

Yours, Samar

The Story of a Heart That Never Let Go

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PROLOGUE

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That day, for some reason, it was darker than usual. And the usual for Samar these days was being lost.

The dark clouds in the late evening had made the sky look dramatic. "It is just like in the movies," Samar heard and smiled, as it was something he knew Inayat would say. Samar could feel her standing behind him, her hands on his shoulders as she looked at the sky with her doe-like, dreamy eyes. She'd say in her hopeful and playful tone, "This sky can be used to make a horror movie. Or a Jurassic one. Even better."

Samar chuckled and, turning a little, said, "We are not using it for anything. Let's just look at it and enjoy."

"Ah... that's boring," she'd say. Then she would come closer, standing on her toes, and whisper into his ear, "Let's play hide and seek."

Samar frowned and said, "No, I don't want to go anywhere. Let's just stay here for a bit."

Inayat would giggle as she stepped away from behind him. "Come and get me."

Getting annoyed, Samar pleaded, "No, please, don't..." and turned around.

And she was nowhere. She was never here. This never happened. It was just another one of his hallucinations. But just then, as his eyes moved up to the doorframe, he saw Shehnaaz standing there.

"Samar, are you okay?" she asked, a little worried.

Samar frowned as he said, "Yeah. Why?"

Shehnaaz shook her head and said, "Nothing," and exhaled before adding, "It's just... they are here."

"Already?"

Shehnaaz nodded with a tight smile.

Samar exhaled, knowing this meant he could no longer stay lost. He nodded and looked back at his room — a set of classic traditional furniture and designs. The lights were off, but the moonlight made everything visible. Cold wind blew in from the open balcony door into his bedroom.

He stood still, looking out at the balcony of the apartment next door. The curtains were drawn; they had not been touched for some time now. Dust sat on the floor and on the glass railings. Not cleaned. An empty house gets dirtier than one that is filled. Life makes a building look alive. Life was what he had when she was around — something far away now.

He felt just like that empty building, with no one living there. Hollow and useless. Samar would have never noticed all this if his mind had not been recalling his past with someone he used to love.

“Well, if he still recalls her, then maybe it is not over yet. He doesn’t admit it, though,” Shehnaaz said.

“And what does he say?” asked the therapist. Shehnaaz had to tell her about Samar before arranging his sessions with her.

“He says she is in the past. But really, if you are living in your past, then it becomes your present, doesn’t it?”

The song ‘Regent’s Park’ by Bruno Major was playing on an old-style music player. He had a cigarette still in his fingers, burnt out even though he had taken only a puff. He had not been able to focus on things. He would often drift into his thoughts or the stories he was working on, because for some reason he liked the parallel world of thoughts better than the real one.

He was snapped out of it again as Shehnaaz called him once more. “They are waiting for you.” She stood by his bedroom door, her hand resting on the frame.

Samar turned around slowly and nodded. “Coming.”

Shehnaaz still hadn’t moved from the doorway. She did not believe his words when he still held the cigarette between his fingers. Samar put it away, then abruptly walked out of his room, a little frustrated with everything.

Shehnaaz mumbled from behind him, sensing his silent anger, "You know, they just came to celebrate your success."

"Yeah, I know," he said uninterestedly, and within a few minutes he stood before a huge crowd of people.

"Hello, people!" he shouted, standing on the staircase and looking down at the party in the hall. Taking a glass of champagne from a passing waiter, he raised it in the air and announced, "You're here already. Let's get the party started then!"

The crowd cheered.

It was a party to celebrate Samar's success for his bestselling book. He had written three or more, and all of them had topped the charts in the past couple of years. The guests were mostly media and friends, and Samar was not particularly keen on meeting any of them. But Shehnaaz wanted the moment to be remembered. You don't get three bestsellers by one author every day.

Shehnaaz was Samar's closest friend — someone he would always love and care for. And she knew him very well, too. Therefore, she knew his happy face was not real.

In the kitchen, Samar went to get some ice for his drink when he met another close friend.

"Zakhir!" he said upon seeing him. The two hugged and shook hands the way they always did.

"Told you you'd be a fine writer," Zakhir said.

Samar finally chuckled with genuine joy and nodded. "Seems so."

"I am proud of you, man," Zakhir said, patting his back.

Samar nodded briefly in thanks.

Just then, a media person's camera flashed as he clicked their picture.

"Excuse me?" Samar said.

"I'm sorry, I just wanted the world to see the real version of your friend from the story. Since you said your books are true and basically autobiographical, would you mind telling us where the lead female character is in real life?"

Samar went quiet. He did not like the mention of his old lover — the person he thought about every day but never spoke to.

"Samar?" the man called again.

Samar did not answer. He did not feel well now. Zakhir asked if he was okay. Samar nodded, looking down, trying to compose himself.

Zakhir turned to the man and said, "Hey, why don't we take a walk while I tell you all about it, huh?" He put an arm around him and led him away from Samar.

Samar exited the house through the back door.

IN THE PRESENT

"There are only two kinds of writers: ones who have a broken heart, and the ones who regret breaking someone else's. Which one are you?"

There was silence.

"Samar?" called a lady. She looked old enough to be his mother. She wore chain glasses and a shawl over her shoulders because it was cold in Mussoorie. She was his psychotherapist.

Samar sat on the sofa, looking down, his face flushed with pain and sorrow. He slowly looked up when he heard her call again.

The lady said, "Remember, you came here to work through what's been going on with you?"

Samar nodded.

She asked again, "Do you want to talk about it now?"

Samar was quiet, unable to understand what to say anymore.

It had been about a week since he started coming to her but had not said much.

“Samar, I know there’s a lot going on in your life that you’re struggling with. And I want to help you. But you need to start talking. Keeping everything locked away in your heart will only make the pain worse.”

Samar nodded again. “I know,” he finally said.

The lady asked, “So?”

“Can I start from when she entered my life rather than the hard part?”

“Wherever you are comfortable.”

“Okay...” he said, inhaling deeply as he prepared himself. “Well...”

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CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNINGS

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2022

Glad you came- The Wanted

The sky was growing dark with heavy rain clouds. It was becoming difficult for the two pilots to fly the plane through them. They had not been informed that the weather would take such a turn.

The captain, Mr. Roy, studied the weather radar for a moment before turning to the first officer, Samar Malik. "It'll be difficult to keep the aircraft stable in these conditions," he said. "But I believe we can get through it if we stay focused."

He reached for the speaker phone, then paused. Samar smiled and said, "We'll pull through, sir. I trust your judgment."

The captain nodded, put the speaker phone back, and guided the aircraft into the storm. As the turbulence intensified, the captain calmly flew the aircraft while Samar monitored the instruments, called out changes, and kept encouraging him. Working together, they maintained control and soon cleared the worst of the weather.

After the flight landed and the two pilots walked out of the airport, the captain said, "Courage is important, Samar, but so is knowing when a risk is worth taking."

Samar smiled. "That's why I never doubted your decision, Sir."

The captain nodded. "And your confidence kept the cockpit steady. Sometimes, that's exactly what a captain needs."

"Yes, Sir." Samar nodded.

"Well done, anyway," the captain added, patting his shoulder.

Samar smirked.

"But this does not mean you're getting the promotion," the captain continued.

Samar chuckled. "Not expecting it."

By now, the captain had reached his car. "We'll meet next week then. Have a nice flight home, Malik," he said as he took his seat.

"You too, Captain," Samar replied, standing nearby.

The captain rolled the window up, and the car drove away.

It took Samar another six hours to reach home in Pune, four of which were spent on another flight, followed by a taxi ride. It was late morning when he finally arrived.

While taking his luggage from the taxi trunk, he noticed two men unloading furniture into the house next door. Someone was moving into the apartment, and judging by the number of belongings, it seemed to be a family.

Samar rang his doorbell, and the maid opened it. She greeted him and stepped aside as a huge bulldog jumped onto him, licking his face and forcing him to sit down.

"I'm glad to see you too, Jacky!" Samar laughed, patting his dog. "My boy, how are you?"

His close friend Zakhir approached next. "What's up, man?"

"Good. And you?"

"Just going through days as they pass," Zakhir replied.

Samar shook his head sarcastically. “Always cheerful.” He pulled Zakhir into a tight hug. They patted each other’s backs before stepping apart.

Zakhir walked back toward the living room. “You wanna join? It’s the finals,” he said, referring to the cricket match.

Samar shook his head while carrying his luggage inside. “They’re playing – what do I have to do with that?”

Zakhir stayed quiet. Samar wasn’t a big cricket fan, though he usually watched finals. Samar chuckled at his own joke and waved as he walked away. Zakhir returned to watching the match.

Samar had already informed them he wouldn’t eat anything since he was tired, so no one disturbed him.

The house was a two-storey builder floor. Samar’s bedroom was on the first floor, the second floor was for guests, and his parents had once lived on the ground floor, where Zakhir now stayed. As Samar climbed the stairs with his bags, he looked at the family photographs lining the wall. They always filled him with a faint sadness.

During college, Samar had met Zakhir, who became like a brother to him. Zakhir dreamed of becoming a journalist, but his parents did not support him. When he was thrown out of his home, Samar took him in. Since then, Zakhir had lived with him, contributing by writing for newspapers and sharing expenses. Samar was simply happy to help someone and not live alone.

In his bedroom, Samar began unpacking while glancing toward the house next door. A woman seemed to be moving around there, her long dress flowing in the air. The houses stood very close, their doors facing each other. Samar tried to see her face, but white balcony curtains blocked his view, and she hurried away. Shaking his head at his curiosity, he drew his own curtains shut, slid the suitcase into a corner, and exhausted from jet lag, fell asleep almost instantly.

Closer – The Chainsmokers

Samar slept for more than ten hours and woke late in the evening when Zakhir nudged him awake, insisting he join him at a club party.

Samar showered and dressed in black ripped jeans, a T-shirt, a beanie covering his long wavy black hair, and a white-and-grey shrug. Autumn had arrived, and nights were getting colder. He was tall, slim, and fair-skinned, with dark eyes and hair – handsome enough to be a model, though he never intended to be one.

They drove to the club in Samar's white Innova Hycross. The club glittered with chandeliers. Girls from across the city filled the place, dressed in shimmering outfits and crop tops, dancing and drinking through the night. Lights flashed, music thundered, and the crowd moved with the rhythm. There was a reason Samar loved coming here whenever he felt exhausted – he could simply close his eyes and lose himself in the moment.

Early the next morning, completely drunk and tired from dancing, Samar drove back home. As he parked in the dim dawn light under a blue sky, he noticed a girl standing on the balcony of the neighbouring apartment.

She wore a short white dress, holding a mug. Spaghetti straps slipped from her bare shoulders, and a silver chain with a blue flower pendant rested against her neck. Her long black wavy hair moved gently in the autumn breeze as she looked away.

At that very moment, Samar realized where he had seen her before. Memories returned in flashes.

TWO YEARS AGO,

Samar was on a flight from Delhi to Pune, traveling in economy class – something he occasionally did just for a change to his way back home. After placing his luggage in the overhead compartment, he sat down, put on his headphones, and played *All Cried Out* by Gareth Gates. Exhausted after a sixteen-hour shift, he closed his eyes to sleep.

A tap on his shoulder woke him.

“Excuse me, please?”

Samar opened his eyes and looked up.

A young woman stood before him; her gaze fixed on him. She appeared to be in her early twenties. The moment he saw her, his heart skipped a beat. She wore a brown overcoat over a black dress against the cold. Her long black curly hair was tied in a loose, messy bun, with a strand falling across her eyes. Her skin was not fair but radiant.

She looked stunning.

She said, again, "Excuse me?"

Samar got back to his senses as he took off his headphone. "Yes?" He said.

"Is this 13-C?" She asked for the seat beside him.

Samar checked the seat number and nodded, "Yes, it is."

"Oh, great." She said and started to place her luggage's on top and took the seat. Samar looked at her waiting for her to say anything to show gratitude or introduce herself. But the girl didn't. She rather pulled out a book and started to read it. Samar then turned away a little disappointed as he put his headphone back on. Right then, the girl held on his arm and said, "Oh, and thank you. I was searching for it the whole way."

"No worries." Samar said.

Now, that the gratitude part was done, Samar thought how to continue the conversation. He liked her and wanted to say something. But he could not start.

He then finally slid his headphones down his neck and took out his hand for a handshake as he said, "I am Samar Malik, by the way."

She took out her hand, too, and shaking his, told, "Inayat. Inayat Noor."

Samar nodded as he said, "Nice to meet you, Miss Noor."

Inayat smiled and nodded in return. Then she went into her reading again.

He checked the book name. It was 'Madly in love with you'. Samar smiled as he said, "How did you find it?"

The girl turned to him in surprise as she said, "Oh, umm, okay-ish. I mean, I am no writer, but I have read many romantic dramas and this one is just not it."

"What do you mean?"

"It should not be called a romantic drama."

"What would you call it, then?"

"Just drama." She said, "Because there is no romance."

"But they do meet up and do...things." Said Samar in defence for the characters in story of the book.

She shook her head, "How much? They have not even reached the second base when it is half of the book."

"But that's the whole point, it is a romantic drama not erotica."

"Yes, still, it is too slow. I mean, give me something. Something that I can hold on to." Inayat said with her hands clutching the air dramatically.

Samar cracked a laugh.

Inayat realised that she just blabbered out and said, "Oops, that did not come out right." And she looked down.

Samar nodded. "But you are reading it?"

"Just because I want to finish it for once and all." She said her finger pointed at him, "Plus, I don't have any other book as of now, so.' She shrugged.

Samar made a sob face as he said, "Is it that bad, really?"

"Yeah, I mean, I don't know how it even became the best seller. I guess, at that time they did not have much of a competition going on."

Samar nodded, "So, would you be able to make a better version of it?"

"I guess."

"Tell me."

“Well, first of all, the book starts slow. Whereas the book should always have first few chapters very captivating and engaging for any reader to continue. Then there are things and details which are unrelated to the main story. It is just distracting and wasting time, delaying the conclusion. And at the end, the conclusion was what, they both died. I mean, it was so predictable.”

Samar made a disbelief face as he said, “What are you saying?”

“Yeah, as readers we tend to know what action or dialogue or scene will lead to what conclusion. I am a Beta reader, by the way.”

Samar briefly nodded.

“The conclusion was hinted from the very beginning. That is the reason why they were sad from the beginning.”

“They?”

“Their family and friends.” Of the book characters she meant.

“But that’s because it is a romantic drama.”

“It is a drama, period.” She corrected, again. “I mean, I don’t understand, first of all, how come they are always sad? Do they have nothing to be grateful for? Any reason to be happy with life? They surely deserved the dramatic ending. “

“A little exaggerated don’t you think?” He said.

“Me? Think of the writer. He literally made something as beautiful as the two main characters in the story and then what, kill them? It’s like killing your own children.” she shouted.

“Okay, now you are going way too far.” Samar said. Gesturing for her to calm down.

Inayat took long breaths to calm herself. Then she continued, “I think, as writers they should show hope at the end of the story. I mean, people’s life is already miserable enough. Why add on to it?”

“I understand.” Samar said, trying not to ignite her, again.

“Writer should be making sure they are spreading hope and wellness through literature. It’s their duty.”

“And this book was nevertheless hopeless?” Samar could not stop but question.

“YES! Absolutely! Hopeless!”

Samar nodded. “And you are saying this when you haven’t even read it all.”

“I don’t need to. I am a beta reader. A professional.”

Samar nodded, “Well, I will consider your points, in that case, Miss. Noor. But as of now it will stay as it is.”

“I am sorry. What do you mean?” She said.

Samar chuckled, “I wrote this book.”

CHAPTER 2

LONG TALKS

Birds of the feather- Billie Eilish

Inayat turned the book around and read the name of the writer. It was a different name. She smiled as she said, “Funny. The name is different here.”

“I never said I am the author of the book.”

Inayat got her eyes squeezed, as puzzled she was, “What does that supposed to mean?”

“I wrote it but did not give my name.” Inayat was still looking at him trying to understand. Samar said, “Ghost writer, you know?”

Inayat nodded briefly, now. She knew what that is. She then said, “I am sorry, I didn’t know.”

“That’s okay. It’s your opinion. You have the right to give it.”

Inayat smiled with tight lips as she tried to cover, “Actually, I did like this book. I was just not satisfied with a few things. Otherwise...”

“It’s okay, Miss. Noor.” Samar said.

“Just Inayat.” She insisted.

Samar nodded, “Just Inayat.” Samar then added, “It’s just a habit of mine. As pilot we call each other by our last names, only.”

“As pilot?”

“Yeah.”

"So, you are a pilot, too?" She gasped.

"What do you mean I am a pilot, too? Are you a pilot, too?"

Inayat giggled, "No, I mean..." And she saw he was already smiling. So, she added sarcastically, "Ha-ha, funny."

Samar chuckled. "I am only a pilot. I wrote or helped in writing that book years ago when I was in college. Ever since I did not go back into that, so I am just a pilot, now."

"May I ask why?"

Samar smiled as he said, "Probably because I was not very good at it. As you concluded before."

Inayat flushed in shame as she said again, "No, I didn't mean it..."

"I was kidding Inayat. I stopped because of some personal reason." Samar said.

Inayat waited for him to continue. Samar noticed that and said, "...which I would not like to share right now. Geez, you are too much."

Inayat nodded and said, "So, is it your flight? Who is flying it, now?"

Samar chuckled as he said, "It runs fine in autopilot mode." Inayat laughed. Then he brushed it off as he said, "It is not my plane to fly."

Inayat nodded as she sighed in relief, "I was scared it would be our last conversation."

Samar repeated her words, "You were scared it would be our last conversation?"

"I mean; I wouldn't want to die so soon."

Samar nodded, "Oh, in that way."

Inayat then found it to sound rude so she tried to cover it, "I mean, I didn't say I would like for it to be our last conversation otherwise. I mean, not if you don't want to...."

Samar kept looking at her enjoying her babbling. Inayat said finally, "I don't want to seem rude or flirtatious. And I am sounding both for some reason."

Samar smiled as he told, "When you try to not do something our brain automatically does it. Its science. You can try that. When you try to stop doing something you do it more. Like, when you try hard not to spill the coffee while carrying you spill the most. So, instead, try diverting your focus on something else. You will not be doing what you did not want to do by doing something else. It's pretty simple that way."

Inayat was quite trying to comprehend. Then she said, "Well, I feel better now knowing what babbling sounds like. Thank you."

Samar laughed out.

Inayat then said, "But I was really not trying to be flirtatious. And that's not because you look bad or something, because in fact, you look very handsome and attractive, and... shit, I am sounding like a flirtatious again."

Samar chuckled, "Why don't we stick to the topic?" Inayat looked confused. Samar reminded, "The plane crash."

"Oh, yeah, I was just..." and Samar turned fully towards her as she continued, "saying that I don't know if we will talk after our flight is landed. I mean, who knows where we go, whether we meet or not?"

"We can plan that if you want to." Samar said out of nowhere.

Inayat got quite at that. Surprised for Samar to be so frank so fast. She asked, "Are you asking me out on a date?"

Samar rephrased it to defend himself, "No, I am just saying, we can stay in touch after the flight, if you'd like."

"So, no for the date?"

Samar thought about it, "No, I didn't...yes, if you want to ask me out."

"So, you are saying yes for the question I did not ask?"

"I am saying yes to the question you intended to ask."

"But I did not."

Samar raised his palm in defence, "Okay, I am sorry then." He said, "We are not going out. Chill."

And Samar started to put on his headset, a little embarrassed now. Inayat started to laugh aloud. Samar turned to her like saying, seriously?

Inayat said, "It is called 'Right back at you'."

Samar shook his head as he turned away. "You think, you are funny, huh?"

Inayat shook her head and said, "No, I know I am."

Samar licked his lips at this witty girl, smiling and nodding at her. And he came in closer to whisper, "Tell me, if I ever ask you out, would you say yes?"

"Oh, you are being too direct, now." said Inayat backing off a little.

"Come on, it's just a hypothetical question." He spoke. But in reality, he was genuinely interested.

Inayat thought about it and said, "Depends, what do you have to offer?"

"Whatever there can be in a relationship between a man and a woman." He spoke.

Inayat thought about it and said, "I am not up for a sexual relationship."

Samar turned to her. "Meaning?"

"I am looking for something emotional. Something real."

He nodded and confirmed, "So, you want no sex at all?"

Inayat thought about it and said, "Maybe just the basics." And Samar chuckled. "But I want commitment. I don't understand how people jump from one relationship to another just to pass time."

"Neither do I," Samar admitted. "But I also don't think I could do one of those relationships where you only text and call forever."

Inayat raised an eyebrow. "Long distance?"

"Yeah." He said. "People say test your partnership before marriage by doing live in. I say that long distance in a relationship is the best kind of test. It will show whether or not you can live in hope of the other person who

loves you and wants you. It is great pain in waiting for someone. But it is the only thing that makes love, true and long-lasting. Although, I couldn't do it."

"I could." She nodded. "And so, I prefer long distance relationship over one-night stands."

"Long distance for years?"

"If it's the right person."

Samar laughed softly. "You must have a lot of patience."

"Maybe, I do."

The two went quiet. They had their meals in silence and after that Inayat got wine to sip.

Samar looked at her in surprise. She did not look to be the one who drinks. It was cute to see her, though. Inayat noticed that and said in defence, "It is my first flight alone. Just need it to be able to rest and have courage in case something happens."

Samar chuckled as he assured, "Relax. Have some faith in us." He said, "By the way, why are you alone in this flight?"

"My family moved to Pune sometime back. I was in boarding doing my college, so I am joining them now."

Samar nodded.

She then took the drink in one gulp asking the airhostess for more to come. Samar kept his gaze at her as slowly but steadily she drank 4 glasses of wine. She was a little drunk now. The lights were turned off as it was nap time, and it went quite as people fell asleep.

Inayat asked then, "So, you must have a deep understanding of love to be able to define it so well in books, right?"

Samar looked at her for this kind of question at this moment and shook his head. *She is drunk.* "Actually...I have no idea about it." Being honest, "I just fantasize about it and write that down. And people love it."

"What! How is that possible?" she shocked with her hands yanking.

"I think, it's because people take it as this magical thing to happen once in a lifetime. But it's really not."

"Oh, yeah? What is it then?"

"Well, for starters the love at first sight thing does not exist."

"Uh-huh, alright." She said as she acted to mock that she is writing it down.

Samar chuckled as he added, "Yes and, from what I've learnt as a bachelor, love is a lot more practical than magical. And it takes determination to keep it up."

Inayat nodded, "And I should take your advice because..."

"I am a writer."

Inayat laughed as she asked next "So, you are saying you have never really fallen in love?"

Samar turned to her in surprise. "I never said that."

"So, you did?"

"Now, that's a personal question."

"I mean, only if you are okay to answer."

Samar smiled as he told, "I don't know."

"Well, then your advice is null and void. And I hereby" Inayat said in a dramatic British accent, "come to the conclusion to not take your advice."

"Why, have you had a lovey-dovey once in life that makes you an expert in love?"

"I announce you shall not be a professional love guru." She said loudly. "In fact, I eliminate your position in the conquest to ever be one."

Samar chuckled and nodded, "Okay." Inayat laughed too.

After a minute Inayat controlled herself as she said, "Well, I hope you do."

"What?" Samar asked, "Fall in love?"

"Mm-hmm." She nodded with her lips tight.

"Why?" Samar said, interested now.

"Because..." And she tried to justify it with nothing coming to her mind, "it is... In fact, magical and once in a lifetime kind of thing. And everyone deserves to experience it."

Samar nodded thoughtfully then he pointed at her. "You know what your problem is?"

"What?"

"You're a romantic."

She grinned.

"And you know what yours is?" she asked.

"What?"

"You pretend you're not."

Samar made a disbelief face. "No, I just like to fantasize about."

Inayat nodded and said, "But unlike you, I think, even if it may not literally bring magic in your life, it does make changes in a way that is quite impossible otherwise."

"Like what?"

"Like, it will make you do things you never thought you would do, just because you are in love. It will make you brave, and scared. Stupid and smart, but at the end, it will all be worth it because you have that one person by your side who means a world to you."

CHAPTER 3

LONG TALKS II

Samar briefly nodded as he said, "You really like love."

"I think, we all do. You will also, once you find the right one for you."

Samar nodded. "I kind of hope not."

"Why?"

"It's just too much of expectations from someone. Like burdening someone with your wishes."

Inayat frowned at that. "It's not your decision to make whether someone wants to do it for you or not."

"But maybe it is. I mean, why don't we do the things for ourselves that we expect them to do for us?"

"Yes, I mean, self-love is necessary. But..." She said and turned to face me, "Humans are made to connect with one another. You can't stop that. It's inevitable."

Samar thought and said, "Sometimes I think about it and I just feel like if I want so much from someone, their time, efforts, their attention, and support, it would mean that someone would expect that from me and I am scared that I will not be able to fulfil it or be good enough."

Inayat smiled as she looked at him and, for the first time, found him very cute. "Awe, so you are scared that you would not be able to provide for her or keep her happy?"

Samar thought about it in the angle she said it and, "Yeah, kind of..."

"Samar," she said as she pulled his cheeks, "You are soooo cute."

Samar chuckled and touched his cheeks which had gone red, now.

She then told, "You know, I think it's not going to be as hard as it seems."

"You think so?"

"See, when you are in love you just pour your heart out and give and provide for that someone and it doesn't seem that hard because it's something you are doing out of love. That is what is love all about, right? Giving selflessly."

Samar shook his head not agreeing with her. Inayat tried another example, "You know like, there are so many things we love to do. And when we do it, it is like effortless. Even though, in all practicality it is not."

Samar smiled as he got it and said, "You have never fallen in love, have you?"

Inayat smiled as she said, "I hope not. Because that would mean, I have a terrible taste in men."

Samar chuckled, "That explains why you are so hopeful about it."

Inayat chuckled as she said, "Oh come on..."

"If you've known the most famous love stories, it ends with a lot of pain or someone probable death."

"Maybe, you don't need to see death as the end of the story. Maybe it is a temporary separation."

Samar turned to her in disbelief as he said harshly, "No. Death is the end of it."

Inayat turned to him. He had suddenly turned all serious.

"Death means, it's over forever." He said looking deep into her eyes. "No coming back, no second chances. It's done, gone, puff."

Inayat nodded and inhaled a long breath as she said, "Okay, I got it."

Samar turned away a little disturbed now.

Inayat could guess death is a trigger for him. So, to lighten the mood she asked next, "Tell me, one thing."

Samar got a little closer to hear her as he said, "What?"

"Why did you put it there in your story?"

Samar realised and was going to give his justification when Inayat laughed and said, "That was not my original question actually."

Samar smiled as he rolled his eyes.

Inayat then smiled as she said, "How come such a charming, rich, and handsome man like yourself is single?"

Samar turned to her with a smile he tried to suppress with his frown of 'what' expression as he said, "I never said, I am single."

"Yes, but you are, aren't you?"

Samar looked at himself as he said, "Is it that obvious?"

Inayat chuckled as she said, "I am good at reading. Whether it is a book or a person."

"Oh, is that so?"

Inayat prided in herself as she said, "Mm-hmm. And right now, I can guess, you are desperately in need of a girlfriend."

"What?" Samar shocked, "Nonsense. I am not desperate."

Inayat laughed again, "Tell me, why are you single?"

"I..." He went quite as he thought about it. He had never really thought about it. "I guess, I never really wanted it."

"What rubbish!" She spoke.

"What? If I don't want a girlfriend and I am perfectly happy with my career and life, what is wrong in that?"

Inayat shook and then guessed, "Oh, do you have a dark side to you? Like an abusive, psychotic one?"

"What? Why, do you have a soft side for them?" Samar said defending himself.

"Oh, come on, there must be a reason."

He tried to look innocent as he said, "I might as well have a sensitive, childish corner instead."

Getting frustrated she said, "So, what do you do for fun? Gambling?"

"I have a lot of fun doing my job."

Inayat giggled sarcastically as she said, "Fuck, you must be boring in that case."

"Excuse me?" Samar said, again.

"Yeah, I mean, you don't have a girlfriend, you don't do gambling so how do you have fun?"

Samar was kind of getting pissed now but in a funny way, "Do you think you only have fun when you have money to waste? There are all kinds of fun. Friends, movies, dance, one-night stands, alcohol..."

"Which one do you prefer?"

"Well..." Samar thought before he said, "I go to parties...every weekend." every weekend part was a lie.

Inayat shouted in joy, "Oh, man! Now you're talking."

The airhostess shushed her again. Inayat whispered to her, sorry.

Inayat turned to Samar as she whispered, "So, there you get what you want?"

"What do you mean, 'whatever I want'?"

"You know..." and she acted like a drunk dancer.

Samar laughed but turned away covering his eyes. He did not want to even imagine her in that position right now. She was a little too much for him.

Samar then said, "Well, if I want, I do, I guess, but it's not like that's what I go there for. Why do you think life is only fun when you get drunk and spend money on rubbish games?"

"Because for me it is not fun otherwise."

Samar tried to look at her sad face. She looked absolutely adorable. Samar smiled as he asked, "Okay, now, Spit it out. What is going on in your life?"

And deep down somewhere for some reason Samar wanted her to tell him that she misses romance. And suddenly he even imagined her pulling him close and kissing him hard. Like she really wants him.

'Fuck! This girl is getting on my head. It's not good.' he thought. But for his disappointment Inayat threw her hands in the air as she said, "I don't know. I guess, I just wanna get in a relationship again, maybe. For the sake of what I crave. A man who I can hug, kiss whenever I want. Who is tall, dark, handsome and rich...enough. But importantly who loves me for who I am and takes care of me. God, I miss being in a relationship."

Samar smiled as he said shaking his head at her, "So, much for non-sexual relationship."

Inayat was not complete yet. "And he should be obsessed with me. Like, he should not be able to sleep without me on the bed. He should not be able to eat his food without speaking to me. He should not be able to smile without seeing me."

"That's...madness."

"He shall come back to me even when we break up, he shall find new numbers to call me to be able to hear my voice when I block his number, he shall, find ways to block my way to work and home and never find peace."

"You do have a thing for psychopaths, don't you?"

"I want more than simple, sweet love, you see."

Quite clearly, he thought and said, "Have you recently got out of a relationship?"

"Well, officially, yes but emotionally, I am still in the process."

"Why did you not find someone new?"

“Well, the fact itself is not right that I want to be with someone because I feel alone. It’s like I am needy. Which, by the way I am. But a relationship should not start at such a note. Who knows where it will go.”

Samar nodded as he tried to understand and rephrase it. “So, you miss being with someone but then you don’t go find someone for you because you miss being with someone?”

“Yeah, I know, it's complicated.”

Samar shook, “It’s stupid.”

Inayat turned to him, “Why?”

“Because what reason does anybody need to eventually go out and find someone? It is this loneliness that we all are trying to fill in our lives, isn’t it? What is wrong in trying to make our self-happy if that is what it takes?”

“Would you rather be with someone in a relationship just for the sake of not being alone?”

“No.” Samar said. “But if I feel lonely and like I need someone, then I will go out, talk to people, find that someone for me. And who knows I might find my true love.”

Inayat nodded. Then added, “Well, my point was that I want to be mentally and emotionally stable before I get into a relationship so that I don’t ruin it or become toxic.”

Samar laughed, “Oh, you will be toxic no matter how hard you try.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Inayat chuckled. “And Samar that was a joke when I said he shall stalk me and all. I don’t want a psycho.”

“I could guess.” Samar nodded knowingly.

“Good.” Inayat said proudly.

They went quite then.

In a few minutes Inayat fell asleep on Samar shoulders. Samar was asleep too.

There was thunder lightening outside because of which Samar looked at Inayat face on his shoulder. She was still sleeping, eyes shut peacefully. Samar whispered, "You are so beautiful, do you know that?"

Inayat made a hmm sound. Samar looked at her in shock. He tried to find if she was awake. She was talking in her sleep. He realised she would not remember any of this. So, he decided to say what he would never say otherwise and whispered, "I like you. I just don't want to let you know just now. Will that be okay?"

Inayat grunted as she turned to other side in her sleep. Samar chuckled at that and went back to sleep turning to her side.

CHAPTER 4

NEW CITY, NEW HOME

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2022

"I did not take her contact details, her full address, or anything through which I could reach her. Not because I did not want to, but because I thought and believed that if she was meant to be mine, she would find me – or fate would bring us together again. Yes, I believed in fate. And as something that has always surprised me, it did so yet again."

Samar kept his eyes on her as he sat in his parked car, his hands still on the steering wheel and his head slightly tilted. The girl suddenly felt something – like someone staring at her – and turned, catching Samar's gaze. He was still inside the car, while Zakhir was half asleep beside him.

Without blinking, the two looked at each other. Even without makeup or styling, the girl looked perfectly beautiful. And she saw something in him that brought a small smile to her lips.

Suddenly, someone called from inside her home, "Ruhi!" Samar heard the name and watched her go inside. The balcony door closed. He remained there, thinking about what he had just seen and felt. This feeling was completely new and unfamiliar to him. She had entered some hidden place in Samar's heart that even he did not know existed.

Zakhir shook him out of his thoughts. "Are you going to sleep here?"

Samar turned, returning to his senses. "Yes... no... yeah, let's go inside."

~

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2022

Too Little Too Late - JoJo

It was a rainy day, and traffic covered the entire city. Inayat Noor had been informed that shifting would not be a problem since movers had been hired. They had planned to start moving belongings early in the morning, but the rain caused delays.

Inayat arrived at the new house late in the afternoon with her little cat, by which time most things had already been shifted. The cat was both excited and anxious in the unfamiliar space. They began settling in as quickly as possible, but with two women and one rather useless man, it was difficult. She also had to go to the office the next day.

She hated her job, but life was what it was — unfair and harsh — and she had learned to live with it.

By evening, most things were in place. They ordered food for energy and bought alcohol to relax. Inayat, her brother Arif, and his girlfriend Swara sat on the dusty floor, tired, clinking their glasses of vodka mixed with cold drink.

“Cheers!”

They took a sip and exhaled in relief.

They sat in a triangle, with Inayat facing the open balcony door. The house next door appeared empty; its lights were off. She admired the architecture — ivory-coloured marble covered the walls, floors, and even the ceilings. The black glass windows allowed people inside to see out but prevented outsiders from seeing in. Only at noon, when sunlight reflected directly on the glass, could the interior be partially visible if the curtains were open.

It looked like the richest house in town.

“This is a fine house, isn’t it?” she said.

Arif looked up. “Yes, it’s nice. Must cost a few crores.”

“A few crores?” Swara said in surprise. “It’s not even that big. Houses where I live are huge — open from all sides — and much cheaper.”

She was from Himachal and always admired her hometown. Anyone would, after spending so much time there. Inayat, however, had never stayed in one place long enough to fall in love with it. Her father had been a truck driver, so they moved constantly, never staying anywhere for more than a year. After their parents' death, they finally decided to settle in this new city.

Arif said, "If we save properly for two or three years, we could buy a place like this."

Inayat made a face. "It's not that good."

"Why?"

"It's for scared and lonely people. Look — huge glass windows so they can see the world, but the world can't see them. People living there must feel insecure and lonely, watching life instead of living it."

Arif and Swara stared at her.

"And you figured all that just by looking at it?" Arif asked.

"I just gave my opinion."

"That's judgment, not opinion. Besides, you never know how nice it is inside."

Inayat shook her head. "I want a house without black glass windows — transparent ones. Or maybe open windows. Not in a city. Somewhere in a valley... maybe our hometown."

Their family was originally from Goa. Though they did not speak their mother tongue fluently, they loved their culture.

"I like open windows too," Swara said.

Arif nodded. "Sure. But if this house ever sells at a decent price, I wouldn't mind buying it."

They talked for a while before exhaustion sent them to bed.

As soon as Inayat truly relaxed, morning arrived, and it was time for work again.

Early that morning, while standing on the balcony with her coffee, she noticed the man living next door. They shared an intense moment of eye contact — almost like a silent staring contest. Later, Swara gathered information from neighbours.

The man next door was the son of a wealthy and respected man in town, known for helping people. His parents did not live here anymore. He lived alone now — a bachelor — with only a dog and a close friend for company.

“Heard?” Arif said after Swara finished explaining.

“What?”

“Not everyone living in darkness is bad.”

“I never said they were bad,” Inayat replied. “I said they were lonely. And that turned out to be true.”

Arif made a face as if she had been proven wrong. Inayat laughed and shrugged, realizing they had been drunk the previous night anyway.

She soon left for work.

In the office cab, surrounded by colleagues she barely knew, she listened to music and occasionally looked outside. A man on a Harley-Davidson bike rode alongside for a moment. He wore a white shirt, brown cargo pants, boots, and a leather backpack. His sleeves were rolled up, revealing tattoos — one of Johnny Depp.

She smiled.

He rode confidently, matching the cab’s speed briefly before accelerating ahead. His shirt clung to his muscular frame, revealing strong arms and a well-built body. Inayat found herself mesmerized. She had never felt attracted to bike riders before, but something about him felt different.

She tried to see his face, but his helmet hid it. Soon, he disappeared into traffic, and she kept watching until he was completely out of sight.

~

She reached the office early and began writing a poem in her phone notes to pass the time.

As she often said, living alone was hard, but finding someone to live an entire life with was harder.

Inayat later spoke with her friend Vivaan at the office. Vivaan was her only true friend in the office. And he was Gay. They worked at a BPO company on a US-based process, so mornings were usually quiet.

"You know what happened yesterday?" she asked.

"What?"

"I matched with a guy on Tinder. His name was Kashish. He looked good so I thought to give it a try."

"Um hmm..." Vivaan nodded while he was still doing work on emails.

Inayat continued, "So, we talked all day and late till night and it was going good. Suddenly, something happened. We got into a quarrel. I don't even remember where it started. And he got extremely against me. It turned into a one-sided fight where he was the one fighting and winning. It started to fall off and then..."

"Then?"

"He unmatched me."

"What!"

"Yeah, suddenly he did not like me anymore and blocked me or something. I don't even know how you do that in this app. It felt so... Bad."

"Don't worry men are crazy." He said turning away and waved his hand in the air as to brush it off.

"I am not worrying." Said Inayat holding unto his chair back making him to turn and listen, "I just felt bad. Like I was dumped. It was going smoothly and suddenly he hate me. He behaved as if I was abusing him or something."

"You can never abuse anyone."

"I know and I did not. It just felt like I was the wrong person. Like I don't deserve to have friends that is why I don't have many. Am I too judgemental?"

"You are very judgemental to yourself."

That did not help. Then, Vivaan said, "Look, it does not matter. Even I am so judgemental. I judge people all the time. I mean, why shouldn't I? Everyone does. It is just that it should not be hurtful to someone's feelings. And I know you would never try to hurt someone emotionally. You actually cannot. So, if that guy has a problem, he shall deal with it himself. You will find much better guys than him. By the way, why don't you join Insta?"

"I told you I do have an id I just don't spend time on it. People seem so fake there. They are either always happy, always smart or always sad and lonely on Insta. I don't know whom to trust."

Vivaan has got a call from the customer, so he excused himself. Inayat went back to her work and did 1 or 2 email cases. Then as the call was over Vivaan took off his headset and turning around said, "Look, stop worrying and take some time. You will find a great guy. I am telling you."

"I think I will just delete my tinder Id. What is the point, anyway? Guys there are either looking for casual hook-ups or friends, and I don't want either."

Vivaan at this point felt bad for her and said, "Men are really crazy."

Inayat laughed out.

Vivaan then said, "No, they really are. But I do find some good ones, too. You know the guy I am moving in with. He is my tinder friend."

"Really?"

"Yeah. One day we were just talking, and I said that I am in a messed-up place because of my roommate Gautam. I want to move out and....."

Vivaan started telling her his story and soon Inayat forgot about hers. So, what she did not find her true love at the age of 22 Inayat was happy to have his friendship.

~

Inayat had long carried a yearning to find the love of her life — someone she felt destined to meet. Perhaps that longing had led her to give chances to the wrong men, hoping something would feel right. But it never did.

Sometimes, when a cold breeze touched her skin, she wished someone would place a coat over her shoulders or pull her into an embrace — not out of physical desire, but for warmth, safety, and closeness. Someone who would save a seat for her wherever they went, hold her hand, and make her feel secure.

Was that too much to ask?

She often wondered whether she should learn complete independence instead of waiting for love. Yet she knew there was a different kind of freedom in being loved deeply — a life she had never experienced.

CHAPTER 5

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT...SORT OF

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2022

Company — Justin Bieber

For some people, life is like a Sudoku game where they solve the equations of life's problems, taking their time. Whereas for others, it is like a rapid fire, where situations are thrown at you like fireball questions one after another, and you have to answer them quickly.

The most recent situation Nazim Iqra had been in was with his ex-girlfriend, who wanted to get married. He loved her very much, but marriage was not in his cards. He wanted to be with her for as long as he lived. He could even have babies with her. Marriage, however, was never his thing. He had seen his friends' and family members' marriages ending on terrible notes — divorce, affairs, and even suicides. His parents had divorced for reasons unknown to him, and that had led to the destruction of all three of their lives.

That is why he remained disturbed somewhere deep inside. He believed marriage was the end of a love story — and then of life itself. Therefore, when his girlfriend proposed marriage, he had to decline, and that did not go well. She made sure to destroy his personal and professional life, calling his friends and relatives and accusing him of being a cheater and many other things in her distress. This raised many questions about Nazim and why he did not want marriage.

He did not have the patience to explain himself to society-minded people, so he decided to move to a completely new city and start over again.

He was a musician by passion. He had enjoyed his fun days in the industry, but now he mostly composed tunes and songs for advertisements and shows. It was enjoyable – just not what he truly wanted.

After a whole week of composing songs, Nazim stepped out of the studio and had to raise his hand to shield his eyes from the sharp noon sunlight. He wore loose white cargo pants, an oversized pink hoodie, and a waist bag. Remembering his shades in his pocket, he took them out and put them on, pulling the hoodie over his head. Though October was not particularly cold, he had worn the hoodie inside the studio for five days straight. He needed to freshen up.

In the industry, the last people to attract paparazzi were background workers like composers – especially those who were not very famous. Nazim did not have to worry about reporters chasing him. He got into his black Range Rover SUV and drove home.

After reaching home, taking a shower, and eating an apple, he went straight to sleep. Days of exhaustion weighed on his eyes.

He woke up the next morning knowing he had a few days before his next contract began. So, he decided to make the most of his free time and do his favourite thing – bike riding.

He got ready in a black leather jacket over a white shirt and brown cargo pants. As he opened his garage, he saw his beautiful Harley-Davidson. It was completely black with a matte finish. He could have kissed that bike. As he sat on it and started the engine, the roar instantly lifted his mood, and he drove off without wasting a second.

On his way to a posh area where his friend lived, he noticed a girl sitting in a cab. He guessed it was a call-centre cab; he knew many people who worked such jobs. Before becoming independent, he had struggled too.

The girl, with wavy hair and a blue top, seemed lost in her thoughts. With earplugs in her ears, she was probably listening to slow songs. Looking at her made him drift into his own thoughts for a moment. She had dark eyes and medium-fair skin, perhaps even dark circles from late-night shifts. Yet she possessed a certain beauty he could not explain – only admire.

He drove closer to the cab. That was when he noticed she looked at him too. Surprisingly, she seemed to like what she saw. Even though they did not make eye contact — his helmet hiding his face — he noticed she kept staring at him. His pride lifted, and he zoomed past the cab.

Too Sweet — Hozier

He reached his friend's home late in the afternoon. It was a bright, sunny day, and since the family was not home, they decided to binge-watch and relax. After one or two episodes of GOT, they decided to cook for themselves. Nazim was known for his Mughlai cooking skills, so they made mutton biryani.

After eating their fill, they decided to take their bikes out again. They called their friends and met at their secret spot. Meeting after so many days, they had a lot to talk about. After chatting and reminiscing about old memories, they partied all night.

Out of nowhere, one of his friends, Tahir, said,

“Hey, Nazim, will you be okay to party?”

“Why?”

“You just had a breakup,” he said, showing fake sympathy. “I am so sorry for you. Will you be okay?”

“Do I not look okay?”

“That's the thing,” Tahir replied. “You never really show your true feelings.”

“And you expect me to tell you my true feelings?”

Tahir continued, “It's just that after Jahnvi, you don't seem to be around much.”

“Yeah, that's not because of Jahnvi,” Nazim said. “That's because of you, assholes poking into my head.”

Nazim left the room, taking his glass of whisky with him.

Tahir asked Asif, “Now tell me, did I say something wrong?”

“The part where Jahnvi came in.”

Jahnvi was Nazim’s first love. Though he no longer wanted her back, her moving on quickly, marrying someone else, and the rumours spread by he had damaged both his mind and reputation. They had once planned a future together — living happily as an unmarried couple, adopting children, and building a life full of love. Now it all felt meaningless.

She had even damaged his reputation with his family, accusing him of affairs and claiming he never wanted marriage and only wanted casual relationships. Sometimes he thought it would have been better if he had actually cheated before all this drama unfolded.

Nazim and Asif later returned home, and soon the boys invited their girlfriends over to Nazim’s friend’s farmhouse. There was plenty of space. They drank and danced.

Being in a relationship — even without love — can leave a lasting impact. Once it ends, loneliness arrives suddenly, and you begin to miss not necessarily the person, but their company.

Seeing the girl — Inayat — made him miss being in a relationship even more. He did not feel this way about other women. There was something about her lost eyes. They seemed to be searching for someone desperately. She looked as lost as he felt. Though he knew nothing about her, he wanted to try love again — just for the chance of being with her.

It was early morning when, in his drunken state, Nazim asked Asif,

“Hey, do you ever miss being in a relationship?”

Asif made a clicking sound in his mouth and replied, “Not at all. Why? Do you?”

They sat side by side on the floor, leaning against the sofa.

Nazim thought for a moment. “No.”

“You took a minute to answer. Something’s going on.”

Nazim chuckled. “No, man. It’s just that sometimes I feel like even if I’m not looking for someone, someone might be looking for me.”

“Who?”

“You know... everyone has someone made for them, waiting around the corner.”

Asif frowned. “Which corner are you talking about?”

Nazim shook his head. “My bad. I shouldn’t have started this conversation with you.”

“And now you’re getting serious. What’s going on, bro?” Asif asked, curious.

Nazim hesitated. “Nothing. I just...”

Asif stared at him eagerly. Nazim sighed. “I saw this girl today. She was looking at me.”

“Oh, so there is a girl now?”

He shook his head as he continued, “And even though she couldn’t see my face because of my helmet’s black shield, I could read her expression.”

“What did it say?”

“That... she’s looking for someone like me.”

“Like you?” Asif emphasized.

“Yeah. Maybe me.”

Asif gasped loudly in a teasing tone. “Oh!”

Nazim shushed him as everyone else slept.

“You like her, bro!” Asif whispered.

“When did I say that?!”

“You want her to like you — so you already like her.”

“Makes sense.”

“My boy likes someone after ages. I was getting worried you’d die a Salman death.”

“He celebrates his honeymoon every night. Besides, he isn’t dead.”

“That’s different,” Asif corrected.

“How?”

“Love doesn’t happen every day,” Asif said. “I’m so happy for you.”

“My marriage is not getting fixed.”

Asif hugged him and kissed his cheek.

Nazim pushed him away. “Get lost!”

“My boy, finally!”

Nazim just shook his head at his excitement.

“So where does she live?” Asif asked. “Let’s get this going.”

“It’s not like I know her,” Nazim said. Then he paused. “Actually... I don’t even know her name.”

“What?” Asif’s energy dropped instantly.

“Yeah. I just saw her randomly on the road.”

Asif nodded slowly. “Yeah... long way to go then. But we’ll find her.”

Nazim shook his head. “I don’t want to stalk her or anything. I just don’t know...what should we do?”

Asif thought for a moment. “Visit the area where you saw her. Maybe she lives nearby. One day, we might find her.”

“What are the chances?”

Asif stayed quiet, lips pressed tight.

Nazim looked away, feeling hopeless.

CHAPTER 6

A WALK TO FRIENDSHIP

2002- Anne Marie

It had been a few days, and Samar had been busy working — flying in and out of the country. As always, he stayed wherever his flights landed, but for some reason, he felt lost.

It was time for him to return home.

After spending a few blissful days partying at his friend's place, Samar was finally driving back home. Zakhir sat beside him. Late at night, as he made a U-turn on the road, a cab suddenly came in front of his car. He slammed on the brakes, and in the flash of his headlights, he looked toward the driver.

Instead, his eyes met what he had been missing for so many days — Inayat Noor.

He froze instantly, his car standing still as if rooted to the ground. She sat in the seat beside the driver. Because of the bright headlights, she could not see Samar; the light fell directly into her eyes. She squeezed them shut and raised her hand to shield her face. The cab moved on.

A car behind Samar honked loudly, snapping him back to reality. Zakhir shouted at him to move. Samar quickly drove forward and continued home.

He had reached early, and since he had seen her heading home in the cab as well, he knew there was a chance they lived nearby — perhaps even in the same neighbourhood.

Samar stepped out of his building wearing shorts and a T-shirt just around the time he expected her to arrive. He took his dog out for a walk, though his real intention was to understand what kept happening to him every time he saw her. How could someone's presence affect him so deeply?

Soon, her cab arrived. They dropped her off and drove away without looking back. Inayat rang the bell at her building's main gate.

Samar watched her from across the street, standing behind her. Almost as if she could feel his gaze, she turned around.

Samar froze again at the sudden eye contact. His dog looked at her, then back at him. When Samar said nothing, the dog barked at him — almost as if asking, 'What happened?'

Samar snapped back to his senses and tried to shush him. That was when he heard a giggle — loud, clear, and musical.

He looked up to see Inayat laughing.

He could guess what amused her: 'his own dog barking at him.'

The moment lightened the tension in the air. But before Samar could say anything, Inayat suddenly asked,

"Have we met before?"

Samar nodded delighted. "Yes. Long time ago."

"I think, too. I am sorry I can't recall your name."

"Samar..."

"Samar Malik." Completed Inayat as she recalled. "I remember now, we were on the same flight. It's been so long."

"Yeah, 2 years to be precise."

Inayat briefly nodded, "So, how come you are here? Oh, wait, don't tell me, you have been searching for me?"

Samar chuckled. Yeah, I guess, mentally, he wanted to say but, "I... live next door."

She nodded, "Oh, don't you say that." Samar smiled. "What a small world!"

Samar smirked and asked, "I am sorry, I also forgot your name, wait, Nayra, was it?" He tried to play cocky as he moved forward and his dog pulled him.

Till then the gate for Inayat building had opened, "I am leaving," said she in fake embarrassment and started to move in.

Samar laughed and kept stood there, a waiting for her to say her name, again. Inayat saw that so she looked out as she was shutting the gate and said, "Inayat Noor."

Samar could not hear it so, he asked back, "What?"

"Inayat. "

They smiled at each other and then Inayat was gone.

Samar could not sleep well just thinking about the moments their eyes have met. Now that they have met again Samar was happy as he could speak with her anywhere without having to be a stranger following her around. He did not just want to know about her life now. He wanted to be a part of it.

Later that week Inayat, her brother and his girlfriend who was her good friend went on a walk to a park close by. The couple would walk arms in arms talking and giggling like newbies lovers. Inayat would get irritated by them and walk away or faster just to keep distance. When she saw a dog and started talking with it.

"Hi, cutie! How are you?"

Samar was by chance there. He had come to call his old friend for a match who refused. They were going to play volleyball at a near park. He saw her and decided to keep an eye.

The dog had started to wave his tail hard, playfully. As she called him again, he jumped up in joy up to her shoulder. Inayat laughed hard as she hugged him and made him get down. She then took boiled eggs from thaila wala nearby and gave it to the dog. As soon as he started his meal, other dogs nearby smelled it, and they all came running. Inayat was so happy to see them but at that time her brother saw what she was doing and started to push her to walk away. As she did, she caught Samar smiling at her.

They wished each other from a distance mouthing, "Hi!"

Next thing, Samar called her to come gesturing with his hands. Inayat nodded and went to her brother and sister-in-law to talk about it. As they nodded and Inayat started to walk towards Samar, from behind her brother looked out to see where she was headed and kept a glare at Samar. Samar knew it was a warning that something happens to Inayat and he is dead. Samar nodded at him. He was still looking at him. So, Samar tried to avoid eye contact with him. As Inayat reached him, he smiled and again said to her, "Hi!"

Inayat smiled back, "Hi."

"I hope I did not disturb you."

"Well, it cannot be fixed, now, so."

Samar chuckled and nodded and asked, "Would you like to come for a walk with me?"

"I am here for a walk only."

Samar was happy at that, and they started towards the other huge park of the society. It was for playing sports only. And it was at some distance. While in the walk Samar said, "I saw, what you did back there."

Inayat frowned as she said, "What did I do?"

"You made that dog your one-sided lover."

"What nonsense!"

"Yes, I know you did it on purpose. Now, he will not be able to resist to meet you whenever you come by the park."

Inayat chuckled.

Samar added, "But I am telling you it's a cheap trick to get lovers. He was better off by himself. Now, he will look out for you every day."

Inayat smiled as she nodded. "Well, I couldn't resist, so."

The two went quite for some time. Then Inayat said out of boredom. "So, how is life going?"

Samar smiled and said, "Good. And yours?"

"Okay-okay."

Samar smiled, "Okay. So, what do you do, now? Apart from criticising books before ever reading, it completely."

Inayat recalled and laughed, "Oh yes, about that. I actually read the whole thing, and it turned out fine by the ending."

"Yeah, yeah." Samar said like, whatever.

Inayat chuckled and added, "And I left doing the beta reading thing."

Samar got attentive, "What, why?"

"I don't know, I just felt like, it is better to read something to enjoy it rather than judge it."

"Oh, come on. Beta readers come handy when writers need good feedback."

Inayat shrugged like, yeah maybe.

Samar said then, "So, now?"

Inayat looked up and, "Now, I do a proper job. Like in a proper company."

"Oh, nice!" Samar tried to show interest and impression.

"Yeah, nice to hear customers yell at you. Fucking hate your life then."

Samar tried to be cheerful still, "Well, you must be earning well."

Inayat thought of him talking like any neighbour aunty and took a minute to decide whether she should get much involved with him or not. But because she did not want to seem poor or complaining she said, "Yeah, whatever."

"I thought you may be doing some course or degree. I mean, you are so young." Sweet lie.

"Well, I am 22. It's time for me to get a hold of myself."

"So, do you like it?"

"The job?"

"Yeah."

"Of course, not. But I have my responsibilities."

Samar nodded briefly. "You are smarter than I thought."

Inayat gave tight lips smile as thank you. "I don't know whether it is a compliment or insult."

The two chuckled.

Then she asked, "What do you do, now?"

"I am still a pilot. Just a level up."

"Oooh." She exclaimed. "Then you earn a lot more than me."

Samar chuckled, "At your age I was not."

"But you don't look much older."

"I am not. I just wish I had become smarter younger. Like you."

"Why are you buttering me?" Inayat had to ask, now.

Samar showed his teeth as if he was caught red handed. "Sorry?"

Inayat smiled and ignoring said, "So, you live with your family?"

Samar nodded and said, "Yeah me, my so-called brother and my little boy Jackie?"

"Ah," Inayat remembered and said, "Of course. Obviously."

"What?" Samar asked confused.

"Tommy, Jacky, Blacky, these are the most common names people come up with for their pets."

"Why, what would you name him?"

"It depends on the characteristics and the appearance of the pet."

"Yeah?" Samar said, "Do you have any pet?"

"Yep. One female cat. She is Indie."

"And what's her name?"

"Mia."

Samar turned to face her, "You are kidding, right?"

Inayat shook her head with a frown between her brows.

"You know that name reminds of the only famous lady personality. Which is not very appropriate."

"Who?"

"Her last name starts with k and ends with an a."

Inayat shook her head not able to guess it.

"In between it is h-a-l-i-f."

Inayat started to laugh. "C'mon, don't think like that."

"I did not. You made me."

Inayat was laughing hard.

"At least, I know, now never to ask you for name suggestions for pets. God, that poor cat. She must be too embarrassed to go out."

The two laughed.

After a minute, Inayat asked, "And what about your parents?"

"What about them?" Said Samar still getting back from the laughter.

"Where are they?"

Samar smiled completely vanished as he recalled it and told, "They are no more."

Inayat realised it was too personal for him to share and said immediately, "I am sorry, I did not know."

"How would you?"

"I mean, I heard that you live alone, but I thought they may be staying somewhere else, so..."

Samar shook his head, "It's okay."

Inayat was quiet.

Samar said, "As far as I know you have a brother and his girlfriend living with you. Do you have any more siblings?"

Inayat was surprised at that and said, "Nosy neighbour, huh?"

Samar made a face showing pride for his secret talent.

Inayat then said, "Elder sister. She lives in Mumbai with her husband."

Samar nodded. "And your parents?"

Inayat looked up from the road and said, "Same. And...I could do much for them."

"Why where were you?"

"My Hometown."

Samar understood and made a sorry face with his tightened lips.

Inayat looked away trying to smile. Samar went quiet. She then asked, "What is it that you can't live?"

"Make a wild guess."

"Sports?" She said teasingly.

"I don't even like it that much."

Inayat nodded surprised as she said, "One of the rarest."

Samar nodded and continued. "I used to write so many stories. Whole day I would sit in my room and write. I did not like playing or going out with friends. Well, I still do not do it much, but then I was way happier. At peace."

Inayat nodded still surprised and told. "I like writing, too."

"You do?"

"Yeah, but I write poems, songs and shayries."

"That's a talent still. I don't write poems. I can't find rhyming words."

Inayat chuckled and said, "And I can't write stories. I get bored."

Samar raised his brow at that.

"I mean, I didn't mean that..."

Samar shook and said before she could complete, "You can't cover it now. The damage has been done."

Inayat smiled and looked down thinking. Then to change the topic, "So, what happened?" Inayat asked.

"About my passion?"

"Uh-huh."

"Peers pressure." Said Samar.

Inayat nodded.

By that time in the walk they had reached their destination. But Samar continued the conversation, "You know, I had to study hard to get better marks as my parents wanted me to be a pilot. So, I did."

Inayat nodded.

"What is your goal in life?" he asked.

"Well, other than to be able to release my album with my own songs, I would like to be remembered for being someone inspirational."

Samar nodded. Delighted to be able to know her thoughts. He said, "I don't think it would hard for you to achieve."

Inayat looked up at him. Surprised by his confidence in her.

Samar then told, "We have reached the park."

"Oh." Inayat then noticed it was a huge plain park behind the car parking area. There were guys and boys coming in.

"My boys are here. I am gonna go play. You wanna join?"

"With guys wearing shorts?" Inayat said looking up afar. "No, I think, I am good."

"Okay. Would you cheer for me, then?"

Inayat smug, "You wish."

Samar started to move towards the centre of the park where the guys were getting together to start a football match. Inayat asked from behind, "I thought, you did not like sports."

"And I thought you did not like getting bored."

Inayat did not get it. Samar danced like a girl with his hands holding invisible pomp pomp, to show he meant she should be more fun and cheer for him. His silly dance made Inayat laugh out.

CHAPTER 7

LONG LOST LOVE

No one- Alicia Keys

The Life of the rich has its own perks. You can either call it reality or excuses. But they don't get enough time with their loved ones. To express their love to each other. Shehnaaz Afzaar was one of them. She was a small-town model working to get a big screen role. Her father was also an incredibly famous serial actor of one time. Her mother however was not in the industry, and she was happy as a homemaker. Since her mother was a Hindu she was half Hindu.

"Good morning, dad! Good morning, mom!" said She as she took her seat at the dining table.

Her father was sat going through the newspaper and hearing her wish he just patted at her head like blessing.

While having their breakfast in the morning Shehnaaz mother asked her upon her sitting, "Where are you planning to go, today?"

Shehnaaz looked up from her cereals. "Nowhere, why?"

"Because at home you do not wear that shimmer on face. Is it another shooting in Delhi?"

"No, no, actually...I was thinking of visiting Samar."

Samar and Shehnaaz had been good friends since childhood as they studied in the same school and class. Samar was however a year older than her.

Shehnaaz had always had feelings for him but never got the courage to express. At this point she was getting anxious and decided to visit him and confess her feelings. At least express herself.

Shehnaaz bedroom door stayed open, and the inside was visible from far away. Her mother then looked at the suitcase packed in her room. She said, "It does not seem like you were just thinking. It looks like you have planned everything already." Gestured her mother for her father to look at the suitcase.

When her father did see it, he got a little pissed off. "Are you already leaving?"

Shehnaaz looked away from that emotional torture. Her father continued, "But, my child, you just came back home from shooting yesterday. Do you have to go away so soon?"

"That is not the concern." Corrected her mother. "You know we have spoken with the relatives about your marriage partner. The boy's family wishes to visit us to see you."

Actually, this was the reason why Shehnaaz was getting anxious now. She did not want to get married to someone she did not love. At least not before she had confessed her love.

Shehnaaz said, "I will be back in a couple of days."

"Couple of days?! For how long we will keep asking them to be postponed."

"Then, ask them to find another girl. If they can find anyone better than me."

"And what will you do? Stay a single model."

"For modelling you do not need to be married. In fact, not married is preferable."

"You heard? This girl does not want to get married." Said her mother to her father. "I am scared she will turn into a gay."

Her father had to put away the news in the paper to focus on the breaking news going on in his house.

“You know, you will need to get married someday, Shehnaaz. So why not now?” Said his father.

“It’s not about when, it’s about to whom.”

“Ah!” exclaimed her mother, “You think that Malik’s son will marry you?”

“Mom!” Shehnaaz shouted to shush her. She was spoiling her secret in front of her father.

“You like the Malik’s Son?” Said her father.

Shehnaaz stayed quiet.

Her father understood and said, “Then why did you not tell us before? He would be the perfect son in law.”

“I know.” Whispered Shehnaaz to herself. “I just need some more time.”

“More time, for what, dear?” Said his father.

Shehnaaz stayed quiet.

Her mother realised and said, “You have not confessed your feelings to him till now? For God's sake, it has been more than 10 years. What are you waiting for?”

“I...” Shehnaaz realised the time they have spent. It had actually been many years since they have been friends. Samar never expressed anything romantic towards her. She suddenly started to worry thinking; Has he already friend zoned me? Is it too late now? Am I going to have to marry someone else in the end?

“Shehnaaz?” called her mother.

“Yeah...I am...I mean, I was thinking...”

“You only think and do nothing!” scolded her mother.

“No, this time I will go and...,” and she gestured the rest.

Her mother guessed, “Are you visiting him to confess your feelings?”

Shehnaaz slowly nodded. The parents brighten up. Her father blessed and wished her luck. Her mother strictly said, “Don’t come back disappointed. Bring him or any other son in law for us.”

“What are you saying, Yamani?” said Shehnaaz father to her mother. Shushing her from putting bad luck on her trip. Shehnaaz then left to take her cab.

Dandelions- Ruth b.

While on the way to her destination Shehnaaz recalled her past and many childhood memories. Shehnaaz father and Samar’s Father had worked together in the past and they were very close. That is why Samar family were close to Shehnaaz family. Shehnaaz had always liked him. She would always choose him to be her teammate. She would make sure he comes to school every day and in case he would not, even she would bunk her classes to be with him. After school Samar decided to go to a smaller college. So, even though her parents disapproved she fought and got admission in the same college as his. Then when his parents died, she was the one staying with him for the longest time. She felt as if she had lost her other parents because his parents were very close to her. Since then, things changed, though. Samar pursued to become a pilot. He got busy and so Shehnaaz gave him space and time and pursued for her own dream of becoming a model. Now that she is one it had become a little boring, so she was thinking to move to serials or better movies. But she had not got any offers. She appeared in ads though.

And then time flew like a bird into the sky. It became invisible how fast and how much of time they spend at their passion. They sort of forgot their loved ones. Shehnaaz had to make it up to him before it is too late.

Whenever Samar was home and Inayat was, too they would talk from the balcony and Samar would keep a note of her week offs and shift timings so he could manage his routine for her. It was as if he had already made her his priority. However, Inayat was unaware of his feelings.

Samar would watch her make food while singing as the kitchen window opened to his balcony and would often come to the balcony faking to do something and listen to her singing. She was gifted. She had a beautiful voice. She knew all the turns and notes in a song. As if she was a professional. Samar would get mesmerized and sit in the balcony all the time. Even when she would be at work, he would imagine her and it would vanish his loneliness that he had since his parents passed away. Samar had

started doing his household chores and even cooking and laundry because he uses to see her doing all this. She was like the mother of her house and watching her daily made him more responsible in his home. Zakhir was very surprised about it and when asked Samar would say anything stupid like, he was getting bored.

One day, when Zakhir had gone out for walk with Jacky, songs were being played aloud, and Samar was doing all the house cleaning while singing along. That day Samar had asked Inayat to come to his place so Samar was preparing his house to look good. Suddenly the doorbell rang. Samar got joyful and went to the door still singing. He opened the door and Shehnaaz was there in a pink umbrella dress.

“Hi!”

She looked beautiful and so happy to see him, but Samar had lost his joy. He managed a smile, still happy to see her long gone friend. “Shehnaaz...” Samar said surprised, “Hi!”

“Samar!” Shehnaaz pulled him into a tight hug.

She made him to dance with her moving and then let him go. “How have you been?” She spoke.

“Good. And you? Long-time not seen.”

Shehnaaz smacked at his chest for that. It hurt and he had to massage his chest. She pushed him aside as she made her way in and yelled, “Yeah, why would you see me?”

“Why do you say that?”

“I have gotten so many good opportunities and got into so many advertisements but there was not even a ‘congratulations!’ from you. Leave alone gifts or a bouquet.”

Samar shrugged his shoulders. “You know, I don’t do bouquet.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Shehnaaz walked straight into the kitchen. “I am so hungry.”

“Anyway, why are you here?” Asked Samar.

“What do you mean?” her brow raised.

Samar immediately corrected himself, “I mean, how come you visit me without any notice? Don’t you have shootings to go to?”

Shehnaaz had taken out an apple from the fridge and as she was taking a bite she said getting exhausted, “Oh god, these shootings! They make me so frustrated. Anyway, if I had asked or told you that I am coming, you would have planned to move out of the whole state.”

Samar fake chuckled and said, “Now, why do you say that?”

“Because you run from me. You make it a point to not get in a meeting with me.”

“No...”

“Yeah right, tell me when did we last meet?”

“It was...” Samar tried to recall it. “...uncle’s birthday, I think.”

“Yes, two years ago.”

Fuck, thought Samar. It has been that long?

“Remember?”

“I don’t run from you.” He said still, “I have a job to fulfil.”

“Yeah, job.” Said she in sarcasm. “Are you a president, or something.... Listen, now that I am here, I want you to take me to some good place.”

Samar made a face already disliking the idea, “Where do you want to go?”

“Beach.”

Samar said, “Do you ever go anywhere else?”

Shehnaaz likes beaches so much that she goes there every weekend. It’s all over her Instagram.

“Beaches are the only good place in Pune.”

“Who said that?”

“Fine, then take me to some new place.” Said Shehnaaz.

‘Oh great!’- Was the sarcastic voice in his head. ‘Now, I will have to find that. Why couldn’t she just drop the plan?’

Right then Samar saw Inayat was stood at the main door looking in and she saw Shehnaaz. Samar eyes met with hers and she felt she came in the wrong time, so she left. Samar ran to the door screaming, “No wait!”

But Inayat was gone. That was a loss-loss.

CHAPTER 8

THE BEACH LOVER

Say you won't let go- James Arthur

Samar then shut the door and walked back to Shehnaaz. She was seated at the dining table. "Who was that?" She asked.

"No one." Said he.

Shehnaaz gave a look that said, now you will lie to me?

Samar said, "Just some friend."

Shehnaaz nodded. "By the way, did you make any girlfriend?"

Samar said sarcastically, "Many."

"Oh, please, tell, no." yelled Shehnaaz, getting impatient.

"You know, I don't do these kinds of things easily."

"So, you don't have a girlfriend. Any crush, or anyone that you admire?"

"Why, have you started the business of getting people married?" annoyed already.

Shehnaaz got upset now and stood up from her seat. She started to walk towards exit. And even though, Samar knew it was just drama and she would not really just leave still he ran after her and hugged her from behind. "No, please, no, don't go!" he cried with an over dramatic voice.

Shehnaaz smiled at that of his acting. Samar got away and Shehnaaz shook at him and moved back to her seat.

Then, she looked around. There was loud music being played and the mop and duster were around the hall. She touched the small statues with her

index finger to see if there was any dust. There was none. "You were cleaning?"

"Yeah," he said as he took the half-eaten apple and went to throw it in the dustbin.

"Since, when did you start to clean?"

"Since you started to visit me without any notice." And Samar started to step upstairs. They went to his bedroom to chill.

"Oh, come on, you can't be upset at me for giving you a surprise." Shehnaaz said as she placed her handbag on the bedside table.

Samar started to correct his bedsheet as he said, "I hate surprises."

"Well, I just wanted to be there for your birthday."

Samar birthday was next month. Even he has forgotten about it. He bumped on the bed. Shehnaaz came in next and said, "We have not celebrated your birthday since..." She stopped midsentence being aware of the touchy topic. Samar knew what she was going to say. She continued, "I don't want you to be alone anymore. Whatever happened, we cannot stop being happy."

"Well, you certainly can't." Said he still upset.

Shehnaaz hugged him from a side and said, "I want you to move on. Anyway, it was not your fault."

"They were coming for my birthday." Samar said as he got her arm off himself.

"Yeah, and they wanted you to be happy, not lost in peace."

"I was... happy."

"Look, any which way we are celebrating your birthday this time. If you want to keep running away you may, I will be here, in your home, waiting for you."

That statement made Samar soften his heart. She has always been there for him. He pulled her close and kissed on her forehead. He loved her very much. Like a close friend who meant a lot to him. It's just her trials to make

him happy that irritated him a little. "Let's go to the beach that you adore so much." He spoke.

Shehnaaz was filled with joy upon hearing that.

In the beach Samar bought her balloons and hopping like a little girl Shehnaaz took the balloons. They walked by the shore with their bare feet. Shehnaaz was hopping more than walking. Samar would look at her and smile so big.

Shehnaaz caught it and asked, "What?"

"I love you."

Shehnaaz froze at her roots. Samar was still walking as he suddenly noticed that, so he turned around. "What?"

Shehnaaz asked shocked, "You do?"

Samar laughed and said, "Yes, you are my best friend."

Shehnaaz lit up face started to turn into sad as she started to realize its meaning. Samar having no clue ran back to her. "Shez, what is it? Are you okay?"

Shehnaaz eyes were filling up with tears, but she looked away, and managed to say with a struggling smile, "Of course, I am." And started to walk faster. She wiped her face clean going forward and took in a deep breath as she said to herself, "Patience."

Samar caught up with her still thinking about what just happened. And they went on.

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Shehnaaz came and took a seat beside Samar on the bench in the park. Samar had come out of the house to take his walk to here. He wanted to be alone for some time. His head hung low. Shehnaaz said, "What is it? What is bothering you?"

Samar turned to her and stayed silent.

Shehnaaz said again,” I know, it is bigger than your parent's death. You have been through all that before. So, now, what is it?”

Samar straightens his back and shook his head as he said, “It’s nothing.”

“Samar, it is bothering you quite a lot. I know there is something you are thinking or imagining.” Shehnaaz said, “You are a writer, Samar. You live in your mind. If there is a slightest thing there disturbing you, it's going to cause storms in your real life. You have to help me to help you.”

Samar shook as he said, “There is nothing really. I am just tired of all these parties and celebration. I wish, I could stay home alone for once. Just for the sake of my peace of mind.”

Shehnaaz exhaled a long breath losing hope and nodded and said, “Well, that can be arranged.”

Shehnaaz then called and asked for the arrangements to be cancelled off or postponed. The two headed back to Samar place. Samar went straight up to his bedroom while Shehnaaz helped the housekeepers and helpers in cleaning and setting up of the house.

Samar laid in his bed working on his next book in his laptop when Shehnaaz came in and threw some letters and postcards at him. Since he was a popular writer, he uses to get them often. Samar caught them and placed aside when he noticed a name on one of them. Rahat Noor Faid. He could not believe in his eyes for a moment. He started to open it as he asked Shehnaaz, “When did we get these?”

Shehnaaz, while brushing her wet hair with a towel, told, “This morning. I thought they are for your appreciation, so I did not give it to you earlier since you are not much of a self-admirer, anymore.”

Samar had started to get up going through the letter by then.

Shehnaaz noticed that and asked while making a bun, “Is there something wrong?”

Samar was shaking his head thinking about it. Shehnaaz confirmed, “There is something wrong.”

He looked up and he could only come up with, “I have to go.”

“Where?”

He grabbed an overcoat from the hanger and pushed the letter in the inside pocket and started to move to exit.

Samar had started to run down the stairs as she said, “Samar, where are you going?!”

“To meet her.”

All the colours faded from her face. She knew what it meant. She said, “Can I come, too?”

Samar had no time to argue with her or make her understand so he just came up the few steps taking out his hand, he said, “Come.”

Shehnaaz ran the few steps down the stairs, her hair falling open from the loose bun and she held his hand. The two headed towards the main door and out with the car keys.

Samar gestured for Shehnaaz to take her seat as he locked the house. In few minutes, the two settled in and Samar started the engine.

Shehnaaz turned to his hurried and worried face as she asked, “Are you sure you haven’t forgotten something?”

Samar pulled on the gayer, “Yes, I have.” He said, “My sanity.”

And they zipped away.

CHAPTER 9

SOME GIFTS

Because love is nothing but exchange of things-

Ki lo saare din tumhare,

Bas ek shaam humare naam kar do.

Ghar, makaan, jaizaad tumhara

Apna dil humare naam kar do.

Ab yeh sab jab apna hi liya h toh

Bas aur kuch nahi

Saara sona, zevraat, pehnawa tumhara

Yeh maang me sindoor humare naam kar do.

Dive- Ed Sheeran

Inayat was writing in her diary alone at her room. She had just been ditched by Samar as he brought a girl to his place whom she does not know about.

Then she heard her only true friend in the town and her future sister-in-law Swara call her name. She answered back, "Yes?"

Swara had asked Inayat to come to the market with her. Inayat shut her diary close and threw it into the drawer as she ran out. Swara was wearing

her all-time favourite oversized kurta over straight pants and cardigan. Yellow and golden. A matching combination. Swara looked at Inayat from up to bottom and said, "You are not dressed, yet?"

Inayat looked at herself. She was wearing a grey sweater and black wool skirt. Her everyday go to. It is the most comfortable she can find. And she said,

"It is what it is. Now, let's go."

They went out the room, screaming back to Inayat's brother, "We will be back soon!"

In the market they went through the stalls of toys and hair accessories. Then they went to a mall that was nearby. Mostly, because it is safer and cooler there. They were just roaming around as they have bought everything that was required. Even if they could not shop, they needed to be there for the visionary satisfaction. Looking at these stuff Inayat and Swara made comments and laughed.

They would say this one is not that good or that one is a little too much. That dress is particularly good for the price, and this cloth should not be this expensive.

While they were on the walk, they were noticed by two guys walking by. Swara absolutely ignored them obviously having no interest in men as she was happy with Inayat's brother, but Inayat looked at them for a minute.

One of the guys was wearing a pink hoodie and white loose pants. The other guy had an olive green t shirt and black jeans on, a silver chain dangling around his neck. She liked the later guy. He looked like a model with his brown eyes and wavy blonde hair falling over his eyes, a nice jawline and a charm Inayat could neither describe nor ignore.

The guy caught her staring at him. His sharp and intense gaze made Inayat to look away in nervousness.

"Shit!" she mouthed to herself as she turned around.

Swara heard her and said, "I told you so many times not to use bad language. It makes me sick."

"Oye, do you think anyone is looking at us?"

Swara looked out behind Inayat. "Umm...there is a guy. But I don't know him." She said, as if she was checking on him.

Inayat said, "Is he that almost blonde guy?"

"Yeah" sounded Swara. "Who is he?"

"Let's get away from here." and Inayat pulled her away while Swara was still saying. "Why, do you know him?"

They went to a different floor and different section. There they did not notice anyone. They went back to checking out the trendy clothes and,

"This one is good, no?" Inayat said showing a piece of peacock blue anarkali suit.

"Yes, it is cute." she said.

She remembered she only need a piece of anarkali to complete her collection of her dresses and clothes. Inayat said immediately, "I wish I could have this."

Then she turned around the cloth to look for the price tag. The price was 3,500 rupees. Inayat raised her brows in shock and placed the cloth back to its place not very nicely. Inayat showed big eyes to Swara and said, "It is too much. I will need to sell my kidney to buy it." She said while laughing and grabbing Swara by her elbow she took her away.

The guy who Inayat had noticed before had seen her putting the dress back. After the ladies were done roaming around and it was getting late, they started to move to exit way. They were chattering and laughing when Inayat is stopped by a security guard. When asked what, the guard handed over a bag to her and told, this belongs to you. Inayat took the bag and opened it thinking if she has lost something in the mall. She found in the bag the very same anarkali dress she was looking at before. She started to give it back to the guy saying, "Sorry, I did not buy it."

The guard did not accept it back and walked away.

Inayat looked at Swara in confusion and said, "What is this? Is there some sort of free gifting going on here to attract customers?"

Swara smiled as she understood and said, "Well, someone did buy it for you." and she banged her shoulder to Inayat's in a playful way saying, "You have an admirer in the town."

Inayat laughed still thinking.

"In fact, in the same mall." Swara said.

That's when she noticed the same guy was walking the other way with his friend.

Swara saw her looking around like that and said, "You're gonna keep it or what?"

Inayat shook her head and before Swara could say another word she grabbed her along in her walk. They reached the guys who were looking up at the third floor talking about watching a movie. There was theatre on the third floor. To get their attention Inayat poked at the back of the guy's shoulder twice. Which was sort of high for her.

He turned around. At his sight for a moment both the girls got froze. He looked mesmerizing. Then, as the guy raised his brow saying, "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes" Inayat said.

Swara in the back waved at the two guys being as polite as she could. They looked rich. Inayat handed over the bag of dress to him and said, "Thank you, but no thanks."

The guy opened the bag, looked inside, and said, "What am I to do with this?"

"I don't know. I guess you gotta find out. But we don't take gifts from strangers." Inayat said.

Swara in the back mouthed, "We?" as in saying she does not mind it.

The guy shook his head and said, "And how do you know I gave it to you?"

Inayat looked at him as if she was challenged. "Because there is no one else who would. I don't have many admirers."

The guy looked in disbelief at that. His friend on the other hand made a sob face at her showing sympathy to her assumptions. Inayat had no more words to prove herself, so she started to leave saying, "So, thank you, but no."

As the two girls turned around from which Swara was pushed away by Inayat, the guy held Inayat arm to stop her and said, "Okay, okay wait." When Inayat faced him, he said, " Well, if you don't take gifts from strangers then, here..." and he stretched his hand out to her for a handshake as he said, " I am Nazim. Nazim Iqra."

When Inayat did not take his hand for a shake he took it back embarrassed and gestured at his friend behind saying, "This is my friend, Asif."

And Asif took out his hand from his oversized Drew hoodie pocket and waved with his fingers at the girls, a tight lips smile on his face. Swara waved back when Inayat pushed down her hand and said, "When I said, strangers, I meant people who I don't know personally. Knowing just your names wouldn't change that."

Swara was now looking at Inayat trying to understand why she was being so rude.

Nazim nodded at Inayat and said, "I get your point but I have bought it now and I cannot wear it so..." and he bit at his lower lip and squeezed his eyes almost like pleading. Inayat was actually melted by that of his face. He looked absolutely adorable. That is why she could not stop a smirk from coming onto her lips. At that Nazim was relieved. Inayat still said, "I really cannot take it. I am grateful for the gesture and appreciate your kindness but..."

Nazim was annoyed at this point and said, "Okay, then come and have a cup of coffee with me."

Inayat shocked that he is asking her out like this. Nazim saw that in her wide eyes and corrected, "and know me better."

Swara could not stop and wooed from behind for her friend. Asif also laughed and supporting Nazim placed hands over his shoulder shaking him proudly.

Inayat was just smiling thinking. Nazim eyes met with hers and like playing with his stare he was being both charming and sweet. Inayat finally nodded her head. Nazim smiled big and offered her his hand again to hold and come with her. This time she did, and he pulled her under his arm. At that Inayat pushed away his arms and laughing Nazim accepted it to be a little too early, but the four started to walk towards a cafe. While in the way Nazim got in front and asked, "By the way, do you girls happen to have names, by any chance?"

The girls laughed and Swara said, "Swara Shastri."

"Inayat Noor Faid."

Nazim nodded, "Nice," liking their names as they walked.

In the cafe they sat at the table of four. Swara was beside Inayat and Nazim and Asif sat facing them. Inayat had her gaze fixed at Nazim who sat in her front, while he was placing the order for them. She noticed the visible veins in his tight arms, the way his Adam apple moved when he talk or sulk in, the freckles on his cheeks, the wavy long hair falling over his eyes from light breeze, the silver chain dangling on his neck over his sweatshirt, the way his lips moved as he speak. These sights were intensely attractive for Inayat. As Nazim turned to her with his brown eyes moving from the waiter to her in slow mo., Inayat felt the nervousness making her shiver. Her arms were folded at the table. Nazim asked, "Was that all?"

For a minute, she could not understand him as she was hardly able to hear and comprehend his words as much lost, she was in him. Nazim said again, "Inayat? "

"Yes." said she then immediately.

"Your order?"

Suddenly, Inayat realised where she was and what she was doing. She said, "Yeah... yes, that's all."

Nazim thanked the waiter and he left while Inayat was feeling embarrassed.

Nazim when again turned to Inayat she was hardly able to make eye contact. Nazim grinned at that and said, "Don't worry, I don't mind being stared at."

Inayat giggled and Swara was looking at Inayat in disbelief. Inayat was not this kind of girl. Staring at men was never something she does. So, Swara said for her defence, "Nazim, actually I have never seen Inayat act like this before. And really when I say never, I mean it. She does not get nervous so easily. This is new."

Nazim smirked in glad and pride. Asif asked Swara. "So, what are you doing? Like in life."

Inayat stayed quite so Swara said again, "Well, I am studying medicine but Inayat do job."

"Oh," said Nazim, "What kind of job?"

Inayat said finally, "It's nothing really. I work in BPO."

"International BPO." Corrected Swara.

"It's still not that big."

Nazim nodded in interest and asked, "Do you earn for yourself or family?"

"Family" answered nodding Inayat.

"And how old are you?"

"22."

"That's young. "

Inayat smiled.

"Do you like what you do?"

Inayat made a face with her eyes squeezed nodding as saying, "Yeah, it's fine. But nothing to be proud of."

"What will make you proud of yourself?"

Inayat thought and said, "Writing my own songs in an album."

Nazim had one brow raised at that as he said getting into it, now, "You like to write songs."

"Yeah"

"Did you write any? "

"Several."

"Can you sing it to me?"

"Here?"

"Uh-huh." he nodded.

Inayat shook her head in shyness. Nazim was gonna say something when the waiter came with their orders. Inayat smiled at Nazim for not being able to speak and Nazim took a sip of his coffee late as he squeezed his eyes at her, thinking how to get a grip of this woman.

Inayat took a sip of her coffee when Nazim said, "Someday, then."

"Someday." nodded Inayat as if a promise was made.

They had their small meals and talked their education, families and stuff. Asif was a MBBS student studying for past four years. Nazim on the other hand was a professional musician and singer but he had not been able to create his own songs till date which was the biggest regret he had. He was around 27 now and it had been years for him in the industry since he came to Mumbai only after his high school. He did not know anything else to do. And so, his parents were sort of disappointed in him. He did not care. Because he felt he would be a massive thing one day and then they would automatically come to his side. He just needed inspiration.

When Inayat and Swara took their seat in an electronic auto or E-rickshaw near the mall to head back to home Nazim hopped in too, sitting next to them. Asif looked at him in shock as he never does it and said, "What are you doing?"

Nazim explained himself, "Being a gentleman I cannot just leave two girls on road on their own at this time of night. "

"Remember I have a car?" Asif said.

"Oh, yes, girls," he said turning to Inayat and Swara, "We can give you ride home."

The two shook their heads. Swara said, " It's alright."

Inayat said to tease, "Anyways, we don't get into stranger's car."

Nazim whispered to himself, "This girl's playful teases are now getting over my head."

Asif said to him whispering, "And what about my father's car?"

"You take it home." Nazim said to him.

Asif looked at him like saying, "Isn't it going too far?"

"But I just started." Said Nazim.

It was only around 9 at night and there were people walking on the streets. Also, their home was 1-2km away. Inayat was looking at Nazim smiling thinking what has she done to get this treatment by such a great guy. Swara said still, "No, please, Nazim, you don't have to be so much of a gentleman. We are used to it, and it is safe."

"Do you think I am looking for your permission to come with you?" He said with a poker face.

Inayat chuckled. Asif was a germ phobic so he did not want to get into the dirty rickshaw but getting annoyed he said, "Oh, fuck it!" and took a seat beside Nazim too before anyone else could. "Things you do for your friends." he mumbled.

Nazim placed his arm around his shoulder being proud of him. Asif fake smiles at him and informed, "We will have to go all the way back to mall to get my car after we drop them."

Nazim nodded, "Absolutely."

Asif looked away smiling. Nazim being overly happy with him kissed on his cheeks.

Asif got away immediately getting irritated and embarrassed, yelled, "Fuck you, man!" And he wiped his cheeks.

Nazim laughed and looking at him being so joyful Inayat happily laughed, too. On the way the new love birds were looking at each other while trying not to be caught. The sight was extremely funny and cute for Swara and Asif.

When they reached home and got off the auto, Nazim looked at the beautiful building next to her apartment and asked, "Is it yours?"

Inayat smiled and joked, "If it was, I would not be doing my job." Nazim turned to him and could feel the sadness in her words. She said, "I live on rent. However, my brother is working on getting one that we can call our own."

"You will have one, soon" said Nazim with confidence in his voice for her. Inayat smiled and started to move to the gate of the building. When Nazim called her out, "Inayat. "

She turned around a little pissed off. She is not used to be called with that name. She said, "People who are close to me calls me Ruhi. Please, call me that only."

Understanding it's meaning and relevance Nazim said, "Can I have this newly made close friend's number?" and he again made that face squeezing his eyes and biting his lips. Inayat smiled and said, "If that is your smouldering face, I shall tell you that it does...work on me."

The two laughed and then shared their numbers. Asif also turned to Swara at this point and said, "By any chance, can I have your number?"

Swara strictly said, "I am committed."

"Oh." Asif nodded in embarrassment.

Nazim then pulled out the dress bag for her to take. Inayat shook her head smiling with tight lips as she said, "Some gifts are best untaken."

Nazim nodded as he accepted his defeat. But then he looked up again and asked, "Would you like to go out with me?"

Swara mouth got wide open at that.

Inayat thought about it and said, "Someday."

Nazim nodded, too, "Someday, then."

CHAPTER 10

THE AFTER PARTY

After few days there was a party at Inayat place. They had decorated the house to look beautiful. There were colourful balloons and lights. Mostly it was Inayat work. Samar knew it was a birthday just not who's. After a few drinks Inayat went in to change and came back into her purple and golden western indo lehenga with huge earrings and a neck piece on. She looked like someone going for a reception. It was a little too much for a house party, but she looked very pretty and happy. They danced all night with a good loud music on. There may be only 7 or 8 people there, but it seemed like big party with the music and deco. Samar was out on his pilot job, so he only came to hear of it, the next day from Zakhir. Inayat danced in all sorts of songs, from 'Beedi jalailey' to Honey Singh's 'Brown Rang'. From Jennifer Lopez 'On the floor' to some Himachal Pahadi songs by the end. She would run and take a seat after getting tired in the front small room bed. Then someone would come and pull her up and take her back on the hall dance floor. They laughed and talked in between. At the end there was a cute dark chocolate cake ordered by one of her so called brothers. And she had many. Overall, they had an enjoyable time.

By the next day in the noon when Inayat went on the roof Samar was there, too. Her building was taller though she can come near the railing for him to see. That she did. Her both hands holding her phone on the railing like if she was scared, she would drop it. She had her earbuds on, listening to some music. Samar sat on a chair reading a book, waved at her and as soon as she caught him, she did too. As Samar walked up to the railing of the

roof to get closer, Inayat pulled her ear plugs out and looked up at him, smiling at his sight. He asked, "What is the secret?"

Inayat squeezed her eyes and pinch her nose confused. Samar playfully completed, "to your glow?"

Inayat laughed out. And then answered to him like any celebrity, "Ah, it's just water."

"Oh, right." Samar nodded and the two chuckled.

Samar then asked, "I heard there was a party going on yesterday at your place. Did I just miss a great invitation?"

Inayat smiled and shook, "How can we have the courage to call you? You are one of the big people of town."

Samar smiled and said, "Well, I can be humble sometimes."

"Oh, sometimes."

"Yeah, depending on the occasion. And here I came to hear there were all sort of bottles getting open. A great occasion to show humbleness."

Inayat laughed as she said, "You really are a nosy neighbour." Samar laughed, too. "Well, it was my birthday so... We had to celebrate."

"Oh, was it?" Samar said, "Happy belated birthday, in that case!"

And he stretched out his hand for a handshake. Having the street in between it did not reach but Inayat also stretched out her hand and the two acted as if they shook hands.

"Thank you."

An idea hit Samar. "Now, that calls for a toast."

Inayat asked, "In the noon?"

"What is wrong with bread toast?"

Inayat laughed and said, "That was bad."

Samar, not ashamed of a bad joke, continued still, "Well, then, what about a nice pizza?"

Inayat was still for a second. Because of her home financial condition she may had not had a pizza for quite a while now.

Samar guessed it with that of her reaction. "Oh, you look so cute like that."

Inayat chuckled and said, "No, I... I have some work to do."

"Come on, who says no to a Pizza." Samar stared at her for her to give in to his pleading eyes.

Inayat rolled her eyes and nodded. In the next 15 minutes Inayat was there. Since Shehnaaz was staying at a hotel near her other friends. Samar introduced her to his dog as he was the first one to greet her.

Then to his friend Zakhir. As Inayat walked up the stairs Samar gestured Zakhir to go out somewhere. He shook but did it.

Unbreakable- Westlife

Meanwhile, Samar showed her his room and stuff there. The pictures of his parents, his friends from college and some gifts and trophies from his school time. Inayat noticed a Piano in the corner of the room first. She asked surprised, "Is it yours?"

Samar told, "My father's. He was a music lover."

Inayat nodded. "May I?"

Samar, stood by the cupboard, his hands folded on his chest, nodded and gestured with his hands, "All yours."

Inayat sat on the small stool in front of it and started. She was just placing her fingers on it not making any music.

Samar chuckled a bit and said, "You have never played it before, have you?"

Inayat shook her head smiling in embarrassment. Samar gestured for her to give him a side to sit. When Inayat stood up, he sat down and played a few tunes. Inayat, with her hands on his shoulder, said surprised and delighted. "Wow! You play well."

Samar brushed it off as he said, "I only know a few tunes."

He then took back his hands and got up from the seat and gestured for her to try again. Inayat sat back on it. He got behind her. She tried to play it, but she was not doing it right. So, he reached down his hands from behind her, placed them over hers as he held her fingers placing it in the right keys with the right pressure. The feeling of their hands touching was intense. His face reached down to her shoulder and the two could feel the sudden change in the temperature. It has become hot with this tension between them. Inayat heartbeat became deep and fast, but she tried to stay calm. Samar acted as if he was just being a trainer even though he was enjoying this closeness. As soon as the tune reached its ending Inayat was able to feel his breaths on her neck. And as she started to turn her face to his, staring at him, now. He has ended the song and got up straight. "See, that is how you do it."

And he placed his hands back in his pockets still feeling the tension.

"Okay" Inayat said, nodding as an innocent student.

Samar's phone rang and he took it excusing himself and went out of the room. She stayed sat there quietly thinking about what just happened and how she should be feeling about it.

Samar on the other hand was getting mesmerized at the thought of that much closeness. His brain it could still feel the softness and warmth of her hands. He remembered the second his hands touched hers he started to lose his focus on the task. Her beautiful smell was hitting hard on his head. It was making her irresistible. He just wanted to kiss the small of her neck and cheek. If not the skin, then on the cloth on her shoulder. He was actually finding it hard to focus that was why he ended the tune faster and went away. This was not planned. He did not want to try to woo her in any manner. But he knew she would be thinking about it too, so he quickly got something for them to eat. The call was from the delivery guy which he lately took.

After a long time of silently thinking Inayat decided it was a bad idea to have come here. She started to move towards the door when Samar reached her. He had two large pizza boxes in his hands held at his chest. But what more precisely Inayat noticed was his arms. Samar had a white shirt on with the few buttons open in his chest and his sleeves folded at elbows. With his

formal pant on he looked like he has just come home from office although he was home. He had longer than usual- long hair, black which he combed back but they looked so messy and cool. He looked somewhat like the Tom Cruise from Mission impossible 2 just with the Indian face to be additional. His muscles were tight inside the sleeves, and he was stood holding the boxes so she could notice his biceps, too. Tight under the sleeves. Man, he looked good.

"Going somewhere?" he asked.

Inayat nodded and then shook. She was getting nervous and confused at the sight of his gorgeous looks and whatever just happened.

"Let's eat it first, then decide. It is hot." and Samar walked in, his biceps stroked her arms when he did, and he took a seat on the bed placing the boxes on the centre gesturing for her to take a seat as he patted on the bed empty space.

As soon as she did and Samar opened the boxes, Inayat had opened her mouth to say about Nazim but was shut with Samar confessing, "I am sorry if it got weird for you."

Inayat looked at him blank.

He further explained himself, "I just wanted you to see yourself being able to play. I don't know if I offended you...."

"No, it's okay." She said shaking her head. " We are cool."

Samar looked at her trying to get reassurance. "We are?"

"Yes." She nodded, "Unless you did it on purpose."

Samar started mumbling in defence, "No, no, no, no. I would never do such a thing. I don't want anything from you unless you want it too." He said and paused as Inayat shot up her eyes at him in surprise.

"I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable..." Samar said trying to cover his mumbling, now.

"Don't think about it now." She said, more to herself than to him. And Samar thought, *don't think about it? I am gonna fucking have dreams about it.*

"I just... don't want to give you any wrong signal."

"There is nothing wrong." Samar said out. Inayat was confused what it meant. Samar immediately corrected himself. "I mean, I can understand. And I am sorry."

Inayat asked out of curiosity, "When was the last time you got any girl in here?"

"Like girlfriend?"

"Like anything. Girlfriend, hook up, etc."

Samar was a little pissed off now. "Never." He said, "As informed few years back I don't do casual. Girlfriend, I have had at times of college but not anymore."

Inayat nodded briefly, getting his anger behind it, too.

Since the topic was on Samar asked next, "Do you?"

"Do I?"

"Do you go out on a casual hook up or something, now?"

The two had taken their slices and started the feast as they continued. "Not till date."

"And in future?"

"I am more of a one-man woman. In a long term committed relationship."

Samar nodded. "So, I thought."

"So, do you play these tricks to get laid?" Asked she.

He had to cough as he choked, "What?" Samar was quite in shock.

Inayat thought he did not get it, so she tried again, "You know, getting laid, having a night..."

"Yeah, yeah I know what it means."

"Hoped so." She said, "So?"

Samar thought about it, then said, "I can't comprehend..."

Inayat made a face as she explained again, "Are you trying to woo me or something?"

Samar was annoyed at that and said, "Why do you want to know?"

"Because I want to be sure, it's not only in my head."

"What!" Samar shocked. "What 'it'?" *Does she know about my feelings for her?* he thought.

But suddenly she had changed the topic. "You were talking like this guy I saw in a series. He is a psycho, but he thinks he is in love."

Samar started smiling. Inayat continued, "No really, you talked like him. He does it out of desperation. Then he ended up killing her. I mean it is dangerous. I want to be sure if you are anything like that guy before we become good friends. What if you have any such plans going on?"

She was playing naive. Samar has started to laugh till she completed. Inayat smiled, too, "I am just being safe here."

Samar shook his head and asked, "What series is it?"

"You."

"That's the name?"

Inayat nodded.

"And did you ever read psychology?"

Inayat shook her head, "I don't need to. I get enough info from all this."

"of course, you do." Samar nodded, "Well, I have no plans of killing you...any time soon."

"Any time soon? That's not very encouraging."

And the two laughed.

"Why not we watch it then?" Samar said, "The series."

Inayat nodded with a big smile. Samar turned his smart TV, which had 64 inches' screen, on to watch it as the two moved to sit on the sofa in the living room.

Inayat watched the series as he stared at her eating her pizza joyfully. He could guess she does not get to eat much of things like this. She took huge bites and her pizza was finished. Samar offered some from his own which she first denied then accepted. They had just started the series when they already finished the pizza and Inayat looked satisfied at the end. Looking at her enjoying it all like a cute little girl he could not resist but tell her, "I like you."

Inayat turned to him in complete shock. Seeing her reaction Samar changed his statement, "Like a person. I like you as a person. Like, you like someone who is a good guy. In short, you are a good guy. I mean, a good girl."

Nervousness can take a toll of me, he thought to himself.

Inayat shook her head getting it a little by now and said, "Don't flirt with me."

Samar immediately turned into a red face with embarrassment, "I am not. I am..."

Inayat was nodding at him with a face that showed sarcastically that she understands.

Fuck! Samar said in his head and looked down. Not able to make eye contact, anymore. He did not want to seem like a player with girls.

They stayed quite for a minute or two while they watched the TV and threw oregano empty sachets into the box and wiped their mouth and fingers with the tissue that came along. It was awkward time for Samar.

Anyway, he had started this tension between the two. So, to change the topic he asked, "How was it, anyway?"

Inayat thought he was talking about the piano playing incident, so she said, "What had happened? Nerve shaking."

Samar looked at her with a frown. Inayat realized he was asking for the Pizza. She then corrected herself, "I mean, it was a nice, tasty pizza."

As Samar got it now, he was more interested in the topic she had assumed, "Was it good nerve shaking or bad?"

Inayat started to blush. She did not want to go there. Samar kept looking at her waiting for the answer.

"Are we really doing this?" she asked.

"That depends on your answer. "

"No comments." She said looking down.

Samar chuckled and said, "I will take that as a good one."

CHAPTER 11

ALMOST PROPOSED

They took seat on the sofa facing each other laughing. Their arms on the sofa back and looking at each other, they slowly stopped their laugh. They had watched a few episodes of 'You' which, by the way, were genuinely nice and then moved to a comedy show.

After their laugh they stared at each other having completely different thoughts. Samar was thinking and trying to remember when the last time was that he laughed this hard before. And she on the other hand said,

"You are sad."

Samar went quite at that. What?

"You are deeply and utterly sad."

"What, no." He said, "Why would you say that?"

"I can see it."

"On my laughing face?" *It must be bad then, my laughing face*, he thought to himself.

Inayat shook her head. "I can feel it. There is something that gives deep sorrow to your heart."

Samar made a face still not believing it and took a sip of his drink. Inayat asked, "What is it? Is it your career?"

He looked away. It would be the worse guess. He was doing well at his career. Inayat then said, "No, you are good at it. Is it your love life?"

He frowned like, what rubbish. *I don't even have one.*

"No, it's something else." She said, "Is it your parents?"

He looked up at her. His face blank. She confirmed it then, "It is your parents, isn't it?"

Samar stayed quite as he took another sip from his drink. She said again, "Why? What happened?"

He was still quiet. He did not want to talk about it. She asked, "You never told me about it. What happened to them?"

Samar was wishing this conversation had not taken this turn. He doesn't like talking about them. It really makes him sad.

Inayat was quiet. Waiting for him to respond.

He asked, "Do we really need to go there?"

"If only you are okay with it."

He shook at himself for agreeing on this. He took in a breath and began. "I...

She looked straight at him. He exhaled his breath as he confessed, "I can't do it. I am sorry."

Inayat smiled. "I can understand." Then she added, "Because I know what it feels like."

Samar looked at her in surprise.

Inayat came closer, "I was not hometown when my parents died." Inayat told. "I was here. With them. And I have seen them sick every day, in their bed for 2 years. They had become sort of hopeless by the end. I mean, I have seen them happy. They were good, no, great people who did everything for the good. And at that time, they were just living bodies waiting for death to take away the pain." Inayat eyes had filled up. "Then one day, I was at the hospital sitting beside their beds. My father asked for some water and after I served him and he drank, I put the glass back on its place and came back on my seat to see they were not breathing any longer."

Tears fell from Inayat' eyes but she continued. "I tried everything, pumping their chests one by one, calling doctors, "Inayat wiped her running nose. "But it was too late. They were gone." she looked up at him. Her eyes filled with tears, her face flashed red and sad, Samar could not take it but hug her to console her. He stroked her hair as she wiped her tears off her face and her nose. They stayed in the hug for a minute or two. Samar then let her go when she was breathing normal.

Inayat sat in her side of the sofa now smiling at her shallow behaviour.

Samar then said to console her, "At least you were there for them when they passed away. You did everything you could in your power to save them. That is a good thing to remember. Because not all people get that chance."

Inayat turned to him now understanding a little of his story.

Samar exhaled a long breath as he remembered it and said, "5 years ago, I was doing master's in English literature and living away in Dehradun in a hostel. I loved writing and was asked by a famous person to write the story he had plotted. I was paid and given food and given time to write. I was so happy. All the things I wanted together. So, I moved there alone. That is when I contributed for 'Mad in love with you'." Inayat was listening with full concentration. Samar continued, "One day, I... I was asked to come downstairs to take call from my parents. I don't remember why I was so irritated that I did not take that call. Later, I was asked to come downstairs again to take the call and so I came down very late thinking why do they keep bothering me." And Samar chuckled and shook at himself as he said, "I picked up the phone and the first thing I said was, 'Why do you keep calling me? Why can't you leave me alone?' And my aunt answered. I asked why she is calling me and she informed...my parents have passed away." Samar eyes were filling with tears as he continued, "They have taken a flight to meet me at Dehradun. It was supposed to be a surprise. For my birthday. And... the plane crashed. No one survived."

Samar looked away as the tears in his eyes were coming out in rage to fall. He sniffed and passed his hands through his face hiding while wiping his tears. He wiped his whole face showing like it was sweat and then corrected his hair. Samar then told, "That day I felt I am a terrible son." Samar joked about it. "I was thinking so much about me or rather my fictional, stupid

stories that I have just forgotten about the real world. I was being selfish and I decided I should not be like this. I decided to be a pilot because my parents always wanted me to be. I left that hostel by the next month and started my course for pilot. I was very much supported by my uncle during that part of my life."

"Your father's brother?"

"No, he is my father's very close friend. He is still close to me. His whole family, actually."

Inayat nodded.

"Since that time, I try to be a better son every day. A better person."

"You are doing pretty good." Inayat said as she patted on his shoulder. He chuckled.

Samar then said to change the vibe to something lighter. "So, you did learn a few things from these movies and series."

Inayat raised a brow of pride as she smiled, "Told you."

The two smiled at each other and felt good to have been able to open up about it.

If you're not the one- Daniel Bedingfield

On the other hand, some days later Nazim asked Inayat on a date. It had been a while that Inayat had been on a date. So, she had forgotten how to act or what to talk about. Her first date had been with a younger boy at school. Right now, Inayat was sat on a bar chair beside Nazim telling him that story.

"He was cute, and it was a nice time. He would bring me stuff that his mother would make and buy me cheap snacks with his pocket-money," Inayat smirked thinking about it.

Nazim smiled and said, "Cute." Inayat nodded. "So, why did you leave him?"

She smiled at his good guessing and confessed, "Insecurity."

Upon hearing that Nazim broke into pearls of laughter. "What!"

Inayat laughed some too but then explained herself. "He had an ex who was more beautiful than me whom he still uses to meet."

Nazim laughed even harder. "Fucking what!"

"Yeah, and then one day we had a fight, so he did not come to my birthday even though I went to call him many times. "

Nazim laugh soften. Inayat continued. "Later on, I came to know that he still had met and gifted his ex with some chocolates on her birthday."

Nazim made a sad smile. Inayat then concluded, "But then when he called his ex on his birthday in front of me, I got so upset that I broke up with him. Since then, I never spoke with him again. Ever."

Nazim nodded briefly. "Sorry for that."

"No, don't be. I am not."

Nazim smiled at her for being so cute bad ass. Then Inayat asked, "What about you?"

Nazim took in a deep breath as he recalled it and said, "It's a long story."

Inayat was still looking at him waiting for it. Nazim said it very quickly, "Okay, long story short. My ex wanted marriage, I did not, so we broke up."

"What?"

"You heard it." said Nazim and took a huge sip of his coke can. He did not want to repeat it.

Inayat asked again, "No, seriously, I could not understand it. It was too fast. Come again, please."

Nazim looked at her with disappointment but began again, "My ex..."

"Who was your girlfriend?"

Nazim did not like this topic let alone the details, "How does it matter?"

"Exactly, so just say it."

Nazim shook his head and told, "Jahnvi Priya."

"No!" shocked Inayat. "That Indian Idol winner."

Nazim nodded still not interested.

Inayat said as a reminder, "This was your idea. You said you wanted us to know each other's past."

"Yeah, stupid me."

Inayat chuckled and said, "So, why did you not marry her? "

"Because I do not want marriage."

"What do you mean you do not want marriage? Will you not ever get married?"

"I hope not."

"Why?"

"Because I do not believe in marriages."

"What is there to believe? It is a certificate given by government. What more proof do you need? Besides everyone gets married one day."

"Yeah, but not me."

"But why?"

"Just because."

Inayat was quite at that. Nazim then gestured for her to dig into her ham burger which was there for a while now untouched. She took a bite or two and they sat in silence. Inayat was looking around the small restaurant. It looked good with all the dark and golden interior. She was still thinking about the talk. About why he doesn't want marriage in life.

As Nazim noticed lately that Inayat seat was not placed correctly. Cause she was not so tall the waiter had pushed the liver of the chair too high. Now, her knees were touching the table. Inayat was wearing a short maroon dress with long balloon sleeves. So, without further ado Nazim went in to push the liver down so the chair gets low. Suddenly Inayat saw him coming too close. As his hands had just stroked through her knees. The feeling was intense. As soon as Inayat could think or move, she was thumped down by her chair. And suddenly Nazim head was in too close to her face and his hands went to hold on her waist to save her as she had her hands throwing

up in air to balance. The touch was so intense. Inayat heartbeat raced to highest speed. Nazim could feel it. Inayat immediately backed off and Nazim too. Inayat was just thinking whether it was a planned tease or flirt and Nazim said, "I am sorry. Are you okay?"

Inayat nodded. Getting back straight in his chair Nazim looked away as he took sip from his diet coke.

Inayat concluded whatever it was, it was not planned. The two then ate in silence and as Inayat was not able to finish it anymore, they went out. Nazim had planned for an ice cream next.

In the walk to that ice cream parlour Nazim was not able to get out of the thought of being so close to her. He had smelled her perfume. He loved it whatever it was. It was hers.

Inayat in her short dress literally looked like an angel. She was too cute to be vulgar with. In fact, in his life he had not met anyone as cute and lovely as she was. She was pure at heart and sweet. She had a lot of self-respect though not even a bit of ego. Her eyes sparkling with that light, her face glowy and her wavy hair bouncy. Her small body looked like something he wants to lift up into his arms and go around. Her cheeks were so blushy that he just wanted to stroke it. And then her lips. Oh, her lips. They looked so irresistible. He just wanted to taste them so badly. Just once.

Her smile would make him smile automatically. Her stupid talks would make him laugh. Just the fact that she was there would make him happy. She did not look like any model or actor that he had been with before. But she looked so perfect.

On the way Nazim held her soft hand to stop her. Inayat turned around and Nazim said, "I love you."

Inayat was frozen at her roots. She was being proposed by the king of her dreams. He said next, "I want you. Will you be mine?"

CHAPTER 12

GOOD VS GOOD

Samar was planning on proposing Inayat. He had decided he will prepare a whole scene on his birthday and propose her officially. There were preparations going on by Shehnaaz anyway. Samar had decided to celebrate this time, too.

They were playing in the play zone area of the mall this day. Inayat threw the ball next after Samar had clean balled all the bottles in bowling. Inayat told, "I did go through the whole thing that you had written. And I loved it."

"You did?"

Inayat made a face when only two of the wickets were hit. She then walked back to answer. Samar had written half a fictional love story at an early age. Since the two use to talk a lot he had mentioned it to her. Inayat forced him to give it her to read. So, they were talking about it now.

"Yeah, I mean, I don't know if my opinion matters now, but I know what a good story looks like. And it is one of them. Why don't you complete it and edit and make it perfect?"

Samar shrugged his shoulders as, "I don't know. Fears." He guessed.

She asked, "What fears you, now?"

Samar stayed quiet.

Inayat was at least 4-5 years younger than Samar. She always found him very admirable and mature. Still sometimes he would say or do things that any

younger than her would do. She then asked, "You know, fears can only overcome by facing them."

"I am not sure." Samar said as he threw the ball and it hit all wicket again.

"You should at least try. Stories like these make days easier for many people who are lost in their lives." She said, "I mean, it did for me."

"I just don't think I should get into writing. After whatever happened..."

Inayat got back after her turn of bowling, sensing the hesitation in his voice. He had obviously blamed himself for the death of his parents.

"Samar, you know they do not blame you for whatever happened?"

Samar stood still, his face blank.

Inayat said, "Well, I would like to tell you that an artist not creating something with his emotions is a waste of talent. I have spent so many days reading stories and books just to go through the day." Samar was quite still. Inayat placed a hand in his shoulder and continued, "I know what it feels like. I have seen my parents die every day until, one day they actually had no strength left to stay alive.

"So, it shows that life is tough. You meet some great people, and you will also lose some great ones. There will be good days and there will be some really bad days. But...you cannot think that everything that happens, happens because of you. You might be an excuse for some but not all that happened.

"And about mistakes I learnt long time ago that if it is not, you doing it intentionally, then it is not you doing it at all. So, stop blaming yourself for whatever bad happened and start appreciating yourself for the good things that you did or tried for so long."

"Right, so why did you not start your career as a singer?"

Inayat was surprised at that question. Samar had to ask. He knew she was a terrific singer. She thought and looking forward to the goal said, "There are some things that you can actually never forget and feel really guilty about."

"Like, what?"

"Like playing this game. " She said and added, "I am terribly bad at it. I will not be able to face myself after such a horrendous lose. And this is something you should feel guilty about because you forced me into this."

Samar chuckled but asked still, "I mean, you must have a reason?"

Inayat shook as she said, "Stage fear."

"What?"

Inayat threw her hands in the air like, I knew it and said, "That's it. My excuse is not as deep and complicated as yours, but it is what it is."

"You are scared of stage? But you look so confident otherwise."

"I get wobbly legs on stage. I fear I will make a mistake in my singing, and they will laugh at me and insult me."

Samar smirked as he said, "But you only overcome that fear by practicing."

"I know. I have my own struggles that I am working on. Don't lecture me."

Samar chuckled, "Okay." Then he thought and asked, "By the way, your parent's death, was it before or after our first meeting in the flight?"

Inayat turned to him surprised again as she tried to recall it and told, "It was after."

Samar nodded, "Well, I can see you have grown since then."

Inayat smiled with her tight lips for his motherly encouragement. "Thank you, bro."

Samar chuckled and said, "I will actually kill you if you say that, again."

And they laughed.

While on their way to the mall exit Samar was still thinking about whatever she said as he knew it all, and he knew he would say it to someone who would be facing issues like he was, but he was not able to apply it on his own life for some reason. Inayat then said to break the silence, "Samar, can we make a pact? Why don't we both try to be who we wanna be?"

Samar nodded at her and as she looked away shook his head, still. He wanted her to succeed in her passion as much as she wanted it for him. The two needed each other support as well as having self-esteem in oneself. But he could not get past his trauma of disappointing her parents.

I'm yours- John Mraz

On Samar's birthday Inayat was asked to come to his party, of course. It had been a day or two and Nazim wanted his answer. And she was talking about this all with her old friend and colleague, Vivaan. He said, "So, that is a good thing, no? Why are you so anxious?"

"Because they both like me and I am not able to decide whom to choose."

"Why do you have to choose?"

"Oh, fucking shut up! You know, I am a one-man woman."

"Well, you can be a one man at a time woman."

Inayat laughed and shook her head. "You are making lame jokes at this serious situation. You should be helping me."

Vivaan stopped his laugh and said, "Okay, so what do you want me to do?"

"Tell me whom to choose."

"How do I know whom you really like."

"Vivaan, I will literally hang up on you."

"Okay, witch, okay." Vivaan thought about it. "Send me their pics first." Being on call Inayat sent him their pictures from their Insta accounts over WhatsApp.

Vivaan checked and even he was confused. "Oh, Good Goddess! They both look so sexy!"

"Exactly!"

"Okay, now we will have to go by the Checklist. I will ask questions and you tell me who is missing out that quality."

"Okay..."

"Attraction."

"Both the same."

"Religion."

"Both are same."

"Behaviour?"

"Good. Same."

"Rich?"

"Both."

"Who is richer?"

"How does it matter?"

"Oh, it does not?"

"I will kill you, Vivaan." and they laughed.

"Who is a better kisser?"

"I have not kissed them."

"What?!"

"Of course not, I just like them."

"Wait a minute, have anyone of them even said that they like you?"

"Yes. I mean, Samar kind of joked about it but Nazim said it very clearly."

"So, why are you counting Samar?"

"Because I know he really likes me."

"How?"

"It reflects on his behaviour. The way he treats me. He cannot see me cry. He always asks if I had eaten something and always feeds me something. He always pays the bill, asks for my wellbeing and....he is just very cocky but also very sweet and nice."

"Then, go for him. Propose him."

"I just have a doubt if he already has a girlfriend or lover. Because I have seen him with a girl and they look to be close."

"So, what? You have a best friend like me. He may also have a best girlfriend."

"He treats her too good."

"Why don't you ask him?"

"And make him suspicious of my insecurities and therefore my feelings for him? Never! Plus, I don't even know if he is better than Nazim. I mean, Nazim is also very good. He has a sort of charm that I cannot ignore."

"Okay, so look, since there is suspicion from Samar side plus, he has not proposed you directly, I think you should go for Nazim."

"I really don't know." Inayat said and the two stayed quiet.

After a minute Vivaan asked scared, "Are you there?"

"Of course, I am.," said Inayat. "I was just thinking..."

"I cannot hear your thoughts, you know. "

Inayat smirked and said, "I mean, is a kiss really that important?"

Vivaan started to laugh.

"Come on, be serious." said she.

"Well, that depends." said Vivaan. "On whom you are kissing. If it is someone that you like, then it would matter. It will tell you what you are going to have in future and how much love and affection is there plus it is a beautiful experience to have. "

Inayat heard it briefly. "But if it is with someone you don't like." he said, "Then, you might wanna throw up."

Inayat laughed. "Right."

"So, whom do you like?"

Inayat was quite for a moment and then said, "I... can't tell. Maybe a kiss would help me."

How would you feel- Ed Sheeran

"You look beautiful." Samar said to Inayat.

Samar had taken her out on a boat ride. There were very less rivers and boats even lesser. But this place he had known of was exceptionally beautiful. They went there in the evening. While talking they sat down on the boat. It was an old type of wooden boat and gorgeous. Samar did not know well how to row it, so it moved too drastically at times scaring them both. But eventually, he got a hold of it.

They talked and talked. They talked about their childhood, about their favourite films. Their favourite songs, restaurants, place to visit, clothes to wear, etc. After riding for a while Samar's arms were tired and paining so he took rest. Inayat felt sorry for him, so she got up and took a seat beside him. She took his arms and massaged it gently. They smiled at each other and sat in silence looking out at the sun setting. It was a lovely scene.

As the sun was almost down and it started to get dark, Samar looked at Inayat. She looked delightful. She wore western today. A white short dress. Her hair tied in a loose braid but her bangs flowing with the light breeze of the evening of spring. Samar was in his regular formals, light blue shirt, and navy-blue trousers. With his beard and moustache all set, he looked absolutely, handsome.

A strand of her hair was not getting off her face, disturbing her view. Samar placed it away, behind her ears. At that moment Inayat looked into his eyes. She noticed, his deep brown eyes. His face features, his nose pointy, his beard well shaped, his full brows and from that closeness she could see he had big eye lashes for a boy. But it matched with his facial hair. His eyes had a childish innocence. A deep search for something. Samar smiled then as he noticed her stare.

"Do I look that mesmerizing?"

Inayat smiled at him. He could not resist being coy.

"You can say something to appreciate my looks sometimes, too, you know? I work hard for it."

Inayat chuckled and told, "You look good, today."

"Today?" Samar shook.

Inayat then said to change the topic, "Why did you take me out here?"

"So that we can talk. More openly." Samar said, "And if you don't answer according to my expectations, I can drone you here."

Inayat laughed. "I think, we watched a little too much of that series."

Samar nodded and joined her.

The two then sat quietly, when Inayat guessed and said, "You are nervous."

"What?" Samar surprised.

"Yeah, you are nervous about something. That's why you are telling lame jokes. To get that heaviness off."

Samar frowned shaking his head like, "How....how do you even..."

Inayat giggled. "I know you."

Samar nodded as he looked down and back up again and asked, "So, tell me what is it in my head, right now?"

Inayat shook her head as she said, "I ain't making it easier for you, Samar. Say what you were gonna say."

Samar exhaled a breath and thought about it as he bit his lips, licking it, getting his head straight. Inayat was smiling at this sight. He looked so adorable.

Samar smiled knowing he looked ridiculous right now.

'Come on, say it!' Inayat shouted in her head staring at him quietly, getting impatient to know it, now. *I want to hear it.*

"I... I don't know where to start." Samar began, "Because I don't know when it started exactly. Was it when we first met or just recently. I just can't get over the thought of...you..."

Inayat was listening carefully.

"I... I think, about the time we met. The time when I got close. I.... don't know if this is even right. I just can't stop thinking...about you."

Inayat was still. Her ears getting warm at the thought of their closeness. But Samar did not say anything further. He could not. She knew she had to make a move.

The two sat remarkably close in the small seat of one side of the boat. There was no one nearby them. Just the lake and the exquisite sunset.

Inayat said, "Why are you telling me all this?" For the boat ride date.

Samar smiled and said, "Why, you don't want me to?"

"That depends whether or not it is true."

"Well, I'd say, if you like what you hear it is for real. And if you don't then think of it all like a tease."

"Well, you do like to tease me a lot." and Inayat started to get closer to his face. A finger on his cheek.

Samar could see it and feel the atmosphere getting a little warmer. He said, "I do?"

Inayat bit on her bottom lip nodding while staring at his lips. At that Samar had to touch that lip with his thumb. His thumb got wet from touching her lips. His eyes staring at him, his mouth getting wet at the thought of tasting those lips.

As he started to move in with his hand holding her face close by her chin, Inayat's breathing became noticeably deep and fast. He reached close enough that they could breathe each other and Inayat shut her eyes waiting for him to lean in the 2 cm distance and make it happen. But he stopped and she looked into her eyes as he said, "Inayat, I just wanted to tell you that I am deeply in love...."

And Inayat kissed him. It was becoming hard for her to wait any longer. The attraction and lust were getting onto her head. He immediately kissed her back. Her taste made him crazy, so he kissed her harder. His hands touching her neck, and her hands holding onto his t shirt hem grabbing him closer as they kissed.

Suddenly the weather had turned rainy and there was chilly wind blowing. They got apart for a minute and looked at each other, smiling. She smiled

and he said, "I've been dreaming of this moment for so long. Don't let it end so fast."

Then Inayat got up and sat on Samar's lap. Legs crossed hugging him Inayat brought his face closer to her chest, his hands moving to touch her waist and then up her back. Inayat now getting excited now kissed him again. This time when they kissed there was strong wind blowing all Inayat hair unto the two faces. But they could not stop. The boat also moved a little. Inayat got scared, now and held at Samar' shoulder tight. Samar pushed her bangs away from her face holding her face close as he got apart and said, "I am here." to reassure her.

On that note Inayat moved in and kissed him, again. He was the loveliest man she had ever meet and she could not resist but kiss him for that. Samar's hands reached to clutch on her waist and held her tightly close to him, in the shaking boat. She clutched onto his back hair and shoulder as they kissed with their tongues meeting. Then Samar went on to kiss her neck and cleavage. Inayat moaned. Samar looked up at her face, and she looked down at him and the two laughed out.

Suddenly, there was a loud sound of thunder. It was going to rain. The sound scared Inayat. The two chuckled and looking at each other took breaths from the steamy make out. They touched foreheads together as he said, "How come I did not find you, sooner?"

Inayat smiled as she said, "That's what I thought."

CHAPTER 13

WHEN IN LOVE

It rained and they reached home all drenched. It was late in the evening, and it was still raining so Samar had come to drop Inayat to her place. There was no one at her place as they were out on work. Samar had thought of waving their byes, but Inayat gestured for him to come in.

Samar said still, "I think I should get going."

"Come on," Inayat said her head tilted a little. She stretched her hand out for him to hold. He did lately and she pulled him inside her apartment shutting the door close.

As Inayat turned around Samar was standing in the middle of the hall with his rain drenched clothes hands on waist, looking around her apartment with amusement. "It's a nice place."

"Thanks," said Inayat. And noticed his hair were so soaked the water was draining onto his face. He sniffed, already catching cold as the ac had made the place cold. She said, "You should wash up."

Samar nodded, "Yeah, okay." And headed to the bathroom on the other side of the hall. Inayat watched as he left and decided to make some coffee for him.

In a few minutes Inayat was stirring the hot chocolate coffee as Samar called out, "Um, do you have towel?"

"Of course," said Inayat and went in to take it from the other room as she petted her cat sleeping on the bed and came to the hall bathroom.

The door was open, Samar stood by the sink rubbing the face wash onto his face. Inayat noticed his chest through the white drenched shirt. He looked incredibly hot. Samar next splashed water onto his face and with his eyes still closed said, "Inayat?" For the towel and stretched out his hand.

"Here, let me help you." Inayat said and coming into the washroom stood in his front and dapped the face tower over his face helping him dry off. Samar was not big of help asking guy, so he said, " It's okay, I'll do it."

Inayat stood in his front watching him, as he did and he looked in the mirror and noticed her smiling. Samar smiled too as he said, "What is it?"

"Your hair"

Samar raised a brow, "What about my hair?"

And Inayat pulled the towel from him and coming behind him stood on her toes to dry his hair. As she did it playfully moving her hands too fast and harshly. "Stop..." Samar said trying to hold her hands to stop her and the two started laughing. Samar then holding her hands above her head turned her around as he said, "My turn now," and placed the towel on her head moving it fast but not as much and she laughed.

Samar then clenched her hair tips to dry it and the two were silent. Inayat was wearing a white dress with broad neckline and puffy sleeves which was drenched in water so it was heavy and falling off of her shoulder. Samar from behind her saw her bare back and shoulder, wet and giving out the mixture of her and the rain odour. It was a beautiful mixture. Samar leaned in to breathe her in, and Inayat could feel the tension so she said, "I don't think I should..." and tried to move out but Samar pulled out the small towel around her bringing her back onto him, not letting her go. "Wait." He spoke.

Best part- Daniel Ceaser ft. her

Samar made them to stand in front of the mirror as he leaned in again and smelled her skin in her neck, his breath hitting her skin sent sensations of deep desire. Inayat looked at them through the mirror, and her breathing has become faster. Samar noticed that and could not resist but kissed her

on her neck. Inayat moaned. At that Samar had to kiss on her neck and then her shoulder licking every drop of water on her skin. Inayat had started to melt down on him. Samar from the back supported and held her close with his hands on her belly. Inayat's hand on his cheek her eyes close. In one pull Samar twirled her around. For the sudden effect Inayat held on the sink with both her hands. She looked up at him surprise. He smiled with sexy thought in his mind as he made her to sit of on hip on the sink, and the two kissed. It became passionate in seconds with tongue playing in and Samar's hand pushing onto her back against him. Their front all touching. He strokes her arms from down to up and then pulled her sleeves off her shoulders, as he moved in and kissed her arms and then her cleavage going downwards. Inayat held his head up by holding his face as she shook and "Not here."

Samar smiled and heled her down on her feet. They looked at each other. Inayat could not resist too as she bit her lower lip and started to open his shirt buttons now. She ripped his shirt open and touched his bare chest. His bulky with small-hair chest. And so, Samar opened the knot at the back of her dress pulling it down her hips. Inayat looked down shy fully when Samar made her to look up by her chin and kissed her again. Inayat slipped her hands behind on his bare back wanting nothing more than to touch him, too. Samar knew where this was going so he lift her up and took her to the bedroom as they kissed.

He placed her on the bed carefully and gently. As he got up straight, his wet shirt still hanging by his sleeves and pulled his belt buckle open. Inayat got up on her knees and pulled him by his face close to her to kiss him. Samar's hand grabbing her closer as he sat on his knees on the bed. Her hands digging into his hair, her arms around his shoulder, now.

Samar opened the clip on the back of her bra, and she slipped it off her arms. Her breath noticeably faster and deeper now at the thought of being seen. Samar could not resist but touched her breast with his fingers. She gasped out of breath. Samar cupped her breast with his hands squeezing it, as he started kissing on her cleavage. His kisses going downwards to her breast with his hands on her belly. She groaned. Samar then dug his fingers into her tummy tucker pulling it down her hips and made her to lay down

as he pulled it off of her legs. She made him to take his shirt off completely as he got upon her.

They both breathing high now as they cuddled and kissed some more. Then he got up a little away from her face and took a minute to look at her. Inayat placed a hand on his bearded cheek, smiling, as she loved his face. She loved him. Samar asked the last time before he start, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Inayat nodded, "Yes."

Samar then opened his pants buttons and soon the ride has begun.

It has been a whole night, and they were not able to get over each other. They were under the sheets. Inayat laid on her stomach and Samar on his side. Inayat said, "Are you tired?"

Samar asked back, "Are you?"

Inayat said, "Not really."

"Oh, really?" Samar said as he started to kiss on her back and bit on the back of her neck.

Inayat moaned and laughed in pleasure, she whispered, "How come you are so good at it?" Samar chose not to answer that question. Inayat then said, "Let's do another round."

Samar was quite for a second. He was actually tired. It has been hours with only small breaks in between. But he said, "Yeah, sure."

Inayat chuckled at that and said, "I was kidding, Samar. Are you not tired?"

"I will die trying to satisfy you." Samar said.

"Awe!" Inayat said, "That is so sweet." as she made him come upon her and turning on her back she kissed on his lips.

Samar looked down at her between his arms and laughed as he confessed, "You can make me go all night. What power do you have over my body? It is addictive."

Inayat laughed.

Samar then kissed a peck on her nose and got up.

"I have not sweated this much even in gym." he said putting away the sheets.

Inayat clutched his biceps as she got up too and kissed on his shoulder touching his back up and down then placed her head on his back.

Samar said, "You are doing it, again. I gotta go home, girl, otherwise you will kill me." Samar then stood up.

He got dressed in his now dry shirt and pant before he moved on. Inayat followed him to the main door with no clothes just the sheet she held around her shoulders.

Samar then turned around at the main door and Inayat stood there a little sad to see him go. He looked at her; the white bedsheet was doing a bad job in hiding anything. "I am sorry if you find me as pervert, but, I wanna see you like that on my bed every night. It will make all my stress of the day fade away in seconds."

Inayat laughed and said, "Noted."

Samar smiled. "Okay, then..."

And Inayat moved in to kiss him. Samar kissed her back and it was a deep kiss before they got apart. Samar started to take the steps from the, narrowed all close, stairs down when Inayat called him, "Samar?"

And as Samar turned around Inayat opened the sheet to show her naked body standing in his front. Samar immediately shut his eyes close as he said, "Oh good god, no! Go inside and get dressed you, crazy girl. You will make me get arousal in my dreams. Get out of my face."

Inayat giggled and said, "Bye, babe."

"Bye, love."

Little things- One Direction

"What is happiness?" She asked.

"A state of mind." Said Samar.

Inayat turned to him. Samar shrugged. Inayat slapped him and said, "No, I mean, what is happiness for you?"

They were laid on the grass in the park they always went to. It was not the best, clean park but it was what they had closest.

"Oh, umm... Never really thought about it."

"Well, think about it now, then." She said as she crossed her arms and looked straight up. She had a heavy oversized sweatshirt of dark blue colour and designs of stars and galaxies. Her hair wavy, open, and messy under her head. Her eyes twinkling like the stars she was staring at. Samar, head up with his elbow, could not resist but have his glance fixed at her.

Inayat turned to him and raised her brows like saying, So?

And Samar remembered, "Oh yeah..." And he got back down straight on the ground. "Well..." and placed a hand under his head as he continued, "I think, I just miss being loved."

And Inayat turned her head to look at him. He side glanced as he said, "I guess, after since my parents, I have become kind of a loner."

"I guessed it, too."

"And so, I just wish I had someone I could feel loved by and someone who I could love."

Inayat placed her hands on her heart as she felt it was too cute for him to express that as she said, "Awe!... sometimes you make me realise you are also a boy in a big man-y body."

Samar chuckled as he turned his head and frowned, "Is it a good thing?"

Inayat nodded smiling delightfully. "It is called self-acceptance. And it is the most beautiful thing."

Samar briefly nodded. Then, he asked her, "What is happiness for you?"

Inayat made a sound, "Hmmm." As she tilted her head to a side and thought about it. "Being loved is important to me, too. But I think, it is more important for me to be someone who is remembered."

Samar raised a brow at that.

Inayat said, "Yeah, I know, I haven't exactly done much for it but yes. Being someone influencing, and inspirational, that will make me truly happy."

"Weird." Samar said.

"Why?"

"You already are quite influencing and inspirational. Why do you think it is something you need to achieve?"

Inayat rolled her eyes- Not believing him.

"What?"

Inayat ignored him as she thought about what he had said and asked next, "What are you most afraid of?"

Samar thought about it said, "Snakes, I guess."

Inayat rolled her eyes again. Samar continued, "No like, look at them. They are like long, leg less creatures moving around. Their eyes are so big and that slit tongue. Erg!" Disgusted he.

"I am scared of love." Inayat told.

Samar turned to her in surprise as he said, "Should I be worried?"

Inayat smiled as she turned to him. "No, but it is something that scares the hell out of me."

"I thought, you liked it."

"I did."

"Then what happened."

Inayat stayed quite trying to think of the factors.

"Is there so much to tell?" Teased Samar.

Inayat chuckled as she shook her head and said, "I don't know actually. One after the other the guys have turned me down on my hopes. Disappointed me. Embarrassed me."

Samar now had to ask, "How many boyfriends have you had?"

"Three."

"At a time?"

Inayat giggled.

Samar shook his head and turned to look up at the stars, trying see any pattern or something he could impress her with.

Inayat said, "I wanted to live the love magic my parents have. They were inseparable at younger days."

"You are talking like you have seen them."

"In the pictures I have."

"Well, ... They must have had their hardships."

"I really don't think anything is very hard once you get support from your loved ones. I mean, it becomes a lot easier."

Samar shrugged, "You never know, Inayat. A couple is never always happy together. There are fights, complications, struggle to manage. I don't think you can escape the hard part."

"Yes, so you are not escaping it. You are just going through it all together getting stronger." she said, "I think, even if love doesn't make things easier or better, it certainly, gives you the power to fight through it."

Samar had to surrender to this conclusion now. So, he said, "Right, then, why are you afraid of it?"

Inayat turned to him as she said, "It is because it is like that. I am scared of love because it is Powerful, wonderful, life changing."

"Am I missing something here?" Samar needed more clarification.

Inayat told, "I am scared I will lose control of myself. I am scared I will become something that I am not. That I will become weak and vulnerable. And who knows the guy I fall for has the same passionate, intense love interest for me as well. If I don't get that love back, I might never be able to recover from that heart break. And that's what scares me the most. Because falling in love is easy. Getting back the same kind of love is hard."

Samar nodded briefly to all that and said, "So, actually you are not scared of love. You are scared of falling for the wrong guy. Which is understandable since you have had your experiences in the past. But then, remember there are a lot more people than you know. I mean, look at me on the brighter side."

Inayat smiled as he placed a hand on his chest being proud and content in being with her.

She said, "It's so weird. You can't even love someone that you want to love just because you are scared that they are not capable of handling that love." She spoke.

Samar feels the serious fear behind the statement and said, "Well, I will not disappoint you like others. I promise you that." And he got over and kissed on her forehead.

Inayat smiled with her lips tight, looking at him.

Samar then said, "Do you think about our future?" Looking at the sky.

"You and me?"

"Uh-huh."

"I don't think I got the time till now." And then added, "But I know that I never wanna lose you. Not on purpose."

Samar smiled blissfully and nodded.

"What do you think of our future?" She asked next.

Samar turned on his side as he said, "Oh well, a lot of things. Sexy things. Like, how about a night at a houseboat the next time we meet. We can make love while looking up at the sky."

Inayat chuckled as she pulled on his cheek being utterly delighted of having him and remembering her exes said, "How come some of us are so passionate, empathetic and intensively caring and some are just so stupid?"

"That's a question for the universe to answer."

CHAPTER 14

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Finally, it was the day Shehnaaz had been waiting for. It was Samar's birthday. Shehnaaz had planned a big party for him. She had asked her parents and all their school and college friends to come.

Shehnaaz wanted them all to celebrate it. And she decorated the whole house with balloons and ribbons while Samar was out on work.

By the evening when Samar came back home, the lights were turned off. Samar in his white suit and light blue shirt threw his handbag on the sofa of the hall as he knew where it was. Suddenly, the lights turned on, Shehnaaz blew the party horn in his ear and the crowd screamed, "Happy birthday!" The party popper was blasted from both sides of Samar and there was big applause with claps and whistles from the crowd.

Samar looked around to see many of their college friends and Shehnaaz family to be there. Shehnaaz grabbed him into a tight hug and kissing his cheeks screamed, "Happy birthday, Samar!" Samar shook his head for her thinking to himself, typical Shehnaaz and whispered to her ears, "I will remember this time" as a threat. He then kissed her cheeks back and went to meet the people he was seeing after a long time.

They were all happy, congratulating him. He was a little confused at that. He did not know why they were congratulating him after wishing happy birthday. He met with Shehnaaz father Rizwaan Afzaar who was remarkably young to him. He hugged him and patted at his shoulder proudly asking about his wellbeing. Samar spoke with them and then was asked to play some piano for the crowd.

When he started to sit down, he saw Inayat coming in from the main gate. He looked at her. She wore a blue dress which was shimmery with her curly hair pinned at a side of her shoulder, her bangs covering half right of her face, her six inches' heels making her look taller and slim, her hands clutching a glittery clutch tight. She was nervous, but she looked incredibly beautiful.

Shehnaaz looked at where he was looking, froze, and was somewhat envy of her attractive beauty. She then called out at Samar to speak with someone they knew. Samar just looked at Shehnaaz once then back at Inayat. Inayat smiled as a greet and Samar smiled back instantly. A beautiful song just then hit him. He sat down on the piano stool and started playing. The tune of "Wonder (Acoustic)" by Shawn Mendes filled the room. Inayat got goose pumps for how good it sounded and she turned around to look at him.

Samar kept his eyes focused on the piano as he played the tune beautifully. Shehnaaz recognized the song immediately. It was a beautiful, romantic song, and she was surprised he had chosen it. Samar was not exactly the romantic type.

With his eyes closed and head slightly raised, he seemed lost in the music. When he opened his eyes, he turned to where Inayat had been standing. Not seeing her, he searched the crowd until he spotted her near the back, looking down and trying to hide.

Then Samar began to sing.

That made Inayat look up at once—which was exactly what he wanted. He was not a great singer, but he was good enough to impress. Shehnaaz could hardly believe he was singing in public.

He sang the song and played piano so smoothly and loudly that it felt as if he had practiced it all for some time. He may have. Only to surprise Inayat. He had originally planned to spend the time with Inayat alone, so.

The crowd responded with delighted murmurs as they could feel him doing it with lots of emotions. Soon, he finished the performance and was rewarded with a warm round of applause.

When he looked again at Inayat, who had her eyes glisten as she was impressed up to sky. Samar smiled back showing his pleasure.

As they met later she could only wish him for his birthday and appreciate him for his performance and he was pulled away by his other friends. Samar was occupied by his friends and relatives talking to him about his wellbeing. It was a long time that they have heard him play and sing.

One of the aunts whispered into Samar's ears they were going to serve dinner now. They had had their wines standing and talking, it was getting late so Samar agreed. He then noticed Inayat standing in a corner looked miserable in a party full of strangers. Because she looked beautiful some guys did approach her to talk but she was very shy and quite. Samar decided to speak with her once. As he started to take steps towards her to the exit of the hall. Shehnaaz blocked him and said, "Where are you going?"

"I just..."

"Let's go. There is a huge announcement."

Samar was confused to hear that and was grabbed away. He was then made to stand at one side of the stage in the hall and Rizwaan took the mike. Shehnaaz tried to hold on Samar's arm, but Samar took away his arm getting a little irritated now.

His smile on his face with joy. Rizwaan began,

"I am so grateful and happy to announce this to you all." he said and looked at his daughter and Samar standing together. "My so-called son is finally becoming my son officially. As in my son in law."

Samar was hearing things but not getting it. Shehnaaz held Samar's hand fingers crossed as Rizwaan said, "I am marrying away my daughter Shehnaaz to Samar Malik."

Upon hearing that Samar pulled away his hand and said shockingly, "Uncle!"

There were claps around the room. The claps felt like slaps on cheeks to Samar. Rizwaan stopped smiling watching Samar's reaction. Shehnaaz was also shocked. Samar found Inayat in the crowd. Her eyes getting tearful.

Samar started to shake his head at her, already. But she walked right out of the main door.

"Inayat!" Samar screamed as he ran after her. Inayat had managed to get out of the house and was walking towards her apartment building when running Samar caught her by her elbow. "Inayat, wait, please."

"What?!" and she threw her hands away from his hold.

"Let me explain."

"What is there to explain?"

"I did not know they have planned this."

"Oh, yeah, right. It is your wedding and you were not informed?"

"Apparently, yes."

"Bullshit!"

"Look, I knew, Shehnaaz sort of likes me but I never thought she would do that."

Inayat refused to believe it and said, "I thought, after whatever had happened, you like me."

Samar moved in to hold her hands as she broke down and said, "I do like you. I... I love you."

Inayat looked into his eyes. Even if she did see some truth there, she felt too embarrassed about it all now she could not accept him. She started to shake her head and withdrew her hands. Now, Samar's face started to turn sad from worry.

Inayat finally told, "You know, I was proposed by someone else, recently. I could not accept him because, ... I thought I have future with you."

"And I do."

"I doubt that."

"Inayat, I will refuse her. I will dump her friendship; I will do anything that is required of me..."

"I just... don't care, anymore, Samar."

"Don't say that, please,"

"It felt like I have been called here to be insulted."

"It's not true, Inayat." Samar whispered. "You know, I would never do that."

"No, I don't, actually!" Inayat screamed. "I don't know you, anymore." and Inayat turned away to leave. "It's over."

"Don't say it...." Samar tried to stop her by holding her hand, but she was out of reach as she ran away whipping her tears.

Samar could not do anything but stand there. His heart aching, it was becoming suffocating. He roared as if it was too much to take. He went upstairs to see all of the beautiful lights and loud music had been shut down. They were all standing, chittering in quiet. He looked at Shehnaaz who was also in tears by now sitting in a corner chair and he said, "I did not expect this from you." Shehnaaz was incredibly sad upon hearing that and then he took his car keys from the table and walked out of the house, again.

Shehnaaz heard him starting the engine of his car and ran to the balcony "Samar!" called she from behind but Samar drove away. Shehnaaz bent down to sit on floor as she broke down. She knew this incident is going to be the end of their friendship.

"I think, the wounds which are invisible are the ones which hurts the most"-

It'll be okay- Shawn Mendes

Samar drove to a beach nearby their house. It was the one he and his father use to come to. He did not come here for a long time because it would make him sad. This evening even though it was his birthday, he felt very sad and lonely, so he decided to come here. He parked his car by the road side and with blurry teary sight, taking off his shoes on his way he walked straight onto the waves of the ocean and not being able to stand any longer he kneeled on the wet sand and let the waves hit him as he cried. His blue shirt and white pant all got wet with the sea water and his face with his own tears.

After some time, Samar sat by the beach, his knees folded up, his arms on his knees, his fingers crossed in middle. He sat quietly looking out far at

the edge of the sea. The sea looked amazing and he could not stop admiring it even though he was utterly sad.

He remembered his father and he use to walk along the shore singing old songs loud. His father was a big music lover. Also, of old songs only. So, singing with him had made Samar a somewhat fine singer.

He then heard a woman's voice calling out to him. Samar recognized it as one of his aunts but did not react.

She hurried over from the car that had just parked nearby and immediately asked if he was alright. Then she began scolding him, saying everyone had been looking for him and that he should not be sitting alone at the beach at night because people said ghosts roamed there after dark.

Samar remained silent, giving no answer.

Rizwaan had driven them there at Shehnaaz's request.

The two came out of the car then. Looking at sad Samar Shehnaaz felt extremely guilty. She did not have the courage to speak to him, so she kept stood by the car door, wiping her eyes which were filling up with tears uncontrollably. Rizwaan walked to him, and placing a hand on Samar's shoulder from the back said, "I am sorry, dear."

Samar was still silent. Rizwaan said, "Let's go home, now."

Samar's eye dropped a tear as he imagined his father and him walking by the beach holding hands, singing joyfully.

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The song, "Are you lonesome tonight?" By Elvis Presley was being played in the radio of the car. Shehnaaz had turned on the music to lighten up his mood and kill the deadly silence. It was a terrible idea. By the second verse of the song Samar had to stop the car by the roadside and get out of it. Shehnaaz tried to ask him if he was okay or if he needs help, but Samar had already raised hand gesturing for her to not bother. In his drunk state he walked wiggling and went into the roadside forest. Being his friend for long enough she knew it is better to let him be if he asks so.

Shehnaaz was sat in the car unaware of the fact that the song was making him sick. Samar had to vomit. Shehnaaz kept sat there quietly waiting for him.

Samar was becoming increasingly disturbed by the images flashing through his mind. He had always imagined his parents' deaths. From documentaries and stories, he had heard, he knew that when a plane is about to crash, passengers are often aware of it minutes beforehand. Those final moments, spent waiting helplessly for death, had always haunted him.

The memory of seeing his parents' lifeless, disfigured bodies being wheeled through the hospital before the funeral only made the thoughts worse.

He needed something to quiet his mind, but the small whisky bottle he carried was already empty. With a sigh, he pulled a cigarette from his pocket—something he kept for moments like this—and took a slow puff.

He had never been much of a drinker or smoker. Stress and overthinking had changed that.

Leaning against a tree, his shoulder resting on the rough bark, Samar exhaled and lifted his eyes to the full moon above.

Shehnaaz could see his back only, but she kept her eyes on him, sadly. As he recalled again the break-up he had with Inayat on his birthday. And what happened after that.

IN THE PAST

Samar came to know that Inayat had left her home and moved to Mumbai with her elder sister. He had tried to reach her over phone, but she has stopped picking up or responding.

Samar tried to focus back on his work, but he was not able to do it. He was not able to focus on anything anymore. After the flight, he was sat in the airport canteen for a break before he goes for the next flight. He had taken the meal and sat on the chair not touching his food. The captain came to check on him. Looking at his face so miserable he took a seat next to him. Samar lately looked up and greeted him with a fake smile. Captain smiled and said, "Did anyone tell you that you are a terrible actor?"

Samar got confused.

Captain said, "Your acting of being cool and fine is not working."

Samar smirked.

Captain said again, "What is bothering you, Malik?"

Samar kept quiet.

Captain smiled and said, "When a guy is not able to express it, then it is about a girl. So, who is it?"

"You don't want to know, captain." said Samar.

"Maid?" he guessed still.

Samar finally chuckled. It lightened his mood.

Captain said next, "Neighbour?"

Samar looked up and then away shaking his head for his own disappointment. Captain guessed it by that, "Ah..."

"I don't know what to do."

"Why, what happened?"

"She's gone."

The captain made a face briefly understanding with his tightened lips. Samar then said, "And it happened on my birthday, as usual."

Captain smiled and said, "So, you are a jinx."

Samar smirked.

Captain said, "Look, doing your job and pretending like nothing really happened while you are actually deeply hurt and not able to concentrate on your work is certainly not going to make things better."

"What are you suggesting, captain?"

"I am asking you to take a break. Get your mind and heart in place and then try to get back to work. Then, maybe we can also talk about your promotion."

Samar should have been happy to hear about the promotion, but he shook his head as he said, "If I leave now, I may never be able to come back."

"Then, don't." said the captain. "I need the old energetic, charismatic, brave Samar back. If it can't be that, then be nothing."

Samar said, "But my parents would have wanted me to do it."

"Your parents wanted you to be happy. More than anything. And you know that."

Samar nodded quietly still looking down.

The captain started to stand up. Samar looked away thinking about it when the captain said, "Samar, by the way, how do you know that she is gone? I mean, how do you know you cannot try anymore?"

It was like saying, why should you not try again. Samar smiled hearing that. At that the Captain asked, "And are you finishing that chicken burger or should I help?"

Samar looked down at the burger and up the captain who had a brow raised still in question. Samar nodded as he stated at it.

The captain patted at his shoulders and said, "Good luck, Malik." As he left.

In the coming few days Samar had taken leaves and rested at home. He had not been home much in his whole life, doing nothing. He was able to stop stressing and soon started to think about completing or editing the story he had started writing at younger age. It was a love story of teenagers. After half a month break, he decided to leave the job and focus completely on his writing. He had savings of a lifetime, so it was cool. He stayed home and within the next few months he had made several changes and plot twists in his story.

One night after a few months when he had finally completed the work, he was sat on his work desk, in his shorts and tee. His one leg crossed over the other as he looked out of the window to a couple birds making love to each other by touching their heads. He smiled.

There was a knock at his bedroom door. Zakhir was stood there with a cup of coffee for him. Samar smiled at his sight. Zakhir walked in, handed it over to him and stood by the desk.

Samar took a sip and delightfully said, "Perfect, bro. Thanks."

"Hmm." Zakhir was trying to read his writings.

Samar had a tendency of hiding his notes which he did again and took away the sheet from him. Zakhir was a little irritated by that.

Samar then thought and handed it back. Zakhir was more surprised now. "Are you sure?"

Samar nodded with his tightened lips and said, "I mean, if I want to be a writer then I must start getting use to reviews of all kinds. And everything starts at home, so."

Zakhir smiled at that. He then read through few lines, smiling at times and making cringe faces at times. Seeing his reaction, it was getting harder for Samar. So, he said, "Let's start by expressing less by face expressions and reading in the back."

Zakhir looked up while he was actually getting interested in reading and not able to hear his words.

Samar stood up and handing him the whole manuscript pushed him out of his room and shut his room door. Zakhir screamed from outside, "I will get it back to you by the morning."

Samar went to sit on his bed as he shook not believing his idea of reading it whole throughout the night. Zakhir was not a big reader. Plus, it is lengthy. Samar shouted back. "Take your time. And goodnight."

"Goodnight, bro. And please actually, go to sleep."

Samar just smiled. He could not sleep much for a long time now. He had become use to it.

Love did not hurt him anymore, though. It was a beautiful feeling that he had for someone. Now, even though that someone is not there the beautiful feeling is. He used to think maybe he had become a one-sided lover, now. But he did not care. And he certainly, did not want to keep feeling

guilty for something that he did not do and sad for something that did not happen. So, he just wanted to remember Inayat as someone who taught him many things about love.

CHAPTER 15

MOVE ON

Illicit affairs- Taylor Swift

We all learn to move on with time. Moving on is good – as long as we don't forget those who were meant to walk beside us.

The Monday market was quiet in the early morning, with only a few shops open under light fog and soft rain. Inayat walked through it to buy plants. She was not much of a gardener, but she loved greenery, and her new place still did not feel like home. She hoped plants might change that.

At the nursery, freshly watered plants stood in beautiful pots – some on stands, others hanging from ceiling rods. Green leaves mixed with shades of purple, red, yellow, and orange. She loved them all but chose only one: her favourite, a forget-me-not with tiny purple flowers. She also picked a low-maintenance water plant since she would not always be home to care for them.

Carrying the plants, she walked toward her nearby apartment, dressed in an oversized white kameez, pants, a heavy grey scarf, and slippers. Memories followed her steps.

The past months had been difficult. She had moved to Mumbai to stay with her elder sister Rahat, whose marriage was falling apart. Rahat earned more than her husband, and his growing jealousy led to constant fights. Eventually, their daughter Chahat discovered evidence of his affair through messages on his phone. After weeks of silence, she revealed the truth, and the marriage ended.

Rahat moved in with their widowed aunt, and Inayat supported her. Around the same time, still hurt by Samar's betrayal, Inayat decided to remain single. Though she had once rejected Nazim, he welcomed her back as a friend and moved to Mumbai to be closer to her. They dated for a few months, and with his encouragement and connections she began working as an assistant to a music director.

Still, forgetting Samar was not easy. Nazim remained patient, giving her care and space to heal.

Life at Rahat's home grew tense. Years of hardship had made Rahat irritable, and one day she accused Inayat of being irresponsible during their parents' final days. Hurt beyond tolerance, Inayat argued back and chose to leave.

Nazim offered her a place with him. Returning to Pune, leaving her job, or risking seeing Samar again felt worse, so she accepted. They moved in together despite opposite routines — Nazim working late nights and Inayat waking early for work and vocal practice.

Reaching home, she removed her slippers and stepped onto the small balcony where a few plants already hung above a grass rug. She placed the forget-me-not by the wall, smiling at the growing warmth of the space.

Inside, she made herself coffee and sat in a wooden armchair near the open balcony door, watching the dull sky.

The faint sunlight reminded her of the day Samar had taken her out on a boat — when they sat quietly on the lake and kissed.

The doorbell rang. Inayat ran and opened the door to find her long lost friend.

"Radhika!" Surprised Inayat.

"Hi!" She said and they hugged moving each other into a dance hug as they do. "How come you find my home?"

"I have visited your sister's place to check on them and came to know you have visited too and got the address for your new home." She said smiling, pride in her smartness. "So, bitch, did not even think of calling me, huh?"

"I am sorry man. I was just..."

"Oh, keep it for your future husband." Said she as she barges in. "Speaking of which, how is your new boyfriend?"

"Did Rahat tell you that, also?"

"No," she said as she takes a seat on the armchair with her legs up. "I stocked you."

Inayat laughed. "I have only posted like one picture with him."

"Yes, but he has posted many of yours."

Inayat looked down hiding her blush. Not knowing this up till now.

"Oh, darling, look how you are blushing like a new bride."

Inayat shook her head as she said in her defence. "I was just smiling at the fact that you were actually stocking my boyfriend."

"Oh, possessive!" She giggled. "See, I was trying to get your information. Also, I had to find out whether or not he is good for you."

"Oh, how grateful I am for your protection" she said sarcastically. "And how did you find him?"

"Well, after scrolling through 346 posts of his and stocking him at every other social media platform, I came to the conclusion that...he is good."

"Thank you for your approval. Now I can marry him with positive energy." Sarcastic Inayat.

Radhika made a face at her and then followed her into the kitchen. Inayat had to start preparing for the lunch, now. "Damn, he is so hot in the pictures. Tell me how you found him. Tinder?" She said taking a seat on the kitchen counter.

"What?!" Shocked Inayat.

"Look, I know you don't go out looking for man, in person, so, how else would you find him."

"I actually, don't go out looking for men in anyway. I just met with him at a mall randomly." Said Inayat taking out onions to peel and cut for the dinner and added, "And I have uninstalled Tinder a long time ago."

"Yeah, fine, don't tell me the truth." Said Radhika taking a piece to bite on from the sliced onions, "Is he as cute in person as he looks in the pictures?"

"I haven't seen his pictures, yet."

"Oh, you are stupid, then." said Radhika had to cover her eyes from the burning the onions gave her. Inayat smiled at her cockiness as she completed her task.

Radhika had to gather the courage to ask this question, "So, is he the guy you were so sad about, before?"

Inayat was surprised on hearing that and placed her knife on the counter. Then concluded, "Rahat, did tell you a lot more than she should."

"But why are you hiding things from me?" Said Radhika getting a little pissed off, now.

Inayat looked at her and saw her pissed off face as she said, "I am not hiding anything. I am just, sad to not be the first person to tell you all this."

She laughed harshly and said, "Yeah, and I am happy to not be the first person you call at such situation."

Inayat got in front of her holding her hands on her lap asked, "What do I do to fix this?"

"It's simple. Tell the truth." Said Radhika as she started to move to leave.

"Okay, let's talk then." Said Inayat and added. "We have met after so long. Would you come with me for a walk to the market?"

Radhika smiled at the idea.

They were walking by the streets to the market talking all the way. Inayat told her everything that had happened in past few months. Radhika was half believing it. Inayat could guess so and said, "I know, it is hard to believe."

"Yeah, I mean, you don't look that super attractive that two beautiful men would fall for you."

Inayat smiled knowing she will take her revenge in some manner and said, "It was just luck by chance."

"I was joking, Ruhi. Since when did you become so insecure?" Radhika said as she could guess she had extremely low self-esteem. She added, "By the way, since you have chosen Nazim over Samar, I suppose Samar is still available. Would you give me his number?"

Inayat laughed out. So did Radhika. Inayat told, "As informed I did not choose Nazim over Samar. I eventually liked Samar but, he had his plans and maybe it was just a misunderstanding."

"Maybe? What, do you even know anything for sure?"

"I know that he loved me but why did he play me? I can't figure out. I mean, I have been with him for so long, why did he not just tell me that he is actually getting married soon?"

"Maybe, he actually did not know it himself."

"See, maybe." Said Inayat. "All I know for sure, now is that I was never going to be loved by two men at a time. Either both of them would be a fantasy or horror."

"Inayat, you did not even give him a chance to explain himself."

"One chance? Like the one I have given to the men I have dated before. And what did they do?"

"Not all men are the same."

"Oh, yeah, right." She said sarcastically.

"Then, why would he call you at his birthday and sing for you?"

"It was all to give me a big tight slap of his marriage proposal."

"Why would he do that?"

"I don't know. Maybe, he is a psycho."

"Inayat." Said Radhika, "You know, you are not making any sense here."

"When did it all ever made sense?" And Inayat shook her head getting emotional.

Radhika hugged her from a side feeling sorry for her. Then said, "By the way, now, for whatever reason since you are not going to date him, would you please mind sharing his number with me? I can also try to take your revenge from him."

Inayat chuckled again, "I don't want revenge. I just want peace. And also, he may be married by now. So, wait, maybe I will just give you his number so you can call him and ask if he is. And if he says he is not then you can date him."

"Like literally call him and ask, 'Hey, Samar, are you married? Oh, you are, sorry then. Wrong number.' And hang up?"

Inayat laughed and nodded, "Exactly."

"I can do that. At least then, you will be better, too."

Inayat made an irritated face.

"What?" Radhika said for that, "You already look miserable thinking about him. I can just imagine how bad it must had been for you and wish that it was not true love, still."

Inayat made a face questioning, why?

Which Radhika read and said, "Because then, Inayat, I am afraid that you will ever be able to move on completely."

Inayat nodded briefly and said sarcastically, "Finally, you said something optimistic."

Radhika chuckled and said, "Just being real, here."

"I don't think I like real, anymore. I like fantasies, now."

"By hearing your love story and your future plans I guessed, so."

CHAPTER 16

THE DEAL

The rain had started again by the time Inayat returned home that evening—soft at first, then steady, like a background rhythm she couldn’t escape.

Nazim was already there.

He sat on the edge of the bed, elbows on his knees, hands loosely clasped. The room was dim except for the yellow lamp in the corner, casting long shadows that made everything feel quieter than usual.

“You’re early,” she said, placing her bag down.

“Yeah, I had...something to discuss with you.”

There was something in his tone. Not sharp, not cold—but deliberate.

Inayat paused. “What’s wrong?”

Nazim exhaled slowly, then reached for something beside him—a thin folder.

“Sit,” he said.

That was when she knew this wasn’t casual.

She walked over and sat across from him, pulling her scarf tighter around herself. The air suddenly felt colder.

He handed her the folder.

“What is this?”

“Read it.”

She frowned but opened it anyway. The pages inside were neatly typed, structured—legal language, clauses, conditions.

Her eyes moved quickly at first, then slower... then she stopped altogether.

“A contract?” she said, looking up at him.

Nazim nodded.

“Inayat, just read it fully.”

She did.

And with every line, her expression shifted—from confusion to disbelief... and then to something quieter. Something heavier.

When she finished, she closed the file but didn’t hand it back.

“You’re serious?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“This is...” she let out a breath, almost a laugh, but there was no humour in it. “A private marriage?”

“A controlled one,” he corrected. “An agreement.”

“In which,” she continued, her voice steady but sharp, “we are bound to each other... until both of us agree to walk away.”

“Yes.”

“And no one knows?”

“No one.”

“And publicly, you’re still single.”

“Yes.”

She stared at him, trying to read his face.

“Why?” she asked finally.

Nazim leaned back slightly, as if he had expected that question.

“Because as I’ve told you before, I don’t believe in marriage. I don’t like the idea of it. I don’t want marriage in my life. But I also don’t believe in unstable things,” he said. “Not anymore. Not relationships that can just... end because one person wakes up and decides they’re done.”

“Nazim—”

“No, listen,” he said, leaning forward again, his voice firmer now. “You’ve been hurt. I’ve seen it. You don’t trust easily. And I...” he paused, choosing his words, “I don’t want something temporary with you.”

She swallowed.

“This way,” he continued, tapping the folder lightly, “we both know where we stand. No sudden exits. No disappearing. No... Samar situations.”

That name landed exactly where it always did.

Uncomfortable. Unfinished.

“And the secrecy?” she asked.

Nazim didn’t hesitate. “My work. My image. The kind of circles I’m trying to move into—being publicly single matters.”

She almost smiled at that. Almost.

“So, I’m... what? Hidden?”

“You’re protected,” he said immediately. “Financially. Legally—between us. You live here, you don’t worry about rent, about instability, about being alone in this city.”

There it was.

The part that made her chest tighten.

Because he wasn’t wrong.

She looked around the apartment—the one she could barely afford on her own. The job that wasn’t her earning or finding. The silence that felt heavier at night.

“You think I can’t manage on my own?” she asked, quieter now.

"I think you shouldn't have to struggle when you don't need to," he replied.
"Not when I'm here."

"And what do you get out of this?"

Nazim held her gaze.

"You."

The answer was simple. Too simple.

"That's not an answer."

"It is for me."

Silence stretched between them.

The rain grew louder.

Inayat looked back at the folder in her hands. Her thumb brushed against the edge of the paper, tracing it absentmindedly.

"A marriage that isn't real," she said slowly.

"It's real where it matters," Nazim replied.

"No one can know."

"Yes."

"I can't leave unless you agree."

"And I can't leave unless you do."

She let out a soft, disbelieving breath. "That's not comforting."

"It's commitment."

"It's control."

"It's security."

They held each other's gaze again—this time longer, heavier.

"And if I say no?" she asked.

Nazim didn't look away. "Then nothing changes. You stay here if you want. Or you leave. That choice is still yours."

She studied his face carefully.

There was no desperation there. No pleading.

Just certainty.

And that somehow made it harder.

Because she knew her own situation.

The unstable income. The loneliness. The constant feeling of being one step away from falling apart again.

And beneath all of that—

The quiet, lingering fear of being left.

Again.

She closed her eyes briefly, then opened them.

“This isn’t love,” she said.

Nazim didn’t argue.

“Yes, it is,” he said. “But it’s also something that doesn’t disappear as easily.”

That answer stayed with her.

For a long moment, neither of them spoke.

Then, slowly, she placed the folder on the table beside them.

“Okay,” she said.

Nazim blinked. “Okay?”

She nodded, though her voice was softer now.

“I’ll do it.”

A pause.

“You’re sure?”

“No,” she admitted. “But I don’t think I’ve been sure about anything in a long time.”

He watched her carefully, searching for hesitation.

“Say it clearly, Inayat.”

She met his eyes.

“Yes.”

The word settled between them—quiet, irreversible.

Nazim reached for the folder again, his movements controlled, almost practiced. He pulled out a pen and placed it in front of her.

Her hand hovered over it for a second.

Just a second.

Then she picked it up.

And signed.

CHAPTER 17

SOMEDAY

“When I said I am scared of love, I meant it. I am scared of the power of love. I am scared of falling for someone head over heels. And I am scared that I will be so consumed by that love that I will not be able to see the other side. I am scared not because they might not love me back the same way, or because it would hurt me. I am scared because I will still love them even if it breaks my heart – when they don’t care anymore. That I will stay stuck even when I know I should move on. I will not ask anything of them. I will just keep loving them, simply because I think I love too much to let go.”

Someone Like You – Adele

Shehnaaz used to cry herself to sleep at night, overwhelmed with guilt for what had happened on Samar’s birthday. She would never have done any of it if she had known. If she had known Samar loved someone else, she would not even have come. If only she had known.

Now she felt deep regret for her actions, and the knowledge that he loved someone else felt like a heavy grief. She thought that Samar have reconciled with Inayat. Often, she pictured them getting married. One such dream stayed with her.

Shehnaaz attended their wedding reception. As she knew she would never have been able to watch the actual wedding; she would have cried in public.

She stood in a corner of the hall wearing a white gown, watching the couple. Inayat looked beautiful as ever in a golden dress, while Samar stood beside her in a tuxedo and bow tie, handsome as always, their arms linked. Samar whispered something into Inayat’s ear, making her laugh, and he

joined her laughter. The cameraman's flashes lit the room as pictures were taken.

Watching them, Shehnaaz smiled, happy for their happiness, though tears filled her eyes.

Samar noticed her after a while. Excusing himself from Inayat, he walked toward Shehnaaz. They looked at each other longer than usual; it had been a long time since they last met. Samar finally smiled, silently showing forgiveness and warmth. Shehnaaz smiled back in relief, exhaling a long, trembling breath. Samar chuckled softly.

Shehnaaz placed a hand on his shoulder, shaking it lightly to show how proud and happy she was for him. Samar took her hand and kissed it gently.

Unable to hold herself back, Shehnaaz burst into tears. Samar stepped closer and wiped her tears away. She tried to smile again as she looked up at him. He seemed more charming and gentle than ever.

His hand caressed her cheek while the other rested around her waist, pulling her closer. Surprised, her hands rose to his shoulders, her breath caught somewhere between shock and longing. Samar leaned in and gave her a soft peck. Her eyes closed, tears slipping down again as her chest finally released deep, steady breaths. She kissed him back, and the moment turned into a passionate kiss.

IN THE PRESENT

"When did it start?" the therapist asked.

They sat inside a small cabin in the valleys of Mussoorie. Tall pine trees dusted with light snow were visible through the windows. Books filled the shelves lining the wooden walls. The grey interiors and colourful furniture gave the place a cosy feeling – perhaps one of the reasons Samar kept returning after everything that had happened.

"What – my depression or the story of my trauma?" Samar replied, more talkative now after days of sessions.

"I guess you can start by telling me when the symptoms began."

"Oh... that was the end of my trauma."

"Okay."

"When I started seeing someone else and blocked her from all my contacts."

The therapist nodded, writing in her diary. "If I may ask – the 'her' you mentioned is Inayat, the one you used to date?"

Samar looked at her, irritated by the question.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," she added gently. "I'm just trying to understand."

"I don't see the point of telling you, my failures. Why don't you ask about my achievements?"

"Because I already know them," she said calmly. "But they are not the reason you cannot sleep or eat properly. Your failures are. Those empty days when you had no hope, when you were so crushed you couldn't even get out of bed – those are the days that brought you here."

She continued, "And also, why do we only celebrate achievements but hide failures? Failures shape us. The hardest lessons come from loss. Why not accept them as part of who we are?"

Samar smirked. "I've already authored a whole book about my story. Why don't you read it?"

"It isn't the whole truth, is it?"

"What?"

"The book."

Samar fell silent.

"You haven't been sleeping for weeks," she continued. "You smoke constantly, cough, vomit almost every day, and the medication isn't working." She paused, waiting for a reaction. He only stared back blankly.

"You are not well, Samar," she said softly. "In fact, you may be seriously ill. You need to address this before it becomes untreatable."

Samar looked down, smirking faintly. In a faint voice he said, "I don't even care if I die."

The therapist sighed, slightly annoyed. "If you still don't want to talk about it, fine. I'll note that in the report."

Samar knew avoidance would not solve anything. If he wanted to end these consultations eventually, he had to cooperate.

"There's nothing that can be done to make things right, now," he said.

"Maybe you don't need to make things right," she replied. "Maybe we just need to understand what went wrong and start there."

"Fine," Samar sighed, giving up his resistance. "Where do I start?"

"When did your trauma begin?"

He paused.

"Actually... it was a beautiful time then," he said quietly. "I guess that's how all trauma starts. It is always beautiful in the beginning."

Selfish — Justin Timberlake

"You know what day it is? It's Someday!" Nazim screamed joyfully as he snatched the blanket from Inayat while she slept peacefully in bed.

Inayat woke up abruptly — and she definitely did not like it.

It was their anniversary, and Inayat wanted to spend the day at home sleeping and doing absolutely nothing. Of course, Nazim was not a Netflix-and-chill kind of guy. He thrived on a hectic lifestyle. He worked tirelessly all week and then spent weekends traveling or visiting people and novel places to refresh his mind.

At that moment, Inayat suddenly hated him for it.

"Let's go out somewhere," Nazim said.

"I am not going anywhere."

Nazim pulled away her blanket again.

“What, man!” Inayat shouted. “I haven’t been able to sleep properly all week. I’m tired. Let me rest.”

“Oh no,” Nazim said dramatically. “In my house, we don’t rest. We work — and then we have fun.”

“I am having fun sleeping,” she muttered, pulling the blanket back over herself.

“Get your ass up!” Nazim tugged at the blanket again. She clung to it stubbornly, eyes closed, shifting positions in search of comfort.

Suddenly, Nazim scooped her into his arms. She looked tiny and light against him, absolutely adorable as she protested loudly. Wearing a grey T-shirt and cargo pants, he carried her straight into the bathroom, locked the door, stepped under the shower, and turned it on.

Freezing water poured down.

She screamed the moment it touched her skin, wriggling wildly to escape his grip. When he finally set her down and she rushed toward the door, he caught her hand to stop her.

They had been dating for a long time and were even living together, yet they had never kissed or crossed many romantic boundaries. At most, they hugged when happy. The moment suddenly made Nazim intensely aware of that fact.

They were alone. Wet. Trapped in a single bathroom.

Inayat wore a tank top and shorts meant for sleeping. The soaked fabric clung to her body, leaving little to imagination. What had started as playful teasing suddenly felt dangerously intimate. Inayat could barely look at him.

Nazim gently pulled her back, bringing her face inches from his. The shower still ran over them. He noticed her rapid breathing and tightly shut eyes.

Leaning toward her ear, he whispered, “Now tell me — will you go out with me, or should I kiss you?”

A smile broke across her face despite herself. She nodded.

“Yes... I’ll go out with you.”

“Thought so.” He released her, grabbed a towel from the hanger, tossed it toward her, and walked out of the bathroom.

Only then did Inayat exhale in relief. She quickly shut the door, wrapped herself in the towel, and dried her skin.

He could take her soul away.

Nazim and Inayat had been invited to a get-together at his friend’s place in Mumbai – Asif’s beachside farmhouse. Outside, beneath a massive hut decorated with warm yellow fairy lights, they began a musical session. With moonlight reflecting over the waves, the place looked magical.

Everyone sang along to the lead singer – Asif, Nazim’s best friend.

Nazim wore a red-and-black checked shirt over a white tee with grey cargo pants, while Inayat wore a floral green Goanese dress.

As soon as Nazim entered holding Inayat’s hand, Asif spotted him, rushed forward, hugged him tightly, greeted Inayat, and dragged Nazim toward the centre.

“Today, bro, you can’t escape,” Asif declared. “You have to sing. At least sing for Inayat.”

Before Nazim could refuse, Asif announced into the microphone, “Ladies and gentlemen, my boy here is going to sing a song!”

“Man, you’re drunk,” Nazim muttered, but the crowd had already begun clapping.

Asif hung his guitar over Nazim’s shoulder and stepped aside.

Nazim stood silently for a moment, looking at the audience – then at his friends – then at Inayat, who watched with folded arms and shining excitement.

Smiling faintly, he began playing ‘Die in Your Arms (Acoustic)’ by Justin Bieber.

The crowd instantly recognized the song and cheered and clapped with the beats.

As he sang, Inayat realized he was looking directly at her. Sometimes he closed his eyes, completely absorbed in the music. She had never heard him sing before – and she was astonished by how good he was.

There was honesty in his voice, devotion in his expression. When he clutched his chest while singing, it felt as though he truly meant every word.

The audience listened quietly, respectfully. As the song ended, applause and whistles erupted.

As Nazim stepped away, Asif returned with the microphone. “Okay, everyone – move a little!” he shouted, starting ‘2step’ by Ed Sheeran.

He dragged Nazim back onstage. Loud bass speakers shook the hut as the crowd began dancing. During the chorus, Asif pushed the mic toward Nazim, forcing him to sing along. Laughter spread through the crowd at Nazim’s surprised expression, but he quickly joined in.

Soon everyone was singing, clapping, and dancing together. Nazim pulled Inayat onto the stage, encouraging her to move. She laughed shyly but followed along.

By the second chorus, the entire crowd sang in unison. Inayat laughed freely, holding her racing heart, overwhelmed by the energy and joy she had never experienced before.

As the song ended, cheers exploded again. Asif’s girlfriend, Sarah, placed a flower crown on Inayat’s head in gratitude. She bowed playfully, and the four of them hugged, laughing and jumping together.

Later, Nazim and Inayat walked along the shore hand in hand.

“I didn’t know you sang that well,” she said.

“You still have a lot to learn about me,” he teased.

“You come here often to sing, don’t you?”

He shook his head. “Not really. Maybe once in a year or two.”

“No kidding! You looked like a professional.”

He smirked. "I did theatre once. Performed at concerts for a while, too."

She nodded thoughtfully.

"I actually wanted to be a singer," he admitted quietly. "Not just an artist working on ads."

"Then why didn't you?"

"It takes skill... the right mind-set... understanding trends. It's hard."

Inayat looked at him. "Is it better to live an easy life you don't want, or a hard one you love?"

Nazim fell silent.

"Did you ever try releasing your own songs?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Why not? Maybe you wouldn't win – but at least join the race."

Nazim smiled softly. "I guess I didn't have the inspiration before." He lifted her hand and kissed it. "Something that I do now."

She smiled, understanding exactly what he meant.

Tightrope – Zayn Malik

That night they stayed on a secluded beach where Nazim's friends had arranged a small bed – a tradition where one couple spent the night there during gatherings.

The sky glittered with stars. Endless waves rolled before them, and the salty breeze felt perfect.

They sat quietly beside each other by the shore. After a long time, Inayat felt that pull again – that undeniable attraction.

Nazim's gaze drifted to her lips. He had waited long enough.

She noticed and moved closer.

He placed a hand gently around her neck and leaned in. Their eyes closed as they kissed. She kissed once; he lingered, holding her face, unwilling to let the moment end.

Eventually she pulled back, placing a hand against his chest to create distance. She smiled shyly, looking down.

Yes, she liked it.

Nazim stood and offered his hand. She took it, and he guided her toward the bed. He removed his shirt, standing bare-chested before her. She glanced at him shyly – at his shoulders, his chest – unable to hide her curiosity.

He smiled at her reaction and kissed her again, pulling her into his arms. Hesitant at first, she eventually held onto him for balance, feeling his skin for the first time. He slipped Inayat's dress spaghetti straps to drop off.

The unfamiliar closeness made her heart race.

That night, they made love.

And even though, deep down, Inayat knew she did not truly love him, it was the first time in a long while that she did not think about Samar – the first time she felt able to breathe.

CHAPTER 18

LET YOU GO

Heather- Conan Gray

It has been a several months for the great disaster at Samar Birthday. Samar had asked them all to leave including Shehnaaz and she had not had the courage to speak with him till now. However, she came to know from Zakhir that Samar had finally completed his story and was going to publish it. He was going to Mumbai for the same looking for some good publishers. Shehnaaz knew she would be closer to meet him there as she lived there but to meet him personally, she needed to clear things up first. So, she took this as a reason or rather an excuse to call him.

It was late in the noon, but the sun was up right on the sky. Shehnaaz took a seat by her window as the glass shield was still shut and there was clear view of the beautiful city outside and the sea next to the road in front of her home and the sunny day sky.

Samar picked up the call at the last ring.

"Hello?"

Shehnaaz mouth was open, but the words were not coming out.

"Shehnaaz, it's okay, you can speak to me, now. "

Shehnaaz eyes filled up with tears of relief as she heard it. She had tried to call him several times mentally. Many times, she even left missed call on his number, as she did not have the courage to listen to him if he'd be upset and say something harsh. Samar knew that she was trying to reach him and

he was giving it time. Time for him to forgive her and for her to forgive herself.

Shehnaaz then said anyway, "I am sorry." With her sobbing voice.

Samar said, "I know, you are." It was after a long time that the two were talking again and it meant a lot to him, too.

"I did not know that you have fallen in love with someone."

"Neither did I."

"I am sorry, I didn't ask you before making such a big discussion of your life. And I am sorry, that I had to make that announcement on your birthday in front of her with so many people..."

"I got it, Shez. It's okay." Samar said to wrap it up.

Shehnaaz finally smiled as she knew him getting fussy about it meant he is past it now. "Thank you." She said, "By the way, congratulations for your book."

Samar said, "Thank you. But there is a lot of work still pending." With delighted smile. Then he added, "I just wish I had told you about Inayat before. You two would have gotten well together."

Shehnaaz was quiet. She did not really like the idea. But for his happiness she said, "I can try it, now."

Samar smirked. "No, you cannot."

"Why? You think I don't match with her standards?"

Samar chuckled at that as he thought- this woman can turn around a simple statement into a harsh one so easily. Then he clarified. "No, it's because she does not live here, anymore."

Shehnaaz was surprised. She thought the two may have a fight but then they have gotten back together.

"So, where is she?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"She left the city. She had shifted to Mumbai with someone. She is not coming back."

"She left alone?"

"Yep."

"When?"

"The next day from my birthday."

"Was it THAT bad?"

"What?"

"The heartbreak."

Samar thought about it and exhaling a long breath said, "For me it was. For her, I don't know."

"Why would she leave the whole city if it did not hurt her that much?"

"Maybe there was some emergency in her family relatives"

"The exact next day from your birthday? That's a bit odd."

Now getting annoyed Samar said, "See, I don't know why she did it, alright? And I don't really care, anymore. I am trying to move on in my life."

"You are trying to move on?!" shouted Shehnaaz. "You rejected me in front of my whole family and our friends in a great party for a girl you fell in love with. And now you have even left her. What the hell!"

Samar was getting irritated now. "So, what? You think, it is easy to forget someone you fell for just like that. No, guess what, it is damn not! But what else should I do? Go and beg her family to tell me about her whereabouts so that I can go to her and ask her to take me back?"

"Yes, exactly! Do that!"

"Oh, come on!"

"Why? Why don't you do it? Is it your male ego or it was just fatal attraction?"

"Neither of them. I can't do it because..."

"Because?"

"Her... family does not know that we were dating. Plus, she may as well have moved on with that other guy who liked her. Maybe, she even hates me for playing with her."

"Look, first of all, her family does not need to know if you two dated. You can act as her office friend or friends' friend, or whatever and get her new address. Secondly, if she was able to move on this fast then it was not love from her side. Better let her go. Third, you don't know if she really hates you. Did she tell you that?"

Samar was quite then. Shehnaaz then said again, "You are going to Mumbai any which way. Why not make it double times useful of a trip?"

"Why are you doing this to me?" Said Samar as now, even he was thinking of going and finding her. Shehnaaz said, "Because I need something to blame on you."

Samar smiled and stayed quite at that. Shehnaaz continued, "And I know how hard it is to let go of someone that you love. But I can't let someone that I admire so much do it just because of some stupid misunderstanding. But, by the way, you are sure that you love her, right?"

Samar chuckled. "I am pretty sure. And even if it turns out to be a fatal attraction, you won't have a chance."

Shehnaaz chuckled now. "Oh, damn!" She also joked about it.

The two chuckled a bit, then Shehnaaz said, "Oh, how I miss the old days."

"Hmm, right. The days when you were my one-sided lover and I did not know." Shehnaaz smug. "But did you really love me that much?"

Shehnaaz stayed quiet. Trying to think of a sentence that did not make it awkward but was still meaningful. She said, "I loved you enough to let you go."

Samar laughed out at that. Shehnaaz smiled with her tightened lips knowing he did not take a single word of her seriously. But it was okay. She did not expect it, anymore.

Samar then said, "In that case, I hope, I do find my love."

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Shehnaaz made a face for Samar's attitude and went into the room.

Inayat had sat up by now. Shehnaaz smiled as she greeted, "Hi, are you okay?"

Inayat smiled back, "It's just some more time." She said, "You must be Shehnaaz. I've heard so much about you from Samar. He had thought of us to become good friends."

Shehnaaz nodded with a tight smile. Meeting of a lover and a fiancé are never truly sweet.

"I saw you in ads and maybe other videos, but I must say you look a lot more beautiful in person."

Shehnaaz smiled shy fully. "Well, I can say that even though you are not well, you look pretty stunning yourself."

Inayat smiled. "Well, it's just water."

Shehnaaz smiled for the joke. Then Inayat looks at what she was holding in her hands behind her back.

"Oh" Shehnaaz recalled and showed the blue flowers bouquet to Inayat, "These are for you."

Inayat took them and instantly took a sniff off of the bouquet. They smelled wonderful. "Thank you, so much."

"It's not me you should thank."

"Yeah, of course." Inayat said, "I never told him about these. I don't know how he knows me so well."

Shehnaaz stayed quite at that. There may be a spark of jealousy, so Inayat tried to cover it, "Come, please, take a seat."

Shehnaaz shook her head, "I might as well, go. It may be time for you to rest. And I don't want to disturb you."

"Well, nothing can be done for that." Inayat joked and gestured to the seat again.

Shehnaaz smirked as she took the stool.

Inayat said, "You must know him from very young age, right?"

Shehnaaz nodded. Then asked, "Did you guys get into a quarrel or something?"

"Who, me and Samar?" Inayat asked back.

"Yeah?"

Inayat smiled as she said, "Is it that obvious?"

Shehnaaz gave a slow nod.

Inayat smirked and looked away, "Tell me, has he been this stubborn since always?"

Shehnaaz thought about it and said, "I don't want to seem like a backbiter but, yes."

The two giggled. "How come you manage to survive with him?"

"Old habits. Don't leave easily."

Inayat smiled. "You must have a very big heart to love him throughout everything."

Shehnaaz stayed quiet and then said, "I try to have. But I tell you, it is not easy."

"I can only imagine."

"On top of it I am a manglik."

Inayat frowned, "I think, anyone to have you in life would be the luckiest person."

Shehnaaz nodded and looked down as she was able to understand now, "You are trying to be nice to me to make me feel like you are happy but really you are just very much sad inside."

Inayat shook her head, "But I am, indeed, very happy for him. This is what I always wanted. For him to have someone as great as you to take care of him. What more I can ask for?"

"You would want to be the one who is with him in place of me."

Inayat looked down, quiet.

CHAPTER 19

NEW CITY, NEW SURPRISE

Red eye- Justin Bieber

Nazim pushed the door open of a production house building. He wore a jeans shirt over a sleeveless white tee and baggy jeans with a red cap on as he walked in and Inayat followed him. As he entered there were people coming around them wishing and greeting them. Inayat guessed those worked under him. He shook hands with a few of the youngsters as they moved on, banging his shoulder as a greet to few others. They finally reached the meeting room where there were old, aged men and few ladies standing wearing suits or sarees waiting for them.

Inayat has been asked to visit his workspace as his colleagues wanted to meet the new girlfriend. but somehow this felt different.

"Nazim, you are late, again." yelled one of the ladies holding her saree folds with one of her hands in place.

Another added, "Could you ever be a little respectful? Making your superiors wait."

Inayat turned to Nazim as she knew whose fault it was.

Inayat had been asked to sing and so she did with her whole heart. as soon as she finished, she opened her eyes and so there was just quietness.

Later, the lady said to Nazim, "Nazim, you can't be serious?"

Inayat turned to Nazim again in a sudden surge of nervousness and embarrassment.

Then the lady completed, "Where had you hidden this gem for so long?"

Inayat left a breath of relief.

The lady came closer to Inayat and taking her face in her hands, she said, "You were unbelievable, my darling. We would love to work with you."

"Thank you," said Inayat with the big smiley face and glittery eyes. "Thank you."

Bmf- SZA

The sun was setting; she wore a loose maroon top on flared dark blue jeans with boot heels showing her palm to the taxi coming by. Inayat was running from the traffic of Mumbai roads to get a taxi for her ride home. she looked extremely excited and busy. her hair wavy and open blowing with the light breeze of the late noon.

Inayat was returning from a studio recording for her first album which with the help of Nazim and his seniors was possible. For Inayat it was like a dream come true.

She took a seat in the taxi and started to remember the times when she went for the recordings. Wearing a loose top with bare shoulders and tight jeans on Inayat would sit on the chair singing inside the studio and pouring her heart into it. Nazim would stand in the monitoring area and listen with his eyes closed, his head nodding with the beats, and the swings she would take in her singing. As soon as she would complete and look at them, the whole crew would stand and clap for her singing. Nazim would be nodding briefly, agreeing with the crowd for the wow. Inayat would laugh out with joy at that.

Remembering it made a smile appear on her lips. She was smiling a lot these days. And she remembered the song lyrics:

It's something you do to me

something in the way you see me

It's something I like I don't know why

something I just can't deny
it's like you have some kind of power over me
I hate to admit but I like to be seen
I wish I knew what to do with all these feelings
if only I knew how to do all the dealing.
Maybe I really like you
or maybe it's just the idea of you.
I like to think of having someone whom I'd like
someone closer than others in my life
I don't know if it can be you
don't know if you want to be the one too
And I am so scared to make a fool of myself again
yet here I am with a story to begin

Bad liar- Selena Gomez

Samar had thought of going at her place and talking to her brother asking them for her whereabouts at least a million times, but he was just not able to get the courage. Standing at the main gate of the building finally Samar rang the bell. He was already in his tee and joggers ready and packed up to leave for Mumbai whether or not he gets the location to her whereabouts. The gate was opened by the old lady living downstairs. He wished her and because she knew him since his childhood she asked about his whereabouts and wellbeing. Samar was in hurry, so he mostly ignored all the questions and moved upstairs. As he knocked at Inayat's apartment door a girl opened it. She was perhaps washing dishes because her hands were all wet and even some foam was there on her forehead. She looked noticeably young. She must be her sister-in-law.

Samar greeted her and asked, "Could I get Inayat to speak to?" Knowing he cannot tell the truth he had planned a whole fake scenario.

"Who are you?" She asked next.

"I am her friend from her old office." He spoke.

"Quintesh?"

"Yes, yes."

Inayat's brother and the girl's boyfriend said as he saw her. "Who is it?" from inside the room.

"Don't know. He says he is from Quintesh and he knows Inayat." She said to him.

Arif came up to the door. "Hello, yes?"

"Just wanted to know her whereabouts?"

"Inayat's? What for?"

"Umm," he came up with an excuse and an empty envelope in his hand. "I have to hand over her pay check."

"Oh, give me. I will let her know. Do I need to sign anywhere?" Said Arif reaching his hand out for him.

"No," Samar thought and said, "I can only hand it over to her directly. Also, we will need her sign, so. Security policies."

Arif was confused. "So, why did they hand it over to you to be delivered? You are just a friend of her. They could not transfer it via net banking?"

Nice point- Samar thought and said, "As you know the company only manually give the money after resignation to the employee and I was the only one who knew her address properly so."

Arif looked from at Samar foot to head getting suspicious and said, "Are you not the guy who lives next door?"

Fuck! He remembered me- Samar thought.

Swara continued, "I have also seen you with Inayat before, somewhere."

Even the girl started to remember so. "Oh yes, I have, too."

Arif remembered. "You were at the park the other day, no?"

Samar was quite till then. But as Arif has already confirmed it, Samar nodded.

So, Arif asked, "So, you also work at Quintesh?"

Samar looked up at him in surprise. He was so glad of his assumption. Yes, Arif knew Inayat and he have been meeting before and that he lived next door, but he did not know Samar is a pilot. Samar quickly nodded.

"Yes, yes. I am a trainer there."

Arif nodded and asked, "And what did you need, again?"

Samar answered, "Inayat's presence."

Arif quickly write him down her new address and he took it. Samar was then offered coffee by Swara before he refused and left.

He took his flight and was landed in Mumbai by the next 5 hours. He unpacked his stuff at a newly rented apartment and went to take some rest. By the next morning, he had gotten up and went to the nearest publishers to show his work. All three of them rejected his story one after the other. Samar was incredibly sad at this point. He wanted to meet Inayat and tell her the good news that his story is being published as he wanted to make her happy and proud not the other way around.

But as the days went by and each day most of the publishers rejected to publish it or asked for some time for them to think, Samar became more and more hopeless. After all, this was taking longer than expected. One day, Samar was sat by the bus stop thinking what would he do if he never be able to publish his story. Should he go and meet Inayat anyway, which would mean he was stalking her or should he go back home, get to work again and forget about all this shit. He sat with his head hung low.

Suddenly, a cab moved in front of him and took a u turn in a good speed and the noise of the acceleration made Samar to look up. When he did, he saw Inayat sitting in the backseat of the yellow taxi. She wore a maroon top, and her hair were open flowing with the wind coming in from the window as in good speed the driver drove. He was frozen to see her after this long. She had not changed much. Just the dark circles under her eyes were even

darker now. Samar took an auto quickly and followed her. In the way, Samar stare at her as she sat with her arm on the end of window her hands clutching her hair away from her face as the wind blew. Samar could not help but smile at her sight. He then noticed the driver was doing this stunt of driving fast just to get her attention as even he stared at her from the mirror. Inayat maybe so used to it that she did not even care, anymore. The taxi finally reached its destination after half an hour ride. Inayat paid the driver and started to move inside the small two storey building. Samar followed her in. She took the steps to the first floor and rang the bell. Samar knew damn well this was not the house she lives in with her sister. The address he had was of a different place altogether. But that made it more important for him to know what she was doing there. Samar stood by the stairs peeking out at her standing by the door. The door of the room got opened. A man of same age as him stood there in his shorts. He was tall and fair. He looked like some model or at least from a wealthy family. But Samar did not recognise him from any time before. The guy pulled Inayat by her waist as they hugged and he kissed her on the lips and said, "Welcome back home, baby." Inayat was then inside the room and the door went shut.

Flux- Ellie Goulding

Samar kept standing there on the stairs digesting what he just saw. Inayat was in a relationship with someone already. Also, she looked happy with him. And he kissed her. Samar's heart sunk deep down in silent pain and sadness. He felt so stupid to think he could win her back. He was so stupid to have followed her. He was stupid to have come to this city looking for her in the first place. It was all so stupid.

Lately, He walked down the stairs and out of the place. He took an auto and went back to his apartment. That day he could not eat or drink or sleep. He just kept thinking and recalling what he had seen. And he fucking hated her and her new boyfriend so much. He did not know when he got asleep thinking about it all. He woke up beside a sofa in his apartment hall. He was sat on floor sleeping with his head on the sofa. His phone was ring-

ing on the table continuously. It was Zakhir. He cut it off. There were several missed calls. He read the message from Zakhir asking his whereabouts and whether or not his book was accepted for publication. He cleared all the notifications and saw the time. It was 7 in the evening. He got up. His heart still felt very heavy and low in his chest. And he remembered exactly what he had seen. He decided to go to a pub nearby. He walked to there. He ordered two vodka shots and after he finished decided to take two more of them. He looked around the place. People were either talking too loudly or laughing or crying in the corner. No one looked quite like him. Numb. He then took some more shots and time slipped like sand from the hand. He was asleep again. His arms stretched on the bar counter his head resting on his arm.

His eyes opened when his phone rang again. This time it was Shehnaaz. He had to take this one.

"Samar, where are you?!"

"Why are you screaming?" Said Samar in his drunken state. Her voice was too pitchy and loud for him.

"Because I am upset. Zakhir has been trying to reach you for so long. Where are you?"

"I am at a bar having some drinks." Samar sighed.

"Since when did you start drinking?"

"Since life became such a shithole."

"Why are you talking like that? What happened?"

"New city, new surprise."

"What?"

"She left me." Samar cried out.

"Who she? Inayat?"

"Who else can it be? I can't imagine she left me so quickly."

"Inayat had left you long back, Samar. But you have come here to convince and win her back, remember? How drunk are you?"

Samar shook his head knowing she does not understand and said, "Leave it. I am going home."

"What do you mean?"

"I am going back to Pune."

"Right now?" Shehnaaz said realising he is too drunk to take right decisions.

"Samar, okay, before you go, will you please meet me, once?"

Without thinking he said, "Where?"

"My place. You remember my home address, right?"

"I think, I do."

"That's not promising."

"No worries, I will take a bus."

"No, no, no. You better take an Uber. For my sake. I want you to be alive when we meet."

Samar chuckled in a dull voice and said, "Fine."

"I am sending you, my location."

CHAPTER 20

THE HEART BREAK

Circles- Post Malone

Samar had finally reached Shehnaaz place. It was middle of the night. He paid the driver and got out of the cab. He was asked if he needs help to get to his place as he was walking with his legs wiggling. He could not walk straight. It was mostly dark with streetlights turning on and off giving a horror effect. But Samar had no thoughts of ghosts at this time as he had greater things haunting him. He told a plain no to driver's help and walked on towards Shehnaaz house in the society. The guard at the society gate was asleep so Samar was able to get in without much hassle. He called at Shehnaaz phone number.

She picked up and asked again, "Where have you reached?"

Samar smiled at her motherly questions and told, "Look outside your window. I am at your house main gate."

Shehnaaz came out running to the balcony of her bedroom on the first floor. Samar stood in his crème colour shirt which had been unbuttoned at the chest because of the heat in Mumbai and his brown formal pant which had turned into darker shade from the dust and dirt of walking on roads. He looked terrible in short. But that was mostly because he was at a terrible state of mind, right now.

Shehnaaz was in an anarkali dress which was of purple colour and silver designs. Her hair styled curly and braided with her bangs falling over her face. She looked like some model. Oh wait, Samar remembered, she is.

She gestured for him to come inside as the door was open and she wanted him to meet her parents, freshen up, and eat something as they talk. But Samar shook his head. Shehnaaz gestured, why?

Samar said into the phone, "I am not at the right state."

Yeah, if he does come in, he would be meeting her parents, who are like his god parents, after months and, at his drunken state with his clothes all messed up it wouldn't make a good impression. Also, it would worry them.

Shehnaaz got it and gestured for him to wait as she got down.

As she walked out of the gate of her house and Samar said, "Hi,"

She ran and hugged him holding his head close. She loved and missed him. But most of all she felt sorry for him. Samar could sense her worries and said proactively, "I am fine. Don't worry."

Shehnaaz got away and said sarcastically, "Yeah, you look, so." And she buttoned up his shirt.

Samar rolled his eyes at her and took her hands away. Shehnaaz then asked, "Now, tell me what happened that got you at this state?"

Samar smiled as his eyes filled up with tears. They walked the horror streets of the society as he told her whatever happened today. At the end of it his hands were in his pockets. Shehnaaz got in front of him, took out one of his hands from his pocket and holding it into hers she said, "I am so sorry, Samar."

Samar smiled again with his eyes glittering with tears. He sniffed and took his hand back to wipe his nose from the back of it. Shehnaaz smiled at that. He was still the same young man that she had fallen in love with, who does not carry a handkerchief.

Samar shook his head like reading her mind and pulled her into his arm and said sarcastically, "Well, you should be. You are the one who convinced me to come to this stupid, crazy hot city and win my love back. I mean, that sounded stupid, already."

"I thought, at least one of us will get his love."

Samar looked at her and shook. "It only happens in the movies. That the girl is still waiting for his lover for months after their separation."

"Well, even movies are somewhat inspired by live incidents."

"You wish."

They walked in silent and reaching the society park they took a seat on the bench. Shehnaaz took off her sandals as she wanted to feel the soft grass beneath her. She gestured for him to do it too. Samar shook his head as he joked, "I have been in these shoes the whole day. You wouldn't be able to breathe if I take them off."

Shehnaaz chuckled at that. Then they looked out at the green ground of the park ahead of them. Shehnaaz said, "You know what day it is?"

"Thursday. Why?"

Shehnaaz was still looking at him, curious.

"Oh, is it someone's birthday tomorrow?"

Shehnaaz smiled. "It is the day my parents got their first and only child, yes."

"Is that, so?"

"Yeah." Shehnaaz kept smiling, knowing he knew it. Samar hugged her from a side and kissing her forehead said, "Happy birthday my dearest friend. May you have all the..."

"Don't."

"Why?"

"Cause, you don't really want it to come true."

"Why, I do want you to have all the good things in life. Better than you wished for. Better than what you can imagine."

"What is the point of having something you never wanted?"

"Because it is best for you. And you will understand that later in life. When you grow up." It was a sarcastic advice.

Shehnaaz missed it. "Not having what I want will still always hurt me."

Samar went quiet. He had no answer for that. He knew she was talking about having him as his lover in her life. And that was not possible. He hung his head low feeling sorry for her and him as he knew what it felt like and he could not do anything about it.

Shehnaaz held his arm. He pulled it back and pulled her into a hug as they sat closely on the bench. Shehnaaz said, "Will you do me a favour?"

"Anything but marriage."

Shehnaaz laughed out. "Of course, not. I just want to spend the whole day with you."

"Your birthday?"

"Um-hmm."

Samar inhaled a long breath and exhaled it thinking about it. He was surely not in a good mood to spend some quality time. But he did want to make her feel happy. Unlike him in his birthdays. So, he said, "Fine. But we are not going to any beach."

Shehnaaz turned happy. Still said, "Oh come on, Mumbai beaches are the best."

"No, they are not and even if it would be the best beach on planet I don't wanna go there."

"Please, why would you say that?"

"Because I am not crazy about beaches like you are..."

"But they are so peaceful..."

And they kept mumbling.

The heart wants what it wants- Selena Gomez

On the other side Inayat was suddenly replaced from singing in the new album. When asked they told, she was not good enough and needed more practice. At this point of time she needed emotional support from Nazim but he was growing at his work and had not time for her. Inayat slowing started to feel of her relationship with Nazim. She thought she will be happy again. That she will find everything in the man she thought was the

king of her dreams. And maybe he really was what she would have liked few months ago. Before she had met Samar. Before she had fallen in love with him. But right now, she would rather like the simplicity, honesty, and humour of Samar over Nazim's smart, fast, boldness. And she knew it was not right what was happening. What she was doing.

Nazim was an outgoing man and always had been. Since there was no promise of marriage between him and Inayat, he lived life on his own terms.

He was often invited to parties, either to DJ or simply because of his many connections. There, he would flirt freely with women, even those who were married or already in relationships. To him, it was harmless socializing. To Inayat, it was a world she neither understood nor wanted to be part of.

Sometimes he made those nights special, pulling her onto the dance floor, singing to her, and making her feel loved. Other times, she would be left sitting alone among strangers while he disappeared for hours.

Inayat believed he never cheated on her, but he certainly enjoyed female attention. More than once, she had to pull women away from him while he laughed it off. When she protested, Nazim accused her of being possessive.

Eventually, she stopped going to those late-night parties. Staying home was not much easier, though. She would spend sleepless nights hoping he was being faithful.

One evening she got a call from his brother. It has been weeks and she had to speak with him. When she did first, he was upset at her for not letting them know her whereabouts. Then that she could have come to their home in Pune if she did not like it there. And then he talked about Samar coming to their house to know her whereabouts.

"You did not give him my new address, did you?" Said Inayat over the phone.

"I had to. He told you were supposed to get the full and final from the company for which he needed your sign. Why would I stop him from getting you your earned money?"

"Oh, you guys are so naive."

"Why?"

"There was no full and final coming from my employer. I had received everything in the last salary, already."

"Oh," Arif briefly nodded. "So what? You are not at that address, anyway. Why, does he bother you?"

"No, it's just. We had..." And Inayat went quite thinking about telling him all this.

"I couldn't hear it after you said, 'we had...'"

Inayat chuckled, "Yes, because I wasn't speaking."

"Oh."

Inayat exhaled a long breath and said, "There is a lot I have to tell you. A lot that had been going on in my life. I am not happy."

Arif was quietly listening. Suddenly Inayat felt a stare. She turned around from her seat at the kitchen counter. Nazim had been standing by the entrance listening quietly. He moved away immediately.

Inayat realised he had heard everything. She placed a hand on her forehead and told Arif that she will call him back and talk later. Arif did not want to become irritation for her, so he accepted and gave her time.

Inayat hung up and went out of the kitchen. As she passed him, she said, "You know, you don't have to stalk me in our own house."

"Well, you don't tell me things truthfully when simply asked."

"I do. I always do. I tell you exactly what you need to know."

"See, that is the problem." He said raising his voice now. "It's not about what I need to know it's about what I want to know."

Inayat said, "Fine, then ask me."

"Are you not happy with me?" He asked with a warm comforting tone.

Inayat knew the truth would hurt him and she did not want to lie. So, she kept quiet.

Nazim shook his head and said, "You know, that is answer enough." And started to turn away.

"Nazim..." She called him out.

"What did I do wrong, huh?!" He shouted turning around.

Inayat was surprised with his loud voice. "Well..." She started and Nazim knowing where she is going, cut her off.

"Look, my professional life is different, okay. I do have to stay all nights out for my work. Because it is my work."

"No, you don't." Said Inayat. "And it is not your job to play DJ at random people's party whom you don't know or flirt with their women."

"But that is politics, babe. That's how I get my work. You think, people are here only because of their talent?" Inayat stayed quiet. "The audience don't love you only for your talent."

"Yes, they do."

"See, this is why you have not reached anywhere."

"Excuse me?!"

"You don't have what it takes."

Inayat felt so insulted her eyes filled up and she walked away furious. Regretting Nazim ran after her. Inayat was walking fast towards the bedroom to lock herself in. something he knew she does when upset. But that would mean a silent treatment or total disappearance from her for few coming days. And he could not bear that. So, he tried to catch her by her elbow. She snapped to get rid of his touch. Nazim succeeded the second time right in front of the bedroom where he caught her strongly and made her to stand still facing him. She was still looking down, tears falling off her eyes.

Nazim tried to wipe her tears of her cheeks when Inayat slapped his hand away.

"Don't, Ruhi," he said for her anger.

Inayat sniffed and stayed quite. Nazim held her face in his hands and made her to look up at him. She fought it. But after trials and failures Inayat did face him. Nazim said, "I am sorry. I did not mean it. Please forgive me."

"Yes, you did." She said looking away again.

"Okay, forget it, then. I said I am sorry." He said as he came closer and whipped her tears off.

Inayat did not say anything.

"What is it? What do I do to fix it?" Nazim said trying to find her face from between his palms.

Inayat just looked at him. And he understood.

"See, I can't stop going to parties or out for work in my studio."

"What about flirting with other women?"

Nazim looked up at the ceiling annoyed as he said, "I will try to stay away."

Inayat looked at him with her eyes squeezed as she tried to understand what he just said. Nazim added, "I know it doesn't make sense to you..."

"No, it does actually. But I also know that there is no need for a man who is committed in a relationship to flirt with other women so much. I understand a bit." Inayat shouted and walked towards the kitchen now to take a bottle of water.

Nazim followed her. "Right. So, what? you also don't exactly love me, Inayat? And I am living with it."

Inayat turned around in shock, "What did you say?"

"I know, you still miss Samar. I read it in your diary."

"What the hell! Who gave you the permission to read my personal diary?"

"You don't say anything. Anything about what is going on in your mind. What you are thinking and feelings. How else am I supposed to find out?"

"Why do you need to know everything that's going on in my head?"

"Because I fucking love you. And I don't see that you do. You live with me like a robot going through the days like you want to die. How much will I

try to make things better for you? I gave you good space to live. I gave you contacts to try for your career. I took you out, I cooked for you, what else do you want from me?"

Inayat stayed quite for a minute. Then said, "Time." And added, " That's all I really needed."

"You know, it has been 6 months, and we never even said I love you to each other. For you it doesn't even matter if we do. But how should I live knowing that the person who is most precious to me does not love me?" Nazim said and his eyes started to fill with tears.

Inayat stayed on her place trying to stay firm. But when Nazim took a seat on the counter stool and placing his elbows on the counter and his face in his palms he sobbed, she felt guilty and came around to hug him. He clutched onto her hard as he sobbed.

Inayat was kind, just not in love with him to pour out her heart like he does sometimes.

"I am sorry, "said Inayat. "I try to forget him. I know, it was not my fault and everything, it just feels like maybe I should have waited for him to explain it. He must have had a reason."

Nazim sob stopped and he pushed Inayat away in anger. He hated for her to talk about Samar. He hated for her to think of another man. He walked to the other side of the room trying to get space and manage his anger. Inayat knew it so she added, "I am sorry for whatever you are going through because of me. I am sorry that I could not fall in love with you even after you put so much efforts. And I don't know anything else for sure, but I care about you and want you to be happy."

Nazim nodded, and asked one last time as he could not forget her confession, "Do you still love him?"

Inayat stayed quite to think then said, "I don't know." And added, "But I do miss him. Everyday."

"You two did not end up at a good note, did you?"

Inayat thought about it and nodding, said, "I guess, it was too quick. Everything happened so fast."

Nazim nodded. Then he walked up close to her. He looked into her eyes and made her do the same keeping her head up, holding her chin. Inayat's eyes filled. Nazim said, "I understand," and tried to smile.

Inayat smiled and hugged him. "Thank you."

Nazim then pushed her apart, "But I can't do it." He said straight face.

"What do you mean?" Inayat said confused.

Nazim wiped the tear from her cheek with his thumb and said, "You told me you need time. I give you all my life. But that is when you need time to fall in love with me. And right now, I can see you need time to move on from your previous love. And that is not my business."

"Nazim, I know..."

"No, I will not negotiate this discussion. If you don't love me, I can understand. But if you are still in love with someone else because of which you are not able to love me, then that I cannot tolerate."

Inayat held his hands on her cheeks as she tried to say, "I just need..."

"I love you, Inayat. But I cannot be your future if you are stuck in someone else past. I can't be your cure. I can't help you to move on. You have to do it alone. By yourself."

Nazim then took his hands away. Inayat head fell like she had no strength left, sobbing. Even Nazim had his eyes glittering with tears by now. Then he said, "But I will not throw you out of our house. You can stay here for as long as you wish to. I just don't wish to see your face, anymore."

Inayat kept standing there helpless when Nazim had broken up with her and left. Getting into the bedroom Nazim shut the door loud and broke down into tears whereas Inayat dropped to the floor in the hall and cried.

CHAPTER 21

WHAT A SMALL WORLD.

Off my face- Justin Bieber

It was Shehnaaz birthday celebration and Samar had spent the whole day with her at random places in Mumbai of her choices like, Gateway of India, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Bandra Worli Sea link and Hanging Gardens. And for the night he had decided they will go to this club and drink and party all night. But after going home to freshen up and change Shehnaaz had not come to the club. Samar sat there alone taking some drinks by the bar counter. He had his head hung low in his hand as he was very tired and sad sitting there alone. When Shehnaaz was around, he was able to smile but the moment she is gone he was back into his misery. Inayat walked in and not seeing Samar sitting, took a seat right next to him. When she placed her order, "One martini please." Samar heard her voice and looked up. He could not believe he was seeing her. Inayat then noticed him, too.

And the first words that came out of her mouth, "What a small world!" In utter shock but smiling "Samar."

Samar chuckled out of shock too and said, "Inayat."

"Hi," they said in unity and the two got up and embraced. It had been so long since Samar had last caught her scent. He breathed it in deeply, unwilling to let go of her. For a moment, it felt like pure bliss.

As they took their seats back Inayat said, "How are you?"

Samar nodded as he took a sip of his whisky and said, "Yeah, I am... I am good." A lot better now, he thought.

Inayat nodded smiling, happy to hear it.

He asked next, "And you?"

Inayat started nodding as she grinned big hiding the deep sadness in her heart and said, "Yeah, I am good, too." She said, "Thanks."

Samar nodded. "So, how is everything?" Samar said genuinely interested to know about her.

"Everything is...everything is good. Mostly?"

"Mostly?"

The bar tender started to serve Inayat her Martini. The two waited as he was done and then Samar looked right back at Inayat still waiting for the answer.

Inayat chuckled as she shook and said, "Oh forget about me. Tell me about you, how come you are here?"

Samar thought about it. He did not want to share all the details. But, he said, "Uh...Shehnaaz, you know. It's her birthday we are celebrating. Umm... she was supposed to be here..." Samar looked into his old watch and said, "precisely 30 minutes ago."

Inayat chuckled. "What a boomer. When the person is not there in their own birthday party."

"Yeah," Samar said. "Tell me about it."

Inayat exhaled a long breath looking at him smiling loving his sight and this moment.

Samar confessed, "You look good."

Inayat smiled shyly, and looked down at her outfit tonight. She wore a leather brown skirt and satin black top with brown leather jacket. She had to suppress her smile from his known sweet but clever flirting tactics and stay sane, so, "Thanks, I guess." Then she took out a straw and putting it on her drink sucked on it.

"So, what brought you here, tonight?" He then said as he grabbed his glass of whisky.

She smirked and tried to compose a sentence with less lies, "Well, it's...umm, I am just a little low lately because of... because of... my...career going down."

Samar nodded briefly. "Oh, why, what happened?"

Inayat turned to him, knowing very well that she should not confide in him laughed as she stirred her drink for no particular reason than to look away.

Samar completed, "But if you don't want to tell me it's okay. I understand."

That's the problem- she thought- you understand me very well. But she stayed quite.

He said then, "At least, for whatever reason we are here, I am happy that we met." And added, "I mean, imagine we would have been in our own worlds while still being here present in the same club just at different corners."

Inayat nodded, "Yeah, I am glad we did." And smiled.

The two looked at each other, sparkling eyes, smiling big. Suddenly, the two had a lot of questions running in their minds. They were so curious to know each other at the same time they were afraid of offending the other or appearing too interested or invading in the other's privacy. But it was too overwhelming for them to keep it in for long. The two said out in unity, "So, what really happened?"

Then the two laughed out. Inayat said, "You go ahead."

Samar said, "No, ladies first."

"Okay," Inayat said. "So, did you guys get married?"

Samar frowned. "Who, me and Shehnaaz?"

Inayat nodded. "Yeah."

"Oh no, we didn't." he said and took sip from his drink, giving as less information as possible.

"Oh" surprised Inayat. "I am so sorry. Why? Is it because of me?"

Samar smiled at that question. She could not resist obviously. He was here in the first place because of her. But she would not take the blame. She would not like to become the reason for someone's life biggest decisions. So, "No, no, no. We were... just not right for each other." He said, "I mean, we are good friends. Great* friends. But marriage and all..." and he shook his head as saying, not a cup of our tea.

Inayat nodded briefly, "Right."

Samar then asked, "What about you? Did you find someone?" It sounded sweet and nice of him, but he was actually in agony of abundance. He was actually jealous and kind of somewhere hated her for have moved on with someone so quickly. Knowing everything already, of course.

But Inayat said, "Umm...I tried."

"Okay..." Samar was visibly surprised to hear that. Is she lying on my face?

She continued, "I mean, I did get into this thing with a guy. And he is a good guy. Great* guy. It's just.....umm, I couldn't do it." she gestured the same way with her hands in the air.

Samar tried to understand. "You couldn't?"

"Yeah, like, it didn't work out."

Samar was genuinely sad to hear it. Not because he wanted it to work out, obviously, but because she looked sad.

Inayat tried to explain. "It was just not something I wanted."

Samar nodded, "Yeah, that..." is understandable. Since it was not long after their break up that she tried to get into relationship again. It was not supposed to be easy for her to do it. But he just said, "Look, I am sorry. And, I am here if you need anything," and he placed a hand on her hand.

Inayat nodded and quickly removed her hand getting overwhelmed by his touch. Samar noticed that. She asked to show curiosity but more importantly to change the topic, "So, are you dating anybody?"

"Ah! No." Samar said quickly taking his hand back. "I can't find time out of my busy schedule."

Inayat nodded smiling. The two were weirdly happy about hearing these truths about each other at the same time they did not feel confident enough to ask the other out about their feelings. Inayat said, "So, still doing your pilot job?" taking a sip of her martini.

Samar realised there is a lot that has happened since she left and said, "Uh- no, actually, I quit."

"You quit? Why?" Another sip.

"I thought, ... I decided to focus completely on writing and becoming an author. This time a named one."

"Oh wow!" Exclaimed Inayat. "That's amazing! I am so happy to hear it!" Inayat said clapped her hands for him.

Samar gestured thank you with a bow and his hands holding the glass on air.

"And how is it going?" Inayat asked next.

Samar chuckled as he told, "Still working on it."

"Okay. " Inayat understood, "Yeah I mean, it does not come overnight. It will take some time but. You will do it. I know, you will." She said holding and shaking his forearm in proud.

For a second, Samar eyes got stuck on it. Her hand on his arm, he loved that they sat so close comfortably. Is there still a chance? He thought. And like Inayat could sense it she took away her hand and finished her drink. Not trying to give any wrong signal here.

Samar smiled with his lips tight for her discernment. Then he asked, "What about your job?"

Inayat also remembered it and nodded, "Um...I had to leave it. Because I had to come here. To Mumbai."

"Yeah, about that. How come you moved so suddenly?" And his sip of his drink. Now she would spill the truth, he hoped.

Inayat smiled looking down at the counter understanding well this question was headed. Old wounds always leave a mark. "Well, ... I also decided

that maybe I should focus more on my passion and make a career out of it. Plus, my sister needed me here, so."

"Oh, why, is everything okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. She is married I told you, right?" she said, her hands moving with her words. "They had husband wife fights and all. So"

"Ah, family drama and all." Samar said, only to match her tone.

"Oh, don't ask. Drama is all my family about."

"That's every family." Samar said. "At least, you have a family."

"Yeah." Inayat said sarcastically. "So grateful."

And the two chuckled. Samar got a notification on his phone. He looked down at his phone under the counter. At that point Inayat also checked her phone. She had two missed calls from Nazim. Then there were messages saying he is going out at a friend's place to sleep. It was just to inform her that he will not be coming home for the night and does not want to be bothered.

Yeah, well, now since he was not her boyfriend and just a roomie he did not care. And she crossed the notifications from view. Samar turned to her and said, "Ah, it was a message from Shehnaaz."

"Oh, is she coming finally?" Said Inayat already preparing mentally to leave.

Samar said, looking at the screen as he typed in an answer for her. "No, actually she got a surprise party from her family. And she will be spending the night at her home. She was asking me to come, too." And he looked up to see Inayat was standing taking her sling bag. "Oh, are you leaving already?"

"Yeah, I thought...since you will be leaving, too. I wouldn't want to sit here alone at night. Also, my sister is calling me home so."

"Right." Said Samar. Then he thought about it and being a gentleman, he finished his drink too, paid for the bill of them and stood up and said, "Let me drop your home."

"Oh, no, no." Inayat said immediately. First, she did not want him to know her new address. Second, she did not want to spend more quality time with him. It was turning her heart towards him. "I don't want you to be late because of me for your friend's birthday party."

"I am not, actually." Said Samar. "She ditched me by not coming so to take my revenge I am ditching her. Plus, we had been together the entire day. We can spare the night."

Inayat chuckled. Samar gestured for her to lead. Inayat still asked, "Are you sure?"

"I will not be able to sleep peacefully, if I don't rescue this alone, sad about her career girl, this night."

Inayat giggled and the two moved out of the club together. They were quite on the way walking on the roadside. Samar had to ask this, "So, did you go back to that guy who had proposed you before me?"

"I did. That was the guy I was talking about." Inayat told.

"I knew it." Said Samar proudly.

Inayat chuckled and said, "How?"

"If not the best, then the second best."

Inayat laughed hard and said, "And how come you are the best?"

"Believe."

She smirked and shook. Then, she also had to ask this, once and for all, "You are not here stalking me, are you?"

Now, Samar laughed out. "What made you think so?"

"My brother told you visited and were asking about me."

Samar got quite at that. Inayat smiled. Caught red handed. Samar nodded then accepting, "At first, I did think I will take your address and come to you. But then I needed a reason stronger than just that I did not want to lose you. So, I decided I will publish my book and then give you the good news."

Inayat felt so good on hearing it. She asked, "And then?"

"And then, my book was rejected by more than 10 publishers. One after the other."

Inayat laughed and made a sorry face. Samar told, "I could not gather the courage to face you and tell you that I tried. I tried to be the only thing you wanted me to be. And I failed."

"You did not fail. You have just not succeeded, yet. That's okay. It may take time..."

"Yeah, whatever." Said Samar. "It does not matter, now, anyway."

"Why?" Said Inayat.

Samar thought about it and decided to confess, "I saw you with that other guy. You looked happy with him." And he hated to admit but added what he felt, "You guys will work it out."

"Wait, where?" She said surprised, "Where did you see us two?"

"At his place." Samar said walking ahead of her, just to avoid her upset eyes.

Inayat was able to understand, now. "So, you did stalk me?"

"Not purposely or as planned. You just appeared in my low days, and I had to see where you are going. Because, I had your address and it was not of the place you were headed to."

Inayat was pissed now. "Okay, so, what?" She said stopping him by holding him by his forearm, "I did get into a relationship with Nazim. He had proposed me before you and did not play games around."

"I did not play any game with you, Inayat." Samar said in defence.

"Yes, you did!" Shouted Inayat. "Why you all try to make me the villain here? I am the victim."

"There is no villain or victim here, Inayat." Said Samar. "And I did not play game with you. I wanted you from the beginning. But then something happened, some misunderstanding and you decided to leave me, completely. You did not even give me a chance to explain." And he started to walk again.

Inayat froze on her spot. Her head was hung low. Samar stopped too and turned around, "What's wrong?" He spoke.

Inayat looked up with her eyes filled with tears as realisation hit her, "You are saying it was my fault?"

Samar walked close to her and held her by her arms and said, "No, I am just saying, if you would have given me a chance, things might have turned out to be different. I mean, look at us, now. Are we happy?"

Inayat got her arms off of his hands and thinking about it, said, "You were proposed to marry another girl in front of me. Should I have been standing there waiting for you to reject her, the beautiful, wealthy model for me?"

"Yes." Samar said looking right into her eyes. Samar then also got it. "Wait a minute, you left me because of your own insecurities?"

Inayat started to get away walking ahead, "I don't need to answer that."

Samar got in front of her stopping her, his hands on her shoulder. "You were scared that I would accept her in place of you because she looked better and she is wealthier?"

Inayat was quite at that. Samar continued, "Inayat, Shehnaaz has been my best friend since childhood. And she has always looked beautiful. But I did not have attraction towards her. If I did why wouldn't I just tell her? She was the easiest person to share my feelings to. Plus, why would I start dating you?"

Inayat told what she thought, "Maybe because she was with someone else before."

Samar chuckled and said, "No. She was always available. Even till date. But I did not choose her. I chose you."

Inayat heard and tried to digest it.

"It was always you, okay?" He spoke.

Inayat nodded, "Okay."

Then, Samar smiled and she smiled back. Samar quickly whipped her teary cheeks and they walked on.

Samar then said, "By the way, I would have rejected 10 rich models for you. Only if I ever did get proposals as such. Though, I would brag about it, then."

Inayat laughed.

They reached the small two-story building and Inayat said, "This is it."

"I know." Samar said.

Inayat then remembered and said, "Right, of course, you do."

"So, is it goodbye?"

Inayat stayed quite. Samar made a salute and turned around to leave. That is when Inayat remembered Nazim was not home. She was inside the gate when she called out, "Samar!"

Samar had walked a few steps away but he turned around. Inayat said, "Would you like to come in?"

"Would your new boyfriend like that?" Samar said coming close.

Inayat said, "He is not my boyfriend. At least not, now. Also, he is not home, so."

Samar asked still, "Are you sure?"

Inayat thought and said, "No. But I am sure I would like to spend some more time with you. It's been so long since I talked to someone close to me."

Samar nodded. She just needed a company. Not like she wanted to be with him romantically. Which was not morally wrong for both of them.

But as he stepped in from the gate he asked to tease, "You are not thinking of sleeping with me, are you?"

Inayat laughed out. "You wish."

"Just checking. Because for your kind information I am not that kind of a guy. I am a one-man woman." Inayat laughed out. Samar realised his mistake and corrected, "I mean, vice versa."

"I knew, you are a little too ladylike."

"Excuse me! How can one be a little too ladylike?"

"You tell me."

And they walked inside the building.

CHAPTER 22

LEFTOVER KISS

Samar and Inayat got to their apartment and turning the lock Inayat opened the door and then turned the lights on. They took off their footwear and walked in. Inayat asked him to take seat in the sofa as she went to take a glass of water. He kept standing looking around the small Apartment. It was white coloured with hue shades here and there. There were lots of songs recorded cassettes and CD covers in display on side wall in hall. That must be an old collection. On the front wall there was a huge TV with speakers around it making it look like a home theatre. And on the corner wall there were certificates and awards in a shelf. Beside it there was a guitar. It was one of Taylor expensive Guitars Samar had known about. Till then Inayat had taken the glass of water for him.

Samar gestured at the guitar and asked, "Does he play?" as he took the glass of water from her and took a sip.

Inayat looked at the direction Samar was and said, "Oh, he plays it well."

"Really?" Samar then took the guitar and sat on the couch next to her while trying to play it. "Does he play it to you?"

"Sometimes." Inayat said. There was a glimpse of sadness in her voice that Samar noticed but did not say anything. Inayat tried to keep up to his cheerfulness as she added, "He even taught me a little."

Samar nodded. She then added, "In fact, he took me to this party by the beach side where he sang and played guitar and basically did the whole concert thing all by himself. And we danced."

"You danced?" He said,

She nodded excited with the memory.

"I've never seen you dance." He spoke.

She shrugged.

Samar nodded being happy to see her speak with so much joy. Inayat noticed it and nodding and smiling ended it by saying, "He is very good at it."

Imagining him being close to her as he teaches her to play guitar or while dancing in a party was a disturbing thought for Samar. So, he decided to get up, place the guitar on its place as anyway, it was not his own and he did not know much how to play it. Inayat gestured him to sit beside her tapping on the space on sofa. Samar did not think it was a promising idea to get this close, but he could not deny.

"Tell me more about him." Samar said trying to as casual about it as possible.

"Well, he has done theatre and music studies. Actually, he is a composer and musician."

"Is he now?" Surprised Samar.

"Yeah, in fact, he helped me get a job as an assistant to composer Pritam."

"Oh, wow. How is Pritam?"

"He is awesome at his work. Absolutely talented."

Samar said to seem nice, "Lucky you." And then changing the topic back to her, "So, are you going to launch something of your own anytime, soon?"

Inayat stretched her arms back, "Not anytime soon", she said. "The producers did not like my singing."

"Not a chance!"

Inayat shook at his confidence, "None of them did. They say I am missing some factor. I don't know."

"That's nonsense. That's an excuse to reject someone from a reality show."

Inayat nodded with him, "I know."

She opened her hair and then brushing it with her fingers pulled them up into a small loose bun. Samar had never seen her at this ease. She was home. She looked comfortable. It was good to see her like that.

Inayat asked, "So, anyways, how did you find this city, Mumbai?"

Samar smirked as if he was being interviewed, he said, "Yeah, actually, I have always loved to visit Mumbai because of my few relatives and friends living here but, I like Pune more."

"Yeah, me, too."

Then, Samar said, "So, who else blames you for your mistakes?"

"Meaning?"

"Earlier, you said 'we all make you the villain?'"

Inayat thought and remembered, "Oh, that I just said out."

"What happened between you and Nazim?" Samar asked now straightforward. Wasting no time.

"Between me and Nazim?" And she shook her head.

"You told you are going through a rough patch."

Inayat thought if she should say it or not and told, "I... I am not able to love him the way he loves me."

"What do you mean?" said Samar surprised.

"I don't know. I just..." Inayat stopped. Samar was still looking at her for an answer. Inayat decided to tell the truth, "I... used to like him. I thought I wanted him and I did at a time. And then it just disappeared. All my feelings and attraction towards him, it just...vanished."

"Since, when?"

"Since I came here." She said sitting with her legs folded Indian style. "I thought I will be able to do it. All this live in relationship thing but it's just... I guess it was just too soon for me. I should have waited a bit."

"You should have." Samar murmured slowly.

Inayat then tried to divert, "Nazim thought, I am still in love with you or something."

A grin started to appear on Samar lips. He was so delighted to hear that. He knew if it was something Nazim could sense then it was there. Oh, good lord. Samar's time was not wasted.

He said smiling, "So, your boyfriend broke up with you because of me?" and he chuckled, "Even my name can cause disasters. What a jinx!"

Inayat chuckled then corrected him, "He broke up with me because of his assumptions. Nothing else" she added, "But we are living together as roomies."

Samar nodded and said as formality, "I am sorry, Inayat."

Inayat glanced at him for a minute and smiled and said, "No you are not."

Samar could not stop but chuckle and accept. "Yeah, I am not."

The two laughed.

After a minute of thinking Inayat said, "At least our separation made us to work on our passion."

Samar briefly nodded solely agreeing with her.

The two stayed quiet. Then Inayat said that she feels like changing so she went to take a shower and change. She offered Samar Nazim clothes to change into. But of course, he refused to wear his clothes. He although did freshen up and washed his hands and face and hair in the hall bathroom. He then walked around the hall in lonesome as Inayat took her shower singing. Samar heard her and wished so badly that he had this opportunity to live with her in the same apartment. To be able to share the same meals. To be able to hear her singing in the shower, to watch her doing her work, to watch her getting ready, to wake up next to her in the same bed every morning, to be around her and love and hug her whenever and wherever in the house. He would kill for it. But he knew he will not. He hummed the same song that she was singing as he walked round the house.

He had connected her home theatre speakers with his phone and going through the list of songs in the app thinking which one to play. He decided to play the one they were humming.

Stuck with you- Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber.

Meanwhile it played he went through their bedroom. There were photos hung over their bed. He went to take a look. There were a few in which they laughed, few they hugged and kissed on cheeks. They looked happy. Just not very much like a couple in love. He hated those photos and it burned him from inside. But then he would think the kind of pictures he would have taken if he was with her. He even made the poses. Then smiling at himself he got out to the balcony.

He saw the many plants she had placed decoratively making it look very greenery and homely. He noticed a small pot painted with water colour had small blue coloured 'forget me not' flowers. Must be her favourites. He then looked up at the full moon sky. He did not know the day would end like this. But here he was.

Inayat had come back. She saw him with his wet messy hair and made a face expressing her admire. Samar smiled Shah Rukh Khan smile at her as she also looked pretty in her tang top and pyjama. She laughed out. They were both hungry. So, the two decided to cook some pasta for dinner and went to the kitchen to prepare. Meanwhile the song ended and started another song. Forever by Justin Bieber.

Inayat boiled the pasta while Samar cut the veggies. Then because the two wanted two distinct types of it they made it separately. Standing side by side in front of the stove. Inayat made her favourite white sauce pasta and Samar tried the mixed sauce pasta. So, while stirring Samar bounced his waist. Inayat could not help but laugh. Then he gestured her to join and the two danced at the song across the kitchen. Moving their hands, head and feet in various steps, they danced.

As the pasta was done, they went to the living room to eat it. They sat on the sofa face to face and ate. When they were almost done eating Samar changed the song to a slow dance one. "Lover- Taylor swift".

"You have all my favourite songs!" Inayat exclaimed.

"Uh-ah," Samar sounded, "Then, let's dance to it."

He stood up licking his fingers and pulled Inayat with him holding her hands. The two overacted the dance where Inayat would start screaming whenever he tries to lift her up. The two laughed along. Suddenly, the song changed to slow song. 'Thinking out loud by Ed Sheeran.'

The two tried to look okay with it as they did a slow dance. Samar tried to make her feel comfortable as he placed her hands on his shoulders and placed his on her waist. Then with the music growing they tried to do the stunts the artists did in the song video. She did the jumps and Samar tried to catch her. They were terrible at it. They moved many times and they stepped onto each other feet. They were clearly not good dancers. But they laughed it out and enjoyed.

Suddenly, their feet intertwined, got hooked and Inayat fell on the rug.

"Fuck!" The two exclaimed. They laughed and Samar placed a hand on her head to protect it. Inayat started laughing uncontrollably sitting down, now. Samar bent and asked, "Are you okay?" smiling, and she nodded loudly. He tried to help her up holding her by her arm. But she stayed down. "What?"

"Come sit with me." She said and slipped her arms down to hold his hands as she pulled him down.

Samar settled down beside her with his arm around her, her head on his chest and their legs straight out snuggled. The two looked at each other first smiling and then the grin disappeared and there was this longing in the eyes of both. And Inayat said, "I missed you."

Samar smirked and shook his head, "No, you didn't."

"I did." Samar looked away as she mumbled, "You were having a good time with this new guy. You could have not missed me through all of what he was giving you."

She held him by his collar and made him to look at her eyes. "I missed you in every bit of the second in my life here without you."

Samar looked at her face. Her Angelic face. How come she has the power to make me believe in anything she says? He thought. And he nodded.

And Inayat looked away having heard something. There was a peacock inside her balcony. "Look," she said.

Samar turned to see it. "Oh my...."

Inayat whispered "Shhh...Don't make a sound."

They two looked at it, being completely still and quiet and another peacock came into the room.

Inayat snuggled close to Samar in excitement as they see two beautiful peacocks so closely. And one of them opened its long tail up into a fan. Inayat could not control but scream out of joy and excitement. Samar had to place a hand on her mouth to shush her. She held his hand on her mouth as she laughed. Samar was controlling his laugh very hardly as they two watched the small dance of the male peacock for the female one.

Happiest at the most and very shocked, too.

Soon, after that the peacocks were gone, and the two laughed for what they just witnessed. "Can you believe it?" Inayat said with her wide in shock eyes.

"It was unbelievable." Samar said matching her tone.

It was turning into dawn. They had their talks of the past. Inayat then feeling tired fell asleep with her head on his shoulder. As he noticed her after some time of being asleep himself Samar lifts her up and placed her on the living room sofa with a blanket on her. But in her sleep, she clenched onto his arm very strongly. So, he had to sit by her side the whole time she slept.

Samar looked at her face. Noticing all the notions it made in her sleep. There were no more questions but of course one in Samar's mind. Inayat's head in Samar's lap as he caressed her hair said, "Would you ever be mine, again?"

Samar's eyes got open early in the morning. He was still in the sofa. In his lap still and calm was Inayat asleep. Samar had to take a brief look at that. A brief moment to remember her head in his lap. With her eyes closed peacefully, she looked adorable. Her body moving up and down slowly with the long breath she was taking. Her hair messed up. Samar knew he will never be able to forget this moment.

He then gently lifts her head as he slipped away and searched for his phone. It was left on the kitchen counter when they were checking the recipes for the pasta last night. He looked for any messages. There were many from Shehnaaz that said, "Need to tell you something."

"Urgent!"

"Helloooooo!!!"

"WHERE ARE YOU?"

"MEET ME AT MY PLACE SHARP AT 8 IN THE MORNING."

Samar looked up at the clock. It was 8.30 already. He decided he should get going. But he did not want to disturb this beautiful sleeper. So, he went out brought some breakfast for her and placing it on the sofa table, he left a note on the napkin on plate and decided to leave. But he had a strong urge to kiss her soft skin so instead of her cheeks he kissed her fingers as he left the house.

He went home changed into casual wear which he doesn't often wear. He wore grey trousers with maroon shirt. His hair was messy he just styled it with his hands and went out. He met Shehnaaz around 10 am. She was standing at the gate of her home society. She wore a long yellow kurta with jeans. She looked nice as usual. Her long hair was open and flowing with the breeze.

"Hi!" Samar said at her sight, walking to give her a greeting hug. "Are you trying to win my heart over or something?"

"I am not in the mood." Shehnaaz said placing a hand on his chest to stop him from hugging her as he walked past him.

"Why what happened?" and they started to take a walk.

"What happened?" She repeated sarcastically, her hands folded on her chest as she looked back at him, "You ditched me! On my birthday!"

"Excuse me?" Samar said with a woman voice. "Who was the one who did not come to the club as planned and later sent just a message making her family an excuse."

"I asked you to come to my home for the party!"

"Yes, and I denied it." Samar said with the same tone as hers. This woman can be very pitchy and loud when upset. "I think, I at least have that right."

Shehnaaz made a face at him. "And you had to switch off your phone at me. Really?"

Samar's smile slipped. Well, he knew that was a little harsh. But he knew she will keep on texting him the whole night if he did not do it and he wanted privacy with Inayat. "Yeah, I was tired of you." He said brushing it off his shoulder.

"You were what?" Asked Shehnaaz pissed off. "Tell me really, you were hitting on a girl, right?"

Oh, *fuck! she knows me*. Samar stayed quiet. Shehnaaz confirmed at that. "Yes, you did."

"I was not hitting on her. I just..."

"Who was it?"

Samar exhaled a long breath as he confessed, "Inayat."

"What?!" Shocked Shehnaaz.

"Yeah, I know, hard to believe, right?"

"What...when...how did this happen? I wanna know everything!" And they stepped down the street out the society.

"Well, apparently, she had a breakup and was there for a drink in the same club where you stood me up."

"Wow!" Shehnaaz laughed. "Well, at least you were there at the same time. You wouldn't be in this city if it was not for me. And if I come to think of it, you should be thanking me for all this."

"What the hell!" Samar said, "You seriously want me to thank you for standing me up alone at a club at late night on your birthday? I mean, fucking, it was not even my birthday that I wasted standing there."

Shehnaaz laughed. "Anyway, you are welcome." And added, "By any chance you have an idea what bomb my parents have blasted as gift on me for my birthday?"

"Since you are still alive it was not a worthy one, for sure."

Shehnaaz gave him a look as she continued, "They have decided to marry me away to some NRI."

Samar laughed out loud.

Shehnaaz looked at him and said with a shocked face, "I am serious here."

"Oh, at least, now you will stop dragging me to beaches with you." Samar then folded his hands as praying and looking up said sarcastically, "Oh, Good lord! Finally !"

Shehnaaz slapped on his arm tight.

"Ouch!"

"You are a bitch!" Shehnaaz shouted in anger.

"I can also bite." Samar said as he grabbed her hand and tried to bite it. She took it away screaming and said, "Let go!"

They have reached a cafe nearby. Taking a seat Shehnaaz continued again, "I don't want to get married, man. I mean, okay, I was rejected for a proposal in front of them, so what? Does it give them the right to change my fate all together?"

"Well, Indian parents have all the rights in the world." Samar said and remembered, "Wait a minute, was that I who rejected you?"

"You are not helping."

Samar laughed. "Okay." He said thinking about it. "If you want, I will talk to them."

"Oh, thank you so much."

"And ask them to make it a grand wedding!" And he laughed.

Shehnaaz threw the napkins on the table at him. Samar douched and laughed more.

CHAPTER 23

RUNAWAYS

Arcade- Duncan Lawrence

"Take your time, Nazim. You are hurrying things a lot." Said Asif to Nazim as they walked to the small building where he lived with Inayat. It was the next morning from the night he spent out. He had gone to Asif place to drink and sleep.

The breakup had caused trauma to him, too. And even if he looked brave and rude he was utterly broken and alone. He wanted Inayat to fight for him. He wanted Inayat to tell him that she loved him. That she wanted him back. But of course, there was nothing from Inayat. She did not show any sign of affection. And Nazim felt somewhere it was his fault in that, too. He was being too demanding. He felt bad. He felt guilty. That's why the night which was supposed to be a boy's night out clubbing, turned into the one where Nazim was drinking too much, crying, and talking about Inayat the whole time. Obviously, everyone could see the breakup was breaking him from inside. And since he really loved her Asif advised him to apologise to her and try to make things up.

Therefore, Nazim was home early this morning.

The two boys had reached the main gate of the building. Nazim had his grey hoodie on and his hands in his black jeans as he looked down thinking about it all. Asif patted on his shoulders and said, "Don't worry, she will come back to you."

Nazim nodded. Asif then turned to leave and Nazim opened the gate and moved upstairs.

All the lines were running in his head what he would say, how he would say. He really wanted to make things right with her.

As he reached his apartment door, he took out his hand to knock but saw the door was loosely closed. He swung it open and saw Inayat was sleeping on the couch. Nazim looked at her sleeping and fell for it. She was so beautiful. He walked in and getting closer he stroked her cheek as he pushed away the bangs coming on her eyes. That made Inayat to come out of sleep.

Nazim's eyes went to the breakfast that was there on the table. He found the small note there. It was written on the note, "Thank you for a wonderful night. I loved spending every bit of a second with you and wish I had more time to spend. But gotta go. Friends Duty. Let's catch up soon again. I will be waiting for your call," and there was his number.

Suddenly, a rage of anger started to fill in Nazim. Imagining Inayat being with someone else was just too much for him to handle.

He started taking long breathes trying to calm his madness as he straightened up. By then Inayat had gotten up, too. Nazim walked the hallway trying hard not to burst out of anger. Inayat saw him there and rubbed her eyes and asked casually, "Nazim? You are back? Where were you?"

Nazim said with a cold voice. "Oh, don't act like you give a shit!"

"What do you mean?" Inayat asked getting a little conscience now. She sat up and could see he was very upset. "What's wrong?"

"My love is sleeping with someone else, that's wrong." He mumbled.

Inayat could not understand it. "What are you saying? What happened?"

Now it was getting on Nazim nerves. "I break up with you and the very next night you go out and sleep with someone else!"

Inayat was shocked to hear that. "What rubbish are you saying? Who told you that?"

"Oh, I am talking rubbish. Who left you that breakfast on the table with a love note, huh?!"

Inayat looked at it and realised it. She thought to herself for Samar, he did not have to do it.

"Who was it?" Nazim questioned.

Inayat did not want to answer, knowing about his suspicion on Samar already it would not help. But Nazim was glaring at her, waiting for it.

She then said, "I met with one of my school friends, that's all."

"Oh, you did? And did you share notes of class 10th?"

"What?"

"Stop bluffing around, alright!" Shouted Nazim. Making Inayat shiver. He then said, "Who was it, tell me fast?"

"Just a friend, Nazim."

Nazim smashed a vase on side table right across the floor with loud noise. As he said in anger, "I don't like to be lied to, Inayat. Tell me his name."

Inayat had gotten straight, shivering with her heart pounding as scared she was.

"Say it!" He shouted again.

She said with her crumbling voice, "Samar."

Hearing that name Nazim clutched his hair and turned around. He hated that name alone. "That asshole! I knew it."

"Nazim!" Shouted Inayat to not to say harsh words for Samar.

Nazim hated that scolding, "What? Did you not like that I said bad word for your lover?"

"He is not my lover."

"Oh, shut the fuck up!" Said irritated Nazim. "You both have been lovers for what a decade, now. Maybe for millennia. I was so stupid to have been involved into all this shit."

Inayat had to clarify, "Nazim, I did not cheat on you."

"Oh right, is that so?" Nazim did not believe her and said, "Tell me, did you guys meet at some club? Had drinks together?"

Inayat decided she stick to the truth. Nazim was very possessive and right now he was terribly upset too, which scared her. Inayat shook her head as she tried to cover, "It was by coincidence."

Nazim nodded and said, "And then what, you guys danced?"

Inayat nodded with a straight face.

It was becoming hard for Nazim to breathe. "Did you guys' kiss?"

Inayat shook.

"Come on, don't lie to me. You can tell me the truth. Trust me I won't tell anyone."

Inayat said plainly, "We did not kiss, Nazim."

Nazim threw marble bowl from the table to the floor. "Just tell me the fucking truth, god damn it!"

Inayat stood up by then, "It does not matter whether you believe me or not. It does not change the reality."

"And what is the reality, huh?" Nazim asked. "What was the reality that I missed?"

Inayat stayed quiet. Nazim was turning into a sob. He could see Inayat was scared so he walked up to her and holding her face forcefully into his hands, (as she was getting away scared), he said with his crying voice, "You were my reality, Inayat. I fucking loved you so much. But you...you played around with my heart like a toy."

Inayat, "That's not true. That's so not true."

Nazim went away and turning he wiped his tears with his fingers.

"I loved you, too." Said Inayat.

"DON'T FUCKING LIE TO ME!" said he turning around.

Inayat got a shiver and turned into a sob. She has never been treated like this before. She immediately knew she wanted to get out of this place away from him.

She got up and started to walk. "Where are you going?!" He shouted from behind.

She did not answer. She did not feel the need to.

"Inayat?" Nazim tried to stop her. Knowing nowhere else to go to. Inayat walked to her bedroom, upset, sad, and scared. Nazim followed her as she went in before she could lock herself in. Nazim mumbled, "If you did not love me, why did you ever get into this relationship with me?"

Irritated and annoyed Inayat also screamed now. "Because I thought I liked you. I wanted to move on after whatever had happened. But you know after talking to him last night, it turned out that it was also my fault. He did not betray me. So, I guess, I am terrible at decision making."

"He did not?"

Inayat shook her head.

Nazim nodded as he said, "How convenient for you."

Inayat turned around, throwing her hands on the air, tired of explaining herself.

Nazim was not done. "I gave you love, care, support, still you could not forget him?"

Inayat turned to face him in anger. "I told you, I did not need it all. I just needed time. A little more time. But you don't get it, do you?" Said Inayat as she had started to cry too. "You think, you can ask me to forget him and magically it will happen. It does not work like that, Nazim. You may fall for someone in a split of a second. But to forget that love it takes way longer than that."

"And you can forget me that easily. I mean, it took you a night from our breakup to run right back into Samar's arm."

"I did not go back to him. We met coincidently in the same club."

"Yeah, coincidently on the very next night from your breakup with me. How fortunate!"

"Nazim, I really don't give a fuck, anymore, if you don't want to believe what is true."

"Oh, I know the truth. The truth is that you have been having an affair with him, all this time. You just wanted my support for you to become a singer and get into this industry that is why you used me. And now, that my part was done you made me get away from you while you can still use the benefits you get from me."

Inayat was utterly upset to hear that all. She sobbed a little then getting straight she said, "You have said enough, Nazim. I get it that you are upset and out of sleep, and disturbed and probably even drunk, but, if you say another nonsense that points at my character I will not stand still, anymore."

"And what will you do? Leave?!" Nazim made a sarcastic laugh as he said, "Go ahead, leave. Get the hell out of my house! The fuck I care! Go, away! It's your life, do whatever the fuck you want. I have nothing to do with you, anymore."

Inayat stayed quiet.

Nazim kept mumbling, "I wanna get rid of all the things I have ever loved in my life in one go. Fucking go and die, you all."

Inayat stayed still. Nazim then walked out of the room and left and did not come home that day. Inayat kept sitting on her bed thinking about all this the whole day.

Mad woman- Taylor Swift

On the other hand, Samar visited Shehnaaz place at noon. There was a family who had come to meet Shehnaaz for marriage. Shehnaaz had told Samar that she was getting forced into all this nonsense. Samar being a good friend came to speak with her parents.

He wished them all sitting in the drawing room as he entered. He then went into Shehnaaz's room to meet her. He slowly opened the door and saw she was sat in a beautiful embroidery saree sobbing.

"Hey!" He greeted as he went to her. Shehnaaz was incredibly happy to hear his voice and to see him. They hugged and crying Shehnaaz told, "I tried to talk them out of it but it's like they have taken an oath or something. They don't want to listen at all."

"I know, calm down, now." Said Samar stroking her head.

"Why do they have to take the responsibility of marrying their kids away? I mean, I am old enough to get married to anyone if I really want to."

"Yeah, you are..."

"I mean, marriage is something so personal. If I am gonna live my whole life with someone then should I not get to choose the guy or at least the date of it?"

"Yeah, you should..."

"Are they crazy that they don't get this simple logic?"

"Shehnaaz, don't speak like that about your parents. You should respect them, always. Because they know what is best for you?"

"And forcing your baby into marrying someone she does not even know, is that right?"

"So, what, we should let you marry whom you had liked?" Said Shehnaaz's mother. She was standing at the door of the room.

Samar got away from Shehnaaz.

Shehnaaz mother said again, "Should I get you married to this Malik's boy. Will he marry you?"

Samar was quite at that.

"It does not matter, Mom! How can you do this to me?" Shouted Shehnaaz.

"So, what, should I see you get old and die alone? Is that what a parent should do? Because certainly this boy has no interest in marrying you." Said her mother.

Shehnaaz said, "So, you will get me married to just anyone?"

"I am not getting you married to just anyone. Sahil is a good boy. He is from a good family, he earns well, takes care of his family, and he likes you. What else do you need to marry someone?"

"Love and interest from my side!" Said Shehnaaz, "Just because you can't see me single for the time being you are doing all this? How selfish of you!"

"See, I know, you loved this boy," and she pointed at Samar, "Since you did not know what love is. And you will not, for the sake of your heart, try to fall for anybody else ever again. I know you my child. I know how stubborn you are. You will not marry anyone if it is not Samar."

Samar was shocked to hear that. Shehnaaz's mother saw that and said, "See, he did not even have an idea about it. You want to stay single and in love with him for the rest of your life when he is not even aware of it, is that not selfishness?"

Now, since Shehnaaz's truth was revealed, she cried, "It's my life! I can live it the way I want!"

"No, you cannot! I gave you this life! I gave you birth from my womb! I have some right over your life! And I can't let it go in vain."

"Mom, please!" Shehnaaz cried.

Shehnaaz's mother held Samar's hand and made him walk out of the room with her as she said to Shehnaaz, "You will have to forget him and move on."

She then locked the door and standing outside she said to Samar, "You are her friend, right?"

Samar nodded.

"Then, do her a favour. Let her find some happiness in her life."

Samar nodded briefly. Samar was utterly shaken. He wanted to go in and comfort and console her, but her mother was right. And if Shehnaaz was being selfish for her one-sided love for him then yes, he wanted her to move on and live happily. And so, he decided to leave.

My tears ricochet- Taylor swift

At her home Inayat waited all day long for Nazim to return or get in touch with her. But of course, he did not come. Sitting in the corner of her bedroom with the lights turned off Inayat had made her state worst crying all her heart out. Lately she decided to call him. He did not pick up. So, she called at his friend Asif. He picked up,

"Hey Inayat," he said trying to seem normal.

"We both know I and Nazim are not at good terms, so don't lie to me, please."

Asif went quite at that. "Okay."

"Where is he?"

"Listen, he is really not in the mood to speak with you."

"Do you think I give a crap?"

Asif was quite for a second, but he knew she deserved to know. So, he told, "He went out with a girl."

Inayat was shocked to hear that. Her heart sunk in.

"He what!" Shocked Inayat.

"Look, I tried to talk him out of it. But it's just he was too mad at you. He thinks you did it, too so... I am sorry, Inayat."

Inayat just hung up. She was deeply disturbed.

She stormed into the kitchen, pulled a bottle of scotch from the bar, and drank it neat. She needed courage for what she had planned.

She knew she had to leave. Before that, she had wanted to see Nazim one last time while he was sober, but now she knew she never wanted to see him again. Her bags were already packed. Yet a part of her wanted him to feel a fraction of the pain he had caused her. After all, he had never hesitated to break the things she loved, especially her favorite vases.

So she began destroying the apartment.

Furniture was overturned. The television was smashed. His records shattered across the floor. Their framed photographs met the same fate. Anything she could break, she did.

For nearly half an hour, she lost herself completely. She cried, screamed, and released years of anger, grief, and heartbreak. The pain of losing her parents, her failed relationships before Samar, the misunderstanding that had torn them apart, her sister's betrayal and her time with Nazim, —all of it came pouring out at once.

When she was finally done, the apartment looked like a war zone.

She was ready to leave, but rain had begun pouring outside. Cold and exhausted, she curled up in a corner of the apartment, hugging her knees as she waited for it to stop.

Two hours passed.

The rain only grew heavier, and the alcohol was making her sleepy. She refused to stay the night. The thought of waking up in the same house, with the possibility of seeing Nazim again, was unbearable.

Dragging her two large suitcases outside, she looked around for a cab, but none were available in the storm. The roads were flooded, and debris blocked several routes. Then her eyes landed on Nazim's motorcycle.

He loved that bike.

And she knew how to ride it.

She wasn't confident enough to ride in a weather like this, but she wanted out more than she feared the journey. After struggling for nearly an hour to secure her luggage, she finally started the engine.

The roar of the motorcycle felt like freedom.

She rode through traffic, past empty fields and long stretches of highway. Trains were delayed and buses were stuck, so she decided to ride all the way from Mumbai to Pune despite the dangerous weather.

As the rain lashed against her, fatigue began to catch up with her. Her clothes were soaked, her vision blurred, and she regretted drinking before leaving.

Then came the thunderstorm.

A flash of lightning lit up the night with blinding intensity. For a split second, Inayat lost sight of the road. Her grip loosened. The motorcycle wobbled.

And then it crashed.

The bike skidded across the wet road, dragging her along with it. Metal scraped against asphalt as both slid uncontrollably through the rain until they slammed violently into a huge rock and came to a sudden stop.

CHAPTER 24

WHAT A LOSS

FEW MONTHS LATER

Roads untraveled- Linkin Park

"So, it is not only about choosing a path which you would like to walk on. It is about choosing a path which you will want to keep on walking no matter what happens. Choose that path. And you will find success on the way.

Thank you."

Samar said ending a great speech. There was a great applaud. Samar in his grey blazer and blue jeans, walked down the aisle and went on to exit the hall.

He had no happiness or pleasure on his face or his heart. He was living as though it was a punishment. That is what it feels like after losing something you wanted so badly again and again.

On the other side, at the night of Shehnaaz wedding. She had a numb face. She did not want this at all, but she had no choice. She was able to feel helplessness and nothing else.

She had her long red lehenga on as she went to the stairs to walk down to reach the mandap in the centre of the hall.

There were all their relatives and friends and family in the hall, but the boy was not there.

Shehnaaz father and her father-in-law to be having an intense argument where he was shouting that they will not get their son married to her because she was a jinx. According to their astrology which Shehnaaz father had kept away for so long, she had bad luck. A manglik.

But now this was not about a marriage only, it was about their reputation in front of all of their friends and relatives.

By the end of it her father started to cry begging him with his hands folded not to leave like this. But the father of the groom started leaving asking all his family and relatives to come along. Slowly they all started to move outside the exit. Shehnaaz father begged with his hands folded to each one of them to not leave like this. Shehnaaz eyes filled up now. She ran downstairs and pushed his father hands down stopping him from doing it and hugged him.

Her mother looked around and saw her relatives mumbling about it and she also broke down.

The wedding that took a few months to take place was broken in only a few moments.

The last few months, Samar had dedicated to his stories and worked to make it better. After he finished editing it, the book was accepted a month later and published shortly thereafter. In the coming months it became a hit and Samar had suddenly touched the edge of success. He was then asked to give a short speech on career guidance for college students in Mumbai. As he was done, he went outside. On the way he was congratulated by many and then he went to the parking lot to get to his car. As he pushed in the keys and twisted, he noticed he had received several missed calls from an unknown number on his phone. He was confused and tried to search the number identity in an app when suddenly, something hit on his head hard. He turned around. It was some guy. Samar thought they are thieves, so he asked, "What do you want?"

Right then he saw Nazim coming into the parking lot. He wore loose full sleeves white tee with many silver chains around his wrist and neck and baggy jeans. He looked like a criminal. He looked at Samar and was instantly upset. He shouted at the guys, "I told you, not to start before I come."

Samar was shocked to see him. He did not know it before, but Nazim belonged to a rich family and he knew many gangsters. Nazim walked close to Samar and said, "I am sorry, Samar. He didn't intend to hurt you."

"Nazim, what are you doing here?"

"I am doing, what they call, justice." Said Nazim and his friend punched Samar on his face.

Samar had a hard pain on his nose and blood all over his hands. Samar screamed out of pain and when he saw so much blood and realised, "You broke my nose!"

"Yeah..." said Nazim. "...and that was intended."

Upset and hurt Samar shouted out, "What the fuck do you want from me?"

"Well, there is nothing that you can give now, which would be enough." Said Nazim in a low tone. He was utterly sad about something.

"So, why are you doing this?" Said Samar wiping his bleeding nose with his hand cuffs.

Nazim said, "Because I can."

Samar saw a pendent wrapped around his wrist with all the bands and chains in hand. He recognised it to be Inayat's. The blue flower pendent.

And Samar had to ask, "Is it regarding the other night?"

Nazim looked up.

Samar repeated more correctly, "Look, if it is regarding the other night that I was at your place with Inayat, so I would confess that we did not do anything."

Nazim grabbed Samar throat. "Do you think if you had I would let you live for this long?"

Till now, Samar had got into the mood of being badass, too. He replied, "Well, you can still try to kill me. But I am telling you, if you miss, I will not show you any mercy."

Nazim tried to hit him again with a punch but was stopped by one of his friends as people were coming in around the area they stood. Nazim left Samar shirt collar and dusted his clothes as the people passed by.

Samar took his chances and teasingly asked, "By the way, how is she?"

"Don't you fucking dare!" Shouted Nazim coming to hit him hard. But was again stopped by one of his friends.

He whispered to him, "He is injured enough, and famous enough to file FIR against us."

Nazim shook and told to Samar, "Before you, she was all good with me. But then, you came and destroyed everything." Then Nazim walked away and shouted, "You are a jinx."

Samar was not sure what he meant because, they had broken up before he had ever come back. So, Samar asked, "What are you shit holes talking about?"

Everyone stayed quiet. It was as if something was seriously wrong. Samar was concerned now. "Is she okay?"

One of Nazim friend who seemed smarter than them and quirky said, "She is dead, bro?"

"What!" Shocked Samar. Looking at Nazim he was trying to believe what he just heard.

Nazim was looking down with a hopeless face.

Samar asked again, "What the fuck is he saying!"

His other friend informed, "The night after you were at his place, she tried to run away. There was a lot of rainfall, and she met with an accident. It was bike against a huge rock. She could not survive."

Samar was shocked to know all this but chuckled sarcastically, saying. "You guys are making shit up, right? Just to torture me?"

Asif told, "Nazim wouldn't joke about his girlfriend's death."

Samar was so devastated now. "You fucking Moron! You killed her!" And Nazim grabbed Samar shirt collar, again.

"What the fuck?" Samar shocked and added. "Should you have just treated her right she wouldn't try to run away and get into...."

"She wanted to get away because of you! You came back in her life and manipulated her to run away, in the process of which she died!"

"What the hell!"

"You did it, Samar!" Nazim was shouting in his grief as he was pulled away by Asif.

Samar was quite thinking. Then he realised,

"Oh, I get it. You did not come here because you wanted to take revenge. You came because you wanted me to feel guilty about something that you did so you don't have to take the blame and so be able to move on. You fucking loser!"

Nazim ran and hit Samar with a punch on his cheek. Samar also got himself off his friend's hands and hit Nazim hard on his face, this time. Making Nazim eye hurt bad. Nazim screamed out of pain once and shouted his friends to hold him tight. Then Nazim hit on his belly twice and explained, "First, you broke her heart and made her go away. And then you were not happy to see her happy with someone else, so you manipulated her back, that's cheap, you know?"

"Speak for yourself." Samar said taking long breaths, blood coming to his mouth, "Stalking me, attacking me in lonesome with your street gangster friends holding me. Is this heroic?"

Nazim was so upset that he took the bat from one of his friend's hand and hit off the car windows.

"What the FUCK!!" Samar screamed to stop him. But he was held behind by his gang members.

Nazim broke all the windows and bent the doors and other areas. The car was severely damaged. He then threw the bat away and said, "Now, this is an attack."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?!"

Nazim then came close to Samar and said, "This is just a glimpse of what you get for messing with me."

Samar chuckled and spitting the blood coming to his mouth said in savage reply, "If I come to think of it, there is a very good reason why anyone would want to run away from you. You are a Dickhead."

Nazim friend came forward to hit him but was stopped by Nazim. They talked and Samar saw there were people coming around. Then, Nazim threw back his car keys to him as they walked away.

Samar looked at his car. It was not in good condition. But he still wanted to get it fixed. It was his father's last belonging that he owned. It was precious. So, he tried to walk to get inside and drive it home. But suddenly, it hit him that Inayat was dead now. She was no more. And his legs trembled with weakness. He fell on the ground unconscious.

Samar woke up in a hospital bed. Shehnaaz was seated there with her hands holding his, her head down and was sniffing with sob. Samar smiled at her sight and by the sound of that only Shehnaaz looked up. She laughed out of joy and relief. "Oh, thank god you are okay." And hugged him.

"Of course, I am." Samar said his arms around her. As she sat back on the chair Samar said, "Hi!"

Shehnaaz smiled in peace and said, "Hi, how are you feeling?"

"A little pain here and there." Samar said. And like Shehnaaz could feel it too she made a face. "But you can't help being my lover, can you?"

Shehnaaz got confused. Samar indicated to their hands. Shehnaaz immediately freed her hand away.

Samar chuckled at that. "I was kidding."

Shehnaaz shook and said, "Yeah, this is what I get for saving you."

"Yeah, tell me how did you find me?"

"Someone on the streets noticed you laid injured and called at the number in your emergency list in your phone. I did not know I am one of them." Shehnaaz surprised.

Samar smiled and said, "You are the only one."

Shehnaaz felt sad on hearing that and asked, "Who did this to you?"

Samar looked away shaking his head. "No one."

"Come on, you have to tell me." Shehnaaz said and added to lighten the mood, "So, what I may not be able to beat his ass up, myself. I will kill him with my curse words."

Samar smiled at that and looking back at her said, "It was just an accident."

Shehnaaz stayed quiet, so. She knew over time he will let it all out and she was okay to wait. Then Samar said, "From curse words I remember, where is your husband? Did he not come to see your lover?" Samar joked.

Shehnaaz smiled but it faded very quickly as she shook her head.

Samar shocked as he asked again, "Seriously? You came alone?"

Shehnaaz nodded and stayed quiet.

Samar was able to understand with her quietness that there was something wrong. So, he said, "Am I missing something?"

Shehnaaz shook her head trying not to break down. Samar started to sit up knowing now for sure something was wrong. "What is it?" He poked Shehnaaz. "Tell me!"

Shehnaaz broke into tears as she told, "At the night of the wedding, they broke it off."

Samar was shocked to hear it. Shehnaaz cried. Samar grabbed her into his arms. To console her Samar said, "What a loss! They will never get to know what a precious person they've lost. Idiots."

After some time, it hit him that Inayat is also no more and he said, "We are both alone." Shehnaaz sat hugging into his chest looking away not crying, anymore. Samar added, "Maybe, we should get married."

And he chuckled softly. Shehnaaz had her ears ring at that, but she shut her eyes shaking her head on her high hopes.

CHAPTER 25

LOOKING FOR INAYAT

Shinunoga E-Wa- Fujii Kaze

Late that evening, Nazim sat in the backseat of a car with his arm hanging out the window and his head resting against the glass. He felt exhausted, as though there was no strength left in him.

His thoughts drifted to the past few months.

He had started taking every kind of drug he could get his hands on. Before Inayat, he had never been addicted to anything. But he had never been this broken either.

And no matter how hard he tried, he could not stop thinking about her.

He remembered the day they first met and the shy way she looked at him. She liked him—he had always known that—but she was too proud and reserved to admit it. Instead, she wanted him to figure it out on his own. Nazim had happily played along because he loved her. He would have done anything for her.

So he waited.

He waited for her to say she loved him.

He could see it in her actions, but he wanted to hear the words.

Then Samar returned.

In his vulnerable state, Nazim felt replaced. He did not want to be someone's second choice. He wanted to be first. He would have waited forever for Inayat to love him, but he could not bear the thought of her loving someone else.

That was why he had lost control when he found Samar's note on breakfast that morning. The moment he saw it; he knew he had already lost her.

And he wanted to destroy everything.

A few days later, after contacting her family, he learned about her regret and everything she had gone through. By then it was too late. He never got the chance to see her one last time.

Now that she was truly gone, he could no longer deny the truth.

She had run away because of him.

Because of his anger.

The guilt consumed him.

He blamed Samar, wanted to beat him, and curse him for taking Inayat away. Yet deep down, he knew the truth. Samar had become the hero of the story.

And Nazim had become the villain.

He hated it.

He hated the truth, hated himself, and hated the life he was living.

So he stopped caring.

He drank all day, smoked constantly, and spent his nights stumbling through bars. Sometimes he cried for hours. Sometimes he drank until he vomited. He became a laughingstock online after several drunken incidents, but he did not care.

Once he got so high that he lost his way home and sat on a roadside for hours. Another time, he was nearly robbed before a few strangers recognized him and stepped in. They called one of his friends, and soon his oldest friend, Asif, arrived.

Asif took him home and practically locked him away.

For several months, Nazim went through recovery. The drugs did not disappear completely, but he learned to keep them under control.

Then one day he heard about Samar's growing fame.

He remembered the anger he had carried ever since Inayat first chose Samar over him.

He went to confront him.

Seeing Samar alone in the parking lot brought all that rage rushing back. For a moment, he genuinely wanted to kill him.

But then he thought of Inayat.

If she loved Samar, hurting him would only hurt her.

Even after everything, Nazim could not do that.

So he walked away.

For the first time, he decided he wanted to move forward.

He returned to music.

At first, he poured his grief into heartbreak songs, often crying while writing them. Slowly, those songs began gaining attention.

Then they began gaining fame.

And tonight was his biggest show yet.

He was still high when he arrived, but he showed up anyway.

Meanwhile, Shehnaaz had returned to work and was doing better than ever. Yet she could not forget what Samar had told her in the hospital. She knew he had been struggling, so she chose not to pressure him.

When her engagement was called off, she decided to move out of her parents' home for a while. Since Samar was still recovering from his injuries, she moved in with him in his Mumbai place, though they stayed in separate rooms.

Most nights, Shehnaaz was busy with shoots, celebrity events, and small television roles. Still, she always found time for Samar.

She cooked for him, helped him eat, assisted him when he struggled to move, and stayed by his side whenever his condition worsened. More than once, she rushed home early just to check on him.

Samar was deeply grateful for everything she did.

But even after his body healed within a few weeks, there was one thing he could not forget.

What Nazim had said to him.

17 JULY 2024

Samar and Shehnaaz had reached the airport and taken their seats in the flight to Goa. Samar put on the belts and taking a long breath tried to relax. Shehnaaz placed her hand on his chest and gestured with her eyes that it will be alright. Samar smiled with his lips tight. He looked out of the window and remembered the first time he had come to Goa and how it had happened.

IN THE PAST:

It has been around a month that Samar was told about Inayat remorse. During this time Samar use to roam around the places they had been remembering the moments they have spent together. Not able to believe that she is no more. He used to sit all evenings in the park looking at the park sidewalks imagining her.

Her wavy hair flowing in air with the evening breeze. Her face shining orange with the sunset light hitting her skin. The way she would laugh hard on his jokes, throwing her head back, her hands on her mouth. She was this little, joyous, gorgeous girl he loved. And he could not accept her remorse. Not so fast.

He had even been to her old office. No one knew anything. They even informed that she had not been in contact with anyone for months now. It was like she had disappeared from existence. But he could not forget her. He did not want to. Samar did not want to believe it was true. Like he could

feel there was something missing. Something was still hidden from him and everyone.

He had even been to her so called village in Goa. He showed her picture and asked about her as if he was her husband and she had gone missing.

One day he received a letter. He usually never read them as they were just appreciations for his work, but he noticed a name on one of them. He remembered the name from somewhere before. Chahat faid. He picked it up and read "Are you looking for Inayat Noor?"

Samar later remembered her niece name to be same. Perhaps, it is her. Most probably it is her. She is her family. Who else would know her whereabouts? Inayat was dead to others. Samar sent a letter back to the address where it came from and asked about the writer who wrote the letter to him. He got his response within few days. And he knew what it meant.

I am with you- Avril Lavigne

The night Inayat ran away from Nazim's apartment, she met with a terrible accident. Driving through heavy rain, she lost control of the motorcycle. The bike slipped, trapping one of her legs beneath it as both skidded across the wet road. They slid all the way toward a massive rock near the seashore, and the impact knocked her unconscious.

For hours, she lay there in the pouring rain, barely alive.

Eventually, a few passersby found her and rushed her to the hospital. Using the emergency contacts on her phone, the doctors managed to reach her family.

When Inayat finally woke up, she had fractures on her legs. However, that was healable but her heart. She had the trauma of her break up and the accident.

She had lost a dangerous amount of blood and remained hospitalized for months. During that time, at her own request, her family informed her friends and boyfriend that she had died.

Inayat had not only met with trauma—she had lost her will to live.

Months later, after recovering enough to leave the hospital, she moved to Goa to stay with her sister, who was now divorced and living with her daughter and grandmother.

Breathe – Taylor Swift

At the college where Samar had recently given a speech, there was a second year student named Chahat. She happened to be Inayat's niece.

Before that day, she had never heard of Samar. But after listening to him speak, she became curious and started searching for information about him. While looking him up online, she discovered that he owned a house in Mumbai, in the same area where her uncle Arif lived.

Wondering if the two had ever known each other, she approached her mother, Rahat. Rahat knew nothing about it. However, after hearing about Samar, she felt that Arif should know about him.

She called Arif and asked. Unaware of Samar's recent fame, Arif told her the truth about his connection with Inayat, though he made her promise not to mention it to Inayat.

Chahat agreed.

She did not need to ask directly.

For months, she had watched Inayat sink deeper into depression. Though she no longer had anything to do with Nazim, she still seemed trapped by something from her past.

Chahat suspected that something was Samar.

All she needed was a reaction.

She walked to Inayat's room.

Inayat sat quietly on her bed, dressed in a simple white kameez and salwar. Her hair fell loosely over her shoulders as she stared out of the open window. These days, she rarely spoke to anyone.

Still, Chahat stepped inside and called softly,

"Masi?"

She did not respond.

Chahat took her phone and searched and found Samar was in her contacts. Chahat was surprised at that. She exclaimed, "Masi, who is this, Samar?"

Inayat turned around surprised. Chahat showed her phone book in the mobile. Inayat was sort of relieved as she had thought he was here and shook her head like saying, "No one."

Chahat dialled the number and put it on speaker. Samar voice came out loud after 3 rings, "Hello?"

Inayat was immediately concerned. Chahat had put on mute so she asked Inayat, "Can I speak with him?"

Inayat shook her head and mouthed, "No." Still scared of being heard.

Samar said again, "Hello?"

Chahat then asked Inayat to tell her how come she knows him. Inayat shook her head. Chahat turned off mute and said into the phone, "Hello?"

Inayat somehow moved out of the bed in hurry and managed to snatch the phone out of her hand as she fell on floor and it dropped on the floor with her, disconnecting the call.

Chahat laughed in surprise and bending down said, "Are you okay, Masi?"

Inayat shook her head at Chahat childishness. She placed her arms on the bed and somehow got up onto the bed.

"Who is he, anyway?" Chahat said again. "And why are you so scared of him?"

Inayat stayed quiet.

"Did you two..." Inayat glared at her before she could ever finish. Chahat was so astonished. She was getting so much more than a blank face at this topic. "So, you did know him before? Was he your boyfriend?"

"Chahat." Warned Inayat to stop.

"Okay, fine, don't tell me." Said she. "But do you know how famous he has become now?"

Inayat stayed quiet.

Chahat said again, "He is earning so well with his new novel. It is about his own life." Inayat stayed still. Chahat continued, "Do you know, he came to give a speech in our college? He used your name several times."

Inayat turned at her immediately, interested.

Chahat laughed out.

Now, Inayat finally smiled. She has been pranked.

"Oh, you so wish he had, no?" Chahat said.

Tired Inayat said, "Aren't you hurrying into your adulthood?" as she was just 18 years old.

"I am an adult. You may or may not believe it."

Inayat shook her head and laid down turning her back at her. She showed as if she wanted to sleep but really, she just could not stand this topic about Samar, anymore.

"By the way, he is visiting our place this weekend." Said Chahat as she shut the door behind her and left.

Inayat was left with a mix of emotions where she was excited, nervous, unsure, and scared all together.

Samar could not sleep much thinking about visiting Inayat's place. He bought the most expensive wine he could find and took it as a gift. He was hoping the letters he received were not hoax.

After asking the people around he found the exact house of the Noors. He rang the doorbell. There was no answer he could hear. He rang the bell again after a minute. He heard a lady voice coming closer as she shouts running to the door, "Oh-Ho, Wait! I can only run not fly."

As the door went open Samar found it was an old lady of about 70 to 80 years old. He licked his dried-up lips to get ready to speak up. "Good afternoon, ma'am."

She glared at him through her glasses as if saying, "You made me run half the house for greetings?"

Instead, she said, "What do you want?"

"Actually..." said Samar when another lady came out at the door, "I am looking for someone."

The other lady looked younger than this one, must be her daughter or in-laws. She wore a night dress and came forward to talk.

"Sorry," said she, "but I don't think, we have anyone of your missing. We hadn't found anything new in this house for years."

Samar shook as he explained, "No, I am looking for someone from your family. Her name is Inayat Noor."

Another scream came from inside, "Mumma, who is there on the door?"

"What is your name, son?" asked the younger lady.

"My name is Samar Malik."

She repeated his name to the girl inside who screamed back, "what?" The lady shouted again, "Samar!"

While the old lady was confirming to him that, "No, no there is no Noor in this house only Faid."

"But the neighbours told me that she lived here."

"I said no? There is no Inayat here. Please leave!" And she started to shut the door.

Suddenly, the girl came out from inside the room to see the bell ringer.

"Is there any Samar Malik at our house?" said she as she came out in her pyjama's throwing her thick biology book on the sofa in hall. She managed to push aside her grandma and took a look. 'It is him. Really him'. She kept staring at him with so much love and admiration in her eyes.

"Chahat?" Said Samar.

She nodded.

"Hi, Samar, here." And Samar took out his hand for a handshake. Chahat reached out her hand quickly but was slapped on it by her grandma.

"You seem very excited." She shouted at her.

Chahat got embarrassed. Samar asked again, "We wrote letters, right? You told me you will help."

"I will do anything for you."

"Eh!" Another slap on her arm from grandma.

"Owe!" Shouted Chahat. "What is wrong with you?"

"What is wrong with me, what is wrong with you?" Grandma shouted back.

"Whom are you talking to?"

"Do you know who Ruhi is?" Asked Samar thinking they may know her nickname.

All three ladies turned to him. Chahat said, "I will be that for you, if you want."

"What!" Samar cried.

"That is your Masi's nickname." Whispered Chahat's mother to her.

"Please have mercy on me. I came a long way." Samar added.

"Wait, are you here just to meet her?" Chahat said.

"Chahat!" Shouted her mother. "What are you doing?"

"Mom, he is no trouble. He is here to help." Said Chahat as she turned to Samar, "Please, come in."

The two ladies kept standing at the door as Samar walked in and Chahat went in to take glass of water. She stretched the tray towards Samar and he refused saying, "I am fine. Just tell me if you know."

"Please, I'll feel honoured."

Samar took the glass and finished in one go.

"I've read so many of your books. I loved them."

"But I only wrote two." He said placing the glass back on the tray.

"Chahat?" Called her mother. She embarrassed by now, went to her and they talked in whisper, "Who is he? And what is he doing here?"

"He is a very famous person. Old friend of Masi. I called him."

"How?"

"Letters."

"Wow, at the age of Instagram and Twitter, people still write letters?"

"Well, he is not on social media, anywhere."

"Oh, so how did you...."

Samar kept his hopeful and impatient eyes at Chahat as he cleared his throat to get attention.

"Oh yeah, right. Wait" Chahat said and went in.

CHAPTER 26

WHAT A SURPRISE!

The lady supposedly Inayat's sister stood on the doorway and started asking random questions to Samar to pass the time.

"So, what do you do for a living?"

Samar looked up and clearing his throat for the interview session told, "I am a writer."

"Really?" getting interested she asked, "What do you write?"

"Stories."

"Oh." And her interest died.

The moment Inayat came to the hall all the ladies and Samar went silent in surprise. Samar had stood up from the sofa, Rahat- the lady had her hands on her mouth and granny took off her glasses to clean to see clearly and believe what she saw. They were all in shock. Inayat was on her wheelchair, wearing a white gown. She had makeup on and she looked absolutely gorgeous. The ladies were shocked because she had not come out of her room to meet anybody for months now and Samar was just shocked to see her in her condition.

Rahat said, "You are looking beautiful."

Granny said teasingly, "What a surprise! Someone is in good mood today."

Inayat chuckled and looking at Samar said, "Hi!"

"Hi," Samar said, finally happy to have found her alive.

Since it was clear Inayat was fond of him and they were not able to speak openly in the house so the two were asked to go out on a walk to talk.

Grow as we go- Ben Platt feat. Sara Bareilles

The two walked side by side on the street as Inayat told him about what had happened to her. After she finished they went quite.

"So, how's life going?" Asked Inayat to end the silent awkwardness.

Samar nodded as he said, "Good, good. You?"

"How do I look?" Inayat said.

Samar turned to look and said, "You look fine."

Inayat smiled.

Samar added, "At least better than dead."

Inayat realised and said, "I am so sorry."

"No, please don't be." Samar said, "I am just...happy that I found you."

Inayat nodded as she smiled delightfully and asked, "How did you...by the way?"

Samar smiled as he recalled and said, "Well..." Samar cleared his throat as he confessed, "I actually got to have acquaintance with your so called boy-friend first to start."

"Nazim?"

"Yeah..."

"Oh" surprised Inayat.

"He...was not exactly happy when we met and..."

Inayat was still looking at Samar as he thought for a second before he tells about their fight or rather Nazim's ragging and amusement. But he chose not to. "Never mind, so he told me that you.... got expired which is definitely rubbish."

Inayat chuckled. "Definitely."

Samar smiled looking at her. It lights up his heart to see her happy.

Inayat noticed his staring and looked away to avoid any misunderstandings.

"I got a letter from your niece." Samar then told.

"Really?"

"Mm-hmm." Samar nodded, "Apparently, she was a student at the collage I had been asked to give a speech."

Inayat showed as she is connecting the dots. Although she knew it already.

Samar was honest. He had always been. One of the reason why it was hard time for Inayat to forget him. Because she was guilty for not having believed him.

Samar looked at Inayat being quite. And he had to ask, "Why did you do it?"

"What?" Inayat becoming mindful.

"Running away like that. Why did you do it?"

"He had cheated on me."

"But you guys had broken up."

"He was still my love."

Samar went quite in disbelief. Quietly looking at Inayat.

"What?" Inayat said.

"You did not love him. Otherwise you wouldn't spend the night before, with me."

Inayat shook her head getting all these thoughts messed up. "Look, I did not like it. Even though, we had broken up and I have met you, I did not like being called a liar and cheater and then being cheated on."

Samar went quite again. He knew she was not fully aware of her own feelings. Inayat asked again for his silence, "What?"

Samar said, "Nothing."

Inayat looked away at the sun set.

"What do you want, now?" Samar asked then.

Inayat asked back, "What do I want?"

"Yeah, as-in with life." Samar explained. "What do you want to do? Now that you are free, again."

Inayat thought about it and said, "Nothing."

Samar stayed quite waiting for an explanation.

So Inayat added, "I don't like anything, anymore."

Samar kept quite looking at her. But Inayat did not say anymore and kept looking at the sky straight as she wheeled her chair to move.

The two got back home lately and Samar was asked to join for dinner. They were mostly quite having nothing to say. Obviously Chahat was still talkative and very interested in Samar which kept the night alive. However before leaving Samar came to Inayat's bedroom while she was out with her granny and niece for a night walk after meal. Since Inayat was moving they wanted her to keep moving.

Samar looked at her pictures from childhood. He took up the photo frame to look at the cute little Inayat looking at the camera with a huge smile on as she held a trophy.

It was from her school time. Rahat came in and saw Samar and told, "It was from the time she won for singing in a school competition. She used to love singing. "

"Used to?" Samar asked as he placed the photo frame back.

"She doesn't sing anymore." Rahat said sadly. "She has lost her spirit."

Samar saw her eyes getting moist as she speaks about it. "She has gone through a lot of pain both physically and mentally." Rahat said. "I don't know, what should I do to make things better for her." And she broke down.

Samar got up and hugged her from a side to comfort her. He then made her sit on the bed side and sat beside her. "See, you are like my sister. Even

though, I never had one so I don't know how it goes." Rahat chuckled." But I would do anything to make her better if that makes you happy."

Rahat nodded. The two sort of made a pact and Rahat stood up to leave.

Samar looked around some more whilst and caught a scrapbook on the side of bed. He took it out and opening it saw pictures of monuments and valleys. He asked, "What is this?"

Rahat looked back at him and the thing he was holding and said, "Oh, that is her dream book."

"Meaning?"

"When she was little she wanted to travel around the world and see all the beautiful places."

"Oh, really?" Samar surprised as Inayat never really travel much.

"Yeah, she really wanted to travel around the countries in Europe. Specially Switzerland. Oh, she loved Switzerland." Said Rahat all smiling.

Samar nodded, "Wow." Going through the scrap book.

"Yeah," Rahat said and then looked around at the photos again, when suddenly an idea hit her. She looked at Samar and said, "Samar?"

Samar looked up from the book. "Yeah?"

"Can you take her out on a trip?"

Samar got confused as he asked, "Trip? To where?"

"Switzerland."

Samar went quite thinking about it. He wanted to do something but a trip would be a big attempt. He was not sure.

"Would it be a problem?" Rahat said for his silence.

"No, no. Not from my side. I have been a pilot so actually it is easy for me to travel around the world. Perks of being a pilot."

"Then, what is it?"

Still thinking Samar said, "Would she come away with me...so far?"

"Yeah, yeah, we will make her do it. That's a piece of cake."

"How can you even think about it?" Shouted Inayat as she heard about it the next morning at the breakfast table. "Why would I like to go out of the country with my Ex?"

"Ruhi, you are making a scene for no reason." Rahat said serving her upma.

"Oh, really?" she said as she tried to stand up from the table, "So, you think, I am talking rubbish?"

"Yes, absolutely, rubbish!" said her grandmother. "The boy is so nice and rich and even from the same religion."

"Are you serious?"

"Look, the boy has a good heart. He wants to help. So, what is wrong?" said Rahat.

"What's wrong is that I don't want his help. I don't want anybody's help for that matter. I want to stay alone."

"Yeah, we could see that." Said Chahat and added, "First of all, I don't understand, how could you leave such a gentleman like him? I mean, he came all the way from Mumbai to see you. He really cares about you, Masi."

"Why do you guys not understand? We did not work out for a reason."

"Yeah?" said Granny, "And what was it?"

Inayat suddenly realised it was not really a good one. She shook her head and said, "It was a misunderstanding..." and they all started shaking head at her. "But I don't think it is right. He is a famous writer now; he must have a lot of work to do. Why burden him with my responsibility?"

"Because the boy took it happily. He really wants to help." Said Rahat.

Inayat said sitting down feeling defeated, "So, I have no right to say in this, do I?"

Chahat shook her head with a tight smile. Granny did not answer. Rahat said, "If not for yourself can you not do this for us? To make us happy, huh?"

Inayat went quiet and had her upma.

We can't be friends- Ariana Grande

Samar had decided to go on the trip with Inayat and he had to talk with Shehnaaz about it.

He called Shehnaaz to come home early the next evening. She knew he had found her again. They had a silent dinner together and then Samar took her out for a walk.

They talked on their way about their respective days and then took a seat on the road side pavement which was quite high. The evening had turned dark and there were few walkers with their dogs only. Samar finally decided to tell her, 'Shehnaaz, actually, I am...'

"You are moving out."

Samar went quite, in surprise when she finished him.

"How did you know?" He asked.

"The treatment you were giving me. It was like a smooth goodbye."

Samar shook his head and said, "No, it's not goodbye. It can never be. I just...want to try this one last time again my luck with her."

Shehnaaz nodded. "I know."

"And I just wanna tell you, thank you...for everything."

Shehnaaz smirked, "Don't embarrass me. I did not do anything."

"Yes, you did. And you know, you do. Not because you need to. But because you have a very big heart."

Shehnaaz eyes filled with tears. "You know me very well, now?"

"You are still very dumb, though." Samar teased.

Shehnaaz slapped in his arm playfully for that. Samar grabbed her in his arms as she sniffed and wiped her tears with her hands.

Samar side hugging her and said, "I will never find anyone like you, my dearest."

"Me neither."

Samar smiled joyfully. "But you should still try, you know. For how long will I or your parents pay your bills?"

Shehnaaz punched him in the belly as she laughed, "I pay my own bills."

Samar laughed and said, "Anyway, I will be touring with Inayat. Because I want her to find happiness."

Shehnaaz nodded.

"I want to give her everything that I can while I can." Samar said, "I just want her to be happy."

Shehnaaz got away from his hug. Even though, she understood and cared for Inayat, she still hated her in some points because she took Samar away from her.

She felt jealous and looked away listening to Samar. Samar being unaware kept saying, "If only I could fix things for her. Even if she might not accept me, I would be happy to see her having a settled life and husband and kids. I so wish things were different for her."

Shehnaaz nodded, silently. Her eyes still filled with tears thinking about him going away.

Samar called her, "Hey."

"Hmm."

"I want happiness for you as well."

Shehnaaz snorted and said, "It's not possible."

"It is possible."

"You know me, Samar." Shehnaaz said. "I don't change. I want what I want."

"But Shez, Love is not only romantic. You can try to date someone without first falling in love. Just be friends. Love happens over time." Said and

added, "Do you know all kinds of relationships have soulmates? Anyone can be your soulmate. It is not necessary that it be your romantic partner."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that I can still be there as your soulmate while you find someone to have a romantic relationship with. Love or not."

"Easy for you to say. You found your love and soulmate in her."

Samar shook and said, "Inayat is my love. And she will always remain so. But you are my soulmate."

"But if you are my soulmate. Then I disagree to find love anywhere else."

Samar got annoyed and said, "Please, don't do this to me."

"What?"

"You are making me feel guilty. Why is it my fault that I don't love you?"

"I never said it is."

"God, then move on. Find someone, get married and have kids." Samar said irritatingly.

Shehnaaz nodded, "I will try." She said and added, "In return, will you do me a favour?"

"Yeah."

"Will you please, choose yourself if she refuses you, again?"

Samar thought about it. He knew what she meant and he knew it was hard. It meant loving yourself and at some point be able to let go. Since she did not make any promise before, he said, too, "I'll try."

CHAPTER 27

THE DEPARTURE

Ink- Coldplay

The following week, Samar cleared his schedule and prepared for the trip with Inayat. He had been to Switzerland a few times during his years as a pilot, so he already knew a handful of places he wanted to show her.

Although Inayat could walk fairly well now, her doctors had advised her to carry her walking stick. Samar knew the trip would require him to look after her, but he did not mind. If anything, he was glad for the chance. What worried him more was making another mistake and hurting her again.

The two packed for a month-long stay and headed to the airport. It had been a long time since Inayat had gone anywhere, and the excitement showed. Sitting in the back seat of the hired car, she let her hair loose and rested her head near the open window, enjoying the evening breeze with her eyes closed.

From the front seat, Samar found himself watching her. The peaceful smile on her face made him smile too.

After an hour's drive, they arrived at the airport. Samar quickly stepped out and helped Inayat with her luggage. She thanked him politely, almost formally.

The whole thing felt strangely amusing to him.

They were shy around each other, careful with every word and gesture. It felt less like two people who had known each other for years and more like a newly married couple setting off on their first trip together.

On the plane both took their seat side by side. Inayat sat on the side of window since she like it. Samar passed Inayat a pack of chips. She smiled and, "thanks, " she said, again. This 'thanks' trend was getting on Samar nerves now. He exhaled a long breath to control his irritation and turning to Inayat he said, "Hey, since we are doing this together, why not try be a little comfortable with each other?"

Inayat nodded to the idea and kept looking at Samar waiting to show how. Samar had not thought it through. He realised it and added, "Ah...we can play games."

"Yeah," Inayat said getting excited and waited again for his approach.

Fuck, Samar thought. "Umm...Ludo?" Samar suggested.

Inayat smiled with a frown and shook her head.

"Then, Tic-tac?"

Inayat laughed, "Are these the games that you play?"

"No, not really. I just thought maybe you will like something like that...forget it." Samar brushed it off.

Inayat was curious now, "Why? Do you think I am boring?"

"No, it's not that. I just thought..."

Inayat did not really listen to his mumble and shouted in between, "Let's play a horror game."

"What?"

"A horror game."

"You mean video game? Like in phone?"

Inayat nodded. "You have I-phone, right? It should do wonders."

Samar was surprised to get that suggestion from her but took out his phone, "Yeah, Okay, well..."

She grabbed it from him like a kid and firstly took a good look. "Wow, it's the latest version, isn't it?"

Samar smiled as he confirmed, "Yeah, it's 16 pro."

"So you buy it on EMI or like...?"

"Cash."

Inayat smiled, "Show off!" She boos at him.

Samar chuckled. "I was just being honest."

Inayat said, "Try being humble," and searched and installed a horror game. And passed him the phone back.

Samar looked at the phone and the dark theme game was getting started. He turned back at Inayat and realising said, "Only one of us can play it at a time."

Inayat nodded, "Yeah. That's how we will compete."

She connected her ear buds and put one on her ear and other in Samar ears. She then turned the volume to full. The lights turned off as it was a long flight and it was sleep time for them. Samar read the name of the game as it began, 'Resident Evil' The screen was mostly dark with something horror visible at corners and a creepy background sound. It already felt scary.

"Are we waiting for something?" Asked Inayat as she saw Samar have not tapped on 'Start' button.

"Oh, right." Samar realised he was supposed to play while she watches. He started the game.

Half of the time there were not much jump scare just sounds but as it was coming to the second half there were scenes which made Samar to take a back and scream, "Holy crap!"

It was loud enough that the airhostess had to come to shush him. Embarrassed Samar looked at Inayat who was laughing in quite.

Samar shook his head at her. Inayat snatched his phone and started playing. Samar was seeing this part of her in surprise. Inayat was very enthusiastic and energetic about this game. The jump scares made her eyes big at

times in scare but she did not really react much. Samar on the other hand was shutting his eyes close with his hands and only peeking throughout the whole time.

Soon, Samar fell asleep without realizing it. He woke up sometime later and found Inayat fast asleep with her head resting on his shoulder. A smile appeared on his face.

She looked peaceful.

The sight reminded him of the first time they had met on a flight like this. They had talked, laughed, and before long, she had fallen asleep on his shoulder. He had loved that moment then, and he loved it now.

His gaze lingered on her face. Her eyes were shut, her features relaxed. She wore little makeup as always, only a touch of lipstick and blush. Her wavy hair had fallen loosely around her face, slightly messy from sleep. Somehow, she still managed to look beautiful.

Without thinking, Samar slowly raised a hand, wanting to touch her cheek.

Just then, the cabin lights came on.

The plane was preparing to land.

Inayat woke up and immediately realized she had been leaning on his shoulder. Embarrassed, she quickly sat up right and wiped her mouth. Samar instantly pretended to be asleep.

A little later, she gently nudged him awake and told him it was time to get off the plane.

Malibu- Miley Cyrus

As soon as they were out of the airport in Zurich Inayat started smiling big which turned into a laugh and then she was running from here to there. She wore jeans shorts with tang top and blazer and Samar was in his formal pant and tee.

Samar ran after her and caught up with her. They got out the exit together. Samar made a call and asked for Inayat to wait. Soon, there was someone

Samar was happy to see after a long time. Samar's ex-boss came in a silver Porsche. Samar grinned as he parked it in front of them and got out. "Yeah, Captain!"

The Captain was in his formal grey shirt and black trousers. They hugged and he patted on Samar back in pride strongly as he said, "Congratulations my boy!" for the book publishing. "Finally you listened to your heart."

Samar laughed and thanked, "I did."

"How have you been?" He asked next. "I heard you also met with an accident."

Samar smiled as he remembered and said, "Yeah as soon as one gets successful people gets jealous."

The Captain grabbed his neck as he said, "You, fuck-boy, never took one leave and then left the job when I asked you to take a break, huh?"

Samar clicked his teeth as he knew this would come up. So, he changed the topic as he said, "Yeah, about that...meet the girl I left it for."

Samar gestured to Inayat standing beside them and said, "Inayat Noor."

She smiled, "Hello, sir."

The Captain, whose actual name is Abhishek Roy, got away from Samar and took a look at Inayat and turned into his smooth flirt version and nice as he said, "Sir? Do I look that old?"

Samar smirked seeing his senior changing tone. Inayat giggled and shook. "No sir."

"Please, call me Mr. Roy." Said he as he turned around and with his car key opened the roof of the car. "Or even better- Roy. Like I call him Malik."

Inayat nodded with sincerity. Samar then, tried to change the topic again as he said, "And how is Mrs. Roy?"

The captain brushes it off with, "At such good occasions you don't take such bad names."

The two chuckled. The captain then said, "So, tell me Inayat did he finally win your heart? He was crying for it for a long time."

Inayat turned to Samar in surprise that he has told it to his boss. Samar shot big eyes at him as he signalled, not that topic.

The Captain saw it and immediately tried to change his statement, "I mean, anyone would want to approach you. You are one beautiful lady, I tell you." Samar shook his head for his boss flirt, smiling.

"Why, thank you." Inayat said shy fully.

"Anyway, we should get going, then." Said Samar.

Captain grinned knowing that he would ruin their whatever it was. Roy nodded and threw the car keys at Samar.

Samar caught it and said, "Captain?" Gesturing what is he doing?

"Take it as a gift from me."

Samar shocked and shook, "No, sir what are you saying..."

"Oh-ho, for the time you are here. Drop the car at my place when your trip is over. It's very expensive to rent cars here."

Samar smiled and nodded. The two placed their luggage in the cabinet and took their seat in the front.

Samar said as he started the engine, "Thank you, Captain. Will remember this."

The captain said, "Well, Malik I would suggest you try make it memorable for her. She deserves it."

Samar nodded, "Thanks again."

The captain turned to Inayat and said, "See you then, beautiful."

"Bye Roy sir." She said back.

"Take care, Captain."

"Enjoy guys!"

And they zoomed away. The Captain kept stood their thinking his wife would not be very happy about this and said to himself, "How will I get home?"

The two Samar and Inayat took a long ride to their hotel on a hill in the open roof car and it was a beautiful time. Inayat threw her hands on the air up straight as the breeze flew and the car ran in good speed.

The adventure had just begun.

CHAPTER 28

THE NEW YEAR'S EVE

Afterglow- Ed Sheeran

It was late in the evening when Samar and Inayat finally arrived at the guest house he had booked. The place was beautiful, decorated in soft off-white tones, with flowers and climbing plants covering the walls, balconies, and even parts of the ceiling. A maid and cook were included, making the stay even more comfortable.

Their dinner had been arranged in the outdoor lounge, where they could enjoy a breathtaking view of the nearby mountains and valleys. Snow-covered peaks stood in the distance, close enough to admire yet still far away.

They enjoyed a refreshing seafood dinner before heading up to the rooftop for a toast.

For now, Inayat was able to walk with the support of a special brace around her calf and foot. However, her doctor had strictly advised against long walks and adventurous activities. Hiking and trekking were out of the question.

On their first night in Switzerland, drinks in hand, they stood beneath the cool evening sky and talked about the next twenty-nine days. They discussed the places they wanted to visit, the things they wanted to experience, and how they would spend the month together.

"It is great place but I don't think it would be good for you to be there. It is a long walk to the place." Samar suggested when Inayat told about a hilly area she would like to go.

"But it is a beautiful church there. Old also. It looks magical in the pictures. I just really wanted to see it," Inayat told.

Samar smiled at her sparkling dreamy eyes as she imagined it. Inayat caught his stare. Samar looked down immediately and nodding said, "I'll see what can be done for it." And then added, "But you gotta keep it from your family. They have asked me strictly to stay low on walks."

"Come 'on, it's not like they are paying you for this or you will lose your job because they will fire you."

Samar thought about it said, "If I come to think of it. They might fire me. Quite literally."

Inayat laughed and placed a hand on his arm.

Samar smiled and the two looked up at the sky.

"It's been so long since I have been out of my house or my room to be precise. I was so dull to know that he..."

Inayat had told about Nazim to Samar in the time being so he knew. And he stayed quite briefly nodding.

"But you brought me here to this beautiful place. It's like a dream come true to me. So, thank you."

Samar smiled happily, "You are always welcome." He said.

"I just wish; I had given you a chance to explain yourself that night." Said Inayat after a moment.

Samar heard and it took him a minute to realise what she said. Then he said, "No, it's okay. I mean, it would be hard for anyone to believe anything at such a situation. You did what anyone would do best."

Inayat nodded. Samar then added, "Let's forget about the past anyway. It is time we live again hopefully."

"Yeah." Inayat said raising her hand for a toast, "'To life!'"

"To life!" Samar said.

The two cheered just when the fireworks started. It was the new year.

They laughed looking out at the beautiful sky and thanked God for this night.

The next morning, they woke up early and took the steep train down into the valley near Lucerne. The journey itself was breathtaking, with stunning views stretching across the mountains and lake below. Once they arrived, they spent some time wandering through the area, exploring the streets and taking pictures together. Eventually, Inayat's leg began to tire, so they stopped by the lakeside to rest.

Samar sat beside her as they watched ducks swim close to the shore, quacking noisily as they drifted through the water. Later, they boarded a cruise and enjoyed a relaxing trip around the lake.

The scenery was beautiful from every angle.

That same day, they decided to visit another destination.

Over the following weeks, they traveled across Switzerland, riding the Glacier Express through St. Moritz, visiting Grindelwald, exploring the Jungfrau Ice Palace, and strolling along the Montreux Promenade near Chillon Castle. Some places were covered in lush greenery, while others were surrounded by charming towns or towering mountain peaks.

Three weeks into the trip, they found themselves wandering through the old streets of Geneva in search of breakfast. After finding a small open-air café, they took their seats outside.

Suddenly, Inayat covered her mouth and hurried toward the nearest washroom.

Alarmed, Samar immediately followed her, only to stop outside the ladies' restroom and wait anxiously by the door.

Inayat lately came out looking a little tired as she whipped her mouth with her hankerchief. "What happened?" Samar asked.

"Nothing. I guess the foreign food is not suiting me."

Samar caught a stain of blood on her hanky and asked as soon as she reached him, "Are you okay?"

Inayat with her smiling face turned concerned on his serious face. "Yeah, why?"

"I saw..." And Samar gestured to her hanky.

Inayat put it back in her pocket as she said, "There is nothing. Let's go, breakfast is waiting."

They went and had breakfast however by the end of the day Inayat has gotten ill. She was very ill to even walk around. Samar had to call the doctor to check her up.

After her check-up when Samar knocked at the door it got a little open by his hands and he heard the doctor say, "You have to take it seriously."

Inayat nodded.

Samar asked the doctor. "What is it, doctor?"

Doctor turned to look at Inayat once again like asking for her permission.

"What's wrong?" Samar said, again.

The doctor told, "Inayat health is very serious. She needs to be at bed rest. Or even better hospitalised."

Samar got shocked and asked again, "Why, what is the illness?"

The doctor turned to Inayat and Samar could not see but Inayat shook her head at the doctor so the doctor turned around, placed a hand on his shoulder, said, "Take care of her." patted and left.

Samar was surprised by that. He then took a seat beside Inayat on her bed and placing a hand on her head said, "I am so sorry...I did not take good care of you."

"Shut up, Samar." Inayat said taking his hand on hers. It's nothing like that. I just need some time. I will be fine."

Samar nodded and kissed on her forehead.

That day, Samar cooked vegetables soup for her and taking it sip by sip he helped her have it.

By the next morning Inayat was getting better. But she was not good enough to travel still.

Samar and she sat in the dinning in the kitchen having lunch. It was very quiet in the lonely house. Samar finally said, "I never got to ask you?"

Inayat looked up.

"What did you like about me?"

Inayat smiled as she licks her lips from the soup and thinking said, "Well, I liked that you were very honest."

Samar chuckled at that.

"What?"

"I did lie to you a couple of times. Not to hide things but I knew you wouldn't exactly like it."

"Like what?"

"Like, I have stalked you to your work place just to see if you already have a boyfriend or something. Only once though."

Inayat was surprised to hear it. "When?" She asked.

"The day we first said hello."

"That day? Really?"

"Yeah."

"Creep."

"Yeah, I know." And the two laughed.

Samar then said, "I had never felt the way I felt for you. So, I was just so curious to know where this force was coming from."

Inayat smiled.

Samar then said, "I lived so long thinking one day I will meet the girl who actually blows my mind. And then when I did get that girl, it...was.... nothing like what I had thought of."

Inayat stayed quite with the brief understanding. Then said, "I guess, good things do not come easy."

Samar nodded, "Yeah, not easy at all." Inayat nodded with him. Samar added, "And even then you don't know whether it will stay with you always."

Inayat had her eyes filling up with tears now. As she knew about his grief. "Samar, I did not want to hurt you when I lied about my death."

"I know, I know. And I know you did it to get rid of Nazim. But it just felt like I have no value in your life. Like you did not care about me."

"Samar," Inayat said and opened her arms to give him a hug. Samar got up and went to her. They hugged and Samar sat down keeping his head on her lap.

Inayat said, "You are making me feel guilty."

"I just wish; things would have been different."

Inayat then said out, "I wish, too."

The two sat in silence for a while when the maid came to take the dishes. She saw them and saying sorry in different language got away.

Samar stood up and went to have his lunch. The two ate in silence. After the dishes were taken out and they started to get up to leave to their separate rooms Samar asked from behind, he just had to ask, "What should I do to get you back?"

Inayat looked back at him.

Samar added, "Or should I ask would you ever think of getting back to me? Now that you are single, again."

Inayat smiled and took it lightly as she said, "You don't really want this sick bag, Samar. Plus, I think you have a better option."

Samar said in defence, "I will accept you as you are Inayat. I don't wish anything more than you."

Inayat was quite.

"I did not forget us." Samar said.

Inayat started to leave the room. Samar decided to follow her. "Tell me Inayat if you don't love me, if you don't think of me. And I will stop asking for you to come back. The strong feelings that I have are not there just because. We share something rare. Something they don't understand. Even we don't understand."

Inayat stopped at the top of the stairs as Samar stood in the starting of it.

Getting annoyed Inayat turned, "I don't get it why do you still want me? I left you, I moved on with someone else. I left that person as well and now I am nothing but a sack of sickness."

"I accept it. I want it all. I want all your burdens, your sickness, your drama, your tantrums. Because I want you. All of you."

Inayat groaned having her eyes filled up with tears already getting soft for him. Samar took the few steps up and held her hands which were shivering with weakness.

"I will not be able to love you back. Not the way you'd want." She said, her eyes filled with tears, her hands crumpling as she held his. She was drenched with fear and guilt that she will not be able to love me back? Isn't that love itself?

Samar smiled and said, "The way I want? You don't know the way I want you."

Inayat frowned confused.

Samar told, "What I want from you is,

The warmth of your body

The softness of your skin,

The comfort of your embrace

The heat between your limbs.

The deepness of your eyes...

but, I don't think I can get it all, now, can I?
In that case, I want,
The gleam of your lips
The darkness your hair,
The wetness of your kiss
The satisfaction in your care
I want, from you, all the content of love
Or you can give me all that's above."

Inayat smiled as she said, "Did you write it?"

Samar nodded smiling big like a little boy. Inayat said, "It is good." looking at his face.

Samar was still waiting for an answer.

She then said, "Well, I wish I could give you anything you want. But I don't think I have..."

"Will you give us a second chance? One last chance." He said holding both her hand tight standing right in front of her.

Inayat looked down, a drop of tear fell off her eye as she knew how much she wanted it too but was avoiding for so long.

"Please," Samar said again trying to find her eyes.

Inayat snorted and looking up, nodded as she said, "One date."

Samar started smiling big again and nodded.

CHAPTER 29

THE COMEBACK

Inayat was sat wearing the beautiful floral dress that she had taken out for the date. The rain coming outside had ruined their plans. But Samar did not want to ruin this beautiful evening.

He looked at her. She sat with her chin in her hands, her elbows on the table, looking out of the window to the rain in the evening. She looked desperate to go out. Samar smiled at her cuteness and thought he has to distract her.

So, he decided to stand up and started dancing at the song he played. I feel it coming by Weeknd.

Samar in his loose formal pants and shirt making smooth movements and mimicking the song lyrics was a sight. Inayat could not stop but laughed enjoying it.

Samar was not a very good dancer but he did fine in his mood. He acted as if he was on a stage with a mike in his hands and acting like his is performing it. It looked beautiful.

Soon he was so much in the feel that he was singing it out loud. With the dancing and his singing Inayat had to move as well while in her sitting position as she enjoyed it.

He then played the song 'Until I found you.'- Stephen Sanchez and Em Beihold.

And he looked at her with his brow and one side of lip lifted up and his head a little tilted to a side- a retro singer position as he gestures for her to join him.

Inayat laughed at his face expression and shook her head in her shyness and started to back off as he came forward.

"Come on. For me." Samar said with his hand stretched out for her and his eyes so sweet.

Inayat could not resist but smiled and then placed her hand on his and he pulled her on her feet in the couple dance.

She knew he was not the guy who dances. With her one hand on his shoulder and other holding his and his one hand on her small back they moved to dance. Inayat was weak to make the steps by herself. So he gestured for her to place her feet onto his as they started. He even gave her a spin and had to hold her before she falls as weak she was. The two laughed and continued.

He then made a gesture with his eyes like saying, "You are not that bad."

Inayat grinned as she said, "Stop it."

With him, miraculously she was doing fine. It felt as if she was finally delighted after a long time.

They danced, while staring into each other eyes, deeply and peacefully in love. Then, she placed her head on his chest. Her eyes closed. He knew she was getting tired of standing. He could feel her warmth. He loved her head on his chest. She loved it too. She felt so much at comfort and safety. Her hands left Samar hand and was placed on his shoulder as he placed his hands around her waist. While they kept moving in the slow dance. Step by step, in rhythm and syncing well.

The song changed to "Kiss me by Ed Sheeran" by itself.

Inayat eyes went wide open. Suddenly, the peaceful and light air has changed into complete romantic one with a little tension and nervousness.

Inayat looked up at him to ask, "Did you set this up?"

Samar shrugged his shoulders. Inayat kept her eyes at him.

"I may have added this song in the playlist in sequence."

Inayat smiled as she shook her head and placed her head back on his chest. They kept moving with the beats slowly.

Inayat's hand were around Samar shoulder held in knot. Samar was also able to feel the tension and tried to stay calm. They moved quietly looking into each other soul, smiling lovingly. With Inayat breaking the eye contact every now and then as it was getting dense chuckling at his stare. And as the song pace changed their both heart beats have started to run faster.

Samar caressed the small of Inayat back, gently, his touch sending signals to Inayat for the feelings she does not show. The ones she knew he also keeps deep down in his chest, away from reality. But it was emerging now. The possibility to get back together. The possibility to love again. Samar was not sure if she could sense it, too. This urge, this keen to taste those lips. It's been so long since they last kissed. And he really missed it. He parted his lips, getting closer to her face. Inayat did not move. Samar got closer, enough to be able to breathe in her breaths. Inayat had not shut her eyes. Still waiting to see how far he goes. Is it a challenge? Samar thought. And he said just to clarify, "I love you, Inayat."

The moment she heard it Inayat face turned into a sob as she looked down shaking her head. "No,"

Samar said, again, "I do, I love you, Inayat." He continued, "You remember, you told me that you want someone to love you so much that he can't sleep without you beside him. That he can't smile without having heard your voice, and can't breathe without having seen you. Well, here I am. All that you wanted..."

"Samar don't..." Inayat started to push away from his hold. He let her but still said unto her face as she turned away.

"I can't sleep, Inayat!" He added, "I can't eat, I can't breathe well when I am not around you. It's suffocating. It's...."

Inayat eyes filled with tears still shaking her head.

Samar continued, "Why can't you love me back? Like you did before."

Inayat shook her head, again.

"Why?" Said Samar grabbing her weak arms, "Tell me, why?" He said shaking her with his crying voice.

"I can't. I just can't."

Samar tried to understand why and remembered their past and he said, "It was just a mistake."

Inayat looked up at him realising how guilty he was.

Samar continued, "It was just a small mistake. Can't you forgive me? For once?" Samar coming closer to her face.

Inayat placed a hand on his chest to stop him as she said, "It's not that."

"Then what is it? What is it? What do I do?"

"Stop Samar."

"What do I do to make you realise my love for you? What do I do to make you love me, again?"

"Please, Samar, stop" cried Inayat. "You are embarrassing me."

Samar got closer and said, "Prove it to me."

"What?" Inayat questioned.

"Prove it to me that you don't love me."

"What!"

Samar could not wait but moved in to kiss her. Inayat looked away placing her hand on his face pushing him away, "Stop, stop, stop,"

But Samar push was so hard on her weak body that she started to bent down. Down, down, down until the two were on the floor with Inayat skidding away towards the wall on her butt and palms and Samar on his forefeet coming towards her. They stopped as Inayat back hit the wall.

As he faced her and looked at her between her eyes and lips again and again. Inayat stayed quite, not moving in or out. Samar moved in and kissed her.

And the moment their lips met Inayat had to shut her eyes close. A breath of relief escaped. It has been so long for her holding back her love for him.

Since she has been loved by him. She missed his love. Oh, his love. It is so satisfying. His taste, not changed but for some reason she was able to feel it more intensely.

Tears rolled down her eyes. Samar left her hands to whip her face with his.

"I am sorry, if I..." have forced you, was his sentence which Inayat understood before he could complete. Inayat had her finger on his lips as she said, "No, no you didn't..." Shaking her head.

The two chuckled and Inayat kissed him right back. Samar held her face and she pulled at his collar for him to sit down with her and the two emerged in a deep passionate slow kiss. Their front all touching as he grabbed her close to him. His hands going up in her back clutching under her arms as he tried to keep her steady as she was losing her balance. Inayat all melt into the kiss had to grab onto his shirt in the back to keep steady. She was too weak.

After a minute as Inayat found it overwhelming she got apart. Samar looked at her. Inayat immediately looked down not making eye contact and started to move away. He let her.

Inayat then said, "Can you please, help me up?"

Samar nodded as she held her one hand and other arm around his shoulder, she stood up. She corrected her dress and Samar helped and then she walked away with her hand slipping off his. Inayat went upstairs and locked herself inside. Samar kept stood in the hall way recalling what just happened thinking if he took a wrong step.

By the morning when Inayat woke up Samar was sleeping sat on the corner sofa of her room. She admired his face. Handsome but cute in its own way. His big eye brows, small nose and pink lips as though he put something on it. She smiled at his sight. Samar eyes got open and he noticed her staring at him. He smirked as he joked, "Do I look beautiful when I sleep?"

Inayat smiling, shook and said, "You are beautiful all the time."

Samar made a cringe face as he smiled and got up and came closer to kiss her. Inayat backed away. Samar knew she was not good.

Inayat took a long breath in and exhaled with a heavy thought hitting her head.

"What is it?" Samar asked.

"What?"

"What is bothering you?"

She shook her head, "Nothing."

"There is something bothering you. I can tell."

She shook her head again, "I said, there is nothing."

Getting agitated Samar stood up and asked, "Why did you leave?"

"Why did I leave what?"

"Why did you leave last evening?" He said, "We were having a moment."

"We were not having any moment. It was..."

"Yes, we were having..."

"A mistake!"

Samar was shocked to hear it. "How can you call it a...?" Now Samar was getting pissed off and started taking a walk to calm his anger, "You can't call it a mistake. You wanted..."

"I asked you to stop but you...."

"You kissed me back...you did not stop me the second time..."

"I did not think it through...it did not mean anything to me."

"How can you say that? After all these years of me trying to get back to you...."

"Come on, Samar, what would you call it, huh? " She said at last, " It's not like you proposed to me."

Samar was quite then. There was silence. Then, Samar realised she was right. He nodded and started smiling. "Yeah, yeah, you're right. " He said. Stupid me- he thought. "Forget it, then." He added. "Forget all about it."

Samar said all smiling and cheery face again and took a seat beside her on the bed. "Tell me, what do you want to eat for breakfast?"

Inayat thought and said, "Pretzel."

Samar nodded, "Pretzel it is then," and he got up and started to leave to get breakfast on bed.

Inayat chuckled and asked, "Why were you sleeping here?"

"I just thought," he turned around, "In case, you might need me at night for any help, I should be nearby."

Inayat chuckled at his excuse then she opened her arms to ask him a hug. He came in and hugged her tight. Then he got apart and stared at her beautiful face as he said, "You left like you will never see my face, again."

"I would not be able to live that way." She said.

"Then, why did you leave?" He asked one last time.

"I was just...feeling too weak." Inayat said. "Sometimes weakness can steal away all the joy of life."

Samar chose to believe it. "Should we go to see a better doctor?"

Inayat shook her head, "I have my medicines."

"But it is not working on you."

"It will eventually. I just need some more time."

Samar went quite at that. Then he asked, "What is it that you have, anyway?"

Inayat thought and said, "Some viral."

"No," Samar said, "Viral does not stay this long. It has been more than a week. Plus, what would be the reason for it."

"New country." Inayat said, trying to be funny.

Samar smiled tight with his lips trying to be polite as he said, "Let's take it seriously, though, before it becomes something serious."

"I have my medicines Samar. Don't worry. What best we can do is book our flight back home. It's time I get good homemade food. Only that can do some magic, now."

Samar smiled and nodded.

Samar was not exactly happy to have finished the month long trip so soon from which they travelled for one week only. But Inayat's health was more important and if it was what would be best for her then he would do it. But before that he decided a surprise for her.

The whole day he was disappeared to do the preparations. The maids and nurses were there for Inayat.

I am not the only one- Sam Smith

Inayat took a small walk around the garden and then watched a movie or two to pass the time. She even wrote in her diary a small poem after a long time. When the bell finally rang. There was someone on the door.

She jumped up on her feet filled with cheer as she imagined Samar to be on the door. Inayat walked as fast as she could with her weak body. As she opened the door a huge bouquet of blue and violet forget me not flowers and white roses came first. "Thanks, Sam..." She said taking it and saw his face who gave it. It was Nazim.

Nazim was delighted to see her. "Hi gorgeous! You are alive." Said he as he kissed her cheek.

Inayat mouth was open for a minute in shock to see him.

"Would you mind if I...?" Nazim asked for himself to be invited in.

Inayat got away from the door and let him in without a word. And he went straight in.

Inayat went to place the flowers on the side table and Nazim said again, "Beautiful house."

"Thanks but it's not mine." Was Inayat cold as ice.

Nazim nodded. "Right."

"How did you get here?"

"Straight to business, are we?" Nazim said and tried to smile. Inayat had a straight face. Nazim added, "Mind if I..," to ask if he can take a seat.

Inayat was quite still. Nazim took seat on the drawing room sofa anyway and touched the fabric and gestured, soft.

"What are you doing here, Nazim?" Said Inayat getting annoyed.

"Me? Looking for you. I thought I will find your grave here. But you...well, you look too alive and beautiful to be in grave."

"I died the day you cheated on me."

"But I never cheated on you, Inayat. I guess, that's why you never really died."

"But Asif..."

"Asif said what I asked him to say. I thought you deserved the pain you gave me. Cause, you indeed cheated on me."

"It were more emotions. I did not...."

"I don't take plead as proof." Nazim said as he brushed the topic off his hands, "What are you doing here?"

Inayat got upset again as she retorted, "It's none of your business."

"Oh, is that so?" Said Nazim, "Have we become enemies, now?"

"We were never really lovers, so."

"But I loved you. In fact, I still do. And you played me."

"If you came all the way from India to here to say all that bullshit, then Nazim I am sorry, but I am not interested so, please, leave."

"I did not come here to say just anything, Inayat. I know your secret." Nazim said, "I came to know about your existence lately and came to look for you and look what I found. Samar and Inayat are a thing back, again. How cute."

Inayat was very upset now, "So what? Are you jealous?"

"Oh, I envy him. I fucking hate him...But you know what I've realised, he is also innocent in this game of yours." Nazim said, "He doesn't know anything, does he?"

Inayat was quite. Nazim then added, "I mean, you could just tell him and set him free. Oh, but you won't. Cause you are as selfish as I am."

"I am nothing like you."

"Poor Samar."

"You think I give a crap about what you say?" Turning away.

Nazim continued still, "Do you know he has a lover friend waiting for him at his place in Mumbai?"

Inayat turned to him in attention. "I met with her too and what a beautiful lady. She doesn't deserve to be in this pain of waiting for her love. But, you have to do this to her, don't you?"

Inayat chuckled with her eyes filled with tears as she realised what he was doing, "You are trying to make me feel guilty so that I leave him. I may will, Nazim, but then, what? Do you think I will come back to you?"

"You should. Because we are alike. Selfish. We deserve each other."

"You and me have nothing in common!" Inayat shouted and went quite as tears rolled down her cheeks as she thought about it and said, "All I am asking for is some time. Some more time before... Am I really being selfish?"

Nazim smiled as he started to get up. "Time, my love? That is the most precious thing you can ask for. Cause it's the only thing you can't get back." He said, "I gave you mine, you gave him yours. It's his wish if he gives it to you or someone else. You should not manipulate him to do it. It's not right."

"I did not manipulate him into doing anything." Said Inayat in her defence.

"Well, you are not doing much to keep him away, either. Do you think it is right? Really? Especially when he can have a beautiful life with someone else who is waiting for him instead of crying over you when you leave him?"

Inayat sobbed and snorted and to calm her Nazim placed a hand on her shoulder and said, "You may do as you wish, Inayat. But remember you had a choice."

CHAPTER 30

THE CANDLELIGHT DINNER DATE

Viva la Vida - Coldplay

Samar had taken Inayat out on a date as promised. He took her to the old church she wanted to visit. It was late in the evening and there was snow fall on this area of the country. The church was huge with old architecture. Inayat wore a red velvet dress and a long fluffy black coat over it for the cold. Samar wore black tuxedo with a red bow.

Inayat was very excited as Samar opened the door of the car lend to him from his boss. He stretched out his hand for Inayat as she held it and got up and out on her pencil heels. She smiled big and so did Samar upon seeing her so happy. They walked to the church entrance with Samar hand around her waist like a gentleman. Inayat clapped in joy as she saw the interior. It was a special request made by Samar for a candlelight concert. The candles decorated the stairs, the sides of the seats and the centre was full of it, leaving small stools and stand for the artists to perform. Yes, there was going to be a live musical performance.

Samar and Inayat went and took their seats on the centre of the hall seating among the great crowd. It was a very pleasant view. It all actually looked mesmerising already for Inayat.

The music concert finally started with the song musical, "A sky full of stars". There were all instruments being played and a singer sang, too, quite well. It was really nice for artists as they were new.

Inayat moved with the beats. Seeing her so happy Samar pulled their hands which were held together and kissed hers. Inayat smiled at him and went on to enjoy it.

Samar had bought a diamond ring for Inayat. He checked he still has it in his pocket in the small box. Yes, he did.

Inayat clapped so hard for the artists as they finished that song too and flashed her teeth for them. The singer then took the mike out of the stand and said, "Well, thank you very much all of you. But I have an announcement to make." And he got to the front of the stage to take a good look at the audience.

He then said, "We have a beautiful couple here. And tonight the man has something to ask to his lady in front of all of us."

The crowd made woo sound and Inayat turned to Samar with a frown. The lead singer finally found him and called out, "Yes, Mr. Malik. Please come on stage."

The crowd clapped and Inayat kept sat in shock. Samar got up and correcting his blazer took the steps down to the stage. The singer handed him the mike clapping and got away. Samar looked up right at Inayat and said, "The love of my life. I asked you for one last chance which you gave me and I will try to utilise it correctly this time." And turning to the audience Samar added, "You can guess I've made a mistake or two, till now already."

The audience laughed.

Samar then said to Inayat, "Come down, my darling."

Inayat walked the aisle and the crowd made a woo sound again excited to see her. She stood in front of him and the audience on stage with nervousness running all through her body.

Samar then bent on his knee and took out the small box from his pocket and opening it showed to the lady in front of him. It was a ring with a huge diamond in centre and small ones all around it. Inayat had her hands on her mouth in awe. Samar said, "Would you- Inayat Noor, marry me- Samar Malik, and make me the happiest man in the world?"

The audience had their hearts stopped in wait. The artists too looked at Inayat in hope.

Inayat removed her hands from on her mouth as she laughed astonished and happy and nodding she said, "Yes!" And placed her hands back on her mouth in disbelief.

Samar smiled in great joy and relief as he stood up and Inayat stretched out her hand. He placed the ring on her finger. The two almost cried in joy as they hugged and then kissed. The musicians continued the song ending loud again and the audience stood up and clapped and cheered in great amusement.

I wish it was true. I wish it would have been the reality. But it did not really happen. I just put this ending in my book for my story with Inayat to be a good read. Because the reality was far from it. And I did not forget a bit of it.

The audience had their hearts stopped in wait. The artists too looked at Inayat in hope.

Inayat made a face that she was going to regret it for the rest of her life. Samar saw that and became concerned. "Darling?"

Inayat shook her head as she said, "I can't."

The audience made a silent cry of sad lose but it was loud enough in the hall to be heard. Inayat ran out of there before she would break into tears. After a second of realising what just happened Samar stood up and ran after Inayat.

"Inayat!" Called Samar after her as they walked in the cold night, on the snow on the road side. Inayat walked as fast as she could on her heels but Samar caught up with her and stopped her holding her elbow, "Stop Inayat! What was that?"

Inayat was in tears as she faced him.

Samar asked again, "Why? Why did you say no?"

"Because I don't want to marry you."

"But why?" Samar argued. "We love each other, we are compatible for each other and now there is no one else coming between us, too. Then why?"

"It's not right." She said in low voice and added loudly, "How do you even know I love you?"

"It's visible in your eyes, stupid." Samar proclaimed. "I can see it. Everyone can see it. But you..."

Inayat shook her head.

"Why are you doing this to us, again?" Samar said, even his eyes filling up now. "I finally got you after so long, after searching you back from death literally. What is stopping you?"

Inayat looked at Samar with her eyes all wet quietly thinking if only she could tell him. She really wanted to tell him. It's just she knew it would be good for him to not know. At least not now.

"What?" Samar asked, again.

Inayat said, "I can't tell you."

Samar was very upset now. Inayat started to leave when Samar grabbed her by her arm again and made her to stop. "Why? Because you are ashamed of it?"

Inayat got confused. Samar confessed, "I know Nazim came around to see you. I was informed by the staff."

Inayat cried as she shook her head. Suddenly it has started to snowfall.

Samar got closer as he said softly, "You can tell me, and I promise I will understand. I will forgive you if you did something wrong. Please just give me a reason, why?"

The problem is that you will understand, thought Inayat but stayed quite in her sob as she gently meets her forehead with his and the two sobbed.

Then, she got away, kissed his forehead and said, "I am sorry." And walked away.

Samar kept stood there looking at her from the back as she walked on under the snowfall, holding the diamond ring in his fingers as tears dropped from his eyes onto the snow.

Samar did not go to the house that night. He sat on a small bar smoking. He had taken off his blazer and smoked after a long time. He used to smoke at the time of his college after his parent's death in depression. It has been a long time that he felt so depressed. Obviously after since the first break up. For some reason in the bar they had a young boy singing the song, Ben by Michael Jackson under a red light in the corner.

Samar placed his blazer on the table as he took out his phone to see missed calls from Shehnaaz. And a message that read, "I met with Nazim. He wanted to know Inayat's whereabouts. I did not tell him but I think he will find out. Samar, he also told that Inayat is in fact his wife. They had gotten married in secret."

Samar realised Inayat may have a thing or two to hide herself. He checked Nazim whereabouts from the fan following and media pages. Nazim was quite a big celebrity now, so people did follow him around. He would not stay just anywhere. And coincidently he was in a nearby hotel. He found his exact location.

Samar had bought a very old and expensive bottle of old wine. The waiter came with a bill. And Samar placed the diamond ring on the table as he took his blazer and left.

Lovely- Billy Eilish and Khalid

The next morning, he went to Nazim place to meet him. When Samar knocked and Nazim opened the door Samar handed him the bottle of wine as he said, "Congratulations man! You won."

"Excuse me?" Nazim said until he found his face from behind the bottle and realised, "Samar... what are you doing here?"

"I should have been the one asking you this question." Samar said clearly drunk, "What the fucking hell are you doing in my life?"

Nazim could see he was drunk, "Are you here for revenge?"

"Revenge?" Samar said, and shook as he chuckled, "No, I am here to give up."

Nazim was not able to understand. "What are you saying?"

And Samar just asked him, "Do you still want her?"

Nazim raised a brow. "Inayat?"

Samar asked again louder, "Do you still want her?"

"Yes," Nazim said, "Yes, always."

Samar said, "I will give her up on one condition."

Nazim said in attitude, "What?"

"You will take good care of her this time."

Nazim smug as he said, "Oh yeah, right. Or else?"

A punch landed on his nose breaking it, causing blood to stream down. Nazim in pain screamed and held his nose gently. "FUCK!"

Samar waved his fist in pain then said. "Now, let's go."

Samar had taken Nazim with him on his way back to Inayat to meet, in his car. He shut the door of the car as he got out and Nazim got out from the passenger seat. Inayat stood by the balcony looking out at them. She knew this was bad. Samar walked the stairs right up to the love of his life with his most hateful enemy by his side. Inayat kept looking at Samar with her sad eyes. Samar said, "Here, she is." to Nazim, turning around and he started to leave.

"Samar!" Called Inayat.

Samar did not turn.

"Samar!" Again she called louder, taking steps forward.

Samar shaking his head turned around and said, "No, Inayat. I can't do it, anymore. It's over." And he walked to his car and drove away.

Samar drove and drove until he got so far away in this strange different country that he could not remember. He stopped his car in the corner of the road and cried. He really just wanted to cry and let it all out. He fucking hated them all now. All those people who ever said love is true and beautiful. He did not believe in it anymore. He hated it.

Later that day Samar went to return the car to his ex-boss and told him about what had happened. Roy patted on his back to cheer him and Samar nodded at him as he left. He took his flight back to India. He had told about Inayat returning with Nazim to her family.

Remedy-Adele

He left back for his home in Pune. Shehnaaz had come to visit at his place before him when she got to know. She came out of the house to see him as he reached by the evening there. Dragging his luggage, he was walking up the steps of his house lawn. As he looked up Shehnaaz saw his eyes were moist with tears. Samar caught her sight and breaking down he said, "I tried...but..."

Shehnaaz came down running and hugged him. He sobbed in her arms. And she stroked his head lightly.

The two sat on the park nearby their home side by side. Samar passed her back the water bottle he drank water from. The two had been talking the whole evening as Samar summarized everything that had happen. Shehnaaz said finally, "So, what are your plans, for now?"

Samar exhaled a breath and said, "I really don't know. I never thought it through. I was just following plan A and I never looked for plan B." Samar smirked.

"I know." Shehnaaz said.

"I wish I saw it through. Things would be so much easier."

Shehnaaz nodded and said, "If it was all known then it will not matter so much. It is because it was all unknown that it became a precious time."

"Yeah, well, it was a precious time. Something I will never forget."

Shehnaaz smiled. Samar started to turn into sob again as he told, "It's just hard. So, hard to let go." Samar said his eyes filling up. He then looked at Shehnaaz who had her hand on his hand held tight as she comforted him and Samar recalled and asked, "How did you do it?"

Puzzled Shehnaaz asked back. "What?"

"Your love. How did you let it go?"

Shehnaaz turned away as she said, "Why do you ask me such questions?"

"Because, I have no one else to ask to."

Shehnaaz smiled and facing him started, "I..."

Samar waited. Shehnaaz was weirdly smiling as she tried to confess it. And Samar realised. "Don't tell me." Shehnaaz clicked her teeth as she looked down embarrassed. "You never did." Samar concluded.

Shehnaaz kept looking down, not able to make eye contact. Samar added, "You loved me all this time? Throughout everything that happened?"

Shehnaaz was still quiet. Samar made her look up by holding her chin up. Shehnaaz eyes were filled with tears, too. "Why, Shez?" He asked.

Shehnaaz shrugged her shoulders and tears fell off her eyes. Samar shook at her and grabbed her into a hug and said. "But you said, you have let me go."

"I did...sort off...and then you came to Mumbai. And... I just don't know...it all came back." Shehnaaz mumbled with her crying weak voice.

Samar said again, "Why, what is wrong with you?"

"What is wrong with you?" Shehnaaz tried to shout back at him.

Samar said in defence, "What is wrong with me?"

Shehnaaz smirked and said, "Why are you so good?"

Samar chuckled and hugging her tight moved her around in content. Shehnaaz giggled and Samar then wiping her tears kissed on her forehead.

A few months passed on. Samar did not talk about Inayat anymore. And it was not because he hated her now or felt embarrassed to talk about her since she rejected him. He did not feel like he knew her anymore. Because he thought Inayat hid things from him which were not right. Also he tried his best, he gave his all but she still did not want him. He could not do anything anymore. So, now he was able to think about starting over with someone again. And after thinking for months he decided something.

Samar and Shehnaaz sat on the park again, close to his house at night.

Samar said, "Let's get married."

Shehnaaz looked up at him in surprise. "What? No!"

"Why?"

"Because you are not ready. You are emotionally broken."

"So, what?"

"So, right now, what you really need is not marriage. It is time and care."

"I know...I just don't want to lose you, too."

"You will not. You will never." Shehnaaz said, "Just don't expect me to be your fall back bag."

Samar smiled and sang for buttering, "But you are my wheelchair, when I am crippled, you are my glasses, when my eyes gets weak, my umbrella when it rains, my courage, when I am scared."

Shehnaaz laughed and punched him playfully. Samar hugged her and said, "I will take my time, but can we get engaged for now?"

"Samar, do you even know what you are asking for?" Shouted Shehnaaz getting annoyed. "It is not like you are getting a hotel room booked that you can cancel later in time. It is a life time commitment."

Samar held her hands in his as to shut her and said, "I know. I know it all. And I know it is something you have been waiting for a very long time."

Commitment is something you don't need to prove me anymore. And I, well, where will I go from here? Who else can I go to other than you?"

Shehnaaz eyes were getting filled with tears again. As she was trying to believe his words. She really did want it for a long time but she was not able to believe it at this moment.

"Come 'on, Shez. Don't you like me?" Teased Samar.

Shehnaaz chuckled with tears falling off her eyes. Samar said, "Oh, girl, how much you cry." Shehnaaz smirked and wiped her cheeks as Samar hugged her from a side and coming to believe it and looking forward to the procedure Shehnaaz remembered and told, "Oh, but you will have to talk to Papa. And convince him."

"Yeah, right." Said Samar as he recalled it, too and he knew this was not going to be easy.

Samar came to visit her parents at her place. They were very happy to see him. Samar looked at Shehnaaz father and could not express any less appreciation for his maintenance of his looks. He looked young like he used to years back. Rizwaan laughed with him.

After dinner the two men sat side by side and Shehnaaz and her mother sat on the corner sofa. Shehnaaz told his parents about what the two wanted to do and the parents looked at Samar in surprise. Yamani said, "So, you changed your mind?"

Samar nodded.

Rizwaan next asked, "Are you sure? You know she is a manglik. And moreover a stubborn."

Samar smiled and said, "I think her stubbornness is what has kept us together so long and will in future as well. And she may be manglik or something for others, but for me she is my charm."

CHAPTER 31

THE ENDINGS

JULY 18, 2024

On their 1.15-hour flight to Goa there was very much silence therefore, Shehnaaz took out the letter Samar had in his coat front pocket and went through it. It read,

“Dear Samar,

I hope you and your bride to be are well. Since my sister is too ill to even get up from her bed I am writing this letter on her behalf.

I never came to understand what was it between you and her which was making her strong and keeping her healthy. As when she was with you she was a lot better. And now, since you’ve been gone has been making her more and more sick.

Yes, she is dying. Nazim tried his best but whatever she takes, food, medicine, it does not show any effect on her, anymore. Like her soul has flown away. Even when she smiles her eyes glitters with the tears of sorrow.

Don’t know if the something that she has for you is worth of her being so unwell or the reason. Probably, she sent you away because she did not want you to see her dying. But I’d say she is in her death bed all because you are not here. You could have made things better for her.

Anyways, God loves you even when you do so complicated things so who am I to judge. Therefore, I request you to come once to visit her. She begs to see your face as she takes her last breaths. Do not do me a favour still do it to fulfil her last wish.

May God be with you.

Rahat Noor Faid”

Scientist- Coldplay

It was pouring rain. They ran with a hand upon their head trying to save each other somehow as they headed towards the main road. Taking taxi, they reached the hospital. Samar asked Shehnaaz to take a seat on the reception seating. Shehnaaz sat whipping her rain wet face with her dupatta looking around hoping to stay positive. Samar went to the receptionist and asked for Inayat Noor and the nurse started to search when Samar heard someone calling him from a side. It was a girl’s voice. Samar turned around to see Chahat.

He was delighted to see her after so long.

“Chahat.”

She ran and hugged him. Samar looked down to her face as she only reached his chest.

“Are you okay? What happened?”

She just shook her head and hid her face in his chest again, as she cried.

Samar stroked and kissed her head knowing her pain.

Samar and Chahat then made their way to Inayat's room while Shehnaaz remained seated in the reception area, already feeling out of place.

They were not allowed inside yet, so they stood by the small glass window in the door and looked in.

Inayat lay unconscious on the hospital bed. Her head was heavily bandaged, and several tubes and monitors were attached to her body. She looked fragile, as though the machines around her were doing everything they could to keep her alive.

The only reassuring sign was the slow rise and fall of her chest with each breath she took.

“She has breast cancer.” Chahat told. “We had had history of cancer in our family however she is the youngest to get it.” She said, “She knew about

it for a couple of months but she did not tell it to anyone excluding Nazim that also in a letter that she wrote for him at the time of leaving with you. We came to know of it after she returned from the trip she had gone with you and that also through Nazim.”

Samar was thinking about it all trying to understand why would she do it. Chahat said, “She knew she only had a few months to live. She wanted to be happy and keep us happy in the meanwhile.”

“By not allowing us to know the pain she was going through?”

Chahat shrugged her shoulders.

Samar turned back to look at Inayat. Seeing her in that condition made his heart sob. His eyes filled up with tears of regret and guilt and he turned away.

It took him few moments to compose himself and then he walked back to Shehnaaz. Chahat followed him. Shehnaaz asked Samar, “How is she?”

Samar shook his head. Shehnaaz felt really bad to know it. Samar placed his face on his palm as he tried hard not to cry. Shehnaaz stood up and consoled him as she pulled away his hands and made him face him. Shehnaaz gestured to ask what is it. She knew very well there was something bothering him for long and now it was coming out. “I always use to think why did she do it?” Samar meant for his marriage proposal that Inayat turned down.

Shehnaaz nodded as she was listening. Samar said, “I know why, now.”

Shehnaaz looked puzzled.

Samar concluded, “She did it for me. So that I can move on with someone else and not live a lonely life of a widow after she is gone.” And tears rolled down his cheeks.

Shehnaaz pulled him close. Samar kept looking down, feeling sad and guilty, his head touching her shoulder. Shehnaaz stroked his head.

Chahat was watching them silently from a corner. Shehnaaz noticed that and whispered for Samar to compose himself. Samar then noticed Chahat too and asked her to take them to their family.

Chahat walked and the two followed as they reached a waiting room they had booked for the close ones. There were a few other people- family, and friends (whom Samar did not know). Samar met with her family members, Asif, Swara, Rahat, her ex-husband, granny and few others. Rahat was glad to see him finally.

Samar said, "Why did you not call me? You could have at least informed me."

"It was Inayat request to send you a letter, only." Rahat said.

Samar nodded. That is when he noticed Nazim there. He stood by the wall on a corner. The two exchanged glances but none came forward to greet or meet.

The Doctor came and informed, "It is very critical time for her. She may not be able to make it for long, now. It is best you start the meeting one after the other and then she goes to rest."

Rahat had to cover her mouth to control her cry. Granny held her from one side and Chahat from another to console her. Shehnaaz turned to Samar and he in urgency started to head towards the ICU room where Inayat was. Nazim came in front of him as he said, "Hey, hey wait. It's not time."

That's when the doctor came into the room again and told, "She is ready for visitors, now."

Samar looked at Nazim. Nazim turned to Arif for approval. He nodded, so Nazim stepped away. Shehnaaz looked at Nazim, hating him already, "Do you have any..." Shehnaaz started at him when Samar got away.

He entered the room and saw she was laid peacefully with the ventilator beside her. Only one or two tubes attached now. Her hair open. At the creaking sound of the door opening she opened her eyes and looked up from her laid position. Samar smiled at her. Inayat smiled bigger. Her eyes sparkling with tears of happiness.

Samar ran and hugged her as she was at the verge of breaking down. As they hugged she did sob into his chest. They stayed in the hug for a few minutes longer and as he started to get apart Inayat breathed in his clothes. As if she could not get enough of him.

The two stared at each other then finally after a minute, Samar said, “Hi.”

Inayat smiled back, “Hi.”

Samar corrected her bangs which were misplaced from the hug and said, “Did you miss me?”

Inayat chuckled and said, “More than life.”

Samar’s smile disappeared at that and he kissed her forehead and said, “I am here, now. Everything will be okay.”

The two stayed in hug again for few minutes. Then got apart and Samar looked at her face.

“You look...” he started, then stopped.

“Stunning?” she offered gently smiling sheepishly. Samar could not smile at seeing her like this, making fun of herself. “Or Dying?” She told knowingly.

He shook his head immediately. “You look like you’re still trying to make it easier for everyone else.”

She exhaled a small laugh that turned into a cough. He instinctively reached for her hand—hesitating for a split second before holding it.

It was colder than he remembered.

“I wasn’t sure you’d come,” she said after a moment, her fingers weakly curling around his.

“I wasn’t sure I should,” he admitted. “After only getting a hand written letter as an invitation, that too from your sister not you.”

Her gaze shifted to him, curious but calm. “And yet... here you are.”

“I had to practically force my willingness to see you.” He said trying to lighten up the mood.

Silence fell between them, but it wasn’t empty—it was full of everything they never got to say.

“I heard you’re getting married,” she said after a while.

His jaw tensed. “Yeah.”

"Is she kind?" she said looking up at him.

"More than you." Samar's eyes on their hands held together.

"Does she love you?"

He hesitated. "More than I do."

Inayat nodded slowly, looking down again, her expression peaceful. "Good." She said, "I told you, you would like love, too, once you find the right one." And she chuckled some more and then coughed because of her weakness, "You deserve it."

He looked at her then—really looked—and something inside him cracked.

"I loved you," he said suddenly.

Her fingers stilled in his. And she started to get apart.

"I loved you in ways I didn't even understand back then," he continued, his voice unsteady. "And I think... I never really stopped."

She closed her eyes with her palms for a moment, as if absorbing the weight of those words trying hard not to get weak.

"But I did try to forget all about you." He continued, "Only to fail because whenever I sat down to write I remembered you."

That surprised her.

"I wrote about you." He said finally, "I wrote about us."

She opened her eyes again, meeting his. "You don't know how much that means to me. Thank you."

A tear slipped down his cheek before he could stop it.

"You should've come back," he said, the regret finally breaking through. "Damn it, you should have at least told me."

"I wanted to," she replied honestly, correcting her bed with the remote controller to get higher from her back side so she could sit up.

He tightened his grip on her hand. "I would've stayed."

"I know," she said again, her voice softer now. "That's why I didn't."

Samar looked at her for a clearer answer.

CHAPTER 32

JULY 18, 2024- THE LAST CHAPTER

“You had a chance at a life that wasn’t... this,” she said, gesturing weakly to herself. “I didn’t want to pull you back into something that would only end like this.”

He frowned, pissed by now. “With you?” he whispered. “That would’ve been enough.”

She smiled sadly. “For you, maybe. Not for me.”

Samar was still looking at her wanting for her to explain herself, now. Inayat said, “I just didn’t want it for you.”

“Want what?” Samar said with a rude tone for clarity.

Inayat said out, “I did not want you to suffer because of me.”

“And if you were well? Would you take me back then?”

“Yes, I would, but...”

He slid the stool closer and tried to talk in lower volume like normal people as he said, “So, you are saying you’d accept me when you are good, and healthy but not when you are down and sick.”

“I did not mean it that way...”

“Does that sound like love to you? Do you think you only love someone when they are at their best?”

“There is no cure for this, Samar! Nothing can heal me. What was I supposed to do? Marry you out of selfishness when I know all this and let you be my widower for life.” Shouted Inayat.

And he had to stand up from the stool now, going insanely mad, “You could have at least told me! Given me a choice, damn it! Why did you had to control my life decisions?”

“It was my responsibility to not get you hurt. Not for something that’s not your fault.”

“But you did hurt me!” He said and turned around shaking his head, plucking his hair back. “And how come it is your responsibility...?”

“You don’t owe me anything to be stuck there in your life waiting for me when I am gone. That’s not right.”

“But what if that’s what I wanted, huh?!” Samar said, “What if I wanted to be by your side when you get sick, drive you to hospitals, take care of you? I would have left my career, my friends and be your widower for life happily.”

“But I did not want it for you!!”

Samar started to shake his head again, “That’s not fair, Inayat. That is still selfishness. You just didn’t want me to suffer because it wouldn’t make you happy. You are ultimately doing it for yourself.”

“I am doing what is right to do in this situation.”

“Oh, you are no God to know what is right!” He said, “I wanted you, Inayat. I still do.”

Inayat looked up from scratching her forehead from this intense argument and said, “Look, you are a married man, now, Samar. You are in a much better position in life. And I am so proud of you.” Inayat told and pulled his hand up to show his own ring.

Samar took his hand away, “Engaged.” Samar corrected, “And I am not leaving her for you, anyway. I would never. Because at least, she gave me a choice.”

And he turned wanting to leave now but before he turned back again and questioned, "Do you really think taking away all that stress and worry, was going to make us happy?"

"The point was never to make you happy. It was to take away your burden."

"Who gave you the right to take away our burden? My burden? I wanted to carry it. I wanted you. More than my career. More than my relationship with Shehnaaz. More than anything. But you had to take away the only thing that I truly wanted in my life. Love."

"Why do you think you don't have love in your life?" She questioned back. "Look around and you will find people who really love you. For no reason. Even when you don't love them back. You really don't deserve it."

"And you deserve this?" He shouted as he kicked the stool away. "Do you deserve to go away from everyone forever?"

Inayat stayed quite. Knowing too well all this anger he had was for the reason that he was going to lose her and could not do anything about it.

Samar shook his head as he said, "I don't accept it." And he walked out. Her relatives were at the door after hearing the shouts, worried. Samar said to them, "I am sorry." As he walked straight out.

Samar shut the gate of the emergency exit behind him harshly and stood on the stairs with open walls. His hands covering his face as it was becoming hard for him to breathe with everything that was happening. Nazim stood there a little far smoking a cigarette. He saw Samar getting tensed so he offered it to him. "Want it?"

Samar looked up and then only saw him. He then took it from him and immediately took a big puff and exhaled trying to calm his emotions.

"So, you came?" Nazim said.

"I had to." Samar said, handing the cigarette back to him.

"Honestly speaking I did not think you will."

"Why so?"

“Well, firstly, because you knew I would not want you to be here. Secondly because I thought it must be hard to face the person who embarrassed you by refusing your big marriage proposal in front of such a huge crowd.”

Samar smirked as he said, “Yeah, but it is still not as bad as having a wife run away to find love.”

Nazim mouth was shut with that.

Samar grinned as he asked next, “So, did you guys really get married?”

Nazim exhaled the smoke as he shook. “It was just some fake paperwork.” And handed him his share of the smoke.

Samar nodded, “And since when are you here?” and he took a puff.

“Since you left.”

Samar nodded as he said, “Well, puns apart, thank you for being here.” And he patted at his shoulders and handed it back.

Nazim shook as he confessed taking a puff, “I didn’t see what she liked you for, at first. But I see, now.” And he added as he looked at him, “One letter and you are here all the way from Pune. Commitment.”

Samar smiled and teased, “Don’t worry you will learn it.”

Nazim side glared him as he said, “Have someone forgotten all the beatings?” and handed he cigarette to him.

Samar was surprised but he said, “Oh, I remember your broken nose, too.”

Nazim looked down as he shook his head having nothing to say but smile.

Samar smiled too knowing he was playing well in this game of his.

They chuckled quietly then, Nazim asked, “So, what did you bring her as gift?” taking it back from him.

“I...” Samar got froze.

“You know; you don’t come to meet someone sick bare hands.”

“I did not think...” Samar knew from the letter that she was sick but did not think about it. “What do I do, now?”

Nazim shrugged his shoulders as he said, "It might be your last chance to give her anything."

Samar thought about it and nodded. He knew the flowers that she loved. So, he started to run the steps down.

"Hey, you know, you need to meet her, again?"

"Yes, please, save my turn."

Samar went and talked to some of her friends including Vivaan. Vivaan told him that she uses to talk about him a lot. There were other friends who told they were aware about him but never in detail. Inayat family members went in to meet her one after the other and then her friends.

Samar went out in the rain and bought the forget me not flowers from the florist nearby. There are always flowers and fruits available nearby hospitals. And then he came back.

He brushed his wet hair back as he walked in to the wait room for the guests and took a seat beside Shehnaaz, quietly. They waited for an hour or so as the others went in to meet her. And suddenly he started too hate the idea of seeing her dying. He hated the idea of giving her flowers the last time. He was not strong or willing to let this happen. So, he asked for his next time to meet her to be the last one.

Shehnaaz turned to Samar who sat looking down. Shehnaaz said, "You brought something for her, right?"

Samar looked up and he remembered, "Yeah, I did. I don't even know why."

Shehnaaz said, "Give it to me, I will give it to her. Since you don't want to see her."

Samar was not fully focused. He took out the small bouquet of Forget me not blue flowers from his coat pocket.

Shehnaaz was stunned to see it. She teased, "I thought you don't do bouquets."

Samar looked up as he answered back, "Well, I am not doing it."

Shehnaaz smiled. Samar looked down again with serious face.

“Are you sure?” Shehnaaz asked still, before moving. “You wouldn’t want her to think it was me.”

Samar exhaled a breath as he said, “You might as well throw it out, I don’t care.”

Shehnaaz shook at his attitude as she left to Inayat room taking the bouquet.

She and Inayat had a brief conversation after which Samar had the meeting with Inayat for the last time.

“I remember when the two of us laid on the grass of the park, looking up at the sky, talked about the most fascinating topics of man life. love, happiness and fear. Things that have no scientific proves. Things that vary definition from person to person.” Inayat said, “We were talking like we know everything, even though we knew barely as much as any young boy or girl would.”

Samar chuckled in a low voice, “Yeah, I know. But then that’s the reason why we can discuss about it. If it was known, we wouldn’t be able to make discussion out of it.”

Inayat nodded and turned to say, “Shehnaaz seemed nice.”

When Samar said in unison, “Nazim seemed nice.”

The two chuckled. Then Inayat said, “Yes, he has changed a lot.”

Samar said, “And she did not change a bit.”

The two smiled at each other. Inayat said, “Well, at least we made two people better.”

Samar half nodded.

Inayat gestured for Samar. Samar helped Inayat to get down the bed and take seat with him on the floor in the corner of the room. Few tubes still attached to her. Samar sat with his legs open, giving her space to sit between. Her head on his chest, his arms around her. The two sat hugging.

"You know, my parent's death always had me struck for one thing."

"Yeah? what?"

"That they got to die together." Inayat told.

Samar stayed still.

"They fell in love at a young age, ran away, got married had kids, faced a lot of struggle from midlife crises to financial problems to what not but stayed together. And luckily they even got to die together, not leaving anyone behind to cry alone. That way they were lucky. They lived a whole life together and died together. Not everyone gets that chance."

Samar briefly nodded as he said, "Yeah, I guess."

Inayat looked up at him smiling with her sad eyes as she said, "You know, I wish I could get that lucky."

"So, you want me to die with you. You know I can do that."

Inayat laughed as she said, "No, I wanted to live with you until you live."

"At least you are not the one crying behind when someone leaves."

Inayat smirked but felt bad for him. Samar shook at himself for saying that, immediately after. Inayat still said, "I am sorry."

Samar shrugged it off as he said, "You are sorry for your illness?" and he tried to be cocky again, "Tell me really you wanted to die with me?"

"Well, not to make you sad for being alive."

Samar tried to smile hiding his own sadness for that as he said, "You know what I think."

"What?"

"I think we are still lucky."

"How?"

"I got to live with you. I got to meet you again and again." Samar said as she kissed her forehead. "I get to live having your memories."

Inayat smiled.

Samar then said, "As anyway, the only true pain a man can get is when you don't get the love in return that you are giving out. This means, your desire which was not fulfilled is what hurting you. So, why don't we remove that desire? Then there would be no pain."

Inayat was calm and listening.

"To love someone without getting anything back is the true form of love. It does not desire, or trade or get needy. Love just love and give selflessly. I want to love you like that, Inayat. Not to get your love back, but to get to be your lover. That is my victory."

Astonished she blinked and drops of tears fell from her eyes. She could not believe she could be loved so much. That anyone has the ability to love someone like that even today. She nodded, "Okay."

He nodded back. "Okay." And smiled.

The two got silent as they looked at their hands intervened. The touch, the warmth, the feelings it arose, the emotions it caused; the things they may not be able to go through after some time. The thought itself was very disheartening. And the two had the same thought. Their eyes filled up. They looked at each other, right into the eyes, as they smiled. Samar stroked her cheek and said finally, "You were, are and will be forever, my true and only love."

Samar came in and kissed her cheeks, her neck and Inayat hugged him, the two started laughing as the tears fell off of their eyes. "Stop it, Samar, you are making me weak." Inayat said whipping her tears off. She wanted to look strong.

"You are making me a living dead man, what about that?" Samar said as he got apart.

"You shouldn't be doing this. You are married, now." Inayat reminded.

Samar corrected her again, "I am not married yet." He said, "Plus, I am not cheating on her. Not with my dying love."

Inayat chuckled at that.

The two sat quietly at peace. Inayat then said, “By the way, would you name your daughter after me?”

“Inayat, that’s so creepy.”

“Why, it’s so cute?”

“No, it’s cheesy and weird. Plus, Shehnaaz must have her own plans for that.”

Inayat accepted with tight lips. And then she said as she recalled, “You know, one thing?”

“What?”

“I loved you from the first time we met on the plane.”

Samar frowned at her as he said, “No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did. I just didn’t know.”

“Well, I knew it from the same time,” Samar said.

Inayat nodded, “That’s why we are still together.”

Samar smiled.

The two talked some more and then Inayat was getting sleepy. She had her medicine and needed to rest now.

Samar said to her, “You can rest now. I will not leave by your side.”

Inayat looked into his eyes and said as she meant it, “Don’t forget me.”

Samar held her hand on his chest as he shook his head, “Not in this life.”

Inayat then got comfortable in his arms and yawned. Placing her head on his chest, her legs out straight touching his, she fell asleep.

Shadow of the day- Linkin Park

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Soniya Xavier

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Soniya is a passionate storyteller who believes that some emotions are too deep to be spoken and can only be expressed through words on a page. Her writing explores love, loss, longing, hope, and the quiet moments that shape our lives.

Through her stories, she aims to create characters who feel real and emotions that stay with readers long after the final page. *Yours Samar* is a heartfelt journey into love, memories, and the complexities of the human heart.

When she is not writing, Soniya enjoys finding inspiration in everyday moments, books, music, and the stories people carry within them.

This is her debut novel, and she hopes it resonates with readers who have ever loved, lost, or searched for a piece of themselves in someone else's story.

EPILOGUE

IN THE PRESENT

"How long has it been for her demise?" Asked the therapist.

Samar looked up at her from the floor with his moist eyes and told, "2 Years."

"And how do you feel about it now?"

Samar got back on his sitting position, hands on his knees and inhaled a long breath not able to come up with an answer.

"Still not able to accept it." The Therapist concluded.

Samar finally nodded. "It still hurts." He said, "I think, it always will. A little." Samar sniffed and corrected his specs that he wore now.

The two went silent for a minute as Samar composed himself, thought about it, and said, "See, I know, what it takes to move on. I have done that in the past. For every person that I loved and lost, whether it was because of separation or death, I learnt to ignore my feelings and slowly forget about their existence so that I can live with harmony."

The therapist had frowned brows at that but she continued to ask, "Right, and?"

"I just... don't want to do that this time."

"Why is that?"

"Because, I think, that's the least I can do for her. To not forget her. She deserves that much."

"Indeed." She nodded briefly, "I can understand where you are coming from. When a soul as vibrant and alive as her dies it does take away a lot of colours from the lives of the ones who loved her. I know. But do you know that you can still remember her in your heart while you live happily and

grow and move on in life? I mean, isn't it what she would have wanted for you? Or you would have wanted for her if she was in your place?"

Samar shook his head, as he said, "I wish, it was me."

"What do you think killed Inayat?" She asked next, "Well, other than cancer."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"She died because of remorse."

Samar was quite in shock. "But why?" He said then, "She was good a person."

"Yes, she was. But aren't we all?" She said, and explained, "She just expected too much and did not simply accept the fact that you can still make mistakes. Major mistakes."

He was still thinking about it as he said, "I don't get it. What guilt must she have?"

"That she refused the love of her life. She thought she knew better but she was as unaware as you were when Shehnaaz proposed you."

"Okay, so how does that fit together?"

"I learned that she does this often. Remember when you asked her how she handled her parents' death? She said she wasn't there. That was her first subconscious response. Deep down, she believes her presence wouldn't have helped—or might have made things worse. It's her way of blaming herself, even though she did everything she could."

That's why she runs away. She ran when you two had a misunderstanding, and she ran again after her fight with Nazim. When your response to fear is always flight, you never stay long enough to face it and grow."

She paused before adding, "In that way, you two are very similar. Both of you blame yourselves for things that were never truly in your control."

"I wish I knew that."

"Yeah? And you know, it is guilt that you have for which you are refusing to move on, too?"

"What do you mean?"

"You thought, leaving her and finally accepting Shehnaaz was the right thing you did. Which you later found out was not, because she did not cheat on you. In fact, she left you to save you from all the burden. So, now, you are not able to move on because you feel guilty for having moved on when you think you should have stayed put with her."

Samar was quite.

"Samar, remember what she told you? The things you did not do intentionally are the things you did not do at all. So stop blaming yourself and forgive yourself."

Samar nodded understanding her point of views but not able to resonate or apply.

"Be grateful, Samar," she added, "You have the chance to change in life. You have a great family, wife who adores you, friends who care about you, fans who love your work. Not everyone has it. You can still make things right with them."

"So, are you saying I should forget about her? Let her go?"

"Forgetting about someone and letting them go are two completely separate things. You can still remember her while living a happy and fulfilling life and letting her go."

Samar was quite then thinking about it all.

The therapist then, said, "Isn't it beautiful, though..." Samar turned up, "to be able to grieve?"

"It's beautiful?" Samar raised a brow.

"It is." She said, "It shows that you have feeling of losing something that was precious to you. And that is because you had found something that you have feelings for. That means, you got to have something that you really wanted and liked and will remember for the rest of your life. That's beautiful. To be able to have something you can take with you as you go on with

your life. To be able to feel something real. It's better than not feeling anything at all."

Samar had tears in his eyes after hearing it and briefly nodded. "I guess."

They stayed quite for moment and then she said, "So, what do you say?"

Samar nodded and said, " But I do have a lot that I wanted to say to her and I can't."

"There are ways you can express your feelings for her for the last time before you move on, Samar."

Samar nodded and after thinking, said, "I would like to write her a letter. The last letter. With all that I had to say to her and then maybe..."

The therapist nodded, "Sure."

SAMAR'S LETTER

Dear Ruhi,

I hope you are well wherever you are. I just wanted to let you know of somethings.

I tried to be an aspiring writer where I tell the positive stories. To make them believe that you can get a nice ending. The ending that you looked for. But, in reality, Inayat, it is not true. You may or may not get the ending you wanted for your story. That is the harsh reality. But I don't think anyone should be unhappy about it. Because we are not here to get an ending of our choice. We are here to live and experience. Because the endings do not make the time worthwhile. The moments do. The things we did together. The love that we shared. That's what makes it a worthy story.

And this story is worthy because you are in it. The book I wrote. It is not my love that makes it a victory. It is yours. It is the love you showed me in ways I could not see. You gave me the life I have now. Meeting you was the reason I decided to write again. Getting apart made me determined. And staying in love with you made me successful. I know, you will not accept it. You will want me to be proud of myself. I kind of am. But I am also very grateful. I am grateful for you. I am grateful you were here. I am grateful the time we got to spend together.

So, I would like to dedicate this victory to you. I would like to give you all the credits for my success. Because you were there even when you were not. You were here with me through my thoughts and dreams. Your words were remembered. And considering how much of it is you, I can at least do this much.

I still do wish I had you here in a way that I did not have to write this all and could tell you directly. But really it is okay, now. Since, I know you are better off wherever you are now. It is better for both of us. Best for all. As you use to say, there are things you have to do for your loved ones even when they would not want you to do so. That is sacrifice. I wish I'd learned it before. I wish, I had learned to let go. I should have lived the way you wanted me to. I tried and you know it. Well, now I can only say that. And

that I know now that this all was probably right. I will still always love you. But I will also try to live. I will try to be the best version of myself. I will try to fall in love, again. I will try to be happy with what I have. I will do whatever you wanted me to do and I will do it with all my heart and soul. And hopefully one day when we meet again, you will be proud of me and stay with me, forever.

Till then, I am here looking for your cheer, finding you in all the people who love me, and keeping you in my heart, still.

Yours,

Samar