

A story written in the mountains,
destined by the stars...

TRUST THE PULL

ABHAY VARDHAN



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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to the person reading this right now. Your precious time for this book definitely means the world to me.

This is my second book, and my readers, most of whom are strangers to me, motivated and inspired me to get on to my second book.

So, here I am...

Also, life can be tough and unpredictable, but it always comes with a hope... That's the beauty of it.

Abhay Vardhan

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my parents, Vinod Kumar Wekhande and Mohini Wekhande, have been constant supporters in my life and have always stood by me in thick and thin. So, the tinniest of applause and the biggest appreciation that I get are all because of their support.

I am thankful to my sister Ketki Thakur and brother-in-law Praneet Thakur, who have been a shadow of support silently.

Also, I am thankful to all my family members, cousin brothers, sisters, their respective husbands, and my brother-in-laws who have always supported and motivated me. That's how families work, right?

Another important part of my life are my friends who stood by me in my worst times. I am extremely thankful to them from the bottom of my heart.

One last thing, which I would like to mention in this space, is that ...

“Always think that the situation around you could have been worse, so what you have is the better version of the worst that could have happened. So always be grateful for what you

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have, and it's completely alright to have dreams that seem impossible, senseless, impractical and unachievable for others. It's fine if they don't understand and that's ok...these people don't even matter in your life. So, dream on people and create your own story of life."

Abhay Vardhan

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About the Author

Abhay Vardhan

Abhay Vardhan started his career as a content writer for the product branding in the year 2010 working for an advertising company. Then started working as a copywriter and an associate director for the same advertising company in the year 2012. Started working as a freelance script writer and supervisor for various dubbing and language translations and continued for over 9 years which also included English and Hindi documentaries, scripts for corporate companies, you tube content and short films from 2012 to 2014. He then completed training in theatre arts from Pankaj Mittal's Theatre Group and did Hindi and English theatre for over ten years. He also has a diploma in acting which he achieved in the year 2004 under the training of the veteran Roshan Taneja Sir, the founder and head of acting department at the prestigious FTII in Pune. He has also been working as a voiceover and dubbing artist for over 20 years now. He also worked as a Radio Jockey where he scripted and broadcasted over 235 romantic

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stories in his own voice and gained national recognition. He was also felicitated by “Spotify” for his podcast channel “Storyteller RJ Abhay” where he narrates romantic stories and gained immense global popularity and appreciation.

He has worked in more than 350 films and shows as a dubbing artist, which includes web series and feature films on Netflix, Amazon Prime and Amazon MX Player. He also wrote and directed a short film “The Perfect Picture” which was felicitated at the prestigious Jaipur International Film Festival in the short film category. He also wrote the screenplay and dialogues of a Marathi film “Unn-Sawali.” With two Hindi films already set to go on the floor, he is looking forward to see his stories come to alive soon in Hindi films this year.

This is Abhay’s second book as an author after a great response for his first book “The best of our lives” a story of six friends, seven years and a legendary tale of manifestation, love and friendship.

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Prelude

Year 1993

Welcome to the simpler times of the year 1992. “The millennial era” as they call it, when there were no cell phones and no social media. The cell phone services started in India on the 31st July 1995. Our story begins and floats through the early 90s and lives on thereafter.

Let’s find out how it feels to live in the time when the terms and lingos like situationship, benching, ghosting, breadcrumbing, love bombing, orbiting, pocketing, cookie-jarring, curving, cat fishing, delusionship, cushioning and micro-cheating didn’t exist...the only analogy that existed was...she loves me or she loves me not...and for men, it was more of the Shakespeare inspired analogy... to be or not to be her husband...

Back then, when the spouse used to introduce... This is my husband or this is my wife... this itself used to light up the eyes with pride and fill the veins with delight. Also, there was no social show off and the competition was not about the fake social life and numbers.

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Having said that, there is one of the many qualities of Gen Z which is very admirable and that is, they know what they want....there is clarity and not perhaps, maybe, could be or would be...
Anywho...

Once upon a time in the lives of Veer and Kavya in the nineties.



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*7th July Year 1993
Brooklyn Bridge, New York City.*

When I say the Brooklyn Bridge, I instantly think of a cinematic location and a moment right in the center of the bridge where a boy and a girl hug each other and promise to be together for the rest of their lives...a moment of deep connection, love and bond. Evidently, the bridge also connects the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn in New York City but ironically, here is Kavya standing at the Brooklyn Bridge with awaiting eyes for someone, day in and day out.

The beautiful outdoor and indoor sitting of “Rizz Café” at the underside of the Brooklyn Bridge instantly catches everyone’s attention and so does Kavya’s. The Café is a pretty blend of vintage and contemporary feel with some antique artifacts like an old radio in the corner which may not be in working condition but definitely serves the purpose of making the place look vintage. There is a small bookshelf near the billing counter from where you can pick a book of your choice while waiting for your coffee order or while having your coffee at your table. The walls of the Café are not loud in color; they look just fine and give a premium look to the Café. The walls are painted in the pearl

color which is a pale tint of off-white. There is enough space between the tables to walk freely without bumping into each other. There is a wind chime hanging on the entrance of the Café, so anyone who comes in and goes out somehow makes himself noticeable to the others sitting inside the Café. A calm and soothing jazz music is playing at just about an audible volume. The ceiling-mounted white American luxury crystal chandeliers with warm lights add to the feel of the calm atmosphere in the Cafe. The coffee makers of the Cafe are busy dealing with their coffee machines and their steam while getting the orders ready and ticking the order notes on their completion. The place is super busy on a Monday morning with innumerable coffee takeaways by the office goers. In that fast-paced coffee shop, Kavya was sitting at a corner where she usually sits daily at 8 a.m. She sits exactly there because from her table she can directly get a view of the Brooklyn Bridge, which is of the utmost importance to her. Every day, without a miss, even on Sundays, Kavya visits the same café and sits at the same place because she is always the first customer to enter the café every day, so she has the choice of picking her favorite place in the café. She keeps looking at the Brooklyn Bridge while working on her scribbled notes in her dusky brown diary with some sticky, colorful notes on the edge of the previous pages, so that she can refer to them

quickly whenever she wants. Also, thinking about someone while writing something in between, while sipping her black coffee along with a mustard sauce spinach corn sandwich every single day without missing, while having a million thoughts in her mind and a million dreams in her eyes, became a routine for her.

As for her appearance, Kavya always dresses well, and she doesn't have a bad dressing day ever. She is that Indian girl who can carry a traditional and a casual look with equal panache. She wears her spectacles whenever she reads and it kind of adds to the cuteness of her personality. She has beautiful long tresses which surpass her waist when she is standing and almost touch the ground when she is sitting on a chair. Sometimes she flips them and rotates them clockwise, makes a bun and then inserts the pencil she is holding in her hand as a bun holder. Some of the strand of her hair still finds a way to fall on her temple on either side which only adds to her pristine beauty.

Kavya is getting her degree in screenplay writing from the renowned Screenwriting Academy of New York (SANY), in New York, as the name suggests. So, for a three-year course, she lives there, at a rented apartment near the academy but comes all the way to the Brooklyn Bridge just to have a black coffee every day,

before her day starts...After her first coffee and breakfast of the day, she wraps up her things every day to catch a cab from the Manhattan side of the bridge to reach the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Kavya always gets down five minutes away from her academy every day and walks towards it which kind of warms up her mind and thought system before starting her lecture at the academy.

Now, why would she go all the way to the Brooklyn Bridge every day when she can have the same routine here in Manhattan? We will find the answers to that question soon but for now, all we can say is that the screenplay writing was not the only reason she was there in Brooklyn.

When we say Manhattan, it sounds all fancy and premium package of a vacation but the cost of living in Manhattan is unimaginable. Although Kavya had already written for some movies back in India as a ghostwriter before she came here for the screenwriting course, she wanted to write a story that is simply a piece of her heart and a nice slice of life, kind of a love story. Now, although she had some savings in her bank account, to manage the other usual expenses during her three-year degree course at the academy, she used to work at a Café in

Manhattan itself. The other reason she was doing a job was that a place like this is an ocean of stories and observation. The variety of people with their own individual stories and events were like a complimentary dessert at a very expensive five-star restaurant.

So, every day after her class, from 4 pm to 9 pm, Kavya used to do her part-time job at the “Tales Café”. Even the name of the café matched her mindset. So, at 4 pm sharp every day, Kavya would come in her casual clothes and change into the jeans, the café t-shirt and after putting on the apron around her neck with the café cap on her head, she used to put up a huge fake smile on her face which would spread across both her cheeks while talking to the coffee lovers of New York.

On a Sunday, after a very long time, Kavya had all the time for the day because she didn’t have a class that day and she also had an off at her Café job. So, after the Brooklyn Bridge routine in the morning, after the black coffee and breakfast, she comes back to Manhattan and after quite a while, she decides to bring out her vintage 1970s Yashica-C camera with those Kodak negative rolls in it on the streets of Manhattan. So, there are two round lenses on the box-like camera. The first lens is used to focus the object and the other is used to click it. To click the pictures, first you have to insert

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a Kodak negative or a film roll inside it by opening the back side of the camera and then slowly you have to fix the roll in the slot and then you have to pull the roll and fix it in the upper spool of the camera. Then you have to lock it with a side button and then rotate it in a clockwise direction to bring it to the arrow on the film on the upside to begin. Then, after closing that part, you have to open the roof part of the camera and look inside the frame that you are about to click and after pressing the flash button, you finally get a beautiful picture out of it after developing the negative or film roll. Quite a long procedure, isn't it? It is far easier now with the HD and megapixel camera in your cell phone itself but this was quite a unique experience back then to make some memories.

There is this word called "Harbinger" which means a sign of something that is about to happen in the future or it is also referred to as someone about to come across in the future. No, I am not talking about the déjà vu...that's different. So, the first harbinger of hope that Kavya sees about someone she is looking for is Broadway. Kavya had already completed her screenwriting assignments a day before, so she had the whole day for herself and going back to her room, sitting in the middle of the four walls was something she didn't want to do. So, she came up with the idea to check out the musical

show “Crazy for You” which recently opened again on Broadway in Manhattan after a long gap on 19th Feb 1992. It is July 1992 already, so while walking on the crossroads of Manhattan, she sees the poster of the Broadway musical “Crazy for You” which is about a banker falling in love with a small town girl. Now, this was the musical which her “someone” wanted to see for a long time but it never reopened after its last show, which happened almost a decade ago and it was on the wish list of Kavya’s someone...

So, Kavya decides to watch the show before they start their tour in other cities. She pushes her specs upwards and then walks up to the ticket window to buy the last remaining ticket of the musical and as luck would have it, she not only gets the last remaining ticket but she also gets the most premium seat E-10 which is considered to be the best view seat in the Broadway musicals and the theatre world. As the colorful and musical show begins, after absorbing the characters and the world of that musical, when it reaches the interval point, it reminds Kavya of why someone of hers once asked her to watch this musical. Now, there are way too many coincidences to digest here.

- First, the Broadway musical “Crazy for You” is reopening after decades.

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- Second, Kavya is at the same place and the same time as the show was.
- Third, Kavya got the only remaining last ticket and the best watching experience.
- Fourth, the name of the musical had something to do with Kavya's story and someone's wish list.

Are these events taking her to something? Is this the harbinger? Well, the weekday knocks on her door again and she gets on with her routine until the fifth day of the week, when she suddenly staggers. Remember the Yashica-C camera she clicked some pictures with right before going for the Broadway musical? Well, she came to this studio near her apartment where she had given her film roll to develop into the hard copy of pictures...so after her work at the Cafe, on her way home, she picked up the pictures and returned to her apartment. She unlocks the door, keeps the bag and the envelop on the chair, then goes to the washroom to take a nice warm bath, then slips in something comfortable... a loose grayish pajama and a loose white thin fabric shirt with two of her top buttons open to let some air around her neck...then she heads towards her kitchen while tying her hair loosely with a clip. In her studio apartment, she starts making the easiest and quickest dish called "Ema Datshi"

which is basically a Bhutanese stew. This is a dish that is an amalgamation of Chilli and Cheese. Kavya quickly slit the green long chillies with her knife and put them in a pan with hot oil in it. Then she chops the garlic and adds it to the pan with some salt and water until the chillies get soft and mushy. Then she adds the final and most important ingredient in it which is cheese... She waits till the cheese melts equally all over the chillies and then serves it on the plate along with the bread bun she bought a day before. She sits near the French window of her apartment, from where she can see the moving cars on the road, the city lights of the skyscrapers and twinkling stars in the sky. After having a couple of buns, she realizes that the pictures in the envelope are waiting to be seen, so she keeps the plate on the small coffee table and walks up to the envelope near the door. She picks up the envelope carefully, not straining it with the food remains on her hand. She first licks her hand and then wipes it with a clean napkin. Then she opens the envelope and walks towards her plate near the window. As she opens and sees a bunch of pictures, her face lights up with pride. She checks all the pictures and keeps them aside to pick her plate and finish her food when something suddenly hits her mind. She keeps the plate and again picks up the envelope, only this time a little quicker. As she restlessly looks

for that particular picture that has shaken her mind, she finds the one that has the colorful streets and skyscrapers of Manhattan but the thing that really caught her attention and was barely noticeable was this person far in the background, out of focus, crossing the street. Kavya then quickly runs and opens a drawer of the chest in the living room to find the microscope lens. Kavya then keeps the picture on the chest and then looks at the person who is out of focus and blurred in the background. She looks at it carefully a few more times, just to be dead sure and then takes a deep breath to realize that it's her "someone" we were talking about for a while. She sits on the chair holding the picture in her hand and then says his name in an astonishing but extremely glad and whispering voice...

The name... Well, we will get to know that soon but before that, let me introduce you to a person who had a very important contribution in Kavya's life and her journey all the way to Brooklyn, New York.



1

The trail of Manali

*Three years ago
Year 1990,
Manali, Himachal Pradesh.*

The winter is just about over and the snow on the mountains of Manali was letting go of their stiffness slowly. The greenery of the place started to surface behind the melting snow. The river Beas is also getting its rhythm of flow back after a cold, freezing winter. A cab drives past the parallel road of the Beas River with its windows closed to avoid the cold breeze from letting in. The window is pulled down and Veer lets his face out of the window to feel the breeze. He is returning to Manali after almost thirteen years and could feel the hometown vibes in his veins already.

Veer has been living in Brooklyn for ten years, ever since he got a job at a company. What did the company make? Well, let's save that for a

moment which is coming very soon. A little later, he rides through the nostalgia lane and remembers the childhood that he spent in these lanes of Manali. Walking through the narrow lanes of the market, the chaos of the children running around in his school, he then sees his favorite food stall near his school where he used to have the Tibetan bread along with Thukpa which is a thick noodle soup. He gets down and heads to the stall to treat his taste buds and remember the carefree years he spent here in this town. He then finally takes the road behind the mall road through the monastery lane to reach a house in the midst of a hilly area. The house is a twenty-thousand-square-foot independent house in an abandoned condition. For years, neither Veer nor his family visited it. Veer lost his Mother quite early in his life and his father took his last breath in Veer's presence in a hospital in Brooklyn. Veer was their only child and his father was a textile businessman who later got into a lot of debts and losses, so he decided to shut down his business completely. Later, he tried picking himself up with the few other businesses but it was never the same after that. Also, Veer got the job in Brooklyn and took the responsibility of the family, so he advised his father not to have any more stress in his life and just relax. So he did. At the time when Veer's father died, he asked Veer to take care of their ancestral house the way he wanted to and pay a visit to

Manali once to deal with it. So, now Veer has to go to Manali to sell his ancestral house and come back to Brooklyn. Visiting Manali was something Veer had been resisting all his life but now he had no other choice. Veer's father also mentioned an old vintage Ambassador car which is parked in the porch, but Veer has not yet given a thought about the car, as to what he is going to do with it.

As he walks inside the house, on the porch, he sees a car covered completely by a white cloth through which only the shape of the car is visible and not a single part of it. He walks close to it and lifts the white cloth off the car, along with the years of dust that flies off with the cloth. He goes around and has a look at it and then takes a deep breath, thinking what would he do with it? He is in a dilemma as to what to do with this old, non-functioning, dark blue Ambassador car in a really bad condition. The cotton and spring inside the driving seat literally screamed for help every time Veer touched it. The engine was in very bad shape and had caught rust. The battery was surely dead, considering that it had not left this spot for years. So, he leaves this matter to be solved later on and gets inside the house. As he enters the house, he sees a cloud of web on the walls and a storm of dust waiting to fly right into his eyes and mouth. He somehow crosses the first stage of entering a house that has been closed

and hasn't seen a resident for almost five years...then he moves on to the second stage by lifting the clothes off the furniture along with the flying dust. Thankfully, it's a day so there is enough sunlight coming inside the house from the main door to see things around him. Veer then walks up towards the closed windows and opens them to let more light and fresh air inside the house. It also had that strange smell you get when the house is closed for many years. The first thing that he thinks he has to do is to get back the electricity which was cut by the electricity department due to the unpaid bills for over five years, ever since his father moved to Brooklyn. Veer heads straight to the electricity department in the Manali market area and settles the unpaid bills, pays a little extra to the department to get the meter back in place at his house. The electricity department sends their man to fix the meter issue and within three hours, including the paperwork formalities, the assessment work and fixing the power supply to the meter, all gets sorted because of that extra under-the-table money he paid at the electricity department. Now that there was light in the house, the next task was to make this place a little suitable to live in again. But for that, Veer has to wait because the house was big and it was already evening time, so he decides to come back again the next morning, along with some local men and women, to clean the place. He

locks the house and heads back to the main market, where he stops at a tea stall to have his first tea of the day to figure out what is next...It was a small tea stall with so much vibe and feel. The place was right at the edge of the valley by the side of the road heading towards the mountain. It had a view of the Beas River flowing through the curves of the terrain. It was quite warm throughout the day but suddenly, a cold wind forced Veer to rub his hands together for some warmth. There was a wooden bench near the edge to sit and look at the view which looked more like an observation deck without the binoculars. Veer patiently waits for his tea and then a few minutes later the tea stall owner brings a hot tea in a glass cup and gives it to Veer. Veer, who is delighted to have his first chai of the day, first feels the hot steam on his face coming out of the glass and then takes his first sip while looking at the valley peacefully. Now that the chai issue was sorted, he thinks of checking into a hotel for the night until his house thing is sorted. He sees a big board of a hotel "Wood N Valley" on a hill and makes a decision right away that he will stay there. Veer reaches the hotel after his chai and checks in to the hotel. He enters the room and can understand the idolatry of the owner towards the name of the hotel. The room had the bed, cupboard, chairs, tables, doors and chest, all made of wood, hence the first part of the name "Wood" and since it was surrounded by the

valley on a hill top, that's why the "Valley"....so an amalgamation of both wood in the room and valley outside became the name of the hotel "Wood N Valley."

Veer takes a warm bath and eats his food down in the restaurant and then goes for a small walk around the hotel before he calls it a night and goes to sleep, as there is a long day waiting ahead.

Veer gets up with a beautiful scenic view from his hotel balcony with a warm cup of coffee in his hand and a plan in his head for the day. He gets ready quickly and heads towards the reception of the hotel and enquires about laborers he can hire to clean his house. The receptionist, a beautiful girl in a peacock color saree and a small bindi on her forehead, looking very graceful, smiles at him and says...

Receptionist: "Sure, sir, I have some contacts here, I will write down the address for you...this will sort it out for you, I guess..."

Veer: "Yaa, that would be great Pranali..."

Says Veer, reading her name slate on her saree. As he waits for her to write down the numbers, he notices a book named "An Author's Breath" kept on the desk which Pranali was reading...Veer looks at it and smiles as if he

wants to say something but then he doesn't. Pranali gives him the address, he thanks her and leaves.

Veer reaches the given address and talks to a man who looks like the head of the labourers on hire. Veer and he talk and settle the money part and then Veer gives him his house address and leaves. Veer reaches his home, opens the doors, puts on all the lights and waits for the labourers. A little later, a team of ten people consisting of six men and four women walk in and immediately get to work. The women start with sweeping and the men start wiping the dust and stains on the furniture. The cupboards are getting cleaned when Veer finds some old photo albums in the gust of dust. He cleans the upper layer of dust off the album and starts looking at it when he sees his school pictures with friends, pictures of his parents with him in the garden of this house. And then when he turns the page of the album and sees a picture of him and Purva together in the school uniform, standing next to Veer's father's dark blue ambassador car, his eyes stop blinking and his heart starts pumping at an unusual speed.

Here is a little thing about our first crush... it always remains close to our hearts... It doesn't matter what its fate is. Having your first crush in your life is something very special. The

realization of the minuscule feeling that exists in your body is something that cannot be defined in words but can be felt every time you come across that person in any form... be it in pictures, in person or even in talks. It's always special, no matter how it ended or grew.

Purva had the exact complexion and stature of a girl from the mountains. All the girls from the school used to have two braids but she was the only one who used to have a single braid in her hair. Since Veer and Purva were neighbors, they mostly used to walk to the school together and come back home together which was only a half a mile away from their respective homes. That's where the bond became strong unknowingly.

Veer and Purva were only twelve back then when this picture was taken. They used to spend the whole day in school together, of course, with other classmates as well but still, for them, it was not enough time they spent together. Honestly, at ten, you are not even aware of the terms "feelings", "Spending time together" and "Hanging out together" kind of stuff but who needs a definition when you are so comfortable around a person and want more of him or her, right?

After a short analepsis down the memory lane, Veer snaps back to the present. He stares at the

picture for a while, runs his fingers over the picture and then takes it out of the album to keep it in his pocket. He keeps the album and closes the cupboard.

A long day comes to an end and they finally call it a day after getting everything cleaned up. Now, Veer is just one step away from getting it ready and putting this property on the selling list.

He locks the house and comes back to the hotel. At the reception, while taking his key, Veer again sees Pranali's smiling face and the book "An Author's Breath" on the desk with a bookmark. Veer curiously asks her...

Veer: Pranali...is this book really worthy of putting your time and energy into reading it?

Pranali: Absolutely, sir...this is not a book, this is the epitome of life...you should also give it a try Sir...This Author, "Akshar Diwan" literally hypnotizes you with his words...

Veer: Really? Is that even possible? (Shrugs) I am not really a book person but I will give it a try.

Pranali: (Smiles) Would you like to order some food to your room Sir? You look tired...

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Veer: Yeah, that would be great Pranali... Do me a favor... You place my order today and send me something that you like...after having ten years of Brooklyn food, I might have a memory loss of how the Indian food tastes... So, you do the honor please...

Pranali: Sure sir... My pleasure.



2

In the midst of the mountains

Since the cleaning part of the house was done, Veer is planning the next part of the execution which is painting the house and making it look like a completely new property available to move in immediately. The photo album he saw before in the cupboard also reminded Veer of his old school friend Daksh. It's been years since he has met his other school buddies and he also had no idea where they all were but he knew that one of his friends, Daksh, was pretty clear that he would join his father's paint business in Manali itself after graduation. So, Voila! Veer can now meet his school friend after years and also get all the color and painting crew sorted out in one place. Also, in this case, he can rely completely on his friend without worrying about the laborer and the completion of the painting in time. He can just give away the entire contract to him and feel free to move around Manali without an iota of worry. Now, the only thing that is necessary in this whole plan is that Daksh sticks to his plan of action. And the second most important factor in this plan is that Daksh still lives in the same place

as before. So, to find out, Veer heads to his school friend's house near the Tibetan colony which was established in the 1960s as a refuge for the Tibetan exiles that fled from Tibet when the political turmoil began there. When Veer reaches the Tibetan colony, he realizes that a lot has changed here, the roads, the shops, there are Cafes now and also some small restaurants. The shopkeepers selling the mufflers and jackets in various colors looked extremely vibrant and vivid. As he goes a little ahead, he finally finds his friend's house, which looks the same as before. The only thing that changed was the main door and there was a compound wall now which had barbed wire before. The house was painted well, perhaps with their own home paint brand which kind of reassured Veer that he had come to the right person. He enters the house and walks through the porch with a garden on either side of the cemented walkway and reaches the main door. The door is open, so he walks inside without knocking on the door and walks right into their living room where Daksh along with his wife and two daughters, is sitting reading the newspaper. The wife was listening to the babbling of her younger daughter and the elder daughter was trying to spoil the uniformity of the living room by spreading everything she could lay her hand on. Veer looks at them and he looks at them and then just goes and makes him comfortable on his own on the adjacent

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sofa. Now, the wife is looking at Daksh and vice versa.

Veer: Bhabhi...I will have chai and nankhatayi, biscuits will do if you don't have nankhatayi...

Daksh: Excuse me... But who are you?

Veer: I had lent you a loan a few years ago... I have come for the recovery of that loan...

Daksh: What loan? I have not taken any loan....What are you talking about?

Veer: Xavier's higher secondary school, class seventh, school canteen, I paid your baked samosa bill for the entire month...I want that back...

Daksh: (Smiles on recognizing him) Meera...make some chai and also make some Aloo Parathas with Bundi Raita...that's his favorite...

The wife is still trying to understand what's going on here when Daksh and Veer get up and hug each other tightly.

Daksh: Abe saale... Kab aaya? (Scoundrel...when did you come back?)

Veer: Do din pehle... (Two days ago)

Daksh: It's been what...thirteen years now?

Veer: Yaa almost... (They hug again...)

Daksh: Meera, that's Veer, my school buddy and this is my wife Meera...

Meera: Hello

Veer: Sorry, I scared you...

Meera: No, no... it's ok... Please have a seat; I will make some chai first...then the Aloo Paratha...(They all chuckle...)

First, they have chai and then the Aloo Paratha while having endless talk about the school and the best times they had. Veer also tells him about the purpose of coming back to Manali and also tells Daksh about the demise of his father. Daksh gets the point and takes complete responsibility for the painting work of his house and also assures him to get the best deal for his house through his contacts.

Daksh also insists and lends him his scooter as long as he is here in Manali to go around the town to run his errand, as it gets very difficult to travel on foot here all the time or to find a taxi.

After settling the painting thing with Daksh, Veer and Daksh spend the whole day together visiting their school, the classroom they used to sit in, remembering Mrs. Archana, who taught them English literature in their time. She looks a little old now, Daksh says but as Veer remembers back then in her time, she was the prettiest lady in the whole school. Also, she was not Mrs. Back then...she was Miss Archana...Almost every kid had an infatuation with her. She used to wear simple sarees and used to carry them with utmost grace. She was a dynamic personality and looked very fascinating when she spoke English. There was this one particular word, "Rendezvous" which Veer used to pronounce as "Rain-dez-was" but then, Mrs. Archana corrected him to say it as "Ron-Day-Woo". It was something that didn't fade out of Veer's mind till now.

Perhaps because of her fascinating English, later on, Doordarshan News channel hired her to be their prime-time newsreader. She became quite a celebrity and a household name after that. Although she lives in Delhi now because of her news channel job and husband, she often comes to her hometown once in a while and fortunately enough, she is in the town currently, as Daksh informs, so Daksh and Veer, without any hesitation, just buy some flowers and visit her at her home in Manali. Mrs. Archana first gets surprised and then feels

extremely glad to see her students doing well in life. She gifts them both a pen set each from her unique pen collection and wishes them the best in their lives before they leave.

After that, Veer and Daksh hang out at the nukkad (Square) and have the kullad wali chai (Tea in a pot cup) along with Samosa, the exact same way they used to have in their growing-up years. After spending the whole day down memory lane in the town, they both come back to Daksh's house to have a couple of drinks together on Daksh's terrace before Veer goes back to his hotel. The day dims down its light and the night is about to take over the sky. From the place where they were standing and having their Whiskey, Veer could see the lights of the town spread across the hilly residential areas of Manali. The sky was so clear that Veer could see every star twinkling clearly. The air felt so fresh that every breath felt like a human system cleanser.

As both of them sip their Whiskey, Veer asks Daksh the question he was already expecting since the time he met Veer.

Veer: Daksh... Do you know where Purva is nowadays?

Trust the Pull

*Solang Valley, Manali
Year 1990*

Now, Solang Valley is considered to be one of the most fascinating spots near Manali and also quite a tourist puller. Veer, with all the enthusiasm, reaches the Solang Valley only to realize that the authorities have restricted the entry there for two days because of the heavy snowfall forecast and a possible avalanche at any time now. Since Veer arrived a little late, all the tourists had already walked away from the valley. The valley and the roads leading to it looked empty. Veer too takes a U-turn to go back to his hotel before it's too late now. As soon as he turns his scooter, heavy snowfall begins to cover the roads with an initial thin layer. It feels very cinematic and surreal at first but then when the snow starts slipping inside his clothes, it doesn't feel the same. It starts getting even worse when it slips down his trousers to some unexpected and unwanted areas. His hands were getting stiff slowly with the extra cold breeze he was facing while on his scooter, as he had no hand gloves. The to and fro road to the Solang Valley was designed in such a way by nature that you cannot see a straight road; there are many curves and a steep drop down the valley if your vehicle slips through the snow. And if that was not enough,

the cold breeze that had entered his ears started taking a halt in his nose which had turned red in color already and his throat began to feel some blockage to speak up. Veer's eyes could barely stay open while riding the scooter but he kept going. Now, this is where it's going to get interesting and this can be considered as the most important part of this story because just imagine, what could happen at this point? The moment was set and the nature had itself set the upcoming scene in the most iconic way possible. At the very next curve, what was going to happen turned the life of Veer upside down as someone was about to enter his life a few seconds later. Everything was just fine until this moment...

As Veer approaches the next curve of the road, it feels like the hills start pushing themselves behind to make the vision clearer for Veer. As soon as Veer takes the turn, he sees a girl standing at the edge of the road waiting for a taxi to rescue her out of this snow world. The girl was wearing black jeans with a red top covered with a dusty brown jacket.

On her feet were long boots in which her jeans were tucked tightly. The cutest part of her appearance was her specs which were resting on her big hazel brown eyes which matched her jacket to a certain extent. Yes, Veer noticed her to this extent. Apparently, Veer was a little

overdressed for the moment because he was wearing a three-piece suit. Now, before you form an opinion about him, let me justify his dressing.

Veer actually had a meeting in the morning regarding....no, no...wait a minute...if I reveal that, the entire story might get revealed...I will tell you for sure why he was dressed in a suit that morning but a little later, because that part is extremely important in our story. For now, let's get back to our damsel in distress on the mountains of Manali. As Veer comes close to her, he stops his scooter, understanding the situation. The girl flips her hair to the right, technically, but it travels all the way to her left and falls on her left shoulder. She looks at Veer suspiciously...

Veer: Hi...come hop on...the snow is going to get worse...I will drop you...

(Says Veer while offering her the extra helmet)

Girl: That's fine...I will manage...thank you so much...

(And she starts walking again...)

Let's correct the words we used before for her....She is not a damsel in distress... she was an independent woman who knows how to find

her own solution without anyone's help or in other words, we can say she is a damsel in distress with an ego... Veer also doesn't try hard after that and he just accelerates and bypasses her. The intensity of the snow rises and our girl realizes that being an independent woman, not seeking help, is not enough; you should also be able to gauge the situation as well. Well, the realization came a little late because Veer had already left and there was nobody around her...just the snow and the empty road...not having any other choice, she kept on walking for half a mile, regretting not taking Veer's help. As she crosses the next curve of the road, she sees Veer leaning onto his scooter, having chai from his thermos cup while looking at her. The girl feels delighted to see him there but also has a dilemma of how she would explain this to her fragile ego that she wants his help... So, she just walks past him, expecting that Veer would stop her, her ego would be satisfied and then she can go with him but he doesn't say a thing...She walks a few steps and surrenders to not hearing anything from him. She turns around to see Veer offering the same helmet again. She walks up to him...

Veer: Veer.

Girl: Kavya.

Trust the Pull

Kavya takes the helmet, wears it and gets on the scooter with him.

So, two strangers, who had just met, were riding on a scooter together on the curves of the Manali hills during an approaching snow squall.

Quite an unusual first meeting they had.



3

An Author's Breath

As they come out of the heavy snow on the mountains, Veer asks her to guide the way to the place, where she needs to be dropped off. Guess where she takes Veer...well, she asks him to drop her off at her hotel, as there was nothing to do in the city for the day. So, Kavya navigates the way and they reach her hotel, "Woods N Valley". That's right, the same hotel where Veer was already staying. She gets off the bike, gives his helmet back to him, thanks him and then starts walking to her hotel. Veer gets off the bike and he too starts walking towards the hotel. Kavya, on hearing the sound of his footsteps, turns around and says to Veer...

Kavya: Where are you going? Listen, thanks for helping but I am not going to ask you to come with me to my room for a coffee and then you would feel like we are having a moment or something and then...you will expect something out of the moment... I will feel really bad to thank you and punch you on the same day...

Trust the Pull

(Veer looks at her blankly and says after hearing her blabbering like something just struck him)

Veer: Ohh...you are that category...

Kavya: What category?

Veer: I get your story...

Kavya: My story?

Veer: Yaa...you had a relationship, just broke up with him and right now you hate the entire male community... anyone who feels even a single bit ok, you feel betrayed by your own belief system and then you just shut it down completely by being rude to them verbally or your favorite, just feel like punching them instantly...

Kavya: What does that mean?

Veer: Well, in simple words...it means...stop giving yourself so much importance...you are not the only one on the entire planet who is living in this hotel...this is where I am also staying, Your Highness.

Veer smirks and walks away, whereas Kavya was still getting to the fact that her attitude just came back to her like a boomerang.

Veer opens his room's drapes to check if it is still snowing; if not, then he can go and check out the market or can just visit his house to see what else is left to be done and would have made a list for the same. But it was still snowing and the mountains looked like they had pulled up their white quilts to cover themselves and gone to sleep peacefully. With nothing else to do, Veer just orders a black coffee to figure out what he is going to do for the rest of the evening. As he opens the drapes again while sipping his black coffee, he sees Kavya sitting on the balcony this time in the adjacent room and he closes the drapes swiftly. He then again opens it just a little, just a small crack, and then steps back to sit on the couch. He sips his coffee and looks at Kavya through the crack between the drapes and smiles about the childish, egoistic games they were playing a while ago. Kavya has changed her clothes after coming back to her room, all drenched in snow, so did Veer, obviously. Kavya was wearing a blue denim jeans, a black top and a colorful, unbuttoned shirt over it with big square boxes printed in red, yellow, blue and light green on it. She had tied her hair in a single pony with a red handkerchief in a single knot which was her temporary solution to stop her from getting distracted by her hair while she was reading her book with utmost attention. Veer first admires her beauty and then tries to figure out what book she is reading...First Veer's eyes get small

while focusing on the book through a tiny crack between the drapes and then his eyes almost come out of his eye sockets when he reads the name of the book... *"An Author's Breath..."* Yes...It is the same book that Pranali, the receptionist, was reading. Now, you may think, what is such a big deal about it? It's just a book and a mere coincidence that two girls in the same vicinity are reading the same book...The big deal is not the book and the coincidence, the big deal is...

Well, we will be coming on to that soon because to know that, you must know this story too which is about to unfold.

So, Veer just found out the way to spend his evening without getting out of the room. As he gets inspired to pick up his long-lost art, he opens his bag and digs in deep below the clothes to find a scroll which was used in ancient times to convey messages to the kings of the other kingdoms. He pulls it out from the bottom and smiles on seeing it. It was neatly wrapped by a thin rope; Veer first unties the knot on it and then finally opens the scroll, not to see the message from another king but to find his sketching pencils of various forms and sizes tucked inside the small pockets of it. He takes out a couple of pencils, pulls out a Swiss knife to sharpen the pencils and then quickly heads towards the desk in the room to pick up

the room service menu which has a hard cardboard cover, makes it a base and keeps a blank white sketching paper over it. He then sits back on his chair, all set to sketch Kavya's face. But when Veer looks through the window crack to see Kavya, his enthusiasm mellows down and flies off the same window. The chair was empty and Kavya was not there. Veer stands up and walks up to the window to see where she is. Veer takes a deep breath of disappointment and walks back to his chair. With nothing to do now, he just spreads his legs and sips his black coffee again when he sees Kavya through the window crack again, settling back on her chair, reading the book...Veer's enthusiasm comes back again through the same window from where it flew off in the first place.

Veer picks up his pencil and gets to work immediately, considering this finicky creature he was drawing might run away again. The luck was in Veer's favor as she sat there reading for another forty minutes, looking here and there once in while in disbelief, then rolling up her eyes in frustration, then taking a deep breath as if she wants to kill someone from the book, then suddenly cracking up and then in the last ten minutes she chose to cry and cry profusely. All these phases gave Veer ample time to complete Kavya's sketch. Also, it made him wonder what was happening in the book that

Kavya had submerged herself in it so much. Veer is just giving it a few finishing touches with his fingers, giving Kavya's long hair a little dark shade. Veer looks at the finished sketch from all the angles while shifting his head, left and right and then checking with the actual person sitting in front of him...well, not exactly in front of him, on the other balcony and a different room. It looked like she had finished her book, she wipes her tears and now she starts feeling cold suddenly. Till now, she was sitting in an open balcony under the sky with a snowfall all over the place, wearing just jeans, a top and a shirt over it and that didn't bother her even a bit but suddenly the surrounding situation just took over her after completing the book. Veer realizes that a woman's mood swing and self-realization can neither be defined in words nor be articulated according to the situations....they are just randomly picked by the woman herself as per her will. After completing Kavya's sketch, he saves it to give it to her at the right time and the right moment. One of the men's qualities that even women cannot understand. Men cannot always express their affection in words but always know how to make their woman feel special.

Veer very carefully keeps the sketch inside the cupboard, smiles and launches himself into the tub in the bathroom with some hot running water in it.

Trust the Pull

*Wood N Valley Hotel,
11:25 pm, Common Deck.
Manali, Himachal Pradesh*

Nowadays, people scroll on their phones and stick to their television but back then, in the early 90s, people used to walk to feel the calmness and inhale the fresh oxygen at night after their dinner.

Every night after dinner, even Veer used to walk a little on the common deck of the “Wood N Valley” property from where the whole city lights of Manali and the mountains used to be visible. He would spend some time there, absorb the view before calling it a night. He follows the same routine that night as well but there is only a slight change...since it was snowing all day, Veer had arranged some Military grade RUM through one of the waiters over there. Now, for people who are not aware of this, the military grade RUM hits differently than the normal one. The reason is still undetected by the heavy drinkers of this country but according to some layman’s verdict, the military grade Rum is the only authentic one with the full foam Regular Use Medicine(RUM) and the ones available at the wine shops are sort of just Rum. Anyway, coming back to this situation, Veer opens a quarter of Rum to ignite the lost heat in his

body due to the cold breeze experienced outside by his body. He pours a big 90ml drink into his glass and then adds lukewarm water to it. He is about to gulp it down when he sees Kavya walking towards him, all covered in three layers of sweaters, a muffler, hand gloves, thick socks on her feet and slippers. She straight away walks towards Veer with her poker face, snatches the Rum from his hands and finishes off the drink in one go. She hands over the glass to him, hugs him, gives him a good night kiss on his cheek and walks back to her room. Everything happens in just a split second, so Veer doesn't get time to evaluate the situation. First, he feels bad that she drank all his Rum and then he shows a few traits of euphoria.

Kavya hugged him, kissed him and then went away...

What the hell was going on? Veer had no idea or explanation.



4

Same...but different

What happened last night was something Veer wanted to talk about with Kavya, but then he had to go early because Daksh was bringing his color expert to finalize the color for the outer walls of his house. So Veer left early in the morning after having his first coffee in the hotel restaurant itself while looking at the beautiful sunrise through its big French windows. Daksh said he will bring the breakfast along with him and they will have it together at the house, so Veer didn't have it at the restaurant. Veer reaches his house on his scooter and parks it in the porch. The house gave some other feeling every time he entered these days because something or the other was changing while it was getting renovated. Daksh was not there yet, so Veer took a walk down his lane.

It didn't affect him much but every time he was on his feet taking a walk down the lane, it reminded him of the fond memories of him and Purva. If you think about it, it sounds very silly and immature to hold on to the adolescent

memories but then there are certain things which hit you when you are at that particular place where those special moments took place. While walking slowly through the lane, Veer notices something which he had not before, how did he miss that...is what came to his mind instantly. He had no idea if it was still there...he walked a little quicker towards the thing he was looking for...he walked a few steps and turned right, off the road through a slope to reach a narrow lane which is now hardly visible because of the trees around it. Veer walks close to that, looking for the landmark of the place that was special for him. As he walks close to it, he sees it....there it was...The red letter box, which was not red anymore after a decade and a half...it had turned almost black in color, barely hanging on to the small pillar that was made especially to hold the letter box. The pillar too had big cracks and it barely had any strength left to hold on to anything but Veer was still holding on to the fond memory of Purva and his first kiss near this red-letter box. The first kiss is always special, isn't it? You barely have any idea why it is happening? How is it happening and what will happen after this? The same was with Veer and Purva when it happened between them. Two teenagers in their school uniforms, so fond of each other, were kissing for the first time in their lives, all nervous and thrilled, near a red letter box.

Ironically, fate always shows up with its masterstroke right when you think things are going great in life. That was the last day of their school and the last day of Purva in Manali. Purva's father got a well-paying job in Sikkim and they were waiting for Purva's school session to end...The parents didn't tell her this, thinking that they would tell her about the shifting after her last exam, so that she wouldn't stress herself thinking about it which might affect her exam. Now, shifting to another place for a better opportunity is a great concept but when you are doing so, you are not shifting places but shifting the lives of people in the family. You are not just leaving behind a place but an entire collection of uncertainties, comforts and memories behind you. For Veer and Purva, they barely had enough time to even absorb the fact that she is leaving in a couple of hours... forever. In the year 1973, the concept of keeping in touch with each other didn't exist. People who once lived in the town were almost unreachable and rarely did people know about their whereabouts. And even the families of Veer and Purva were not that close; they just existed in the same locality and greeted each other whenever they crossed paths.

Veer went back to his home to change his clothes, have his lunch and come back as soon as possible to Purva's house but he was not as

quick as Purva's father. Completely unaware of the turn of events, when Veer reaches the front gate of Purva's house, he sees a truck filled with their entire luggage and Purva sitting in a red Fiat car which was about to leave. Purva was in the back seat, looking at Veer through the rear windshield glass with tears filling up her eyes as soon as she saw Veer standing behind the car. It's fine that they had to accept that they won't meet each other ever after this but the worst part was that they couldn't even say their final goodbyes to each other. As if it was not enough for Purva's father, he signals the luggage truck to go ahead and he too starts his car to leave. The moment the car starts moving, Veer's heart starts pumping like never before. Purva keeps looking at Veer and this eye contact continues till the car leaves Veer's sight. As soon as the car takes a turn and vanishes, a tear falls out of Veer's eye for Purva.

Purva and Veer were thirteen back then, before they could understand what was happening around them; they were not around each other. But the red letter box was still there even now in the year 1990. Veer pulls out the half-hanging red-black letter box off its hinges and takes it along with him to his house.

When Veer comes back, he sees Daksh standing next to an old wooden table supported by a tile under its fourth leg to balance it out

which he got from the junk kept in the store room of the house. And when Veer walks in, Daksh sees him with a letterbox full of junk in his hand. They both look at each other and sneer.

Daksh: What's up with the junk?

Veer: Memories, my brother...can we clean, polish and restore it?

Daksh: For what?

Veer: For letter and stuff...what else?

Daksh: Why this?

Veer: Because a part of you always stays with you...

Daksh: What does that mean?

Veer: I want to keep this man...

Daksh: Fine, I will get it done for you...now let's eat breakfast

Veer: Yes...I am getting hunger pangs already. Come on.

Veer and Daksh, after having their breakfast, get to work to find the right color for the outer walls of the house. They try out the various

combinations for the wall but they also make sure that it matches the colors of the doors and the windows from outside. After trying all the mixing and stirring of various colors, Veer finally agrees to have a Pearl White color on the doors and windows and for the outer wall, it will be a pure White color. The whole idea is that the house is in the direct contact of the sunlight, from the east and west both sides, as in there are no big trees to hide it and block the sunlight, so Veer says... every time there is a sunrise and a sunset, the sunrays will directly fall on the walls to make it look like light golden in color which will add on the soothing and close to the nature kind of a feel to this house. So, after explaining this logic to Daksh and his color expert, they all agree and finalize the color for the walls, doors and windows.

After sorting that out, Veer finally takes a break and reaches the same place where he had his first tea before checking into the Wood N Valley hotel, when he came to Manali. The tea was ready, so he didn't have to wait this time; he took the tea cup and walked towards the sitting area, where there were a couple of benches to enjoy the view while having your tea. As he walks close to the bench, he sees someone sitting there already; he leans a little more to get a better look and also acts nonchalant at the same time, only to realize later that it's Kavya. It indeed looked like a very romantic

Trust the Pull

setup with the sunset, golden light, mountains, sky, a little cold breeze and a hot tea in hand. As they both look at each other, Veer smiles at her, remembering the closeness they shared yesterday for the whole ten seconds. Kavya doesn't respond with a smile; she ignores him and concentrates on her tea and the view. A few seconds later, she looks to her left, at Veer but doesn't see him. When she turns back to her right side, she suddenly gets startled to see Veer standing right behind her. They don't say a word to each other; they just sip their tea and enjoy the breeze.

Veer: Are you coming with me or not?

Kavya: Where?

Veer: I am going to our hotel. I will drop you...

Kavya: It's not snowing today, I can manage...thanks.

Veer: But...I thought after last night...

Kavya: Last night? What?

Veer: I mean, we got along and bonded in less than ten seconds. I mean, you bonded with me, I barely got time...

Trust the Pull

Kavya: Are you out of your mind? When did I meet you last night? I was in my room the whole time...

Veer: What? What are you talking about? You came to the common deck of our hotel, hugged me, then kissed me and then went back to your room.

Kavya: (Smirks) must have been in your dreams...

Veer: What? Are you out of your mind? What's wrong with you? It wasn't a dream...it happened last night for sure... (Kavya gives him a blank look) you...

Veer doesn't understand what was wrong with her but she was so damn confident in what she was saying that it made Veer doubt himself whether it was really a dream. Not sure of how to react and what to say, he just leaves without Kavya.

As per his daily routine at the hotel, Veer reaches the common deck of the hotel after dinner at 11:45 to have some Rum again. As he pours his first peg of Rum and adds some warm water, Kavya again walks up to Veer like last night in her nightdress, gloves, socks and cap to drink his Rum bottoms up. She drinks his Rum; hugs Veer again, kisses him on his cheek

Trust the Pull

and walks away exactly like last night. Veer looks at her go and then walks up to the mirror hanging there, looks at himself carefully...

Veer: Am I dreaming? (Slaps himself) I am not dreaming.... I am definitely not dreaming...what the hell is happening here?

Veer just couldn't understand what was up with this girl? Is she using him for just 90ml of Rum every night? Why is she a separate person in the day and a separate one at night?

Same... but different



5

The making of a dream...

The next morning, Veer opens his eyes but stays on the bed, having a moment of sheer laziness with a picture-perfect view from his window of clouds flying off his window and the beautiful valley added a beautiful depth to the view, showcasing nature's purest form of magic. The sun was just about to get out from the back of the mountains in its full glory but the golden light falling on everything there is on the earth made it look so picturesque. The cold weather triggered Veer's tardiness and he didn't feel like getting out of bed, leaving his quilt alone. So, he snuggles with the cushion a little bit and takes his own sweet time to get out of bed and embrace the day's work. After a while, he drags himself out of bed literally, to run his errands for the day. The first thing he does is go close to the window and opens it to breathe the fresh oxygen flowing along with the clouds and then finally makes eye contact with the sun behind the clouds and starts his day. As he turns around, his foot hits the table near the window and a picture out of a book falls on the

ground like a kite string snapping. It was he and Purva in front of Veer's father's Ambassador Car...Well, the string keeps the kite and the person flying it connected, but in this case, it is the other half of the story when the kite string snaps. Veer picks up the picture and looks at Purva. Something strikes Veer suddenly and he quickly gets inside the washroom to get ready to leave. Veer locks his room and then, before starting the day as per his daily routine, he goes to the restaurant of the hotel to have his first coffee of the day while sitting near the mesmerizing view of the mountains from the window. But today it is different, as he walks up to the window side of the restaurant to take his usual seat, he sees Kavya already sitting there having coffee while looking at the view and making some notes in her diary. Kavya looks at Veer for a fraction of a second and then gets back to her thoughts, brutally ignoring his existence. Considering her history so far of being a different person in the daytime and at night, Veer too chooses not to say anything and rightfully saves his self-respect by just minding his own business while going and sitting on the exact opposite table of Kavya, adjacent to the view window, confronting her silently. A look exchange takes place a couple of times between them but doesn't lead to any further conversation. Veer, while sipping his coffee, is trying to understand this girl's mind that ignores him in the daytime

Trust the Pull

and then hugs him like a polar bear at night. Veer finishes his coffee and leaves this matter to be solved later. He gets up and starts walking when Kavya says...

Kavya: Listen...Thank you for the other day.

Veer: Which day?

Kavya: The snow day...for the lift...I didn't thank you for that...Thanks.

Veer: Ohh... That was three days ago... isn't it a bit too late for that?

Kavya: Ya but...I didn't get a chance...

Veer: Ohh...that's ok, you have thanked me enough already for two consecutive nights...

Kavya: (With firmness in her tone) What does that even mean?

Veer: Do you by any chance have an identical twin sister and she has come here with you?

(Kavya frowns on hearing this weird question)

Kavya: No...I don't...why? You are such a weird person.

Veer: Right...I am the weird one...Anyway, I got to go...see you later...

Trust the Pull

Kavya: Yaa whatever...

Veer walks away and Kavya gets back to her diary.

Kavya: Such a weirdo...

Manali Market

Veer reaches the market to meet a mechanic whose contact owns a big garage in Delhi and deals in all kinds of rare spare parts for all the vehicles. He has come especially to meet Veer, who contacted him a few days ago regarding the modification of his father's old Ambassador Car. Veer brings them along with him to his house to take a look at the car which was a sitting scrap. They have a look at it and provide Veer with the list of spare parts required to be changed, right from the engine to the gearbox. They all then work out the estimated cost for it, negotiate a little and then settle for a particular amount. The work on Veer's car is set to begin in a day or two. And in the same amount of time, the painting work of his house was about to get completed. The garden area of the house is also ruined completely due to the negligence for many years. It was like a barren land with dead grass. The land needed to be nourished to bring it back to growing something condition. One of the painters who also happens to be a

Trust the Pull

gardener, comes to Veer while he is looking at the dead garden and says...

Painter: Sir, this garden needs to be taken care of soon or the house will flash elegance and the garden will flash disgrace...

Veer looks at him as he sounded like a barber who finds nothing good about your personality and look, when all you need is a simple haircut but you are summoned with quick action on your whole face and hair or you will lose everything at the blink of an eye. Veer nods his head and says...

Veer: Yaa... I am sorting that out... Don't worry...

Gardener: Why are you sorting it when I am here?

For a moment, Veer felt like his Son-In-Law who needs to do nothing other than taking care of his daughter.

Gardener: I am a gardener Sir and a part-time painter; I will make it look like a lush green lawn again, better than ever before. I have years of experience in this; my family has been doing this for many generations; in fact, my great grandfather grew grass in the royal garden of the king of Bikaner. So now, your worry is mine Sir. Relax.

Veer: Really? Can you take care of it?

Gardener: I will take care of it for the rest of my life Sir. I will maintain it from now on. You don't even have to look at it. I will manage every single grass on this land and make sure it stays green forever, even if it doesn't wish to...

Veer: Okay, then get to work...it's a deal.

It is so amazing how this man is so efficient and convincing. The painting work is about to get over in a couple of days, so he got himself his next assignment in no time. Maybe this is what it means when they say to be at the right place and the right time. He not only got himself work in just two minutes of a conversation but also made sure it is an annual maintenance package to keep him employed for the rest of the year. Also, the royalty touch was awesome. This is what is called knowing the market niche and the value of your skills. Well done...you look like a gardener but you are also an economist, is what Veer was thinking inside while smiling at him while shaking his hand.

The house, the paint, the car and now the garden, everything is sorted and going as per Veer's plan, except for one alien he is about to see again at night. That's right, Kavya...Veer thinks he cannot just let her get away just like that, so Veer doesn't buy a 90 ml Rum this time but a whole quarter just in case Kavya drinks up his 90 ml Rum again. So, as usual, Veer

comes back to the hotel, gets fresh after a warm bath, has his dinner at the restaurant and then heads to the common deck of the hotel at around 11:30 pm. Veer is taking a walk while waiting for her. She is running late tonight, it's 12:10 am and her usual time of snatching drinks from Veer was way past. Now, Veer wants to start drinking his Rum but waits for her who is expected anytime now. He waits for ten more minutes but she doesn't come. Veer thinks that she is not going to come tonight, so he pours himself a 90ml drink and adds warm water to it. Veer is about to gulp it down his throat when he sees Kavya walking in the corridor, coming towards him. On seeing Kavya, Veer drinks the one in his hand, puts the bottle in his pocket and hides behind the pillar to see what happens. Kavya this time doesn't come to the common deck but she keeps walking in the corridor to walk to the reception of the hotel. Veer wants to settle this once and for all, so out of curiosity, he follows Kavya. Kavya reaches the reception area where the receptionist is taking a nap on his chair. Kavya keeps walking and gets out of the hotel's main door and onto the street. Veer finds it weird that at this time of the night, she is going out of the hotel in her nightdress. Technically, if she was checking out, she would have worn something regular, or would have carried her luggage, or would have talked at the reception to tell them that she is checking out and most

importantly, there would have been a hotel car or taxi waiting outside for her. None of those matched the checkout routine so Veer follows her to find out what's going on. Kavya keeps walking and walking through the secluded streets of Manali, away from her hotel and nobody is around until she reaches a mountain cliff. She keeps walking towards the edge of the valley without any hesitation. Veer, on seeing this, runs towards her and pulls her hand just in time before she steps down the valley.

Veer screams at her and says...

Veer: What the hell is wrong with you?

Kavya frowns, thinks, looks at him all confused, then looks at the surroundings and the valley and asks Veer in a scared tone...

Kavya: How did I get here? What am I doing here?

Veer: What? What do you mean? You don't know how you came here?

Kavya: No, I swear I don't know...I don't remember anything...What's happening?

Veer: You mean you don't remember what has been happening over the past two nights? You're coming to the common deck, drinking my RUM,

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hugging me and then kissing me.... all of that...and since I was not there tonight, you came out of the hotel and you were about to just off this cliff...You don't remember anything?

Kavya: No, I don't... I swear...

Veer: Ohh... (Takes a deep breath) Now I get it...you have been sleepwalking...has this happened to you before?

Kavya: No, this is happening for the first time...

Not knowing what to say or do next, they both stand there looking at each other. Veer keeps his hand on her shoulder and brings her back to the hotel. They reach the hotel and walk down the lobby to reach their rooms which were next to each other. Veer's room comes first. Veer stops in front of his door. Kavya looks at him and then looks at her room door. She hesitates to go back to her room, considering what just happened. Kavya's hands and body were shivering with fear, thinking of what could have happened if Veer had been a second late. She hesitantly says to Veer...

Kavya: I don't want to stay alone Veer... I still haven't come to terms with it yet...Please...

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Veer: It's ok Kavya...if you feel comfortable, you can stay here in my room as long as you want. I will take the couch, you take the bed. Come...

Veer opens the door of his room for her and invites her in. Kavya, feeling a little secure, enters his room. Veer picks up his clothes and some files lying on the bed to make space for Kavya to sit.

Veer: I will make some hot coffee, you will feel better.

Kavya: Yaa...

Veer walks up to the desk where the coffee sachet and an electric kettle are kept. In the early 90s, it was a very new and unique concept. A thermos pot which boils water with the help of electric energy and even more surprising was that a hotel somewhere in the mountains, far away from the city, had this electric kettle in the room. Today, it doesn't amaze us a bit as we have seen and done it a million times but think of the times when these things were new and were the symbol of technological advances. Anyway, while Veer was making coffee for both of them, Kavya walked up to the study table as she noticed a book lying on it. Kavya picks up the book "An Author's Breath" by "Akshar Diwan", the same book she was reading a couple of days ago. In the meantime, Veer comes to Kavya with two

cups of coffee in his hand, hands over one cup, and realizes that she has already seen the book. Kavya asks him curiously...

Kavya: Akshar Diwan? You read Akshar Diwan's book?

Veer: Ahh...no...no...the receptionist at the front desk sent it to me; apparently, she is also an ardent reader of Akshar Diwan's novels, like you. I haven't read a single word of this book yet.

Kavya smiles, puts the book back on the table and walks up to the window. Suddenly, she stops and turns around as if something just struck her.

Kavya: How do you know I am an ardent reader of Akshar Diwan?

Veer: Ahhh...you...I...I saw his book in your hand in the restaurant the other day...

Kavya: No, that's not possible....I have never taken the book out of my room. I read it there and keep it there, so there is no chance that somebody can know that I read Akshar Diwan's books...what are you not telling me?

Veer keeps the coffee cup on the table, walks up to his cupboard, opens it and brings the sketch that he made of Kavya the first day they

met. She looks at the sketch of her sitting on the balcony and reading the Akshar Diwan novel. Even the name of the novel was sketched by Veer. It was the replica of Kavya's face.

Veer: You know why I made this sketch? The smile on your face and the joy in your eyes inspired me to sketch again after seven years. Your joy somehow got my joy back.

Kavya: Well, you saved my life twice, so I guess we are even.

Veer and Kavya share a smile and Veer asks her if they can take this coffee to the common deck of this hotel from where the view of the city is breathtaking. Kavya too feels like getting out of the room in the open. Anyway, after the incident, she is super alert now and doesn't feel like sleeping anytime soon. Also, the strong coffee added to the sleepless night they are about to experience. Kavya agrees and both of them have their coffee at the common deck of the hotel. It is past midnight now, so the lights in the city houses were off except the porch lights. But the powerful source of light falling off the full moon made the city visible even in that darkness and it looked so beautiful. Even the mountains in the background of these houses were shining because of the reflection of the moonlight. It was cold enough and the breeze was only adding to the coldness but

that's the fun part of it, feeling the cold while having a hot cup of coffee in your hands.

Veer had a lot of questions but he was thinking that now is not the best time to ask them, as she already had a rough night and now that she is finding some peace in the lap of nature, it would not be a good idea to take her back to her past. The past, if good, can be visited more often happily but if it's not, then living those moments all over again can be heart-wrenching and soul-piercing. Clearly, there is some story behind Kavya's life, thinks Veer, seeing her immersed in her thoughts so deeply. So, Veer then just gets back to the view they were watching together. As the night moved ahead, the temperature went down in minus degrees. Kavya falls asleep after a while on the chair. Veer looks at her and then calls out her name to wake her up but she is sound asleep and doesn't respond. Not knowing if he can take the liberty of picking her up and taking her back to the room, he tries to tap her and wake her up by calling her name again but again she doesn't respond. Veer after a little hesitation, then dares a little and picks her up in his arms to take her to the room. As he picks her up in his arms, he realizes how incredible her hair smells and also that she looks feather-light but feels ponderous on lifting. Veer gathers all his strength and picks her up successfully. As Veer walks along with her towards the room, Kavya opens her eyes and realizes she is in Veer's

arms. Kavya quietly closes her eyes again, not to embarrass Veer, as he has been taking care of her the whole night with her sleepwalking and also tolerating her condescending behaviour towards him ever since they met. Kavya just plays along to support Veer's good side this time. Veer takes her to his room, puts her in the bed and then slowly puts a quilt on her. As he gets away from her to set up his bed on the floor, Kavya keeps her eyes closed, smiles as she feels extremely safe in his room which is kind of strange if you think about it. Just before the lights of the room go off, Kavya opens an eye one last time to scan the whereabouts of Veer and the room when she accidentally sees an impression of a note on a blank paper on the side table which came on it while it was written on the paper above it. Out of curiosity, when she crawls under her quilt towards the side table to get a closer look at it, it blows her mind completely. A few seconds ago, she was at peace and now an invisible note on the side table which she was not supposed to see, triggered her inquisitive mind to use all her inbuilt espionage skills and took away her sleep again. For the rest of the night, Kavya stared at the note and the note stared at her. Now, what the hell was on that invisible note? We will get to know that as our story moves a little ahead.



6

Remember me?

The next day, Veer takes Kavya to a doctor in the Manali market, as in the 90s and that too in a small town like Manali, there was no such thing as a Psychiatrist. But the doctor they visit connects her to his psychiatrist colleague who gives her a consultation on the phone. Veer leaves her not to trespass on her private space, so he tells her that she can find him at the café near the Beas River if she needs him.

*Beas Café
Beas River bank, Manali*

Veer, along with a Thukpa soup and the Momo, enjoys his breakfast at the Beas Café which is on the bank of the Beas River itself. The tall mountains in the background and the sound of the flowing river took all his stress away. The stress was not about Kavya but the timeline he is floating on. He has ten more days to go back to Brooklyn, and before that, he has to get the property ready, the car done and the other property selling formalities sorted. There is too

much to do in too little time. A little later, Kavya comes and joins him.

Veer: So? What's the root cause?

Kavya: Well, apparently it's something called the post-traumatic stress disorder...

Veer: Ohh, what trauma did you have that's forcing you to sleepwalk at night? What is your story? I mean, if you are ok telling me...

Kavya: No, it's fine...it's not that dramatic but may also sound funny...

Veer: Ohh, I like funny stuff...go on...

Kavya: One year ago, I was in a relationship with Kushal. We went around, had the best of the times, were committed to each other...three years into our relationship, he had a car accident and when he woke up, three years of our relationship just got erased from his mind.

Veer: What does that mean?

Kavya: Well, in medical terms, they call it the retro grade amnesia in which you have partial amnesia. In my case, he couldn't remember the last three years of his life and apparently my relationship with him fell in those exact three-year bracket that he forgot.

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Veer: Did you try to find out if it was genuine or if he wanted to get rid of you and made up this stuff?

Kavya: It was genuine. The doctors vouched for it. That's not the funny part of it. The funny part was that I tried reminding him of everything, days in and out about us but neither his mind nor his heart responded. So, a few days later, I stopped trying as I could see he was getting irritated by me and now comes the climax of my story. The day he got discharged from the hospital was the day he started dating the nurse who was taking care of him at the hospital.

Veer chuckles and says...

Veer: This is like the worst case of unfortunate incidents...the rarest of the rare cases of destiny. Ohh boy...life is so unpredictable...the more stories I hear, the more it amazes me...

(Veer keeps on looking at Kavya. She smiles a bit and turns her head towards the flying clouds over the mountains to hide her tears from Veer.)

But I understand your pain though...when someone completely erases your existence from their life, be it a retrograde amnesia or even in the normal circumstances, it hurts...it tears your heart in parts in fact...

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(Kavya looks at him with her big, dead eyes, which show no attachment to anything anymore)

But then life comes with other good surprises which make up for it...you will know when it happens. Change is the only constant, they say...But I believe that hope is the only boon we all have...it fades away the worst nightmares and scars. The only thing we all own is hope...and that's why I love it so much, because it brings innumerable possibilities of life.

Do you see this river with strong currents? If you want to cross it, no matter how much effort you put in to swimming and crossing it, the strong currents of the river are going to take you along with them. But if you really want to cross it, you can simply build a bridge over it. What's important is that you keep trying to reach the other side by other means. Again, you may or may not succeed for various reasons. The bridge might fall, you may not be able to build the bridge, the water may rise and drown the bridge, etc, etc, but what matters is you keep trying...and then someday...it might as well happen just like that...

Kavya: What would you have done if you were in my place?

Veer: I would have built my life again...brick by brick. Have you heard about the red car theory?

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Kavya: No...

Veer: So, if I tell you that I will give you a hundred rupees for each red car you spot on the road, you will start looking for it, and in your subconscious mind, it will keep on ticking time to time whenever you are on the road. But if I don't provide you with a purpose, say I don't pay you any money, you will not look for it.

Kavya: Hmm, interesting...

Veer: So, give your life a purpose and then ride it along with hope.

Kavya: Wow, you know, suddenly you reminded me of my favorite novelist, "Akshar Diwan", he too speaks like that through his books and words.

Veer: Diwan who?

Kavya: Akshar Diwan... sold three million copies of his first novel within three months, a record sale for any Indian Author...his writing is just absolutely brilliant...

Veer: Ohk...

Kavya: But I also feel he is a bit eccentric because he writes his book and then disappears for a while, then again appears back when he

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writes his next. Neither attends any press conferences nor puts up his picture on his novel covers. But if I had to put a face to his personality, I think your face will suit that mould perfectly. Don't you think?

Veer: (Hesitantly) Huh...how would I know?

Kavya: Yaa... (Smiles crookedly)

Ok, now you might wonder about the sudden teasing and comparison to Akshar Diwan, the Author, by Kavya but this triggered last night when she saw an impression of a note on a blank page on the side table of the bed in Veer's room, remember? Yeah, the note said Prabha Verma, Koala-Books, Project Manager.

Kavya knew that the book "An Author's Breath" by "Akshar Diwan" was published by Koala Koala-Books. So, apparently, that publishing company's manager's contact was on Veer's side table. So, Kavya just took a shot in the dark. Is Veer the same Author that the world is going crazy for? Is this just some kind of a stupid coincidence or is she just sleep-deprived?

The next day, Veer invites her to have lunch with her at his newly renovated house in Manali but doesn't tell her that it's his house. Veer writes down the address and leaves to take care of the finishing touches on his old Ambassador

car which is almost ready. The interiors are done aesthetically with new pearl color seats, and the dashboard is coated with charcoal black. Now, the only part that remains to be done is the painting part on the outside but there is still an iota of doubt about the particular shade of color which will look absolutely cool and different on the car. Kavya enters the house thinking she is visiting a restaurant for lunch but as she enters the house, she is spellbound with the open porch, peacefully surrounded by long-standing trees, the lush green lawn and not to forget the recently painted and restored house which catches the attention of the onlooker instantly. The pure white paint on the outside and the blue doors which looked like a replica of Santorini island, in Greece, were enough to make Kavya awestricken. As she walks in through the pathway surrounded by the lawn, her smile keeps getting bigger. Veer is looking at her, understanding the amazed look on her face and silently thinking...wait till you see the interior part of this house.

Kavya: What is this place?

Veer: My ancestral house...I got this renovated to sell it.

Kavya: (Shocking reaction on her face) Sell it? Why on earth do you want to sell it?

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Veer: Maintenance... It's practically impossible for me to maintain this as I don't live here in Manali...But you can buy this if you want...

Kavya: Yaa... like I have some ancestral hidden treasure in my house which can settle this...Trust me, if I could ...I would have given you a blank cheque right now and asked you to leave my property...(smiles)

Veer: What would you do with this? Live here?

Kavya: I would have converted this into a peaceful café with perhaps some outdoor seating, a restaurant inside and some rooms for accommodation as well...so a Café, a restaurant and a hotel. The ultimate vacation experience for people. I can already see the eyes of the people lighting up when they have their morning coffee here with this snow mountain view. This place encourages art and creativity. The peace that it beholds is what we all are craving for in the midst of our work-life imbalance. Imagine a barefoot brisk walk on this lawn with your loved ones, and making some memories under the shade of this big, wide Royal Poinciana tree completely bloomed, the cold nights with warm bonfires and soothing guitar music with hot appetizers. Imagine the nice and cozy moments created here which will last till the end of this life, the memories that families and friends will share with their next generation, the picture

frame kept on their work desk that transports them to this place again for a moment and takes away all their worries for a bit. Imagine the broken families coming together here to reunite and the broken hearts looking to heal themselves...this is not just a place Veer, this is a treasure of lifetime happiness.

Veer is astounded by her vision and emotion and keeps looking at her inquisitively.

Veer: (Smiles and says) Let me show you how it looks from inside.

As they enter the main door of the house and get in, innumerable adjectives just start spilling off Kavya's mouth and Veer continues to smile and enjoy her admiration for the place.

Veer calms down her overflowing enthusiasm with a coffee while standing outside the house on the porch. Veer then introduces Kavya to his family's Ambassador car which is waiting for the right color selection to get ready completely. Veer says, Since you are so honest about your feelings for the things you like, I can perhaps use your opinion for the color of my car. Kavya looks at it while sipping her coffee and says What's so difficult about that? Don't look for colors on a shade card, look for them around you...Veer looks at her with questionable eyes and she says... clearly this car has some emotional attachment and family history, that's

why you rebuilt it just like your house, so pick the color which is always recognized as the color of passion, love and joy. Red but more on the maroon side. Veer looks at her, thinking what a brilliant piece of suggestion she just gave. Red family of colors, it is. And the color of the car gets finalized. Red but more on the maroon side.

Veer and Kavya then have their lunch together on the porch, enjoying the amazing snow mountains behind them while Kavya says one thing over and over again with each bite...

"I cannot believe you are selling this place."

Veer smiles and says, *"Hey Kavya...If you like this place so much, you are most welcome to stay here until I get back...or even after that, as long as you want."*

Kavya looks at him while chewing her Rajma Chawal and asks curiously, *"Where are you going?"*

Veer replies, *"I am off to a road trip day after tomorrow to Chandra Taal Lake, hopefully the car paint will dry up by then..."*

Kavya: "Chandra Taal Lake? What's there?"

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Veer: Peace...I'll just sit there by the lake looking at the mountains while sipping a coffee prepared on a bon fire, inhale some fresh air, scream out loud to let go my aggression and let go some pain off my heart too, heel myself in silence and talk to my life...gaze the dark sky and twinkling stars at night along with some sour soup for my soul...accept the life, the way it is and gear up to build a life again.

A few notes in my diary to remind me of the time and the moment I was there, even after twenty years which will define my life as to where I was and how far I have come... (Kavya is listening to him silently)

You know...We are given different routes of life by the Almighty, different looks, different personalities, different genders, different mindsets, different coping mechanisms and different levels of showing happiness and contentment but...there is one thing which He gave us all in equal quantity...

(Kavya is listening to him with utmost attention without even blinking, leaving the food aside.)

Veer says in his deep, base voice, which resonates with Kavya as if her life itself is talking to her and giving her closure for her past...

“Hope”. We were all given hope in the same quantity and what’s ironic is that the more you spend hope, the better it gets. The saving doesn’t work, the spending does...

Kavya realizes that even Veer has been through something in his life and there is some part of his heart where pain still exists but the real question was, what would that be? Kavya takes a moment out of the silence between them and asks Veer in her low-pitched voice...

“What’s your pain, Veer?”

Veer just looks deep in her eyes and says nothing... Just a little smile to hide something. In the evening, when Kavya comes back to her hotel after declining Veer’s offer of staying in his house, she picks up her keys from the reception, opens the door, kicks off her shoes, throws her handbag on the couch, takes off her jacket, goes and sits on the edge of the bed, thinking about something and suddenly, a guilt kicks in.

But why? What was the guilt? She starts walking in her room restlessly as if she is trying to make up her mind and decide, but for what?

Back in Brooklyn a few years later out of the Manali flashback Kavya is still submerged in the same thought and unclarity about Veer

being the unknown but popular Author Akshar Diwan as she browses through some of the negative roles of her camera holding it up in the light by the window of her apartment which had pictures of Kavya and Veer when they were...

Well, hold on to that thought, we will be coming back to that later but for now, Kavya quickly puts back the camera roll in its small vertical box, gets her screenplay academy note pad out of the bag along with some practice bound scripts and keeps it on the desk by the window, takes the empty air-tight plastic lunch boxes out of her bag, puts them in the sink of the kitchen, runs some water on to it, as she cannot stay and wash them right now since she is already late for her coffee shop job. She quickly grabs her café t-shirt and jeans, puts them inside her big, spacious handbag, grabs her house keys and locks the house to leave. As she steps down, she quickly rushes to the "*Tales Café*" which is two blocks away from her apartment. She waits for the signal to turn red impatiently at the crossroads and then as soon as the signal goes green and all the cars stop, she scampers across the zebra crossing and reaches her Café. She enters and greets her colleagues, putting on her fake greeting and smiling face for work. She first goes to her store manager to assure her that she has reached, then opens a register and ticks on her attendance sheet across her name. Then she

heads to the changing room to put on her café attire and cap. She comes back to the counter and relieves the previous coffee maker after taking charge. She sees a queue of people waiting to order their coffee as it's 4 pm and usually the rush starts peaking at this time of the day. The people who had a rough day, try to find some peace in their coffee, the people who had been yelled at by their bosses, want to calm themselves down, some housewives want to eagerly complain about their respective husbands and extended families to their friends, then there is the senior citizen category who want to tell their stories about how they moved mountains and stopped oceans with their bare hands and how they have earned an experience of a lifetime but their kids don't want to use their advice at all. Then comes a category of dreamers who, with a sip of coffee, build castles in their imaginations and scribble a game plan specially designed by them which might change the world and mankind in the coming years but the only thing that they are lacking is the support of funds and the trust of investors and the banks. In the end comes the most crucial category of young couples who are there to put up a show of public display of affection because come on, if they do all the coochee-cooing at home who is going to see them and adore them? So, it has to be done especially at public places to get recognized as a sweet and much-in-love couple.

As Kavya was managing all the rush by taking their orders, she suddenly saw Kushal with the nurse he started dating after his discharge. Remember Kushal? Kavya's boyfriend and fiancée who had retrograde amnesia, which is some kind of partial amnesia, forgot the only three years of their relationship and those three years were the only years Kavya had with him.

Yeah, such is life that when you are running away from something or someone, the same event or person will resurrect suddenly. Kavya looks at them happily, displaying their public display of affection, feeding each other and caressing. Only one and only one thought constantly kept banging Kavya's head, that off all the continents on the earth, countries across the world, states, cities, lanes or even the area per square feet, this man Kushal along with his nurse girlfriend has to be here in Manhattan that too at this exact place, time and moment when she is there and she has to witness them sitting together all happy and satisfied in their lives whereas she has to struggle through her life to bring it back on track after everything that she went through, did for this man during their relationship and during his recovery at the hospital. To add on to that, the words of his parents which reverberated in her head constantly, only added salt to her wound when they said to her on a daily basis in the hospital that they are least worried about their son since

she is here to take care of him in his sickness and health. And here their son just woke up after the accident and asked her who she was due to some motherf@#@#@g retrograde amnesia spinning her life upside down completely. As Kavya takes a break from her work which she just resumed three minutes ago, runs away to the store room trying to hide from the new sensational couple in the town, Kavya realizes that the nurse is not just Kushal's girlfriend anymore but she is a legal wife of Kushal. She could make that out from the vermilion on her forehead which is a mark of an Indian married woman along with the chuda (A bunch of red bangles worn by married women in both their hands). Kavya also had an urge of disquisition while passing about how quickly a Christian Malayali nurse adapted to a Punjabi tradition of chuda and vermilion...she was practically wearing a crucifix cross along with a Mangalsutra (A sacred wedding necklace which Indian women wear) around her neck. Kavya is really amazed by the turn of events and coincidences in her life.

Anyway, she takes a little time inside the store room and tears start to fill up her eyes when suddenly she remembers what Veer once said to her...

"Kavya, the day you see them together again in your life and it will definitely happen someday,

don't shrink yourself into your emotions, rather... see them in the eye and face them with pride. Trust me...they will remember that look for the rest of their lives..."

As Kavya realizes that Kushal should be the one hiding and not her. She wears her cap back on to her head like a queen wears her crown, wipes her tears and walks out of the store room with her head held high. As she goes and stands right in front of Kushal and the nurse, they too take out some time off their coochie-cooing and notice Kavya. Kushal and the nurse get embarrassed to see her; they get spellbound and see no way out of the sudden confrontation with Kavya. They right away pick up their shopping bags to leave. Kavya keeps looking at them, standing all tall and poker-faced as Kushal and the nurse vanish out of the café door as quickly as possible. Kavya gets back to her work, ending that chapter of her life completely because from now on, Kushal and the nurse are the ones who will be hiding their faces and not her.

Kavya, after her work shift, wraps up her stuff, changes her work clothes to the normal ones and starts walking towards her apartment with her handbag on her shoulder, thinking about her life and the incidents that happened in a chronological order. See, when a chapter of your life gets closed, unknowingly it also opens

the other previous and latter chapters as well. And then we start analyzing the good and the bad that came out of it. Although we have popularized the term “Move on” which we often say very casually but the reality is that it’s not a switch-off button that we can put off so easily; it’s a process and it takes time, no matter how quickly we want it to happen. The process may have many distractions nowadays and perhaps it helps a person to hide behind those distractions now but back in the nineties, the “Move on” thing was still in the making and waiting for it to end existed a little longer. Ever noticed? The level of tolerance has zeroed down to well...level zero itself because these days we are not creating lives together, we are creating packages in which relationships have no space to breathe. The pain lingered longer back in the nineties because the relationships had that much depth back then. So, eventually moving on was also a bit harder back then.

While studying screenplay writing at Manhattan, Kavya is also writing her dream screenplay simultaneously and she keeps on writing whenever she feels the motivation and the natural push by her writing instincts. The push may come from anything and in any form. It can be an incident, an emotional moment, people she sees or the events of her daily life that she observes. Today was the emotional push, she walks up to a café near her house,

sits and settles down with a black coffee. She sips her coffee first, takes a couple of seconds for the coffee taste to settle in her system, then rolls her long, thick hair into a bun, takes a pencil out of her purse, inserts the pencil in the middle of the bun and holds them together tight. Although some restless tresses do fall on her forehead but she just tucks them behind her ears. She then puts on her reading glasses, takes a deep breath, opens her diary and picks up her pen to write some key notes of a scene in her story.

While Kavya has submerged herself in her writing, Veer walks down the lane on the other side of the café, completely unaware of Kavya sitting in the café or as a matter of fact, he is completely unaware that Kavya is in Manhattan right now. The other day, if you remember, when Kavya was clicking some pictures with her camera and she accidentally clicked someone's picture in the background which she got to know about after developing the camera roll? Well, that surprising expression on her face that day after seeing the picture was because of our very own someone "Veer". Even Kavya was not aware of the fact that Veer was somewhere in Brooklyn or Manhattan right now.

It seems like destiny is cooking something magical or surprising for Kavya and Veer. Now,

Trust the Pull

there are two ways to look at it: maybe that the magic is working out in a very mysterious way or maybe the Almighty is feeling a little left out and playing his cards in a way that amuses Him and makes him feel important in their story.

Well, a bunch of coincidences were happening all at the same time. First one is that Veer is somewhere in Manhattan, very close to Kavya, the second one is the camera Kavya had clicked pictures with the other day, which is Veer's Yashica C camera, which he gifted to Kavya when...

Wait a minute... let's not reveal it that way, let's go back to Manali to find out what exactly happened back then and what this hide and seek between Kavya and Veer is all about...



7

The Lighthouse Effect and the detour

If you see the literal meaning of “The Lighthouse Effect” then it is pretty much a sailor or a ship being guided by a light in a house to reach the shore. But in a philosophical definition, it is one person showing the path to another person, unknowingly, who is lost or disconnected in life. In other words, if one person’s actions or decision-making ability inspires the other person and acts as a guiding line, then that can be considered the lighthouse effect. The same effect was somehow pushing Kavya to be with Veer a little more. She was feeling nice being with him and having conversations which sometimes had no conclusions but felt right at that very moment. There was no winning or losing in their conversations; there was only a perspective and a space left between the words which felt soothing somehow to Kavya.

Trust the Pull

Three years ago
Manali Hotel

Kavya slept early that night and she was thinking of what Veer said while changing sides constantly all night, that he was going to the Chandra Taal Lake in his new modified Ambassador just to have a cup of coffee by the lake. It sounded weird to Kavya at first but then it also felt like a decision taken by a free bird with no assumptions and no repercussions. In her mind, it felt very liberating that Veer could take such impulsive and carefree decisions, so it unknowingly had the light house effect on Kavya because the thought had some butterflies flying in her stomach and she too wanted to be a part of this road trip.

The next morning, Kavya gets up early at 5 a.m., pours herself a cup of black coffee and after her morning routine which includes brushing and freshening up, she takes a quick shower, packs her bag and checks out of the hotel she was living in for the past few days. She asks the hotel receptionist to drop her off at a certain address and they oblige her by arranging a car for her.

As Veer gets out of the main door of his house in his ambassador early in the morning, he sees Kavya sitting on her suitcase, waiting at the

turning of the main door. Veer suddenly pulls back and takes a moment to see Kavya in the freezing morning in her woolen thick jacket, over it was a long coat which detectives used to wear in the old movies, with a monkey cap on her head and hand gloves with boots on her feet. Veer gets out of his car and walks up to Kavya. Veer doesn't say a word; he just picks up her luggage and keeps it in his car's dickey. Kavya too doesn't say a word and sits in his car in the front. Veer comes back and sits in the driver's seat and they both look at each other for a moment...They both smile and then Veer and Kavya begin their road trip to the Chandra taal lake.

The unheard local pahadi peppy folk music starts playing as Veer pushes the audio cassette into the tape player in the car. Yes, there were only audio cassettes back then in the early nineties, CDs came in a little later and no pen drives or online music existed. Neither of them understood a word in the song but the rhythm of the song was enough to make them shake their shoulders and heads. Both of them were unaware that any such road trip vibe existed in the other person. They get onto the pahadi (Mountain)roads with the music on their way to the beautiful Chandra Taal Lake to have a cup of hot coffee at the lake. How simple and uncomplicated is that? So, the route back then in the year 1990 from Manali to Chandra

Taal Lake was via Rohtang Pass, then to Lahaul Valley, then to Gramphu which led to Batal and then finally via Batal to Chandra Taal Lake. After driving for fifty kilometers on a road which can hardly be recognized as a road but just a passage to your destination, with a complete off-road and roller coaster road experience, they finally reach Rohtang pass in two hours where they cross the even more narrow passage of the snow path on either side. The Maroon Ambassador, while passing through the white snow, looked beautiful and eye-catching. The wind kept blowing their minds as it was cold and the snow attire that Kavya and Veer were wearing barely kept their bodies warm. The words coming out of their mouth were shivering as much as their lips. A little later, the clouds started visiting them down on the road; they could literally touch the clouds as their car moved through them. The visibility of the road gets a little affected by the clouds after a while when they reach the top of the mountain but they still manage to get through it slowly and attentively. They decide to take a moment to enjoy the cold wind and hug some clouds, so they take a little halt at the side of the road on the mountain carefully where there is enough space so that they don't block the way for other vehicles. Kavya and Veer look at each other and Veer asks her whether she would like to sit on the bonnet of the car? She shrugs her shoulders, showing the uncertainty that she

could climb the bonnet...Veer moves in closer to Kavya and she gets a little surprised by the move not sure what exactly Veer is trying to do... but she too doesn't take a step back or resist. She looks at him in the eye and Veer looks her in the eye, there is no blinking of eyes, they were literally exchanging the fog breath coming out of each other's mouth, the heart beat was also beating faster than the usual not because of their sudden intimacy but they were like 20 thousand feet above sea level and the heart automatically starts pumping faster while seeking oxygen at such high altitude. Then comes the main purpose of this intimacy, Veer holds her from her waist, picks her up and makes her sit on the bonnet of the car. Once she gets comfortable, Veer too climbs the bonnet and sits next to her. They smile and then look away to focus on the view of the mountains and clouds. They just sit there peacefully for about 25 mins without saying a word and then get down. Kavya, of course, gets off the bonnet with the help of her knight in shining armor and then they get on the road again. After the first level of a minor kind of sexual friction between Veer and Kavya, they get on the road to move ahead.

As they reach the regular highway road off the mountain and cross the Gramphu village, they stop at a roadside dhaba (roadside hotel) to have some food. They have the typical dhaba-

style double Dal Tadka and Rice along with some pahadi kadha to keep themselves warm. Veer finishes first and asks her if he can have a cigarette until she finishes her food. Kavya says yes and he goes and lights up a cigarette away from her and near the road. Kavya, while eating her last bites, is looking at Veer. He takes a drag and then looks at the road ahead, thinking about something. Kavya thinks that maybe he is thinking about the moment they both had a little while ago on the bonnet. But there is something else that is going on in Veer's mind. It's like he is trying to decide on something and it has to be done now...Kavya finishes off her food, Veer finishes off his cigarette and they both get on the road to continue their journey. As they get a little ahead on the road, Veer reads the milestone which indicates Chandra Taal Lake towards the straight arrow but he stops right there on the side again, thinking about something. Kavya could sense that something was bothering him; there was something he was hesitating about, so she asked him directly...

Kavya: Is there something you are hesitating to say?

Veer: Ahh...Kavya, I kind of lied to you....

Kavya: Oh, OK...good time to bring up your honesty...you lied about what?

Trust the Pull

Veer: Chandra Taal was not the destination I was coming to... I came here to see someone...

Kavya: Oh, okay...So...now you are hesitating whether you should or should not see that person with me by your side?

Veer: No, it's not you, Kavya...it's my inner turmoil since many days and all the way through this trip...

Kavya: Huh...(Takes a few seconds) Well, Veer... we are in the middle of nowhere right now...and I am guessing we are close to that person you were supposed to see...so I say you might as well see that person... that's why you came all the way till here...so why hesitate now? and as far as I am concerned... You can drop me here at some hotel...that's fine with me...I will find my way somewhere...I am a big girl... You go ahead. Don't overthink about it...it's ok. Drop me here...

Veer: No Kavya...If I have to meet this person...I will do it with you or I won't... Is it ok if we take a little detour from here?

Kavya: (Smiles and says with all the politeness, hiding her curiosity) Whatever you like, Veer... Inside, Kavya was inquisitive and so eager to know who this person is who is creating a

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turmoil inside Veer... A little while ago, they had a sexual friction or call it an intimate moment and now, they are having this moment where some third person is creating turmoil inside him. Kavya cannot wait to see this person, as she knows for sure that such turmoil can only be created by a girl in a man, but the real question is, who is she and why is she important for Veer? All these questions were hitting Kavya's mind while she was showing an innocent none of my business smile on her face. Veer too takes her smile for a yes and takes a U-turn towards Sissu town.

Sissu, Himachal Pradesh
Year 1990

Veer neither says a single word during this detour, nor does Kavya ask him anything about this mystery person they were about to see. They just keep going and then an hour later, they reach Sissu village. Sissu is a beautiful small village situated in the majestic Lahaul Valley of Himachal Pradesh, right on the bank of the Chenab River. The air in Sissu village felt like it had some detoxification effect, some relief effect for the wounds of the heart and some pure breath which enhanced the life span. The mountains in the valley felt magical and the river flowing right by the narrow road felt serene. The houses in the village and the road were separated by a bridge built right over the

Chenab River which looked beautiful and when the clouds held themselves on the top of the houses, it felt like a crown shining proudly due to the little sunlight that fell on them. The mountains were covered in a blanket of snow and the rivers made an aggressive sound, warning everyone to get out of the way.

The suspense for Kavya was building minute by minute as Veer hesitantly got out of the car and walked towards the bridge. Kavya too gets out of the car, walks and stands next to Veer near the bridge.

Veer looks at the village once, gathers some courage and then decides to walk to the other side of the bridge. As Veer takes the first step on the bridge, suddenly the surroundings start changing. The sunlight hides behind the clouds and the light gets a little dim. The wind starts filling the silences with its sound and the snow starts pouring. Veer keeps moving step by step on the bridge to reach the other side. Kavya too follows him to know what the hell was about to follow. Veer and Kavya enter the village with narrow roads (Pagdandi) and walk past some houses. All the houses in Sissu or for that sake in snowy areas all over are specifically built with an inclined roof like a hut so that the snow doesn't stay on the roof, making it heavy and slides down easily when pushed down with a snow stick. A little later, Veer takes out a piece

of paper from his pocket on which an address was written. Veer sees it and then looks for house number 55. Kavya too peeks into the address and points towards the house number 55 which was three blocks ahead. They both walk towards the house and reach a red-roofed house, a big house with a big compound beneath the snowy mountains. The house had big French windows and looked beautiful. The pathway to the house had a lane of colorful flowers on either side and it smelled very nice when someone walked through it. Veer and Kavya walk towards the main door of the house, slowly making Kavya wonder that her life and this situation were heading in the same direction... clueless... she had no idea why she was a part of this and what was about to happen.

Veer looked like he was lost in some other world. It looked like he was seeing the flashes of the past or maybe an upcoming future with this person who brought the inner turmoil in him... Kavya thought. Kavya couldn't understand why all this was affecting her and why her curiosity was at its peak.

Veer snaps out of his world and walks towards the house door to ring the bell. As he stands there waiting patiently at the door after ringing the doorbell, he can hear someone walking towards the door from inside to open it. Veer

Trust the Pull

quickly peeks into the hanging blue artistic pocket kind of a thing made for letters, on the side of the door. He fixes his hair, looking into the small, round mirrors on it. The sound of the door latch opening is heard by Kavya and she gets all attentive to see this person, whereas Veer keeps his eyes fixed on the door without blinking at all. As the door opens, time gets frozen completely and stands still.

A sound fills the moment of silence, a few nanoseconds later and again freezes when he hears this in a whispery voice of hers...

Veer...



8

Meant to be or not?

*Sissu,
Himachal Pradesh.
Year 1990*

The moment brings a thousand moments and memories rushing back to the both of them. For a while, they just stand there and look at each other until tears fill their eyes. That's when they realize that they are in a different era now and the time that is lost is not going to come back in this lifetime. Kavya, standing behind them, could see some kind of strong connection between them and also could see that they had met after many years. The faces of Purva and Veer were hiding tons of emotions; they wanted to hug each other tight but they couldn't. They wanted to let go of the hurricane of tears in their eyes but they couldn't. They wanted to say a million things to each other which they had accumulated in their chest but they couldn't. Of course, the personalities of both of them had changed. The face, a little bit, the jaw line, the

structure of their bodies but those eyes were the same which exuded the same amount of familiarity. The peacock color saree with some embroidery work on it looked stunning on Purva. The loosely tied hair from the bottom looked like a temporary arrangement, as she must have been in the kitchen preparing to cook something. Her forehead had a small bindi which looked just perfect on her and the small nose ring that she was wearing also made her sharp nose look perfect on her face. This is the first time that Veer is seeing Purva in a saree and like a married woman, something he always wanted to have as her own but...

Purva too looks at Veer, who looks a bit different now with the stubble on his face but the same messy hair. Purva has to look up to him literally to look into his eyes, as his height is not the same as the last time she saw him. Veer takes a step forward and after getting over the initial hesitation of saying something, he asks her, even though it is so evident that she has, just to tease her a bit...

Veer: Remember me?

Purva hears Veer's deep, strong voice and says...

Purva: Do you?

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Veer smiles on her counter question and thinks that in some departments, she is still the same...unchanged.

In the meanwhile, Kavya, who felt like the excess baggage in this whole romantic world that Veer and Kavya were submerged in... is waiting for them to get over this and get inside the house, as it is freezing outside and it also made Kavya wonder, how the hell is Purva standing there in just a saree, unaffected by the freezing weather?

Purva looks at Kavya, thinking that she might be Veer's wife, but then the questions in her eyes get answered by Veer...

Veer: She is my friend Kavya...

Purva: Hello...

Kavya: Hi...

Purva: Please come in.

Veer and Kavya enter the house which was aesthetically decorated and maintained by Purva. The house had big windows that overlooked the snowy mountains and the ample sunlight entered the house even from the roof as they were made of transparent glass. The house had a positive vibe and felt like a home.

The soothing color of the furniture, which was mixed and matched, gave it a very welcoming feeling. Veer and Purva are not ready to let go of their eye contact and Kavya is thinking what if the husband comes to know that someone from his wife's past has emerged again, that too in his own house? And Veer solves her mystery when he asks Purva...

Veer: Where is your husband?

Purva: Office...but he must be on his way...will be here anytime...

And Kavya is thinking... "So should we leave or stay?". It looked like Veer wants to have complete satisfaction of meeting her, even her husband, to know if she is in the right hands...so he continues...

Veer: What does he do?

Purva: He is the head of the Himachal tourism and development authority.

No wonder the house is big and looks sophisticated, thinks Kavya while rolling her eyes around the whole house. Just then the next curious question comes from Purva about which even Kavya was wondering.

Purva: How did you know I was here?

Trust the Pull

Veer: Ahh...do you remember Navin our classmate?

Purva: Ya, I met him a few months ago in Dehradun...

Veer: Yes...so he took your number and address and then he met Daksh...

Purva: Your best friend...

Veer: (Nods his head) he has collected the names, numbers and addresses of all our classmates and made a school slam book out of that year's batch ...So, recently, when I met him again in Manali after many years, I found your address in that...I was a bit hesitant to come here...

Purva is about to say something but then thinks about Kavya who might not know their history. So, stops herself from saying anything...

Purva: Kavya...Please feel comfortable ...you guys get freshen up... the washroom and the guest room's this side...please go ahead... I will get the chai ready...

Purva walks up to her kitchen and hides behind her fridge quickly to hide her tears and sobbing. Kavya walks up to the kitchen to ask Purva

Trust the Pull

something but then she sees her sobbing through the gap between the wall and the fridge and comes back without saying a thing and giving Purva her time.

A little later, Purva brings the chai and gives it to Veer first and then to Kavya off course. As they sip the chai, Kavya could sense the tension and awkwardness. Veer keeps the cup on the table and says...

Veer: I think we should leave.

Kavya had not even finished her chai, she finishes it bottoms up quickly on hearing Veer and keeps the cup on the table...

Purva: No way you are going anywhere right now... You are staying here in my house and having dinner with my family...

Veer: No, Purva...please...

Purva: I am not listening to anything...you are staying...that's it.

As she says this, her husband walks in...They all look at each other and greet, then Purva introduces them to her husband.

Trust the Pull

Purva: My husband Ajit...Ajit, this is Veer (with excitement) and this is Kavya (Doesn't matter kind of a feel to it) ...

Ajit: Ohh, hi Veer...so nice to meet you finally...

From his tone, Kavya sensed that Purva had already told him about Veer and who he was. But what's with the husband's enthusiasm? Why is he not upset? Wondered, Kavya...thinking that maybe she is the only one who is awkward here because the rest of the three seemed unaffected and were having a gala time with each other. The husband, too, insists that they stay with them tonight.

As the evening proceeds, they all have dinner together at the table. Purva also introduces Veer to her elder seven-year-old daughter, who looked like a replica of Purva and had woken up from her sleep for dinner. After the delicious dinner specially made by Purva, they all decided to go up to the terrace for the view of the village and stargazing. Veer, Kavya, Purva and the husband were all there on the terrace looking at the stars when Purva and Veer got a moment of solitude to have their talk which was, by the way, designed by the husband himself...must say that the husband too had a heart of gold for doing this...

Veer: So...Are you happy?

Trust the Pull

*Purva: (Looks at him and takes a few seconds)
Yes, I am very happy...Ajit takes care of me,
respects me and respects my feelings...the day I
got married to him, I told him about you...from
that day till now, we have had a good life
together...and yes, I love him and respect him
equally...*

*Veer: He is a very nice man, Purva...I am very
glad where you are in your life right now.*

*Purva: But I am not happy for you, Veer...I don't
know if we were meant to be together or if it was
destiny that separated us... If the situation had
been different, perhaps life would have been
different too...whatever it is...we cannot correct
it now...But please don't resist life, Veer...Kavya
seems to be a nice girl...think about it,
please...Promise me...I want to see you settle
down with the right person and have kids.
Consider this as my parting gift...promise me...*

Veer: Purva...I met her just a few days ago...

*Purva: And she came all the way here along with
you? For what? Trust me Veer...I am a girl...
Something is going on in her heart... perhaps
even she doesn't know about it yet... You both
need to find it out...*

Trust the Pull

I see she is a big fan of Akshar Diwan...Have you told her that you are the anonymous popular Author "Akshar Diwan"?

Veer: (Gets shocked) How do you know that I am "Akshar Diwan"?

Purva: Well...by the power vested in me by my past relationship with you and the dedication in your book to a certain girl called P...Plus, the story reflected our moments together which only I know of...that many coincidences cannot occur at the same time and in the same book...The Author's breath in the book resonated with me...

Veer: (Smiles) Well, that was the only way I could reach out to you...

Purva: I know...and I loved every bit of it...would you personally sign the book for me?

Veer: My pleasure.

Purva: Is the post box still there?

Veer: It was...Now I have unhinged it from there and have put it in my house in Manali...

Purva and Veer look at each other and smile while the stars in the background were twinkling in full force, even though there was a snowfall a few hours ago. The sky just cleared

Trust the Pull

up to see the stars which we can metaphorically refer to as Veer, Purva, the husband Ajit and in a way, Kavya too. They all were putting up a brave front to the situation and were so graceful about it.

Trust me, it's hard, way too hard...

Anyway, they call it a night as Veer tells Purva to show Kavya to her room and he will crash in the car. Purva stops him and says there is ample space in my house, you can sleep in the other room. Purva takes Kavya to her room and while walking towards the room, Kavya seeks Purva's permission to ask her a personal question...

Purva says yes...

Kavya: Do you both still love each other?

Purva: (Smiles) Depends on how you define love...I know for a fact that it took Veer and me seventeen long years to meet again and I know for sure, now that he knows where I live, he will never come back and meet me again. He will vanish out of my life like thin air...This particular visit is all we both have for this lifetime. He didn't come here to claim his love for me; he came here to see if I am happy in my life... Now that he is assured that I am, he will find some peace within. We live in a human society Kavya

Trust the Pull

where every emotion, feeling and connection has to be named and defined properly but honestly, I don't have a category to define what we mean to each other now. Whatever it is, it will always stay within us...deep inside somewhere...and then maybe someday in some life things will be different...I guess in this life, it was not meant to be...

Just when Kavya got lost in those beautifully described words by Purva, she says...

"He is all yours Kavya..."

And Purva walks away with a smile even before Kavya could have reacted to that.



9

Until next time...

The next morning, Veer and Kavya are standing near the car, along with Purva and Ajit on the other side of the bridge, about to leave. Veer looks at Purva and says a final goodbye to her which had been pending for seventeen long years. He knows he will not come back here again or see her again in this lifetime. He also thanks Ajit and then gets inside the car. Kavya follows him and gets inside the car. As Veer drives away, he looks in the side mirror to see Purva aligning herself with the mirror, so that Veer and she can see each other for a few more seconds. After a distance, when Purva fades away from the side mirror, Kavya could see Veer's eyes fill with tears. He was not sobbing, he was not crying out loud but there were just enough tears that showed the inner pain of Veer.

Back at Purva's house, she is standing on her balcony, seeing Veer's car disappear on the road. She gets back inside the room and sees the book written by Veer lying on the table.

Purva picks up the book and opens the first page of it to see the book signed by the Author Veer and not by his pen name “Akshar Diwan”. The only copy in the world that had the author’s real name and signature on it. Ajit comes from behind and Purva shows him the sign on the book. Purva then turns around, holds Ajit’s face with her hand and says...

Thank you Ajit, it’s enough for this lifetime...
Ajit smiles and Purva hugs Ajit.

Veer and Kavya kept driving non-stop this time because they were in Gramphu village and they had a target of reaching Batal as soon as possible which was about two and a half hours away, so that they could cover the remaining distance of one and a half hours without any rush and reach the Chandra taal lake way before sunset. The roads in this mountain region were very narrow and it took a lot of time to cross them which were an inch away from the valley next to it. So, they had to drive through it carefully. Also, it was winter time, so the sun sets a little early in this region and Veer didn’t want to mess up the commitment he made to Kavya of having coffee at the lake while watching the fabulous creation of the Almighty.

After a while, they reach a road beneath a mountain and Veer looks at it and says...

Veer: See that mountain? That's the last one, when we cross that, we will reach the lake...

Kavya, on hearing this, gets all alert and starts focusing on crossing that mountain, as she didn't want to miss the first glimpse of the Chandra Taal Lake of whose beauty and serenity Veer had talked about so elaborately.

The wind keeps messing up Kavya's hair, so she picks up her colorful scarf with red, white and orange colors on it, keeps it between Veer and her, on the seat and ties her hair with it. Veer, while driving and looking at the mountain, shifts his gaze to Kavya while she ties her hair. There is something very unique about a girl tying her hair, although it's very normal but it becomes very romantic suddenly when a boy is sitting in the front and looking at her. It was not just her tying her hair but for Veer, the way she ties her hair with a scarf was something very unique for the reason only he knows. It reminded Veer of the first time he saw her in the hotel room next to him, tying her hair with the same colorful scarf. Kavya triggered one of his long-lost hobbies of sketching again; maybe she will also trigger the long-lost space for love in Veer's heart. Veer has a lot of mixed thoughts going on in his mind. For the last few days, Kavya's entry in his life has been nothing less than a fresh glimmer of hope and assurance, which he never thought of until now. Purva's

words, “Don’t resist Veer” kept echoing in his mind over and over again as he was casting a furtive glance at Kavya. Kavya had a little smile on her face expecting to see something unexpected and Veer noticed this for the first time that she had a small little mole on her upper lip which he never noticed but now that the golden hour light was falling on Kavya’s face, he could see the mole and the glow on her face not that she had no glow before this but it somehow enhanced her beauty to some other level all together. As Kavya turns her face to look at Veer, he looks away towards the road but it was a little too late because she caught him red-handed looking at her. Kavya smiles and focuses back on the mountain and the road leading towards it. A little later, when they cross the mountain and leave it behind, it was a scenic vista, a panoramic view held at the centermost point of the surrounding high, snowy mountains and some dry mountains. This place was no less than a heaven. According to the ancient Indian history of “The Mahabharata”, after the war, many years later, the Pandavas decided to give away their kingdom and proceed on a journey of life. While all four Pandavas, Arjun, Bheem, Nakul and Sehdev, along with Draupadi, died on the way during this journey, the eldest brother, “Yudhisthira” of the Pandavas, reached the lake and was taken to heaven from the Chandra Taal Lake by the God Indra on his chariot. So, the

Chandra Taal Lake is considered to be the gateway to heaven and has had spiritual relevance ever since.

Veer parks his car on the road as they have to walk for a few meters because there is no access road for cars to drive and park closer to the lake. Veer and Kavya get out of the car, Kavya looks at the lake and then at Veer, mesmerized by the lake's beauty and they both smile looking at each other. They get some stuff from the car in their hands and walk towards the lake. There was nobody at the lake except Veer and Kavya, maybe because of the little snowfall, people didn't want to take any risk. The sky was clear now, though and there were no signs of snow. In fact, the sun was shining all bright and hot; perhaps it was also melting the snow on the mountains to make the experience for Veer and Kavya a memorable one. As they walk close to the lake, Kavya and Veer look around in 360 degrees to experience the serendipity and the beauty of the lake. Kavya takes off her sandals and walks into the water, only to realize that the water is freezing cold. So, she quickly pulls back her legs but the smile and happiness on her face were not fading away any time soon. Such was the magic of that place. Veer is carrying his Yashica-C Camera and not wanting to miss this moment, he quickly takes some candid pictures of Kavya looking so happy and also cinematic in the golden hour light.

Remember the Yashica-C Camera that Kavya had in Brooklyn? Well, yes, it was Veer's camera. But how did she get that and why? Well, we will come to that very soon.

Veer starts preparing for the bonfire, puts in some small wooden pieces that he had already crafted for the fire and carried in his bag. Kavya looks at Veer and comes to him to help him out.

Kavya: Can I help you?

Veer: No, just enjoy the view and prepare yourself to have the best coffee you've ever had till now. It's a slow-burning process, the minute details that come out as a flavor in the end when you sip that first taste of rejuvenation and delight.

Kavya: Ohh... Can't wait ...

Kavya smiles in response and witnesses the slow-burning process of Veer, which looks like a rather elaborate process. But she didn't complain as she was about to have a specially made barbecue coffee for the first time in her life by a person she had developed some affection for over the last few days. A rather unusual story of her life with this stranger, who didn't seem like a stranger anymore. Amazing turn of events that life had planned for her, isn't it?

Anyway, on the side of the woods, Veer erects a cross X-shaped wooden stand on each side and then keeps another wooden stick horizontally above that. Veer then pulls out a bag and adds raw coffee beans to an apparatus with some blades inside it, specially brought to grind the coffee beans. He closes the lid and then rotates the lever on the side of the apparatus which makes the blades rotate eventually and the beans inside it get ground to coffee powder. Kavya, while watching all this, had no idea that drinking a coffee on the lake was going to be such a grand event. They keep exchanging looks and chuckles in between the process. Veer then puts the freshly ground coffee powder in the kettle and then adds a few drops of water to it. He then takes a spoon and starts rotating it in the kettle in a circular motion to make it thick like a sauce. Then he adds some cinnamon sticks to it to give it a flavor. Then he closes the lid of the kettle and hangs it on the hook on the horizontal wooden stick in the middle. Then he lights the fire on the wooden pieces below with his lighter and adjusts the wooden pieces to raise the flame of the fire a little bit. After supervising everything, he looks at Kavya to assure her that they are on the right track. They let the coffee slowly burn in its flavor while they wait for the last part of it which only Veer knew. A few minutes later, Veer takes the kettle off the barbecue and then pours the coffee into each cup. But before serving, he then

takes out his other apparatus, which apparently creates a smoky flavor. He keeps the barrel-shaped wooden thing with a hole in the bottom of it on the cup, making Kavya wonder what she was getting into but Veer seemed confident of his procedure, so she smiles to keep him motivated. Veer then pulls out another small box and keeps some wooden chips on the barrel apparatus and then from above with his lighter puts them on fire. As the wooden chips burn, the smoke created out of them automatically flows downwards, filling the coffee with a smoky flavor. Kavya leans down to see what was happening and then, on seeing the smoke moving to the cup, smiles and appreciates the magical process of Veer. Veer smiles and then serves the special, freshly ground beans, barbecue-smoked flavored coffee with Cinnamon to Kavya. They both sit on the bank of the lake on stones and sip their coffee, enjoying the picturesque view of the Chandra Taal Lake.

For a while, they just sit and watch the view of the mountains and the changing color of the Chandra Taal Lake as every minute went by. It was simply magical, there was no compulsion of speech, silence talked louder than words, the peace that the wind brought along with it and the view of the Sun setting slowly behind the mountains only made them realize that the only constant in this whole wide world is the change.

Trust the Pull

It constantly keeps changing. And after many more sunsets and sunrises, life brings a new day and a new night. The sorrows that we burden ourselves with have minimal value in life. We have so many things that we are provided with free of cost. The oxygen we breathe, the food we eat (provided by nature, remember photosynthesis?), the water we drink, provided by the rivers and rains. So, figuratively, we just have to live amongst these things which are provided to us free of cost by nature. But it is also true that we are humans and the things that didn't work out in our favor or as per our plan bother us more than the things we already have without even asking for them. Perhaps you can write your own story but the events and the chapters in that story are ...

“The Inscriptions of Fate”.

Veer and Kavya were having a great time sitting together, talking about nothing and just existing... which was a little weird because a few days ago they had no idea that some Kavya or some Veer existed in this world and now, from being strangers to enjoying each other's company on a road trip and then a coffee at this mesmerizing view of the lake...

What a splendid first date it is...

After a while, the flying clouds decided to make their unacknowledged date a memorable one.

Veer was silent all this while at the lake because he was also trying to decide on something and this road trip was also the time he wanted to decide and analyze just that. After finishing his Coffee, Veer, being the secret popular romantic/fiction author that he is, always had an elaborate way of doing things when it came to romance. So, he decides to use this moment to make a move in his life positively. As he had always had a certain attraction towards Kavya since the first day, he made up his mind to conclude the future of the Veer and Kavya story.

Veer keeps his coffee cup on the stone next to him, then gets up and walks up to his bag to pull out a Walkman out of it along with the wired earphones. He then looks at Kavya and asks her to come to him. Kavya smiles and walks up to Veer. Veer spreads his hand, asking for her hand. She reluctantly keeps her hand on his and then Veer pulls her slightly close to him. Veer then clips the back side of the Walkman to his belt. Then he puts one earphone on his left ear and the second one in Kavya's right ear. Ver then presses the play button on the Walkman and the song starts to play which was a set of many questions in one song, also had a little flavor of flirting and somehow had the ingredients of a commitment as well. Kavya's frown turns into a smile as she

hears the song which apparently was also her all-time favorite.

Song: "Hum aapki aankhon me, iss dil ko basadein toh?"

As Kavya gets comfortable with the beginning of the song, Veer holds her close and starts dancing slowly, looking into her eyes and meaning every word of the song. There was no dance floor; the place was filled with so many uneven stones and rocks that keeping the balance itself was a bit difficult, let alone the dancing part. Kavya initially gets a little surprised with Veer's sudden move which she had no idea even existed in Veer. Throughout the trip, he was a silent and less talkative person, so this was actually quite contradictory to his personality. Kavya and Veer look into each other's eyes and just keep moving slowly, cutting through the clouds in between them. After a while, the smile gets wider on their faces and they both feel this irresistible magnetic pull towards each other. Kavya too starts losing her inhibitions and becomes a part of the moment. A little later, Kavya looks at him and feels this unsettling urge to keep her head on Veer's chest while dancing. The dancing stops and Veer too moves his hands around her back and Kavya didn't object to that even a bit. They close their eyes and hug for a long time without saying a word to each other. Kavya then looks

at him and Veer also looks at her with a lot of affection. Then, a few seconds later, they both didn't realize that they were actually kissing each other, lost in each other's arms. They realize it when the song in the Walkman stops playing and the empty cassette tape just keeps rolling till the play button pops out automatically, making a sound. They get awkward then and step back from each other. Veer says something to save them both from any embarrassment...

Veer: Ahh...I am starving ... Ahh we have the biscuits ... come ...

Veer walks first and then Kavya follows him. Veer and Kavya again settle down on their previous rocks, looking back at the view of the lake. After not saying anything for a couple of minutes, Kavya asks him...

Kavya: Veer, I told you my story; you didn't tell me yours?

Veer: (Looks at her) What story?

Kavya: You and Purva ... You both loved each other, that I know ... But what happened between you two, that I don't know ...

Veer looks at the lake and thinks that he has to live those moments again and feel the pain but

he also feels that Kavya is right, it's only fair. She deserves to know his story...Veer takes a deep breath and tells Kavya his story...

Me and Purva ...

For the next one and a half hours, Kavya listens to Veer and Purva's story, completely involved in it. As Veer completes the last part of his story, tears start falling from Kavya's eyes ... Veer looks at her and says to her...

Veer: It stopped hurting, though, since this morning, Kavya, when we left Purva's house. She is happy in her world and I was happy to see her happy there. That's all I wanted to see. If she had been miserable, it would have broken me into pieces. The moment we left her house, I found my peace and now my closure.

Kavya: What about your happiness?

Veer: I am working on it...Hopefully, I will find it soon.

Kavya says something which Veer saw coming already...

Kavya: So, you are Akshar Diwan ...aren't you? The famous anonymous Author of "An Author's breath"?

Trust the Pull

Veer: (Smiles) Yes...I am.

Kavya wipes her tears, takes a deep breath and gathers all her courage to confess a secret she has been hiding from Veer all this time.

Kavya: Veer, there is something I want to tell you...

Veer: What?

Kavya: I always knew you were the Author Akshar Diwan. The publishing company of "An Author's Breath" has sold all its rights to a big film production company and I am writing the adapted screenplay of your book. They sent me here to get a closer look and perspective of your story. To get the soul of your story right. I came here for a research on you.

No words ...Veer just hears all that silently, like the rocks he was surrounded with and feels like yet again he is the one on the side where his heart has been cut into a million pieces. Suddenly, a heavy snowfall begins, which starts its natural process of freezing things around it. And it was doing a great job, apparently, as Veer's heart was about to get frozen after this, perhaps for the rest of his life.

Trust the Pull

Veer: So, all that happened between us in the past few days was a setup? The story about your life and moments between us?

Kavya: No Veer that was real...every bit of it ...

Veer: I feel like I am with a completely different person right now ...How will I ever know if the connection we had for the past few days was even real or was just a part of your setup? While having those conversations at that Café near Beas River, I was trying to comfort you and you must have thought what an easy fool I am ...

God... I am such a fool ... I let you into my world, pour my pain and feelings, while you were just making notes in your diary to make it into a scene in your film.

How will I ever know Kavya? What happened between us just a few minutes ago was real or it was just your master plan?

Kavya: (while sobbing) Veer ...

Veer: Hope you have got enough stuff for your research Kavya? All the best.

Kavya: Veer, please let me ...

Veer: It started snowing ...We may get stuck here ... We need to find a hotel to check in...

Veer grabs all the stuff lying here and there, gets everything in the bag the way it was before, as Kavya just stands there looking at him, completely speechless.

As they walked toward their car, Kavya kept stealing glances at Veer, who was focused straight ahead, avoiding eye contact. When they reached the car, Veer placed the bag in the back seat before opening the front door for Kavya, waiting for her to get in but still not looking at her. Kavya sat inside, and Veer settled into the driver's seat. He started the car and drove off without exchanging a word. The only sound filling the silence was the swish of the windshield wipers clearing the snow. Kavya kept looking at Veer, hoping he would meet her gaze, but he didn't. After driving for nearly forty minutes, they arrived at a safe hotel where they checked in for the night. Veer handed Kavya the room key and asked her to go to their room while he filled out the check-in form at the reception. As Kavya waited, she resolved to speak with him as soon as he arrived. When she reached the room, she sat down and waited, wiping away her tears. However, as time passed, she grew anxious. The door finally opened, but it was the waiter who walked in with Kavya's luggage. He greeted her, set down the bags, and left, closing the door behind him. Kavya continued to wait for Veer, but an hour

went by without any sign of him. Assuming he was angry and had booked another room, she decided to go to the reception to find out Veer's room number. When she inquired about him, the receptionist replied, "But ma'am, he made all the payments and left in his car. He also left this for you..." She handed Kavya Veer's Yashica-C camera, which contained some pictures Veer had taken of her during their road trip, along with a sketch he made of her the day they first met. Kavya looked at the sketch, which depicted her reading Akshar Diwan's book "An Author's Breath." In that moment, she realized that Veer was not returning and had left forever.



Epilogue

A Part of Life

After spending the night in thought, Kavya fell asleep in the chair by the window. When she woke up the next morning, the first thing she noticed was the frozen water droplets hanging at the top of the window from the snowfall. She went downstairs to ask the receptionist if the roads were clear for travel. The receptionist assured her, "There was heavy snowfall last night, but the main roads have been cleared this morning. You shouldn't have any problems taking the road." Feeling reassured, Kavya decided to check out of the hotel and asked for help with a bus to Delhi. The receptionist informed her that there were no direct buses, but she could take a bus to Manali, from where she could catch a bus to Delhi. Kavya nodded in agreement and returned to her room to complete the check-out process. After finishing, she got into a car, and the driver took her to the bus stop. While waiting at the bus stop with her luggage, the sun emerged and began melting the snow, which also lifted her spirits. An hour later, the bus arrived, and she boarded. The bus was nearly full, but she found an empty seat by the window in the second-to-last row.

Another woman sat down next to her. Shortly after the bus left, it became stuck in the mountains due to a landslide. Kavya, lost in her thoughts, had momentarily forgotten about the possibility of such an event after the snowfall. As the vehicles came to a standstill, passengers began exiting their cars and the bus in search of a way out. The Himachal Pradesh traffic department was informed, and they replied that help would arrive in an hour to clear the road. Families with children, growing restless, started playing in the leftover snow, making snowballs and throwing them at each other. Chain smokers took this opportunity to finish their cigarettes, finding the cold to be a perfect excuse. Some resourceful individuals built a makeshift stove from leftover leaves and wooden pieces, igniting it to brew hot tea. Despite some snow lining the road, others found their shoes filled with snow as they stepped into it, intensifying their chill.

Kavya didn't feel like even getting out of the bus; she was all lost in her thoughts, sitting there alone in the bus while watching the valley on the side of the bus through her window. There was a pin-drop silence in the bus as Kavya was the only one who was sitting inside. Suddenly, for no reason, she felt like her heart was beating faster than usual. She starts hearing this hooting sound behind her by the people which was distant at first and then gets

louder as if something was approaching them. When Kavya turns around to find out the matter, she realizes that she was wrong; it was not something, it was someone approaching them. Who else would it be? All the cars and buses were behind each other, parked bumper to bumper, the way it happens here in India, as there is always this insecurity that the vehicle behind them may cross and leave them behind, so we leave only enough space to pass between the vehicles at the traffic blocks, so that only air can pass through and not the people. Anyway, when Kavya turns around to see what the chaos was all about, she first flinches on seeing what she was seeing...

Veer was jumping and running on the roofs of the cars and the buses to reach Kavya's bus. It was simply amazing how Veer didn't care about falling off the roof and getting himself hurt, considering there was snow on the roofs of all the vehicles, the chances of Veer slipping and falling off the rooftop of the buses straight into the steep valley by the side were like a hundred percent. But Veer didn't care about that even a bit. As Veer comes to the last bus behind Kavya's, he takes a giant leap onto her bus. Kavya gets off her seat and starts running towards the door of the bus with a huge smile on her face. It was simply beautiful, the way they were meeting. Kavya was running in the aisle, following the sound of Veer's footsteps on

Trust the Pull

the roof, running towards the entry door of the bus, desperate to meet each other. As Veer drops down to the door of the bus, his leg slips a little bit and he loses his balance when Kavya's hand comes out of the door to hold Veer's hand and pulls him inside the bus. They keep eye contact with each other without even blinking a wink while they both climb the door steps to reach the aisle of the bus. Kavya's tears find their way to fall off her big eyes as Veer holds her face and kisses her with all the affection and love. Then they hug each other like nobody in this world would have...

As they both were about to get over the moment slowly, the loud horns of the vehicles woke up Kavya from her sleep and she realized that it was indeed a dream.

The traffic gets clear and the bus starts moving again with all the people onboard as before. A few hours later, the bus reached its destination, Manali, two hours late from its usual time. Kavya gets off the bus with her luggage and straight away goes to Veer's newly renovated house in Manali to meet him. When Kavya reaches Veer's house, he sees Daksh (Veer's friend) standing in the garden talking to some people about the finishing touches of the house. Kavya approaches him and Daksh too recognizes her instantly.

Kavya: Daksh...is Veer here?

Trust the Pull

Daksh: No, he went to Chandra taal lake a few days ago, even I have been trying to connect with him for a few days but couldn't get through... what happened?

Kavya: Nothing ... Daksh, this is my card and it has a landline number on it, please call me as soon as you hear from Veer or meet him ...

Daksh: Certainly, I will call you as soon as I connect with him.

Kavya: Thanks.

Kavya says this and turns around to walk away. While going out of the house, she sees a post box hanging on a tree near the main door, which was an important part of Veer and Purva's love story. She pulls out a page from her diary in the bag, sits on the bench near the post box and starts writing a letter to Veer.

Veer,

I know how betrayed you feel right now, feeling used and I know what that feels like because I have been in your place before and felt the exact same way. Veer, me meeting you was planned but the moments I spent with you in the last few days, the stories we shared and personal space that we let each other into was neither planned nor expected ...I wanted to tell

Trust the Pull

you this the first day we met but something held me back, you brought the real long-lost Kavya back to me ...With you, I experienced the uncertainties of life, the unseen aspects which I didn't know existed somewhere, the hope you drove me to and the life you reintroduced me to are real gems of my life now. But this is all going to remain incomplete without you. You have carried the pain of love and unacceptability in your heart for years and now I am standing at the same spot you were in. I want you to know that I am not going to take up this project and offer your soul to the world for their entertainment. I promise you...I want to meet you just this one time and then whatever you decide, I will accept that as "The inscriptions of fate."

I want you to know this, Veer, that I love you to the moon and back ...The height of the mountains and the depth of the rivers that we experienced in the last few days is the epitome of my love for you ...Whenever you find some heart to forgive me ...I know, we will meet again...

I will wait for that day.

- Kavya

Trust the Pull

Kavya folds the paper properly and drops it in the red post box. Then she turns around to see the house one last time and then walks away.

*Three years later
Manhattan, New York
Year 1993*

Kavya kept in touch with Daksh but even after three years, Veer had not come back to Manali or contacted Kavya or Daksh all these years. But Daksh maintained Veer's property in Manali and kept it in a good condition, the way he left it. Why Veer disappeared suddenly and why didn't he contact Daksh or come back to Manali were some of the questions that had no answers.

Kavya was now doing her screenplay writing course in Manhattan and there was one specific reason why she chose this course: Daksh told her that Veer came back to Manali from Brooklyn three years ago to sell his ancestral house; maybe he has gone back to Brooklyn again. But where he was in Brooklyn was something, Daksh had no idea about. Kavya has been looking for Veer in Brooklyn for three years; she looked for him everywhere, just following an unknown shadow and having no idea whether it even existed or not. The letter that she left in the post box at Veer's Manali house three years ago was still lying there in

the box, untouched. Nobody had any clue where Veer was...Kavya started feeling like her story with Veer was just a mirage which she thought existed but in reality, it was just an illusion. Kavya's course at the screenplay academy came to an end, and she completed her degree with flying colors and topped the batch. She informed the apartment owner a month ago when she was about to complete her degree at the academy, and that she would be leaving and going back to India. So, now she still had a couple of days in her hand. She packs her bags and things in the apartment late in the evening, gives away the things she won't be able to carry along with her and then, with her few boxes and bags in the empty hall right in the center, with her hands locked around her knees tightly. A few memories of three years and a few days that also had Veer in it kept flashing in front of her eyes. A few tears too in her eyes paid a visit and that's when she decides that enough is enough and wipes her tears off.

The next evening, she goes to her Café where she has been working all this time. It was her last day at work and she noticed a man with his back towards Kavya sitting at a table looking outside. Kavya looks at him a couple of times and gets back to her work of making a list of things that are required at the Café. Then, a few seconds later, she again glances at him and

sees him sitting there all alone, nobody by his side, just lost in his thoughts. This time, Kavya decides to go to him, thinking that maybe he is waiting to place an order. Kavya walks up to the table and says ...

Kavya: Excuse me ...

The man looks at Kavya with his big eyes and a smile on his face. He had a salt-and-pepper look and his face was glowing. Undoubtedly, she had never seen such a nice, positive-looking face before this in her life. The man smiles a little more and says...

Man: Well, good evening...

Kavya: Good evening...would you like to place an order?

Man: Oh yes, I was waiting to ...

Kavya: Actually, you have to place an order there at the counter ...

Man: Oh ... I am sorry, I had no idea this is a self-service Café ... just like our life, isn't it? Got to help yourself ...

Kavya: Yaa ... it's ok, you can place your order with me, I will get it for you.

Trust the Pull

Man: Wow, that's so nice of you...But it's ok, let's not mend the rules of life just for one person ... process is the same for all, right?

Kavya finds some weirdness in his talk but he insists that he will place the order on the counter only, so she doesn't argue with him any further and goes back to the counter. The man walks up to the counter and says ...

Man: I would like to have a black coffee and some sugared almond milk on the side of it please ...

Kavya: You don't want them mixed?

Man: No ... separately.

Kavya: Oh, okay... quite an unusual combination ... you would like to drink them separately?

Man: Yes ... I don't like the bitterness of the black coffee, so I sip it once and then I have the sugared almond milk.

Kavya: Then why are you having the black coffee? Just have the sugared almond milk.

Man: Oh no, since we are doing it like life, we got to taste both sides of it ... bitter and sweet.

Trust the Pull

Kavya: Whatever you like ...

Man: Make it a takeaway please ...

Kavya: Sure

The man pays her cash and she gives him back his change.

Kavya: Ok ... your order will be ready in 5 minutes ...

Man: That's ok ... I have time ... In fact, I wouldn't worry about it; I control it.

Kavya: You control time?

Man: I mean, time management is pretty much like controlling time ... I will lay down an example for you since we have some time here until the order gets ready ... My wife was in the hospital, a few years ago and was about to die... she had only two days to live ... Our wedding anniversary was on the second day but we had no idea if she would make it to that day or not...

Suddenly, Kavya develops an interest in his story as she keeps the list she had in her hand down on the desk and asks him curiously.

Kavya: Then what did you do?

Trust the Pull

Man: (Smiles and says) I just skipped a day ... and celebrated our wedding anniversary a day before ... I convinced everyone at the hospital to act as if its 29th February, the leap year ... she was a tough woman to convince, I even had to change the calendar to convince her that it's the actual day of our wedding anniversary which came once in the four years. But once she was convinced, we had the best wedding anniversary celebrations we ever had in our lives in that hospital ...it was intimate with just the two of us and a little hospital staff and the doctor. That day was my sugared almond milk... and a day later she left the world which was my bitter black coffee... You got to balance the life out you know...Convincing and making it happen are your own asset and power...You need to decide what will it be and the things follow... you got to convince yourself first and then expect others to adhere to it ...there will be obstructions for sure...but then ...

Ohh...the order is ready ...

Kavya breaks out of the theory he was expressing and hands him the two takeaway cups of black coffee and sugared almond milk. He takes it from her and smiles.

Man: You made my day...Thank you so much.

Trust the Pull

The man turns around and just walks out of the Café door. As he leaves, Kavya realizes that he left his carry bag which looked like a gift bag, on the counter. She picks it up and runs towards the Café door to hand it over to him but as she comes running out onto the street, she finds that the man is nowhere. She looked on both sides of the street but it felt like the man just disappeared into thin air in a fraction of a second... how is that even possible? The street was long, broad and considerably empty ... there were not many people on the street and you could clearly see people for a range of a hundred meters at least. The man just vanished and Kavya had no idea. She then opens the bag to see if she can get a clue to find the man and return his bag. As she opens the bag, she sees a book inside, and when she pulls out the book, she gets stunned and literally shocked. Yes, the book that she was holding in her hand was "The Author's Breath" by Veer, aka pen name "Akshar Diwan." This was her last day at work and second last day in the city and this happens ... Who was that stranger and how come he landed here at the same Café as Kavya and that too with a book which had a story and connection with Kavya ... What do we call it? "Inscriptions of fate" perhaps.

As she looks at the book and runs her fingers over the cover, Kavya's face gets filled with all the memories of Veer and yet again, the tears

couldn't wait to fill her eyes. As she wipes her tears and turns the book to its back cover, she sees a stamp of a book Café in Coorg, India. She gets the point that this book was bought or issued by a book Café in Coorg but doesn't establish the point that Veer is there. The book is an international bestseller; anybody can buy a book from anywhere ... be it some place in India or any street here in New York. But the question that bothered Kavya the whole evening and later that night was, why now? Why this turn of events?

Kavya had a flight late at night the next evening. She reached the airport on time, leaving Brooklyn/Manhattan/New York, probably for never returning again. After checking in her luggage and security clearance, she buys herself a black coffee from a shop there at the airport and walks towards her boarding gate with a million thoughts and doubts in her mind. She waits near her gate for the boarding while a quick, unbidden flashback runs in her mind constantly. She was trying to make a decision whether she should go to Coorg just to make sure or if she was just overthinking. It could just be a mere coincidence that the book came to her yesterday; that doesn't indicate anything. As she looks around for some break from her thoughts, bang ... another indication pops out in front of her ...

Trust the Pull

A wooden easel with a canvas on it advertising for “Crossroads Tours and Travels” with a caption under it ...

“Don’t ask why ... Just trust the pull ...”

Kavya looks at it and thinks, “God ...I cannot even catch a break from my messed-up love story”.

The flight boarding is announced, Kavya opens the first page of her passport and checks the seat number on the boarding pass once again which was tucked inside the passport, then picks up her purse and walks towards the gate. The flight takes off right on time, all the passengers peacefully go to their sleep after forty minutes of take-off, while only one passenger stays awake with her eyes wide open, with lots of questions in them ... That’s right ... It’s Kavya ... By the time she falls asleep, the flight gets ready and the captain announces landing. The air hostess wakes her up, asks her to get her seat to the original position and open her window, as Kavya was sitting next to it which is a standard procedure when a flight is about to land.

The flight finally lands at the Delhi International Airport and all the passengers alight the aircraft. Kavya is still in a dilemma as she picks up her suitcase off the conveyer belt.

Trust the Pull

She is rolling her suitcase and walking towards the exit. Then, suddenly, when she is about to just step out of the airport through the exit gate, she stops.

*Year 1993
Delhi Domestic Airport*

The next thing Kavya knows is that she is walking towards the boarding gate at the Delhi domestic airport to catch her flight to Mysore airport, which is the closest airport to Coorg.

As the flight lands at the Mysore airport and Kavya comes out looking for a taxi to take her to Coorg, Bang! She again comes across another indication ... A Maroon colored Ambassador Taxi comes and stops right in front of her which was also the color of Veer's Ambassador car. The indications that she was getting for two days somehow cemented her belief that she is on the right track but there were still some uncertainties in her mind which would rest in peace only after she reaches Coorg and concludes this whole demeaning shenanigans of her destiny.

The taxi driver blabbers something in Kannada. Kavya frowns first but then she finds a familiar word in it which is Coorg. So, she asks him to put the luggage in the trunk and doesn't even negotiate the money. Leave alone the

negotiation, she doesn't even ask him how much he will charge. They both just agreed on going to Coorg and the money was not even mentioned. The luggage, Kavya and the driver all of them drive away to reach Coorg as soon as possible.

The driver, while going through the city and villages, explained everything around them. The history and the beauty of this side of the country. The driver developed a very good camaraderie on the way with Kavya, apparently only from his side because Kavya was busy thinking about what she would say to Veer if he were actually there. The driver became very fond of Kavya, he stopped the car on the roadside after an hour and a half for some refreshments and out of his money, bought Kavya coconut water to drink. Thankfully, with only one straw and not sharing it with her. After the refreshment break, they get on the road to Coorg again. The driver asks her where in Coorg she wants him to drop her. Kavya shows the address on Veer's book which had the stamp of the book café. The stamp also had an address on it which the driver read and got all ruffled, murmuring something in Kannada language which Kavya interpreted as a place far away from his expected route. Of course, it has to be a place far away from the normal civilization, as it's Veer who is trying to hide away from her and the world which he is very good at, so the

driver's concern felt pretty justified to Kavya. After watching the tall coconut trees and the fields of banana trees passing by for another hour, they reach Madikeri in Coorg. As the car stops, Kavya opens the door of her car and asks the driver before getting down ...

Kavya: This is the place?

The driver speaks in English this time in his broken South-Indian accent while scratching his beard.

Driver: No Amma, this is a tea break ... six and a half hours from here, we reach Honnavar and from there you take a boat and you reach Basavaraj Durga Island after 30 minutes. Thattt is your destination. More money also you pay me...

Kavya: Huh, first thing ... you knew English? Then why didn't you speak before? And second thing ... what? 7 more hours to reach?

Driver: Yes Amma and more money also ...

Kavya: Yaa, I heard that already ... this means we will reach late at night?

Driver: Yes Amma ...

Kavya: (to herself) This bastard Veer is punishing me like hell ... I hate him ... (to the

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Driver) It's not safe to go now, no Anna? (starts catching his south-Indian accent) What can we do Anna?

Driver: Amma, you stay here at hotel tonight and then early in the morning we go ... But extra night stay-charge Amma ...

Kavya: Yaa, fine, I will pay all the charges ... get me a hotel here.

Driver: Ok, I will go and book hotel there ... you want coconut water?

Kavya: Ahh no thank you ... enough of the coconut water.

The driver gets out of the car, who already knew that Kavya was going to make a decision to stay here only tonight, so he parked the car exactly near the hotel which pays commission to the driver for bringing customers to their hotel. After a few minutes, the driver comes back with a bright, shining white smile on his dark complexion which flashed from a distance.

Driver: Come Amma ...

Kavya had developed a strange kind of trust with the driver, he said you are going to stay in this hotel and Kavya had not said a word, just followed him to the hotel. But really, it was

commendable how brave Kavya was to travel all alone, trusting strangers and facing all the obstructions just to see Veer and there was no certainty whether Veer was at the location or not ... She was just taking a chance over her hunch and some random indications she witnessed which had no guarantee that she was doing the right thing or not. So, Kavya just checks into the hotel, goes to her room which was a basic one with minimal amenities. She just had to spend the night and then leave early in the morning, so she didn't care much about it. Kavya has been travelling for more than twenty hours non-stop now since she started from New York airport and again she has to travel for seven more hours the next day. She decides to take a nice hot shower before she orders food and calls it a night. So, she switches on the geyser and goes inside the bathroom, rotates the hot shower valve but there is no water. She looks closely at the shower and realizes that the pores of the shower were blocked and water couldn't pass through them. She gets irritated a bit but then calms herself down. What choice did she have? She then pulls the lever to run the hot water tape in a small bucket and this one works perfectly. She also mixes the cold water to balance the temperature out and then she enjoys pouring the water on her body while sitting on a small stool kept there. She comes out of the bathroom in her robe, just the robe that she brought along

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with her. She orders rasam-rice, eats her dinner and then crashes like a piece of wood on her bed till the morning.

At 5 in the morning, the driver knocks on the door.

Driver: Amma ... get up ... we have to go ...

Kavya wakes up half asleep and replies.

Kavya: Yaa coming in 15 mins Anna ...

Driver: Ok Amma ...

Kavya somehow assembles herself back and literally pushes herself out of the bed. She freshens up and gets ready in her red top, blue jeans and a jacket over it. Well, considering the nineties era, Kavya was quite the bold one when it came to dressing. She ties her hair with her scarf and leaves the room. After completing the check-out formalities, Kavya gets back on the road to see Veer. When a girl fights for her man, it brings another level of adorability effect on the men they are fighting for. Try that for a man and you will see how he surrenders to you for the rest of his life. Loyalty will run in his veins along with the blood and he will be ready to fight the greatest battles for you. That's the magic that happens when a girl makes a man feel special and her own.

So, Kavya, after completing her check-out formalities, gets back on the road to Honnavar. Approximately six and a half hours later, driving nonstop this time, Kavya reaches the backwaters of Honnavar. The driver talks to the motorboat rider and gets her on the boat to Basavaraj Durga island which was about 30 minutes from Honnavar through the lake.

Kavya pays the driver his amount and of course, the extra charge as well, as per the deal. The driver smiles and loads her luggage on the boat and sees her off with his happy face and sparkling white teeth which were flashing as bright as his car's headlight even in the daytime. Kavya sits on the edge of the boat in the front, just in case she has to jump off the boat, scream out loud for help because there was only one boat in that lake at that time and there was one man who looked scary with his big moustache and beard wearing a kurta and an angavastra along with a veshti under it which he had pulled up far away from his knees and very close to his hairy inner thighs. And if this was not enough, he was sitting at the backend near the motor, maneuvering it while his knees were pointing towards the front, where Kavya was sitting. Anyway, as they moved forward, Kavya experienced the beauty of the backwaters of Hannover. The Sun had settled down a little bit and the golden rays were falling on the lake which looked beautiful

and it was surrounded by the tall, thick and lush green trees. It was completely picturesque but Kavya had something else going on in her mind at the time. She was nervous, what if she doesn't find Veer after all these efforts and what if she is not able to face herself after this, when she had lost all self-respect for herself when there is nobody and only her and the motorboat man? She might lose it and cry in the arms of the motorboat man in that weak moment ...

There were many questions and the answers were there on the island she was going to. After thirty minutes, she reaches the island shore and gets down to find the book café with the address on the back of the book. She asks a few local people carrying all her big bags on her own, trying to reach the book café. Some people guide her and tell her that she has to cross this big wooden bridge which goes through the thick mangroves, to reach the other side where that book café is. Kavya takes a deep breath and keeps walking along with her heavy luggage, somehow dragging it over that wooden bridge to reach the other side of the mangroves. There was a pin drop silence on the bridge except for the dragging sound of her bags but as she stopped for a few seconds to catch her breath, she could even hear the sound of her breath and the beats of her heart. She looks around and then keeps walking over the bridge. As she crosses the bridge, she sees a narrow road on

the right with handmade, beautiful cement tiles with golden and brown square and star designs on it. The lane was surrounded by beautiful plants with colorful flowers on it. It was very soothing to the eyes and walking on it alone felt very peaceful to Kavya. As she walks over that lane, the lane takes her around which leads her to the book café which creates more suspense for her as slowly the sight of the book café gets clear. She gets completely stunned at first when she sees the small but beautiful bookstore which was like a hut under a big tree and all the branches were lying over the hut-shaped roof of the bookstore. The roof was filled with the light yellow-red flowers and some golden leaves that fell from the tree and were lying peacefully on the roof of the hut. The entrance had a glass door and the big French windows on its left and right, through which she could see all the books in the shelves inside. There were some warm hanging bulbs attached to a brown rope which gave just enough light and kept the ambience a bit dim, creating a perfect ambience for the bookstore. The name of the Café “Book-Café” was encrypted nicely above the entrance of the bookstore on a hanging wooden plank with chains on either side. There was a porch in front of the bookstore which had around ten to twelve tables with four chairs for each table. All the tables were occupied with readers and tourists who were reading books while having their coffee and tea, along with

some snacks by the side of it. There was also a small blackboard kept on the floor, supported by a wooden plank in its spine near the entrance of the bookstore, with "Today's special" written on it using some colorful chalks and creativity.

Kavya walks to the reception desk of the bookstore and asks the young boy sitting there about the book she was holding in her hands ... The young boy confirms that the book was purchased from this bookstore by recognizing the store stamp on it. Kavya then asks him if he has ever seen the Author of this book, "Akshar Diwan" here? The young man asks her name and she replies ...

Kavya ...

And then shocks Kavya by saying ...

You mean Veer sir?

Kavya looks at him, surprised, and on seeing her, all surprised, the man says...

Veer sir had instructed me that a girl named Kavya would come looking for him one day ...

Kavya's face gets filled with a wide smile and she asks him in her cluttered and choked voice...

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So, you know where I can find him?

The young man smiles back and says ... Yes

Kavya asks him in a curious and restless tone,

Where?

The young man says ...

Here ... Veer sir owns this Café. There he is ...

On hearing this, Kavya turns around and her eyes start looking for Veer. At that very moment, it felt like everything had gone silent and the world had stopped existing completely. There were people around her but she could barely see or hear them. The few seconds before she could see him felt like a period more than the three years that they hadn't seen each other.

A few seconds later, Kavya's eyes sees Veer with a tray in his hand walking through the aisle to serve the coffee and sandwiches on a table. He was dressed in a white shirt with the top two buttons open and sleeves folded till his elbows. Under that, he was wearing a blue jeans and white shoes that were up to his ankles. The mild wind made his hair fly a bit and there was a smile on his face as he reached the table to serve their order. He smiles, they thank him

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and he starts walking back to the kitchen to get the other order ready. As he takes a few steps, he suddenly stops, realizing something. He turns around slowly to see Kavya standing, looking right at him. They both take a few seconds and keep staring at each other, not realizing that the tears have filled their eyes slowly. For three long years, they had not seen each other and now, no matter how much they kept looking at each other, it was not quite enough and couldn't make up for the three years that had passed between them.

They both walk towards each other and stop right in the center of the aisle amidst the tables, looking at each other but this time even more closely.

Kavya: A thing that didn't even happen, you punished me for that? I was honest with you ... I even dropped a letter in the post box in Manali... but I guess you never read it ...

Veer: I did ... And then kept it back in the post box.

Kavya: Ohh ... then I guess you never really bothered about it ... Did I commit a crime that big that you cannot find some heart to forgive me?

Veer takes a deep breath while looking at the waves trying to reach the shore ...

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Veer: Kavya, do you know ... a Bamboo tree blossoms only once in its lifetime ... Only once in 50 years of its lifetime. And the day it has flowers, it dies ... its life ends.

Yes, initially I was mad at you because I felt like I shared the deepest feelings and pains with someone whom I felt like my own and then there was this huge distance that got suddenly raised between us ... It messed me up ...

I fell in love with you, I am still madly in love with you Kavya ... You have no idea how much I want you, how much you mean to me ... And that evening, I came back to the hotel, stood outside your room, wanted to come in...but then something stopped me ...

I fell in love this one time and carried the pain of that for half of my life ... Yet again, I was falling for someone ... Perhaps more deeply than ever before ... I knew I was in love with you but I didn't know if that was just a weak moment for you ... I wanted to be sure that you felt the same way, So, I turned around and left.

Actually, if I think about it, I never left you. I was always around you Kavya ... In Brooklyn, when you used to sit in that café making your notes under the Brooklyn Bridge, around that "Tales Café" where you used to work in the evening ... While attending your screenplay academy classes in Manhattan ... During that Broadway

show "Crazy for you" in that Broadway theatre ... I was sitting right there two rows behind you.

Kavya: Why didn't you come to me then?

Veer: Well, you wanted my story, now you have a story of your own ... An original, soulful and a legendary one for sure ... I knew that if you love me too, then you will find me no matter what ...

You will climb the mountains and cross the rivers for me ... And you did ... Who loves someone that much? You came here all the way for me and trust me Kavya, I am the luckiest man on this planet. Thank you for loving me like that.

Kavya keeps looking at him without blinking, with her teary eyes and then gets overwhelmed and cries like a baby in his arms. She never showed her emotions like that to anyone in her life until now but this time she could stop them, she was a couple of feet shorter than Veer and reached only till his chest but that was the best thing, because she kept her head on his chest where his heart was, closed her eyes, listened to his heartbeats, gave herself a much-needed rest and peace of mind.

The Sun was setting down in the background in the Turquoise colored Arabian Sea, the birds were getting back to their nests, the waves were trying to reach the shore as always, trying again

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and one more time after that and then again, the sky was getting all Golden-Orange in color but unaffected of everything around them, Veer and Kavya kept hugging, not letting go of each other. Kavya suddenly remembers something and asks him.

Kavya: Did you send that man on my last day at the Café in Manhattan?

Veer: Which man?

Kavya: The man who left your book “An Author’s Breath” at the Café, which led me to you ...

Veer: Ahh ... No ... I have no idea what you are talking about ...

Kavya looks at him, surprised, and then wonders who that man was. And what timing he had ... Then, Kavya just settles down with the thought that sometimes, you just have to...

“Trust the Pull”.



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Veer: Hey ... I have some news about the Manali house ...

Kavya: You have converted the house into a Café...haven't you?

Veer: How do you know?

Kavya: I know you ... That's how ...

They both smile and then Veer-Kavya, walk along the beach as the stars were about to rise and the Sun was about to set.

Kavya was resting her head on his chest and Veer was holding her close with his arm.



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*Thank you so much for taking the time out
of your lives to read my book. It really
means a lot to me.*

See you until next time.

