

SHE WAS A POEM HE NEVER TRIED TO READ

HER *Battle* TO BE *Loved*

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Stories Matter

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Dedication

To those who see love as clingy,
and to those who believe it ends—
love is not a death sentence.

It is a river—
sometimes held back by stones,
sometimes still in quiet pools,
but always ready to flow again
when the path is clear.

Acknowledgement

Writing *HER Battle to Be Loved* has been a deeply emotional and meaningful journey. As my very first book, it holds a special place in my heart. This semi-fictional story touches on themes that many—especially teenagers—may relate to or have experienced in some form. I hope that each reader finds comfort, reflection, and connection within these pages.

To my beloved partner, thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your endless support, patience, and encouragement have been the backbone of this journey. You stood by me through every moment, and I couldn't have done this without you.

This book is also a heartfelt surprise for my friends and family, whose presence in my life has always been a gift. Your love and encouragement have inspired me to believe in myself and to keep going.

I truly believe that unfinished love stories are not endings—they are beginnings of something more profound. Love doesn't die; it lives in memories, in silence, in the spaces between moments. Incomplete stories are often the most beautiful, because they leave room for dreams, for imagination, for hope. We are all living through phases of love—whether silent or spoken—until our very last breath.

To everyone who reads this book: thank you. I hope
HER Battle to Be Loved leaves a lasting impression on
your heart.

With love and gratitude

Foreword

Love is one of the most powerful and complicated emotions we experience. It can heal, it can hurt, and sometimes, it can leave us with questions that never find answers. *HER Battle to Be Loved* is a touching portrayal of that journey—the internal war between hope and heartbreak, between self-worth and longing.

This story may be semi-fictional, but the emotions are real. They echo the experiences of many, especially young people who are navigating the early, intense, and often confusing phases of love. It reminds us that not all love stories end with closure, and that's okay. Some of the most beautiful tales are the ones that remain unfinished—open for us to interpret, imagine, and carry forward in our own hearts.

What makes this book special is its honesty. It doesn't try to fit love into a perfect frame. Instead, it embraces the messiness, the vulnerability, and the courage it takes to keep loving—even when you're unsure if it's returned.

To all readers: this book is for you. For anyone who has ever questioned if they were enough, if their feelings mattered, or if love would ever feel safe again—may you find comfort in these pages. And may you always remember: love doesn't truly end. It stays with us, quietly shaping who we are.

Preface

HER Battle to Be Loved is more than just a story—it's a voice for every silent heart, a reflection of emotions many of us are too afraid to express, and a tribute to the strength it takes to love in a world that doesn't always love you back.

This book was born from a blend of truth and imagination, shaped by real emotions and fictional moments. Though the story is semi-fictional, it holds pieces of reality that I believe many teenagers—and even adults—can relate to. It speaks of love, heartbreak, loneliness, hope, and most of all, the battle within ourselves to feel worthy of being loved.

Love, as portrayed in this book, isn't always perfect or complete. Sometimes it ends without closure, sometimes it lingers in silence, and sometimes it transforms into something unspoken yet eternal. I truly believe that unfinished love stories don't mean the end—because love never really ends. There's no death to love; it evolves, stays hidden in memories, or lives on in the corners of our hearts until our last breath.

I poured my heart into every page of this book, hoping it reaches those who need to hear it most. Whether you've experienced something similar or you're simply here to read a good story—I thank you. This journey is yours now.

CHAPTER-1



"It was a cloudy morning, with rain on the verge of falling. A gentle breeze rustled the leaves, and the sun was just beginning to peek through. Yet all I wanted was to stay cozy in bed. "Lying in bed, I started to think—it didn't feel like just another day. It was my first day of college. I wasn't sure if this was something I had dreamed of, but I knew how hard I had fought, how many nights I had struggled, just to reach this moment. "I was never considered particularly intelligent in school, but as I grew

up and witnessed the struggles my parents went through just to raise me and provide a good education, something changed in me. I thought to myself—yes, I have to do this. They endured so much from a young age: being raised by relatives, the absence of parental care, and the loss of their own dreams. Now, they see those dreams alive again—through me."

I scored distinction marks in high school—something I'm still proud of. But I'll never forget that day. My father was with me, not because he wanted to be, but because he had lost his job. He stayed and worked nearby to support us. My mother also took up a job. I was left all alone. It was one of the scariest, most breathless days of my life. I couldn't feel hunger or thirst—just the loud thumping of my heart. Time felt like it was ticking louder than ever. The world around me was silent, but inside, I was filled with noise and fear.

"I was too afraid to even pick up my phone and check the messages. I knew everyone was waiting eagerly to hear about my results. My parents had taken a big step—they wanted me to study in a good school, even though the fees were high. Still, they managed it, sacrificing quietly so I could have better opportunities. People around us talked. They said, 'Why not put her in a government school? It's free.' They didn't understand. Not many supported the decision—but my parents did it anyway, just for me."

"The results were to be published at 2 PM. While waiting, I called my mom—she's always been the most concerned about my studies. She works as an accountant in a good company, one that treats her like family. Everyone there was just as excited as we were. I kept praying, whispering every chant I knew, trying to calm my racing heart.

Finally, when the clock struck 2, everything around me faded. I couldn't hear, couldn't see clearly—I felt completely weak. Then my mom called. With all the strength I could gather, I picked up. But she was crying. She didn't say a word. That silence made my heart sink even deeper. My anxiety grew. And then, through her tears, she called out— 'Hila...'”

"'You did it, my little girl, you did it!' my mom cried. I was stunned—could this really be happening? This was the day I had dreamed of: the day I made my parents proud; the day they could hold their heads high. I had gotten distinction. Tears of joy streamed down my face. All I wanted was to see my mom and dad, to share this happiness with them. But I was still alone, and the weight of that loneliness overwhelmed me.

Then, within half an hour, my parents arrived—carrying chocolates and smiles. That moment was unforgettable. It felt like time stood still, freezing forever in my heart."

"I knew my parents gave me the best they could afford at that time. I never expected anything grand—just their

love was enough. I received countless calls congratulating me, sending their warmest wishes. And then, my one and only elder brother came over to pamper me, celebrating his little sister's success with joy and pride."

"Are you dead or what? It's your first day! And are you daydreaming again? Wake up, wake up! If you wanted me to drop you, you should've been ready on time!"

I woke up suddenly, realizing he was teasing me—he knew there would be many girls around on the first day, and he just wanted to show off a little. I smiled to myself quietly, then got up to freshen up.

Mom was busy making breakfast and packing lunch. I wore a beautiful pink gown and waved goodbye. When my brother came out, I wasn't sure if it was his first day or mine—he was so well-dressed, wearing sunglasses like a Bollywood actor! I even suspected he had borrowed my face cream and body spray.

Mom, look at us—leaving her sight as if we were fading into a world too big to hold us. We crashed into that beautiful weather, not with noise, but with the weight of growing up. He used to tell me all those typical things parents say before you leave for college—study well, be careful, don't trust easily. I'd just nod, give short answers, barely listening. But that day, something shifted. His words came back to me, clearer than ever. My ears caught everything—the sound of engines starting, horns blaring, footsteps rushing. People were in a hurry, everyone

moving like the world would leave them behind if they slowed down. Students clung to the steps of crowded buses, barely holding on, faces half-awake. The streets were alive with urgency, and for the first time, I didn't just pass through it. I saw it. I felt it. And I understood why his words mattered. Within five minutes, we would reach the college. Suddenly, an alarm seemed to go off in my mind. A wave of tension crept in—it was my first day. New college, new students, new teachers, new friends. My whole world was about to be filled with strangers. Who would become my friends? How would they treat me? I didn't know. But deep inside, I was craving a good circle—people I could laugh with, trust, and grow with. My school days weren't great; honestly, they were full of frustration and fake smiles. I just wanted a fresh start—something real this time. But honestly, I loved my high school days—they were some of the best moments of my life. I was surrounded by good friends and unforgettable memories that nourished me like sunshine. I'll never forget those days because every single one of them felt special. That was when I truly began to understand the value of friendship. I felt everything—love, laughter, anger, sadness—all those emotions blending together like the colours of a rainbow. Those days were magical, and the people who showed me what true friendship looks like will always hold a piece of my heart. We had dreams of moving into college together, continuing the journey side by side. But different dreams

and different marks split us up. My best friend—my soul sister—we’ve known each other since 8th grade, back when we were just classmates in the same tuition. We became close in high school, and by the time we graduated, we were inseparable. We had planned to study together, but fate had other plans. She got into engineering, and I went into medical. It made me a little sad, honestly. But we’re still close—she lives just ten minutes away by drive. I visit her almost every weekend, or sometimes she comes to my place. No matter what, we hold onto each other. That bond isn’t going anywhere.

At last, we reached the college gates. I waved him goodbye, but he was still hovering, almost like he was going to walk me all the way to my classroom—like I was still in kindergarten! Embarrassed, I rushed him to leave before anyone noticed.

CHAPTER-2

It was the first day, an introductory session, so all the students had gathered in the auditorium. We were grouped by department; each section marked clearly by boards displaying our course names. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry, running around, trying to find their assigned sections.

My dream had always been to become a paediatrician. But life had other plans—or maybe just different ones. My grades had landed me a seat in BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) instead. Still, it was okay, right? At least I made it into medical—it was a big step.

I found my section and took a seat next to a girl I didn't recognize. A complete stranger. I looked at her and gave a polite smile, hoping to break the ice. But she sat there stiffly, barely glancing at me, her face unreadable and full of attitude.

Well, if that's how she wanted to play it... I decided I could match that vibe too. No big deal. We both sat there, strangers with a hint of pride, pretending not to care. And so, my first day began—not with warm introductions, but with a quiet game of who-can-act-colder.



Just as I was settling into the awkward silence beside Miss Attitude, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. A warm hand reached out from the seat behind me, and I turned to see a girl with the brightest smile.

“Hi, I’m Juli,” she said cheerfully, her voice soft but confident.

Her hair was left open, silky and flowing, catching the light like strands of satin. She wore a soft, milky cream-colored Kurti that complemented her glowing skin perfectly. But what truly caught my attention were her eyes—deep, expressive, and lined with kajal that made

them look absolutely stunning. There was something mesmerizing about the way she looked at people—kind, yet captivating.

She had a medium build—neither too tall nor too short—but carried herself with a kind of grace that turned heads effortlessly. It was easy to see how boys would be drawn to her, and I'd be lying if I said it didn't spark a tiny twinge of insecurity in me.

For a moment, I just stared at her, slightly awestruck. Gorgeous was the only word that came to mind.

After meeting Juli, I felt a little more confident. That small gesture of kindness had warmed something in me. I turned my head and offered a smile to the people around me. Some responded with polite smiles, while others just sat stiffly, acting like I wasn't even there. Still, I didn't let it bother me—I was trying.

Soon, the prayer began, echoing through the auditorium, followed by the usual round of speeches. They were long and, honestly, a bit boring. Everyone seemed to be zoning out, but we sat through it like obedient first-years. Then, finally, something exciting happened—a cultural program by the seniors. It was surprisingly cool, full of energy, music, and dance. Their confidence and creativity were mesmerizing. For a while, we forgot we were the nervous newcomers and just enjoyed the show.

After the program, we were told to move to our classrooms. That's when a little panic hit me—who do I go with? Everyone seemed to have found someone or formed small groups already. I looked around, unsure, and then my eyes met Juli's. I hesitated. Something about her effortless beauty and the way people noticed her made me feel a bit out of place. Being around her was a little uncomfortable—but I still decided to walk with her.

As we walked, we talked about our old friends from school—those we left behind. The memories were bittersweet. It made me wonder: will I ever find that same kind of connection here? Or was that warmth something I'd have to let go of?

We reached the classroom just as our tutor entered. A fresh silence fell over us all, and just like that, the real college journey began.

Mr. Natraj is our tutor—a very friendly and calm person. He teaches us anatomy.

From the moment he walked in, there was a quiet warmth about him. He wasn't strict or intimidating like I had imagined a medical tutor might be. Instead, he spoke gently, with a kind tone that made us all feel at ease.

He introduced himself, gave a brief overview of what we'd be learning in anatomy, and encouraged us not to fear the subject. "Anatomy is the foundation," he said.

“It might seem overwhelming at first, but with patience and curiosity, it becomes fascinating.”

His words gave me a sense of relief. I had walked into college unsure, with a head full of doubts and a heart still holding on to old friends and dreams. But in that moment, hearing him speak so calmly, it felt like maybe this wouldn't be as hard as I thought. Maybe I'd be okay here.

In class, Mr. Natraj asked each of us to introduce ourselves. Many students were from different states, and it was interesting to hear all the different backgrounds and accents. After the introductions, he gave us a brief overview of the basics of anatomy—nothing too heavy, just enough to get us started.

Since it was the first day, classes were only scheduled until noon. I was glad to find myself sitting next to Juli again. It felt like I had at least one familiar face now. There were around 25 girls and 20 boys in our class, and though everyone still seemed like strangers, the atmosphere was slowly becoming more comfortable.

As the day came to an end, I noticed most of the students were hostilities. Juli, however, lived nearby like me. So, we walked to the bus stand together. Walking beside her, I couldn't help but notice everything about her—her sense of style, the way she carried herself, even the elegance in her simplicity. It was clear that she came from

a well-off family. Her beauty, her outfit, everything about her gave off an air of richness and confidence.

We were traveling to two different ends, so we waved and said, "See you tomorrow."

But during the journey, my mind drifted to him—the one who's now just a stranger.

CHAPTER-3

From school days, I never really felt love or deep attraction toward anyone. If I'm being honest, maybe back in kindergarten there was a boy... but I'm not sure if that was love.

I barely remember anything from that time—only his face and his name.

He switched schools. I moved to another place.

Still, I find myself checking for him on Instagram.

But who knows where he is now?

Once again, I find myself leaving...

Leaving from him.

From Izhan, the stranger.

I first noticed him in high school.

He wasn't in my class, but we shared the same subject, so we crossed paths often.

It was the second day of school when he caught my eye—not intentionally, not dramatically, just enough to leave a mark. He stood out without trying to. He was leaning against a pillar outside the corridor, surrounded by his usual group of friends. One hand was casually tucked into his pocket, the other adjusting his perfectly styled,

bullet-like hair. One leg was folded back against the pillar, the other straight, grounding him like he owned that corner of the world.



He was deep in conversation, laughing about something I couldn't hear. But it wasn't his words that got my attention—it was the way he carried himself. Effortless, confident, like the main character in a movie who doesn't know he's being watched.

That moment struck me.

And from then on, I couldn't help but notice him—again and again.

I don't know what to call this—infatuation, attraction, or just a simple crush. But one thing I'm sure of: it's not love. Not yet, at least.

Still, I kept noticing him. Every day.

It was like my eyes found him on their own.

I wanted to tell someone about it. It was building up inside me, like a secret waiting to be whispered. I thought of telling my best friend, Fara. But before I could, something unexpected happened.

One afternoon, I was out walking with another friend from our group—we're seven in total. We were just out for fun, chatting and enjoying ourselves. Suddenly, she spotted someone and called out. I turned to look.

It was Izhan.

My heart skipped. I didn't expect that.

What surprised me even more was how she knew him—how casually she spoke to him, like they were already familiar.

He stood there, talking, and for a moment, my mind was smiling with joy I couldn't show on my face. Then, with polite manners, he looked at me and asked, "What's your name?"

Just that.

A simple question.

But to me, it meant so much.

After he left, she told me they had studied together back in school. Then she added something that stuck in my head:

“He’s a suitor.”

That word hit differently. It left a strange, uneasy feeling inside me. A negative thought crept in, like a quiet shadow over the moment. But even with that, part of me brushed it away. Because deep inside, I knew—I was feeling something for him.

Later, with all the courage I could gather, I turned to her.

“I want to tell you something,” I said. “But I don’t know how you’ll take it... and honestly, I don’t even know what this feeling is.”

My school days were... tragic, in a quiet way.

Lonely, really. I didn’t have close friends—no one I could truly talk to, laugh with, or just be myself around.

Maybe that’s why I always got good grades.

There was nothing to distract me—no people, no moments, no memories worth lingering on.

Just books, silence, and the dull routine of getting through the day.

But now, things have changed.

I’ve found a group. Friends who feel like home.

And among them, my best friend—Fara.

We're in high school now, slowly stepping into adulthood, feeling the edges of freedom for the first time.

Laughing louder, staying a little longer, dreaming a little bigger.

Maybe that's why something in me feels different lately. Something unusual.

Something new.

And I'm telling you this now—dear Reema—because I feel like this is the right moment.

You've known him from school. You've seen that quiet version of him.

And even though I didn't have the courage to say this, but i need to say it now.

Because if I don't let someone know... this feeling might just burst inside me.

I had just finished telling Reema everything—how I noticed Izhan for the first time, how something in me stirred the moment I saw him leaning against that pillar, lost in conversation, confident without trying. I described the feeling—raw, new, and hard to name.

But the moment I finished, her face changed.

“Are you mad?” she said, almost instantly.

“He’s not the kind of guy you think he is. He’s had an affair before—and honestly, I think he might be in something even now. He’s probably already committed. He’s not a match for you. Just leave it.”

Her words hit like a slap I wasn’t expecting.

Sharp. Final.

It turned into a small quarrel. I tried to explain, but she wouldn’t hear it.

I finally gave up, my voice dropping to a whisper.

“It’s not like what you think. Maybe it’s just... attraction. Nothing serious.”

And with that, I let the topic go.

We walked into the classroom together, the silence between us louder than before. I felt heavy inside, disappointed—not just by her reaction, but by how quickly something special had turned complicated.

As I took my seat, I looked back—just once.

He was there.

Izhan. Still leaning against the wall in his usual posture, one hand in his pocket, that calm, collected look on his face.

But this time, he looked at me.

And he smiled.

It wasn’t much. Just a small, effortless smile.

I smiled back, gently nodding.

And for a brief moment, that was enough.

I was in a bad mood at that time.

I didn't expect that from her.

Yeah, I know what she said was probably good for me — maybe even true — but I wasn't in the mood to hear it, let alone accept it.

Time passed.

Teachers came in, taught their lessons.

I was only half there — physically in class, mentally somewhere else.

After two subjects, it was interval.

Now, I'm not a bookworm or anything.

So, the moment that bell rang, I was out — the first one to step out of class, like thunder breaking through the sky, the storm rolling in after a heavy rain.

CHAPTER-4

Suddenly, a loud clap of thunder roared through the sky, and heavy raindrops lashed against my face through the open bus window. It was nearly lunchtime, and I was starving. I was just about to reach home, and the thought of food quickened my steps.



As soon as the bus stopped, I rushed out and hurried toward my house — it's only a five-minute walk from the bus stop. The rain continued to pour, soaking the streets

and everything around me. As I got closer to home, a familiar and delicious aroma filled the air. Chicken! My heart leapt — it was something special today.

Excited, I pushed open the gate and called out for my mom as I entered the house. That moment of stepping inside always brought a unique comfort, but nothing mattered more than seeing my mother. No matter how tired or drenched I was, if I didn't see her first, a strange sadness would settle over me. But today, the smell of chicken, the warmth of home, and the hope of her presence made me truly happy.

While I was having lunch, enjoying every bite of the delicious chicken, Mom sat beside me and, as always, started a conversation.

"So, how was your first day at college?" she asked, her eyes filled with curiosity.

I smiled, chewing quickly so I could reply. "It was good. The campus is big and beautiful. Oh, and there's this girl, Julis—she looked stunning. She seems really rich too... stylish clothes, fancy gadgets. Everything about her just stood out."

Before I could say more, she gave me that look — the one that meant a lecture was coming.

And, like clockwork, she began her usual rhythm of scolding. "Why are you always looking at others' blessings? Look at what you have! Say thanks to God for

the things you're blessed with. There are so many people who don't even have what we do. And here you are, always greedy, always comparing. Bla bla bla..."

She went on, her voice rising and falling in that familiar tone. I knew she meant well, but at that moment, all I wanted was to finish my lunch in peace. Still, deep down, I understood her. Maybe I did need to be a little more grateful.

After lunch, I slipped into a much-needed nap — a ritual I never missed on my days off. Mom pampered me like she always did, fussing over whether I was warm enough and then lying down beside me. That quiet time, just the two of us resting together, felt like pure comfort.

Sometime later, I was jolted awake by the sound of my phone ringing — it was Farah. Her ringtone played loudly in the quiet room, and I groggily reached for my phone. She was calling with excitement, eager to hear all about my first day at college.

Farah had started her classes two months earlier, so she already knew what the college buzz was like. I told her everything — how the day went, about Julis with her elegance and fancy style, and even the performances the seniors had put on to welcome us. She listened with the same energy I'd expect from a sister.

In fact, that's exactly what she is to me. We're not related by blood, but being the only daughters in our families made us bond like real sisters. We share everything — our

happiness, our sadness, our anger. Her house is like my second home, and mine is just the same for her. That kind of connection is rare, and I treasure it deeply.

Dad called on video from abroad. I shared the entire story of his daughter's first day—it made him feel proud of his little girl. After a while, my brother joined the call too. He laid back for a bit, and we ended up talking for a long time. He's not just a brother to me; we're more like best friends.

To be honest, I really wish Farah and my brother would get into a relationship. That way, she'd become part of our family—she'd come home more often, you know? I have this feeling that he might actually be interested in her too. Every time she comes over, he acts all smart and puts on this cool attitude. I've noticed it more than once.

But what about Farah? I haven't asked her anything yet. Maybe something's on her mind too...

I always tease her about that childhood love story of hers—which, to be honest, was barely even a story. Still, it's fun to laugh about it together.

CHAPTER-5

Days passed as fast as a cheetah.

What started as a friendship between me and Juli soon grew into a full-blown gang—with a whole team of friends. We had our own little world, and yeah, we used to bunk classes every now and then.



You won't believe what happened the very first time we bunked a class. We were all chilling on the side of the auditorium, eating ice cream from the cafeteria, and I

thought it would be a great idea to take a selfie. I even posted it with the caption:

"Bunked classes are like..."

Feeling proud of our little rebellion, I casually checked who had viewed the story. Guess who the first viewer was?

My tutor.

I was like—what nonsense did I just do?!

But surprisingly, he didn't say a word about it. Not then, not later.

Just when I thought I had gotten away with it, I reached home and Mom goes,

"Where were you during your fourth period today?"

I froze.

My words got all jumbled, and I couldn't come up with a proper reply. That's when I found out the harsh truth—

Mom gets notifications when I skip a class.

Lesson learned... the hard way.

At first, I felt very tense and scared about bunking classes. But later, it just became a habit—a kind of weakness. We didn't just skip class; we also went out to eat. Do you know what happened when we went out for food that day?

After lunch, we cut class, and when I got home, she asked me, "Where were you during the afternoon period?" I wanted to tell her the truth, but she asked before I could say anything. The moment she asked, I knew I was in trouble. I told her we had gone near a hotel to eat.

Without saying a word, she went to the backyard, plucked a guava stem, and came back. I immediately started running and shouting, but she chased me and beat me a lot. I cried so much. Through my tears, I shouted, "You're the only one who has a problem with everything! You're raising me like a bird in a cage. Other kids' parents are so cool compared to you!" I cried with so much pain.

Growing up, my mom wasn't just a parent—she was my best friend. We had this bond that felt unbreakable, like two souls who could read each other's silence. Unlike most moms, she wasn't strict. She gave me space, trusted me, and let me make my own decisions. But there was one thing that always stood between us like an invisible wall—her constant worry about what others would think.

She would often say things like, "What if someone says something about you?" or "People are watching; they'll talk." And every time, I'd feel this mix of frustration and sadness rise inside me. I'd argue, "We're not living on their money, Mom. Why do you care so much about what they say?" But no matter how many times I said it,

her heart remained soft for the people who barely deserved her kindness.

What hurt me the most was seeing her get nothing in return—only judgment, backstabbing, and harsh words. Still, she'd treat them with love, offer help, forgive their mistakes, and smile through it all. I couldn't understand it. How can someone love those who hurt them so deeply? I used to think. I knew one thing for sure—I wasn't like her. I didn't have her patience. I wasn't a god to forgive everyone, especially those who dared to hurt her in front of me.

But despite these differences, I shared everything with her. From silly daily things to my deepest secrets, my mom was my diary with ears. Every thought, every feeling—she knew it all. Well... almost all.

When it came to crushes or love, I'd get nervous. I couldn't bring myself to say it directly. So instead, I'd drop hints. I'd say something like, "He's just a close friend. We talk a lot these days," and I'd keep mentioning him here and there. It didn't take her long to catch on. Moms always know, don't they? She'd smile in that knowing way, and I'd feel both exposed and relieved at the same time.

Even with all our fights, tears, and silent misunderstandings, there's no one else in the world who knows me like she does. And honestly, there's no one else I'd rather be so known by.

But there was one story I never shared with her—one name I never let slip, not even as a hint.

Izhan.

I don't know why, but something in me just couldn't bear to let her know about him.

Maybe because I knew I wasn't proud of how I felt. Maybe because I didn't want her to know that her daughter—who she trusted so much—was acting like a complete fool for someone who barely treated her like a human being.

He treated me like nothing. Like a stray dog following him around, begging for the smallest bit of attention.

I should've known better. I did know better. But I didn't stop myself. I kept going back, letting him make me feel small, worthless. And through it all, I never told her. Not a single hint. I didn't want her to see me that way.

And then, one day, it all came crashing down.

She caught me. Red-handed.

One message. One moment. That's all it took.

I saw her face when she read it. She didn't scream. She didn't raise her hand or her voice. She just looked at me. And that look—it broke something inside me. She was hurt. Disappointed. Maybe a little heartbroken.

She asked me, "Why didn't you tell me?"

And I had no answer. I couldn't speak. My lips trembled, my eyes burned, but I couldn't say a word.

Because how do you tell the person you admire most that you let yourself become someone, you're ashamed of?

She sat beside me. Didn't shout. Just held me. I cried like a little girl in her arms, because in that moment, that's exactly what I felt like—a little girl who had made a mess and didn't know how to fix it.

And she whispered, "Even when you hide things from me, I still know when you're hurting."

That's my mom.

Even in pain, she offers comfort. Even when I fail, she stands beside me. And that day, I realized no matter how much I try to handle things on my own, no matter how grown up I pretend to be—I still need her. I always will.

I checked his Instagram today—he looked so happy, laughing with his friends, sharing joyful pictures like nothing ever happened. Just living his life, untouched. Then, I opened WhatsApp... still blocked. No message, no sign, just silence.

I closed my eyes for a moment and told myself, Be positive. Move forward. This is not the end. I tried to believe it. I really did. He's just someone from the past now—a person who chose to walk away. Maybe there's someone better out there, someone who will truly value me.

But deep down, it's not even about wanting him back. It's not his life I'm craving—it's the attention, the feeling of being seen, of mattering to someone. That's what I'm missing. And that's what's keeping me stuck.

I feel like I'm caught in a loop I can't escape, like I'm constantly rewinding a painful scene. I don't know why this is happening to me, why I can't just let go. I'm trying, but the struggle is real. And all I can do is ask... God, why does it have to hurt like this?

CHAPTER-6

It was my day off, and like always, I went out with Farah. We usually celebrated our off days together—it was our little tradition. That day, we decided to go for a drive, just to clear our minds and have some fun.



As usual, when we're out, we playfully check out handsome boys—it's just a fun thing we do, nothing serious. Later, we stopped by the mall and spent a long time trying on different outfits, mostly just to take pictures and laugh at how we looked in each one.

Eventually, we picked out twinning dresses, one each for our mothers. It felt sweet doing something thoughtful like that.

Outside the mall, there was a small canal. We sat near it, enjoying ice cream and snapping photos. The moment felt peaceful, but my phone kept buzzing. It was my mom calling again. She's always like that—constantly asking “Where are you now?” or “When will you be back?” It doesn't give me much peace. Sometimes, even Farah gets a little irritated by it.

Later, we went to the beach and had a really good talk. Farah opened up about her class, her friends, and all the usual gossip. We shared laughs, talked about people from our past, and just let it all out. You know how those conversations go—light-hearted, sometimes a little deep, but always comforting.

While we were talking, a thought kept circling in my mind—I wanted to tell Farah about my brother. I don't know why, maybe part of me wondered if something could ever work between them. But then, reality hit. Farah is the only daughter in her family, and they're quite well-off, the kind of family that pays attention to status and appearances. We're just middle class. And let's be honest—most parents wouldn't want their daughter marrying into a family that's "less" than theirs, at least in their eyes.

So, I stayed quiet. Just listened, nodded, zoned out a little while she talked. I didn't want to ruin the moment or bring something up that might make things awkward.

Then, something caught my eye. A notification blinked on her phone—it was an Instagram message. For a second, the profile picture looked... familiar. Too familiar. My heart skipped, but I acted like I hadn't noticed. I didn't ask, didn't react. Just kept sitting there as if nothing had happened.

Now that I've seen that, something's clicking in my mind. I'm not sure yet, but I feel like I've connected a piece of a puzzle. Maybe it's not the right time to talk. Maybe I'll bring it up another day, when things feel clearer—when I feel ready.

CHAPTER-7

The day my mom saw those messages between Izhan and Farah is something that still haunts me. She read everything before I could explain a single thing, before I could even introduce him properly to her. And what she saw... wasn't what I ever wanted her to see. She saw heartbreak, betrayal, and me being torn apart by someone I genuinely cared about. You know what that handsome, mesmerising boy – the one who thought he was every girl's dream – said about me? He told Farah that everything I felt for him was just infatuation. He called it a disease – like my feelings were some kind of sickness that would disappear once another boy came into my life. As if I was just desperate, craving the attention of any guy. That broke something in me. I won't lie – it hurt deeply. But what hurt even more was that my mom saw all of this play out in screenshots, not from me. She saw my pain before she heard my side, before I could tell her that none of it was what she thinks. And now, I don't even know what to say to her – how do I explain that this wasn't just a silly crush, but a piece of my heart that someone carelessly shattered?

We didn't become friends intentionally – it just happened somehow, naturally. After classes, my group of friends and I would head to tuition together, and

honestly, that tuition was the only reason Farah and I even chose that school for higher secondary. It turned out to be a good decision. In our gang, it was me, Farah, and Manha who lived in the same city, so we would always take the same bus home. After getting off at our stop, we'd split into three different ways, each heading to our homes. At that time, I didn't have much experience travelling by bus, so they became my strength. We used to get home pretty late at night, and from the bus stop, my house was still more than a kilometer away. The road was dark and quiet – a little scary, honestly. I had to cross the road alone to get to my path, but I never had the courage. Every day, Farah and Manha would hold my hands and help me cross. After that, they'd head to their own ways, and we'd wave goodbye before parting. On some nights, when it was too dark or rainy, my mom would come to pick me up on her scooty. Those moments – the laughter, the quiet walks, the little gestures of care – they meant more to me than I ever said out loud.

Days passed like that, and slowly, Izhan and I became good friends. But because of my overacting and maybe a bit of obviousness, some people started to pick up on the chemistry I felt toward him. I knew he had that typical playboy attitude – I saw how he flirted with girls in school, how casually he moved through their lives. And yet, that was exactly what kept pulling me in, making me fall for him all over again. Sometimes I would wonder

about myself – what kind of girl am I, someone who falls so genuinely and honestly, yet ends up chasing someone so careless? In class, I usually sat near the window that faced the veranda. Izhan's class was scheduled after mine, and every day, without fail, he'd come late. I'd see him walking past the veranda with that usual attitude, like he owned the path he walked on. Sometimes, our eyes would meet – just for a second – and somehow, that tiny glance would be enough to make my entire day feel better.

some days, when Izhan wouldn't show up at the usual time, I'd turn into a total mess during the first interval – like a restless chicken running around to lay an egg. I'd wander near his class just to check if he was really absent or had taken the side path that didn't pass by our class. There was another route he could take directly to his room without anyone noticing, and I had to be sure. But honestly, Izhan rarely took leave – he was present almost every day, just enough to make me blush like a rose with his passing glances, subtle smiles, and quiet presence. Through these silent exchanges – the looks we shared, the little smiles, my hidden affection – we built something unspoken. And while I kept my feelings to myself, my gang had already caught on. They started teasing me, sometimes dramatically, and we'd all burst into laughter. Even though it was embarrassing, those moments became memories I cherished – light, silly, and beautiful.

It was during Ramadan, and since we were fasting, our routine changed in small but meaningful ways. Me, Farah, Manha, and Reema would always find a quiet corner on the veranda where a beautiful Gul mohar tree bloomed. That spot became ours. While students of other religions had their lunch breaks, we'd gently move away, giving them space and also making ourselves more comfortable. It wasn't about separation — it was about understanding, about mutual respect. Every day during that one-hour break, Muslim students from different classes would gather around that shaded corner or nearby spots. Despite the empty stomachs and long hours, those moments were filled with joy. We laughed, talked, teased each other, and somehow, time passed so sweetly under that red-flowered tree, with the breeze and our quiet bond holding everything together.

It was Ramadan, and the school courtyard felt quieter than usual during lunch. The sun filtered through the branches of the Gulmohar tree, casting warm, dappled patterns on the ground. Most of the students had scattered — some to the canteen, others to their usual corners — but he stood there alone, near the corridor, hands in his pockets, leaning casually against the wall.

His friends, mostly from other religions, had gone off to eat. It was just one of those days where he wasn't surrounded by anyone — no crowd, no noise, just him. Sometimes the girls from class would gather around him,

laughing and joking, as if drawn by his charm. But today, he seemed quiet. Alone.

I don't remember exactly how it happened – whether he called me over with a wave, or if I just walked up to him out of instinct – but somehow, I ended up standing next to him. We started talking, casually at first. Little things. School stuff. Exams. Weather. But as the conversation went on, I noticed something... different.



He was relaxed. Open. Comfortable in a way I hadn't expected from someone like him. I'd always heard the stories – from Reema, from others – stories of how he

used to be in his old school. The so-called playboy image. And then, in the middle of some random topic, he mentioned his ex's name. Just like that – slipped it into the conversation, like a thought that escaped before he could filter it.

I didn't flinch. I'd half-expected things like this. Maybe that's why I didn't take it to heart. Reema had already told me bits and pieces, laughing while sharing dramatic little tales from their school days.

But as we stood there talking, I caught sight of Reema and a couple of others under the Gulmohar tree – giggling, whispering, eyes flicking toward us with curiosity. They were trying to read our body language, to figure out what was happening between us. Were we just talking? Was something starting?

I could feel their glances, but I ignored them.

In that moment, it wasn't about them. It was about how easy it felt to talk to him. How he looked me in the eye without trying too hard. How the conversation, though casual, left a strange warmth behind.

When I walked away, I realized something had shifted. I felt... closer to him. Not in a romantic way, not yet. But something friendly. Familiar. The start of something new – something unspoken, unfolding quietly under the Gulmohar tree.

Thank you for sharing something so heartfelt — it really captures the innocence, the butterflies, and the growing weight of emotions that often come with these kinds of early connections. Here's your next part, visualized in story form, continuing the tone and mood from the last scene:

After the last bell rang and the school gates began to buzz with students spilling out, there was always a moment — brief, unspoken — between me and Izhan.

Sometimes we exchanged a smile. Sometimes a soft “bye.” And other times... nothing.

But on those days when he didn't even glance in my direction, something inside me stirred — playful, stubborn, maybe even a little desperate. I would somehow end up walking the same path as him, matching my steps with his, pretending it was all just coincidence. But it wasn't. I just wanted him to look. To notice. And eventually, he would — a flicker of his eyes, a smirk, or a casual nod — and that would be enough. Enough to light up the rest of my day.

Looking back now, I can't help but smile... and cringe a little. The things I did just to get his attention. The silly little plans. The way I adjusted my walk. The way I'd stand where he might see me. It all felt like a game then — sweet and harmless — but now, it makes me shy just thinking about it. How far we go, unknowingly, when affection quietly wraps itself around our hearts.

And now... here I am again. Older. Supposedly wiser. But once again, that familiar pull has returned.

Izhan.

Somewhere between random memories and silent moments, that soft affection is creeping back into my life. These days, I find myself lying in bed, the ceiling fan humming above me, my phone resting just a few inches away. I tell myself I won't check it. I don't need to. But then... my hand moves on its own.

I open WhatsApp. Did he come online? When was his last seen?

Then to Instagram. Has he posted anything new? A story? A hint? Anything that gives me a glimpse into his world – a world I'm not quite part of, but not entirely out of either.

Sleep doesn't come easy on nights like this. Not when your heart is too full, and your mind is too loud.

CHAPTER-8

One day, while having one of our usual long chats, I found myself opening up to Juli. It just slipped out – the truth I'd been carrying silently for almost two years.

“I think I really love him,” I told her. “Izhan. It's been two years now... and still, he hasn't shown even a single green flag. Only red.”

I said it with a small laugh, trying to sound casual, but it wasn't funny. It hurt.

I didn't expect Juli to take it seriously. I thought it would stay just between us – one of those quiet, personal conversations. But somehow, the topic spread through our little gang like wildfire. Before I knew it, we were all sitting together, and I was being asked the inevitable question:

“Who is it?”

And just like that, we shared his photo. *That* photo. The one where he looked exactly like himself – a little careless, a little charming, a little too good at not being serious.



That's when Noja saw it. Her eyes widened. She stared for a second, then blurted out, almost in disbelief,

"Wait. Is *this* the boy you're in love with? Seriously? You've been in one-sided love with *him* for two years?"

I tried to smile, but her voice cut sharp.

"How mad are you? You didn't get *any* other nice, innocent guy? Only *this* playboy?"

Her words hit harder than I expected. Not because she was being cruel – but because I realized this is what people saw when they looked at him. Not my Izhan, but

that guy — the one with the stories, the reputation, the charm too easy to doubt.

It made me sad. Sad not just for myself, but for him. Because no matter what they said, none of it made my love for him fade. Not even a little.

That was the part that surprised me the most.

Not the comments. Not the judgment.

But how *unshaken* my feelings were.

Even in that moment of public doubt, my heart stayed quietly loyal.

Still, I was curious.

“How do *you* know him?” I asked Noja, trying to hide my trembling voice.

She shrugged.

“One of his friends came to me with his photo. Said he wanted to propose. I thought it was a joke. Why couldn’t *he* come himself? Why send someone else?”

And that’s when I felt it again — that tiny tug at the heart. Confusion. Hope. Disappointment.

Why couldn’t he come himself?

Maybe he didn’t feel the same.

Maybe he was shy.

Maybe he was just... never mind to begin with.

I don't know.

All I do know is that, whatever people say about him — whether they call him a playboy or mistake him for someone careless — to me, he still feels like someone who mattered. *Who matters.*

Because no matter what he is to the world, to me... he was good. Maybe not perfect. Maybe not even right.

But *good to me* — in the quiet, complicated way that only the heart understands.

I was genuinely surprised when I found out.

He had proposed to *so many* girls around him — the same boy who acted like an introvert when I approached him. It didn't make sense. With me, he was all calm and quiet, like he'd never even had a girl best friend. He never flirted. Never crossed a line. He'd just talk, sometimes smile, sometimes stare into nothing... and that silence always left me wondering.

Was he pretending? Or was I different?

The thought would spin in my mind at random moments — especially during those casual gang conversations, when all of us would sit together and laugh about everything and nothing.

Sometimes, I'd go quiet. Not because I didn't have anything to say — but because I wanted to talk about him. I'd seen a new update on his Instagram story. A random

sunset photo. A song lyric. A mirror selfie that made my heart skip a beat. But I kept it all to myself.

They wouldn't get it. They never really did.

In our gang, everyone had their own little story going on.

CHAPTER-9

Juli — she had half the boys in school orbiting around her. Every other week someone would confess, and she'd just shrug it off with her effortless charm.

Liya — already committed for over four years. Loyal, mature, and so settled that it felt like she was living in a grown-up world we hadn't even stepped into yet.

Faza — soft-spoken but already in a long relationship too, the kind that had history and trust written all over it.

And then there was Momo — our wild, free-spirited girl. No love stories. No drama. She just wanted to live. Long drives with music blasting, iced coffee in hand, laughing until her stomach hurt. Her motto was simple: *entertain life before life entertains you*. She was like every girl's dream — light, loud, and unapologetically flying through life.

And then there was me.

Quietly in love.

Holding feelings that never quite fit into the group's conversations.

Watching him from a distance, while the rest of the world spun fast around me.

Sometimes I felt like a background character in my own story.

But even then... even in all that silence, something in me refused to let go of him. Maybe because he never truly gave me a reason to. Maybe because when he spoke to me, even if it was rare or quiet, it *felt real*.

Even if the world called him a flirt... with me, he wasn't.

With me, he was just... different.

And that difference is what kept me holding on.

Sometimes, I catch myself dreaming of a love marriage — the kind that feels like it came from a storybook. A soft, dreamy life with someone who knows me in and out, someone I can laugh with, cry with, travel with, grow old with. The image is blurred, but the feeling is clear. I want something real, something kind. A life that feels warm and safe.

But if you ask me *who* I'm expecting to fill that role, I wouldn't have a name.

Not Izhan.

It's strange, because I do love him — in a way. I love how he makes me feel noticed, even when it's rare. I love watching him from a distance, knowing little things about his day. I love the silence between us more than the noise I share with others.

But deep down, I know:

He's not the one I see as my life partner.

I don't imagine him standing next to me in a wedding photo.

I don't see him raising a family with me, or walking with me through all the seasons of life.

What I *do* want — maybe selfishly, maybe innocently — is just a moment of being seen by him. I want him to say something simple, like:

"She's my forever friend. She's someone who'll always matter to me."

I think that would be enough. To be remembered like that. To be held in someone's life, not as their love story... but as something solid. Something soft and permanent.

But even then, I'm not sure if that's really what I want — or if it's just what I need right now, in this phase of growing and learning who I am.

One thing I *am* sure of:

I want a life filled with mutual care.

Not one-sided love, not emotional guessing games.

I want attention that doesn't need to be earned. I want laughter that doesn't hide insecurity.

And when it comes to love — the real, lifetime kind — I want it to feel simple. Not complicated. Not confusing.

Izhan? He's someone I'll probably remember forever.

But he's not my forever.

And that's okay.

I'm pretty sure my mum would be okay with me having a relationship – and even a love marriage. But of course, like every typical mom, it comes with a checklist: same religion, good family background, decent looks, and the ever-familiar “*blah blah*.”

But here's the twist.

She had her own love story once.

And I never let her forget it.

She always laughs when I tease her about it – but behind that laughter, there's a softness. A story from her own school days that we now retell like a family legend.

She was one of *the* three best friends in school – inseparable girls, always sitting together, sharing secrets, laughing at the same jokes, even writing in each other's notebooks. You know the kind. Classic teenage trio.

And then came *the boy*.

Every single day, this one boy would pass by and throw that classic flirty look in their direction. Not subtle at all. He was *so obvious* that her friends would nudge her and giggle,

“Look at him! He's totally crushing on *you*! Look, again! Same stare every day!”



And slowly, just like that, my mum started to feel something stir inside.

Butterflies. Or maybe just the sweet confusion of being noticed.

This was all happening during 10th grade – when everything feels more dramatic, more magical, and more final.

Then came the end of the year – exam stress, the last days of school, the farewell tears. Everyone was exchanging autographs like they were precious treasures.

Writing paragraphs of “*never forget me,*” doodling hearts, promises, and goodbyes.

That’s when it happened.

The three girls sat together, flipping through their autographs, reading sweet messages from classmates, smiling at the words. Until suddenly, they opened the autograph book of one of mum’s friends – and there it was.

A confession.

From *that* boy.

Not in my mother’s book.

But in her *friend’s*.

He had written it all – how he’d been staring every day, how he had a crush, how he hoped she knew.

But it wasn’t for my mum. It was for her *friend*.

My mum turned *gloomy* after that. Of course she did! All this time she’d thought those glances were meant for her. And it turned out – nope. Wrong girl. Wrong guess.

We still laugh about it. I mock her whenever she gets too serious, saying:

“Maa, at least my love story’s clearer than yours!”

But the best part?

That boy actually married her friend.

And even now — years later — those three girls and that boy are still close friends. They all live abroad now, but whenever they visit during vacations, we celebrate. We meet, go out, share meals, and retell that same story with the same laughter, like it's a warm old film we never get tired of.

It makes me think:

Love doesn't always go the way you imagined.

Sometimes it's awkward, unexpected, or even disappointing.

But the bonds? The real ones? They somehow stay — through the mess, through the change, through the years.

Maybe that's what I want too —

A love that feels like friendship first,

That still shows up even when the story didn't go as planned.

When it comes to my father, he surprised me one day with something I never expected.

He said, quietly but clearly,

“If you ever fall in love... or have any affair, don't tell anyone else. Just come to me. I'll arrange everything for you.”

That one sentence stayed with me.

It was so *sweet*, so unexpected — coming from someone who's never talked much about love or romance. I've never heard about any love story from his past. No tales of young love, no old crushes. Just silence.

But every now and then, my mother teases him — about the girls he once visited, the traditional "bride-seeing" meetings, the quiet moments of his youth that still linger in teasing memories.

But I know the truth runs deeper than those jokes.

My father grew up without his parents.

He was raised by his brothers and sisters — a life built on sacrifice, not softness. Struggles shaped his early years, not stories. And maybe that's why he didn't have space for love — not the kind that fills diaries or stories. His life was about survival.

And maybe that's why, even now, he still holds his brothers and sisters above everything — above logic, above fairness, sometimes even above us.

That's the part I find hard to accept.

Even when they aren't good to my mother. Even when they show no warmth to us, his children.

Still, he would do *anything* for them.

His loyalty is deep — almost blind.

And sometimes, I wonder... *when will we be his first priority?*

I love him.

I know what he's been through. I understand the weight of being raised without parents, of being shaped by siblings who became parents before they were ready.

But it hurts — watching him defend them, protect them, even when it comes at the cost of our peace.

Maybe he doesn't realize it.

Maybe for him, love means sacrifice. And maybe he thinks he's doing the right thing — keeping everyone together.

But sometimes, I just wish he saw *us*.

That the same man who offered to support my love so kindly, so secretly...

Would also stand up for the love that's already here — the family he built, the wife who stood beside him, the children who just want to feel chosen.

CHAPTER-10

It was just a regular school day – noisy, light-hearted, the kind of day when everything feels a little more alive during the interval. The class was buzzing with energy, and in the middle of it all, Momo, with her usual “rules are just guidelines” attitude, pulled out her phone.

Phones weren’t allowed in school.

But Momo? She didn’t care.



And honestly, I didn’t either – not in that moment.

We slipped to the side of the classroom, near the window that faced the veranda, away from the door and most eyes. We laughed as we leaned in to take selfies – quick, playful, harmless fun. The kind of memories we’d later scroll through and cherish.

But fate had other plans.

Pathology sir.

Of *all* people, he had to walk by the veranda right then – silent as a shadow, strict as ever.

He saw us before we even realized.

And without a word, he stepped inside, walked straight up to us, and took the phone from our hands.

We froze.

Our smiles vanished mid-laugh. The classroom fell silent in a ripple of tension. It all happened in seconds – like a plot twist none of us saw coming.

The rule was clear:

Get caught with a phone, and you have to donate an “awareness book” to the library – from a specific list.

The books were expensive.

Too expensive for a random mistake.

Too expensive to explain at home without a storm.

Panic hit us like a wave.

How could we tell our families?

How would we explain why we were even carrying a phone?

We knew what the reaction would be — scolding, disappointment, maybe worse.

So we did what anyone in crisis would do:

We bunked the next class.

Our whole gang — together, as always. Not because they were involved, but because they were *ours*.

Loyalty meant sticking together in both mischief and mess.

We gathered in a quiet spot, throwing around fake excuses we could use, and then — a tiny spark of hope.

One of the boys in our gang said,

“I can get the book. Cheaper. We can even change the price tag to match the official rate. But I’ll need a little time.”

Time.

Exactly what we *didn’t* have.

We had to submit the book by the end of the day if we wanted the phone back before heading home. Every passing minute felt like a countdown to disaster.

But somehow... *it all worked out*.

The boy kept his word.

He arranged the book.

And luckily, Momo had just enough money to cover the cost.

By the end of the day, the book was in the library, the phone was back in her hands, and the whole incident faded into the shadows — just another crazy chapter in our gang's endless school adventures.

Later that evening, when I thought back to it, I smiled.

Not just because we got away with it,

but because *we did it together*.

If someone had to be caught for using a phone during class, it really should have been me.

Because the truth is... I *am* the one with the habit. The bad one.

We had these desks with little shelves underneath, and during lectures — especially the long, dragging ones — I'd slide my phone down into that space, out of sight. Smart, sneaky, and a little too confident.

Sometimes, I didn't just check messages.

I watched *films*.

Full-on scenes, headphones tucked in under my scarf or hair, the screen glowing faintly in that secret cave of a desk.

My friends used to say I was a pro at it.

“So smart,” they’d whisper, impressed with how smooth I was.

But now, when I look back... it just feels like nonsense. Useless.

I was always in a rush — to reply fast, to react fast, to see first.

When someone posted a status, I needed to see it *the second* it went live.

When someone posted a photo, I had to be the first to like it.

Not because I cared about all of them — but because I needed to prove that I was *paying attention*.

To everyone.

To everything.

Even if none of it was really meant for me.

And the biggest reason behind it all?

Izhan.

Everything kept leading back to him.

I needed to know. Needed to *see*.

What he was doing, posting, feeling, *thinking*.

Even if he never messaged me, even if he never posted anything directly — I found myself lurking on his friends'

profiles. Hoping to find *some glimpse* of him. A tag, a photo, a comment. Something. Anything.

I didn't want to miss a single detail — not because it mattered to the world, but because it mattered to *me*.

And then there's Maakri.

Funny thing is... I don't even remember his real name sometimes. From the start, I only ever called him "Maakri," and now I do it purposefully. Like that name fits better than anything else.

He used to scold me for this.

"You're addicted to that phone. It's going to hurt you one day."

And deep down, I knew he was right.

But how do you stop, when that glowing screen is the only place where your heart gets answers — even if they're fake, or half-true, or nothing at all?

I don't know how to overcome it.

Not yet.

Because for now, this screen feels like my only window to him.

And I don't want to close it.

CHAPTER-11

We weren't even in the same class.

But during the language period, we were placed together.

By luck. By timetable.

Or maybe by fate — the quiet kind that doesn't make noise, just places two people a few feet apart every day.

And if you ask me which was my favourite subject?

It wasn't English.

It wasn't science.

Not even the fun hours like art or games.

It was language period.

Not because of the lessons.

But because that was *his* period too.

Every day, I made sure to sit near his bench.

Not too close — just enough.

Enough to see his expressions. The way his eyes moved when the teacher said something funny.

The way he joked with his friends under his breath.

The way he ran his fingers through his hair like it was nothing — but it meant *everything* to me.



I wouldn't even hear half of what the teacher said.

My friends would tease me later, whispering,

"You're not in class, you're in the air."

And it was true.

Because for that one hour, I wasn't a student.

I wasn't a girl worrying about exams or assignments.

I was just someone quietly, madly, helplessly *watching* someone she liked.

His mischievous smirks.

The way he turned around mid-lecture and threw comments that made the backbenchers laugh.

The casual way he leaned back. The rhythm of his voice when he read aloud.

Even his handwriting, when I managed to peek.

Everything. Everything made me fall harder — not because he was perfect, but because he was *him*.

That one hour became a film I watched every day.

And no one else knew how much it meant to me.

It was just a period for them.

But for me?

It was the closest I ever felt to him.

We weren't even in the same class.

But during the language period, we were placed together.

By luck. By timetable.

Or maybe by fate — the quiet kind that doesn't make noise, just places two people a few feet apart every day.

And if you ask me which was my favorite subject?

It wasn't English.

It wasn't science.

Not even the fun hours like art or games.

It was language period.

Not because of the lessons.

But because that was *his* period too.

Every day, I made sure to sit near his bench.

Not too close — just enough.

Enough to see his expressions. The way his eyes moved when the teacher said something funny.

The way he joked with his friends under his breath.

The way he ran his fingers through his hair like it was nothing — but it meant *everything* to me.

I wouldn't even hear half of what the teacher said.

My friends would tease me later, whispering,

"You're not in class, you're in the air."

And it was true.

Because for that one hour, I wasn't a student.

I wasn't a girl worrying about exams or assignments.

I was just someone quietly, madly, helplessly *watching* someone she liked.

His mischievous smirks.

The way he turned around mid-lecture and threw comments that made the backbenchers laugh.

The casual way he leaned back. The rhythm of his voice when he read aloud.

Even his handwriting, when I managed to peek.
Everything. Everything made me fall harder — not
because he was perfect, but because he was *him*.
That one hour became a film I watched every day.
And no one else knew how much it meant to me.
It was just a period for them.
But for me?
It was the closest I ever felt to him.

CHAPTER-12

Some days, our class felt like a long stretch of yawns and clock-watching.

But other days — when the right teacher walked in — it turned into pure entertainment.

Like our physiology teacher.

She wasn't like the others.

She had jokes, stories, and a spark in her voice that kept the whole class alive. And best of all?

She *sometimes* let us use our phones — to open PDFs, follow along with the notes, or check out diagrams she was teaching.

That kind of freedom?

Rare. Gold. Beautiful.

So naturally... my *inner content creator* woke up.

As she started teaching with full energy, explaining something animatedly from the board, I thought:

“This is it. This is the kind of class I need to show off.”

I wanted to post it. Just a quick snap. Something like:

“*Classes like this >>>*” with a sparkle emoji or two.

So, while she turned for a second — facing the board — I opened my camera, silent as a spy.

I tilted my phone just right...

I made sure it was quiet...

And I clicked.



FLASH.

Oh. My. God.

The flash lit up like a tiny explosion in the classroom.

And just like that — the entire room went dead silent.

Everyone turned.

Eyes like arrows.

Even the ones at the back turned slowly like in a horror film.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't move.

I just stared down at my desk, pretending to be VERY interested in the grain pattern on the wood.

My friends didn't laugh — not yet.

They were too shocked.

And I... was too mortified.

Thank God, she had her back turned.

Thank God, I clicked just a second too early.

But after that?

You better believe I turned my flash *off* forever.

Lesson learned — the hard, glowing way.

We were waiting for it — our first Onam celebration in college.

There was excitement in the air, plans forming, laughter filling the corridors.

But none of it happened the way we expected.

Because in August 2018...

The flood came.

Not just rain.

Not just water.

But a disaster — one that swallowed homes, lives, pets, memories.

And left heartbreak behind.

It hit hard, across the state.

We watched the news with wide, worried eyes. Each headline worse than the one before. Entire families stranded. Houses swept away. Animals clinging to rooftops. Water rising faster than people could run.

We were lucky.

Our home stood close to the fields, and for a while, we didn't know if we'd stay safe.

The rain poured endlessly, the courtyard filled, and the road outside turned into a narrow river.

But somehow... the water only reached the road.

It never entered our home.

And for that, I silently thanked the sky.

Still, it was impossible to celebrate anything.

How could we, when just hours away, people were clinging to trees, crying for rescue, losing everything?

We missed some classes.

We missed Onam.

But others missed their lives — their entire *worlds*.

That flood became more than just an event in the calendar.

It became a shared memory — one that shaped us.

It taught us that nature doesn't ask before entering. That joy and fear can live in the same month. That sometimes, surviving is a quiet kind of blessing.

Even now, when it rains hard and long, I feel it.

That old tension.

That memory of 2018.

Not just for what we missed...

But for what we were lucky *not* to lose.

CHAPTER-13

It was during the flood holidays — those endless days of no classes, grey skies, and interrupted routines.

Most days, I'd meet up with Farah, my constant.

We'd spend hours at her place — talking, taking photos, cooking small snacks, sometimes just sitting in silence, scrolling through our phones, and laughing over old screenshots.

But that day felt different.

We were chatting as usual when she suddenly paused and said,

“I need to tell you something.”

Then, without another word, she walked into the kitchen.

And just like that, the whole air shifted.

The silence around me became *loud*.

And my mind? It went everywhere.

What did she want to tell me?

Was it about Izhan?

My heart began spinning with questions I couldn't answer.

Did she find out something about him?

Is it bad? Is he talking to someone else?

Did he say something about me?

Or is it not even about him—did she find a new best friend?

Am I... being replaced?

The more I sat there waiting, the more my thoughts grew tangled.

In just a few minutes, I'd imagined every possible scenario — from heartbreak to betrayal, to good news I wasn't ready for, to bad news I couldn't bear.

She was only gone for a few minutes, but it felt like forever.

I sat there, pretending to scroll my phone, but really just trying to breathe through the storm in my head.

And in that moment, I realized something:

How easily silence can make us question everything.

How quickly love, friendship, and fear mix into one loud silence.

I didn't know what she was going to say.

But I knew one thing for sure:

Whatever it was — it mattered.

Because *she* mattered.

When she returned from the kitchen, I pretended like I hadn't been sitting there overthinking everything.

I sat there with a straight face, scrolling like nothing happened.

Like I hadn't just fought a full emotional battle in my mind.

She smiled casually and said,

"Come... let's go somewhere. It gets boring just sitting here."

I nodded, acting cool — but inside, I was still tangled in that silent *something* she hadn't said yet.

We left her house and made our way to the nearby hills.

It wasn't far, but enough to feel like we were escaping — from the flood-holiday boredom, from the things unsaid, from the noise in our own heads.

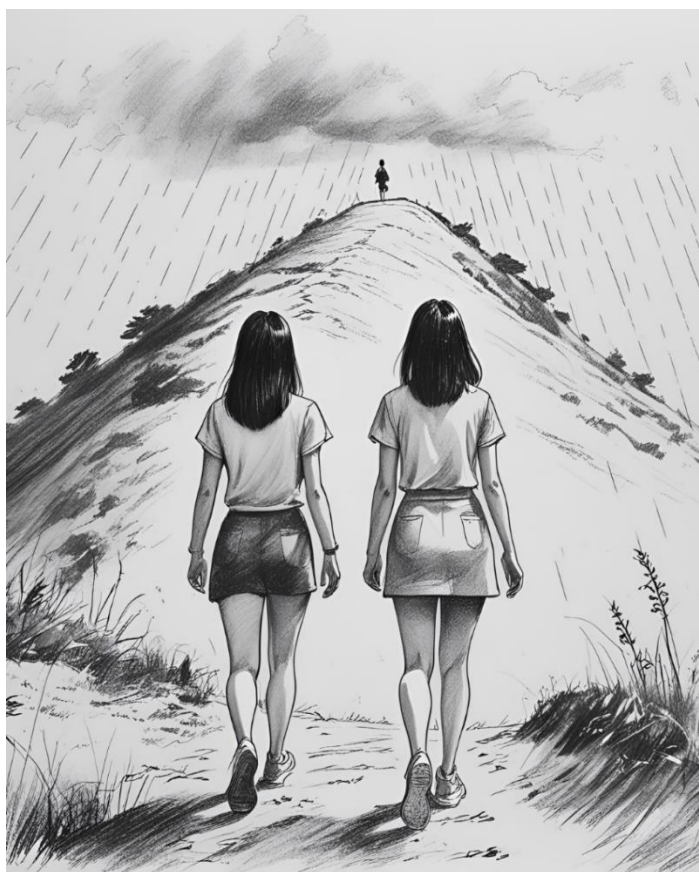
As we reached the hill base, I noticed a bike parked nearby.

It looked *weirdly familiar*.

Something about the colour, the helmet, the sticker on the side.

But I didn't say anything — just made a note of it in my mind.

We started climbing the hill together — slow steps, shared laughs, moments of silence, catching our breath halfway up.



And then... it began to drizzle.

A soft, *shallow* rain — not heavy enough to run, just enough to make everything feel magical.

The breeze turned cooler. The sky turned paler.

By the time we reached the top, I was a little tired... but completely *in awe*.

The city lay below us, barely visible — covered in white fog like a sleepy secret.

Patches of green peeked through like a painting being slowly unwrapped.

It was beautiful.

It was silent.

It was... exactly what I needed.

As we stood there taking it all in, Farah's phone rang.

She stepped aside to answer — walking just a little farther, her voice low, her back turned.

I watched her quietly, still wondering:

Was this the moment she'd finally tell me?

When she returned, she didn't speak right away.

Instead, she sat beside me beneath a giant banyan tree — its roots hanging like soft curtains, its branches above forming a thick, green umbrella.

We sat there, not speaking for a while.

Just listening to the breeze, the tiny drops falling through the leaves, the distant hum of the city hidden below the mist.

Two girls.

One secret.

And a banyan tree that felt like it had seen a hundred stories before ours.

Just as we were sitting beneath the banyan tree, the rain slowing, the breeze brushing gently across our faces...

I suddenly felt something.

Footsteps behind us.

A familiar energy.

I turned.

And there he was —

My one and only, full-attitude brother.

In that *split second*, it all came together in my mind like puzzle pieces snapping into place.

The familiar bike I saw at the hill's base.

Farah stepping away to take a call.

That hesitation in her voice earlier.

Her nervous smile.

It all made sense now.

This was what she wanted to tell me.

Not about Izhan.

Not about a fight.

But *this* — the most unexpected, and somehow, the most perfect surprise.

My brother... and my best friend.

Together.

I looked at both of them, my heart blooming with quiet joy, even as I tried to hold in my laugh.

They stood there, awkwardly — caught like kids who got busted.

Farah looked like she didn't know where to start.

My brother was doing that thing where he scratches his head and pretends to be chill — when he's actually panicking inside.

I smiled softly and asked,

“So... when did this start?”

Just loud enough to tease, just soft enough to say *I'm happy for you*.

Farah looked down, cheeks tinted pink.

My brother looked at the trees like maybe they had the answer.

Both silent.

Both shy.

Both caught in that beautiful mess of trying to explain love — when love doesn't really need an explanation.

And for a moment, under that giant tree, wrapped in mist and soft rain, I felt something warm in my chest.

These were the moments that didn't need filters or captions.

Just heart.

Just timing.

Just real.

And maybe, just maybe — they were the moments worth remembering forever.

They stood together like a pair of swans—so close, so peaceful, and full of love. Watching them made me smile, but deep inside, something burned quietly. I felt happy, yes—but also worried. *What if our parents don't accept this bond? What if they say no?* I've always loved calling him my brother. We've been close for so long, and I guess that's because I've always wanted a brother in my life. God listened to my heart and gave me the sweetest gift—a younger brother. He's like my own child to me. I care for him deeply, and our bond is something special.

CHAPTER-14

But deep down, I always wished for an elder brother. Someone I could ride bikes with, laugh loudly, act silly with, and explore the world beside. Someone who would stand up for me if anyone ever tried to hurt me. I love night drives, and I often imagine having an elder brother by my side during those peaceful rides, with the wind rushing past us and the world quiet around us. In my family, it's just me and my little brother. My cousins are lucky—they have siblings, sometimes two or three. But still, I feel grateful.

Even if I don't have an elder brother by birth, I found one in my cousin who lives nearby. He's always been there, and I see him as my own. I tell everyone, "He's my brother," and I mean it with all my heart. Because sometimes, family isn't just about blood. It's about love, loyalty, and the people who stay by your side no matter what.

He was always kind to me and acted just like my own brother. But still, there was always a small gap between us—something unspoken that reminded me he wasn't truly my real brother. Maybe that's why I sometimes held back. What hurt me most was seeing how much he pampered his own sister, who is the same age as me. That's when I would feel disappointed... and jealous. I

didn't have a brother of my own, and watching their bond made me wish for one even more. But time changed things. Now, we've grown closer—we truly are like siblings. And today, I hold one of his biggest secrets in my heart. That trust... it means something. It made me feel like I have a special place in his life, like I truly matter to him—not just as a cousin, but as someone he deeply trusts. And maybe, in the end, that's even more special than blood.



Farah and I used to spend a lot of time together, staying at each other's homes, having sleepovers, and sharing little moments. Sometimes, our mothers would join us

too, and it felt like one big happy family. Farah has brothers as well—two of them—and just like me, her father also works abroad. I always loved the times when our families came together. Those were the best days—we'd go on trips, laugh more, and everything just felt full of joy and togetherness. But lately, those memories have been striking me in a different way. A strange feeling—almost like fear—sits quietly inside me. I wonder what would happen if Farah's relatives noticed something... noticed *me* standing between two sides. What if they figure out what I'm holding inside? Being in the middle feels heavy sometimes, like I'm caught in a place I can't explain. And even though everything still feels warm and familiar on the outside, deep down, I'm starting to wonder how long I can keep standing in this space in between.

Days passed, and they continued on like a couple, while our first year flew by in the blink of an eye. By the second year, we found ourselves in the same class again, and that's when everything truly began to feel special. We became one of the most noticeable gangs among the teachers—always together, always laughing. They made sure to keep us right under their noses by placing us on the first bench every single day. But that didn't stop us—we turned every class into a bingo game, a snack break, a storytelling session, or some random fun. It felt less like school and more like a playground of friendship.

Of course, all that fun showed up in our marks too—*very clearly!* But even during exam season, we stuck together. Sometimes, we gathered for “campaign studies” where the idea was to study hard... though it often turned into more chatting and planning than actual reading. Still, the best part was always right before the exam. There was always *that one person* who would rush through all the modules and explain everything in a quick, clear way—like a magic capsule of the entire syllabus. And that person for us was Liya. She could sum up hours of study into a few minutes, and somehow, we remembered *her* explanations better than anything we tried to study ourselves!

CHAPTER-15

One day during our philosophy class, something funny happened. You know how it always goes—when one person takes out their water bottle to drink, suddenly *everyone* feels thirsty? That day, I took my bottle to drink, and then Momo wanted some too. We passed the bottle between us, but while doing so, a little water spilled on Liya's dress. Without a second thought, Liya picked up her own bottle and playfully threw water at Faza!

Of course, that was the moment the teacher lost her patience. With so much anger, she shouted, "Get out of my class!" and sent both Faza and Liya outside. But the funny part is—I still don't know why *we* followed them too. None of us were asked to leave, but somehow, we all ended up outside the classroom.

There we were, standing in the verandah behind the classroom door, all slightly wet from the water fight. But we didn't stop there. When our bottles ran out of water, we went to the water filter, refilled them, and continued pouring water on each other like kids in a water park. It was such a silly, mischievous moment—but one we laughed about for a long time. It's memories like these that made those school days so unforgettable.

Our classes, the fun, the exams—everything was going smoothly. And then came the time for Onam holidays.

But before the break, we got to celebrate our *first* Onam in college—something we had missed during our first year. So we were determined to make this one extra special.

Our department decided to go all in. The dress code was green, and everyone showed up in matching green outfits—boys in dhotis, girls in sarees. The whole place looked like a beautiful sea of green, full of tradition and excitement. We also planned a cultural program, and our class signed up for a group dance performance. It was both fun and nerve-racking!

Momo naturally became our leader—she’s a trained dancer, and Liya was really good too. The rest of us, well... we managed! Somehow, we all pulled it off and performed confidently in front of the seniors. We laughed so much during the rehearsals and even more after the performance. Right after, we jokingly agreed, “Okay, never again—we’re done with dancing!” (Though deep down, we knew we loved every second of it.)

We took so many photos that day, shared a delicious *sadya* with payasam, played games, and just lived the moment. That Onam became more than just a celebration—it became one of the most special memories of our college life.

The day before the celebration was just as special—maybe even more. After our classes, Farah and I went out together to collect our blouses that had been stitched for

the Onam function. Since we were both celebrating on the same day, it felt like a shared mission. We laughed, talked, and walked through the streets, enjoying every little moment. But then, out of nowhere, the skies opened up. A heavy rain came pouring down with such force, soaking us completely.



It was already night by then, and it had taken us longer than expected to collect the dresses. But instead of panicking, we embraced it. We were drenched head to toe, but it felt so freeing. We laughed and walked through the rain like kids, no umbrella, no rush—just joy. After that, we decided to stop by a café to warm up and spend some time together.

That night felt like something out of my dreams. I've always imagined moments like that—being out in the rain at night, almost like a midnight adventure or a rainy night drive scene from a movie. And now, I was living it. Still, a small part of me was scared we might catch a fever from all that rain—it really was *that* heavy. But even with that worry, the happiness of that night stayed with me. It was one of those rare, unplanned moments that end up becoming the most precious memories.

At first, whenever we bunked classes, we never dared to leave the college premises. We stayed close, always careful not to be caught. But slowly, that small act of rebellion became our little weakness—and soon, we started spreading our wings. What began as quick escapes turned into longer rides through the city streets, laughing and exploring like we owned the world.

My mom used to scold me every time she found out. She'd worry, get angry, ask a hundred questions. But eventually, she stopped. Maybe she realized that nothing she said could stop this new freedom I had found. Or

maybe she saw something else—maybe she understood that I wasn't alone, that I had a good group of friends with me. A gang that wasn't just about fun and mischief, but also about loyalty, laughter, and memories that would stay with us for life.

My tricky friends had their own smart way of handling things—they actually blocked the college number on their parents' phones so they wouldn't get notifications when we bunked classes. And on some days, they even blocked my number from their parents' phones, just to make sure I didn't accidentally give anything away. Because, well... I was the dreamy one—the one who loved sharing everything on status updates, showing off the fun we had like it was a scene out of a movie. It became my habit. Every day, without fail, I posted something.

But eventually, that habit caught up with me.

Some relatives and family friends began to notice. They'd see my status and then go around saying things like, "Why are you letting her be so free?" or "She's always with boys," or "She's outside with friends every single day." And just like that, my mom would get angry—sometimes upset, sometimes just teasing me—but either way, it stung. It hurt, not just because of the scolding, but because it felt like those older generations were still trying to inject their outdated thinking into our lives, not even realizing how much the world has changed.

I started to wonder—why is it so hard for some people to accept that the new generation, the so-called 2k kids, are just trying to live freely? Everyone blames us for everything, but honestly, I see how much we're struggling. Struggling to find freedom, joy, self-expression, and a life that feels meaningful. We *do* love our parents. We respect them deeply. But I've never believed that simply walking down the path they've already drawn out for us is the only definition of good manners.

We are individuals. We have our own hearts, dreams, and wishes. And yes, we deserve the freedom to live the way we want—to make mistakes, to learn, to grow, and to enjoy life on our own terms.

There's always been a gap between generations—but today, it feels like more than just a difference in age. It's a difference in thinking, in freedom, in dreams, and in how we express ourselves.

Old generation parents grew up in a world that valued silence, sacrifice, and obedience. For them, respect meant listening without questioning. They believed in rules, in reputation, and in following the path already drawn. Going out too often, having friends from the opposite gender, speaking up for yourself—these were once seen as signs of rebellion, not growth.

But times have changed.

We—the so-called "2k kids"—grew up in a world of questions, choices, and endless possibilities. We want to live out loud. We take photos, share our moments, dance in the rain, laugh with friends, and sometimes even cry publicly. We're not afraid to show our emotions. We dream bigger, aim higher, and yes—sometimes break the rules. Not out of disrespect, but out of the desire to create our own path.

And yet, we're often misunderstood.

They say we're too free, too bold, too emotional, too connected to our phones, and too disconnected from our roots. But what they don't see is the pressure we carry—the pressure to be ourselves while also making our families proud. We love our parents deeply, and most of us still live trying to balance their expectations with our need for freedom.

Respect isn't about walking in silence. It's about listening, understanding, and growing—together. The truth is, we're not trying to run away from tradition. We're trying to blend it with the present, to live responsibly but *freely*. To be good humans—not just good sons and daughters.

So maybe it's time to stop blaming the new generation. Maybe it's time to sit, talk, and listen—to both sides. Because between their fears and our dreams, there's a bridge waiting to be built. And on that bridge, love and understanding will always meet halfway.

There's a constant conversation—sometimes a fight—between old-generation parents and new-generation kids. On one side, there's tradition, discipline, and the path of values laid out by time. On the other, there's freedom, individuality, and the hunger to live life differently.

The truth is—*both sides are right... and both sides are wrong.*

Yes, today's youth is more expressive, confident, and open-minded. They dream big, speak up, and dare to break boundaries. They believe in mental health, personal space, and choosing love over fear. They want freedom—not just in where they go, but in *who they are*. That's a powerful shift from the silence many of our parents grew up with.

But on the other side of that freedom, something dangerous has also taken root.

Some of today's youth have lost their sense of balance. Disrespect, rebellion for the sake of it, addiction to harmful habits, and total disregard for consequences have become common in many places. There are heartbreaking stories—of kids hurting their own families, of losing themselves to drugs, of crossing lines where there's no return. Not every young person is like this, but the truth is, *this part of the generation exists too*. And it's loud. It hurts not just families—but the name of the entire generation.

Freedom without responsibility becomes destruction.

Respect isn't about fear. And obedience isn't weakness. But when we forget kindness, gratitude, and the value of life itself, we fall into darkness—no matter what generation we belong to.

So yes, the old generation needs to *listen* more. But the new generation must also *learn* where to draw the line.

The world doesn't need perfect children or perfect parents. It needs *understanding humans*. Humans who know how to balance dreams with values, and freedom with self-control. That is the generation that can truly change the world—for the better.

In fact, many parents today are no longer stuck in the old ways. They've changed. Bit by bit, they've learned to loosen their grip, not out of defeat, but out of *deep love*. They've started becoming friends with their children, sharing laughter, worries, and even secrets. Some parents, who once believed only in strict rules, are now the biggest supporters of their kids' dreams. They tolerate the ups and downs, the mistakes, the stubborn choices—just to see their children succeed. They're evolving too. That bond, when nurtured with trust and understanding, becomes something beautiful: not just a parent-child relationship, but a companionship for life. The truth is, this generation is not completely lost, and the previous generation is not completely rigid. Between the extremes, there are so many hearts trying—trying to

understand each other, to meet halfway, to build something better. And that effort... is where real change begins.

CHAPTER-16

We had a small tradition of celebrating everyone's birthdays together, as a gang. When it came to my birthday month, it became even more special—because Noja and I have our birthdays just two days apart. That year, we were all busy preparing for exams, so on one of those days, me, Noja, and Momo were at the college premises “studying.” But, as usual, we spent more time taking TikTok’s and selfies than actually reading. During all that fun, we noticed Momo kept stepping aside to take secret phone calls. At first, I thought it was probably one of her many guy friends—she was always surrounded by them, and we even teased her about being in love. But deep down, we knew she just liked making friends without catching feelings.

After a while, she came back and suddenly said she needed to go home urgently, and asked if we could leave with her. Of course, we agreed. On the way, she said she had to stop at Burger Mom nearby to pick up a burger. We thought nothing of it and went along. Once she got the parcel, she casually said, “My cousin is upstairs at the café—I’m just going to say hi. Want to come?” I remember feeling like something was up, but we followed her anyway.

And then—*surprise!* As we stepped into the upstairs café, the entire gang was there, shouting “Happy Birthday!” for me and Noja. It was a complete shock. The decorations, the laughter, the love—everything felt perfect. We cut the cake, made wishes, blew out the candles, and shared one of the warmest, most unforgettable moments together. After that, we sat down for evening snacks, talked for a while, and then slowly parted ways for home. But that day—that surprise—stayed in our hearts like a soft, glowing memory.



Ever since our paths crossed in school, my eyes would always wander toward Izhan. I watched him in silence, wondering if he ever thought of me the way I thought of him. On my birthday, I found myself hoping—foolishly, maybe—that he'd remember, that he'd message me, even just a word. But the day would pass quietly, and so would the next. I sent messages, tried to reach out, clinging to any small chance to be seen, but he always ignored me, like I was invisible. We all joined the same evening tuition classes from the beginning. The long days left us exhausted, stumbling home under the weight of fatigue, so we switched to morning sessions instead. Some of Izhan's friends were with us too, from the beginning. We were all friendly, but the truth was, I became close to them with a hidden purpose—I wanted to be closer to him. I laughed with them, shared notes, joined their conversations, all while keeping one eye on him, hoping he'd finally look back, just once, and notice the way I did everything to be near him...

I stood on the verandah, the breeze brushing against my face as I watched him from afar, like always—quietly, secretly. He moved through the corridor like he always did, unaware of the storm he stirred inside me. But then, unexpectedly, he turned... and walked toward me. My breath caught. "How are tuitions going?" he asked, casually, as if this wasn't the first time we'd ever truly spoken. I tried to play it cool, teasing, "Are you planning to join us?" He didn't answer—just winked. And my heart

soared higher than I could ever admit. Later, before our second-year classes began, we arrived early for our tuition session. The classroom upstairs was warm with morning sun, windows flung open to the road below. Everyone was laughing, catching up, voices filling the room. But I sat by the window, lost in thought, my eyes trailing the road without really seeing—until suddenly, I did. There he was, walking with his friends, right toward the building. My chest tightened with joy so sharp it almost hurt. I tried to hide my smile, to stay calm, but excitement bubbled through me like fireworks. I turned quickly to Fara, Reema, and Menha, barely able to contain myself. “Something’s about to happen,” I whispered, my voice shaking with the thrill. They blinked at me, half-laughing. “What is? Tell us first!” But I just smiled, heart pounding, eyes drifting back to the window where he had just passed.

He stepped into the classroom slowly, each footfall syncing with the wild rhythm of my heart. It felt like time had slowed just for me—to take in every second, every breath, every moment of him walking closer. I celebrated quietly inside, holding in the kind of joy that feels like it might burst through your chest. Then—he sat. Right in front of our bench. I managed a small wave, unsure if I was dreaming. He turned, catching my gesture, and smiled, “Oh, you guys are here?” I nodded, trying hard not to let the grin stretch too wide across my face. I slipped into acting normal, but inside, a thousand

butterflies danced in the space between my ribs. We began talking more after that, slowly becoming friends—not as close as I had dreamed, but close enough for me to hold onto the hope. Farah leaned over that day with a knowing smirk, whispering, “Now you’re living in your dream, huh? Your crush just walked into it.” From then on, as we shared morning tuitions and sat just benches apart, the teasing never stopped. Farah, Reema, and Menha watched us like hawks—every glance, every laugh, every accidental eye contact turned into a joke. But behind their giggles and teasing smirks, I knew—they saw it too. Something was there, even if only I truly felt how deep it ran.

Days passed in a soft blur, like pages turning in a book I never wanted to end. Manha, Farah, and I always started our mornings together—we were from the same bus stop, the same rhythm, the same sleepy eyes and shared laughter. Our tuition master, amused by our constant presence and our hijabs, nicknamed us the “Hijabi Team.” Me, Manha, Farah, and Reema—each wrapped in our faith and friendship—walked in sync, even when we were late, even when the world around us felt rushed. Our other two friends hadn’t joined the tuition, so it was always just us, arriving either too early or fashionably late, but always together. One morning, we were running behind, the kind of late where every second feels like it matters. As we waited breathlessly at the bus stop, I noticed someone rushing toward us. My heart skipped.

It was Izhan—his steps quick, eyes searching. For a moment, I froze. Was he heading this way... because of me? That thought wrapped around me like sunlight. I tried to stay calm, but Farah and Reema caught the shift in my face instantly. They elbowed me playfully, grinning, “Ooh, now you're glowing like it's Eid—don't smile so hard, he might start wondering what's up!” I bit my lip, trying to hide it, but the joy had already bloomed inside me like a secret I couldn't stop from shining.

CHAPTER-17

As school reopened, our mornings began in the same crowded bus, packed so tightly that the air felt heavy with warmth and unspoken glances. The bus would arrive early, still dressed in dawn's grey light, and yet I never once needed an alarm—my heart was already awake, long before the sky stirred. Every morning, I rose eagerly, not for school, but for the chance to travel with him. With so many bodies pressed together, there were days when fate let us stand side by side, shoulders almost brushing, breaths hanging in the same narrow space. In those moments, I'd steal glances at him—just brief, nervous looks—and sometimes our eyes would meet. A spark. A pause. And then we'd both look away, pretending it didn't happen. I'd want to say something—anything—but the words would lock themselves inside my chest. Reema and Farah would giggle from behind, nudging each other and flashing teasing signs at me, making my cheeks burn. Still, I stayed silent. And sometimes, I wondered... maybe Izhan already knew. Maybe he had already seen through my clumsy efforts—the way I tried too hard not to care, and yet everything about me screamed that I did. I was doing every silly thing, every silent confession, everything but saying it out loud—that somewhere between these bus rides and stolen glances, I had quietly started falling for him

Even without saying it out loud, I always carried this secret belief—that maybe, just maybe, he felt it too. That in the quiet way he looked back at me, or the soft curve of his smile, there was something unspoken waiting to be understood. But then, doubt would whisper. Maybe he wasn't the type to fall in love. Maybe his past, with all its sharp edges and heartbreaks, had turned him away from such things. Maybe he wasn't someone who believed in slow, gentle love—how could someone with a reputation like his carry feelings so tender? I tried to silence those thoughts, but they stayed. Sometimes he wouldn't ride with us—he'd disappear, slipping away alone. I noticed. And I started paying attention, learning his rhythm.

I memorized the time he usually arrived and began delaying my own walk to tuition on purpose, just to catch that one moment where we'd meet. Then, like it was meant to be, we'd walk together toward the class—side by side, the world narrowing down to footsteps, glances, and laughter. I'd pour every unspoken feeling into those short walks, hiding love in jokes, hope in smiles, and pretending it was all just casual. But for me, those small, quiet moments.



After tuition ended each morning, we'd naturally drift back into our groups—boys on one side, girls on the other—walking the short, familiar path toward school. It became a small tradition among us to jokingly assign every girl a “pair” from the boys, just for fun, just to pass time with giggles and teasing glances. Izhan, of course, was always mine—even if no one said it out loud, everyone knew. Once we reached school, I'd slip away

with a quiet purpose. I always found myself on the upper veranda outside our classroom, a place I slowly made my own. There, I'd carefully tear the games section from the *Times of India*—crossword, sudoku, or puzzles—grabbing a pencil like I was there to solve something important. But really, I was waiting. From that spot, I could see the front road, where students trickled in with lazy steps and sleepy chatter. And then—there he'd be. Izhan, walking with his gang, laughing about something, one hand buried in his pocket, the other swinging casually with his bag. My eyes would follow his every step while I pretended to be focused on the game page, heart racing, face composed, living inside a moment that was mine alone.



It was one of those early mornings when the sky hinted at a storm, the clouds hanging low and heavy, and the cool breeze whispered that rain was near. I had timed everything just right—purposely reaching the stop so I could walk with Izhan to tuition. The air was fresh, and tiny drops had already begun to fall, dotting the road like quiet warnings. As we walked, Izhan glanced at the sky and said with a playful urgency, “Walk fast, or we’ll get caught in the rain.” I tried. I truly did. I pushed my steps to match his pace, my heart fluttering not just from the rush but from being beside him in that fleeting moment. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t quite keep up. My hurried footsteps echoed against the empty road—loud, clumsy, too obvious. Suddenly, he stopped, turned to me, and with a half-laugh asked, “Are you walking with a giant stone tied to your feet?” The words hit me harder than I expected. I forced a smile, brushing it off like a joke, but inside, a small sting settled in. I didn’t say anything, but in that moment, I wished I could’ve told him how I wasn’t trying to be clumsy—just trying to keep up with him, with everything he meant to me.

Even though his words stung a little, part of me couldn’t help but feel warm inside—wasn’t it a kind of care, after all? Telling me to walk faster, looking back to check on me... maybe, just maybe, he noticed me in ways I didn’t understand yet. Or maybe he was just teasing. I didn’t know. But those morning walks became something I looked forward to more than anything else. There was a

quiet rhythm to them—the sky always painted in soft grey, the wind carrying just enough chill to feel like a secret, and us walking side by side, sometimes talking, sometimes just walking. Over time, his friends began to catch on. They started to notice the way I always arrived just a little late, the way my steps became more lively when I saw him at the stop. Everyone seemed to figure it out—everyone but him. We had a habit: arriving just late enough that sir would keep us standing outside the classroom as a lesson. But that punishment turned into my favorite part of the day. Just me and him, both waiting in silence or small talk, rain misting the space between us, and me stealing glances at him like I was living in some daydream. And maybe I was. What a fool I must've looked like—doing all this, all this silliness and softness, for someone who didn't even know I had built entire mornings around just being near him.

CHAPTER-18

I've always been scared of cats. I don't know why or how it started, but the fear has followed me since childhood. Every time I visit my mother's old home, memories come flooding back—warm, soft memories of my grandmother. My mother says she died when I was just four. “How can you remember her?” she often asks. But I do. I remember her face so clearly, like a gentle light in a dark room. When I think of her, tears fill my eyes without warning.

Everyone speaks of her with love. They say she was full of patience, always calm, always kind. She and my grandfather fell in love when such things were rare and difficult. Their love convinced both families to agree. They got married, hoping for a happy life. But happiness didn't stay for long.

Soon after, she fell sick. The doctors said it was a rare blood clotting disease. They warned her—having children could risk her life. But she didn't care about herself. She wanted to become a mother. And so, with courage in her heart, she gave birth to my mom and her brother.

My grandfather left to work abroad, hoping to earn money. But life there wasn't easy. He became stuck—struggling, helpless, unable to return. Back home, my grandmother quietly carried the weight. She took her medicine every day, hiding her pain, smiling for her

children. But the sickness grew stronger. She grew weaker.

One night, while sleeping next to my mom—just a little girl then—she closed her eyes and never opened them again. She left this world softly, like a candle blown out by the wind. Even now, though I was so small, I still feel her love. It lives in my heart like a quiet song that never ends.

I still remember my grandmother gently feeding me slices of apple with a teaspoon, her soft hands and warm smile wrapping me in comfort. There was an old woman too—very aged—who used to visit her often. She had kind eyes and walked slowly, but her presence brought peace. I loved her just like I loved my grandma. And then, there was a cat—always around. It had strange, shining eyes and followed my grandmother everywhere, as if it understood her. Whenever she called it with a small sound, it came running to her side. But after my grandmother passed away, no one ever saw that cat again. I believe my fear of cats started from that moment—like the cat took a piece of my childhood and disappeared.



Years later, my brother, a big pet lover, brought a cat home. He loved animals, but I felt my fear crawling back the moment I saw it. I avoided visiting him, always asking, "Is the cat around?" He would laugh and say, "No, no—it's upstairs." But one day, while we were chatting and laughing together, he played a trick on me. He quietly placed the cat in my lap without warning. I screamed—so loud and sharp that the whole house went still. Even the cat leapt off and ran away, terrified. That scream scared everyone, even him. After that day, he never tried to frighten me with a cat again. Even my best friend Farah was a huge cat lover. Her whole family loved

them—especially her brothers. They didn't just have one, but two cats: Bella and Simba. Can you believe it? I actually went with them to bring one of the cats home! Farah, her two brothers, and I rode on two scooties—me on one, and she on the other, her brothers holding a cage with the cat inside. The cat was right behind me, in that cage. I still don't know how I managed to sit through that ride. My heart was pounding the entire way. When I finally reached home, it felt like I had escaped from a nightmare.

Whenever people talk about kittens, I don't just feel afraid—I feel something worse. Disgust. A chill runs down my spine. I never chose this fear, but it clings to me. I wish I could ignore it, but it follows me—even in my sleep. There were nights I screamed from my dreams, waking up breathless, all because I saw a cat in that dream.

After Farah brought the cats home, I slowly stopped visiting her. I missed her company, but I couldn't handle being near those cats. Luckily, they kept them in a cage, placed in the upper corridor of their house. Knowing the cats were locked away gave me a little courage. Bit by bit, I began to visit again—carefully, always watching my steps, always alert. It was never easy, but for Farah, I tried.

And now, something funny happens. The moment I pull up outside on my scooty, the cats seem to recognize the sound. They instantly run and jump into the cage, as if

they know: *She's coming!* It's like we've made an unspoken agreement—I get to visit Farah, and they stay in their little corner. That small routine, in its own way, gave me the courage to return.

It was one of those soft, rainy mornings—the kind that makes everything feel slower and more delicate. As usual, I got late trying to catch up just to be with Izhan. In my rush, I forgot to carry my umbrella. The rain was falling heavily, soaking the roads and darkening the skies, and I felt a small panic building in my chest. From the bus stop, it was almost a 10-minute walk to the tuition center, all under that pouring sky. But a thought came to my mind that made me smile quietly—*maybe Izhan has his umbrella... maybe we can share it*. That little hope felt warm inside me. I turned to look for him in the bus, just to make sure he was there. He was—but sitting far at the other end, gazing outside, lost in the rain, like he was dreaming of something far away.

When the bus stopped, one by one everyone began stepping down. I waited. I stood there, patiently hoping he'd come out next. We were already late, but I still waited. But he didn't appear. Confused and disappointed, I slowly stepped into the rain, completely drenched, like a little chick caught in a storm. The drops hit my skin like tiny needles, and the cold wrapped around me. I thought maybe—just maybe—he had gotten down at the stop before, the one slightly closer to the center.

With heavy steps and a heavier heart, I reached the class, soaked to the bone... and there he was—standing outside the room, already kicked out by the sir for being late. I couldn't tell what I felt in that moment. A mix of surprise, a little ache, and something I couldn't name. I joined him silently. We sat under the back shed, on those rough benches beneath the sheet-covered roof. The rain tapped gently above us. I glanced at him—not angrily, but with quiet thoughts swirling in my eyes. *He didn't wait for me.*

We sat there for a while, the rain still whispering above us, dripping from the edges of the roof. Everything was quiet—until I heard it. A soft, helpless sound. A tiny cry. I looked around, confused, and then I saw it—a drenched little kitten, soaked in rainwater, shivering and crying as it slowly made its way toward us. My whole body froze. My heart jumped to my throat. *Why now? Why here?* I screamed silently inside, panicking. I couldn't let my fear show—not in front of Izhan. I sat there trying to act calm, my heart beating wildly like drums inside my chest, thumping so loud I thought he could hear it. I held on, breathing slowly, pretending everything was fine... but it wasn't.

As the kitten crept closer, I couldn't hold it anymore. I suddenly stood up on the bench, my face filled with fear and panic, silently begging Izhan with my eyes for help. I looked at him, hoping he would understand—do *something*. But that heartless boy just sat there... watching

me like it was some kind of comedy show. Not a hand, not a word. Just that blank, amused face, as if my fear was a joke. I couldn't believe it.

And then—like a scene from a movie—the mother cat came running out of nowhere, scooped up her kitten, and disappeared into the rain. The tiny cries faded. The moment passed. But I stood there, still frozen, soaked and shaking. Not from the rain—but from the shock. The fear. And the bitter thought that burned in my mind: *How could he just sit there? What a heartless boy...*

CHAPTER-19

It wasn't always just me and Izhan in quiet corners. Most days, it was all of us—a whole gang, full of noise and joy, teasing each other, walking together like we owned the street. Laughter echoing, jokes flying, our steps light with youth. I had a little habit that became my signature mischief. Whenever we passed a certain tree—its branches heavy with fresh rain or morning dew, droplets clinging like little crystals after a night of photosynthesis—I'd quietly walk up and shake it hard. A soft shower would fall on everyone, making them scream, laugh, or scold me while trying to dry off.

One day, Izhan was with us—more friendly than usual, his mood warm and easy. He talked, laughed, and joined in like a true friend who genuinely belonged there. That day felt special. And when we passed the tree, I couldn't resist. I did my usual trick—shook the branch, and water rained down over all of us. The cold drops hit our skin, and everyone shrieked in surprise. But then... Izhan looked at me.



Not annoyed. Not angry.

Just this... look.

Playful. Surprised. And soft. A moment that made my heart flutter like wings in my stomach. I smiled and looked away, pretending not to feel it—but inside, everything was warm and spinning. Just that one day, that one expression, made something stir quietly in me.

But only that day.

Every other time I pulled that same trick, he'd sigh, roll his eyes, and show his irritation like I was a little kid. And yet, no matter how many times he acted annoyed, my heart still remembered *that one look*, and how it made me feel—for just a second—like maybe I meant a little something more.

That day, his mood was unusually bright—soft, open, like the rain had washed away all his rough edges. I felt it was the perfect moment to push his buttons playfully. So, with a cheeky smile, I teased him—slipping in the name of his ex, just loud enough for him to hear. His eyes widened, a flicker of shock flashing across his face. He stared at me like I had just spoken a secret he thought was buried deep. “How do you know that?” he asked, his voice low, almost nervous. I acted innocent, pretending I was just being silly. “I’m not everyone,” I said, grinning. “I know *everything* about you.”

That lit something in him.

He ran after me, playfully chasing me down, catching up and grabbing my bag from behind. He pulled me gently back, not with force—but with that pleading look of a boy caught in wonder. “Please... tell me,” he whispered, with a tiny, sheepish smile. That moment... I loved it. Not just because it was funny—but because he looked at me like I mattered. Like I saw him for who he really was, not just what he showed to the world.

He was the only one who ever said something unforgettable to me. Yet he forgot me.

And do you know something strange? He once wrote her name across his chest. Deep. Bold. As if love needed to be carved into skin to feel real. After they broke up, he tried to erase it. But even now, you can see the faint marks left behind—like shadows of a name that no longer belongs. Love... it really does make us blind. Brave. And sometimes, a little brainless. But for one moment, watching him that day, I felt like I had seen both the boy he was—and the story he tried so hard to hide.

It's true—love has a strange, wild power. It can lift us to the clouds, and it can also pull us into places we never thought we'd go. When we fall in love, logic fades. Caution disappears. We start believing in impossibles, trusting too deeply, hoping too wildly. We begin to see the world through someone else's eyes—and sometimes forget to see through our own.

Love can make us *blind*—blind to red flags, to warning signs, to the pain we're swallowing just to keep someone close. We convince ourselves, *it's okay, they'll change, this is just a phase*. We defend them even when they hurt us. We forgive things we said we never would. And we stay, not because it's easy—but because our heart is louder than our mind.

Love can make us *brainless* too. We do foolish things. We cross our own limits. People tattoo names on skin, leave

behind families, abandon dreams, all for someone who made them feel seen. We write long messages at 2 a.m. hoping for a reply, wait hours just to catch a glimpse, cry silently into pillows after smiling all day for others. We beg without words, hurt in silence, and call that sacrifice *beautiful*—even when it tears us inside.

But here's the truth: love is not just about pain. It's also the feeling that teaches us the most. It makes us feel alive in a way nothing else does. It's the soft ache that reminds us we *cared* deeply. Even when it ends, the scars it leaves behind are proof that we once *felt* something real—something brave.

So yes, love makes us blind. It makes us brainless. But it also makes us *human*.

CHAPTER-20

In those days, something strange was unfolding.

Juli, with her stunning beauty and quiet charm, had unknowingly captured the hearts of nearly everyone in our college. Among them was a super senior from the psychiatric department. He wasn't just attracted—he was madly in love with her.

While the rest of us were busy bunking classes, having fun, and sneaking off for little adventures, Juli kept her distance. She was different—always focused, always in class. But she was also my best friend.

Farah, another friend of ours, often grew jealous. She used to wonder aloud if I was the reason people drifted away from her, doubting whether I somehow pulled all the attention.

Then came Juli's love story.

That super senior was quiet at first, too shy to confess his feelings. Cultural week had started, and he was leading the *vattappattu* team. Every evening after class, they stayed back for practice. Since he often saw me with Juli, he must have known we were close.

One day, as I was passing by their practice room, he suddenly ran up to me and asked, almost breathless, “Where’s Juli?”

Surprised, I replied, “She must’ve left already.”

He just nodded and walked away quickly. I stood there puzzled—Juli barely interacted with anyone in our class, let alone someone from another department. Why was he so eager to know about her?

Later that day, I told Juli about it. Without hesitation, she guessed who the boy was. I was shocked at how easily she knew.

She smiled faintly and said, “Don’t bother about him. Especially if he ever asks about me again.”

There was something in her tone—calm, but firm

By now, it was clear—he was in love with Juli. Deeply. Desperately. But Juli... she was irritated by him. She didn’t even try to hide it.

Sometimes, I couldn’t help but wonder—why? Why did she keep pushing everyone away? Not all of them were bad. Some were genuinely kind. Some really cared. I knew what it felt like to be ignored by someone you loved... to hold that special feeling in your heart and watch it mean nothing to the other person. So why was Juli doing this?

But he didn't give up. Almost every day, he showed up. Quiet, persistent. There were even times he followed her home. For nearly a year, he tried to get closer to her. To win her heart.

And then came her birthday.

We were on the college veranda, laughing and teasing, throwing harmless chaos around. Suddenly, he appeared—with his gang of friends beside him. He looked at me and simply said, “Can you call Juli?”



I paused, nodded, and went inside. When I told her, she hesitated, sensing something unusual. And she was right.

Out on the veranda, he had laid down an entire dozen of chocolates. Expensive, premium ones. Carefully placed with a small note that simply said, “*Happy Birthday, Juli.*”

Then, just like that, he left.

Oh my God—the chocolates! Just looking at them made my heart burst into imaginary happy laddoos. My stomach may have been empty, but my excitement was overflowing.

Juli, on the other hand, rolled her eyes and scoffed. “I don’t even want a chocolate from *there*,” she said, her voice sharp with attitude. Then she walked away without even touching them.

Well... if she didn’t want them, we knew what to do. Me and the girls? We feasted like queens. Birthday? It felt like ours too!

It’s a universal rule in friendship: when one of us falls into a relationship—or even something close to it—*we*, the side characters, are the ones who get the perks. And chocolates? They’re just the beginning.

He tried everything.

From little gestures to grand efforts, he poured his heart into making Juli fall for him. Day after day, he came to see her—even if it was just to catch a glimpse. He’d wait

silently, follow her quietly from a distance, hoping she'd notice. Hoping something would change.

And during all this... I started feeling something, too. A strange mix of admiration and sadness. I could see his love—raw and real—and somehow, it touched me. I even spoke to Juli a few times about it. But she wasn't interested. Not even a bit.

His friends, once full of support and excitement, slowly gave up. They couldn't understand why she never responded. No hints, no smiles. Nothing. They felt disappointed—not in her, but for him.

One day, he came to me again. His eyes tired, voice low. "Please," he said, "do something. Anything."

But what could I do? It wasn't my place. It was *her* choice. And honestly, who am I to speak on anyone's behalf when I'm over here, silently begging for Izhan in my own story? Love makes you helpless—no matter which side of it you stand on.

Still, I couldn't stop myself. Just one last try—for him. I made a small effort, just enough to make Juli look his way. To maybe... just maybe, let her smile at him. A small smile. That's all he ever wanted.

And that day... something happened.

I don't know if it was my effort or something she felt on her own. Maybe she finally saw his sincerity. Maybe her heart softened. But she smiled.

One small, hesitant smile.

He saw it. And that was enough for him. That single smile became everything. Without even thinking, he shouted “Yes!” so loudly it startled everyone. Then he ran, his face lit with a joy I’d never seen before.

Juli, as always, just turned and walked away quickly—like she hadn’t meant it or didn’t want anyone to see her soften. But I saw it. And so did he.

That smile... was no accident.

The next day, when I walked into class, everything felt... off.

The air was heavy. Everyone sat silently, faces pale, eyes swollen. A strange stillness wrapped around us like a fog. I looked around, confused—until I saw Juli.

She was sitting quietly in the corner, staring at nothing. Her eyes were red, filled with something I couldn’t describe—fear, guilt, pain?

When she saw me, she stood up, took a few slow steps, and suddenly collapsed into my arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

“He’s gone...” she cried.

I froze. “Who? What are you saying?”

Juli clutched me tighter, trembling. “*He’s gone... that senior...*”

I felt my heart sink. No. Not him.

That day... it had rained heavily. I later learned that after college, he had gone out with some of his friends near a pond. Just for fun. No one expected the danger.

He slipped.

The current was strong, and the depth was worse than they thought. His friends tried. They screamed, cried, reached—but it was too late. He vanished beneath the water before anyone could save him.

He never made it out.

But the part that shattered everyone's heart—the part that still echoes in my mind—was what came after.

His phone.

He was still *online* for a while, after he took his last breath. And his last message—his final words—was a message to his group chat. Sent just minutes before the accident.

It read:

"Yes. Finally, she smiled at me. She gave the hint."

That one smile... was his everything. The moment he had waited for, prayed for, chased for a year.

And then, he was gone.

Gone with that one small piece of happiness... as if the universe gave him just that before it ended.

CHAPTER-21

We friends had been planning a trip for a very long time. But somehow, every time we made plans, something or the other would come up, and the trip would get cancelled. And you know how Indian moms are—super strict! Even if we wanted to go out just for fun, they would need permission from every relative and still say no.

So obviously, if we told them we were planning a “trip,” there was no chance they would allow it. That’s when a genius idea struck us—we decided to call it an IV (Industrial Visit).

Since everyone in college has to complete at least one IV this year, we thought, “Why not turn this into our excuse?” We made up an entire story around it—like it was officially required and everything. Just to be extra careful, we even searched for real industries and companies that offered training or workshops, so we could show some proof if needed.

And as if fate was on our side, we found a 3-day certified training program happening in one of the top colleges in Bangalore. It was perfect. Everything fell into place—and our ‘trip’ finally had the green light... just under the name of ‘IV.’

About three weeks before the training, we started our mission—convincing our parents. One by one, each of us began pleading at home. We even took turns calling each other’s moms, just to build trust and make them feel like their children would be safe with our group.

Surprisingly, my mom agreed pretty quickly. I was shocked—but happy. But later, after she had some “mom-to-mom” conversations with my friends’ mothers, things started getting a bit shaky. Suddenly, they were all confused again, filled with doubts and endless questions.

One by one, though, all the parents gave their approval. The green flags were up! Except for one—Liya’s parents. They were still firm on their “No.” We couldn’t leave her behind, so I personally called both her mom and dad and poured my heart out. I explained everything—where we were going, how we’d be staying together, and promised them she’d be safe with us.

Finally, just after our exam results were out, they gave in. It was official. Our trip was happening!

We planned for five full days. There were 5 girls and 7 boys in total—and we were beyond excited. The train tickets were booked, hotel rooms reserved online... everything felt perfect. We were over the moon with happiness, counting down the days to what was going to be our most unforgettable adventure.

The excitement was overflowing—we were all in a frenzy over what to pack, what to buy, what essentials to carry...

It felt like no one could sit still. The night before the trip, none of us slept. We were all online, chatting non-stop, counting hours, and laughing like crazy. The excitement was just too real.

The next morning, I reached the railway station with Noja and our moms. Slowly, one by one, the rest of our gang arrived, each with their parents. Our moms were there with all their worry and love, checking if we had enough clothes, food, and everything in between. But we were already in full-on adventure mode.

Then came the moment—the sound of the train arriving on the platform. Our faces lit up with pure excitement and a bit of mischief. We waved goodbye to our parents, promising with big smiles and loud voices, “We’ll take care! Don’t worry!”—trying our best to make them feel at ease.

And just like that, we boarded the train.

It was my first train journey ever, so that made it even more special. I was literally thrilled just looking out the window and feeling the train shake as it moved.

Inside, it was pure fun.

We sang songs, took hundreds of selfies, shared the funniest stories we could think of, and, of course, teased each other non-stop. We played games, laughed till our stomachs hurt, and lived every second like it was already

the best part of the trip. It was a long journey—but none of us even noticed the time passing.

We were too busy making memories.



Somewhere in between all the fun, we eventually dozed off. The train rolled past countless stations, and at one point, I woke up needing to use the washroom. As I

stepped into the corridor near the washroom, someone walked past me. For a second, I paused.

It was a transgender person—someone who appeared like a boy but was dressed and made up like a girl. This was actually the first time I had ever seen a transgender person in real life. I had heard stories, especially that they're more commonly seen in northern parts of India, but this was new to me.

I don't know why, but in that moment, I felt a bit uneasy—not just because of how they looked, but also because of how they behaved. There was something intense about their presence—the way they stared, moved, and interacted with people in the corridor.

I quickly returned to my seat. As I got there, I saw Nadeshan pretending to sleep, hiding his face behind my shawl. Others had jumped up into their berths, clearly trying to avoid being noticed. There was nervous laughter, a bit of tension, and an awkward silence that followed.

I want to be clear—I'm not against transgender people. They are born the way they are, and that's something natural. It's not their fault; it's just how life shaped them. But what bothered us was not their identity, it was how some of them choose to behave—especially those who beg or cross boundaries by touching people in uncomfortable ways. It can make others feel unsafe, especially in a closed space like a train.

That moment stayed with me—not in hatred, but in thought. It made me reflect on how the world is filled with different people, and how important it is to respect each other while also setting boundaries for safety and dignity.

By night, we finally reached the station. Nithin, our self-declared co-planner, proudly announced, “I’ve arranged rooms nearby, we can just walk there!” Acting all confident, he led the way like a tour guide, and we all followed him through the unfamiliar streets.

Everything around felt so new—the language, the people, the place. I couldn’t understand a word of what others were speaking, and for the first time, I felt a slight fear creep in. This was truly a different world. The railway station was crowded with strangers, and in that night silence, even the smallest sound felt loud.

We finally reached the hotel. Nithin told us to wait outside while he went in to handle the check-in. He said, “Just wait here, I’ll call you once it’s done.”

But when he came back, his face had completely changed. Something was wrong.

Then he told us—our booking got cancelled. Someone else had already checked into the rooms we had reserved. Our hearts dropped. There we were, twelve students, tired, hungry, and now stranded in an unknown city in the middle of the night. It felt like everything was falling apart.

But somehow, thanks to some quick thinking and calls, the boys managed to find another place, though it wasn't what we hoped for. It was inside a small, narrow street, and honestly, the surroundings felt a little off. Disgusted but with no other choice, we accepted it.

We finally got two rooms. The five girls, including me, stayed in one room. The boys had a room on the opposite corner of the same floor, just above us.

We dropped our bags and collapsed on the beds with pure exhaustion. After freshening up, the boys brought us food, and we ate together, grateful for at least this comfort.

Before we fell asleep, someone reminded, "Don't forget to set the alarm! We need to wake up early for the training tomorrow."

With that, we finally drifted into sleep, not knowing what the next day in this unknown city had in store—but with a sense of thrill that our adventure had truly begun.

From the next day onwards, we completely skipped the training sessions. Our brilliant co-planner, Mr. Nithin, had confidently assured us that he could arrange the certificate without us attending the classes. And well... we trusted him. Blindly.

So instead of lectures and notes, we chose adventure.

We headed to Orion Mall, one of the biggest in Bangalore. It was our first time there, and honestly, it felt

like entering a different world—bright lights, endless stores, delicious smells drifting from every corner. We tried everything that made our taste buds jump in joy—from cheesy fries to thick milkshakes to things we couldn't even pronounce. It was like a mini food festival for us.



Later, with full stomachs and happy hearts, we made our way to a park near the Parliament office. It was peaceful, green, and breezy—a perfect place to just relax. We sat under the trees, clicked pictures, cracked silly jokes, and just enjoyed doing nothing.

Suddenly, Faza started acting weird—making some funny hand gestures and facial expressions like she was trying to signal something important. Everyone caught on quickly... except me. As usual.

They all burst out laughing and said, “You’re such a tubelight!”—our group’s nickname for me since I always understand everything a few moments (or minutes) late. Even if it’s a joke right in front of me!

Confused, I looked around... and then I saw it.

All around us, hidden in the bushes or quietly sitting on benches, were couples—some just talking, some cuddling... and some kissing *openly*, not caring at all who was around. It was surprising... and honestly, a little uncomfortable. We all felt a bit uneasy, so we decided to quietly move away, giving them the privacy they clearly weren’t asking for.

That park visit ended with a lot of nervous giggles, awkward glances, and jokes we’d keep repeating for the rest of the trip.

That night, we all gathered in our room with one wild idea—to play the Ouija board.

I'll admit it—I was already a little scared. But everyone insisted it would be fun, just for laughs. So, we made it feel spooky on purpose. All of us huddled together under one blanket, with a coin placed in the center, a single candle flickering, and the lights completely off. The shadows danced on the walls, and the air felt heavier with each breath.

Nithin, as usual, took the lead. He pretended to chant some mantras, his voice low and serious. Slowly, the coin began to move.

That was it—I shut my eyes tight.

I didn't have the courage to watch what would happen next. All I could see was the dim glow of the candle through my eyelids, and I could hear everyone's nervous breathing and fake scary noises.

Then, suddenly—the candle blew out.

Darkness.

A complete, chilling silence for a second...

...and then panic.

Someone screamed, someone else gasped—and I felt myself losing it. I was dizzy, almost fainting. Someone turned the lights on in a rush, and I slowly opened my eyes, still shaking.

That's when I saw the truth.

The boys had been playing tricks all along.

They were laughing, while trying hard to stay in character. But then, something else caught our attention. There was a weird-looking statue of a woman on the wall—we hadn't noticed it properly before.

And then one of the boys, with the most serious face, pointed and said,

"Did you notice her eyes before? They were closed... now look, they're open."

For a moment, we froze.

No one moved.

No one breathed.

"See? Our Ouija board worked," they whispered. "We brought something... here."

That was it.

Everyone screamed and ran out of the room—even the boys who started the whole drama. Panic took over. The joke had gone way too real, and now even they couldn't pretend it was all just for fun.

And me?

I was standing there, frozen, still trying to figure out if that statue really looked different or if it was just my imagination.

But one thing was certain—none of us would sleep peacefully that night.

That night, after all the Ouija board chaos, I somehow ended up sleeping between Faza and Noja. Well... “sleeping” is a big word. I was trying hard to sleep—eyes half open, ears alert, every tiny sound making my heart race. But being squished between the two of them gave me some weird comfort. At least if a ghost showed up, it would have to deal with the three of us together!

Eventually, I drifted off.

The next morning came like a blessing. The fear of last night slowly faded as the daylight poured in through the window. We all got ready and headed out to explore the famous markets of Bangalore.

And oh, what a treat that was!

We roamed the bustling streets filled with colors, people, and endless shops. Bangalore had a charm that was completely different—modern yet cultural, fast yet calm. We walked through the crowds, shoulder to shoulder, trying street snacks, laughing at random things, and posing for pictures every two minutes.

The best part?

Everything was so cheap! Clothes, accessories, souvenirs—you name it. We kept picking up things, even those we didn’t need, just because “it’s only 50 rupees!”

We walked in one long line, each of us calling out, “Look at this!” or “Try this!” The street was alive, and so were

we—roaring with laughter, excitement, and a feeling of pure freedom

As promised, on the last day of our trip, Nithin took us back to the college. It was time to collect our certificates—the ones we were all counting on to make this trip officially “educational.”

But when we reached there, the mood quickly changed.

One of the staff members checked the list and said bluntly,

“Your names are not on the registration. We can’t issue you any certificates.”

Our hearts dropped.

We looked at each other, stunned.

Was this a trap? Had we really come all this way... for nothing?

Panic started to build. All of us began talking, pleading, explaining. We told them we’d travelled from another state, how it was important for our records, and how we were informed everything was taken care of.

After a long back-and-forth, they finally agreed—to give the certificates... but only if we paid a certain amount.

At that point, we didn’t argue. We just nodded and agreed. It wasn’t about the money—it was about saving everything we had worked and dreamed for in those few

days. We paid the amount, received the certificates, and breathed a sigh of relief.

The next morning, we packed our bags, checked out, and headed to the station. The journey back was quieter, not because we were sad, but because we were full of memories.

Laughter, fear, chaos, fun, food, tricks, friendship—and a feeling of achievement, even if it came with a few twists and turns. We did it.

We made it happen.

And though we came back to the same lives we left behind... something had changed in us.

We carried not just certificates, but stories that we'd tell for years.

Because that trip wasn't just a getaway—it was a moment in life we all owned together.

CHAPTER-22

As the year crept toward its end, a silent tragedy began to unfold—the world was changing, and so were we. News channels echoed with alarming updates. A new virus... contagious, invisible, and everywhere. Fear spread faster than the disease itself. Masks became second skin, sanitizer a lifeline. Streets emptied. The air, once full of laughter and life, now carried only silence and suspicion.

My brother was in Tamil Nadu then, away for his studies. One afternoon, unexpectedly, he returned home. We were overjoyed—laughing, eating, sitting together as if nothing had changed. That one day felt like a festival, a stolen moment of happiness in a world gone mad.

But the very next morning, everything turned.

He woke up with a high fever. He looked pale, shivering, drained. His sister and I sat beside him, gently massaging his legs, trying to comfort him the only way we knew. Hospitals were crowded, risky, terrifying. We didn't dare go. This was corona, we were sure.



Then the signs became clearer—his sister lost her sense of smell, then her taste. That's when we knew for certain. The virus had crept into our home.

One by one, like falling dominoes, everyone in our family started showing symptoms. We lived in a single compound, close-knit and inseparable. My mother, with her warrior heart, took charge. She cooked for all, cared for each of us tirelessly. Despite her exhaustion, she boiled water infused with turmeric, ginger, lemon, and herbs—a portion of love and hope.

Then, my little brother got the fever too.

That night, my mother gently told me,

"You should sleep in the other room... just a little distance, it's safer that way."

I froze.

Tears filled my eyes, and a storm rose in my chest.

"What do you mean!?" I cried out.

"This is my little brother! My baby! I've shared my bed with him since he was born! I am not leaving him!"

And I ran to him. I wrapped him in a tight hug, kissed his burning forehead, and whispered,

"I'm here. I'm not going anywhere."

That night, we slept close, just like always. My mother soon joined us. We were sick, yes—but we were together. That mattered more.

Within a week, all of us were caught in the web of the virus. But by God's grace, it didn't become a nightmare. We fought it together—with warmth, care, and the stubborn strength of family.

After a month, the fevers subsided. Laughter returned slowly. Taste and smell crept back into our lives like shy old friends. And with them came a deep sense of gratitude—for life, for each other, and for the little acts of love that made even the darkest days bearable.

Even after the storm seemed to pass, its shadows still lingered.

By now, those who tested positive were taken away to quarantine centers. Just the thought of it terrified me—the isolation, the cold glances, the distance forced between hearts. People no longer looked at you with sympathy... only fear.

That day, my mother hadn't been feeling well. Though most of her strength had returned, the doctors suggested a scan to be safe. So, I went with her to the nearby hospital. Before we could even step inside, a COVID test was mandatory. We stood in line under the harsh sunlight, the world around us muffled behind masks and plastic shields.

But I was calm. Confident even.

It had been more than a month since the virus first entered our home. I had gotten sick before my mother, and she was the last to fall ill. We were sure it was over. When her test result came, it was as we expected—negative.

I smiled under my mask. *If she's clear, then I must be too... right?*

But then the nurse returned with my report—her face unreadable behind the shield.

“You're still positive.”

For a moment, the world froze. My breath caught in my throat. My hands trembled, though I tried to hide it.

They led me to a corner of the hospital veranda, where they told me to sit. It felt like a punishment. Chairs far apart. People looking. I could feel their eyes on me—some curious, some scared, some pitying—as though I were some giant infected creature, not a girl who had already fought this once before.

I pulled my shawl tighter around me. Even in the warmth of the afternoon, I felt cold.

After a while, my mom came out from her scan. She saw me sitting alone, vulnerable, small in that big corner. Without a word, she walked straight to me—her eyes calm, her touch warm. She didn't care who saw or what they thought.

Together, we returned home. We didn't talk much on the way, but I could feel it: her presence was my shield, my comfort, my courage.

And in that silence, I knew something: no matter how many tests or rules tried to separate us, love doesn't follow distance.

CHAPTER-23

As days passed in the shadow of the pandemic, our lives shifted into the glow of phone screens and laptop monitors. Online classes had become our new normal, but honestly... they felt nothing like college.

Our schedules were the same as regular college hours—long, monotonous, and draining. The spark of being in real classrooms, with real laughter and chaos, was gone. Instead, we opened the class links each morning more like a ritual than a responsibility—not to learn, but mostly to escape mom’s chores.

We’d slip into our rooms, plug in our earphones, and mute both mic and camera. The only time we paid attention was when the teacher paused and suddenly called out a name—our survival alarm.

Behind the black tiles of Google Meet or Zoom, we chatted away in WhatsApp groups, played games, laughed at memes, and sometimes just kept the phone aside and wandered off, while the class droned on in the background like white noise.

And then came *that* unforgettable day.

Our friend Noja, ever the multitasker, had joined the class as usual and left her phone unattended—except this

time, she handed it to her little cousin to keep him busy while she ran some errands.

The moment was innocent. But fate had other plans.

Suddenly, through everyone's headphones, came a loud, enthusiastic cartoon voice:

"HEY DORA! WHERE ARE WE GOING TODAY?"

We all froze. A second later, the entire class erupted into giggles.

The mic was on.

The cartoon blared on, full volume, causing complete chaos. The teacher tried to speak—but her voice was drowned out by the adventures of Dora the Explorer.

"Whose mic is on?"

"Please mute yourself!"

"I can't hear anything!"

We immediately knew it was Noja. Frantic, we texted her, called her, spammed the group chat, but there was no response. The little cousin was deep into his cartoon world, and poor Noja was missing in action.

The teacher, after several failed attempts to manage the noise, lost her patience and ended the class early. The group chat exploded with laughter, chaos, and wild guesses of how this could've happened.

A while later, Noja finally came online.

“Guys, what happened? Why so many missed calls?”

As she scrolled through the messages, the story unfolded before her. Her eyes widened in horror as she read the part where her cousin had turned her class into a cartoon cinema.

She tried to explain:

“I swear! I just went out to get something... I didn’t think the kid would touch anything. He must’ve pressed the mic button by mistake!”

Despite our sympathy, the damage was done. For the rest of the week, the jokes didn’t stop. *“Dora di class teacher,”* *“Noja’s TV show hour,”* and *“Cartoon edition of online classes”* became running jokes in the group.

She smiled through it all, slightly embarrassed but laughing with us. After all, that’s what friendship is—teasing, forgiving, and remembering the weirdest moments together.

And deep down, even with all the mess and monotony, these chaotic little stories are what made online college worth remembering.

The monotony of those long, dragging lockdown days felt endless. Online classes had lost their charm, and our screens had become more tiring than engaging. Then one quiet afternoon, my phone rang.

It was an unknown number. A polite lady on the other end introduced herself—she lived nearby and had just launched an online tutoring startup. She was looking for young, passionate tutors to join. After the call, I immediately rang up Farah, only to find out she'd gotten the same offer. Both of us, craving something meaningful to do, decided: *Why not? Let's turn these boring days into something fun.*

Soon, we joined.

I took up English for secondary classes, while Farah handled Science. In the beginning, it was actually exciting. We enjoyed preparing lessons, interacting with students, even staying up late to revise before teaching. It was tiring, yes—but there was something fulfilling in it.



During this time, I slowly became close with someone in the tutor group—a guy. We started sharing chats, stories, laughs. It felt natural. Eventually, I found out he ran a writers' community, which instantly caught my attention. Writing had always been my hidden passion, and he warmly welcomed me into the group.

Inside, people poured out their thoughts, poems, short stories—every word carrying a piece of their heart. I started sharing my own writings too.

For the first time, I published my writing on a public platform—and it was this.

DEAR DECEMBER!!

You are the last hope for this year...

Bidding farewell to you and waiting for a new year,
Waiting for the new bud to blossom. Yeah, you're
something special...

Being with you every day brings hope for a new
beginning. The lessons you gave, the scars you provided,
the broken stories you buried, the tears you hid...

Everything gave a new life to me.

This too is going to be a memorable year among the rest.

Every year you came to visit me, but always the discerning
fluctuates.

How beautifully is the end! Falling of snow, flowing of
romping wind, chilling day,

twinkling stars all these helps me fight the loneliness.
Gifting everyone's amiable festive and relishing with you
make us glee

This is not an end, it's just a new beginning dear...

Every year we will sanguinely halt for you.

See you December

And as days passed, our bond deepened.

We promised each other: *No matter what, let's be friends forever.*

He already had two best friends—a girl and a boy—from school. The four of us soon created our own little world: a private group, endless chats, group calls, jokes, and memories. It became a safe space, full of connection and joy.

Then, came a twist I never saw coming.

His birthday was approaching, and the other two planned a prank. They wanted *me* to pretend to propose to him. At first, I refused. It didn't feel right. *How could I fake something so deep?* But after much convincing—and playful teasing about how similar we were—I agreed.

I thought it would be a joke.

But when I “proposed,” he said yes.

And somehow... in that strange, unexpected moment, it didn't feel like a prank anymore. Something shifted. We began texting as a couple, sharing sweet words and feelings. His friends were overjoyed. But inside, I was still hesitant—haunted by memories of Izhan, my old, unspoken crush.

"After such a close moment, he asked me for one thing—he wanted me to write about what I felt after meeting him. So, to capture the magic of my dreamy thoughts about him, I wrote this:"

How I met him?

What I felt about him?

It was really a different and difficult question that made me mad and confused....

I never met him, but I knew him more than anyone.

How I met him is very simple to answer because he knew it.

It was through an association I started to notice him.

He was something more and attractive in our first view.

I was too careless and lazy that made us to have a stunning bond.

As days moved our bond become to bubble gum.

Our chats began to float as a seiche.

We began to experience and it defeated the barrier between us.

We find many resemblances, the only difference in us was that it's he and me. He made his best to succour in my falls.

I started to feel jealous on him.

I felt grudging when he tries to bring others in our daily gossip.

Why he came so late, to comfort me.

Being with him made me fall for him.

But for this sudden question, "what i felt about him" become arduous to answer.

I wish I could explain, how the sound of your cuteness gives me butterflies.

I never thought anyone would never ever make me smile, laugh supportive, grasp and with me a fast as he did.

I wish, as we too were failed to manage being with others.

But today we have to prove that we will never be desperate. And I never want to lose him.

I like him as the hell dear.

Because he is the best that cannot be defined by words.

I hid this from Farah at first. I didn't know how she'd react. He was younger than me. We had never met in real life. Still, we kept talking. Yet deep down, I kept asking myself:

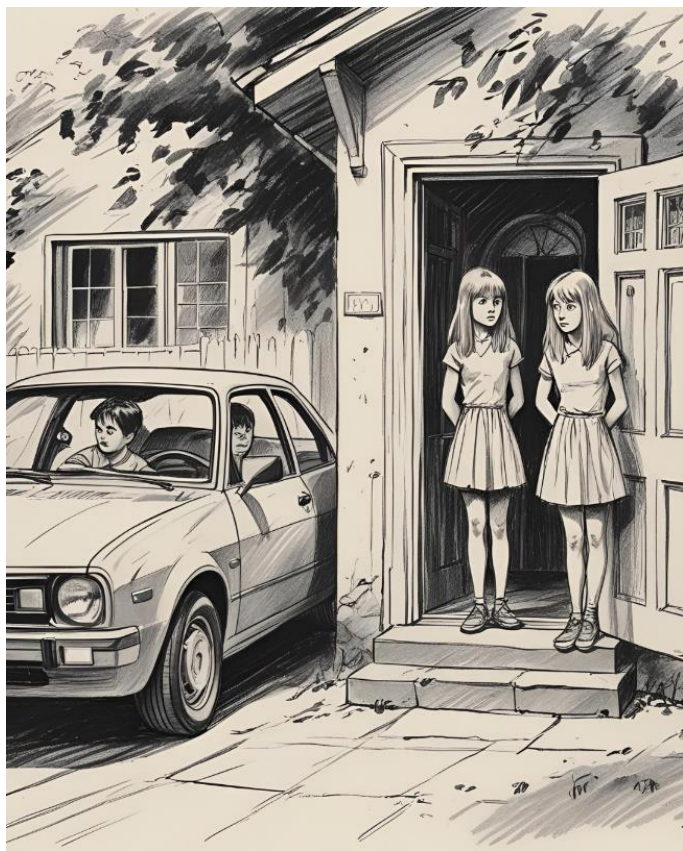
Is this love? Or just a fantasy?

Finally, I opened up to Farah. We both agreed—I needed to see him in real life, to know for sure.

We made a plan to meet him on the road near Farah's house. He'd text us when nearby, and we'd step outside casually. But fate, again, had a different plan. While tracking the location, he and his friend ended up directly at Farah's house.

Panic struck.

Farah's mom stepped outside, confused. We acted like it was a coincidence, nervously laughing, trying to brush it off. She didn't buy it completely. Something clicked in her eyes.



After they left, I turned to Farah. My heart felt heavy.

"I don't think I feel the same," I whispered.

"It's not a crush... not anymore. I'm just not sure."

That evening, Farah's mom, sensing our anxiety, gently asked what had happened. We broke down and told her everything. I was too scared to tell my own mom, so we brought Farah's mom with us to my house.

To my surprise, my mom didn't get angry.

She was calm, understanding. She listened to everything quietly. Then, she asked for the boy's number, called him directly, and spoke with maturity and grace:

"Don't feel bad, beta. She's not interested. It's better to end this now. Please don't try to call or message her anymore."

And just like that... the story ended.

Quick. Sudden. Like a page torn from a book before the chapter could finish.

I sat there silently afterward, unsure of what I was feeling—relief, sadness, confusion. Maybe all of it. But what I knew for certain was this:

Some people come into our lives as lessons. Some, as blessings. And some—like this boy—come as both.

CHAPTER-24

I feel like I'm stuck in a loop – a loop of mad love I can't break free from. No matter how hard I try, I keep battling for his love, and even now, I can't imagine anyone else. Every relationship feels empty, like it's missing something real.

The other day, I opened WhatsApp and, even though I knew I was still blocked, I sent him a simple “hi” – just to check, just to feel something.

I remember one day, during a heavy rain, I arrived late to tuition. As I was entering the class, I saw his friends standing outside. I had a strange feeling, so I asked, “*What happened?*” One of them replied, “*We're waiting for Izhan. He's been gone a long time. He didn't even tell us where he went.*”

I asked them to try calling him, but none of them knew his number. Without hesitation, I said it aloud – his number, from memory. They all stared at me in surprise. I knew they already had their doubts about me... and now, those doubts were confirmed. From then on, I felt their eyes watching me, teasing, whispering behind smiles. I was sure they had started making fun of me in front of him too.

That's when I became shy around him. The next day, while we were walking, I couldn't even look at his face. I was hiding. I thought he didn't notice — but suddenly he ran up to me, calling my name, "*Hila!*" I walked as if I didn't hear him. He stopped, and I felt breathless. I turned and said, "*Sorry... I have no excuse.*"

But he just smiled and said, "*It's okay.*" And for a few days, everything felt normal again.

I started wondering — *Does he love me too? Maybe...*

But it didn't last.

Suddenly, he changed. He started acting like I was a stranger. Every time I tried to talk to him, he avoided me. I had no idea what went wrong. It felt like living in hell — confusion, heartbreak, silence.

Secretly, I asked one of his close friends about it. They told me, "*We thought he liked you too. We're not sure what made him act this way.*"

That's when disappointment hit me the hardest.

That was our final year of higher secondary. We had formed an unofficial tuition group, and somehow, I got his number. Everything had seemed like it was falling into place — just the way I had wished.

But nothing felt right anymore.

From group chats in our tuition circle, our bond slowly moved to personal conversations. That small shift felt like something big to me — something precious.

Back then, I didn't even have my own phone. I used my mom's, secretly waiting for his message like a ritual. I remember how I would check her phone a hundred times a day, just to see if he replied. We didn't chat every day, but whenever he messaged, it felt like a spark of warmth in the middle of my ordinary days. Even a single "hmm" from him made me feel special.

But now, everything's changed. I finally have my own phone... but not the person I wanted to talk to. He's not here anymore.

I checked Instagram. My friend request is still pending — ignored. But since there's an option to message even without following, I kept texting him. Again and again. Without pride. Without dignity.

My friends kept saying, *"Why are you doing this to yourself? Where is your self-respect?"*

I didn't know what to answer. I just knew I needed his attention — even if it meant breaking myself to pieces.

I cried. I screamed. I begged.

Was that love? Or was I just sinking into madness?

I don't even know anymore. I only knew I wanted him. I needed him to look at me, to just care.

And how did he respond?

He walked away. Just like that.

Left me like a stray dog, waiting outside a closed door.

When I finally confronted him, he gave me excuses. He said he was in love with another girl.

It shattered me.

Still, I begged him. How shameless I must've seemed.

I even asked him to break up with her... just for me.

I didn't recognize myself anymore.

I was turning into someone desperate, someone dark — a version of me I hated. A girl drowning in sadness, who couldn't let go, even when everything was screaming that she should.

I was losing myself.

And the worst part?

He didn't care.

Not even a little.

I cried like a little child — not just tears, but loud, helpless sobs. I told him things I never thought I'd say out loud. "*I don't want this life anymore,*" I whispered through the pain. Can you imagine how far I had fallen? How much pain I had bottled up, and how badly I wanted him to just... care?



I even confessed, *“Yes, I’m mad. Mad for you.”*

But he didn’t flinch. He didn’t care.

He only repeated those same cruel words:

“You’ll find someone better. Someone who will love you more.”

Better? I didn’t want better.

I just wanted *him*.

That day, it was raining — just like my heart. I was already soaked, so I walked out into the rain, not caring

anymore. And in that madness, I gathered all the courage I had left and called him. I just wanted him to stay. To hear me. To feel something.

The rain mixed with the tears on my cheeks.

I begged. I sobbed. My voice trembled.

And then he... shouted.

He raised his voice like I was a stranger clinging to his feet.

It was a battle – me trying to be loved, him trying to push me away.

In the middle of my cries, I heard something strange.

A song.

He had put a song on full volume... and left the phone there.

That was his answer.

Music.

Not words. Not love. Just loud music drowning my sobs.

I stayed on the line, crying, hoping he'd return.

But he didn't.

He was gone.

With shaking hands and a shattered heart, I ended the call – empty, hopeless, and completely alone.

CHAPTER-25

As our online classes finally shifted back to normal, life slowly settled into a new routine — just with masks on our faces. What once felt strange became the new normal.

It was our final year of college, and everything felt intense but beautiful. We were busy with projects, submissions, and most exciting of all — our long-awaited college trip. Those days became some of the most unforgettable moments of our lives.

We went on a five-day tour, traveling in a big, noisy bus filled with laughter, songs, snacks, and memories waiting to be made. We moved from one beautiful destination to another, soaking in every second. The joy, the bonding, the late-night talks — all of it felt like a dream we never wanted to end.

But the best — and scariest — memory of all happened during a water ride.

We were all so excited as our group boarded a small air boat for a ride toward a waterfall. The air smelled fresh, the sound of water crashing nearby gave us chills, and we screamed and cheered like children. But what started as fun quickly turned into panic.



Our boat was overloaded. Right before reaching the falls, the boat suddenly shook, and a few of my friends fell into the water. Chaos broke out.

None of them knew how to swim.

Water started entering the boat. We screamed. We cried. Some reached out their hands, others just froze in fear. It felt like seconds turned into hours.

But somehow, with all our fear and courage combined, we pulled each person back, one by one. Hands trembling, clothes soaked, hearts pounding – we helped each other without thinking twice.

By the time everyone was back on the boat, we were silent – not because we were okay, but because we were overwhelmed. We sat there, cold and wet, realizing how close we came to something truly dangerous.

But in that moment, something beautiful happened. We laughed through our fear, hugged each other tightly, and promised never to forget that day.

But soon we came to know – it was all a prank.

The boat guide had played a trick on us. The sudden shake, the panic, the screams – all part of their dramatic stunt to add “thrill” to the ride. Once we realized it, we were too stunned to react... then we burst out laughing. Relief flooded through us like a wave. Our fear melted into joy, and we began teasing each other about who screamed the loudest or who clutched someone like their life depended on it.

That moment marked a shift in the trip – from adventure to magic.

Every place we visited after that felt like something from a movie. The waterfalls, the lush green paths, the spontaneous photo sessions, the roadside food stalls –

all of it became golden memories stitched into our hearts.

But the stay in the tents... that was something else entirely.

Sleeping under the open sky, zipped into cozy tents with our own little gangs — it was an experience none of us had ever had before. Each tent echoed with laughter, secrets, late-night ghost stories, shared snacks, and whispered dreams. Outside, the wind whispered through the trees, and above us, the stars blinked like tiny promises.

Early in the morning, we went cycling through misty trails, the cold breeze slapping our cheeks, eyes half-sleepy but hearts full of thrill. At one point, our path crossed a narrow wooden bridge built right above a calm water canal. The moment we crossed it, we felt like explorers on some secret mission. The water below reflected the golden sunrise, and the silence of nature was so pure, it felt holy.

And then came the night.

Music played softly around a warm bonfire. We sat in circles, wrapped in shawls and laughter, swaying gently to songs that felt like they belonged to us — to this moment. Some danced wildly, some just stared into the flames, lost in thought. There were jokes, singing battles, and even quiet tears hidden in smiles as we realized — these moments would never come again in the same way.

It was more than just a college trip.

It was the kind of memory that you carry in your bones forever.

A memory of being young, wild, and free — under the stars, with the people who made you feel alive.

After the trip, reality slowly crept back in.

The laughter faded into quiet halls. The bags were unpacked, the cameras filled with memories, and the projects once again took over our lives. We were suddenly caught in the rush — preparing for final exams, chasing notes, sitting late in classrooms, and trying to hold onto those last bits of college life.

Everything felt rushed, like time was running too fast.

And then... came the goodbyes.

Our farewell was like a soft heartbreak wrapped in smiles. We dressed up in our best clothes, took countless photos, wrote each other messages in slam books, and tried to laugh through the tears we were holding back. The stage was lit, speeches were given, and everyone tried to act like it was just another event — but deep down, we knew it was the last chapter.

One by one, we hugged our friends tightly — not wanting to let go.

Eyes met with unspoken words. Smiles were cracked by tears. Even those who never talked much found their voices to say *"I'm going to miss you."*

Some wrote little notes. Some slipped friendship bands on wrists. Some just sat quietly in corners, staring at the people who had become their second family over the years.

And when it was time to leave... it hit like a wave.

That this was it.

No more rushing into class together.

No more last-bench giggles.

No more shared lunch boxes or group studies that turned into gossip sessions.

We walked out of those college gates – heads high, but hearts heavy.

Because even though we were stepping into the world with dreams in our eyes... a part of us was still holding on to those unforgettable days. The laughter. The love. The heartbreak. The friendship. The memories we carved together, forever etched in the walls of that college and in our hearts.

CHAPTER-26

While talks about fighting for love from a partner, not many know what it feels like to fight for friendship. From the start, we were all very close — always friendly and full of fun. I was deeply connected to them, and my days felt complete because of them.

As time went on, even though everything seemed the same on the outside, I started to feel a little lonely — right there within the group. No one pushed me away, no one ignored me, everything was just as usual... but somehow, I could feel a difference inside me. Like I was standing in the middle of the crowd, but slowly fading from the inside.

Our girl gang slowly grew—we welcomed the boys in too, and for a while, it felt like one big, happy group. But after a year, I started noticing something painful: a kind of groupism forming within our own circle.

They would talk about their private chats or laugh over stories from classes they had bunked together—stories I had never even heard of. The way they spoke made those moments sound more fun, more beautiful than the times we all spent together.



I couldn't understand it. Wasn't what we had enough for them? Why did it feel like I was being left out by the very people I loved the most?

It broke something inside me—being ignored, not by strangers, but by your own favourite's, the ones who once made you feel special.

And sometimes, all you can do is pretend you don't know. You fake a smile, even as your eyes quietly fill with tears.

At some point, I slowly began to distance myself from them—not because I wanted to, but because deep down, I could feel they wished for it.

I didn't want to be the one trailing behind like someone begging for attention. If they saw me as a useless piece of cake, then maybe it's better I let myself be thrown away—at least that would hurt less than pretending I still belonged.

This feeling wasn't new to me. Even in my own family, I've felt like an outsider. Growing up, I saw how our financial struggles set us apart—always surrounded by people who had more, lived louder, and looked down quietly.

Yes, I know money comes and goes. But I've always believed something stronger: your character, your heart, your attitude—those are things money can never buy or replace.

Because no matter how rich you become in one world, you'll always be poor in someone else's eyes.

People always say, "*Money can't buy happiness.*"

But I don't fully agree. I think money can buy happiness—maybe not the deepest kind, but it can give us the things that bring peace: a family that's not

constantly stressed, friends who don't disappear in tough times, good health, proper food, clean clothes, and a place to call home.

Sometimes, when I see little children begging on the streets, people sleeping on sidewalks, families torn apart by struggle—I can't help but question God.

Why do some people have everything handed to them while others are left to fight for basics every day?

Why does life feel so unfair to the ones who try the hardest?

Some days, it breaks my heart. Some days, it makes me angry. And some days, I simply feel tired of watching the world hurt people who deserve so much better.

I know why I never really fit into their group.

But deep down, I still believe I did the right thing.

Being a teenager means we often get pulled toward things that seem fun in the moment, even if they're not always right. It's easy to get caught up in bad habits, wrong choices, or things that just *look* exciting.

But I chose differently. And maybe that's why I was left out.

Still, I don't regret it. Because at the end of the day, it's about personal choices. And I chose to protect myself, even if it meant standing alone.

Falling in love with the wrong person...

At that time, I truly believed it was the right thing. Even just talking to them felt like the best decision I had made. But now, I see it differently—and sometimes, I regret it deeply.

But that's life. The worst things often happen not because we're foolish, but because we're human.

We make mistakes. We trust too easily. We follow our hearts, even when they lead us into pain.

But those mistakes—they teach us. Each one becomes a lesson.

A reminder of what we deserve, of how strong we've become, and of the love we should never settle for again.

I love people deeply—truly, from the heart.

Even when they drift away, I still hold on. I stay by their side whenever they need me, no matter how far they've gone.

Even when they hurt me—leave me bleeding with their words or silence—I tell myself, *"It's okay."* I keep going back, again and again, because that's the kind of love I give.

But when something in me breaks... when that love turns to hate—

That's where everything ends.

I don't look back. Not even for a second.

Maybe that's the best or maybe the worst part of who I am.

I don't hate easily, it takes a lot to reach that point.

But once I do... I can't love again.

Not even pretend.

CHAPTER-27

One day, I was laughing and enjoying time with my friends when I happened to see a senior passing by. I don't know why — but something inside me paused. I turned to my friends and casually said, "*He looks really good, right?*"

At the time, I didn't think much of it. Just a random comment. But sometimes, that's how stories begin... with something you never expected.

Days later, I noticed him again — this time in our college group. Something pulled my attention toward him more than usual. Out of nowhere, I messaged my best friend, who was in another class, and mentioned him. That same best friend who had once supported me with Izhan... who had even spoken to Izhan on my behalf. But this time, he wasn't doing it just for me. He had his own reasons — he wanted help with his own love interest too.

And before I even knew it, he secretly passed my words to that senior.

Oh God. I had *just* followed him on Instagram. I didn't expect much. But then, on New Year's Eve — he messaged me.

"Happy New Year."

My heart skipped. I was surprised. Things were moving so fast, I could barely keep up.

From there, we slowly became friends. I felt the connection growing. But I was cautious, so I made sure to tell him not to take anything seriously about what my friend had said. *"It was all just fun,"* I told him.

He replied, *"I took it as childish."*

But that one sentence stuck with me.

Childish?

Did I seem immature to him?

Is that all I was in his eyes?

Still, our bond deepened. We talked more. We shared thoughts, memes, moments. I even opened up about Izhan. He listened. He didn't judge. Slowly, he became someone I trusted.

Then one morning, something unexpected happened.

He came to my class — looking for me.

He said, *"I'm attending an interview today — campus placement. I just wanted to wish myself luck, but only after shaking your hand."*



I didn't know how to react. I was confused — not because I was unsure of him, but because I didn't know what I *meant* to him.

Why was I being given this kind of importance? Why me?

From his chats, his gestures, the way he made time for me... I felt something different. Something soft, something real. Maybe he was in love with me too, but just scared to open up.

So, one day, I asked him — directly. I needed to know.

But he stepped back.

"This isn't the right time," he said. "You should focus on studies. I don't have anything to say to you."

Those words stung.

I began to question everything. Was he playing with my emotions? Did he just want someone to show off in front of his friends? A girl to laugh with, walk beside, but never truly care for?

I didn't want to be *that* girl. I had already gone through too much with Izhan. I knew the pain of being led on.

So, I made a decision — I quietly stepped back.

I chose to keep my distance. To guard my heart this time.

But deep inside... I couldn't help but wonder:

Why do my stories always end before they truly begin?

Why does love always slip through my fingers, like a curse stitched into my fate?

CHAPTER-28

After our classes ended, we found ourselves with no real plans or direction. Liya and Momo had already chosen to follow their fathers' businesses, but Farah and I wanted something different—an escape, even if temporary, from the constant pressure of marriage proposals waiting back home.

So, on a spontaneous note, we both decided to enroll in a course—far away, in a completely different city. It was a dream of ours to live together, just once, in a new place, to explore and feel free. That's how we ended up in Kochi, joining an institute that offered a course suitable for both of us.

We stayed in a hostel with 7 other girls. Our room was on the third floor, and to our dismay, there was no lift. At first, everything felt unfamiliar and tiring—especially the stairs—but slowly, we began to enjoy it. Kochi had its own charm. Our hostel was near the stadium, and with only 4 hours of class in the morning, the rest of the day was ours to wander.

We explored the city together, trying different food, visiting new places, enjoying night walks, and sometimes even going to small parties. It was freeing, exciting, everything we'd hoped for.

But then came the nights—my personal nightmare. Red bugs.

Every night became a battle. They bit me relentlessly. I couldn't sleep. I would sit up, eyes burning, hunting and killing them one by one. It turned into a strange obsession. Farah started getting a little scared, watching me silently go mad over these tiny creatures.

Weekends meant traveling back home. While I longed for just one good night's sleep, my mother waited with a different kind of excitement—her new list of “potential grooms” ready for me to review. While I was running from marriage in Kochi, she was preparing it at home.

Days continued in the same rhythm—mornings filled with laughter and adventure, and nights haunted by the red bugs. It was a strange contrast: joy under the sun and restlessness under the moon. Slowly, I began to miss home—not just for the people, but for something as simple and precious as a peaceful night's sleep. I realized then how important sleep was to truly feel alive and fresh the next day.

Then, suddenly, things began to shift.

Farah received a call from her father—he had arranged a job for her; one she had been hoping for. But there was a catch: she had to join immediately. She didn't even have time to think. Just like that, the chapter we were writing together began to close. She was going abroad. Far away.

I felt a deep sadness settle inside me.

We had dreamed of this journey together, and now she was leaving. We packed up our things and vacated the hostel, and while I knew it was the right decision—for her career, and for my own mental peace—it still hurt. I didn't know how to process the silence that was about to follow.

Within two weeks, she left. My dearest friend, my partner in every moment—from silly laughter to late-night confessions—was going. Every second, every meetup, every spontaneous travel plan—we had done it all together. And now, words weren't enough to describe the void that was forming.

On the day of her departure, we hugged tightly, holding on for as long as we could, trying not to let go. But we had to. Our tears said everything we couldn't. I went with her family to drop her at the airport. I waved goodbye, but deep down, I had no idea when I'd see her again.

After she left, I returned to my hometown and continued my course from there, commuting daily. But things were different now. The silence was louder. The routine felt emptier. Yet somewhere in that quiet, I started learning to stand alone—with all the memories tucked safely in my heart.

Those days felt very different from anything I'd known. A new institute, new faces, a new rhythm—I found myself in unfamiliar territory, both outside and within. With

Farah gone, I slowly withdrew from the noise around me and started focusing on myself. My routine became simple: traveling from home to the institute and back, mostly lost in thoughts.



Often during those long rides, I'd wonder: *Was everything that happened just a dream? A big, beautiful dream we once lived in?* Or was I already older than I realized, sitting

quietly in a moving train, reminiscing over the golden fragments of my past?

Some days it was hard to believe it all had actually happened.

Farah and I still messaged each other, but the conversations began to fade. She was busy adjusting to her new life, and the time zone difference didn't help. Slowly, the everyday connection we once had turned into occasional texts and long silences.

I often visited her house. Her mom would warmly welcome me, and sometimes, while sipping tea, she would show me photos of potential grooms for Farah. That's when I understood—her family had become serious about her marriage. And somehow, even that felt like another reminder that things were changing, fast.

Meanwhile, my course wrapped up in six months. Not long after, I got a job offer in another city—ironically, the same place where another old friend of mine was already working. I was ready to go. A new start.

But home didn't let go so easily. Marriage talks kept circling me, getting louder and more frequent. Still, I stood firm. I wasn't ready. I couldn't give in—not yet.

With everything about to change again—new job, new city, new chapter—I felt the weight of something unfinished pulling at me.

So, one last time, before life turned another page, I opened Instagram.

And I texted Izhan.

“Hey, how are you?” I typed, my fingers trembling slightly, even though the words looked casual.

A surprise message after all this time.

To my amazement, Izhan replied within a minute. “I’m fine,” he said.

What started as light, everyday conversation soon took a turn. I hesitated, then asked the question that had been haunting me lately.

“My family’s pressuring me to get married... I don’t know what to do.”

He responded with a simple, almost dismissive line:

“Then get married.”

That hit me harder than I expected. A strange tightness formed in my chest. I stared at the screen for a while before gathering the courage to ask again, my fingers unsure but my heart louder than ever.

“Can I... discuss about you at home?”

I hoped—even a small hope—for something warmer, clearer, softer.

But his reply came blunt, cold, and sharp.

“For what purpose?”

At that moment, it felt like even swallowing my own breath was difficult. The silence in the room grew heavy, like I was being crushed by it. My heart ached, but my ego cracked even more.

I began to type long paragraphs—pleading, explaining, lowering myself just to be understood. Words full of emotions, but all falling on deaf ears. He didn't care. He didn't even pretend to care.

He was quiet now—not because he had nothing to say, but because he chose silence over honesty.

With no hope left, no strength to beg for something that should've been mutual, I finally said my last words:

“Bye... I'll never come again.”

And I meant it.

Because that version of me—the one who pleaded, who held on to false hope, who waited for crumbs of emotion—is gone too.

"It came from the depths of my emotions, and I wish to hold onto it as a beautiful memory."

Memoria

Why are memories so special? Why are they momentous?

Why are they sweet and bitter at the same time?

Why are they still afresh in my mind?

Why can't we get over them?

Why are they so touching?

Why can't we flip out of its loop?

At times, it brings a smile on our lips. At times, forcing a tear and losing our sleep.

Those were the days where we laughed, enjoyed and got attached to each other unconditionally.

They are so powerful because it was deeply enrooted into our hearts, making it more painful

Yes, it's indeed a powerful weapon, against ourselves. It haunts us and may even kill us.

Changing our jolly mood into depression Which was something we never wanted me to be in.

I wish I still have him around me to console me and bring me back to life.

So, do he

Why do they haunt us?

Even simple things remind us about them

Everything may end sooner or later; but the memories last forever

At times they were the only reason for my survival.

The moments will pass; but the memories live with us

Some are treasures; but some petrifies us

His presence made everything memorable: And my
presence made everything memorable for him

I'm lucky enough to have him in my life; just like him to
have me in his life

We wish we're lucky enough to turn our beautiful
moments into a special memory and we need even more
luck to make them a reality

They hold my hands and it plants a pleasant smile on my
face when I'm all alone

You've to be lucky enough to have those beautiful
memories with you

CHAPTER-29

I had just joined the new company. It was my first day, and everything felt unfamiliar yet exciting. As I walked along the road toward the office, disaster struck—my chappal broke.

I stood there, flustered and embarrassed. *Why now?* There were no shops nearby, and the clock was ticking. My first day. I couldn't afford to be late.

Panicking a little, I noticed a maid nearby, busy with some work. Swallowing the awkwardness, I approached her and explained what had happened. She looked at me with a kind smile, and without hesitation, offered me glue. That small gesture—it felt like the universe was telling me, *you'll be okay*.

When I reached the office, I was introduced to many new colleagues. It turned out they were forming a new project wing. The vibe was fresh, energetic, and filled with possibility. It didn't take long before we began to feel more like a little work family than just coworkers.

At first, we all commuted home every day—long hours, crowded buses, shared autos—but it was manageable. After a month, a turning point came: we found a villa nearby. Our very own space. A new home.

There were just three of us in the beginning, and we shared a single room. Morning routines became a beautiful chaos of rushing around, helping each other get ready. Work hours were productive and fun. Nights? They turned magical—full of horror stories, binge-watching movies, late-night talks, and shared meals. That house echoed with laughter and quiet comfort.

Later, one of my juniors joined us, and we became four. Our daily morning walks to the office turned into little adventures. The late-night cooking experiments, the silly arguments over who forgot to buy onions, the sound of slippers shuffling around the kitchen—it was all so real, so simple, and yet so perfect.

I had finally started to enjoy this new life. Independent, earning, living on my own terms.

It wasn't just a job anymore—it was the start of a new version of me.

As days flew by, our memories grew like hidden treasures—tucked into every corner of our office, every laugh in the hallway, every shared lunch box, and every late evening walk back home. The office didn't feel like a workplace anymore; it had slowly become our second home.

People often say you'll end up hating your first company, that it's just a stepping stone. But for me, it was nothing like that. It was special. It was where I grew, where I belonged.

One by one, faces began to change. Some of my colleagues moved on to new paths. New people arrived. The workspace evolved, but my bond with the place remained. Soon, I was the only one left from the very beginning—a silent witness to everything that had changed.



Then came a new chapter: a lady boss. Strong, kind, and graceful, she didn't just manage us—she nurtured us. She treated us like her own children, and under her care, the atmosphere transformed. We grew more confident, more open, more daring.

With her encouragement, we began to step out of our comfort zones. Our world wasn't limited to our desks anymore. After work, we started going out—shopping sprees, random street food dinners, movie nights, and long walks under the city lights. The dull routine was replaced with little sparks of joy.

Each day stitched a new thread into the fabric of our lives. We weren't just employees—we were becoming ourselves.

Something about those ordinary days felt extraordinary. We didn't realize it then, but we were living the kind of days that would stay with us forever.

CHAPTER-30

Sooner or later, the time came when I had to make a choice for myself. I decided to move forward—focused on my career, my dreams, and the quiet longing I carried within me for a fresh start. After everything I had experienced, I felt the need to pause, reset, and rediscover myself. That's when I made the decision to move to Europe for higher studies.

It wasn't just about academics—it was about healing. About finding myself again after everything life had taken me through. A part of me was searching for a new beginning in a place where no one knew my past. A clean page, waiting to be written on.

But with that decision came a heavy weight: *leaving behind the life I had built*—the people who weren't just colleagues anymore, but my second family.

Saying goodbye was harder than I thought it would be. We had shared everything: deadlines, celebrations, birthdays, heartbreaks, midweek breakdowns, silly fights, and spontaneous chai breaks that turned into life talks. I had laughed with them, cried silently beside them, grown with them.

But destiny had other plans.

A month before my flight, I decided to step away from work to spend time with my family—time I knew I would deeply crave once I left. I wanted to soak in the warmth of home—the smell of my mother’s cooking, the sound of my little brother’s footsteps running across the house, the quiet moments of sitting on the balcony with my chai while my mom softly hummed from the kitchen.

I watched the ordinary days with a new kind of tenderness. Every hug from my brother felt longer. Every time my mom tucked my hair behind my ear, it lingered. I knew these moments wouldn’t return soon. The walls of my home, once so familiar, suddenly began to feel like a part of me I was being asked to leave behind.

Packing my bags was emotional. Every outfit reminded me of a story. Every drawer held memories I had almost forgotten. I kept pausing, caught in thought, touching things gently as if they’d speak back.

Deep down, I wasn’t just preparing to travel across countries—I was preparing to become someone new.

And yet, in my heart, I promised myself: no matter how far I go, I’ll carry their laughter, their love, and every moment we lived—because home isn’t always a place. Sometimes, it’s the people who built you, piece by piece.

While packing my bags, I felt a strange silence settling into my room. With every item folded, every shelf cleared, the space around me started to feel less like

mine. My room was slowly becoming empty—and so was my heart, in places I hadn't realized were still holding on.

It wasn't just me preparing to leave—my home, too, was preparing for my absence. My mom quietly moved around the house, making my favorite dishes. My little brother clung to me more than usual, asking small questions he already knew the answers to, just to hear me respond. Even the walls, the breeze from the window, the echo of footsteps in the hallway—they all seemed to say goodbye in their own silent ways.

That one month flew faster than I had imagined. And then, the day came.

With a heart full of love and a throat heavy with words I couldn't speak, I said goodbye. Not just to my family, but also to a version of me I was leaving behind. As I hugged my mother and brother tightly, I knew this wasn't just a “see you soon.” It was a pause. A stretch of time where nothing would be the same.

And quietly, deep inside, I said another kind of goodbye—a forever goodbye to my battle for love... the love I had once chased from Izhan. That chapter had closed now. I carried the pain, but no longer the hope.

Then the flight lifted, and so did I.



A new morning awaited. The sky above a different land welcomed me with open arms. The sun rose differently here. The air had a new rhythm. Strangers passed by with polite smiles. New faces, new voices, a new pace of life.

And just like that, my world changed.

And so, did I.

Synopsis:

She dwelled in a world spun from dreams, where every whisper of the wind told a story of magic and endless possibilities. With a heart full of hope, she longed to weave her own fantasies — tales where love was pure, and the world was kind.

But time revealed a different tale. Reality, cold and unyielding, stretched before her like an endless shadow. For years, she wandered through the maze of her own struggles, chasing a love that was never truly hers to hold.

In the silence between dreams and truth, she learned that some battles are fought not with swords, but with the courage to accept what cannot be changed.

Her Battle to Be Loved is a haunting journey through heartbreak and healing, where the fragile line between fantasy and reality blurs — and a girl discovers the strength to rewrite her own story, beyond the dreams she once chased.

Because sometimes, the greatest love is the one we find within ourselves.

About the Author

Newrul Hina is a dreamy soul who grew up weaving her world through stories born in fantasy. Deeply connected to emotions and the unspoken truths of the heart, she finds magic in turning pain into poetry.

Her *Battle to Be Loved* is her first story – a semi-fictional journey drawn from the blurred lines between her reality and imagination. Through her writing, she gives voice to every girl silently fighting her own battles, believing that behind every smile is a story waiting to be told.

This book isn't meant to wound – but to heal, to accept, and to understand the beauty of facing one's truth.