

ENGLISH
VERSION

Why Not Me?



A feeling of millions

ANUBHAV AGRAWAL

Iwritewhatyoufeel®



Why Not Me?

A feeling of millions

(English Version)

A DEBUT NOVEL BY ANUBHAV AGRAWAL

About The Author

Anubhav Agrawal is a writer, poet and a social media influencer. He was born in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh and has earned his degree in Master of Business Administration before embarking on a journey as a writer.



He's the founder of a famous poetry community Iwritewhatyoufeel[®] which has more than 2.8 Million followers on social media.

He started writing as a hobby, later then, it became his passion, and now he writes to heal people with broken hearts and hopes. He has influenced millions of people through his podcasts and poetries, and showed them the bright side of everything that happens.

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Acknowledgement

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*Kabhi kabhi beintehaan mohabbat bhi,
Thodi reh jaati hai...*

CHAPTER 1- LIFE AS IT IS!

Life! A word set right to describe childhood days. Roaming around fearlessly, with friends, and a lot of playtime with them in the park besides our house. Lukka chuppi, baraf paani, loha lakkad, and cricket; those were an all-time favorite. Childhood is the best time of life, isn't it? Because the time that comes after it isn't easy to deal with. The fight with work, people, bosses, and yourself isn't going to be easy.

Just like every normal family, I have 5 members in my house. My parents, two brothers, and me! The environment at my home is very free and transparent, despite my dad being a government officer. And I believe it's all because of my Maa. She's the one who has kept us sane throughout, stayed home with us and met all our needs. My eldest brother worked for the stock market and the other one was already done with his BBA.

You know how the youngest lad of the family is always everyone's favourite, that was me!

Amongst my two elder brothers who always did all the work and also received all the lashings, I was the one who was pampered and loved by all, given all that I asked for and on the other hand, all the blames for everything that happened were put on my poor brothers.

Things were going good, life was amazing, I was performing good at school and my parents were happy. But things don't remain the same forever.

Enter the internet and Orkut. After Grade 8, when I had access to the internet; my mind always kept wandering to Orkut and thinking if I received scrap from that girl or not? Would she even send me a scrap? I started spending most of my time on the internet.

And as a result, my books and grades were both sidelined.

It was known as the age of Orkut. It was young and so was I. Orkut took control over all my nerves and brain cells, and the only thing that I wanted and could think about was to make friends! Time started flying on the internet, it kept me busy. And that's how I spent, or let's say wasted 2 of my school years. I was in Grade 10 now!

Never in life, I had the courage to step up to a girl and even utter a single "*Hi*". But social media gave me that courage and confidence to talk to people I didn't even know personally.

Anyway, as kids we all probably followed the same routine every day.

Get up at 6.

Have a bath, which was quite possibly the most difficult task for everyone. Right?

Get dressed and head for school.

"I hate taking a bath! Why do we have to bathe anyway? We have deodorants!"

God! Summers or winters, I just hate bathing!"

I was quite lost in my own thoughts when I heard a voice from behind,

"Anu, I've cooked your favourite spiced potatoes for the lunch box. And please, make sure that you eat it and not your friends; as always. Have it as soon as the lunch break starts. Alright?"

So that's my Maa. Isn't she the cutest? Always taking care of my needs and making sure that I don't end up staying hungry at lunch. Which I actually did, because my friends always stole my lunch box.

I'd actually blame my Maa for that, she cooks amazing. So why wouldn't they steal?

"Argh! I can't help it, Maa. My friends steal my tiffin right before the lunch break. But today I'll make sure that I eat it way before lunch. Thank you!" I said, laughing and cuddling my mom.

Maa packed my bag, I gave her a hug and headed for the bus stop.

"Why does my Maa love me so much? What is love? Why do we live like this? What is life for? Why do people want to love someone?"

Pretty heavy thoughts for a tenth-grader, right? But that was me, always having thoughts which were way too complicated for my teeny tiny head. Amidst all those thoughts, I didn't realize that I'd reached the bus stop.

I saw my friend Ankit standing there, and as usual Aryan was late. I knew that idiot would, like a habit, again run behind the bus to get in!

Ankit and I kept staring at Aryan's door.

Did it open? Did he come out? Is he even coming to school?

The bus is here but there's no sign of Aryan. We stepped in, took our seats and the bus started moving. And that's when we heard a scream from behind.

"Stop the bus! Stooooopppp"

We laughed for a while, made him run as a punishment, enjoyed it, and then alerted the driver about Aryan running behind. He immediately stopped the bus, and let Aryan in.

So, Aryan is one of those people who never learns from his mistakes and would never be on time. He'd run behind the bus everyday, but would never step out of the house 5 minutes early to get to the bus stop in time. We all welcomed him with thumps of fists on his back. Too many thumps!

It was Aryan's turn to sit on the window seat today, which was taken away from him, by us, as a punishment of being late again.

CHAPTER 2 – IT’S TIME TO BUCKLE UP FOR BOARDS!

We were halfway through Grade 10 now. It was almost time for the board exam time-table to be put up.

I reached school, but it wasn’t the same. I didn’t like St. Paul’s anymore. I was tired of looking at the same old building with peeling paints off the walls, the broken windows, old chairs and tables with names of students engraved on them, the students who must have left school years ago. I wanted to leave this place. I wanted a change, a change for the better.

We took our seats in the class. I didn’t want to stay at St. Paul’s anymore. I was tired of the daily schedule, and most importantly of the fact that it was an all-boys school. I’d spent almost a quarter of my life in an all-boys school, with almost no girls to talk to around. Can you imagine how torturous that is!

“After the boards, I’m going to change my school. I want to spend at least the last two years of high school as a normal child in a co-ed school. Yes. I am going to do that.”

“Anubhav! Anubhav!! Where are you lost? The exam time-table is up. They start from 2nd of March,” screamed Anmol, bringing me out of my thoughts.

We spent the whole day worrying about how we’d prepare for the exams and how we had already wasted almost the whole year doing nothing!

I had a few friends, Ankit, Deepak, Pranjal and Aryan. But Ankit was the closest of all. I shared every little bit with him. Good or bad. Also, Ankit was a living proof for why you always become best friends with someone who’s exactly like you. And he was. He lived near my house, we shared the same hobbies and were in the same school. Who else could’ve been my best friend if not him? It was pretty obvious.

Ankit was the kind of guy who'd tell you where you're wrong. He had small brown eyes, and full framed spectacles, which always kept slipping from his nose. His nose was long and sharp and really pointy. Honestly, that made him look like Pinocchio. He had a hint of a moustache and no signs of a beard yet. He was tall, healthy and really lazy. He always wore clothes bigger than him and had really small feet for a boy.

Unlike mine, he had a smaller family with just his parents and a baby sister. One thing I know for sure is that he was always scolded because of me. And maybe sometimes even received a left and right on the cheek. The reason being that I always called him during the exams, so we could go out and relax for a while, or maybe have an ice pop here and there.

I never enjoyed being surrounded by friends or people. I liked my privacy and have always been an introvert in these cases. This also played to my benefit, because my Maa always said,

"Do whatever you want in your life, but promise me that always, always you will stay away from drinks and cigarettes."

..so that's what I did. I never touched them.

Today was not so bad, because I enjoyed my lunch on my own. Remember those idiots who always stole my lunch? Anmol and Pranjali, they were absent today. And this gave me the luxury of enjoying my Aloo Parathas all by myself. But that luxury did not change mine or anybody else's facial expression. Our faces were still pale with the news of the exams commencing on March 2nd.

"Oh my god! What are we even going to do? How will we complete such a vast portion? I can't think straight. I am so scared. I'm losing my mind" said a scared Deepak, finally breaking the pin-drop silence.

"Don't worry bro. Tell me how have we passed our exams to date? We remember our Lord Bhole and he never let us fail a single exam. If we've done this before, we can do this again." I assured him with a laugh.

At least that made everyone laugh for a while. We all started planning how we'd study and make the best use of time. And in case, just in case, if

we fail, we need a plan B to survive. We booked our future businesses sitting there in the cafeteria. We decided on who would sell groundnuts, who'd run a tea stall, and who would drive a rickshaw to earn a living.

We cleared our lunch table and left for our classes, waiting for the school hours to end.

The moment I reached home; I was lost in the thoughts of changing my school. I considered many options but found DMA to be the best of all. I'd always heard a lot about it and the most important thing was that almost all of the children in my area went to that school, except me.

"Listen Anubhav! The time-table for the exams was put up today and Lalit Sir is going to be really strict now, so make sure that you're not late for the tuition. Pick me up on time. Okay?" Pranjal texted me.

"Alright. I'll be there." I replied.

I came back from the tuitions, and the Sun had already set. This day was pretty uneventful. Normally my days aren't so uneventful. Is something wrong? Is this the silence before a storm? Or am I overthinking again?

Just as I started growing old, so did Orkut.

Scraps were now a thing of the past and 'chat' had entered our life. Facebook was taking over, and just like everyone else even I created an account in the hopes of making at least a few new friends.

Having no companion my age at the house, my only partners were my books. But they were so boring that the moment I opened them, I instantly felt sleepy. Like they had some kind of strong sleeping pill in them. I tried studying for a while but eventually gave up.

For refreshment, I turned on my computer and logged in to Facebook. Just as I logged in, I saw a part on my wall, stating 'People you may know'. I closed my eyes and randomly sent a friend request to the people on that list.

I grew up in the '90s, in the era of hopeless romantic movies. And that made me a hopeless romantic. I always wanted that one love in my life, the

person I could live with and share everything; my life, my happiness, my sorrows, and eventually marry her. The only difficulty I had was that I never found someone like that, yet. Keeping in mind that I went to an all-boys school.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FIRST CONVERSATION

Everybody sees the world in their own way, according to what they want to see. For me, the world turned pretty colourful and crackers burst around me, the moment I saw this notification on my Facebook wall “Friend request accepted”.

Does this mean that the person has accepted me as a friend without even meeting me? Without even seeing me? Is this for real?

I clicked on the notification to see who this person was. Zoya Khan, such a delicate name; I thought. I noticed that there’s no profile picture, no pictures with any friends; felt a bit weird. “Am I being catfished?” I thought.

“This person accepted my request two hours ago, should I send a message or not? Oh, what’s the harm in sending a message? I’ll just send it”

I opened her chatbox and sent a really simple “Hey” along with a smiley face. I was now just waiting for a reply and her friendship.

Sometimes I wonder how naïve is our heart, it doesn’t think, doesn’t question, just stays there and waits for the person forever. The heart makes a mistake and the soul is the one that suffers the consequences.

“Dinner is ready Anu! Turn off your computer, have your dinner and sit to study; your boards are to start soon.” Maa screamed from the kitchen, scolding me.

“I’m coming, just give me five more minutes with this” I replied.

It had been a few days that I’d sent the message. No reply, yet. I checked my messages every day. Patient. Waiting. Wondering. I waited for her name to pop up on the top of my screen, I wanted to see that, I wanted

to know her, I wanted to talk to her. I was nervous. Maybe because all the friends I had in my life were only guys. I never, ever in my life, had had a small talk with a girl.

Every boy should have a girl-friend. Space between words, a girl who's a friend. More so a best friend. Because she'd always be the person you can look up to, to share your feelings, your problems, and literally everything! I believe it's quite important to have that in your life because that girl will never judge you or even your silliest habit and emotion. She'd make you laugh and you'd make her laugh, no promises no conditions, just pure friendship. That girl will always support you, would never let you face a bad situation alone.

And. I never had a person of these sorts in my life. Maybe that's the reason I was waiting for her message with such impatience.

I was smiling from ear to ear. I didn't wait for another second to reply to her.

"How are you?"

"I'm good, how're you?"

And then, one fine day, when I had lost all hopes of receiving a message, I finally saw the notification.

Zoya Khan has sent you a message, *"Hi!"*

The next message was probably the stupidest thing I could've done.

"I'm good very well thank you love you all"

I am sure she had no reason to control her laughter. I could feel her laughing through the message. She sent a *"Hahaha"*.

This conversation continued for a while and she suddenly sent this message.

"You're quite interesting, you know that right?"

I was stunned. First of all, I've never spoken to a girl in my life and secondly, the first girl I talk to, calls me interesting. This was big. During the whole conversation, I kept smiling ear to ear. It was the smile that I had never seen on my face, ever.

"Okay, now I have to go. Bye!"

I wanted to talk more. I didn't want her to go. But I couldn't stop her. I feel she wanted to talk too.

I have a quality, or let's just call it the sixth sense maybe? I can read the person's emotions in the words they speak; I can very well know what the person wants and what would make them happy. I can sense if they're trying to hide something or are unable to put their feelings into words.

I know this is quite weird, but that feeling, that sense is what told me that there's something here, hold on to it.

CHAPTER 4 – HALF-LEFT

A few days later, I got back on track and finally stopped thinking about Zoya. I wasn't worried about talking to her, but the one thing that I worried about, for sure, was the board exams. The moment I looked at my friends and classmates' faces; almost everyone had a face as long as a fiddle.

Everybody was busy praying to our Lord Bhole. I guess they took my idea pretty seriously.

“Lord Bhole, please don't let me fail this exam, I promise I'll study next time.”

I came back home that day and checked Facebook. And once again to my disappointment, there was no message from Zoya.

I shrugged my shoulders and decided to focus on my studies. And in addition to that, being the child of an Indian family; I was banned from using any social media during the exam time, or any electronic gadget for that matter.

After a lot of convincing and talking to my Maa, I finally got the permission to keep my phone with me. I was happy with it and didn't ask for more. I got back on track and started studying for my exams. They weren't as far as I thought they were. But the sad news was that I couldn't check my Facebook account till I get done with my exams.

Group study, which was a pretty famous trick to get out of the house and meet your friends, was my only way to get a break from all the long study hours. Trust me, it's a scam. No one, I repeat no one has ever studied seriously during a group study session. My partner for group study was Aryan. We would do everything except study, we'd waste our time by taking unnecessary breaks from late-night Maggi to taking at least 5 coffee breaks. But we also made sure that if we're not studying, we won't let our friends' study as well. We made sure that we call or at least text our friends'

once every hour to check how much they've studied, or cry and plead them to clear our doubts and teach us a chapter.

We spent the whole month studying, and finally the day that no one was waiting for arrived.

But isn't that life? You've to go through the days that you don't wait for and also the ones you wait for.

"Oh God be merciful! Exams start tomorrow."

This time I took the exams pretty seriously. I studied with all my heart until the last exam. Following the Indian tradition, every morning before leaving for the exam, my Maa put a red tikka on my forehead and prayed till I came back home. And my Dad, he was busy making offers to me. Offers to score well and he'll get me whatever I want.

"Dear, if you score 80%, I promise you I'll get you the bike you've always wanted; the top end model."

"Dad, if you cared about me having the bike, you would've bought it by now. Why are you making excuses?"

I have had a lot of quarrels with my Dad about the bike and scooty, but every time he got out of it based either on technicality or some good old excuse. But this time, I felt that if I really scored 80%, he might actually end up buying the bike for me. Let's just pray for the best and keep studying.

The two weeks of exams felt like an eternity to me. I had butterflies in my stomach on the last day of the exam. I finally did it! No more studying for a month or so! I was on cloud 9.

Now all that I waited for were the results, after that, I'd just pack my bags and shift from St. Paul's to DMA. Oh, how I've waited for this to happen.

As soon as I came back from the school after the exams, I threw my bag on the bed, didn't even freshen up, and like a toddler waiting for his candy, turned the computer on, and logged into Facebook.

As soon as I opened the chats, all I could see was a flood of messages from my friends, but I scrolled down them all to look for the name Zoya Khan. But I couldn't find it. Where did the name disappear? Did she unfriend me? Did she delete the conversation? Did I accidentally delete the conversation? Noooooo!

And then suddenly something caught my eye. *'Facebook user'*. I opened the chatbox and realized that this was the conversation I had with Zoya. The first thought that entered my mind was,

"Did she block me? Why would she block me? Did I say something wrong? Oh my god, I shouldn't have disappeared like that for so long, I should've at least dropped her a text. Will she ever unblock me?"

I waited, checked every day to see if she unblocked me. But all my hopes were a waste, she did not unblock me. All I could see was *'Facebook User'* and a *conversation left half*.

CHAPTER 5 - SHE'S BACK!

Orkut was long gone; it was all about Facebook in the world. Everyone I knew was busy creating accounts, uploading their pictures, updating statuses, and anyway they had nothing to do right? Who studies during summer vacations? And the result hadn't come out yet so we weren't busy with the admissions as well. Everybody was busy making new friends on Facebook, it was so easy to make and break a relationship on Facebook.

You like them? Add them as a friend.

You don't? Block them!

I started following the trend, and one day, out of the blue, I saw the name Zoya Khan on my chat screen again. I was happy, very happy! I immediately sent her a chat.

"Hi, I thought you blocked me."

I believe she had started typing the reply even before my chat reached her, I saw a popup almost instantly. It was as if she knew what my message would be.

"I didn't block you, don't take me wrong, I had to shut down my account due to the exams. I couldn't focus on my studies."

All the thoughts I had, all the doubts, vanished. I was so relieved.

"Oh, then that's okay. How were your exams?" I replied, trying to extend the conversation.

"I am not sure, I believe I did well, rest I've left it all on Allah. If he wants me to pass, he'll work his magic."

"You'll pass, I'm sure. Don't worry so much"

She seemed very scared, I just wanted to comfort her. Maybe with just words right now.

“I don’t want to just pass the exams; I want to ace them, Anubhav Agrawal. I’ve always topped all of my classes. And moreover, if I don’t score well, I won’t get into AMU.”

“Look at you now. I am worried if I’d even pass the exams and you want to ace them? How ironic is this!” I said playfully.

“Anyway, let’s set this apart, you’re from Rampur to! Which school do you go to?” I sent a double text.

“Whitehall Public School” she replied

Whenever I had a conversation with her, I always addressed her as Zoya Ji. ‘Ji’ is used as a term of respect. Again, a thing which was drilled into my brain since childhood by my Dad was to respect girls. No matter what. Never treat them with disrespect and never raise your voice on them. And I truly followed that.

We talked for hours, almost every day; about the most random things in the world. I hadn’t asked for her number yet. I didn’t have the courage to. I wanted to know if she’s with someone or single. And I was not courageous enough to be upfront about it. So, I just let it flow; making the most random conversations.

“Zoya, tell me about your family members?”

“Ammi, my elder brother and me; there are the three of us.”

She didn’t mention her father. That’s odd.

“Oh! And your father?”

“He left us 2 years ago. He’s no more.”

Sometimes, even if you don’t know a person, you still feel like you’ve known them for so long. That’s the same thing I felt for Zoya. I felt a wave of emotions the moment she said that. I couldn’t imagine the pain, because I was the closest to my Dad in my family, and I couldn’t imagine my life without him. So, I cannot even estimate the amount of pain she must’ve been through.

Neither did I have the courage to say something to her, nor could I think of anything. Under the fear of saying something wrong, I just left the computer and headed for my Dad's room. I sat with him for a while. And then I headed back to the computer. I checked 2 messages from Zoya Khan.

"What happened? Where did you leave mid-conversation?"

"Anubhav Ji, you should never leave without at least saying bye."

I was a little astonished when I saw that message, astonished and happy though. Happy that someone cares for me, that someone would wait around if I don't reply to their text. I know I know, I am making a lot out of just two messages, but for me, even those two messages showed concern. I was feeling all this for the first time, and hence, astound and happy.

I got back to reality and realized I still hadn't replied to her texts. I immediately sent apologies.

She came back online and that night, we talked till 3 am. I couldn't stop grinning all the while. This was one of my firsts. So, I finally gathered the courage to ask her what I wanted to.

"Zoya, can I ask you a question?" I was still scared though.

"Yes sure." She replied.

"Are you with someone? Dating I mean." I was scared to death now!

"Allah Tauba, never. I stay far away from all these things. I believe they're really bad, they push you away from your ambitions and people are really mean as a whole."

That was pretty straight forward. I felt like I shouldn't have asked that question.

"Hah! That's true, but not all people are mean. But not everyone is bad right?" I said, hinting towards myself.

"Maybe, maybe not. I'm single and happy." Straight forward again.

Everyone has a past. No one would hate people for no reason at all. I wanted to know what was her reason to hate people around her. Slowly and gradually I moved forward with the conversation and she slowly opened up. I got to know that she truly loved a guy named Zaid before, and he broke her heart terribly. He left her for someone else. She shared a lot of things about her past with him, and I felt she's still heartbroken.

"This healing is going to take time. A lot of time." I thought to myself.

I couldn't believe that I hadn't seen her yet. But I had an image of her in my head.

A girl with eyes shaped like almonds. Serene on her face, luscious long black hair, one strand of it touching her face gently. Rosy lips and blushed cheeks. The perfect Indian shade and a cute little nose ring. Almost like an Angel. Bringing heaven on earth.

I wanted to keep up with the image of her in my head but also wanted to know how she looked in person. I tried asking her for pictures but always got a clear big NO. And above that, whenever I asked for her number, I always got a very diplomatic reply saying, *"You'll get it when it's the right time."* I didn't know when this time would come, or would it even come at all? I honestly felt that time is always the same. Same seconds, same minutes and same hours and days. What's so big about being the right time.

CHAPTER 6 – NUMBER EXCHANGED; BUT NOT HEARTS

20 days had passed. Seriously? I couldn't believe it. It felt like yesterday that she accepted my friend request. Every single day she had a different impact on me and my mind. An impact which could not be changed or altered, only enhanced. In a way, she had enchanted me!

I didn't know if this is just love, or I just like her, but whatever it was; it was amazing and I loved that feeling. She felt like a really close friend, you know; like family? I never thought of the cultural differences that we had or the problems that we might face in the future. All I did was just like her and adore her. That's all I ever wanted to do. I had never met someone like her, and I believed I never would. It had become a routine for me to talk to Zoya every day. In fact, that was the time of the day I always waited for so much.

"I am going! I can't believe it, I'm going! Yayyy!" She seemed ecstatic.

I was worried for a moment. Is she leaving the city? Where is she going?

"Where are you headed to? And why so suddenly? We just started talking like a few days back, you already want to leave?"

"Oh ho uninvited drama, I am going to AMU! I am leaving for Aligarh the day after tomorrow."

"Oh! That's umm, great...even I have been shortlisted for DMA" I didn't have words to speak.

I never met her, I never saw her, and yet I felt like something broke in my chest. It was like someone shoved a rock down my throat. It felt heavy. I didn't want to say all this to her, I didn't want to steal her thunder. But I feared the thought that now we both will be in different cities. If there ever was a chance, even that's gone.

“Congratulations! Zoya, Good luck!”

“Congratulations to you too Anubhav Ji!”

I felt utterly stupid at that moment. Felt like everything from my hand was slipping away, like all this while all I had were false hopes. I had hurt myself with my own thoughts and hopes. The weird feeling of love or like, was even more strong, now that I realized she's moving cities.

“How can you ever like someone without even seeing them in person? Just with their words and name. How does that even make sense?” I thought to myself.

I again asked the question which had already been rejected so many times before.

“What did you think about giving me your phone number?” I asked. Still scared.

“Anubhav, see, if I move to Aligarh, I probably wouldn't carry a cell phone, but if I do, I'll drop you a text. Is that cool? You can give me your phone number if you want.” she said, yet again convincingly.

“Okay” and then I sent her my number.

We talked and talked, but I still kept feeling that stone in my throat and the heaviness in my chest. There was a lot unsaid. Thousands of thoughts were running around my mind, I couldn't sit straight. I didn't know what was happening, why it was happening. Confused and lost.

The day that I feared was here. I felt weird on a whole nother level. I was sad. I was famished. My mom was starting to get worried now, she asked me like a gazillion times.

“What is wrong beta? Are you okay?”

What would I have replied, what could I have said? I didn't know what I was feeling, how could I even put it in words?

On top of all that, I didn't know what to say to Zoya. So, I just simply sent her a chat message.

“Zoya Ji, I will miss you. I don’t know why, but I definitely miss you.”

“Oh, why would you even miss me?” Was she teasing me?

“Haha, are you actually trying to tease me here? I’m trying to have a serious moment Miss. Zoya. But no, on a very serious note, some people will always have a place in your heart.”

“And you always end up paying a very heavy price for keeping people in your heart.”

“Possibly, but a person should always give themselves that one chance, who knows; if this time it’s the right person for you? And you cannot always judge everything on the basis of what you’ve experienced. Right?”

“Whatever! I don’t want to keep anyone in my heart, nor do I want to be in someone’s heart” she seemed angry.

“Okay okay. Don’t be angry.”

CHAPTER 7 – IS THIS LOVE?

And just as she said, that she'd text me as soon as she reached Aligarh. She did.

Though an unknown number, I instantly knew it was her.

"Hello, Ji."

"Reached Zoya Ji?"

I would like to believe that she was stunned because that's what the next message conveyed as well.

"How did you know it was me? Tell me honestly, did you have my number all this while?"

"No, I didn't. I just took a wild guess."

Things were getting weird, my feelings for her started growing. I still didn't know what to do. I was thinking about her all day long. Like typical Bollywood style love. I imagined meeting her. It felt like I was surrounded by people playing the love songs from Bollywood. A clear blue sky and a golden evening. The grass would be dancing to the music and would be the happiest that they touched her feet. And I swear I could see butterflies hovering around her. Dressed in a dress as bright as the setting Sun, she would look precious when the Sun rays would kiss her cheek gently and leave a shine on her.

I imagined the conversations we would have, how we would walk around the park and chase butterflies. Or how I would try to hold her hand but move it away instantly in the fear of getting scolded.

She might've moved cities, but she didn't move away from my thoughts and my wishes.

Sometimes I did feel the distance between us. Not physical distance but the distance that we had emotionally. Maybe I was too attached, maybe she wasn't interested. Maybe she was too scared. Maybe. Maybe.

And one fine day I decided to distance myself from her. Not that I had stopped loving her, but I just couldn't hurt myself more.

April 16, 2012, while talking to her, I started talking as if I didn't know her. I started distancing myself. And I disappear mid-conversation.

I kept battling between my mind and my heart. My mind wanted to stay away from her and not hurt myself anymore, but the feelings in my heart said, even though one-sided, we'd still get to talk to each other, I would still know her, even if she doesn't accept me.

I didn't care that we belonged to different cultural backgrounds. I didn't care that she would never accept me.

She kept sending me messages, forwards, jokes, but I never replied to a thing.

April 20, 2012, I had had enough of the fight between my heart and my mind. I have not decided that I would at least convey my feelings. I'll tell her what I feel. What I want. I made up my mind. No matter what the reply, I will confess.

"Zoya, I want to confess something, since a few days, in fact from the moment we started talking to each other. But I never had the courage to tell you that. I feared that we would even stop being friends if I ever confessed it to you. Many things have changed between us. At least from my side. I don't know if these things, these feelings are valid or not. But I can't control my heart. Can I? And now these feelings have become so strong that I cannot control them. I like you Zoya, and not just like, I believe I have started loving you. It's weird, without seeing or listening to a person how can you fall in love with them? But I believe that this is the purest kind of love because I love who you are and not how you look."

I typed this after three attempts. Every time I wrote something, I thought about how she would respond to it. And in the end, I just sent it. Didn't think of anything. I just wanted to get that load off of my chest. My brain knew that I was making a mistake, but this was one of those times where I heard more of my heart than my brain.

"Listen, can you come over to my place?" I sent a text to Ankit.

"On my way" He replied instantly

I tried to take my mind away from the message I just sent Zoya. Ankit came home, and I told him about all that had happened. He didn't question, didn't comment about it. He asked me to come out of the house and go for a walk.

Late at night, my phone buzzed.

"Why?"

I didn't understand, but yet I knew what she tried to convey with that one single word.

"Why can't we just be friends? Why is it so difficult? Why did you have to ruin it all? Why did you have to fall for me? You said you're not like the others, you're different, I thought so too. But now, I don't. I don't think you're different. You're the same as every other guy. You're no different. I honestly didn't expect this from you."

I had an answer to every question she asked. But I didn't want to say them out loud. Because I understood what she wanted. And moreover, I didn't want to lose her as a friend as well. I wanted to cry my heart out. I didn't know where to go. So, I called up Ankit.

I cried and cried and cried. He didn't question, he just let me cry. Zoya's message had hurt me, hurt me to the very core of my heart. I had never been so emotionally invested in someone, and the first time turns out like this? It was one of my worst dreams.

That day, I learnt one thing, friendship above love. Both experiences taught me this, the one with Zoya and the other with Ankit. I learnt that a

friend would always support you, even with the stupidest ideas.

Next day, when I came back from school, I threw my bag and my socks in the room, ran for my phone, as usual, to check if Zoya texted me. But to my disappointment, there was no text from her. I thought I'll text her casually and have a normal conversation.

"Hello Ji, how are you?"

10 minutes later....

"I am okay, how are you?" Zoya replied.

"I am okay."

Neither of us mentioned the confession today. She was behaving coldly again, somehow distant. I didn't feel that she was happy to talk to me today, as she used to be. Everything was just cold, the messages, the selection of words, everything. I couldn't stand it, I tried reasoning with her again.

"Zoya, all I am asking is to give yourself a chance, to me, to us, who knows good things might come your way and you'd have a chance at love and happiness."

"Anubhav even if I try, tell me how will it be beneficial? Everything will send some or the other day, and regretting then will be even worse than stopping it now."

"Love doesn't provide you with benefits or losses, it just happens. No conditions and no guidelines. And it's never in control."

I had no more words to explain to her the whys or whats of love. Zoya has hardened her heart, she's built a wall which grows every single day around her heart. More than that, she would never let her word be proven wrong. But this unreasonable anger and the habit of always pushing me away were doing nothing but pulling me more towards her. I was trying more than before, I was trying to control myself, but I just ended up falling in love with her more. Every, single, day.

CHAPTER 8 – WILL I NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU SOUND LIKE?

“O kay, let's leave the love part aside, tell me one thing, will I never know what you sound like?” which I was desperate for. I wanted to know what she sounds like, is it the same voice in my head which reads all her messages for me? Or is it prettier than that, whatever and however it is, I am sure it will be the sweetest voice I've ever heard.

“There's always a time for everything, maybe this has its own.”

Declined again? Oh god, she is so stern on her words. And what is this deal with, at the right time? I don't get this!

I guess Zoya was trying to play it cool, or make me chase her. But why would she try that? I was already head over heels for her. But no matter how cold she plays, I am sure that the day I hear her voice, every cell in my body will melt.

Ever since childhood I have had everything I've ever wanted. Without even asking twice for it. But it wasn't the same in this case, I knew that If I wanted Zoya's love, I would have to earn it. Nobody can give it to me, it can only be earned by persistence and efforts. And I was ready, mentally prepared to do whatever it took to get the love, the one thing I desired the most.

The thing that disturbed me was that I had no one to share the things that were happening with Zoya. It was only Ankit, who knew about me and Zoya. But the worst part is me not being able to share anything with him because he was still in St. Paul's and I had moved to DMA. The timings were different, the tuition timings were different, this didn't give us a chance to talk to each other or meet as before.

“Tell me one thing Anubhav, don't you want to be loved? Be in a relationship?” Megha said. She's funny, but little did she know about Zoya

and my love for her.

I met Megha in DMA. A sweet and sorted person, with curly hair and a crooked smile. A good person who would never in her worst dreams think of harming someone, even with her words.

“Okay, I’ll tell you a little about myself, I am not the guy who would get into a relationship with someone just for the sake of it. Relationships are temporary, I know what I want, a love such that there’d be books written about it.” I replied to her in a very sarcastic manner.

“Ohhoo, I meant it as a joke. Don’t get all serious. But on a very serious note, I bet that the girl who falls in love with you will be very very lucky.” Megha replied with honesty reflecting in her eyes. I could say that she really meant it.

After I came back home from school that day, I noticed that I hadn't received any text from Zoya. I was worried. Because now that she's living alone in Aligarh, we talk almost every day. So I texted her myself.

“Zoya Ji, when you text me, it always makes me feel that at least you’re thinking of me. Then the distance between us automatically starts seeming smaller.”

I kept checking my phone constantly, every time my phone beeped I thought it would be a message from Zoya. And finally, after 30 minutes I got the message.

“Sorry, I was a bit busy at school today. Couldn’t text you.” Her text read.

“Are you okay Zoya? You sound a little low.” I could sense her not being in a good mood just by these few words. I knew something was wrong. But I was also sure that, to prove herself strong, she wouldn’t confess it to me.

“Low? No. Why would you feel that? I am well. Very well in fact.” I knew she wouldn’t share. I was expecting a similar kind reply from her.

But I was persistent in my efforts and kept asking. Reluctantly. After about 10 minutes she said that she missed her Dad today.

“Tell me one thing, how’d you even know that I was low? I sent clear messages, nothing could’ve given away the fact that I was sad.” This is what she asked after I consoled her, and finally, she smiled a little.

“You know when you truly feel close to someone and want them to be happy always even a well-written message can tell you that the person isn’t okay. And this time it wasn’t even the message, there’s this little voice in my heart that kept screaming at me that you aren’t okay.”

2nd May 2012 4:31 PM, I believe this was the time when Zoya realised that I am not going to hurt her feelings. I can say that she must’ve been quite impressed by our conversation. But I was here just to impress her or make her fall for me, I was here to give her all the happiness in the world, to give her what truly she deserves.

“Listen, will you be free somewhere around 8 tonight?” She asked. And all kinds of questions started rushing their way into my mind. Then I finally replied.

“Yes definitely, even if I’m not, I know where my priorities lay. I’ll always make time for you. Just assure me that you’re okay and nothing is wrong.”

“Oh no no, nothing to be so worked up about. I just asked randomly!”

I still couldn’t figure out the deal with her. Every time she would just twist the statement and never really say what she wanted. Maybe she does that on purpose to get me to ask her repeatedly? Or maybe not?

“There’s nothing to worry about Anubhav. I asked because I thought we could talk over the call today? Maybe? Only if you don’t mind doing that.”

I COULDN’T BELIEVE IT! I started jumping with excitement! I’d finally talk to her like people with voices and not just over the messages. We would finally have a real conversation! I couldn’t control my happiness.

I wanted to dance and just be happy with the fact that this little call could be one of the stepping stones for us.

“Thank you, Zoya Ji! You made my day! I couldn’t have asked for anything better today. This is the most exciting moment of my day. I’m so happy I cannot even express it.” Is the text that I should’ve sent her. But I didn’t want to seem so desperate. I wouldn’t want her to think that I’m some creepy crazy guy who’d jump in the air with happiness. And just because of the fact that a girl would talk to me over the call. So instead I sent her this,

“Oh sure sure, definitely, why not. Any Day. I’ll be free.” I know I couldn’t have sounded dumber.

And just as she said that she'd call me at 8 in the night, she did. My phone rang, while I was in the kitchen helping out my Maa with a few things. I had a pile of utensils in my hand. As soon as I heard the phone ring, I ran as fast as I could towards the phone, and with that swift movement, I ended up dropping a few utensils which startled my Maa.

But it was all worth it the moment I heard that sweet voice saying *“Hello”* it felt like every cell, every tissue and every muscle in my body melted. It was worth the wait. And moreover, her voice was even sweeter than I imagined it to be. It felt like her voice was dipped in honey. It was all happy around me, the typical movie style. Violins playing, people dancing, leaves rustling and wind blowing.

That very day, I felt like everything would turn out to be good. Finally, she might acknowledge that she feels something for me, even if very little, but that acknowledgement is what I needed the most. We spoke for around an hour that night, 50 minutes to be precise. She told me everything about herself, her childhood days, her relationship with her family, her friends. The conversation was just flowing, there was absolutely no need of pretending to be anyone else. She adored her parents, they loved her the most, she was what we call ‘laadli’ of the family.

Zoya was always the child who would excel in studies, from kindergarten to high school, she aced every test she'd ever appeared for. She lives in a joint family, wherein everybody was so fond and protective of her, that they'd call her numerous times throughout the day to make sure that she was having her meals on time. Her elder brother Zain was the guardian brother that every girl needs in her life. From protecting her at school to making sure that her needs are met in Aligarh, he had taken care of everything. After the demise of their father, Zain took care of Zoya not like a brother but as a father.

Zoya always wanted someone who would love her as truly and unconditionally as her family, especially her father. She did not have good experiences with love before, and that explains why she was so distant all the time. She had made her mind that you will only get pain and hurt from love, and nothing else. But I knew that I wasn't here to hurt her or make her feel bad about herself, all I wanted was to give her what she wanted and deserved. I also knew that it wouldn't be easy, convincing her and making her realise my intentions is going to be the hardest thing I have ever done. Though hard, it won't be impossible.

Our conversation continued merrily until her brother called her up and she had to disconnect my call. But before she disconnected my call, I said one last thing to her,

“Zoya, I know you are scared of loving a person, and that you miss your father immensely. I know now one would ever be able to replace or compensate for the fatherly love missing from your life, and I completely understand that. But I would also like to tell you that I am not a guy who would take this up as an advantage, rather I would work my way towards your heart and make sure that I give you the love that you deserve. Nothing less nothing more.”

CHAPTER 9 – NOTHING LIKE HOME

It had been around 20 hours since we had that conversation on the call, yet it felt like I'd heard her voice a minute ago. I couldn't sleep well that night. My thoughts kept running, and I kept imagining situations. I felt like this is it, the phone call is the first step to moving forward with our relationship. She will love me as I love her.

The next morning I woke up with a big smile on my face. Ear to ear. I couldn't get the sound of her sweet voice out of my ears.

Happily, I texted her again. But something was weird today. She wasn't the same as yesterday. My thoughts started running again, *"Did I say something wrong? Did I do something to hurt her?"*. Her behaviour was changed.

I couldn't figure out what was wrong. She was different yesterday and very different today. For once she made me feel like she cares about me and that I matter to her, and today she makes me feel like I am nothing? This thing kept disturbing me, the change in behaviour, importance, it was all making me feel weird. I kept fighting it, thinking that there must've been a reason for this change. But I could do it only for so long.

I tried asking her, confronting her about these changes in behaviour, but all I ever got was a cold reply.

"Anubhav, if I have a good conversation with you, speak to you with kindness, why do you get your hopes up? Can't I have a simple good conversation with you?"

One thing that this reply always made me feel was, she's lying. But I couldn't figure out that she's lying to me or herself. I had thousands of similar questions in my mind, but she never answered even a single question upfront.

Anyway, during the conversation last night, I tried expressing my feelings, in the kindest and sweetest way possible. I believed after she got an idea of how deep my feelings ran for her, she might be able to keep her differences aside and for once consider giving me a chance. But no matter how much I tried, she wouldn't budge a bit.

Moving on with this roller coaster friendship, days kept passing on as usual. And suddenly one day, my phone beeped.

"I am coming." Said the message that Zoya sent me.

"You're coming? Where? What does that mean?" I asked.

"Rampur, my place," she replied.

"Really? That's great!! If it's possible for you, we can meet up." I was happy with the fact that we both will be in the same city again, regardless if we get to meet each other or not. I was just genuinely happy.

"Inshallah! There is nothing like home, the people that surround you, make you feel loved, and provide you with all the care. But the most important thing is, home is where my heart is, because of the one person I love the most in the world, my Ammi." She replied.

This was different. I felt great. I was happy. The way that I've never been after the phone call. I wanted to meet her, see her, and see if she looked the way she imagined her to be. But I'm sure that she'd be prettier than I imagined. Well, that's something only time could tell.

She was coming this Sunday. But before leaving Aligarh, she instructed me not to text her.

And I understand, she's coming home after so long, she'd be surrounded by people. And I wouldn't want her to be disturbed. So I decided not to text her. Regardless, she assured me that she'll text me herself, as soon as she gets the chance to.

Sunday was here! Finally! I'd been waiting for Sunday like never before. Though this day was the one day I wouldn't possibly be able to talk to her, but if I'm lucky enough, I'll get to see her! And these series of

thoughts are what gave me enough patience to keep going. I kept waiting for her text.

This is what love does to you, isn't it? It makes you wait for that one person, even when your heart isn't sure that the person would talk to you or meet you. But you still keep waiting for that one miraculous moment in which that might be possible. But as much excitement that this kinda love gives you, it also gives you the same amount of pain.

"Hello Ji, are you there?" Zoya texted me. I jumped to my phone and replied to her within an instant.

"Han Ji, tell me, whom would you like to speak to?" I tried fooling around.

"Hahaha, I would like to speak with Anubhav Ji," Zoya replied.

"Anubhav Ji is ready to give you everything you've ever wanted. I have a better option, why just talk? Why not meet him?"

"Ahh! Crazy man!! Tell me what's up?" She replied, changing the topic.

"Waiting, when you'd finally make up your mind about meeting me. Thinking, about the conversations we'll have."

"Offo, have you taken up a course or something in love? Where do you bring all this from? Mr Poet."

"You don't need a course for love.. it just happens, it doesn't wait for the right moment," I said.

Zoya had come back home because her session at AMU hadn't started yet and she didn't want to waste any time there, so she moved her admission back to Whitehall. We kept talking to each other in intervals, but I desperately wanted to meet her. But I just couldn't figure out how.

"Zoya, how often do you come out of the house?"

"Not often, why do you ask? You don't want me to be comfortable at home?" she replied.

“Ohhoo, understand and try to read between the sentences. Let me explain, if you come out of the house, we might have a chance to meet each other. And if we get to meet each other, I get to see you! And that would be the best part of my day, so basically, seeing you will make my day happier. Don’t you want me to be happy?”

“Haha, so you just had to flaunt your word skills, didn’t you? What if I don’t come out of the house? What if you don’t get to see me? Will you be sad then?”

Okay, okay, so she’s trying to play with me! Let’s take this game a little further.

“If you don’t come out of the house, and I don’t get to see you, I’ll get really really really sad. Can’t even put it in words. Can’t even imagine. But are you willing to give me so much sadness? :(“

“Okay okay, haha, enough with your melodrama. I’ll meet you when the time is right.”

So she’d back with the time thing. Argh! I hate this time, what is this time?

“Zoya, I cannot wait anymore. Seriously. I want to meet you and talk to you in person. I want to see you, and see if you look like the way I imagined. I cannot wait now. I am impatient.”

“Don’t worry, seriously, I promise we will meet soon.” Zoya calmed me.

I don’t know what Lord Bhole was thinking while writing my destiny. He gave me things, but all in bits and pieces. Does he expect me to join those bits and pieces? Or to learn a lesson from them. But what I believed in the most is that every person comes into your life for a reason, to stay or teach you a lesson. I wasn’t sure which one Zoya was. But the thing that I was sure of was that I love her with all my heart and I will keep loving her until proven otherwise.

CHAPTER 10 – 24TH MAY 2012

This was the most happening announcement ever. Now that I was a student at DMA, I had grown used to events and activities happening all round the year. One fine day, the school management announced that *Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Sir* will be visiting our school campus, and not just him along with him a few students from different schools in and around Rampur are coming along with him who will get a chance to interact with Sir.

A few days into the announcement, we received a list of schools which will be visiting. And in the list I noticed, 1 student is coming from “Whitehall Public School”. My heart started racing, and I assumed that it would be Zoya.

“Zoya, do you know, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Sir is visiting my school on 24th May? And you too!” I texted her excitedly.

“Yes, I heard it at school today. That is great news. But wait a minute, me? What does that mean?” She sounded a bit confused, I guess she’s just trying to hide the fact that she will be coming to my school, or maybe she wanted to just surprise me. So, I just played along.

“See, all the toppers from various schools around and in Rampur are coming to meet Sir, and your school is listed as well. You are a topper, so I know you will be visiting my school. Now even if you say that you won’t, I am not going to believe you.”

“You think so? We’ll see.”

She ended the conversation there. We didn’t have much to talk about after that. Now all I was waiting for was 24th May, because I knew that she’d be coming to my school and I’ll be able to meet her! Finally! And if not meet, then I could at least get to see her, I guess that would make things a little better.

It was the day of the event. It was around 12:30 and the busses from different schools had already started to come into the school campus. We were all ready and set for the event to start at 1pm. Zoya had finally confessed that she will be coming to my school, but I was worried if she would or would not, and even if she comes, will I get to meet her or not? And the worst part is, if she comes to the school, how will I even recognise her? I have never seen her, nor her picture. Even if I recognise her, what will we talk about?

It was almost 12:45, all the buses from other schools had come, but I could not spot a bus from Whitehall. I was worried, the event was about to start in 15 minutes. I was nervous. We weren't allowed to carry our phones, or else I would have called her up.

The teachers started calling us into the hall now, all of the students had to settle down. Me and my friend Shaurya chose the seats at the end of the hall, so that we could see who's entering and who's leaving. We gave ourselves a duty of keeping an eye on the students from Whitehall.

"Dude, are you sure that the students from Whitehall will be coming today?" Shaurya asked me.

"I can only hope dude, only hope. Maybe that will do it." I tried convincing myself that she will come here and I will get to see her.

It was almost time when Deepa Ma'am walked up to me and asked me to call Charu Ma'am from the B block. And as I left, I saw a line of students entering from the door. I wondered if it was the line of students from Whitehall, but I couldn't wait to check with Deepa Ma'am staring at me. I ran as fast as I could and called Charu Ma'am. But by the time I came back, all the students had already settled and now finding Zoya amidst all those students was not only difficult, but nearly impossible. I didn't even know where to look.

After I went and sat with Shaurya, he confirmed that the student line was from Whitehall. I regretted getting up and wasting all that time going to B block. I wish I could've seen her enter the hall. I still tried looking for her

in the crowd of students, and asked Shaurya to help me but he couldn't. The reason being that when he asked me to describe Zoya, I told her I don't know how she looks. I am sure Shaurya had a good laugh about it in his head.

I was worried during the whole event about me seeing her or even getting a chance to meet her. In the last 3 months this is the first chance I have had to see her personally. If I miss this, I don't even know if I will get another one. I prayed and prayed that I would get a chance just to see her today.

Around 3 hours later, the event ended and the students started gathering around. The students from other schools started gathering around their buses, preparing to leave. I ran to the ground and started looking around. Whitehall students hadn't gathered yet, I heard someone was asking guests to the chief guest. I kept looking everywhere. Me and Shaurya were running around the ground so that it became easier to find her.

For once, I considered that I will go into the Whitehall bus and check for Zoya, she would definitely be in the bus if she's not on the ground. I ran towards the bus and saw a bunch of students standing there.

I was waiting so I could spot a familiar face. I knew a few people at Whitehall. I asked them to look for her. All of a sudden, I saw a line of girls coming from the corridor. And everything went quiet. One, two, three, four...and five. That's when I stopped. Every muscle in my body could hear my heart beating really fast. I saw her and here's how she looked, tall around 5'5. Fair, really fair, just as pretty as an actress, with curly hair and almond eyes. The almond eyes which were looking for something or someone. Maybe me?

And then the most wonderful thing happened, our eyes met. And oh god, there is not a single word in the whole world which would describe that feeling. Our eyes met and she smiled at me, as if she knew who I was and that I was desperately waiting to see that smile. I didn't know for sure that it was Zoya, but I just couldn't move my eyes off of her. The line of

students kept moving ahead, but she didn't take her eyes off me. And neither could I. Now, I was sure that it was Zoya, definitely Zoya.

"Mili nigaaho se nigaahin main rok na paya khud ko. Dost khada tha mera peeche, girte girte usne sambhala tha mujh ko. Uske chehre se barasta noor mujhe usko dekhte rehne par majboor kiye ja raha tha. Wo dheeme dheeme sharmati, haule haule balkhati. Kya khubsoorti thi, kya adaa thi. Usey likhna, usey bayaan karna, uski khubsoorti ki tauheen thi maano."

I was so lost in her eyes, that even those 15 seconds of eye contact seemed like forever. But I still couldn't gather the courage to go up to her and talk to her. Ten minutes had passed, I kept looking at her, when she reached the bus, got into the bus and when she took the window seat. I just kept looking at her and she kept looking at me. The bus started moving, but I still kept looking at her, she peeped a little outside of the window and smiled once more. All the buses had left but kept standing there. With a smile on face from here to here. And how I wish that there was a rewind button and I could live the last 10 minutes of my life, again and again and again.

"Hey dude. What are you smiling at? The ground is all empty. Everyone has left." Shaurya said to me, and he had to shake me rigorously to make me listen to him.

"I can't tell you how happy I am today. It is quite literally the best day of my life, and on that occasion let's go and eat samosas. I am so happy that I might even treat you with one extra samosa!"

I reached home in the evening. And everybody kept asking just one question.

"What's up with you Anubhav? You seem quite ecstatic today."

And I was tired of answering that question.

"Can't a man just be happy for no reason?"

“Only crazy people stay happy for no reason.”

I knew she'd text me as soon as she got the chance, so I waited. By the time I was making my bed, my phone beeped and I was eager to hear what she had to say.

“I have just one question, and it is eating me up! I want to ask it.”

“Yes, ask up.” I replied.

“How did you even recognise me? I mean, you hadn't even seen me, neither did you see any of my pictures, even then you somehow figured out that it was me? There were hundreds of students on the ground, and how did your eyes only meet mine? How?” I could say that she was clearly surprised.

“Zoya, always remember one thing, when a person truly loves another no part of their body works but their heart. I looked for you with all the love in my heart, and the moment I saw you my heart immediately told me that it is YOU! Even if there were thousands of students and not just hundreds, I would've still found you. My heart would've still found you. Seeing you and our eyes meeting each other was not just a coincidence, both of our hearts knew that it was the other one. And isn't it surprising that the girl I love is probably the prettiest girl I have ever seen.” I explained to her with all the love I have in my heart.

“Oh my god! How can a person love someone so much?” She asked.

“It is just the start Zoya, you never know the limits of this love.” And that's where the conversation ended.

CHAPTER 11 – I WISH I COULD REWIND

The most beautiful phase of my life had just started. I had fallen, really fallen for her. Deep in love. Now, all I was waiting was for the day that she would too. The acceptance of my love that I needed was yet to come from her. And along with the acceptance, I was expecting a little reciprocation of the love that I have for her, maybe not the whole thing, but just a little. I had a little hope of that happening because I noticed that Zoya's behaviour had changed after 24th and her heart had softened a bit. And this was a good change, I liked this change.

She had started respecting me, and enough so that I could at least put up my feelings in front of her. Before this, whenever I tried doing that, she'd get irritated and stop the conversation then and there.

I was lucky that Zoya had finally started to understand all that I used to say to her before, about my feelings for her being so strong that I would never in my worst dreams think of hurting her. It was still difficult to understand what she felt about me. But I was happy about the fact that she was not denying my feelings now. And I decided to take baby steps towards us being together. So this was a really good step.

I never let her inability to express the feeling take over my sense because I knew someday or the other she would do it. Eventually. Zoya had admitted herself into a class just near my house, and the timings were somewhere 6 pm - 7 pm.

Though she never told me when she left for the class, or from the class, I always ended up standing there. A little away from the road, waiting for her to come and go in a rickshaw. And whenever her eyes fell on me, I always saw a really pretty smile on her face. And that smile was always the best part of my day.

"Someone looked pretty in that white dress today."

I always sent her messages like these after seeing her. And to be honest, I always saw something in her eyes. Those feelings for me were growing every day. I would notice her eyes scanning the road where I stood every day, just to spot me. I was sure there was something in her heart for me, but what I did not know was, why was she so scared of admitting it to me? Why would she not be upfront about it?

There was only one thing about Zoya that I hated. She would believe everything and everyone around her instantly, but not me. Not the person who'd tell her every day and night that he loves her truly.

But keeping all those things aside, I waited for the clock to strike 6 every day so I could at least see her. And every time I saw her, I would just want to make her mine, mine forever. Sometimes at night, I would cry myself to sleep. Just to relieve myself of the pain of loving a person so much that I could not contain it. For me, being in a relationship was never important. But the most important thing was for her to love me as I love her. Was that too much to expect?

I wasn't sure how far this one-sided love would go. But I wanted to go on that road because somewhere I believed that there's a beautiful world waiting for me at the end of this road. A world where I and Zoya will be together, and happy. Happy with each other.

CHAPTER 12 – END OF EVERYTHING BUT LOVE

Zoya had been through the pain of loving someone and being hurt by them, really hurt. I knew she didn't want to trust me, because somewhere down the line she believed that even I would hurt her, that even I would leave her hand as soon as she held mine. I had realised in the start that winning her heart and her love would be difficult, so I wasn't going to give up until I had it.

Anyway, I always supported her for everything, always took care of her. She had a bad habit of skipping her meals whenever she's tense, so I always reminded her to have proper meals. Taking care of her was now my responsibility, though she didn't want me to do it, I anyway did it. Because if anything were to happen to her, I knew that I would blame myself. She always stopped me from doing all that, but little did she know that I too am as adamant as she is.

"Zoya, I have told you so many times that you are not supposed to miss your afternoon medicines. Why are you so careless? You know that those medicines are important for you to be healthy again." It was hard, but I tried scolding her.

"Anubhav, I have told you many times that I forget. Why do you take me as a little child who cannot take care of herself? I am very much an adult now and can take care of myself. I don't need you worrying about me and my medicines every time." She said, portraying the anger about me treating her like a child.

"Yes, and I can see how much you take care of yourself. If you are an adult, which you think that you are, why do you forget your medicines?" I replied. I wasn't going to give up unless she accepted that she'd become careless about her medicines.

A little anger but care overweighting it, that is how my love for Zoya was. While texting, if she would get a little late in sending a text back, I

would get worried if she's okay. And sometimes would end up calling her worried sick.

"Tell me, what is up with you?" I texted her when I came back from school the next day.

The whole day passed, but she didn't reply. I considered that she would be with her family, and would ring me up as soon as she got the chance, but it was almost nightfall and not even a single text.

I tried calling her, but she didn't answer that either. I was worried. Worried. This had never happened before, we had never let a day go by without talking to each other. Was she angry about the scoldings yesterday? Oh my, I shouldn't have done that.

It has been two days now, and she hasn't returned my calls nor replied to the gazillion texts I sent her. These two days have been the worst days of my life. I couldn't concentrate on my classes at school, I hardly had a proper meal. All I did was constantly stare at the phone and wait for it to ring.

And as always, I stood at the place where she used to pass from in a rickshaw for her classes. But there was no sign of her for two days. I was unable to understand what was happening.

On 4th August 2012, as usual, I went to the place from where she'd cross for her classes. And I saw a rickshaw coming from afar. My heart started beating fast, and I was about to cry. It was Zoya, I waited so long to see that face. I wanted to run to her, and just hug her, let her know how much I have missed her. I knew that wasn't possible, so instead, I texted her.

"Is everything okay Zoya?"

She took a glance at the phone and looked up again. I don't know whether she read my message or not, but she didn't reply. Was she angry about something? I couldn't figure out what had happened. Just as I reached home, I sent her a lot of texts.

"Yes?" Zoya sent me a text.

“What does Yes mean? What is wrong? Where have you been for the last two days?” I replied.

“I was busy, I didn’t see your text.” She texted sounding normal as if not speaking for two days had not affected her at all.

“Okay, so for the last two days, you didn’t check your phone? Tell me honestly what happened?” I replied, stressing on the part where she was busy.

“Okay on second thoughts don’t tell me why you were busy but at least tell me what happened?”

”Are you spreading the word amongst people that we both are dating? And that I am your girlfriend?”

I was shocked. As far as I am concerned, only Ankit was the one person in my life who knew about me and Zoya. And I trust him the most, I have known him since childhood. He would never do such a thing.

I finally gathered the courage to reply to her, *“No! Never! I haven’t told about us to anybody, except Ankit and you know him, he would never do anything like this. He is a very trustworthy person. And I can even trust him with my life. Even you know that. Trust me on this, whoever has told you all this is just trying to drive a wedge between us.”*

Many times we also had quarrelled about it, *“You would trust anyone but me, you would believe their words but not mine.”*

I could not understand who would do this, and why. I didn’t tell anyone, she didn’t even tell her best friend, then who would do it? I am not the kinda guy who would put his personal life on a platter and show it off in front of the world.

Yet, I tried reasoning with Zoya and tried to convince her that I am not behind all this. And that she has to put her trust in me that I will never break her heart.

It was almost time for her second tuition at 8:30, a teacher was coming to her place to teach her. So I stopped texting her and she went to class.

It was somewhere around 8:52 pm, and suddenly I received a call from Zoya. She sounded really scared and worried about something, her voice got me tense. She was speaking with hushed voices and saying that they are listening.

“What happened Zoya? What is wrong?” I asked

“They said that my Ammi knows everything about us, she has read all our messages and now she’s asking around about you. Whatever questions I ask you, please answer them, and answer them truthfully.” She said in a hushed voice.

Now I was really scared, I could not understand what was going on. *I don’t know what to do,*

“Ask me whatever you want Zoya, just don’t be scared. Everything will be alright and I am sure of it.”

She started asking me various questions, questions that she already knew the answers to. My full name, my parents’ names, what they do, where I live, which school do I go to, how did I get to know Zoya, how did we start talking.

All this was freaking me out. She already knew all of this about me, so why would she ask all that again? I feared that this isn’t Zoya, but it sounded like her, so there was no chance of me knowing if it is truly her or not. I just had to answer everything that she asks. The biggest question that I had in my mind was, why would she ask all of this? Maybe she wanted to know something I haven’t told her yet. Is there? Or is it someone else?

Then it all got even more serious when she asked me this.

“Will you marry me? Will your parents have no issues with me being a Muslim? All the rituals will be conducted just as they happen in a Muslim wedding. And only if you say yes to all this, will I think of talking to you again. Or else this is the last conversation that we will ever have.”

This got me even scared. This is what assured me that I am not speaking to Zoya. This is someone else. This statement was a reality check for me. The call ended after that statement and I didn’t know what to do, or what to

say. It wasn't Zoya, that I was sure of, and that is the reason that I couldn't even call back.

It was raining, and I was on the road walking around in circles, thinking about what I should do. I was crying and worrying about what might happen.

And within a matter of ten minutes, I received another call from her, she said,

"This is Zoya's Ammi, you have been talking to me since the start and not Zoya"

Now my doubt had turned into the truth, it wasn't Zoya. Zoya's Ammi did not even give me a chance to speak, for the next 20 minutes she kept scolding me and saying how all this is wrong, how I am wrong for Zoya. She said that it is not our age to fall in love or be in a relationship. You are still kids and you shouldn't be doing this. I was crying all the time. I didn't know what to say or do. I could hear Zoya crying from the behind. Her Ammi kept hitting her while we talked. And I hated it. I hated that I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't bear to hear the sound of her crying.

I came back home, washed up, and went to my mom, kept my head in her lap and went to sleep. That night was the last night of the year when I spoke to Zoya.

Since that day, I never received a single call or message from Zoya. I missed her day and night. I didn't see her coming to the classes as well. So I decided that I will ask my friends at Whitehall about Zoya. They told me that she came with her parents and took a transfer to Aligarh.

I was heartbroken. She was gone. It was the end of everything, but love.

CHAPTER 13 – TIME PASSED BUT HOPES STAYED

That night, the dreadful night of 4th August was the last day I heard Zoya's voice. It had been 6 months since that day. I was still broken. The days just kept passing by. I kept myself busy with my studies and my exams. I didn't care about gadgets, Facebook, or anything, not even the scooter my dad was supposed to give me. All I wished was for Zoya, to come back, to have a chance to talk to her once. Just once.

I cried myself to sleep almost every night, but I never lost hope. I knew that someday, somewhere our paths will cross again, and all my questions will be answered. She will come back. Even if she isn't able to give me the love that I always wanted, but as a friend. Just having her in my life would give me all the peace that I needed.

Simran, she was a common friend, and close to Zoya. I always asked her about Zoya, and she told me every bit about her. I was just happy that she was okay in Aligarh.

Time has been passing slowly ever since I stopped speaking to Zoya. It has almost been a year now. But I still remembered every bit of her, her voice, the smile that crept up on her face whenever she saw me, the first day our eyes met, her style of saying '*Anubhav Ji*'.

I couldn't move on with my life, I was still stuck there. It was like I was reliving on the 4th of August every day.

Honestly, I didn't even want to move on, I wanted to be stuck there, with all the memories of Zoya. I never considered that day to be 'the end' of our love story. I knew deep down in my heart that we are meant to be together and in each others' lives. When, where and how will she come back in my life were the questions that I wanted to ask God.

"How long will you wait for her Anubhav? If she wanted, she would've texted you at least once by now. It has been more than a year for god's sake."

You are waiting for no reasons and no one.” Ankit tried consoling me and talking some sense into me, but I wasn’t ready to let her go just yet.

“Dude Ankit, I know it has been more than a year, and I know if she wanted she could’ve texted me, but I cannot get my heart to believe that. My mind knows it, but my heart still believes that she will come back. And if my heart believes it, I believe it. I will not let all this go so soon. I have to wait for her. I have to give her the benefit of the doubt that she didn’t get a chance. I may not trust her friendship for this, but I trust my love for her. And I know someday, she will come back. No matter how long it takes, I will wait for her.” I clarified myself to Ankit.

I didn’t know if I was saying all that to him or myself. Maybe all these are baseless beliefs, but I wanted her to come back, deep in my heart. However it was, this was it.

I texted her every day, one text every day ever since the day she moved back to Aligarh. I called her, god knows how many times, but she never replied to a single message, nor did she ever take my calls. But I never gave up.

And I knew I never will.

CHAPTER 14 – COLLEGE, A NEW DAY!

We were all done with our 12th boards and had moved on from school. We all now had just one question in our minds, ‘What to do now?’. After all, that happened almost 2 years before, got me distracted from my studies, all I ever thought about was just Zoya.

I was walking where the crowd walked, doing what I was told. All my other friends had some of the other plans regarding their future, what they wanted to study, where they wanted to go to college. Some had even started applying for various colleges around the country, a few were even travelling abroad for their studies. And I had no idea what I wanted to do.

I got a reality check when I saw all my friends moving forward with their life, and I thought to myself ‘*Keeping all the love for Zoya aside, I would still want to make my career suffer? No. I will think of something.*’ I promised myself that I would not let my career or my studies be hampered anymore. But still wouldn’t leave my hopes for Zoya.

I gave it a lot of thought and finally decided to go forward for a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Bareilly. I will get a lot of things to learn and time to sort things out as well. I convinced my parents and got myself registered at Invertis University because it was the only college well known for its education.

24th Aug 2014, the first day of college. A completely unknown world, every face was new. I still didn’t dare to go up to someone and start a conversation, or even make friends. Before moving here, I had thought that I would be able to leave all of that behind, people, faces and love, and I will start afresh.

The first day of college was really weird, I did not introduce myself to anyone or talk to a single human soul. Introduction to the various classes and teachers was done on the first day, after that, we were all allowed to go around the campus and meet people. But instead, I decided to go back to

my room and send the rest of the day there. All I did in my room was think about Zoya. Is she okay? What is she going to do? Where would she be? And sent her a text.

Most of my days were similar, go to college, attend classes, come back to the room, sit alone and think of Zoya. I spent a few days like this, and one day I suddenly remembered the promise I made to myself before coming here. I thought let's fix this, and focus on improving myself. Sometimes thought of giving someone else a chance would strike my mind. How long will I stay like this? How long will this go on? How long will I wait for? There's always a time in life, when you are tired of everything, you don't want to keep hopes with anyone, because you know that they will end up hurting you. The situation that was created, had me confused about waiting for her or letting her go.

Usually, for people, college is like a new start, a new beginning for them, to meet new people, make new friends, it is supposed to be happy. But it was different for me, I wasn't doing any of it. I was still stuck with the old people and memories, memories of Zoya crying would wake me up in the middle of the night. I had this huge baggage on my back which wasn't easy to let go.

Zoya had completed her school, she always wanted to be a doctor, because that's the dream her father thought for her. Now that he's not with her, Zoya was determined to fulfil his father's dream.

She wanted to get into Akash Medical Institute. Simran told me that she has been spending her day and night preparing for the Institute. She was working hard because that Institute will open doors for many Medical Colleges for her. I asked Simran a thousand times to let me talk to her, but she couldn't. Zoya wasn't ready to talk to me.

I wondered what could've happened to turn her heart so cold towards me? Does she still think that I was the reason all this happened? Did she never miss me? Or think of me the way I do? Didn't she realise that I was still waiting for her?

Time was still passing by, but now I decide to use it well. I started making friends and made five of them eventually. We were a group, always together, hanging out and joking all round the clock. I started to get to know

a lot of people at college but these five were the closest, Honey, Hanisha, Gopika, Anmol and Kajol. We never realised how time passed by while doing all that. Apart from this, I had a best friend who was in a different section. Pawni.

Pawni and I made friends within a month of the commencement of the college. Exactly like me, but very short. I was 5'10" and she was just 4'5" or maybe even smaller than that. She was the only person who was so close a friend to me after Ankit. I could trust her completely and with all my heart. Even though we met just during the break, we still managed to have a lot of fun together. Pawni had two other friends, Tulya and Suvigya who'd now become my friends as well. All four of us had a really good bond. And making friends like these crazy people helped me in forgetting my past and moving forward with my life. We used to spend almost every day together, even during the weekends, we'd meet somewhere or the other to talk and chill.

I always wondered that these people gave me so much importance, but what was wrong with Zoya, she never gave me a tad bit of attention or even care. Leaving attention aside, she could never be a good friend to me as well.

CHAPTER 15 – CHANGES

The emotions that I felt that day were intense, I wanted answers. I wanted to know why she never accepted me. What was so wrong with just friendship? I thought too much about it, so I decided to send a message to Zoya. I had no hopes that I would get the answers to my questions, but at least I could vent it out.

“I don’t know if you are even reading the messages or not, or if you have blocked me. But I am still texting you because I want to vent it out. I have hidden all this in my heart for way too long to contain it now. I need answers. What was wrong? In me? In my love for you, the friendship that I wanted from you. Was it all too much to ask for? Did I not care enough for you? Did I not give you the importance? Why didn’t you accept me? Moreover, 2 years have passed Zoya, 2 YEARS! You did not even think of me once? I have texted you almost every day since the last two years, and you didn’t reply even once. You did not answer my calls. Did you not miss me? Don’t you care? You have been selfish Zoya. and not just in the past 2 years, but from the start. All you have ever been is selfish.”

I typed everything I felt and sent it. I couldn’t stop thinking about her, so I texted Pawni and thought of talking to her for a while. Because I knew that I would never get a reply to the message that I just sent.

I was having my dinner, and then my phone beeped.

‘New text message from Zoya Khan’

My world stopped. My heart skipped a beat. I couldn’t find the courage to open the message. I didn’t know what she would think of me after I sent that message. I was happy and sad, both at the same time. Just that notification made me so happy, I can only imagine what would happen when I see her smile once again.

Tears started flowing down my cheeks, I tried controlling myself but I couldn’t. I consoled myself, I said to myself that this is the day I have been

waiting for for the last two years. I waited long enough. It is time to finally bear the fruits.

“Hello, how are you?” Zoya had sent. Is that it? This is what she says after two years of ignoring me. I was angry and frustrated and happy and sad. I had no idea what I was feeling. I decided to send her a normal text.

“I am okay. Okay. How are you? Where have you been?”

“I am okay. Doing good. Studying. That’s it.”

How can she sound so normal? I couldn’t control my emotions anymore.

“I wasn’t okay until now, but I guess I am now. I have waited for so long to see your name flash on my screen. I was waiting for you. Where have you been for the last two years? Do you have any idea how much I have suffered?”

As soon as I sent that message I felt a pain that I couldn't explain, maybe that was the pain you experience after a massive rock has been lifted from your heart. I started crying as I have never cried before. I cried my heart out. All the tears that I had kept in my eyes from two years, I let them all out. And the worst part is that no one was near to even console me or wipe my tears.

“Why were you waiting? Did I ask you to wait? Why couldn’t you move on? Don’t know how to move on? Why do you want to be stuck in the same place for all your life?” Zoya replied angrily.

This was the first time that she made me realise, I had my heart in the wrong place. I fell in love with the wrong person, a person who never cared about me. I had stopped crying by now, but the pain in my chest had increased four-fold. Like someone just hit me with a hammer. The words she said, the way she said it, it hurt me, more than the wait. I decided not to reply to that message.

Just before I went to sleep, I received one more message from Zoya.

“I’m sorry Anubhav, I was not in a good mood. I am sorry if I hurt you. I know I was really rude.”

I didn't feel like replying to this message as well. I didn't believe that this apology was heartfelt. It had been a while and I hadn't replied, so she called me up.

"Listen? Please forgive me. I am sorry" Zoya said in the sweetest voice possible.

This was the first time that she had spoken to me so sweetly, I had to forgive her, I had no other option.

"It's okay! I felt insulted after reading that message. I felt like you insulted my feelings and my wait."

"Yaar, I'm sorry, I wasn't in a good mood. I had no idea what I was saying or doing. I am sorry again."

"Oh. What happened? Why were you in a bad mood?" I enquired.

"The result just came out and I didn't clear one of the subjects. I was devastated. I have never failed a subject." she replied.

"It's alright Zoya, these things keep happening to everyone. In life, if you do not experience failure, you will never know the sweet taste of success. And it is just one subject, I am sure you will clear it in your very next attempt. What's to worry about so much?" I consoled her lovingly.

"How do you make everything so easy? I have been crying for the last two hours and all my friends have tried everything to make it stop, but I just wouldn't stop crying. You said two lines and suddenly I believe that I will be able to do it. I cannot tell you how relieved I feel right now."

I was shocked at the recent turn of events. Zoya seems to have changed, two years back she wouldn't even have said a simple thank you to me, and today she's praising me and saying sorry? I could not understand what was happening. First, she replies to me two years later, and then she speaks to me so sweetly. She also called me upfront! She's never done that before. I looked up and prayed to God.

"Please keep everything the same, okay? Let her be this person that she is right now, that is all I wish for."

It was an amazing day for me. The day that all my prayers were answered and Zoya had come back. Finally! We spoke for an hour that night, I cried a lot, she consoled me, asked for forgiveness and assured me that she's back, and she will never leave ever again. Zoya was never like this, she has changed. She's opening up. She's speaking her mind, and showing me that she likes me. I did not question anything, just went along.

"Zoya, can I ask you a question?" I was about to ask her the one thing that disturbed me for the past two years.

"Yes, tell me?"

"Why didn't you even try to talk to me once since the past two years? What happened that night? Why didn't you ever think about talking to me? Did you not want to know how I was?"

"The night that Ammi found out about us, she hit me and warned me about not talking to you or seeing you ever again. And if I did, she'd come to your parents and tell them everything. And to save you from that, I decided that no matter how much you text or call me, I would never answer. I didn't want you to be in any sort of problem just because of me."

That moment, the respect I had for Zoya, increased 10 folds. I decided to forget all the things that happened, and start afresh.

CHAPTER 16 – SHE’S COMING CLOSER

It was the month of December, and Zoya had started coming closer to me, she was sharing things, talking to me. All the feelings I had for her were still there as if they never left. She had started listening, I was happy, she was happy. If I mentioned something she did that hurt me or is wrong, she would make sure not to do it again. I had suddenly started feeling that Zoya had realised my love for her. But I wasn't sure if it was the same for her or is this just friendship.

“Zoya now that you are in Delhi, can we meet?” I asked her one day.

“Sure when the time is right.”

“Zoya, tell me one thing, what is the right time? Why does it know everything? And why is it so important? When will it come?” I curiously asked.

“Ohhoo! When the time is right, I’ll call you here. For now, you have your exams to focus on and I have mine”

“Ya ya sure, you always have all your excuses ready.”

And since that day, I kept waiting. For the right time. I was waiting for the day Zoya would call me to Delhi and I’ll get to see her again. And then we both got busy with our exams and its preparations. I completed my exams and went back to Rampur for a few days.

She too cleared all her exams within a few days of me coming back to Rampur and one fine day she texted me *“I am coming to Rampur”*, the reason being her Ammi, she asked her to come back home. I wasn’t so happy about it. Because I knew that we won’t be able to meet each other here in Rampur. It is a small city and people know each other, it will be difficult for us to meet without being spotted.

Anyway, I did not force her or even talk to her about meeting me, but I wished that I could see her from afar. I always asked her to tell me before

she went out of the house so that if possible I could at least go and see her from a distance.

Whenever Zoya stepped out of the house, I always went out to see her, wherever she was. And the moment I saw her, I would smile from ear to ear, because seeing her from a distance was also the best thing that could've happened to me.

And just the way I used to get happy on seeing her, she too confessed that she was happy to see me after so long.

We had started talking to each other all night long now. It all seemed like a dream to me. It was really hard for me to believe that the one person I have loved for so long, waited for two years, was finally about to be mine. I felt that she too was falling in love with me.

I did not know how true all this was, but I was still happy about the fact that she was back in my life, and she is here to stay.

I could see my love turning to be successful. I had loved her for three years! One-sided love for three years. But finally, all my hopes were bearing their fruits for me.

"Zoya, thank you," I said, expressing my relief and gratitude.

"Thank you? For what?" she asked

"For coming back in my life Zoya" .

"I should've never left Anubhav, this is where my peace is. Where our peace is." Zoya expressed, with all the love she had in her heart for me.

CHAPTER 17 – IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE!

Zoya has finally come back to me after two years of waiting and three years of loving her with all my heart. This was the biggest moment of happiness for me, I had never been so happy before. Love was all around me, surrounding me, from friends, family and finally Zoya. My friends were happy about me and Zoya being together finally, and they wished that she would never leave me like before. Just the way I did.

“What’s up Anubhav? You seem to be happy these days. It's like your feet don't settle on the ground.” Honey teased me.

“She’s back in my life, and everything’s better now. I couldn’t have asked for more happiness”

Days kept passing by, and I looked at every coming day with a huge smile on my face, knowing that Zoya is here, with me, and she will be with me. We spoke almost every hour of every day. In February I started realising that my feelings for her have grown stronger, with each day. I decided to confess my love again. I called her up and started speaking

“Zoya, I have waited 3 whole years for you, and I wouldn't say that I haven't felt this for you before. I have loved you constantly in these 3 years, and I will keep loving you. But since the past few days, that love for you has grown, 10 folds. I don't know what I should do to prove it to you, or if the time is right or not but I need to tell you that I love you, and I will love you always. I don't expect you to return it to me, but I wanted to tell you that.”

Zoya stopped me mid-sentence and what she said, made me immensely happy.

“Anubhav, I love you!”

18th March 2015,

I could not decipher what she had just said. I have been waiting to hear this for the past three years. Zoya said that she loves me. ZOYA SAID THAT SHE LOVES ME! I cannot believe it.

I had tears in my eyes, and I was confirming myself that it is true. She said that she loves me! I was laughing with tears in my eyes, those are emotions that I felt. Tears because the wait was finally over, and happy because, oh it's obvious. SHE SAID SHE LOVES ME!

I wanted to scream out loud to the world and say that Zoya is mine. WOW! The love I have kept for years has finally bore its fruit. I have what I always wanted. I couldn't believe it. It is true, when you wait, good things come to you. You just need to have that patience.

"Zoya, you have no idea how long I have waited to hear this. To hear those words coming out of your mouth. To have all that with you, all the love and care which we see in movies. You have no idea how much I love you, how many nights I have cried myself to sleep. Now that you finally have said it, it is so hard for me to believe that it's true. Ah! I have no words to explain."

"That wait, that is the reason that I could not stop myself. The day I texted you, you responded to me with such respect, even while confessing your feelings about all this while you were so respectful. You still treat me the same way you did three years ago. Nothing has changed, not even your behaviour towards me nor your love. You have given me the amount of respect that not even my family has, they can be no one else as perfect for me as you are."

"Zoya, I cannot thank you enough for understanding me for loving me, for respecting me as you have today. I have a lot to say to you, but I don't know why I cannot put it into words. There are so many things that I feel but I cannot express. There is so much love that I want to give you but I still cannot express it." I had tears in my eyes when I said this, and those with years of happiness and not of sadness.

"I know, and I understand. You have expressed a lot of feelings to me, but even if you don't I will always understand. I promise you that. This moment is 1000 times more special for you than it is to me. Because you have waited for it for so long that you cannot believe it is true."

Oh! How I wish she was here with me right now. I would've had her and wouldn't have ever let her out of my sight. But it's okay, messages are fine too I can adjust that much. Since Zoya wasn't here with me. As soon as

I disconnected the call I ran to my mom and I hugged her as long as I could. My mom was stunned. She didn't understand what was happening so she just hugged me back. But I know that she was glad to see me happy. 20th April 2012 to 18th March 2015 was the longest journey I could have ever made in my life. But this journey was beautiful, it was full of everything, pain, wait, and so much excitement too. And now it was time for love. And it was here to stay, to make the journey even more beautiful than before.

CHAPTER 18 – MY LOVE, MY LIFE

With each passing day, our love kept growing stronger and stronger. We would talk about everything, from how we started talking to how we felt when we first saw each other from across the road. How things started taking a bad turn and we separated, but our bond stayed the same. Despite the distance between us, there was something which held us together.

Zoya always said how she adores that I waited for her for so long, and how much I love her. She shared everything. We shared everything we did in the last two years, from school to moving to college and making friends. We did not want to miss out on anything important that might've happened within these years.

“I wouldn't dare say that I love you as much as you love me. But I can promise that you will never feel alone henceforth. I will be there, whenever you need me, in the happiness of sadness. I will always be there. Whatever you want, whatever you need I will always give it to you.” Zoya had started putting her feelings into words finally. And it felt amazing, to know that she loves me, to know that she will be there.

“I don't want anything from you Zoya. Just your love, that is enough for me. I wouldn't ever ask for anything else from you. Because that is the only thing that I have wanted and needed for so long.”

“There's nothing you need to worry about, I am here now,” Zoya assured me.

I have always wanted that Zoya would think something about me, would treat me as one of her own, would share her secrets and habits with me, and all the happiness and sadness too. I wanted Zoya to be mine, completely. I knew that it would take time, but this was the first step towards it and it made me happy.

“Anubhav, you know that I cannot find much time during the day when I am here at Rampur, the little time that I find is the only chance for us to

talk. Why do you want to be busy during that same time?” Zoya expressed her sadness about not being able to talk to me.

“I know I know, and I am sorry about it. I had gone out for some really important work. You know I wouldn’t miss that time for anything in the world, but that had to be done. Next time I will not compromise on that. I promise. I am sorry?”

All these small fights and quarrels brought us even closer to each other. She was falling more in love with me, and I could sense it. And now that she has finally started to express her feelings to me, she kept saying how much she loved me. Every time. She would tell me every little thing that happened in the day and with her family.

“God, I have never asked you for anything. I have been extremely happy with whatever you have given to me. But today I want to ask you this one thing, I want Zoya. For the rest of my life, please let her be there in my life. Never let her leave. I will keep her happy always. And I also want to pray for Zoya and her family’s health and prosperity. Thank you”

I never prayed or wished before, but now I want to. For Zoya, for us. I always prayed for her and her family’s well being.

“You know what Anubhav, you are a true lover, an honest person. You are the definition of true love. Every person has some or the other weakness, or a trait missing, a good quality maybe. But you have everything, all the good qualities and pure love.”

“To understand a person the kind that you described, you have to be that person. And since, you are that person, you have made my love ever successful.”

For us, those three years played a major role in bringing us close to each other. And we never took this for granted. Previously, we barely talked over calls. And now, we couldn’t let a day pass by without hearing each other's voice.

“Anubhav, can I ask you for something?” Zoya questioned.

“Given,” I replied, without even knowing what she wants.

“Wait a minute, let me complete first. Let me tell you what I want.”

“Hehe, what are you talking about? You ask for something and I wouldn’t give it to you, how can you even think of it? Moreover, I do not dare to say no to you, be it anything.”

“Still, listen to what I have to say.”

“Okay okay, tell me,” I said.

“I have trusted someone, after a long time. Please never break it. Don’t put me in a situation where I would regret trusting you.”

“Zoya Ji, always remember one thing, I will never do anything to jeopardize this. Even in my worst dreams, I wouldn’t want to lose you.”

“Hehe, paglu, I believe you.” Zoya chuckled a little.

Next day, something amazing happened. Zoya finally got her results for the Pre Medical test and she had aced all the tests. She scored an amazing rank. And to express my happiness, I wrote a song for her and sang it. She loved it and was grateful that I took so much effort for her.

I always expressed my happiness in this manner. I would make a video for Zoya every single day, without fail. And express how much I love her, tell her how special she is for me. She was always excited to receive the video and watch it. And after watching every video, she’d type a long message full of feelings and send it to me. This was her style of expressing love.

A few weeks later, another amazing thing happened. My eldest brother got married. It was a very small and intimate wedding, with just close relatives. And the best part about it is, that it was a love marriage. He dated my sister-in-law for around 10 years before deciding upon getting married. And this was wonderful news. He set an example for me.

I sent Zoya a picture of mine with the tux and another with the Indian attire. She was so happy to see me all dressed up because I hardly do that. She kept sending messages and praises about how amazing I looked and how I should try dressing up a little more often.

After all the wedding rituals were done, I came home and called Zoya. I told her everything in minute details, the traditions, the various functions that we had, what the relatives said, and how much I danced. And most

importantly, how I spend most of my time at the wedding imagining situations wherein she and I would be the ones getting married.

Zoya laughed a little and was immensely shy about the thing that I had just told her. But finally, she said that it would be an amazing experience, the most beautiful one. To have all the people we love under one roof and say our vows in front of them. And with this conversation, we moved to our little imaginative world.

CHAPTER 19 – EID KA CHAND

Eid was just around the corner and her family had already started preparing for everything. But I was more excited than Zoya. Because oh god oh, the way she dressed up during Eid was to die for. She looked prettier than ever. The most beautiful girl in the whole wide world.

“Anubhav, please help me select a dress for Eid. I am so confused.”
Zoya was upset because she couldn't find anything good to wear during Eid.

“I sent you a few dresses, didn't you like any out of those?”

“I know, I got them. But I am confused. Help me. Which one should I choose? Green or the black and white one?”

“I think you should fix the black & white, because the more time you take to decide, the longer it will take to come back from the tailor.”

“Are you sure that will look good on me?”

“Not just beautiful, you will be the most beautiful girl to ever walk the Earth. And anyway, everything suits you, so I am sure you will look pretty as always.”

“Offo! Why can't you answer a question with a normal yes or no?”
Zoya teased me.

“I don't think so, my personality does not allow me to talk with normal words.” I smiled.

There were still a few days till Eid, but Zoya was already stressed about her dress. And finally, her dress came back from the tailor, she tried the dress on and loved it. But she swore that she won't show it to me until Eid. She was very excited to show it to me, but little did she know that I was counting days until Eid, so I could finally see her all dressed up.

“Zoya, just once, please send me a picture of how you look wearing the dress, just a little bit.” I tried requesting her.

“Wait for some time. Be a little more desperate, I have heard being desperate increases love? I just want to test if it is true.”

Now all the wait was for Eid. And I had zero patience, but high levels of excitement. I was so excited to see her that I could not sleep that night. I kept tossing and turning, tried calling Zoya but she had already slept.

“Get up Anubhav. It is already 11. How more do you want to sleep?” My mom wanted me to wake up, but little did she know I didn’t sleep all night. And as usual, she used her tactics on me and turned off the AC. Her tactics always work. I was up in a jiffy.

The moment I got up, I picked up my phone and checked. That's when I realised that my dumb brain forgot to turn on the switch again, and my phone did not charge at all. I turned it on and went to freshen up.

I had a fun morning, despite not being able to sleep all night. I sang while bathing, and danced a little too. After all the gala time in the bathroom, when I came back to the room I checked my phone and saw 30 new messages from Zoya.

I looked at them and thought to myself *“Get ready Anubhav, you are going to get the most scoldings of your life today.”* But the moment I opened those messages, I saw all of those 30 messages were pictures. Zoya’s pictures.

Zoya looked so beautiful that it is hard to put it in words, nearly impossible. She looked exactly like a princess, the most beautiful girl ever. I could not stop staring at the pictures she just sent. That black and white dress added so much to the already beautiful Zoya that I was stunned and mesmerised. In true sense, she looked like the ever pretty ‘*Eid ka Chand*’

Sometimes I questioned myself, how did I even find her. I would look at myself in the mirror and then look at the pictures she sent me. Nope, it is hard to believe that a girl as amazing as Zoya loves me and is mine. I had to reassure myself every single day.

That day, I couldn’t stop sending her messages full of praises. Until this year, I had just seen Zoya’s pictures on her profile pictures during Eid. But today, this year, I will get to see her. She would be there, right there in front

of me. I was happy that we will be celebrating these festivals together this year.

CHAPTER 20 – TIME FOR ERA

Eid was long gone now, things kept moving as usual. But now the most obvious thoughts started disturbing my sleep. The thought of me and Zoya being able to end up together. ‘We both belong to different castes, she’s a Muslim, I am a Hindu. Will we be able to get married? Will I have to convert my religion? How will we convince our parents?’ It was true that these thoughts were unavoidable, but I tried to avoid them as much as possible. Because they did nothing but worried me even more about the future.

“Zoya, you will never leave me right?” I texted Zoya while thinking of all this. I didn’t want to bother her with all my thoughts, but still wanted some assurance that she wouldn’t leave me.

“What are you talking about? I fear that you might end up leaving me.”

“If we both are scared that the other will leave, then why would we ever be separated?” I convinced myself.

“Exactly, then what are you scared of? Don’t worry, I will always be yours.” and Zoya ended the topic.

I would always get emotional while speaking to Zoya. I always had this bad feeling that someday she might leave me, and as soon as Zoya would sense that I am feeling low again she would always say something sweet to calm me down. And that made me feel that she won’t leave me after all.

For the past few months, I did not think about Zoya moving out of the city for her studies. But I barely knew how soon she would move out. We had never met, but her being in the same city made me feel that we are together, every second of every day we are together.

She had started applying to various colleges after the results came out. One of those colleges was a college in Lucknow. Era’s Lucknow Medical College. I asked her a few times about the environment of that college. Are there any chances that ragging might happen there? I was always worried.

“C’mon, ragging will happen, no matter where I take admission. But will I stop studying because of it? No, right? And anyway, it is a medical college and there will be some amount of ragging.”

“I know all that, but I want you to be careful. You will have to take care of yourself because you are most important to me.” I said, expressing concern.

After a few days, she told me that she received an email from Era College and that she has been selected for her course. And that moment was the moment of realisation for me, that now Zoya will leave the city, and we won’t be able to see each other ever.

“Yaaaay! I got selected!” Zoya texted me in excitement

“Yay! Congratulations, I am so happy for you .”

“What’s wrong? Are you okay? Why do you sound weird?” Zoya questioned when she sensed that I wasn’t okay.

“Oh no no, I am happy. Happy.”

“Anubhav! Tell me what’s wrong?” Zoya asked again, and this time stressing on the part about what’s wrong.

“Zoya, I don’t want you to go, but I cannot do anything about it as well. I don’t want you to stop pursuing your dreams, your father’s dreams, but still, all I know is that I will miss you a lot more than you think. While you are here, and we both are in the same town it always feels like we’re together. Even though we have never met. Now that you will be leaving this city, it will feel empty. And I wouldn’t know what to do. I will miss everything, coming to see just a glance of you, just looking at you from afar smiling at me. Everything.” I said everything that was in my heart.

“Awww, baby, you will miss me?” .

“Way too much. You have no idea.” I replied, with pain in my heart.

“I will miss you just as much as you miss me.”

These things might be small, but they are the ones that create memories for life. Because in the end, everyone remembers how the person made you feel.

She was moving to Lucknow on Monday. And this Sunday morning was the saddest I had been on any of the Sundays before. I did not want hours to pass. I wanted the time to move as slowly as it could. Just so I could spend a few extra hours talking to Zoya and having the feeling that she's home with me.

"I cannot do it Zoya. I can't. I seriously can't."

"Anubhav, if you give up like this, even before I move to Lucknow, how will we handle the distance then? You have to be strong so that I can be strong." Zoya said, trying to explain to me that if we give up at this point it will be difficult for us to tolerate the distance between us.

"What can I do? I am unable to accept the fact that you are going away."

"Don't worry, Lucknow isn't that far. I will keep visiting whenever I have holidays."

"Okay, I am sorry. You should get back to your packing now. There's too much to be done and so little time."

CHAPTER 21 – SHE HAD TO

That Sunday was the most dreadful. Zoya had been packing all day, so we hardly got to talk to each other. I couldn't concentrate on anything I was doing. I was sad and worried all day long, and had my eyes full of tears. I didn't allow myself to cry that day, for two reasons - it would make me more weak and second if someone asked about it, I wouldn't have an answer.

"What happened Anubhav? You don't seem to be in a good mood today. Are you okay?" Maa asked me with concern in her eyes.

"Right, what happened? Why are you so upset today?" my brother's question followed.

Since I couldn't tell them anything about the real reason, or the truth for that matter. I made something up.

"It's nothing, I am just worried a little about my future. That's it."

"Don't worry beta, whatever you want to do, wherever you want to go, and whichever field you choose, we will always support you."

It was almost nightfall when I had thought of recording a few songs and sending them to Zoya. She always loved listening to them, I just wanted to make her feel more special before she goes away. I thought of recording a few old and new songs. I ran to my room and locked it from the inside, turned on the light, adjusted my chair a bit, closed my eyes, and started recording. One after the other, I sang songs, old songs that would bring tears to my eyes. And I knew, the moment she'd hear those songs, she'd know that I had been crying while recording those.

"Anubhav, what are you doing??" Zoya sent a message

"Nothing much, waiting for you to come online so we could talk."

"I haven't left yet, but I still miss you a lot."

It would always make me feel special whenever she'd say such things to me. It made me feel that I matter to someone. That there will always be someone who will love me with all their heart. And I have always been grateful for that

Just as we were talking to each other, I sent her the recording.

"What's in these recordings Anubhav?"

"My feelings. Listen to them whenever you're free."

"Give me a minute, I will listen to them right away," Zoya said excitedly.

She went to her room immediately and one by one started listening to the songs I sent her. My heart started beating fast, I didn't know she would react. I used to send her poems before but I never sang for her before. I was worried. I wanted to know what she had to say about the recording, I was waiting desperately. I could see she was 'Online', and moments later 'Online' turned to 'Typing'. And finally, I received her text.

"OMG! Anubhav, your voice! It is so amazing! Why don't you sing often? I am so in love with these songs. I heard them 2-3 times and I can't stop myself, especially "Lag ja gale". I cannot control myself. Promise me that you will sing for me when we meet. There's peace in your voice Anubhav. Why didn't you ever sing for me before?"

I was stunned, I mean those notes weren't even that good. So why is she praising me so much? But whatever the reason, I knew it was linked to the love she has for me. So I was at peace.

"You liked it, that's enough for me. And it wasn't even that good, but your words made them so."

"Shut up, your voice is so sweet, I could listen to it all day long. I want you to send me more songs."

This was the one time that she asked something from me apart from that promise. I couldn't dare say no to her. I locked my room again and started recording songs, sent them to her. She was so happy! And that's all that I wanted.

Before she went off to sleep, she texted me.

“Please don’t come to see me tomorrow, I will not be able to leave if I see you.”

“I am sorry, I cannot do that. I have to come to say goodbye.”

“Please Anubhav.”

“Zoya Please, let me come and see you tomorrow. Don’t deny me of it. I won’t be able to stay if I don’t see you tomorrow. I will come, I will come.”

Zoya didn’t say a word after it, she knew she couldn’t deny me of it.

She was supposed to leave at 5 in the morning, with her Ammi and the driver. I was not used to waking up so early, every day I always woke up somewhere around 9-10 am. And that day, I woke up somewhere 15 minutes before 5. I woke up in a jiffy and got ready as fast as I could. And by the time I got ready and came back, my Maa was already busy doing the daily chores.

“Hello, prince. Where are you going so early in the morning?” Maa enquired.

“Nowhere, going out for a walk. I woke up early today so I thought I will go around and see how the city looks this early.”

“Oh yes, why not? You are the one in charge of patrolling the city in the morning. Right?”

I picked up the bike keys before my Maa could ask any more questions. I tried to start the bike, but it wouldn’t. I had to kick it 3-4 times before the engine started running. But then it stopped again within seconds. It was 4:58. And I had to rush if the bike wouldn’t turn on the road and would take twice as long for me to cover. I tried many more times and finally, it started running. I rushed to the bus stop from where I was sure that she’d pass.

The moment I had woken up, I texted Zoya Good morning, and she called me up as soon as she read it. I could sense in her voice that she was about to cry. I tried to calm her down. She was sad that she would miss everything here at Rampur. Me, her Ammi, her brother, the city, everything.

“Zoya, don’t worry, you will never be alone. I will always be there for you. You just have to assure me that you will take care of yourself.”

“Yes baby, and you assure me that you will never change and never leave me.”

“Okay, Ammi is here, I will disconnect the call.” Zoya disconnected the call in a hurry.

I left for the bus stop on my bike and Zoya left with Ammi and the driver.

“Dear, did you keep everything you need? Are you sure you didn’t forget anything?” Zoya’s Ammi asked her.

“Yes Ammi, I have kept everything ,” Zoya said while thinking about the things she kept.

Zoya sat on the last seat of the bus and kept her baggage on the seat beside it. She peeped out the window and was looking for one familiar face. Mine.

I was waiting on the other side, waiting for her car to cross. The place where I was standing, had an adjoining road which led to the outskirts of the city. The thought just struck me that she might have taken the other road. I texted Zoya instantly and she confirmed that they took the other road. She was already on the bus and it was about to leave.

I got worried. I turned on the bike fast and started making my way through the other road. I went and stood at the end of the road and waited for the bus to come. I started looking here and there but there was no sign of the bus. And Zoya was looking for me everywhere. I was growing impatient, I kept looking here and there and suddenly I saw a bus coming from behind. I kept staring at the bus. And waited for it to come closer so I could spot Zoya.

And that’s when I did. There she was, sitting on the last seat of the bus. My heart was pounding, I saw her, she saw me and we both smiled at each other with tears in our eyes. She peeped out the window more and looked at me, waved goodbye to me and gave me a flying kiss. I was standing there with tears in my eyes when I lifted my hand and bid her goodbye. I was

standing amongst the crowd, that's why her Ammi couldn't spot me. I saw Zoya only for two minutes but those two minutes felt like an eternity. I was just glad that I reached there in time, if I would've been even a minute late, I wouldn't have experienced this beautiful Goodbye.

CHAPTER 22 – ACCIDENT

I was heading back home after looking at Zoya. All the way I kept having flashbacks of her sitting in the bus with tears in her eyes. I was missing her. I already had started missing her, I could only imagine how much I'd miss her in the next few days. I kept having flashbacks all the while when passing through the road I always used to stand to see Zoya cross. I was remembering everything, even the first day I saw her. I reached home and saw that my Maa was standing just outside the house.

“Done with the patrolling officer? Did you go around the whole city? Is there anything wrong anywhere?” Maa said, pulling my leg.

“Oh Maa, you should be proud. Your boy woke up so early in the morning today. He did such a good deed. You should get an ‘Aarti ki thali’ and put ‘kumkum’ on my forehead. You should be making an amazing breakfast for me, but here you are making fun of me. And hahaha, there isn’t anything wrong around the city. I took care of everything.” I said and hugged my Maa.

“Oh why not my lord, I’ll do everything. But first, answer my question. Where were you? Whom did you meet?” Maa said with that investigative look of hers.

“What? No, No one? Whom will I meet so early in the morning?”

“I am your mother, I can read your face. You never know whom you just dropped off at the train station or the bus stop.” Maa chuckled.

I did not dare answer that question and ran quickly to my room. I lay on my bed when Maa came back to the room and said,

“I’ve cooked dhokla for you, come quick.”

The moment I heard that she cooked dhokla for me, my mouth started watering. I got up and was about to leave the room when my phone beeped again. It was Zoya. She was sitting on the bus and sending me selfies. I was happy that she’s alright. I told her I’ll be back after breakfast.

I went to my parents' room to eat the dhokla.

“Umm!! This is so delicious Maa! I love it.” I said, looking at my Maa and then the plate of dhoklas.

Maa smiles a little and said, *“Take some more”*

And I didn't stay back, I picked up 4-5 dhoklas at once from the plate.

“Oh ho, slowly officer. The dhoklas won't run away. I cooked them for you.”

I have never had food more delicious than Maa cooks. She is in true sense 'Annapurna'. Now that I was all done with my breakfast, I went back to the room and started asking Zoya about her whereabouts. This kept on until I was sure that she's safe.

Zoya was thinking about how her life will change in Lucknow. She was going to start a new life, she'd have to make new friends. She was nervous and happy about it. She kept thinking the same thing for the whole journey. And sometimes, she also thought about me, started analysing the rights and wrongs, digging into the basket of memories that we had made together despite not being able to meet each other. She was worried that we never got to meet each other but happy that at least we got to see each other from afar.

She was going to make new friends, start her life from zero. And these people will be there in her life for the next 5 years. She was nervous about not making the right friends.

“Are you sure everything will be alright?” Zoya texted.

“Zoya, I am with you, always. If you ever face any difficulties we'll face them together, we'll sort out all your problems together. Don't worry about it.”

Zoya would always calm down whenever I assured her that I'd be there with her, for her, no matter what. You never need to be there, physically, with a person to sort out their problems or issues. All you need to do is support them, and that's it. That support gives the other person enough strength to deal with the problems on their own.

It was around 2 in the afternoon when Zoya texted me and informed me that she's reached Lucknow safely. I spoke to her for a while and she said that after she's done with her hostel work and is all settled, she'll give me a call.

After that phone call, I couldn't stop thinking about Zoya, and how we might never have a future. When Zoya was here, things were different and I never thought about these things, but now that she's moved away and I feel so lonely, these thoughts keep entering my mind. I tried to control them, but it wasn't possible.

These thoughts were so disturbing that I didn't know what to do about them. I wanted to talk to someone about this, but I hardly spoke to my friends and shared things. I didn't usually speak to people about all this, because I knew what they'd say to me.

'You should've thought about all this before.'

And when these thoughts got out of control, I went off to Ankit's place.

Ankit had just come back from his factory and was freshening up. So I waited outside his home. There was a stray dog near Ankit's house who would always come and play with me. He was there today as well. I pet him a little and got biscuits to feed him. He got happy and started wagging his tail. He sat patiently and ate all the biscuits I gave him.

We always forget that they are a part of our world and are as sensitive as we are. We are the ones who'd have to take care of them and feed them. They want nothing but our love and care. I always loved dogs.

I have always wanted a dog, but my Maa was scared of dogs. So she didn't allow us to keep any kinds of pets. And that's the reason I could never have a dog at my place. But that didn't stop me from petting all the dogs in my area and near Ankit's house.

And just as I was thinking about all the dogs who need love in the world, Ankit came home. And just as he came he threw a taunt at me.

"Oh wow, so you finally realised that I am alive? Huh, Romeo?"

I started laughing and that pissed him off.

“Bro, can I tell you something? Ever since you’ve had a girlfriend in your life, you have forgotten all of us. You hardly even text me, forget about talking and meeting.” Ankit said, expressing his emotions.

“What? This is unreasonable. If I have a girlfriend, that doesn’t mean that I will forget all of you.” I questioned him.

“Bro you think I haven’t noticed anything? The day Zoya entered your life, you and your time have all been only hers. It’s like we don’t even exist for you.”

“Dude, the college has started and I moved to Bareilly, I have always been since I moved. It isn’t sudden or because of Zoya. It’s because life happened.” I tried reasoning with him.

“Exactly, first of all, you moved to Bareilly, secondly whenever you’re here in Rampur, it’s all about Zoya. You have never had time for me or any of your other friends.” Ankit said angrily.

“The day you make a girlfriend will you understand how life and things change. I accept that I have been busy lately, but that doesn’t mean that I have forgotten all of you. But as a friend, it’s also your responsibility that you understand my part of the story and make me understand things.”

After hearing this, Ankit got even angrier but smiled and said,

“The way you have to keep up the relationship with your girlfriend, in the same manner, you also need to keep up with your friendships. You need to make time for your friends or else you’d be left alone. We being your friends will understand stuff but only for so long, after that even we will end up abandoning you. Only if you understand others, will you be understood.” He said emotionally.

“If it is such an issue for you to understand, don’t do it then. I didn’t ask you to understand me, I didn’t force you. You can do whatever you want to.” I said in anger while getting onto my bike.

Ankit stood there stunned and watched me leave, he didn’t even try to stop me. And then I left. I was already so disturbed and above this Ankit said all those mean things to me. I didn’t give it a second thought and made my way towards the highway.

All the things that he said, things about Zoya and things about my future. All kept driving me crazy. That one friend, the only who's always been there with me from the start, why can't he understand, he should. Every person when starts a new relationship, gets busy. He has to spend that time settling things with relationships, the new person who has entered his life. His time is divided into two, one for the person he loves and the other for his friends.

But, I guess I was the one forgetting that time is divided into two. And both of them should have that time equally. We, people, get so lost in our love life that we forget to maintain the friendships that have been here with us for years. We forget how valuable they are to us, we stop giving them time and expect that they will understand all this.

They won't! Oh my, how dumb was I to have a fight with Ankit over this.

The moment I realised my mistake, I decided that I will go back to Ankit's place right now and apologise to him. Because I was scared now, I did not want to lose my best friend because of my love.

Without giving it another thought, I took a U-turn. I was so lost in my thoughts that I did not realise that there's a car coming right in front of me while taking the U-turn. I tried to control myself, but I couldn't. Neither could the car driver. He dashed into me, and it was with so much force that I was thrown off of the bike into the bushes beside the road.

For a while, I could not understand what had just happened. And then it hit me that I had met with an accident. I was in the bushes, I got myself out of them and started looking at my legs and hands to check if I have had a serious injury or a fracture. But I couldn't get up. My back was hurting way too much for me to be able to bear it.

CHAPTER 23 – FRIENDS EVENTUALLY GET BACK TOGETHER

The car that dashed into me didn't stay back and ran from the spot the moment they realised how serious the accident was. I somehow managed to get my hands on my phone and called my brother to inform him about the accident. I asked him to come to the accident spot. My brother and one of his friends' immediately left the house and reached the accident spot within 5 minutes.

Somehow they managed to pick me up and put me in the car. My back was still hurting, the pain was too much for me to bear, by now I had started crying in pain. I started praying, God I wish that there isn't any serious damage. I hoped it to be a minor accident with a few bruises.

I was then taken to the hospital. I was scared. They put me on a wheelchair and my brother started asking questions about the accident.

"How did this happen? What were you doing? Have you lost your senses?" He asked.

I started looking here and there and not straight into his eyes I replied "Before I could realise something the car dashed into me"

"Have you forgotten the driving lessons, the rules and regulations a person has to follow while driving?" He said.

After waiting for a while it was my turn to see the doctor and find out what exactly the issue is and if I am okay or not. During the checkup, the doctor asked me about how the accident happened and whose fault it was, I explained everything to him.

The doctor told me to turn around so that he could examine my back properly, I had a few issues while turning around. And that's when he told me, *"We need to get an X-ray"* and said to his assistant, *"Take him to the X-ray room."*

The moment I came out of the cabin, Ankit was standing right in front of me, I looked at him and said,

“Whatever happened is all because of you, Idiot! If you wouldn’t have fought with me, all this wouldn’t have happened” I said this and then we both started laughing.

“Yes Yes, you are right, every possible bad thing that has happened to you is all because of me.” Ankit wanted to keep the jokes on, so he could lighten up my mood.

“Whatever! But this time it was all your fault. So you shut up .” I said with an angry face.

“Leave all this, tell me how did this happen? You were going home, so why did you take the highway? Had a memory loss while driving?” Ankit asked laughing.

“I broke my bone, and all you want to do is crack jokes ?” I said while cursing him.

The real test of friendship is when it goes through tough times, friends drift apart, but they unite back and that's the true meaning of friendship. Friendship is the real gem you earn in life and it stays with you forever. But if it leaves you hanging mid-road, then it wasn't a true friendship.

I got my X-ray done and came out of the room, now all I had to do was wait for my reports to come. Ankit was sitting right beside me, I looked at him and said,

“Sorry! Bro ”

“It’s okay, let it be ,” Ankit said ending the topic here.

“What leave? At least ask the reason for the sorry I just said.”

“I know what you are sorry for, ” Ankit said confidently.

“What do you know, tell me?” I asked.

“You might have realised that it's your fault, which it is actually, and then you turned your bike around in a hurry because you had to come to

me, well eventually you came to me but in this condition, I bet you never imagined that, ” Ankit said

I wanted to laugh but I wanted to show that I was angry. The reason behind the laughter was the special friendship that we both shared since childhood and the anger was because I knew it wasn't just my fault but his as well. He should have understood this fact that after having someone in your life as your girlfriend, time gets divided amongst many people and relationships. But I guess I had to understand this because I was wrong.

I managed to adjust myself a bit and side hugged him. Usually, we tend to forget our friends and our close ones after we find the love of our life, and we end up expecting that they will understand us and the situation we have. But why? Why should they always understand us and the situation we are in? Isn't it our responsibility as well to understand them and the situation, and to give them equal time and love that they deserve from our end.

In this friendship of 9 years I and Ankit never fought on anything, we never even argued. Anyway, friendship is all about the ups and downs that come in our path, and not only friendship but every relationship in our lives has to face ups and downs which makes the relationship more strong and firm. All we have to do is give them time and nurture the relationship with utmost love and care that they deserve because if once this time passes by, you will never get it back and all you would be left with are the regrets.

CHAPTER 24 – IT WASN'T SOMETHING MINOR

Ankit and I were normally talking to each other when a person entered with the X-ray and handed it over to the doctor. He asked me to come along with him to the doctor. Ankit pushed my wheelchair and my brother tagged along to meet the doctor.

“You will have to get an MRI done because you have displaced the disc of your backbone, which can only be clarified with an MRI report. Only then will we be able to diagnose how serious it is .” The doctor instructed us.

For a while, I could not decipher the code language that the doctor spoke in. But all I could understand was that my backbone had cracked.

“Have I cracked my backbone? Will I never be able to stand up again?” I questioned the doctor while being scared to death.

“Oh no no, don't worry so much. When you were flung across the road and fell on the ground, you might've hurt yourself. MRI is just for precautions, just so that we're sure that it isn't something serious.” Doctor clarified.

“Oh, so where will the MRI be done?” I enquired.

“You can get it done from Moradabad” he replied.

I left the doctors office because I was scared. And just as I was leaving, Zoya called me up. I disconnected the call and sent her a text message saying “ttyl”.

Zoya sent me a few texts later, but I did not read them. I wasn't in the state to read them. And above the Ankit came from the doctors' office and told me,

“You've seen all those movies, where people are put on a bed and sent into a huge round machine? And that machine makes a lot of noise?”

“Why don’t you stop watching movies dude?”

Ankit had come to the hospital by his car, so he dropped me off in it. When I reached home, my Maa and Papa were already worried, but the moment they saw me they hurriedly came to the door to help me come in. And then they started firing questions at me.

“Are you okay? Are you hurt? Tell me.” Maa questioned.

“No, I am not okay Maa.”

While all this was happening, Zoya kept calling me and I kept rejecting all her calls. I thought that I’ll go to my room and then talk to her.

“What happened Anubhav? Why are you ignoring me? Is everything alright?”

I was happy that she cared about me. But I didn’t want to disturb her with all the things that were happening around.

“Why are you not telling me what happened? Why are you smiling? Have you gone crazy?” My father scolded me.

“Ohoo papa, there are a lot of discs in the backbone and one of them has slipped. The doctor has asked us to go to Moradabad and get an MRI scan done. Only then will we get an idea of how serious the injury is.” I explained.

The word MRI scared my Maa and papa. But I tried calming them down.

“It’s nothing seriously papa, if it was that serious I wouldn’t have been standing on my feet. Don’t worry Maa papa, everything is fine. And anyway we’re going for the MRI scan tomorrow, we will get to know how serious it is.”

Dad worriedly went back to his room after hearing this and Maa asked me,

“You want me to cook something for you?”

And Ankit about was about to leave when I said,

“Cool bro, thanks for coming today. We’ll meet tomorrow and if possible take some time out for your old buddy.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be there.” Ankit said.

After all this, I finally went back to my room and called up Zoya.

“Hello ,” Zoya said.

“Yes tell me, you were saying something?”

“What tell me? You tell me. Where have you been since so long? I was so worried. Is this the way you’ll treat me now? It’s been just one day that I’ve moved to Lucknow and you’ve already changed.” Zoya was screaming on the other side of the phone.

“Cooldown cooldown.” I tried calming her down.

“What cool down? I have been calling you for hours and you didn’t answer even one of them. And you ask me to cool down? What happened that you ignored me so much? Was it that important work again?”

“I met with an accident.”

The moment she heard this, she went quiet and was scared.

“Whattttt??? How??? When??? Are you okay??? Is it anything serious Anubhav???”

“I don’t know ya, the doctor said it’s some issue with the backbone disc, it has slipped or whatnot. I don’t know. But they’ve asked me to go for an MRI scan tomorrow, so I’m going to Moradabad for the same.”

“OMG!! All this happened and you’re telling me now? Couldn’t have informed me before? But how did you even end up having an accident?” Zoya was scared. And I could sense it in her voice.

This worry and concern about me made me realise that Zoya loves me. And not just Zoya, but my parents, my brother and even Ankit. Doesn’t all this give you a really good feeling? A feeling that you are valued by these people? And that the other person is so scared of losing you, that they cannot even bear the thought of you getting hurt? But this was the first time that I had seen these feelings coming from Zoya.

“Bike, a car dashed into me on the highway and flung me into the air. I landed in the bushes though, that’s why nothing major happened.” I tried explaining to her that there’s nothing to worry about.

“Anubhav, what were you thinking? Are you a little kid who doesn’t know that you’ve to always look before you cross or drive? You should always be careful on the highways, god knows how much it must’ve hurt you. Oh!” And by this time she had already started crying on the phone. I had no idea that she'd be this worried about the accident.

“Don’t worry Zoya, we’ll get to know tomorrow about how serious the injury is. And I know it isn’t that serious, because if it was, I wouldn’t have been able to stand on my feet. If I can stand up on my own, that means I’m okay. Right?”

This conversation went on for a while. I also asked her about the hostel and how she adjusted. That night, after years, my mom fed me my dinner with her phone with her own hands. It was a feeling that was beyond comparison.

After dinner, I went back to my room and called up Zoya again. I asked her about the day and how her hostel mates were. She told me that her roommate Alina was a friend from AMU. As soon as I heard this, I was relieved that at least Zoya has someone she knows with her.

She had just spoken to her Ammo about it and she was glad to hear about Alina. Now that Zoya has moved to Lucknow, I feel like we’ll drift apart because she’ll make new friends and she'll meet new people so she might end up forgetting about me. But I decided to keep all those thoughts to myself and not bother her with all that. I just kept convincing myself that nothing this sort will happen.

CHAPTER 25 – MRI SCAN

Today's day is going to be the scariest day of my life, because I will get to know the actual situation of my back and how things are to be handled further. I had just started with my college life and wanted to explore more and learn more but I didn't know what God had planned for me. Disc slip stays with a person for a longer period of time in his life and he has to take utmost care of it. All I could do in this situation was to keep hope and ask for something better.

I called up Ankit and told him to come early, we had to leave for Moradabad. We took the appointment for 11.30 and for that, we had to reach there at least by 11. It takes half an hour to travel from Rampur to Moradabad, but still, we were all prepared and we left in time so that we could reach on time.

On reaching, we figured out that there's a big queue of patient's and we would have to wait for some time. It was Zoya's first day at college and she had already told me that she won't meet new people at college or make new friends, she liked few people and sweetly ignored others. Zoya was not the only girl from Rampur.

We were told that we'd have to wait for half an hour in the queue. My brother paid the fee at the counter. It was a weird feeling, that I would be put into a big machine and that thing wasn't normal for me. But still, I kept hope for the good and calmed myself down.

I did not receive any message from Zoya today and her absence was felt clearly. You know when you love someone you give them all your time, and they give you all of their time. But when suddenly one day, they stop texting you and all of a sudden you start feeling lonely. You start missing the way that you would send a message and receive a reply instantly. That is exactly what was happening to me. But now that we have different lives and schedules it's hard to cope up. Even my summer vacation was about to end.

“Anubhav Agrawal” a person called out from the reception.

I gathered all my strength to get up and started heading towards reception. I was asked to remove all the metal objects on my body like the belt, rings, spectacles, etc. I removed everything and handed it over to Ankit.

The room was dark and had a big machine in the centre of it, that I was supposed to go in for the scan. The room had different types of computers and systems for the doctors to diagnose and check-up. The moment I saw the machines I said to myself I've hurt my back and not my brain, what are these people planning to do to me?

They asked me to lay down on the bed of the machine and advised me not to move my body. The machine started functioning and slowly I was sent in it. The interior of the machine was completely white. There were many lasers which were invisible to my eyes but scanned my body 360°.

I was in that machine for about 20 minutes and wasn't allowed to move an inch. As always, if you are told not to do something you always tend to, or end up doing it. After 20 minutes of a hard time in the machine, I came out of that room. Ankit and my brother came running towards me as if I was coming out of an exam hall after the VIVA exam, they asked, *"How was it, What happened inside?"*

I told them everything and in a while, the receptionist said that we would get the reports by tomorrow. I called my Maa and told her everything. Then we left the hospital and headed towards Rampur. There wasn't even a single message from Zoya till now and I felt a little bit of anger about it. I didn't know what could've been more important than my MRI scan.

"Zoya, where are you? Are you busy?" I messaged her in anger

For a long time, I did not receive any message from her. And with every passing moment my anger kept increasing, I was about to reach home and still, no message. Ankit had to go to the factory so he dropped us and left. Papa was in office and I had already informed Maa about the experience and what had happened in the hospital. Rest reports would be coming by tomorrow so we have to go to get the reports.

“Anu, today was my first day at college, it was a busy day so I didn’t get a chance to check my phone. Please don’t be mad at me. Tell me how your MRI Scan was and what did the doctor say?” she messaged.

I had a sigh of relief after reading this message from her, but I was still angry at her. It’s so weird that you get angry with someone you love and they put all the effort into making you feel special.

“It doesn’t take much time to reply or send one message. At least you could’ve texted me so I would know you’re busy and will text me as soon as possible. I won’t be tense that way .” I replied.

“I know dear, but I did not get the time or chance to text you. Or else I would have texted you.” Zoya apologised.

“Okay fine leave it, tell me how was your first day at college ?”

My heart melted the moment I heard her sorry. I knew that I couldn't stay upset with her for long. So I kept the conversation going.

“I tell you about mine in the evening, I’ll be free and relaxed from here, you tell me about yours. How was it, and what about the reports? When will you get them?” Zoya asked

I told her everything about my day, my experience, and also that the reports will come by tomorrow. After talking for a while she said she had to leave now because she has a lecture to attend.

CHAPTER 26 – ZOYA'S FIRST DAY AT COLLEGE

Ever Since the accident, I didn't have much work to do. I could hardly pass the days. The only thing I could do was, stay home and watch videos on my phone. Everything would come to me, food, water, everything. Maa would cook all my favourite things, and the best part no one would question me if I didn't bathe for a few days! So that's the perk of being injured.

I called up Pawni and told her everything that had been happening, she was very shocked when she got to know about the accident that I had. She told me to take care and get well soon. Soon after that, I called Honey and all my close friends. I spoke to everyone and tried to learn from my mistakes in the past. I decided that I will never fight with any of my friends because of my love life, neither will I ignore them.

Today my Maa cooked Kadai Paneer for me, and the moment I got to know this I got happy beyond measure. I kept asking my Maa to give me lunch and that I am eagerly waiting to eat the Kadai Paneer. And finally somewhere around 3:30 she did. I started eating as soon as she served me.

"Yummm! Ohoo! This is so delicious!" I said the moment I took my first bite.

"You loved it? That's enough for me." Maa replied, ruffling my hair.

"Why don't you cook this often? You should. I'll be even happier if you do."

"If I start cooking all these dishes daily, you'll get used to them. And then they won't be special anymore. It's good to not be habitual about something. You end up forgetting its importance."

This is how Indian families are, you would get a life lesson even from Kadai Paneer. And that's how my Mom has always been, she'd keep imparting her wisdom and teaching us valuable things in the most random manner. I understood what she wanted to say, I read between the lines. I

should understand the value of distance and how it doesn't deteriorate things but strengthens them. And when you give your love to someone in abundance, they lose the value for it. Friend or foe or love, you need to maintain a healthy distance.

Just as I was having my lunch and this beautiful conversation with Maa, I received a text for Zoya. It has been 6 months today, from the day she came back into my life and confessed that she loves me. But even today, my face lights up the moment I see her name flashing on the screen.

I got done with my lunch and called up Zoya. Because I thought, now that she's away from home we can talk whenever we wish to. This wasn't the same when her Ammi was around, then we would only get the chance to talk to each other at night,

She rejected my call, and that made me feel weird. But then she texted me saying,

"Will call you back. Around with my faculties."

The moment I read that message I removed all the assumptions from my head. To me, little things like these create a huge impact. I don't know what's wrong with the wiring in my brain, even if there's nothing, no reason at all, my thoughts automatically become negative, maybe it's the fear of losing her.

Just as I was analysing myself, Zoya called me back.

"Hi, Anubhav. Tell me. How are you? Has the back pain improved yet?" Zoya asked

"It's better, you tell me, how's your day going?"

"It's going good. They have way too many rules and regulations, you always have to enter the classes in a proper queue, you wouldn't be allowed to enter without bags and whatnot."

"Restrictions will be everywhere, don't worry we'll get used to them in a while."

"I know. And I believe rules and regulations are good, but it's too much in this college."

We spoke about random things for a while and then she said,

“Alright, you should rest now. I will call you once I go back to the hostel” .

I had already made up my mind before so you're left for Lucknow, that I will always be there for her whenever she needs me. Now I had to abide by that. I will have to help Zoya to be strong, and for that, I will have to be strong myself.

It is not easy to maintain a long-distance relationship, but that doesn't mean that the person you love changes with the distance. If the person is right for you no matter the distance you are separated with they will always love you and be with you. But, if they are not the ones that you think they are, the distance will ruin the relationship, no matter how strong you have built the foundation, the relationship will fall apart.

I was always scared of losing Zoya, but now with the distance that fear had reached its heights. I have never been the person who was mentally strong enough to bear the pain of a loved one leaving them, and I believed that I would never be able to come out of it if that happened to me. In the last six months, I had realised one thing, that I cannot live without Zoya, and if that she ever leaves me for any reason I would be devastated. Now the only wish I had, was that everything would stay the same as it was when she was here. Because I had always heard that out of sight is out of mind.

CHAPTER 27 – CONCERNS

Zoya and I were talking to each other at night and that's when I realised how much she cared about me. She was very concerned about the injury and hoped that it wasn't serious. While explaining to her that the injury isn't serious I told her,

“If the injury was in any case major, it would have been difficult for me to move around. So you don't need to worry that much and once we receive the reports tomorrow everything will be clear.”

“Yes you are right, I should not be concerned about you because someone else would be ,” she replied in anger.

After talking to her I went off to sleep. The medicines were working their way and they made me super sleepy, so I had to sleep before Zoya today. I woke up the next day at around 10. The moment I woke up papa entered the room saying,

“How is the pain beta? We have to go to get reports today.”

“Yes papa, the pain's still there, not much has changed since last night, I will have to wait to see what the reports say and then decide further,” I said to papa.

Papa and I had a short conversation and after that, he left the room. I sent a text to Zoya on WhatsApp saying,

“Good morning.”

She was online and the moment I texted her she went offline. I found this weird and sent a few more texts. I waited for a long time, kept my chat window open to figure out whether she was coming online or not. And then I heard Maa calling me,

“Ankit is here, get ready you've to go and get the reports.”

“Yes coming,” I replied

I got out of the bed and started getting ready, and thought when I will be done I will find out why this is ignorance. It took me 20 minutes to get ready and when I came out the first thing I did was to check whether Zoya texted me or not. And there was a message from Zoya,

“Good morning, sorry for replying late, I was researching some books.”

I did not think much on it and told her that,

“I am leaving and will let you know about the reports.”

I, Ankit and my brother reached the hospital and collected the reports. The doctor said that the disc has been displaced. He also recommended me to see a doctor in Rampur for further treatment and what has to be done. Coincidentally the recommended doctor happened to be Zoya’s uncle and he would be taking up my further treatments and diagnosis.

We collected the reports and left the hospital. Meanwhile, I texted Zoya, told her everything that the doctor said and sent her the pictures of the reports. After reaching home I explained everything to Maa, Papa what the doctor suggested and about the recommendation of another doctor for further treatment regarding the medicine and time for recovery.

In the evening, I visited the doctor’s clinic. He informed me that the recovery would take somewhere around 5 to 6 months along with a bed rest of at least 1 month with no movement, after that month I would have to wear a belt. When I heard all this I realised that the injury was deep and serious, I took the medicines, the belt from the medical shop and came back home.

I told Zoya about everything and she got so worried thinking that it’d take a long time for recovery. Everyone around me was worried about the condition and injury. But the point was, people only notice the scars on your outer body, no one can even think or imagine the pain that you feel internally.

“Anubhav, don’t worry I am with you and you won’t need any medicines. I will heal you with all my love and care.”

The moment I read this text that Zoya sent, I was relieved and overwhelmed. I realised how much she loves and cares about me.

Since that day my life has changed. Everything around me felt so good. All I had to do was stay in bed and order around. I would get everything in bed from food to whatever I need. Even Papa would get me different foodstuffs that I loved eating. I didn't even have to get up if there was someone at the door. So you see, my life was a total vacation from everything. But just like everything comes at a cost, the cost that I had to bear was pain; not in small amounts but way too much pain!

The vacations at college were almost over, but now that I couldn't attend the college I had to call up my class teacher and apply for a medical leave. She explained to me the necessary documents I had to submit for the college to grant me a month's leave. So I did all that my teacher asked me to. I called up Pawni after doing all the necessary work.

"Dude, if you won't come to the college, we'll all be bored. Who'd crack all those stupid jokes?" Pawni said.

"I know Pawni, I will miss everyone too. But this is a completely different adventure, stay home all day, no work, no worries about getting up in the morning and attending college. My life is all about eating, drinking and sleeping."

"Yes sure, you dumb man. You'll enjoy it, but what about me? I'll be bored." Pawni turned angry.

"Seriously? Don't worry, I have a solution for that. Whenever you're bored, just look at yourself in the mirror, and you'll need no entertainment. Hahaha," I said, teasing her.

"I have a better solution, I'll keep your picture with me. I wouldn't even have to look at myself then. You're entertaining enough." Pawni said sarcastically.

This is what friendship is all about, you can tease each other, insult each other playfully, and no one ever feels bad about it. The friendship that lasts forever with us. And when it's between a boy and a girl, it's even better.

"I will miss you, bro, take care of yourself." Pawni expressed before disconnecting the call.

"Definitely bro, you too!"

After having all the pampering done by my family and friends there still was more pampering to be received, from the utmost special one, Zoya. She was at college but she'd text me in between lectures to check up on me. Believe or not but these incidences in life bring you closer to your loved ones and only then you understand the amount of love and care they have for you.

During this period of life, I was very happy. When in the night if by chance I missed taking my medicines, then Zoya would scold me like a child,

"Anubhav, I've told you so many times that you have to take your medicines on time, and you cannot miss taking the medicines, if you don't take them, the recovery will be delayed, why don't you understand these little things?" she said while scolding me.

"But Zoya, you said that I wouldn't need these medicines and that you would heal me with your love and care," I said, and made an innocent face at her.

"Whatever, shut up and take your medicines on time otherwise you are going to have it from me."

The way Zoya took care of me and was concerned about me, made me overwhelmed but at the same time, it also melted my heart. Whatever she'd say I'd have to do, even if I am not willing to do it or not. There was something in her that made me do all the things she said, her voice, her words, her calm, her anger. Everything.

Days passed by, I was recovering slowly. Now it was time to join back college again.

CHAPTER 28 – FACES LIT UP!

I could not believe it, but my vacations were already over. I did not wish to go back to college. I was so used to being at home and enjoying all the pampering that I was scared of going out of the house. The time that I had spent home, which is the most blissful time I have ever spent. I did not hate my college, but I just did not want to go back. They had one reason to go back, and those were my stupid special friends.

Whenever we say that we missed college, we don't miss college, the teachers or the studies but we miss our friends. The friends that made the college seem like a college. A student would never miss the studies, but he would always miss the fun he had with his friends. And such were my mixed feelings of going back to college. I was dying to meet my friends but was dreaded that I will have to start studying again.

I went back to Bareilly with my brother and my sister-in-law. During the first year of college, I was staying in a PG, but now that my brother was married I had to live with him and my sister-in-law. Because they had decided to move to Bareilly and had already taken a flat on rent.

“Are you back finally? Did you face any difficulties while coming to Bareilly?” Pawni sent me a text.

“Yes bro I'm finally back, but truth to be told I don't wish to come back to college.”

“Shut up yaar, Anu! you're never in the mood to come to college, you know it's been so long that we met each other. Every day we all missed you so much, you have no idea at all. We attended the college without you for a month and now we don't want to. All we want is for you to come back to college.” Pawni scolded me.

“Oh my God stop scolding me, and why are you so worried I have already reached Bareilly and I will come to college.”

“Why do you always have to keep pulling my leg Anubhav?”

After speaking to Pawni I called up Zoya. She didn't answer my call but texted me after a while,

"Anubhav, my friends are here in my hostel room. I will call you back once they all leave."

After reading this message I felt that she just had to text me. She couldn't even ask if you reached Bareilly or not, if I have settled or not, if my pain is alright or not, at least something. How can she be so busy that she doesn't even have the time to talk over text messages? But then I thought, it's a new college. She's just meeting new friends and she has to adjust to them, she needs time to do that and I have to give it to her.

I waited for Zoya to call back for around an hour, I sent her a few text messages as well, but she didn't come online. Not as she called me back. I had to wake up early in the morning the next day, and I was already tired of all the travelling. So I decided to go off to sleep, and anyway if I sleep once I never wake up before a proper eight hours sleep.

Before sleeping, I asked my Bhabhi to wake me up in the morning. Because anyway she would be waking up early to go to school, she was a primary school teacher. Next morning, she woke me up after she woke up. I got up and checked my phone, there was no missed call from Zoya. I felt really bad after seeing that I started getting weird thoughts. And then I read the message that Zoya had sent me.

"Sorry, I know it's late and you must've slept by now, it's alright we'll talk tomorrow."

After reading that message the only thought that came to my mind was how she could be so normal about this, she would never sleep before talking to me, and today she just went off to sleep even without talking to me. I don't know if I was overthinking or if the film or a feeling this was normal or not but all I knew was that something was wrong. I could not come to my mind. I wanted to call her at that very instant and ask her what went wrong. But I didn't, instead, I just sent her a message.

"I did not like this, you could have at least called me once. Slept or not would have been a second part, did you not even find it necessary to call me once."

I sent the message and kept the phone on my bed. After that, I started getting ready for college. It was really weird to see myself in my college uniform after so long. And it didn't even fit me well now, this is because after the accident my physical movements were restricted and I put on a lot of weight because of that.

My Bhabhi gave me a sandwich. I hurriedly ate the sandwich and checked my phone for one last time to see if Zoya had replied or called. But she didn't there wasn't even a single message or a single missed call from her. Disappointed, I kept my phone back, picked my back up and left. We weren't allowed to carry our cell phones to the college so I had to leave it at home.

I got down from the house and walked a while and noticed that the bus was already at the bus stop. I took the bus. The whole journey from home to college I kept thinking.

“Why this sudden change of behaviour in Zoya? Was she talking to someone else last night? Or was she just actually sitting with her friends and talking? I wouldn't know. Even I joined college last year, but I never lost the value of my friends. And these are just friends, but I am Zoya's boyfriend. Why would she ignore me? Are those people that she met two days before or more important than her seven-month-old boyfriend? Moreover, she has known me for almost 4 years. How could she do this to me?”

I kept talking to myself the whole journey and didn't realise that I had reached college. I got down from the bus and met a few classmates who were standing near my block. They all knew about my accident, so they started asking me about how I was and if the injury was serious? I told him that I'm fine and the injury is not that serious now I have recovered, and walked to my building.

I am now in my second year, and the classrooms have already changed. I looked at the watch and realised that the lecture would start in the next 15 minutes. I still had time, Pawni and the rest of my friends were standing just outside my classroom waiting for me. The moment they saw me they all started smiling and cheering for me. They were so happy to have me back.

Is it a typical filmy scene, all the 5 to 6 of my friends were running towards me and laughing hysterically. I could not understand if they're running towards me to hug me or to hit me. I thought that running away would be the best decision so I turned around and started to run slowly. Though it was difficult for me to run, I was wearing my lumbar belt so it made it a little easy for me to run.

Since I was running real slow in these for 5 to 6 fast running people, it wasn't that difficult for them to catch me. These people caught me and then pushed me to the ground, some started punching me some started pulling my hair and some were kicking me. The other classmates who were passing by one looking at the scene and laughing, I wonder what they might be thinking. These people, these friends of mine thought that they just got hold of a ghost and then they just started hitting me and we all had a good laugh.

This was the best welcome I have ever had.

CHAPTER 29 – MY WORLD, MY COLLEGE

Everyone was talking to me, they were asking me about the accident, how it happened, what I did these days and if I'd missed them. Everyone bombarded me with questions, they were all so eager to know what happened. You know this is what happens when you stay away from friends, they miss you and you miss them, the bond between you all increases and it gets stronger by day. Yes, I know it happens with everyone but when it happened to me I realised it even more.

The regular college life started and we had to attend all of these boring lectures for six hours. The canteen was a bit far from the classes so either we had to wait for the class to get done so that we could go and eat. The other option was to ask for someone's tiffin or else we would just take it from their bag and for this task, Kajol was the best. Kajol was a very jolly person and would talk to everybody in the class, everyone knew her. At the start of college, we could not talk to her but as time passed we became good friends.

We would all sit together on a big bench with a fixed seating that started from Kajol, then I, Gopika, Honey, Hanisha, and last one was Anmol. The whole day me and my gang would play around, play pranks and create a rukus all around.

Lectures were going but I could not focus. All I could think about was Zoya. Whatever had happened last night was unforgettable and I didn't feel good about it. I was worried, I had many questions to ask but didn't have my phone. I had to wait until I could go home and talk to her about this.

"You look tense? Is everything okay? What is it that is bothering you?" Honey could read my face.

"No, nothing serious," I said ignoring

"Dude there is something wrong, you don't look as happy as before." Honey said.

“Would you like to bunk the next lecture?” I asked.

“Of Course dude .” Honey replied laughing

I wasn't able to handle the storm inside of me, and I was looking for someone I could talk to and pour my heart out so that I would feel relieved. I considered speaking to Honey about this.

We waited for this lecture to end, the moment the bell rang Honey waved towards Hanisha to apply for a proxy attendance in the next lecture. It was Saurabh Sir's lecture next, so there was no attendance issue and we could leave the class easily.

We reached the canteen and ordered a cold drink and pattice for each, and sat on a table.

“Remember I told you about Zoya?” I said directed to Honey.

“Yes, what happened? Did you both have a fight?” Honey asked.

“No, we didn't fight. But since yesterday she has been behaving weird and that is troubling me. I feel as if she doesn't care about me anymore and isn't serious. As if she doesn't care about the fact that we both don't get time to talk to each other like before.” I explained to him.

“Dude, she just joined the college and after a person starts with college they get a bit involved in the whole process, you tend to meet new people and get to know them. It takes time to get adjusted to new things and a new environment. Give it some time and everything will be okay.” Honey said, explaining to me.

“Yes you are right but I feel bad about this and whatever is happening between both of us. When you meet new people at least don't get so involved in them that you forget the existing people in your life. If you are in a relationship and if you love them you have to give time to them. I am not her friend.” I kept my point in front of him.

“Yes you are right brother, but you still have to give her time to get adjusted to the new environment she is in right now. Eventually things will go back to normal and everything will be okay. Don't get so stressed, go home and talk to her nicely and explain to her what you feel. I am sure she will understand your feelings.” Honey said.

“Yeah, let’s see. I am ready to adjust but all I want is that at least she should understand these things, and should not ignore me or behave like that for such casual reasons.”

“It’s okay, give it some time and things will be normal again,” Honey said, ending the topic.

I felt a bit relaxed after I shared everything with Honey. Sometimes it gets difficult to figure out the problems on your own, it’s because you yourself are stuck in the maze. But when you share your problem with someone else that person could definitely give you another point of view to the problem that you’re in. This makes it easier for you to find a solution. It’s better to give time to things rather than to stress about it.

We not only spoke about Zoya but we also spoke about many other things. We talked about many things. I asked Honey about his life, his relationship with Hanisha and about his family. Meanwhile, even the lecture was done.

Talking to Honey had calmed me down temporarily but the only thing which would come down completely was talking to Zoya. In lunch break, when I met Pawni and Tulya I told them everything that happened and they said the exact same things that Honey said. And that everything will be normal.

After spending the whole day in college, the first thing I did after coming back home was to check my home and there were 2 missed calls and 3 messages from Zoya. I did not know what was there in the messages but at least I know that she cared.

“Good morning”

“I didn’t call you because I knew that even you have to go to college tomorrow morning and even I was tired so went off to sleep.”

“Did you not carry your phone?”

These were the 3 messages from Zoya, and after reading those I took a sigh of relief. You always get weird and negative thoughts when you fear losing someone very close to your heart and dear to you. I immediately

replied to her and she replied, “ *I’ll message you in 5 minutes reaching the hostel*”.

Zoya and my college timings are similar, she gets free my 4 and I come home by 3:45. She went back to her hostel and gave me a call after freshening up, I shared everything with her.

“See Zoya if you tell me that you have an exam or a test and you wouldn’t be talking to me for a month, I’d still understand that. But if you ignore me for such small reasons and excuses, it hurts. I cannot deal with it until I get my answer and the issue is out of my head. You have no idea how my mind wanders towards those negative thoughts, when things of such sorts happen, I can’t keep my mind calm.” I spoke my heart out to her.

“Anubhav, firstly I am sorry that you felt this way and I didn’t do anything intentionally, I didn’t want you to feel like this way. I understand what you feel but on the other side, I would expect you to understand me. My college has just started and I have 50 other things to do and manage. And that too everything on my own. I am surrounded by 50 people and have to interact with them daily. I have to be here for 5 years now.” Zoya explained her points

“Zoya, but there’s only one Anubhav,” I said, putting an end to the topic.

CHAPTER 30 – DISTANCES

September was already here, the seasons had started changing. Summers were already gone and it was almost time for winter. You would randomly feel a cold breeze touching your face. Zoya's ignorance was disturbing me. It wasn't just a day now this is an everyday thing, and now she didn't even feel the need to talk to me. My relationship had now turned out to be wobbly, nothing was stable.

Now, the gathering of friends in one of the hostel rooms has become a daily thing. They would sit all night long and talk. It has started disturbing me. Whenever I complain to Zoya about you not giving me the time that I need, she would make the same excuses as she would before. *"I need to give them time Anubhav, they are my new friends. I need to develop these friendships if I have to survive here for the next five years."*

This was one of the worst habits that Zoya had. She will always give more importance to a person sitting physically in front of her then she would her lover was sitting miles away from her. She had started ignoring me so much that I started feeling suffocated. She wouldn't even talk to me about her day or the things that she's been doing in the college, talking about our relationship still seemed far-fetched. How long could I understand all these things? She doesn't understand any of my feelings now. The fears that I had before she moved to Lucknow had started becoming true now. I was very scared, I did not want more distances between us. I did not want this relationship to die. I was very scared, I did not want more distances between us. I did not want this relationship to die.

Almost all our days were like this: we would hardly talk for 10 minutes a day. On a Friday night, Zoya told me that she doesn't have to go to college tomorrow so she would be able to talk to me. I thought that she would be free, so I shouldn't go to college, we would get time to talk. I just wanted that one single chance to talk to Zohra. And I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world.

“Bhabhi, I won't be going to college tomorrow, it's a Saturday, nothing important happens around the college on Saturdays. Please don't wake me up in the morning.”

“Good morning, baby” I texted Zoya as soon as I woke up.

Hours passed by but I did not receive a reply from Zoya. And I started thinking of the days that Zoya was the one who would text me first thing in the morning. It was a beautiful time. I missed everything from texting each other to having long calls. If I had a chance I would want to relive all of that again.

I was noticing every change in her behaviour since the time that she had moved to Lucknow. It was really hard for me to do so, I wanted to cry, I wanted to scream, but for how long? For how long would I tolerate all this behaviour change. For how long is she going to put the new friends in front of me?

12 PM, 2 PM, 4 PM, but I still did not receive a reply. I called her up but she didn't receive it. I waited for her all day long like a crazy lovestruck person. It was in the evening around 7 PM when she texted me,

“Anubhav, my college is hosting a sports event, my friends and I have joined a sports club. I might be a little busier from now on.”

The moment I read that message I felt a rage beyond comparison. First of all, we were not talking to each other for a few days, and in addition to that, she has not joined clubs. How can she be so irresponsible? I could not understand one thing, two months before it was all lovey-dovey and she would talk to me almost all day long. Now that she's moved to College everything is changed. Everything. Is this normal? Because it doesn't seem to me. I believe all this is going somewhere in the wrong direction.

“Zoya, I took a leave from college today for you, so that we could talk to each other all day long. We haven't talked for the last few days. I thought that today will give us a chance to clear all the misunderstandings that have been rising between us. And that we would get some time to spend together.”

“Anubhav, grow up. We don't need to talk all day long, every day. Before this I was free, I had no studies to do and I had no college to attend to. That

is why I could give you all of my time. But now that I have a lot to do in college I cannot. It's that simple. You will have to adjust to it."

I wanted to reply to that message, I wanted to tell her how I feel, I wanted to show her the anger that has been built inside of me because of her ignorance, but I did not. I controlled myself so that the situation doesn't turn out to be worse than it already is. I have had enough of this ignorance. It almost feels like for months that we haven't spoken to each other properly.

I understand that relationship, for it to work you need to adjust. Adjust to the situations that would be created, adjust to the behaviour of the person. But these adjustments are supposed to be from both the sides, not just one. If it is just from one side it becomes a burden. The relationship becomes a burden. Here Zoya expected me to understand, to adjust, to go on with the relationship, and I wasn't even allowed to expect the same from her.

I have always supported Zoya. Given her everything that she wanted, when she was sure she wasn't with me, I have always prayed for her well-being. A relationship requires equal amounts of effort from both the people involved in it, it's like 50-50. But here, in this case, I was the one giving the hundred per cent on my own and she wasn't even trying to give 10% of it. This made me sad, and angry and made me feel a pool of emotions which I haven't felt before.

I always felt that in a relationship, caring for the person, giving them the love that they deserve, supporting them, has to be equal. But in my relationship, it was just me giving Zoya all of those things. However, I wouldn't say that she didn't value me. She did, for some time she did. But now she seems to have been taking everything for granted. She believed that even if she ignored me I would still be there to support her, to love her, and to give her everything that she deserves. I wanted answers to all of my questions, I wanted to sit in front of her with her and talk to her about everything that has been going wrong. But I could not do that.

I did not reply to the last message that she sent me. I kept my phone aside, got up and locked the door to my room, I started crying. I cried my heart out that day. All of my fears of Zoya leaving me and asking drifting

apart we're coming true. And you scared me, I cannot even explain how scared I was.

In the start of the college when she had moved, she would always tell me about the male friends she had and how most of them had started liking her. Now the fears in my mind had taken another turn, I was starting to believe that she's going to replace me with someone and that my love is not enough for her. The worst feeling in the world is probably being replaced by another person. And I did not want that to happen to myself. Zoya was my first love and being replaced in her life by someone else would break me, it would break my heart into a 1000 pieces. It is the worst feeling ever. All these thoughts had given rise to the insecurities that were never there before.

An hour or two must've passed by that I hadn't replied to her message, but she didn't even text me back. Neither did she call me. And that's how another night passed by without us talking to each other.

CHAPTER 31 – DEENANATH'S LASSI, GAVE ME A LESSON FOR LIFE

October this holiday here, the negative thoughts just kept adding on to each other. As the days of the month passed by they kept on increasing. I did not know how to control these feelings, because it was getting out of my hand now. Life did not seem as happy a place as before. I was surrounded by negativity and bad vibes.

During this phase, my friends had given up on me. And I completely understand why, because whenever I was with them I was either thinking of Zoya or was surrounded with all those negative thoughts. No matter how much my friends try to get me out of it, they couldn't. In the end they had no choice but to give up. They started maintaining their own distances.

I kept begging Zoya day and night to give me some attention and some love which I deserved. I would keep saying, *"Please don't do this, don't push me away from you. I beg you. We are 2 different hearts united by the soul."* No matter what I'd say to her, nothing could impact her and that hurt the most. I would do everything that she loved, sing her favourite songs for her, make videos to express my love and pain at the same time but nothing seemed to work.

Today marks four years of my one-sided love to Zoya. And in all these years all I wished to celebrate my birthday with her. I always expected that she would do something for me, or try to make this day special for me. And if not that I could try something and surprise her so that she would stay with me on my birthday. I know that I have my friends to make my birthday special, and I also wanted her. I wanted Zoya.

When this year started, I finally felt that my wish would come true. But as my birthday gift nearing, the distance between me and Zoya kept increasing. I had started losing hope in this relationship and the hopes of celebrating my birthday with her. Though I was losing hopes I still had a

little hope somewhere in my heart, that Zoya would take some efforts and make my birthday special. I hoped that Zoya would change her behaviour and would again be normal with me and in this relationship and she was in this before.

3rd October 2016,

“Anubhav, my internal tests are supposed to start from 15th October and will be for 3 days. It will be a problem if I don't perform well.” Zoya informed me

“Okay! I won't disturb you. But after you complete your test you will come back in my life as you were? You talk to me after a month, I don't mind, I'll wait but I want you to come in like you were before.” I answered.

“I am the same Anubhav! Please change your attitude and stop about thinking all of this. Apart from the college things, you are one of my other headaches; constant messages and calls disturb me. I haven't been able to focus on my work and studies because of it.” Zoya replied in irritation.

I couldn't dare speak a word after she said that. A few days before, this girl would've given everything to be with me, and now all of a sudden, I am a headache to her? I couldn't believe that this was the same girl who wouldn't sleep without talking to me, or wouldn't have her meal before I'd had mine. And now, I am disturbing her mental peace?

“What about my mental peace which has been disturbed for the last 2 months. Since 2 months I haven't been able to sleep properly, I've had these negative thoughts in my mind. Every thought is about you, every question is about you, my happiness is you and my sadness is you. You are included in my prayers. All I do is think about you all the time day and night. Well, what about that?”

I typed this message but did not send it. I was fighting a battle with myself every day. I'd question myself and ask things about what was going on. But I couldn't say all this to her, I knew the moment I'd say all this she would stop talking to me and would never come back to me. I have seen this side of Zoya where things like these won't affect her, even if the person is there in her life or not.

Then I decided that at this point of time she needs me and my support, so I will not question her on anything and would not disturb her. She's already burdened with the exam pressure, and studying medicine is not easy. I did not want any impact on her exams because of me.

10th October 2015

By this time, my Bhaiya and Bhabhi had started noticing my distress, and that I wasn't keeping well these days. They tried their best to cheer me up, but nothing apart from Zoya could do that. They eventually asked me to go out with my friends, to refresh myself and have a break.

I was leaving in the evening and saw that I was getting a call and it was Ankit who was calling me,

"Hey dude what's going on, How are you?" Ankit asked me.

"I am fine, you tell me?" I answered

"I am fine too, how's everything in Bareilly? And how are things with Zoya?"

"Yes yes all good, exams are going on, so just study and all," I told him, hiding my pain.

"Okay! You haven't come to Rampur for the last 2 weeks, everything okay?" He was suspicious now,,

"Dude, nothing's wrong, I am just occupied with assignments and have to submit them on time. After all this is done I will come over for a weekend." I answered him with a reason.

Very disturbed mentally to go anywhere. Lately I haven't been feeling okay. I just want to lay in bed all day, not meet anybody, not talk to anyone. I don't want to go anywhere. I somehow managed to attend college every day because attendance mattered.

After talking to him for a while, I hung up the call and left. I loved Bareilly ke Deenanath lassi and Pav Bhaji, which was famous in the whole of Bareilly. That place was very near to where I lived, the Hartman School. So I thought I'd go there and have something tasty which would lift up my mood and refresh me.

After seeing how Zoya's behaviour had changed, I was unable to relax even for a minute. All I could think was about Zoya. Somewhere down the line even I was tired of all this. I tried really hard to stop overthinking and to control all the negative emotions that I had, but nothing seemed to work.

I reached Deenanath with all these thoughts in my mind. I ordered myself a glass of Lassi and a plate of Pav Bhaji. I sat on a table waiting for my order to come. Beside me sat a couple. I always loved watching couples, no matter if they were fighting or they sitting quietly talking to each other. I always thought how lucky they are, that they get a chance to spend time with their partner and here in my case I haven't had a chance to meet her till now.

A few minutes later, the couple beside me started fighting. I wasn't that far from them so I heard everything they said. The girl said, *"You never give me time, do you even know how much I wait for you. At least take some time out for me. You will realise my value and my love when I am not near you or with you. You will regret it then."*

To this, the guy replied, *"Why do you always have to complain about these things? The time I give you, is it not enough for you? Be happy with what you get"*.

After hearing their conversation I realised that in my case, I was giving her everything she could ask for Love, Care, Respect but still she didn't care about it. On the other hand people like her beg for all this from their partners but still don't receive it.

That is the thing we don't understand sometimes. When you get something easily and you don't have to push yourself hard or struggle to get it, you don't realise the value of what you have until you lose it. When you struggle to get something, it's then that you understand the value. Here is my case, I have been running behind her for years and now that she is with me, I am afraid of losing her. That day at Deenanath I got to learn one thing that was *"Everyone wants love, but give it to that person who will care about your love and would appreciate your efforts in being with that person. Overdoing things would result in losing your self-respect and also the love given by you, eventually you'd be ignored by the other person."*

Meanwhile, my order arrived and I asked the waiter to parcel more 2 lassi and 2 plates Pav Bhaji for my Bhaiya and Bhabhi. And I started enjoying my meal.

CHAPTER 32 - THE BEST GIFT EVER!

13th October 2015,

My behaviour had completely changed by now. I became really rude. I would talk rudely to my friends. My friend to stop bothering them sells now, they didn't even care to reason with me about my rudeness. There is no skip. Everybody was irritated, by the constant rudeness and the changed behaviour of mine.

For me, this was the time that I hardened my exterior so that no one would know the soft interior of my heart and how broken it was. We hadn't broken up, I and Zoya, but it did feel like a break-up. All I was waiting for was my birthday, I hoped that everything would go back to normal by then. But who knows what goes on in the heart and mind of another person.

"Zoya, don't worry everything will be okay. You look good in the tests, just study well and leave the rest to God. And I'm sure your father's blessings are always with you." I said to Zoya, she was really worried about her exams and her tests.

"Anubhav, all these blessings and leaving it on God, stop all this. You do not need to motivate me unnecessarily. I am already frustrated because of my exams and you have turned out to be another headache for me".

"Zoya, I am just trying to make you feel positive since when did this become such a burden for you? I don't understand what is wrong with you. You have changed so much in the past two months. And have been treating me like some roadside Romeo. What has happened to you? What went wrong?" I finally told her all that I have been feeling for so long.

"Anubhav, you know what? We need to talk. Once my exams are done I will talk to you. Thank you for your support, take care."

Every time she would give me a new pain, This pain would feel like death every single time. This isn't Zoya I fell in love with, someone is controlling her. These are all not her thoughts. I am sure there is someone

behind everything that has been happening. I tried contacting a few of her friends I knew, but she made each one of them block me.

All the words that she chose to speak with me go to torture me every time. The words that would not let me sleep at night. I could not understand how much positivity I should have inside of me while talking to her because every time I tried doing that she would come up with something negative and hurt me in ways which I had not thought was possible.

15th October 2015,

It was her test day today, I was scared that even if I called her up to say all the best she would end up fighting with me and cursing me even more. But still, I wanted to wish her and that's why I called her up,

"Best of luck, Zoya!"

"Thanks!" She said in a really low voice.

"Are you well prepared for the test? Studied everything?"

"Hmm.."

The last 'hmm' made me feel like that she did not want to talk to me so I decided to end the conversation there and I said,

"Okay, I think you should get back to your revision now. All the best once more. Let me know later how your test was."

After the conversation, I played a little for her. left my phone, and went back to get ready for college.

Bhabhi had prepared a glass of milk for me, I drank that and left for college. The moment I reached college I relaxed a bit. Even though I was physically in the college, but mentally all I kept thinking was how Zoya's test might be.

I spoke to Pawni about what happened the morning that day. I share everything with her. She tried explaining to me that *"She has already told you that she will talk to you after she's done with exams. So don't call her, I am sure she will call you the moment her exams are done. I guess it is the 18th right, so all you have to do is just wait for 3 to 4 more days and hope*

that everything goes back to being normal and she realises what has been happening.”

Now how do I explain Pawni, that considering the way Zoya has been talking to me these days, I don't feel everything will go back to normal. And I don't feel like she would want to stay with me at all, God knows what will happen next.

I spent the whole day in the college, but the moment I went back home the first thing I did was called Zoya. I wanted to know how her test was.

“Zoya, how was your test? Did you face any issues?”

“Ummm.. this one is good. It wasn't that difficult, but I'm scared of Anatomy, it's a very difficult subject.”

“It's alright Zoya. I am glad that today's test was good. And I'm sure you prepare well for the next ones.”

“Yeah alright, I said to study now. I will talk to you later.” I understood that she did not want to talk anymore and wanted me to leave her unbothered. So that's what I did.

“Okay okay, you should get back to study now .” I disconnected the call because I had no right to make a stop and talk to me.

18th October 2015,

One by one all of Zoya's tests were done. Every day I called her once to wish her all the best, should be irritated a little and then disconnect the calls but I always believed that wishing her all the best would do well for her. But I had decided that no matter how she behaves with me, I would still be there for her and with her. Maybe that would make her realise how wrong her behaviour towards me is.

She was done with her exams and I hope that today she will talk to me properly. Because she promised me that she would. I tried contacting her today, but she didn't talk about that and said the same old, we will talk when the time is right.

I felt really bad about this, that now she doesn't even want to talk about it? Why is she delaying it? At least she could tell me point blank if she

wanted to stay with me or not. How does it even make sense to keep the person hanging? I tried a lot to get to know about the reasons behind this change of behaviour, but all I got was silence.

My birthday was just a week later, and Zoya sent countdown messages to me on WhatsApp every day, '7 days to go', '6 days to go'. I wasn't happy even after these countdown messages, because I felt that she should first solve the problems between us, and only then should she be happy for my birthday. Why would she be fake happy in front of me?

I replied to every message that she sent. Sometimes I even sent her the crying emoji, because all that she was doing wasn't making me happy, but it was hurting me. Every single time.

Time kept moving on, and I had come back to Rampur now. I met everyone at home, Maa, Papa, that gave me the happiness which I had been longing for since a few months. It's right what everyone says, people outside your family are just temporary. It's only your family that stays with you forever and ever, they are the ones that will support you throughout and be with you whether in happiness or pain. Rest of them come into your life to just teach you a lesson. I realised, this is what I have been missing since so long.

25th October 2015,

All my friends texted me at midnight. Ankit, Pawni, Tulya, Honey, Hanisha, Gopika, Kajol, Saransh, Sandeep, and many school friends, it felt great. And then finally around 12:30 I received a text from Zoya,

"Happy Birthday, have a great day..."

I read that message and thought to myself, 'Oh my god, why is she being so fake? She couldn't even wish me properly?'

I replied to everyone but Zoya. I didn't want to reply to her. It's truly said, 'Expectations lead to Disappointment'. That's exactly what happened to me. The hopes that I had with this relationship and how I had imagined this to turn out, nothing was like that. Everything was the exact opposite of what I had thought. I could not understand what vengeance she had with me and why she was doing all this. But all I wanted to ask her was, "Is this your love?"

The moment I read the emotionless message that she just sent for a formality, I started weeping. I'd never thought that this would happen on my birthday. That I would cry on my birthday and that too because of Zoya. It was the worst feeling in the world. I wasn't even happy about being born. I was crying, literally crying.

I did not want to talk to her, or even text her for that matter. I left her message on "read". I'd hoped that at least today she'd talk to me properly, will wish me with a heartfelt message and leave all the issues aside.

It was around 3 am. And I kept seeing her online on WhatsApp. I couldn't bear it. She doesn't have time to talk to me, but she's here, online until midnight. I didn't reply to her message, couldn't she have double texted? To check what happened? Doesn't it affect her even a bit? I couldn't understand, nor could I wait anymore. So I ended up calling her.

"Zoya?" I said in a broken voice.

"*Yes tell me?*" She replied in an unemotional voice.

"*You didn't even wish me properly, nor did you call me? Why ?*"

"*I didn't want to,*" She said with a stern voice.

"*What is wrong with you? Don't you wish to talk to me? You've ruined our relationship Zoya. What do you want? You've almost ruined our relationship. You don't even talk to me these days. You're there but at the same time you're not with me.*" I finally confronted her.

"*Anubhav, I cannot do it anymore,*" she said.

"*What can't you do, Zoya?*" I wiped my tears in shock.

"*I cannot stay in a relationship with you. I don't love you anymore. I WANT TO BREAKUP WITH YOU. We're done.*"

The moment I heard this, every muscle, every bone in my body broke.

"*This is the best gift ever Zoya.*"

CHAPTER 33 – BROKEN

“Gift? Do you even know what you have done to me and my life in these 3 months? Do you even know how difficult it is to love you? I thought that I could love you and make things work but I was wrong, it is not easy to love you. Loving you is the biggest trouble and you are too .” Zoya replied in irritation.

“Zoya, it is difficult to love me? Where did I go wrong? Did I respect you less? Did I love you less? Did I support you less? Did I care less? When you wanted we spoke, when you wanted you ignored, everything in this relationship has been done according to you and how you’d like it. I’ve never dominated you then why are you doing all this?”

“I don't feel happy with you, I don't like your company anymore. We were good as friends. See, I don't have any problem being friends with you, I can be friends only if you are okay with it? But I can't take this relationship anymore. ” Zoya said.

“It takes a lot of effort to build a relationship and takes a few minutes to break it. Whatever you are doing now is not good, at least give me one chance to prove myself. I will control my feelings and my emotions. Please trust me once.” I said, pleading with her.

I guess Zoya had already decided that she wanted to end all this here and that she doesn't want to stay in this relationship. That night I pleaded with her, begged her to stay back and not to leave. But she didn't feel anything, didn't even bother about the fact that I was crying. I did every possible thing to make her stay, but everything turned out to be a waste.

I was broken, the girl who was my strength for all this while, and the one who kept me sane. Today that girl broke my heart and my soul. She shattered me.

I could see flashbacks of how I spoke to her for the very first time and how I fell in love with her, the day we first saw each other, crossing paths

with each other. I wished that I could go back in time to hold her and stop her from leaving. Oh! How I wish I could stop her from leaving, because all this started from that one place in Rampur where our paths separated.

I could not believe that this was happening in real life. It felt like I was in a dream and the moment I would open my eyes everything would go back to being normal. But no, it didn't change. How can someone be so stone hearted and do this to a person who loves you a lot?

She left me crying that day and disconnected the call. I could not digest the fact that she was not with me anymore and she just left by saying Bye! I was hoping this darkness would end but with the first ray of sunlight nothing changed and everything stood still. I could feel the pain inside me. I was shattered into pieces and I was still right there in the corner of the room holding my broken pieces in my hand still hoping for things to get better.

It was very difficult to hold back all the tears but I had to do it. All I could think of was, if I talk to her once and make her believe that everything will change, I will change so she will come back. I wanted to try my luck on talking to her once again and make her understand how much I love her.

From that night all I did was hold back my tears on my own, praying and hoping for things to get better. I would message her and call her but she would never take my calls nor reply to my messages. I'd text her till 11 in the morning, before leaving for college. I'd keep the chat box open for an hour to see if she comes online. I did not know what I could do to get her to come back in my life. But everything I could think of was getting wasted as she was not at all responding to anything.

28th October 2015,

It was night around 11.15pm and as always I tried calling and wanted to talk to her and make her understand things.

“Zoya, please, I am begging you, please talk to me once, listen to me for once, and what I want to say. Give me one chance to prove myself, please.”
I said while crying.

“Anubhav, why are you doing this? What is the use now? I don’t love you anymore. You don’t belong in my life anymore. You lost your chance, it’s not possible for me to give you another one.” Zoya said.

“Zoya, if you’ve ever loved me please give me one last chance. I will change myself and be just the way you want me to be. But please at least give me one chance to prove myself and my love to you ” I said.

“Hmm...okay! I will try.” she agreed.

“I promise you Zoya, I will change and I will understand you and your situation. I will never cry in front of you now.” I promised her.

“Okay, now we will talk later I have to go, Bye!” she replied

After that conversation I still wasn’t sure and satisfied. I felt like she was doing some kind of favour for me by giving me a chance. To find out whether everything was good or not between us, I could think of only one way for this and that was “The Meet”. Meeting her was the only way out where I could get her back in my life and that was my last hope. The reason that you don’t give up someone is that you love the person and the hope keeps you up.

Without wasting any further time I booked a train from Rampur to Lucknow and also booked a hotel. Zoya would go out with her friends every Sunday. This was a good time to surprise her. I told my Maa that I was going to Lucknow with Ankit and will be back by tomorrow. Next day morning I left around 7.15 in the morning by train, and I left for the station.

CHAPTER 34 – MEETING HER FOR THE FIRST TIME?

While leaving for Lucknow, I started typing a text to Zoya,

“I am coming.”

I thought for 1000 times before sending that message, but there was something in me which stopped me from sending that message to Zoya. I typed that message but I did not send it to her.

The journey was about to end, and the whole journey I kept on thinking whether she would want to meet me or not. I still couldn't believe that we've already broken up. I did not know if she would meet me or not, but there was a little voice coming from my heart, which said *“She will meet you. She is not that bad she will meet you. She is not heartless, People or not this heartless even with their enemies.”*

I reach Lucknow around 2PM. The moment I stepped foot into the town I felt weird. My heart started pounding, and there were tears in my eyes. I have never travelled alone before, but I travelled this far and just for that one person. Who I believe is ready to give me a second chance and I want to make the most of it.

I reached the hotel that I had booked. Finished all the formalities that had to be done to check in, and then was guided into my room. The moment I reached into the room I kept my bag suicide said down and started to plan. I planned about how I would convince Zoya to meet me, or what I would say when I meet her. I had a whole conversation prepared in my head, what I would say on what she would say. I would say what she would say.

I thought for around an hour about all of these things, and how to reach her. And then I opened my Instagram feed and started to scroll. Suddenly I got a notification from Pavani on Snapchat, I opened a Snapchat story and in the first story there was a quote,

“If you succeed in cheating someone, don’t think that the person is a fool, realise that the person trusted you much more than you deserved.”

I was just reading and analysing the quote, when suddenly the story changed. Now the story that was on my screen was Zoya’s. In that video, Zoya had recorded one of her friends making a joke, and when I looked closely in the video I found out that she is in a restaurant named curry leaf. This curry leaf restaurant Was in Hazratganj. The Hazratganj market was one of the most popular markets in Lucknow. And then I look at the time that Zoya had posted the story, I realised it was 29 minutes ago. And it struck me that she must still be there. I got up and left for the Hazratganj market, because now it’ll be easier for me to find her.

I left the hotel and took a rickshaw to Hazrat Ganj market. I googled how far the HazratGanj market is from the hotel and got to know that it is just a 15 minute road. There was way too much traffic on the road that day. I closed my eyes and started reminiscing every moment of the last 4 years. The day I saw Zoya for the first time, how we started talking to each other, the little fights and quarrels. Everything. I have loved her for 4 years and today was the first time that I’d get to meet her. It all felt like a movie playing on the screen, which is always supposed to have a happy ending. Maybe this meeting with Zoya would be my happy ending.

Somehow I convinced the rickshaw man to drive faster and move through the traffic, after we reached Hazratganj I gave him an extra 50 bucks happily! The moment I got down I thought that I was meeting Zoya for the first time, I should maybe take something for her. That very moment I saw a small child passing by selling roses, I bought a rose from him and gave him another 20 bucks.

Now the only thing that was left to do, was look for Zoya. The moment I looked at the market I realised how gigantic the market is, anyone could easily be lost in here. But I remembered that I have to go to Curry Leaf restaurant, so I started asking random people for directions and finally reached there. The restaurant had two parts, a patio and an interior.

I searched through the patio but didn't find Zoya, so I guessed she might be in the other seating area. I tried looking through the windows, but the glasses were made of reflective materials, I couldn't see the interiors. All I could see was my reflection. I decided to go in and check, but before that I settled my hair and collar to look as neat as I could. I pulled the door towards me and entered the restaurant. I looked through every table and every face I saw there was unknown. Zoya wasn't there. And now, looking for her was quite impossible for me, because I had no other lead.

I kept looking here and there, went through the whole market, and checked almost every restaurant. I opened google maps and looked for all the top restaurants in the market. But whatever place I went to, she wasn't there! I didn't lose hope, I kept looking. It was almost 6 in the evening now. I didn't know what to do anymore. It was almost nightfall and now it'll be even more difficult to look for Zoya.

I was tired from looking all afternoon and hadn't even had a proper meal. So I sat down on a bench at the almost end of Hazratganj market. And a group of friends were chilling under a tree near the bench. It was a really noisy group, everyone was shouting and cheering. I suddenly looked at them, carefully, and understood that the group had 5 girls and around 2 boys. I couldn't see the faces clearly. But the thing with the universe is, whatever you want you eventually find it. And there she was. Zoya. I could not believe my eyes.

I got up and started walking towards that group of people, and as I was walking the dynamics of the group and the way they were behaving kept changing. One of those 2 guys came out from the side and held Zoya's hand. The moment he held her hand, he went down on her knees and removed a ring from his pocket. What he did after that was the thing that I couldn't even dream of. I was standing there. A little far from the group. Stunned. I couldn't believe my eyes.

He asked Zoya the question that I wouldn't have dared to ask, and the moment he asked it, Zoya smiled. The smile that Zoya had on her face was

the one that I would've died to see. I looked at that scene with teary eyes. And then the thing that broke my heart in a million pieces happened, Zoya shook her head in a "Yes". The guy got up and hugged Zoya.

CHAPTER 35 – CONSEQUENCES OF LOVING TOO MUCH

I was sitting right there on the bench, blank, trying to digest what I just saw. What just happened and what I saw was true enough to even consider? She was right in front of me, I could see her, I wanted to talk to her, but she was with someone else holding his hand and giggling around. She was happy. I could bear to see it, so I started crying. I felt like things around me just paused and nothing was left. There was an ocean full of questions in my head trying to seek the answer that why did this happen and how is it possible.

I was feeling multiple things at a time, I wanted to scream, I wanted to cry, moreover I wanted to finish my life. I did not want to live anymore in this ruthless world where emotions and feelings are not considered and people are being used as per their convenience. For 3 years of my life I loved that girl, and when I actually got her I did not leave any stone unturned to make her feel special and express my love to her. I could not understand what went wrong. Why was Zoya behaving like this?

All I could think at that time was, should I go to Zoya straight away and ask her why she did this to me? If she'd started liking someone else she should have told me on my face, I would have understood. But doing this behind my back and leaving me all alone and assuming that I will handle myself on my own, was not justified. I had many questions in my head which I wanted to ask her but could not.

After watching all this with my own eyes, I understood why she was behaving like this since all these days. Why things were not affecting her anymore, why she was not caring at all, why she ignored me for casual reasons which didn't even matter. Until yesterday the girl who'd never raise her voice was now shouting and yelling for casual reasons, until yesterday the girl who was dying to be loved was saying that she is irritated now,

which is obvious because she had feelings for someone else. All these were the reasons that helped her create a scene for breakup.

All the respect which I had for Zoya, for all this time was still there and I could not erase it from my mind. If any person would have been there in my place and would've seen the love of their life holding hands with someone else, I cannot fathom what that person would have done.

I stood there in the same position for at least half an hour and looked up in the sky and asked God, *"This is what was written in my life, if she was not a part of my life then why did you send her in my life? She wasn't there before and I was learning to manage without her. So why did you send her again and showed me this? Is this what you were planning for me?"*

But I knew there was only one person who could answer my questions and it was Zoya. I immediately called up Zoya but as usual she ignored my call. And why not it was so easy, because we both lived in different cities, who could ever figure out what was going on. And who knew that I would get to see all this in this way right in front of my eyes.

I guess this was destined and it was God's will that I should know about all this in this way. If I would have been in Rampur I could have never figured out that things were turning like this and this would be the end.

I did not want to live anymore. I couldn't figure out that even if I live how would I cope up with the pain and hurtings. I did not have any strength inside of me to bear this pain everyday, it felt like a piece of me was dying everyday and at every moment of my life. And then I started thinking of my family and their smiling faces looking at me. My Maa, papa, both of my brothers and bhabhis, and it felt like they were stopping me from taking a wrong step.

That night was the darkest of all nights for me. I was not able to come out of the pain and it kept haunting me for days, weeks and months. I did not tell anyone what had happened to me. I did not inform my friends nor anyone from my family members. My behaviour had changed and I was a person with pains and who's happiness was being taken away from him.

I used to question myself, *“That, is the result of loving someone with full hearted or is that someone starts loving you when they are alone and the moment they are being surrounded by people they start ignoring and let go of your love and affection towards them.”*

I would always message, *“Why did you do this to me?”* She did not block me but she’d never reply to any of my messages or answer my calls. But suddenly one night she called me and said,

“Anubhav, what is your problem,? What wrong have I done to you?” She asked.

“Zoya, instead of questioning me, you should ask this to yourself, that you have done.” I replied.

“You tell me, you are the one who keeps texting me ‘Why did you do this to me?’ Now tell me exactly what I did.” Zoya said rudely.

“Who is that guy? Who are you with right now?” I questioned her

“What do you mean with whom I am?” she acted surprised.

“Zoya, who are you with? Who is that guy? Who are you committed to now?” I questioned her.

Zoya was confused and I heard her voice tremble, and it was confirmed now that she's been hiding something from me, lying to me about something.

“I am with no one Anubhav, stop overthinking now.” She tried hard to hide things and turn the conversation.

For a long time she did not accept that she was hiding something from me until I confronted her about the lie that she had been telling me all this while, and that I saw her with the guy, holding hands and about the ring. She did not tell me anything about the relationship, about the guy, who he is and when all that happened and how it started. She didn’t tell me a thing about it. She’d got the idea that this was the time to end Anubhav Agrawal’s chapter forever.

She gave me a chance to speak my heart out and say whatever I had in my heart for all this time. She knew I was suffering from inside and I had pain which was unbearable. But you know it has been said that when the person is wrong they don't see what they are doing to the other person, how would the other person feel and what pain the other person goes through. They do what they have decided and what they feel is right. And Zoya had already decided what she wanted to do. These were the last words from Zoya,

“Anubhav, remember one thing that you are a gem of a person, and you didn't do anything wrong by loving a person, and also it is not like that you loved at wrong time, it's just that you loved the wrong person. I'll pray to god that one day you'll find the love you deserve, and be a successful person.”

And she hung up the call by saying this. She left me broken and shattered all on my own. I kept calling her like a crazy person but she'd blocked my number. I was shattering piece by piece everyday.

I understood that how it feels when someone you love breaks your heart and tears you apart and behaves even worse than an enemy would do to you. When the person you love with all your heart and soul, stabs you in the back and cheats on you, it is one of the worst feelings in the world.

I could not differ right from day and every minute of the day seems to be a year. I tried hard to survive the day but as soon as the nightfalls, the thoughts and the pain would find their way back and keep haunting me. No matter how hard I would try to pull myself back from the zone, I would always find myself in that zone, caught in the endless loop of loneliness and pain.

Now her calls would be busy all the time and she'd be online at all times. I always kept questioning myself and god that, *“When you didn't have any plans to keep her in my life why did you bring her back in my life and make me fall in love with her”*.

Later on I started answering my own questions. What could be the reason for being separated from the love of my life. First reason, we didn't have any future which meant some or the other day we'd to be separated from each other. Second reason, can be that when the person is not sure about being with another, then what is the use of keeping that person in your life. It's better they leave. What's the use of losing your heart and taking stress? You would just waste your own time.

One day I confessed everything to Ankit because it was getting too hard for me to keep things to myself.

"Dude I thought one day I'll help you to run and get married if she does not agree on any point, but now things have totally changed." Ankit said laughing.

"You think this is funny? I lost my girlfriend." I replied, irritated.

"Dude she is gone, leave it. Come let's have a drink" Ankit said.

"No way Dude, even if she's left, I will never drink. Let the Gods come down and tell me, I still wouldn't." I replied.

"Dude you do not understand. Alcohol releases all your tension, 2 pegs inside and easy for you to move on." Ankit said.

"I don't know what I did in my past lives to have friends like you idiots. I would never need enemies in my life. I have you all!"

I had loved Zoya for 4 years now, and it was always one sided. Yet, forgetting it wasn't easy at all. I couldn't forget her when she was just a friend to me and but now she had actually accepted my love for her, we were together. I guess people don't notice what impact they have been setting on someone when they are together and that your presence in their life matters a lot.

Now slowly and gradually I made up my mind and started loving myself. Because, I learnt one thing in my life that is, in the process of loving someone you tend to forget how to love yourself and all you do is love the other person. And trust me this feeling is not good.

Never lose your self respect for someone ever in your life. Don't beg for their love, respect or time ever. Doing this would make you lose your self respect in front of the person and they would never appreciate the efforts you put in the relationship. I told everything to my friends whatever happened and everyone, Honey, Tulya Pawni showered me with care and love. Trust me sharing things with your friends will make it easier for you to come out of the situation, at least you won't feel alone.

CHAPTER 36 – A CLOSURE IS ALWAYS NEEDED

1st March 2016,

It was the 1st of March today, Zoya's birthday is on the 10th. It was very very close. I checked every single day if she'd unblocked me or was I still blocked. I noticed that she's finally unblocked me. But I guess this was the first time in years that I didn't want to text Zoya. The only thing I was concerned about was doing something special for Zoya on her birthday. That night when Zoya said that she'd give me a chance, she got closure for herself. But I hadn't had that closure yet. I wanted it. So I could move on from Zoya. I was tired of crying and being stuck in those memories of her. I wasn't able to accept anything that had happened or was happening.

I started planning some things to make her happy, and how I could make this birthday special for her. All I wanted from this was my peace of mind. I wanted that calm in my head I had before I met Zoya. I did not want to long for her anymore. I thought of calling up all her friends from Rampur and Aligarh, asking them to send a short message for Zoya. I had a plan of combining all those clips and making a video for Zoya. I tried contacting one of her friends Faiza, and she said that she wouldn't help me with this.

The other friends agreed on sending a short video, but as her birthday kept coming closer, they all backed out. Maybe her friends didn't want to help me or Zoya might not have maintained a good relationship with them, because of which they didn't feel like doing anything special for her.

Me, Pawni and Tulya sat in the cafeteria of the college one day, Ek din college mein main, Pawni aur Tulya baithe hue the.

"Dude, what should I do? How should I make Zoya feel special on her birthday?"

“She broke up with you, said that she’d give you a chance, then said yes to someone else, and you still want to do something special for her? Are you crazy?” Pawni said angrily.

“Whatever it is that she’s done, it’s all in the past for me. All I want to do is make her feel really special on her birthday. I know this sounds really stupid, but I want to do something for her. One last time .” I clarified to her.

“Bro! Open your eyes and see, you shouldn’t be so blind in love that the other person feels it’s alright to walk all over you .” Tulya screamed at me.

“It’s not about being blind in love, she spoke to me and got the final closure for herself. I don’t have it yet. And maybe, just maybe if I do this I’ll get the closure that I need to move on from her. ”

“Alright, see if you can send her some dress or a cute photo frame. Let’s do one thing, we’ll all go to archies and pick something for her.” Pawni suggested some ideas.

“Okay!” I said.

Days passed, and now Zoya’s birthday was just 3 days away. When I was kid I was really fond of drawing, but making a portrait of someone was not my cup of tea. But I thought that making a portrait of Zoya myself would be the perfect birthday gift for her, and she’ll be really happy to see it. So I visited a stationary and collected all the necessary materials required to do so.

The portrait of hers that I made was one of my favourite pictures. It was a picture she’d sent me on Eid. It took me almost 5 hours to create that portrait of her, and finally the result that I achieved was beyond my expectations. Now all I had to do was get it framed.

8th March 2016,

It was the 8th of March today. I went to Phoenix mall, and asked them to frame the portrait beautifully. They said they’d give it to me the next day. After that, I went to archies and bought a really pretty card for her. I searched through some more shops at the mall and a really pretty black top

caught my eyes, and I remembered that black is Zoya's favourite colour, so I bought that top.

I didn't have much time left now, her birthday was in 2 days. I had to come back to the mall tomorrow to pick up the frame, and then send it to Lucknow via speed post. And if I don't do it before 3pm, it wouldn't reach her on her birthday. I decided that I won't go to college tomorrow, because if I did, I wouldn't have been able to complete all this.

I woke up at 10 the next morning. Mall opens around 11. I got up real quick and got ready to leave. I didn't even eat my breakfast that day, and quickly left for the mall. I was waiting outside the mall, waiting for it to open. The moment it did, I ran to the shop and collected the frame. I asked the guy to gift pack the frame along with the card and top. This took a little while, due to which I happened to be a little more late. I was in a hurry. I was driving fast, and ended up meeting with an accident near Cantt.

I knew it was my fault and not the other persons'. I was angry but I didn't have the time to stay back and quarrel with him. I picked up my stuff, checked if everything was okay, and I was really glad that the frame didn't break. Thankfully. I turned my bike on and headed towards the DTDC courier service.

I reached there and spoke to the person at the counter. I told him that it's an urgent parcel and has to reach Lucknow by tomorrow. Under any circumstances. He said that they'll try their best, because even if it's an urgent parcel it would still take them at least 24 hours to deliver it. I addressed the parcel to Zoya's senior and my friend Soha. I had already had a word with her yesterday about the parcel, she said she'll hand it over to Zoya.

The moment I gave that parcel, I took a sigh of relief. I came back home and checked how much that little accident hurt me. And to my surprise, my knees were completely bruised and they were bleeding. But I didn't realise all of that all this while because I was in a hurry to send the parcel. The moment my bhabhi saw how I was hurt, she started panicking and called my brother to get the first aid kit immediately. I got a lot of scoldings that

day, but none of it mattered because the parcel was sent. And to be honest, it didn't hurt that much.

The day started passing by and I was eagerly waiting for the clock to strike 12. I had another plan at home. I wanted her to feel special from the moment the clock strikes 12 and be happy.

I thought about it and then finally made up my mind. I took my brother's scooter and went out to buy pastries, a packet of balloons, and a packet scandal. The moment I reached home I told my Bhabhi softly that,

"Please try and stop bhaiya from entering my room tonight?"

"Why? What happened? Is there anything serious?" Bhabhi looked at me with concern in her eyes.

"I'll explain everything to you Bhabhi, I promise. But for now please don't let him come to my room?"

Even if I would've told Bhabhi about the birthday thing, it wouldn't be an issue, she would understand me, but the problem is that my brother wouldn't. He would get really angry.

I kept all the things in my cupboard and the pastries in the refrigerator, I didn't want them to go bad. I had my dinner as usual with bhaiya and Bhabhi, after that I came back to my room. I looked at the time, it was around 10pm. 2 more hours to go! I could not wait. I waited till 11, and then started blowing the balloons one by one. Between this I checked once if she was online, this was her first birthday with her college friends and I knew she won't be able to make time for me.

I didn't call or text her, but I kept having flashbacks of my birthday. I got up and walked to the mirror, looked at myself and promised myself,

"This is my last day, the last time, that I will do something for her. I am at that place in my life where she doesn't respect me anymore, and I won't stay there forever. I don't care if she replies or doesn't, I don't care if she blocked me again. 10th March 2016 will be the last day of Zoya's chapter in my life. After this day, I will not think of her, mention her, or have a place

for her in my heart. All I will wish is happiness for her and me. Separately. That's it."

I talked to myself, strengthened my heart and my mind, closed all the doors to my heart and put a huge lock on them. After this, I started placing the candles around the room in the shape of 'JAAN'. It took me around 10 minutes and then I got back to blowing the balloons.

I was blowing one of those balloons when suddenly, one of them burst. The balloon burst but my heart exploded and I was so scared that my brother would find out and come running into the room. I sat quietly in the room for 5 mins with my ear on the door, trying to hear any walking steps. I praised God that no one heard it, and got back to my work.

I blew some 20-25 balloons and spread them across the floor of the room. It was almost 11:45, when I started lighting the candles. I wanted to send her the video at 12. I lit all the candles one by one, but I didn't think of the rise in temperature that all these candles will lead to. My whole room felt so hot, and moreover I couldn't even turn on the fan, plus it was summers.

After I lit the candles, I played her favourite song, '*Tera mujhse hai pehle ka naata koi.*' After that I recorded a video on snapchat and sent it to her at exact 12.

I wrote a really big text, around 4 days back so I could send it to her. But I didn't send that message at 12. Everyone wishes at 12, and I didn't want my message to be lost amidst all the other messages. I thought I'll send her that message somewhere around 3.

It was somewhat 1:02, when she saw those videos, but didn't reply. I thought she'd reply, but a little later. I kept waiting for the clock to strike 3, and I couldn't wait anymore so I just sent her the message around 2:45. That message was so long, that it might take her around 15 minutes to read it.

I waited around 10 minutes after sending that message, she was online but she didn't see my message yet. I know that she has now completely

ignored me, my message and my videos. I lost all hopes of getting a reply and went off to sleep.

I woke up in the morning and checked once more for a reply. I noticed that she read my message somewhere around 4, but didn't reply. I lost complete hopes and decided not to check again.

I reached college and decided to stay back alone. I wanted to stay occupied for as long as I could, because if I went back home, my mind would still wander and I'd end up calling or texting her. I didn't want to do that.

"What happened? Did she like it? What did she say after reading your message?" Pawni started questioning me.

"Nope! Not yet. She must be busy, it's her birthday after all." I tried reasoning with her.

"Yes, that's right, the one who loved her the most, she's always been busy for him for months now. Right?" Pawni threw a tantrum at me.

"Let it be Pawni, I did what I had to. If she wishes to, she will reply keeping her humanity. If she doesn't want to, she won't. I have zero hope. Nope. None. Nada." I tried reasoning with myself more than Pawni.

I was definitely saying that I have no hopes, but I did. I did expect at least a 'Thank you' from her. I didn't want anything else, just the recognition for my efforts. That's it.

I spent the whole day at college, and the moment I went back home I checked my phone. There was no reply to either the snapchat videos or the WhatsApp message. But there were some messages from Soha.

"Anubhav, I gave your parcel to Zoya."

The moment I read that message, I called up Soha. And then she told me exactly what happened,

"I called Zoya in my room to give her the parcel you sent. She took it from me, and asked who sent it? And the moment I told her that you'd sent

the parcel, she walked out of the room and threw it in the dustbin. I felt really bad after seeing that. There's nothing that I could've done. I am sorry."

That very moment, I had a realisation that now all the feelings I had for Zoya were dead. I didn't feel bad about her throwing everything away, these were just gifts she did that for our relationship. Her reaction didn't surprise me, I knew she'd do this or something similar to that. I realised my mistake finally, all the things that my friends and Ankit always told me were true. Loving Zoya with all my heart was one of the biggest mistakes I'd ever made. My heart was broken, in a brutal way that I couldn't even mend it if I wanted to. I thanked Soha for helping me and disconnected the call.

It was that very moment, that call with Soha which gave me the closure I needed for my relationship. Now all that was left were her memories, and I decided to keep the best ones and forget the hurtful ones. I didn't want to feel that pain for even a single moment now.

CHAPTER 37 – IWRITEWHATYOUFEEL

Zoya could never be a blessing for me, and temporary blessings like her have been coming and going in my life. They always taught me one or the other lesson. “An Anubhav for Anubhav”. She never understood the depth of my love, the value of my love, and how I would’ve given her everything in the world. She never knew how much I could dive into or rise out of that love.

Some lessons that I learnt from this:

- *If you love someone, you need to have the patience to keep up with it. You will eventually have that person in your life. But if that person doesn’t come into your life, don’t waste another moment on it and move on with your life.*
- *It is important to love someone, but everything is supposed to be done in moderate amounts. You wouldn’t ever like more pepper in your dish, would you? So why give attention, love, and care more than it is needed? If you keep giving more than the necessity, you will end up losing your value and eventually all your love and care will be taken for granted.*
- *Do not stay available for a person every second of every day. You need to focus on your own life, your career, your personality. Keep them with you forever. People will keep coming and going from your life, but you will have to stay with you, so make sure that your future is bearable.*
- *Don’t look for happiness in other people. You never know when they would change, and when the situations would*

change in such a manner that they'd have to leave. Be your own happiness.

- *Don't put your expectation on anyone, if they're giving you something - accept it, if they don't then don't expect it. It's all about ACCEPTING and EXPECTING. Be responsible for your own happiness*

- *Time is really precious, don't waste it. On a person or a thing. Make the most of the time you have right now.*

- *Keep up with your self respect, do not ever let it down, and never in front of a person. If you do so, that person will lose all the respect for you. Keep your respect in your own hands.*

- *You would definitely be important for someone, but that won't stay the same or last forever.*

- *Do not ever ruin your friendship for a person who entered your life recently. Friends are really important, they will support you and guide you. Keep your love life and friendships separate. The day you mix them, you'll end up losing one or the other.*

- *Do not fall in love with someone blindly, nor trust anyone blindly. The more you put your trust in someone, the more are the chances of being hurt immensely.*

- *Every person that enters, stays or leaves your life, teaches you a lesson. Do not keep any hatred in your heart. It's your heart, fill it with love and not hate.*

- *Karma comes back to you in this life, so make sure that you don't hurt anyone intentionally or unintentionally.*

- *The way we accept people, we have to be accepted in the same way.*
- *You can never forget someone, but after a while it stops creating an impact on your heart and mind. Hence,*
- *Give time the time to heal you. I am sure you will feel better.*

I learnt many more lessons like this before Zoya came into my life, or after she left me. I never turned around to look back at Zoya after that night. I wouldn't say that I had no pain or hurt about it, I did, but I didn't let it control me.

All these emotions that I had in my heart, I wanted to let them out, because if they stayed inside they'd make a home there, and destroying it would be next to impossible. I never liked writing, but I still thought that I should pen down my feelings. After having your heart broken, many people will tell you what to do and how to do it. But the only person that can save you from the pain is yourself. I started pouring my heart out while writing.

In the year 2016, instagram had turned really popular. I had a personal profile, and I started writing captions on the pictures. I'd write whatever I felt in the caption. The lessons I learnt, the feelings I felt, everything.

I had a lot of my friends following me on Instagram, college friends, school friends, or the people who never noticed me in both these places. And after a while, I started receiving messages and comments about and on my post.

"This has happened with me."

"How do you know about all these things? This is very relatable."

"You write really well. You've become the heart of my voice. Thank you."

When I read all these comments and messages, I realised that I can do this. I created a page. I can help people with this page, I can put all their feelings into words. The ones that they cannot speak of to someone. I myself hadn't come out of all the things that happened yet, but I knew the difference between the rights and the wrongs.

I created a community page with the name of, Iwritewhatyoufeel. The name itself speaks to the purpose of the page. Putting people's feelings into words. I dreamt of creating a community where everybody could pour their feelings out without being judged. A place where they could realise that they're not alone, and that many other people are going through the same thing. And a place where they'd find all the answers they seek.

I started posting day and night on the community page Iwritewhatyoufeel. The posts that people loved, they shared it. And within a few months we were a community of 25,000 people. People sent me direct messages, or on comments, stating their issues and problems and I tried to answer as many as I could. People started trusting me, trusting that I could help them come out of all the pain that they're going through.

I had finally stopped thinking about Zoya. She never replied to those birthday messages. Though I always felt that I deserved at least a 'Thank you' message. But I never felt bad about it.

July passed, it had almost been a year now. I was still coming out of all that. My college life was back on track, I had started focusing on my studies a bit. People did question me about Zoya every now and then, *Did she reply? Did she call you?* And all I ever answered was,

"I don't think talking about it is necessary now. She's gone from my life for good, and I don't want to know about it anymore."

Pawni always convinced me that I should go out with another girl, or at least think of dating someone. She'd always point to some new girl everyday and ask me,

"Bro, how's this one? She is pretty. You'll make the best couple."

“Stop running your imagination horses. Have you opened up a marriage bureau? I am happily single, can’t you bear the fact? Take a deep breath! And let it go.”

We kept fighting and quarreling about all these things, but it all was always just a joke. And then one day, somewhere around 9:43, while I had a cup of coffee in my hand and was scrolling through my Instagram feed, I received a notification.

“New WhatsApp message from Zoya”

I could not believe my eyes. How is this possible? Zoya Khan texted me? What happened to all the attitude and arrogance? She said she'll never look back, and now she texts me? I did not open the message for around 10 minutes. Kept it on hold, and then opened it. She'd just sent a *“Hey”*

I thought about it for a while, should I reply? But then I thought that let's just see why she has to say after so many months. And then I replied her,

“Hi”

“How are you? How’s everything at home? Maa, papa, bhaiya, Bhabhi?” Kaise ho tum?” She asked all the questions in one single message.

I wondered what happened, that suddenly she was so concerned about me and my family.

“Everything’s good. You tell me, how’s Ammi and bhai ?” I asked as a formality.

“Everyone’s good.” She sent along with a smiling emoji.

I didn’t reply after that, because I couldn’t understand what she wanted or why she'd returned.

“Actually I wanted to say something to you .” She texted me again.

“Ya tell me?”

“We ruined the one good friendship that we had because of love. I believe we were good as friends. There’s no relationship purer than a friendship. Can we be friends again?”

Friendship? Why friendship? For whom? And for what? You have to be a good and trustworthy person to maintain a friendship, now she wants to be my friend? I felt a rage like never before after I read that message. All the 4 years flashed in front of my eyes, how she made me wait desperately for her friendship, for her love. How she treated me, and how she cheated me in the end. How could she even expect that I’d be her friend now?

Today, if I let her come back in my life, I will lose all my self respect. And how could I even forget the pain she’s caused me? How did she crush my heart right in front of me and walked all over it? And not just once, many times in those 4 years. That message was in front of me, and she was online. She must’ve thought that my love for her would make me weak and I’d eventually accept her friendship. But no, I wasn’t going to let that happen today.

Today is the day that I decide to keep myself in front. Ahead of all the pain and ahead of all the love I have for her. I stretched my fingers, pressed my thumbs and typed,

“NO”

And sent it...

A Note From The Author

This was my story, and maybe some part of your story too. I could get myself out of all the pain and suffering from when Zoya left me. But, it is quite possible that you might still be stuck there, suffering from the pain of losing your loved one. But the only thing that can heal it is, time. You have to give yourself and the pains, the needed amount of time to recover, until then, do not take a step in the wrong direction. A step that will not only hurt you, but also your family members, your friends and your loved ones. You might've lost the will to live because of all that happened, but this the time where you have to hold that *will* and those *hopes* tightly. But believe me, everything changes in the end, everything turns out to be the best. You just have to give it the time it needs. You will reach where you want, you will get what you want, you will be loved.

Let your pain be your strength, learn the lessons it teaches you, learn to embrace that pain; because pain and healing go hand in hand. NEVER GIVE UP.