

ONE

THREE FRIENDS

It was a Monday morning. Dhruv woke up early that day. His head was humming from yesterday's extra shots. He wanted to get to the office as early as possible. He rushed for the shower. That cold touch gave him little relief. He came out. Booked a cab. He wore the sky-blue shirt, one of his favourites. Took his bag, locked the door, and went for the elevator.

Dhruv, a twenty-six-year-old coder. Working hard to achieve his goal. A good post as manager of the company. He reached to his office building. National Enterprises, one of the most reputed companies in the country. Dhruv's office was on the twentieth floor. Monday morning and going up till twenty floors, yes that's a good start.

The office was deserted. There was still an hour. He was in his cubicle. Looking at the blank screen of the monitor, into the void. Suddenly he heard a familiar voice from behind.

"You are so early this morning, everything okay?"

A man, the same age as his, was standing at the other cubicle looking at him, shocked. Dhruv smiled and said, "Yeah, all great, had some work to finish before today's meeting." Dhruv looked at his watch and asked, "and why Dev Mehta is up before the sun?"

Dev smiled. He put his bag on his desk. Came near Dhruv's cubicle. Pulled one chair and sat on it. "For coffee." He said.

Dhruv laughed. "Really, for coffee? Stop kidding."

"Bro, you should try the first cups of coffee in the office. They are always better than the rest of the day."

"Oh, really. Ok, let's try." Dhruv's phone lightened up. A notification. He ignored and they both went to the direction of the cafeteria.

They took their coffee cups and went to the open terrace of the cafeteria. From there you could see the beauty of the entire city. Dev was gazing at the park. There was a nervous look on his face. Dhruv caught that.

"So Dev, how is going on."

"With?"

"You look not okay." Dev looked down. Took a sip from his cup. "Everything is good. Just work stress. Nothing else."

"Its been a month from the incident. And Dev you never talk about it." Dev smiled.

“Nothing to talk about. Let’s go I need to prepare for today’s meeting. And even you have a big day tomorrow. Have you prepared the speech or not?”

Dhruv knew Dev was so nice in changing the topics. He didn’t force him for answers. “Yeah. But I am not sure about it. Competition is tough.”

“Don’t worry, you are a rock star. Let’s go it’s time.”

“Yeah” Dhruv knew something was wrong. Dev didn’t finish his coffee.

■

Later that morning Dhruv was editing his code for the new project. He was so into it. He felt a hand on his shoulder. He startled and looked back.

“Hey, what’s up Mahi?” He said. Looking towards her trying to avoid eye contact.

“You don’t get to ask the question when you ignore someone’s message.” She was looking angry. Dhruv knew, making Mahi angry is a bad choice.

“Listen, I was a little busy that moment and then the boss gave me some stupid work.” He was still trying to avoid eye contact with her. Mahi sat on the chair to the opposite, folding her hands. And started staring at him with anger.

Mahi, twenty-four-year-old web designer. Working in the company for the last three years. Same as Dhruv. They both joined on the same day for the same project. From that day they were best friends.

At last her eyes. They were sparkling behind that specs.

“Someone is looking nice today.” He said.

“Of course I am. You forgot right?” She kept her phone on the desk. Dhruv looked at her again. She was really looking so beautiful today. Open hair. Formal look. Of course, she can’t wear a fashionable dress in the office. But even in formal full sleeve baby pink shirt and dark pants with black heels, she was looking amazing. Then he tried to control himself from staring at her. A golden glow caught his attention. It was her golden watch, gifted by her father. She used to wear it only on her birthday. It was her birthday.

“Oh shit, sorry Mahi I really forgot your birthday. Really sorry. I wish you a great happy birthday.” He got up from his chair and hugged her. She smiled. He came back to his place.

“Thank you, idiot.” She smiled again. “you are eight hours late.”

“Really sorry, I was in my own thoughts, and boss gave me stupid work and I totally forgot about your birthday.”

“It’s okay, this was your stressful week. I know. And tomorrow is an even more important day.” She came near him. Took his hand. Looked in his eyes and said, “I believe in you will get that promotion and you deserve it.”

Dhruv felt relief. “Hope so.” He took a deep breathe. “Birthday girl, when is the birthday party?” she looked away.

“Dhruv, you know already I don’t do parties.”

“It’s your birthday Mahi.” He had a caring look in his eyes.

“Don’t worry I will enjoy your celebration of getting a promotion. Which is tomorrow.”

“I know you are stubborn. Not going to listen to anything.” Dhruv was happy. Mahi was an important person in his life. Talking to her was like a relief to him.

He turned towards the monitor and opened a browser and logged in to a shopping website. Without looking at her, he asked Mahi, “Tell me what you want for your birthday.” Dhruv always used to ask her what she want as a gift. Mahi was looking at him with a smile. She was happy.

“I don’t want anything.”

“Are you sure?” he said with a confused look.

“I want something, but I’ll tell you tomorrow. It’s more like I am going to ask you something.” Dhruv could tell, she was happy. So, he didn’t ask her why.

“As you wish Mahi.” He said.

Mahi checked the time. She stood up. Picked up her phone.

“It’s my group meeting time. I’ll see you after the office.”

“You will.” He said. Mahi started walking towards the elevator. Dhruv was looking at her. Without blinking. She was typing something on her phone. Dhruv's phone buzzed. He picked up the phone and looked at the received message.

‘Stop looking at me and finish your work, idiot.’

He smiled. Turned on the compiler and started coding again. With a smile on his face.

■

Dev was standing near the coffee machine. Drinking his coffee. He saw Mahi coming towards him. He waved a hand. Mahi replied. She came to him.

“Please make one more for me.” she said. Making herself comfortable near the cooler.

“The regular one?” He asked. Turning on the machine.

“Yes, the regular one.” Dev started making coffee for her. He looked at her and asked.

“How was the group meeting?” He finished making the coffee and gave it to her.

“Normal, as a group meeting goes.” She took a sip from the cup. “Little stressful.”

He chuckled. “Yes you are stressed but this is not about the meeting.”

“what you mean?” She looked at him doubtfully.

“Come on, Mahi, I know you from last two years. This is not your work stress.” He was smiling quietly.

Dev became friends with Mahi and Dhruv on a business trip. Two years ago. For a similar project. From that day they were best friends.

“Okay, but promise me you are not going to utter a single word in front of Dhruv.” She looked right into his eyes.

“I swear, I will not utter a single word.” There was a shine of trust in his eyes.

“I am going to ask him out.” She was so excited.

“Are you serious?” Dev was shocked. He always knew that Dhruv had a crush on her. But he didn’t see this coming.

“This is great news.” He hugged her. He was so happy for her.

“Do you think, he’ll accept?” Mahi asked.

Dev smiled and said. “Obviously he will. He doesn’t have any other option.” Mahi was blushing.

“Don’t try to tease at all. Please.”

“Relax, I will not.” He said. “when are you going to ask him?”

“Tomorrow in his party of getting a promotion.” She said.

“That is perfect timing.” He added. They both finished their coffee. Dev was having a client meeting in the next five minutes.

“Okay, Duty calls. See you after office.” He put the cup in the washbasin.

“Yup. You will.” She did the same and returned to the group meeting.

Dev came near his cubicle. Took out his phone. Typed a message. And sent it to a private number. Then he deleted the message history.

“Dev your client is waiting please hurry up.” He turned back. Put his phone again in the pockets.

“Yes, I am on the way.” Tina started walking away. “Tina!” he said. Tina looked back.

“Yes, Dev?”

“Can you please postpone tomorrow’s meetings. I have some family emergency.” He said while taking the files and arranging them.

“Yes, I will. Next Friday is good?”

“Yes. Thank you.” Dev headed towards the meeting room. With a worrying look on his face.

■

Dhruv was waiting for Mahi. The coffee evening was planned. Mahi and Dev were late as always. He started looking at the sky. Then again towards the watch. He was thinking about the promotion. The whole day was so long for him. So, the night was going to. He got a glimpse of Mahi near the gate.

Dev and Mahi were walking towards him. Dev was carrying a bunch of files.

“Are you going to work in the CCD?” Dhruv asked Dev with a boring look.

“Actually, sorry guys. I need to drop the plan. You both can go. I have some important work. I need to finish that.” Dev said while smiling. He looked at Mahi and winked. Mahi looked at him with anger. Indicating *shut up*. Dhruv ignored their sign language conversation.

“Okay, As you wish Dev. But you need to promise me, you will be there tomorrow, with me. I really need you brother.” Dev gave him a calm look.

“I am going to be there. Don’t worry.” Dev hugged them. And started walking towards his car. He opened the door. Gazed at Dhruv and Mahi. Started the car. And drove off.

“What was going on?” Dhruv asked Mahi. With a question mark on his face.

“Nothing. Relax it was just about his work.” She looked away. Dhruv knew she was lying. Mahi was a terrible liar.

“Okay. Let’s hurry. Coffee is waiting.” They both started heading towards their cars. After some time they reached the CCD. They both grabbed a table and ordered.

“Have you decided, about the particular thing you want me to gift you?” Dhruv asked Mahi with curious eyes. He was looking at her. Without a break. And waiting for the answer. Before it could get awkward. The waiter broke his concentration. He put the cups on the table and left. Dhruv took the cup and took a sip. Mahi was still holding the cup.

“Not decided yet.” She said looking away at the street. “I’ll tell you soon. Don’t worry.” She took a sip and put the cup back on the table.

“Take your time.” He said. When he saw Mahi was looking away. He signaled the waiter and returned to his coffee.

“When are you going to take Swara for shopping? She is so excited about it.”

“Maybe next Sunday. This week was is really busy. Please tell her to wait.” She requested him.

He said calmly. Leaning towards her. “You are her favorite. And I still don’t understand. How can you be her favorite!.” He teased her. She gave him an angry but cute weird look. She was about to hit him but she got disturbed when a waiter brought a chocolate heart shape cake. Twenty four number on it. Mahi was written on it with pink cream. And there were two cream baby pink roses on top. Her favorite. Both roses and chocolate.

Mahi was shocked. For ten minutes she was just looking at the cake and Dhruv. Back and forth.

“Happy Birthday Mahi.” Dhruv broke the silence and took her hand

“Thank you so much.” She said with watery eyes. She hugged him. And it was the longest they have ever hugged.

They celebrated her birthday. Dhruv paid the bill. Mahi was insisting. But he was more stubborn than her in the cases of paying bills.

“See you tomorrow. And really thank you.” She said while hugging him.

“You are most welcome.” He replied with a gift in his hand.

“Dhruv, Unplanned gift. This is not so you.” She was shocked.

“I know. But don’t open it until tomorrow. Please.”

“Okay. I will not. See you tomorrow.” She kissed him on the cheek and started heading towards her car.

“See you tomorrow. Take care.” He replied.

■

Dhruv rang the bell of his home. It was already 9 pm. He was late. Swara opened the door.

“I thought you are not going to come. Obviously, you were busy with Mahi.” She laughed. And punched Dhruv.

Dhruv mimicked her. With funny voice. “ *you were busy.*” He said, “Please don’t. I am really tired.” He made a very tired face.

“Yeah, now don’t be dramatic. Go and change dinner is ready. He took a shower and changed the cloths. He was wearing a regular t-shirt and blue jeans.

“Why are you wearing jeans. Are you going somewhere?” Swara asked with curiosity.

“Yeah, Just little work.” She knew questioning further is useless. So she didn’t say a single a anything.

After dinner, Swara got herself busy in the kitchen. Dhruv said, “I am going for a walk and also have a little work to be done. Will be late. So, don’t wait for me. Swara replied in positive.

Dhruv came down near the parking. He was about to open the door of the car. His phone ringed. He picked it up. After some seconds. He put the phone back in his pocket. Started the car. Drove off the Bombay circle. After five minutes of driving, he came near a huge building. He got out of the car. Cane near the building. The letters in front of him were shining in sparkling blue light.

BLUE NIGHT INN