why seek validation and companionship from others when you have yourself? Think about it—when you were born, did you come into this world surrounded by friends?" He shook his head. "No, I didn't." "Exactly," Kainat

said. “You entered this world alone, and it’s alright to spend time with yourself. Focus on your dreams instead of worrying about how others perceive you.” With a heavy heart, Rayeem said, “Ma’am, I just want to be happy in life. Can you please share how I can always find happiness?” Kainat regarded him with compassion, then provided him with a list, her voice steady and reassuring:

1. “Remember, everyone faces problems; you are not alone in your struggles.
2. Challenges are an inevitable part of life; it is only the dead who are free of them.
3. Know that every problem has a solution; the difficulties you face today can be overcome.
4. The way you see yourself has a profound effect on your happiness, so visualize yourself as a valuable and beautiful individual, avoiding feelings of low self-esteem.
5. Don’t dwell on what others say about you; some people thrive on negativity and enjoy bringing others down.
6. Seek friendship with those who uplift you and make you happy, steering clear of anyone who mocks your challenges.
7. Utilize your leisure time by engaging in hobbies that bring you joy, like reading or learning something new.

8. Guard yourself against those who intimidate you with wealth or material possessions; remember, circumstances can change rapidly.
9. Regardless of what you're experiencing right now, never lose hope; as long as you're alive, there's possibility. Each time you stumble, give it one more try.
10. Cultivate a habit of prayer; it can serve as a catalyst for attracting blessings into your life.
11. Lastly, have the courage to pursue what you truly desire. Life is inherently about taking risks, and without stepping out of your comfort zone, you may never achieve your dreams." Kainat watched as Rayeem took in her words, hoping they would inspire him to forge a path toward his happiness and success.

Rayeem hesitated for a moment before he declared, "I will try, Ma'am. I'll take your advice to heart and commit to loving myself." Kainat, sensing a familial bond developing, gently replied, "Instead of 'Ma'am,' you can call me Didi. You're like a younger brother to me." She continued with a warm smile, "I'm confident you'll notice a significant change in yourself if you truly embrace self-love. Everyone deserves that kind of care; it's not just important, it's essential." Rayeem's smile broadened as he responded, "I feel so much better talking to you, Didi." His mother, who had been listening nearby, couldn't help but express her gratitude. "Kainat, I am so thankful to you.



Rayeem is our only son, and the way you've made him feel so at ease—and referring to yourself as his sister—gives me so much hope. I'm finally starting to believe that my son can be cheerful and fun-loving like he used to be. It breaks my heart to see him sad and struggling.” Kainat beamed at Rayeem's mother, “Aunty, I promise you, if Rayeem follows my advice, he will find joy in life.” She shared her contact number with Rayeem, encouraging him to reach out whenever he felt low. “And please, consider stopping the medication that comes with side effects. Self-care is the most potent medicine of all.” From that day forward, Rayeem found himself reaching out to Kainat frequently, texting, calling, and immersing himself in her motivational videos on YouTube. He was captivated by how Kainat explained the little nuances of finding happiness and enjoying one's own company. She reassured him that she understood his plight, having faced her own share of negative comments, feelings of neglect, and loneliness from friends. Occasionally, Rayeem would visit Kainat's clinic for counseling, always leaving infused with positive energy she cultivated. But as semester exams loomed closer, he struggled to focus on his studies. Despite his best efforts, intrusive negative thoughts infiltrated his mind, clouding his concentration and leaving him disheartened. After receiving disappointing grades, he rushed to Kainat, his voice trembling, “Didi, I'm having suicidal thoughts. I don't know how I'll face my dad; he's going to be furious

about my scores.” Kainat looked at him with compassion, saying, “Rayeem, if becoming a lawyer is your dream, why are you letting fear of failure hold you back? You can’t allow depression to dictate your ability to study.” He countered, “It’s easy for you to say that; you seem to have everything figured out while I’m still searching for what I want to achieve.” Kainat took a deep breath, a slight frown passing over her features. “That’s where you’re mistaken, my dear. I, too, have faced countless storms. I’ve encountered suicidal thoughts and dealt with the stigma of being single, yet I’ve found ways to embrace self-love. You’re not the only one with burdens; everyone grapples with their struggles. The difference is how we respond to those struggles.” She continued, her voice steady and inspiring, “When I hit my lowest point, I had a revelation: no one is coming to rescue you. You have to learn to be your own savior, to wipe away your own tears, and to stand firm, even when life feels overwhelmingly chaotic. I learned that people may come and go; many stay only during good times but vanish when you need them most. It’s painful, but it’s a part of life.” Gazing sincerely into Rayeem’s eyes, she emphasized, “You cannot stop someone who has learned to nurture and uplift themselves through self-reliance. It’s vital to focus on your growth and prioritize self-love as the foundation of your life. Engage in habits that enhance your mental and emotional well-being, pursue your passions, and surround yourself with positivity. By elevating your

own needs, you will not only build resilience but also become a source of strength for others.” Kainat paused, allowing her words to sink in, and then concluded thoughtfully, “It wasn’t easy for me either, but after weathering so many storms, I discovered my worth. The choice is yours—either rise or fall—but remember, only you can make that decision. No one else will fight for you if you won’t fight for yourself.” Feeling the depth of her message, Rayeem

lowered his gaze, his heart swelling with newfound resolve. “I’m sorry, Didi. I’ve let you down. From this moment on, I won’t let my happiness depend on anyone else.”

With the passage of time, Rayeem gradually learned the importance of self-love and began to genuinely enjoy his own company. In moments of uncertainty, he would pick up the phone and call Kainat, his beacon of support, who had played an instrumental role in his transformation. The shift in Rayeem was nothing short of remarkable; his academic performance surged, which filled him with a sense of fulfillment he had long been missing. He made a conscious choice to distance himself from friends who had once taken advantage of his kindness, revealing themselves to be insincere and shallow. His parents, too, were quick to notice the positive shift in their son’s demeanor, observing how a newfound confidence began to radiate from him. Kainat had kept her promise, successfully helping to dispel the cloud of depression

that had loomed over Rayeem's life. With hard work, he completed his Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree, achieving commendable marks, and soon found himself practicing law alongside some of the most esteemed advocates in the field. One sunny afternoon, Kainat was enjoying a warm family gathering, surrounded by her parents and her brother Kiyan, who was happily chatting with his wife, Nawal. Their relaxed atmosphere shifted as Rayeem, along with his supportive parents, entered the room. Rayeem approached Kainat and her family with a friendly smile, his expression a combination of gratitude and humility. "I'm really sorry for coming here without an invitation," he began, "but I felt the need to express my thanks in front of your family and mine." Kainat looked at him curiously and asked, "Thanks for what?" His voice was earnest as he replied, "You changed my life, didi. I was at the lowest point, grappling with feelings of hopelessness and despair for reasons I couldn't even understand. It was through your guidance that I discovered the real meaning of life—self-love. You opened my eyes to how it can infuse happiness into our lives. Today, I stand here, having fulfilled my dream of becoming a lawyer, and I owe that joy to you. Kainat, you truly are an angel to me. It feels as if you waved a magic wand, and somehow, all my wishes have been granted." Kainat, always humble, responded with a gentle smile, "No, Rayeem, all I did was what comes naturally to me—being a counselor. I just guided you and reminded you of your

worth, not only to yourself but also to your family. We often seek validation and love from those around us, forgetting that we must first provide that to ourselves. It warms my heart to know I could help you find happiness, but remember, it was your own efforts, paired with Allah's blessings, that created this change." Rayeem then presented her with a beautifully arranged bouquet of vibrant flowers paired with a box of chocolates. Kainat hesitated, saying, "You really didn't have to do this," but his parents encouraged her, explaining that she was like a sister to him. With gratitude in her eyes, she accepted the gifts, thanking Rayeem for the thoughtful gesture. As they settled into comfortable conversation, Nawal served fragrant tea accompanied by an array of delicious snacks. Laughter and stories filled the room as they praised Kainat for the incredible work she did. After Rayeem and his family left, Kainat turned to her father, who looked visibly proud. "I'm so proud of you, my daughter. You've not only changed your own life, but you're also bringing about positive changes in others." Kiyan chimed in, "You're spot on, Dad. We all feel proud of her. Kainat has grown more confident, independent, and resilient." He embraced Kainat, his voice earnest as he continued, "I want my children, Adab and Azan, to be influenced by your strength. Please teach them the value of self-love so they can face life's challenges without fear of becoming lost or hopeless." Nawal added, "Kainat, you truly are making a difference, and Kiyan's absolutely right. We're assigning you the

honor of mentoring Adab and Azan. They adore you and seek out your company.” With dedication in her voice, Kainat assured them, “I’ll do everything in my power to make them strong. I want to spare them from the loneliness I once felt, to help them understand that they must be their own best friends in tough times, like a sturdy umbrella in the storm.” Nawal gently approached her, kissing her forehead affectionately. “Darling, you possess a kind of magic within you. It’s astounding to see how someone who once appeared so reserved and worn has bounced back, glowing with self-acceptance and love. What’s the secret behind this radiance?” Kainat let out a playful wink and confidently replied, “The secret is simple: self-love is the ultimate glow-up.”



## Conclusion

Kainat's journey beautifully highlights the profound impact self-love can have on both your life and perspective. When you begin to embrace self-love, you undergo a transformation that enhances your confidence and ignites a vibrant glow from within, empowering you to take on life's challenges with an unstoppable spirit. Kainat made the brave decision to shift her focus onto herself; she consciously chose to ignore the negativity that surrounded her and dedicated time to her own thoughts and feelings. It's essential to stop fretting over whether or not others understand you or your journey. Instead, invest your energy in discovering what truly makes you happy and what brings a sense of calm to your soul. You are your own greatest commitment, and this means accepting every facet of yourself—your imperfections, your quirks, and even your vulnerabilities. Embracing your unique blend of traits allows you to lead a more fulfilling life, free from the burdens of societal expectations.

Remember, as the world spins on its axis, it will do so with or without the approval of others. So, why not dedicate the next year to nurturing your own growth and self-discovery? Building a genuine sense of self-love and support often involves intentionally engaging in practices that promote personal development and emotional wellness. Loving yourself means taking full responsibility for your own journey—acknowledging that you are the architect of your life. This involves not only defining clear standards for how you want to be treated but also establishing healthy boundaries that reflect your intrinsic worth and values. To truly embrace self-love, it's important to commit to nurturing your passions and recognizing your unique achievements, no matter how small. Prioritize self-care and cultivate self-compassion; these practices empower you to create a life that is both fulfilling and meaningful. Furthermore, it's crucial to identify and release the people in your life who may be holding you back from true happiness. This includes individuals who cause you to question your worth, those who are only present in your life during easy times but disappear when things matter, and those who are emotionally inaccessible. It's time to let go of the ex-partner who has long moved on while you remain anchored to their memory, as well as the acquaintances who offer the bare minimum yet expect the utmost in return. Recognize the old friends who lingered only to take rather than to give; they drain your energy rather than uplift you. These are the people who might prefer



gossip over loyalty or competition over support, making you feel as though you need to shrink yourself to fit in. Consider distancing yourself from those who only half-listen, feign care, or create superficial connections. Be wary of individuals who mock your happiness or use your vulnerabilities against you, and especially those who amplify your insecurities instead of shining a light on your strengths. Relationships that exhaust you more than they uplift are not serving your best interests. As you reflect, acknowledge anyone who makes you feel less than your best self—those who drain your spirit and come to mind as you read this. It's essential to let them go. Wish them peace in their journey, but love yourself enough to walk away and prioritize your own happiness.

Make it a daily mission to bring a little light into someone's life, even if it's just through a warm compliment, a small act of kindness, or simply by sharing a genuine smile. While you focus on spreading joy to those around you, don't forget the importance of nurturing your own happiness and well-being. You have every right to feel valued and loved, just like everyone else. Set aside a special moment each day—whether that means diving into a beloved pastime like painting or gardening, savoring the pages of a compelling novel, or dedicating time to rejuvenate with self-care rituals like a relaxing bath or meditation. Consider this your gentle reminder: there's no reason to feel guilty for prioritizing your needs today.

Choosing to care for yourself isn't selfish; it's a crucial part of your journey. Embrace the person you see in the mirror, who has weathered storms and navigated challenges, yet still stands resilient and ready to pursue self-love. Your most important commitment is to cherish yourself and recognize your inherent worth. Be the kind of love you've always wished to receive; in doing so, everything around you will begin to align beautifully. Take a moment today to show yourself a bit more affection than you did yesterday. Make your own needs and aspirations a top priority, because you deserve to chase after your dreams with passion and determination.

Every small stride you take, no matter how insignificant it may seem, brings you closer to turning those dreams into reality. Take time to count your blessings and feel proud of the distance you have traveled in your life. You are a distinctive and brilliant star, a vibrant rainbow emerging after the rain. Embrace the journey you're on—the ups, the downs, and everything in between—because it has crafted the magnificent person you've become. Celebrate your successes, learn valuable lessons from the obstacles you encounter, and never underestimate your own value. You are enough, just as you are, and today is yours to embrace fully.

In recent months, I've embarked on a remarkable journey of self-discovery that has enriched my life in ways I never anticipated. I've carved out time to listen

intently to my inner thoughts, finding solace in the rhythm of long, reflective walks through my neighborhood, where the rustling leaves and chirping birds become my companions. Each morning, I savor the process of brewing my favorite artisanal coffee, allowing the rich aroma to envelop me as I prepare for the day ahead. As I delve into the pages of captivating books, I lose myself in stories and ideas that challenge my perspective, while also bringing me immense joy. I've made it a practice to greet my reflection in the mirror with a warm smile, reminding myself of my worth and the beauty inherent in my individuality. Speaking my fears aloud—those nagging doubts and insecurities—has become a form of liberation, as I confront them head-on. I've made a conscious effort to focus on the pursuits that ignite my soul: writing in my journal, painting, or simply sitting quietly with my thoughts, rather than indulging in habits that drain my energy or spirit. Through this exploration, I've gained clarity on what I truly desire—meaningful company. I long for a connection with someone who not only listens but also aligns with my worldview, appreciating the stillness of tranquil evenings spent in each other's presence or comfortably alone. Most importantly, I've come to realize that the person I need to rely on for this companionship is myself. This journey has illuminated a profound truth: no one can possibly understand me as well as I understand myself. Each day, I make the intentional choice to engage in activities that bring me happiness, slowly peeling back

the layers of my soul like an artist revealing the vibrant canvas beneath.

As I learn more about who I am, I find myself falling deeper in love with the person I've become. Kainat, also discovered her value through the practice of self-love and the nourishing experience of being her own best company. This transformation has allowed her to shine brighter, and she in turn inspires those around her to celebrate their own existence. Kainat firmly believes that self-love is not an act of selfishness but rather a fundamental necessity; it cultivates self-assuredness and grants us the wings to soar to new heights. Let us all take a cue from this philosophy and become our own pillars of support. When we stumble, we should gently pick ourselves back up; in moments of sorrow, we should dry our own tears with tender care. Treat yourself with the love you truly deserve—buy that beautiful dress you've been eyeing, or indulge in a spontaneous trip to a place you've always dreamed of visiting. Spend quality time with yourself and relish in your own company; that's the path to truly knowing who you are. Ultimately, you hold the power to make your life a masterpiece—no one else can unlock this beauty for you.



## **Piece of Advice**

Embracing and loving yourself is not an act of selfishness; it is a fundamental necessity for your emotional and personal growth. Imagine being your own greatest ally and the support system you've always needed. It is crucial to cultivate self-love, as it determines the foundation for your future well-being and confidence. Picture yourself planting a vibrant garden within, where each seed represents your dreams and aspirations. This inner garden will blossom beautifully if you nurture it, rather than waiting for someone else to bring you flowers that may never come. Relying solely on others for validation, affection, or a sense of belonging can lead to disappointment. Each individual has their own struggles and responsibilities, and sometimes, they might overlook the need to tend to your heart. That's why it is so important to prioritize your own care and happiness. Think of yourself as a dedicated gardener: plant your dreams, nurture your inner peace, and

watch your happiness flourish as a radiant garden within you. Even if the world around you remains indifferent to your growth, take pride in your accomplishments. Celebrate each small victory, no matter how insignificant it may seem to others. Don't wait for someone else to tell you that you are beautiful; instead, cultivate that beauty through kindness and compassion towards yourself. Rather than hoping for reminders of your worth from others, recognize it in your resilience and your ability to rise after setbacks. Decorating your soul goes beyond superficial adornments; it involves filling your life with pursuits that resonate with your heart, engaging in activities that bring you joy, being gentle with yourself during difficult times, and offering forgiveness for your missteps. Someday, a person may arrive in your life with flowers, but by that time, your own magnificent garden will already be thriving. This new presence won't be there to complete you; rather, they will enhance the beauty that you have painstakingly cultivated within yourself. So, nurture yourself in the manner you've always longed to be treated, and safeguard your heart as if it were a precious gem. Remember, you are not destined to remain in silence, waiting for someone else to infuse your life with happiness. You are the passionate gardener, the creative artist, the soulful individual, and you deserve to flourish in every season of your life. Allow yourself the gift of happiness. I am aware of the myriad of heartbreaks you've endured and the heavy weight of

sadness you may be carrying in your heart. There are times when you might find yourself questioning your own worth, feeling inadequate in various aspects of your life. But today, I want you to truly understand that you are deserving of happiness and fulfillment. It's time to stop settling for less than what you genuinely deserve! Start recognizing your value more frequently and aspire to be the best version of yourself—not to gain approval from others, but to foster a sense of pride in who you are. Quietly, yet resolutely, plant seeds of love within yourself, ensuring that hatred and negativity never take root. It's essential for you to acknowledge your worth, for far too long, you may have overlooked how wonderfully deserving you are. You exhibit such kindness towards others, yet it's imperative not to forget to extend that same compassion to yourself. Hold this truth close: you are precious and unique. The pain you've endured was never a reflection of your value, and you don't have to carry that burden forever. Allow yourself the grace to heal; not everything in life is meant to be broken, and you are not an exception to that. While it may feel daunting to believe that you could ever be truly okay or happy, take heart—it's never too late to pursue a brighter, more joyful version of yourself.

One day, I hope you will deeply realize that treating and loving yourself rightly will illuminate your worth. If there's one undeniable truth about life, it is that despite its complexities, it unwaveringly moves

forward. People will evolve and change, often in unexpected ways, and the nature of love can shift and reshape, wearing new faces as time passes. Our hearts, resilient as they are, have the capacity to break and then mend, emerging stronger from each experience. The dreams we once clung to with a fierce grip may slowly fade, allowing space for new hopes and possibilities that we couldn't have imagined before. We confront the profound loss of dear ones, feeling an empty void where laughter and connection once thrived. We may also find the courage to step back from relationships we once held as unbreakable, understanding that sometimes, necessary distance leads to personal growth. Throughout the chaos and emotional entanglements that life presents, there remains one undeniable truth: life moves ahead—unyielding and relentless. Each moment, filled with ups and downs, uncertainty and clarity, teaches us resilience, guiding us as we navigate our unique paths. So let's take a moment to deeply embrace self-love, to appreciate the richness of our individual journeys, and to fully savor the spectrum of life's experiences. Each day presents itself as an opportunity to live with passion, seek joy, and treasure the relationships that illuminate our lives. Your path is yours alone, and you are deserving of all the beautiful blooms it has to offer.

Sometimes we overlook the reality that our current circumstances are not permanent. We may find ourselves enveloped in feelings of hurt, uncertainty,



and confusion, grappling with where we truly belong in this vast tapestry of life. It's essential to remember that every painful experience is merely a temporary phase, and the most challenging moments often serve as the crucible that prepares us for more wonderful times ahead. These trials test our resilience and strength, but it's crucial to remind ourselves that we will not remain in this state forever. Your present situation is not your final destination, and the pain that feels so consuming right now is not endless. Consider this moment in your life—a time when everything appears to crumble, where nothing seems coherent, and no person feels like home. It is akin to the shock of dipping your toes into ice-cold water for the first time. Initially, it's uncomfortable and jolting, but as time goes on, not only does the discomfort fade, but the water begins to feel refreshingly invigorating. Similarly, as we navigate through our difficulties, we may find that they gradually morph into lessons that resonate with us. Over time, what once felt unbearable can transform into something manageable, slowly yielding to the warmth of love and joy. We often forget that nothing is eternal, and just like the heaviness of one day can spiral into another, today, too, shall pass. Until that moment arrives, it's vital to embrace and cherish the essence of who you are—prioritize self-love and make yourself your favorite person. When we genuinely love ourselves, we naturally raise our standards and refuse to accept anything less than we deserve. We should wear our

self-worth like a regal crown, proudly showcasing the high esteem in which we hold ourselves. Anyone who crosses our path offering less than what our self-worth signifies should be swiftly dismissed from our lives, as we safeguard our inner sanctity. Practicing self-love directs us away from relationships and influences that do not serve our highest interests. It acts as a protective barrier, preventing us from opening our hearts to detrimental behaviors, toxic energy, or deceptive actions that undermine our self-esteem. It saves us from enduring empty promises or half-hearted affection and shields us from pain we could have sidestepped if we had prioritized our own needs and well-being. Cultivating self-love is a journey toward self-discovery. The more intimately we come to know ourselves, the less we allow the external perceptions of others to sway us. So, embrace your uniqueness, love yourself wholeheartedly, and nurture a deep-seated trust in who you are—that is what truly holds significance.

**“You are the sole architect of your own identity, a unique tapestry woven from the vibrant threads of experiences, memories, and aspirations that only you understand. Yet, it’s remarkable how quickly we can feel ourselves crumble under the weight of words spoken by others—those who have never tasted our struggles or stood in our shoes, nor grasped the complexities of our journeys. It’s vital to turn your focus inward, nurturing that inner voice that whispers of your worth and seeking out the joy that lights up your spirit. That joy is your true beacon, guiding you through life’s tumultuous seas. When someone dares to voice their disapproval of you, don’t shrink away. Instead, hold your head high and assert yourself confidently. Remind them, with unwavering clarity, that their perspective is merely one thread in the vast tapestry of existence. Their choice is simple: either embrace the vibrant individual you are, with all your quirks and experiences, or step aside. Remember, you have dedicated countless days and nights—perhaps even a lifetime—to the noble pursuit of self-love and acceptance. You have peeled back the layers of doubt and insecurity to reveal the beautiful core of your being. You deserve to be surrounded by those who elevate your spirit and celebrate your unique light, not by those whose shadows dampen it. Life is far too precious to waste on convincing someone else to recognize your extraordinary value. Instead, dive deeply into who**

**you are, let your true self shine like the sun, and watch as it draws in those who truly appreciate you”.**