

Dear

UMAIYA



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Umaiya



PRITAM UMAIYA, 2024

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1. Glimpses of My Childhood

Dear Umaiya,

You must be thinking, how did I suddenly remember you after so many years, and what it all means to write a letter in such an old-fashioned way? You may have hundreds of questions too, like: Where have I been for the past seven years? If it was so important, why didn't I speak to you on my last day at school? Why have I changed my name? And so many more. 🤔

Well, you can't be such a *buddhu*, but I promise I'll answer everything. But before that, it's important to know something about me, my past life, and the stories after January 14, 2017, that brought Pritam back to her Umaiya.

I have shared many stories since my childhood, and among all my stories, there is one that belongs to us, too. Now it's time for you to hear my stories, *our* stories. Ready? Okay, let's begin with a very small story about Pappu & Pinki—who are they?

Pappu had some level of education. He hadn't even started his profession properly when his parents began looking for a match for him. Pinki, on the other hand, had only a primary education. She was nearly 18 and very gorgeous. Then her family met Pappu's family, and proposals were exchanged!

Since Pappu wasn't ready yet, he wrote a letter to Pinki where he smartly mirrored every word in the letter and indirectly tried to deny the wedding.

But imagine, it was the 20th century, when parents were the bosses. In the end, many anonymous lovers got their hearts broken, and Pappu got his Pinki.

Pappu got a job in America, but neither Pinki nor his mom gave him permission to go, so poor Pappu started his own business instead. And that's how three wonders came into the world.

Now their lives are just like those of any other middle-class Indian couple. Pappu—yes, my dad—follows a simple routine, or rather a route, from home to his shop and back home again. And Pinki—my mom—is a great housewife, spending 80 percent of her life at home.

While my parents invested their whole lives looking after us, they never really became my ideals. Honestly, I feel that if they had lived their own lives more, it would have been better for everyone.

The first wonder is none other than my brother, Prince—just a year older than me. Well, you can think of him as either a cool guy or a genius. So far, I've seen the world but never found anyone as cool as he is. In my entire life, I've never seen him worry about anything or get into a fight with anyone; he is just... amazing.

His favorite toy was a rifle, and I remember how he would jump from heights like a hero, shooting down all the imaginary villains. 🏹 What started as a childhood passion has now become his career. He completed his bachelor's degree at the National Defence Academy and is now in his final year of officer training in Dehradun.

The next wonder is me, of course. On March 17, 2001, a stupid boy came into the world. They named me Pritam. But what they didn't realize was that my name means "lover," which I see as their biggest mistake. Who knows if my future will ever live up to my name?

My younger sister, Puja—the last wonder—has nothing to do with studying. She's just like any other younger sister you can imagine. Back then, her days were spent with her dolls or our pets, and now her phone is packed with thousands of selfies. She's cheerful and everyone's favorite.

Back to my story, I was the only one in my family with darker skin, so I was often teased by my siblings. I've had bad luck since the day I was born. My brother was a genius when it came to studies, and no one dared to mess with my sister—probably because no one wanted to deal with her crying all day. As for me, being the quiet one, I often became the favorite target for punishment by our home tutors.

We all had the habit of playing imaginative games, but I was at least the king of this. I had my own fantastic world of superheroes, and my whole day would pass in these imaginary adventures.

I'd pretend to be a hero like Vanraj from *Chandramukhi*, sometimes Shaktimaan, or even Dracula. 🦋 And, of course, there were villains too. I was so deeply immersed in that world that almost every night, I'd dream of a villain. He worshiped Goddess Kali, and I was always prepared to be his sacrifice. I'd wake up in a sweat, asking for water.

We started school at a very young age. You can picture me as any other school kid, wearing gray shorts, a white shirt with a tie, black shoes, straight hair, and a rectangular bag hanging on my back. I followed my brother to our local school, bringing my own imaginative world along with me.

I often shared my imaginative stories with friends. At that time, we watched a lot of action movies, so naturally, I assumed I knew Karate. One day, a senior called us over to show off our 'skills,' and what happened next was hilarious. My brother and I both made 'knife

hands' and started jabbing them into his belly repeatedly. He just stood there, smiling, while everyone else burst out laughing. 😊

I don't remember if I studied much back then, but I was surprised to see a first division on my report card. I really had a fear of school since I never did my homework. Our teacher was quite cruel.

One summer day, while I was sitting in class, the electricity went out. I picked up his attendance register and started to fan myself. When he saw me, he slapped me. How dare he slap me! The next time he left the classroom, I took the register, tore out the latest page, and chewed it. That's how I got my revenge. 😊

If I look back at my past and think about what I was good at, I'd say that if being a thief were a profession, I might have been quite successful. Everyone who knew me would probably agree. The reason is simple: I had a knack for being secretive. I rarely spoke, and most of the time, I'd be talking to myself or lost in my imaginative games.

I was a sneaky little thief, and my father's pocket was often my target. I would keep the stolen money in the neighbor's house. I remember one incident when a worker at our house had a radium watch that fascinated me. I asked him how much it cost, and he said 500 rupees.

Within a minute, I came back with the money in my hand, as usual, stolen from my father. He started shouting for my mother, and I got scared. I quickly hid the money and destroyed it.

Our life was full of excitement. We had a group of kids, including neighbors and my siblings. Our mornings would start with either sneaking fruit from nearby trees or picking flowers. Sometimes, we'd walk long distances to explore new places.

During the rainy season, we'd head to the nearby flooded areas, where a neighbor bhaiya would take us out on his boat to pick lotus flowers. Evenings were even more exciting. We'd play different games like Hide & Seek, Thief & Police, or run through the crop fields. It was the time I now wish for.

I would always change schools within a year, so I left that one as well and enrolled in Delhi Public School. It has its own stories, but let's save that for next time. For now, let me tell you more about how I was during my younger years.

Like every Indian, I was also exposed to religion and God from a young age. I even remember a young sadhu, dressed all in white, visiting our home. He looked at my hands and told me I would become an engineer one day.

I had a deep belief in God, and that belief made me think he was the only way to achieve my childhood dream of becoming a superhero. But how would I reach Him?

One day, I decided to start Tapasya (penance) and tried to run away from home. Unfortunately, with my tiny legs, I couldn't even get past the gate in our backyard. So, the plan failed, but not my eagerness.

The next thing I did was completely unbearable. I took different chemicals and pesticides, and mixed them together. I poured a small amount into a cap and went to the field behind our home. The smell was awful, but my desire to meet God was much stronger. And I drank it. 🧴😞

I can't describe what I felt at that moment. I was all alone, and the smell was unbearable. Within a minute, I started vomiting. 🤮 I rushed back home and drank some water, only to vomit again. For

the next two or three days, I had unpleasant burping, but no one ever found out what I had done.


Can you ever imagine that someone could be so stupid? Well, there's no doubt about it—I certainly can be. And this is just one story; if you look ahead, you'll see my whole life is filled with my own stupidity.

Anyway, enough of this nonsense for now. I'll share more about myself and my experiences growing up in the next one. Until then, take care of yourself, Umaiya, and know that you're always in my thoughts. 🙌

Yours Pritam

2. Young Pritam in School


Dear Umaiya,

I'll be happy if you're still reading this letter,  as it means you've started thinking about me. Maybe, through these letters, I can find my way from your thoughts to your heart. You're thinking, *na*?

Since we're getting to know each other more through these letters, I thought I'd share a bit about how I was as a kid when I first started school.

A new chapter began when I took admission in Delhi Public School. I was still in KG, and that's where I made my first real friend, Aman. We were very close friends. From class to the sports ground, he always accompanied me, and we would have our lunch together.

I used to tell him that I had superpowers. In fact, I strongly believed I could fly—just as I did in my dreams. There were even several moments when I actually tried to fly.

It was a perfect spring day, with the harvested fields shining under the morning sun. Like every day, this morning felt exceptionally beautiful. Feeling like Superman,  I began my grand adventure to reach the edge of the Earth. But after just a minute or two of running, I got tired, and my childhood dream remained just that—a dream.

Have you ever tried something crazy like that? No worries; next time, we'll run together. Then, we'll fly for sure.

Aman's father was a wealthy businessman, and he often talked about this, but I had nothing to do with it at all. Instead, it was Aman who

had to bear the consequences of my stupid act. There's an interesting story about this.

There was also a girl named Shivangi, who was the class captain and top student. Meanwhile, I was the kid who only knew, "A computer is an electronic machine... (silence)." One day, I took a piece of paper, carefully changed my handwriting, and wrote: "I love you, Shivangi – Aman," then slipped it into a girl's bag. 🎒😊

I can't believe a five- or six-year-old could come up with something like that! Afterward, I walked past that group of girls, acting very smart, just to hear what they were saying. One of them said, "I can't believe Aman could do this." Thankfully, nothing ever came of it. Poor Aman!



Every year during some festivals, we had stage events, and that year, there was a Radha and Krishna dance performed by the junior students.

Since Krishna is often portrayed with a wheatish complexion, I thought I would be perfect for the role. But no one even considered me for it. Instead, our class captain from the boys' side got the opportunity to dance with Shivangi. Still, I knew that with my fear of performing on stage, I wouldn't have been able to do it anyway.

I remember my name being entered for some sports events, which I never wanted to participate in. First, there was the ball-and-spoon race. Lacking the patience to balance the ball, I ended up being the boy who stayed on the track the longest without finishing. During the high jump, on a scorching summer day, I jumped too early—before even reaching the rope.

My brother went to a boarding school in Bhagalpur City. From a very early age, he used to tell our mom that he wanted to study and go

outside. I, on the other hand, always had complaints about the hostel—the food, the living conditions, or something else. I ended up following him there as well.

There, I made friends who were just as imaginative as I was. My stories expanded from Nagraj and Vanraj to ghosts and vampires. I used to tell my ghost stories to them, and they would listen so carefully. While my classmates were busy repeating "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall," I was lost in the pictures of fairies  and dinosaurs  in an encyclopedia.

I noticed something unique about my brother and me: we were the only ones who never got punished by the principal. Eventually, my brother had to bear the consequences of my tantrums. My wish on a shooting star came true, and we left that hostel within a year.

Next, my father sent me to St. Michael's School in Katihar with my sister, while my brother got admitted to New Brilliant School in our own city. I was in first grade at that time.

St. Michael's School was more a place of terror than a school. The principal was extremely cruel. But again, I broke the record of not being punished for more than 10 days.


The Principal was a Brahmin with an old-fashioned mentality, and he believed punishing students was the way to make them excel in studies. My handwriting was terrible, and that became a reason for my punishment. You won't believe it, but within two or three days, my handwriting became the most beautiful. I was asked to visit every classroom and show my handwriting to everyone. After that, the cruel principal started liking me.


He had two sons, and the younger one, named Sunny, was my classmate. We really enjoyed each other's company and became

best friends. I remember one day when there was a cricket match on TV. I hated watching cricket, but Sunny and I preferred watching cartoons. While all the senior students were preparing to watch the match, Sunny came to me with the TV remote and switched the channel to cartoons.

As expected, everyone started shouting, but no one dared to take the remote from him. He said, "Pritam doesn't like cricket, so we won't watch it." Everything depended on me. If I said to switch back to cricket, he would. I felt so embarrassed because everyone was staring at me, so I naturally said to switch it back to cricket.

Since Sunny was often in my company, it was natural for him to get pulled into my dream world. I strongly believed in the concept of souls. I used to think that after I died, I would gain superpowers, and we talked about this a lot. His dream was to break free from his strict father, and mine was to gain magical powers.

Eventually, we started making plans. One day, Sunny managed to get hold of two knives.  The plan was simple: we would hide on the terrace, and once the doors were locked and everyone was asleep, we'd execute our plan by killing each other. Can you believe that two kids in first grade could come up with such a plan?

That same day, we already began feeling some fear, but we stuck to the plan. Once everyone went to bed, we hid on the terrace. A senior girl came and locked the door. It was a calm, clear night. At first, we were silent, then we started discussing: "What if we don't die? What if one of us dies but not the other?" 

I can't fully explain what we were feeling at that moment. Eventually, we threw away the knives and started pounding on the door. Thankfully, no one ever found out about this, as it had only been 10 or 15 minutes since the door was locked, and we came up with a

simple excuse. We never talked about it again, and during my first vacation, I never dared to come back.


How stupid was I in my childhood, wasn't it? You've probably never heard anything like it before. Did this story bring a smile to your face? If it did, that's awesome! I have plenty more idiotic stories, but I'll save those for next time. Have a good day, Umaiya.

Yours Pritam

3. A Mischievous Mind

Dear Umaiya,

Today, I've got another crazy story of mine to share. By now, you've probably got a pretty good idea of how I used to think back in the day, but you won't believe just how daring I could be. Let me tell you the story.

My sister and I enrolled in NBS, where my brother was already studying. The environment was different, and I liked the school because we were no longer in a boarding school. The only thing I hated was the school van rides. 

Going to and coming back from school were the worst moments for me. Some girls would always make comments like, "He's so quiet," or "He never says a word," which made me feel even more uncomfortable.

Being an introvert, I wouldn't say a word. But they didn't know that I was a born devil, I stayed quiet only because my sister was traveling with me. My sister, however, was the complete opposite of me—she never stopped talking.

Between these horrible rides, I had a lovely moment as well. I was starting to have a crush on a girl named Alvira K. We would travel together every day in the same van. But the problem was that my sister always sat with me. Because of that, nothing ever came of it. I never said a single word to her, so something remained untouched before it could take shape.

By the way, since we're talking about girls, it's important to admit that, from childhood till now, I've been quite the mischievous one when it comes to girls. I have plenty of such stories, but let's not talk about them—not even in future stories. I'll only talk about the ones that are safe to tell; otherwise, I'll end up getting scolded by a lot of girls! 😊

As I grew, so did my thoughts. One day, my friend brought a thornapple from a Datura plant. It was Basant Panchami. Since it's a poisonous plant, it could have been enough to kill me. I tried chewing it, but luckily, the taste was so unpleasant that I spit it out. Maybe I wasn't in the mood to die that day, especially since that same friend was planning to show me the house of a girl.

On Republic Day that year, he had asked me who my girlfriend was. Being around 10 years old and single, I felt embarrassed and randomly looked around before settling my eyes on the most beautiful girl in our school at the time. No one would believe it, but I was just in 4th standard, and she was in 8th or 9th. 😊

But don't judge me, Umaiya. It was something that was just... happening, and it really didn't mean anything. I did it only to show off to my friends. Her name was Kajal, but I never understood why everyone called her Kimmi. As we had planned, we left school early, and my friend showed me her house, which I now realize was wrong.

At that time, I was a good artist. I remember drawing various sketches of the human face and a portrait of Goddess Durga. I would also help my sibling create designs in Mehndi (Henna) and Rangoli. But I was more absorbed in Hollywood fantasy movies on TV—that's why I always imagined myself as a Superman.

My desire to become a superhero grew stronger over time, and different wild ideas began to appear in my mischievous mind.

One day, I woke up early and headed to the railway station. I boarded the first train I saw, determined to find an untouched forest where I could meditate and gain superpowers—or, if that failed, die under a train. What I hadn't considered was what I'd do when I got hungry. I had a habit of eating every hour or two. By noon, I got off at a deserted station.

Now, I was completely alone. I wandered around the ticket counter aimlessly, and a man eating lunch nearby noticed me. Eventually, he approached and asked what I was doing there. I had no excuse, so I told him the truth—I had run away from home.

He then asked for my father's phone number, but I was too scared, so I pretended I didn't remember it. I did have a friend's number scribbled on my hand from the day before, but it had faded. The man tried several numbers but couldn't get through. Eventually, I gave him my father's number.

When he called, my father was already at the police station. The way he asked, "Where is your son?" made everyone think the man was a kidnapper. Eventually, everything got sorted out, and I went with him to his house.

He lived in the railway quarters with his wife, daughter, and son. His wife treated me with kindness, even though I was a stranger. I finally ate some food and drank a glass of milk.

Later that evening, a man came in a car to pick me up. He had thought I had run away because of some romantic issue, but he was shocked to see that I was just a young boy.

On the way home, I started thinking of a believable excuse to tell my father. When we arrived, I made up a wild story about how a man had made me faint with a handkerchief—just like in the movies—and

took me to the railway station in a van. I said I had regained consciousness on the train and got off at the next station. There were more questions, and I added more details to the story.

When we arrived, we first went to the police station, where my father explained the story I had made up while my eyes were fixed on the policeman's gun the entire time.

When we got home, I was shocked to see a crowd of people gathered at my house, and my mother was busy performing a *puja* (worship). I had to repeat my story to them as well. I don't know if they believed me, but at that point, I had no other option. 🤔

So, that's my childhood. On one hand, it was exciting, but on the other, it was pretty terrible. I can't believe I hadn't even reached my teens and was already creating such drama. Of course, you could say I was a bit of a mastermind when it came to lying or making stories.

But how was your childhood, Umaiya? What kind of mischief did you get up to back then? Were you a naughty girl, or more of a quiet one? I'm really excited to know what little Umaiya was like—so adorable, I bet. 😊 Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Pritam

4. Did I have talent?

Dear Umaiya,

My story is moving forward, and I feel myself getting closer to *our* story. Yes, today, I have a story about the same school where we met. But have patience—your entry is yet to happen.

My brother had to take the Sainik School entrance exam, so he got admission to Adhunik Vidyapeeth in Katihar. By that time, I had completed 4th grade, and as usual, Papa sent me there too.

It was 2012, and I was 11. Unfortunately, the school turned out to be just as bad as St. Michael's. In fact, it was the worst school I'd ever attended. Interestingly, the principal was the younger brother of the principal at St. Michael's, and he shared the same rigid mentality.

The principal believed that since I had been studying in a CBSE school, it would be difficult for me to manage the 5th-grade curriculum, which followed the Bihar Board. So, without even testing me, he placed me in 3rd grade.

I hated the environment: poor living conditions, bad food, and no real focus on quality education. I could hardly adjust. My brother was the only thing that kept me going.

The students were even more irritating—almost everyone used abusive words. While I had some friends, Hasan N. became my best friend because he was different from the others; at least he didn't speak like that.

During this time, I received the heartbreaking news of my grandpa's passing. Soon after, my brother cleared the entrance exam on his first attempt and left the school, which meant I was left alone.

Since the principal trusted me, I was allowed to stay with the seniors in a room that wasn't locked. I took advantage of this and made my way out of the hostel.

It was a dark night, and I didn't have the courage to jump over the wall into the jungle. Everyone used to say that the jungle had once been a burial ground for the dead. 🙈 I was terrified. I woke up Hasan, and finally, I jumped into the jungle. I can't describe the moment when I found myself alone there. In an instant, all my fear vanished. From that day on, I no longer feared darkness.

Unlike every other time, I couldn't follow my brother to Sainik School until I cleared the entrance exam. I had no other option but to return to the same dreadful school. I was terrified about the punishment, but to my surprise, the principal didn't even ask me about it.

Even when I fled the hostel for the second time after hearing that my maternal uncle had committed suicide, no one even questioned me when I returned. I remember I was sitting on the ground, feeling upset, when Soni ma'am came over to talk to me.

Soni ma'am was everyone's favorite. She had a unique way of teaching—never getting angry and always encouraging us. Her presence alone made me feel better, even though I didn't respond much at the time.

Maths was considered the most important subject at the school, and I initially struggled due to the Hindi syllabus. But since I had already completed 4th grade and was placed in 3rd, it gave me an advantage.

There were three of us who were considered good in math: my friend Badal, Nisha, and me. They became my competition, and being good at Maths made me a favorite of our strict Maths teacher, Mr. Amit.

I was neither good at academics nor interested in joining the army, yet I never understood why everyone thought of me as a studious guy or why my father sent me to take the Sainik School entrance exam. Just because I was quiet in class, teachers assumed I was a genius. I was doing well only because I was repeating the same class.

Rather, I had more expertise in creative things like drawing and singing, and if storytelling counts, then yes, that too.

I was in the 4th grade when Arijit Singh was becoming more popular. He was my favorite, and I often found myself singing his songs. I was a good singer back then. But wait—I know what you're thinking. You think I'm lying, right? Just trust me on this.

I could sing well, which is why Amit Sir liked me more. He would often call me to sing for him. I remember how I'd sing secretly while the whole class was loudly repeating the lesson during evening prep. And on some Saturdays, I'd even sing in front of the class.

On one occasion, I was asked to sing on the mic. 🎤 That was the first time I sang in public, and I chose my favorite song, *Tum Hi Ho*. I still remember Soni Ma'am being there. Unlike the other teacher standing next to her, urging her to leave, she stayed until I finished my song.

During my time there, I developed a strong interest in space science. I would borrow seniors' science books to study planets, stars, their life cycles, and more. The topic that fascinated me the most was extraterrestrial life of aliens. 🦠🪐🚀

Another guy in my class, Prashant, shared the same interest. He would always bring new magazines about space and aliens, and I would stay up all night reading them.

At that time, I felt like a scientist. I would wake up early to see the morning star and spot Venus during evening prayer. My fantasy world began to blend with space science and aliens, shaping itself into stories. All my imaginative games were based on these stories and various superheroes. I remember sharing these stories with my classmates and explaining space facts to them in the classroom.

My drawing skills had improved a lot by this time. I drew many space diagrams, and once even created a drawing showing the process of cloning a human, which fascinated our science teacher so much that she asked me to draw one for her.

I also remember drawing a world map and adding various science facts about space, which I pasted on the classroom wall. Many senior students came to see it, but they made fun of me because of the text I had written below: *'I am the great scientist Dr. Pritam Jaiswal.'* It was actually a line from the famous superhero TV show *Shaktimaan*, which eventually made me take the drawing down from the wall.

I was often found in the classroom reading my interests, even during game time. That's when I became a target for some senior students. For some reason, they started suspecting me of being involved in the thefts happening there.

Theft was common, and I always seemed to be in suspicious places. The reason was simple: whenever I got lost in my imaginative games, I couldn't control myself and would completely immerse myself in them without noticing where I actually was.

One day, I was flying and fighting my imaginary villains. I would use my fingers and sound effects to battle them. I was completely lost in my own world, unaware that Amit Sir and some students were watching me. Suddenly, when my fingers moved in their direction, I noticed them sitting at a distance, watching and smiling at me. Feeling shy, I quickly made my way to the classroom. 🙈😊

This story leaves me in confusion. I still wonder what talents I had. Sometimes, I thought of myself as a singer or a drawing artist; other times, I imagined myself as a storyteller or a scientist.

Now, you tell me, Umaiya—was I really a talented guy? It feels complicated to look back and understand who I was, but I still wonder... if I had tried, maybe I could have been... I don't know. But the place I was in was not meant for me. I wish I had been somewhere else.

And now, when it comes to talent, this story would be incomplete without you. I always wonder about your voice and how you sing so beautifully. Seriously, it's just out of this world. Alright, if you tell me your secret, I promise I'll share my biggest one with you. 🤔

I keep thinking about what I had, and you keep singing. Wishing you a day as beautiful as your voice, Umaiya.

Yours Pritam

5. Change of Personality

Dear Umaiya,

You're probably wondering about my personality. What I've told you about myself so far and the version of me you've seen—there's a big difference. But things don't just happen by themselves; it's the time and the place that play a huge role in shaping who we are.

The story I told you last time was just one side of the picture. Something else was happening concurrently in my life: I was changing, and I was losing my creativity and skills.

The first event that played a big role in changing my personality was when I lost my faith in God.

Back then, I was a true devotee of gods and religion. I would worship every religion. Once, I started reading the Bible, which seemed more like a comic. It took me three days to finish it. Amit Sir also noticed me reading the Bible late at night, and somehow, I sensed that he didn't like it.

I was probably in the 4th grade, and during my vacation, I didn't want to return to the hostel. By then, my desire to die was at its highest. One night, while everyone was asleep, I woke up quietly. I remember crawling under my parents' bed and unlocking two doors without making a sound.

I stepped outside into the darkest night I had ever seen—there was no moon, no electricity, just silence. I made my way to the railway tracks and eventually found myself standing on them.

I could hear the loud sound of a train in the distance, with its headlight shining far away. The train started moving and was getting closer. I was very scared. I stood frozen, and my heartbeat matched the sound of the railway track. Before the train could get any closer, I got off the track and ran straight home. 😨

Now, instead of fear, my mind was filled with a deep hatred for God. I can't fully explain what I was feeling at that moment—let's just say I had faced the fear of death up close.

Halfway home, I noticed my father following me. I continued on, and he quietly trailed behind until we reached home. My mother and sister were waiting for me. Sensing what was about to happen, my mother urged me to go to bed quickly, but it was too late—my father had already arrived, and I got beaten badly. I spent the whole night thinking about it.

From then on, my faith in God and religion began to fade. Back at school, I started to insult anyone who spoke to me about God or religion, and I even started using harsh language—but let's not break down that part of the story.

There were students from different religions, and many of them became my targets. Eventually, I found myself in conflict with students who believed in God.

But as time passed, I began to see things more practically rather than through faith. I started focusing on my studies, and I remember scoring 99 out of 100 in Mathematics. But wait, this doesn't mean I was a genius. It was only because we were told to memorize every single word from the math book. And if you're taught the same book for two years, anyone can become a "genius."

Another event was when I came face to face with my reality. I always imagined myself as Superman. Once, Badal asked me if I could fight anyone. Without a second thought, I replied, “Even if they all came at once.” But soon, my belief was going to disappear.

We had two separate rooms: one for juniors, where I stayed, and another for students in the competitive class. A senior guy lived with us, and one day, he found himself in conflict with all the other classmates.

I don’t know why, but it was decided that there would be a fight that night between him and the seniors. All of us juniors were supposed to be on his side. Since we were triple in numbers, I agreed quickly.

But that night, something unexpected happened. The seniors came up with a clever plan—they realized fighting all at once would make too much noise. So, they decided to settle it with one-on-one matches. They chose a candidate from their side, and I was picked first from our side since I was tall for my class and matched the senior’s height.

The fight started, and I never imagined my first fight would go this way. It was completely one-sided. He punched me one after another, and within a minute, I admitted defeat. 🥊🥊 Then another fight, and another—we lost all the matches. I stayed silent.

This might have been normal for them, but for me, it was my defeat in my very first fight. I started realizing how weak I felt in this environment. Naturally, I began pushing myself to adapt. This was when I first started exercising.

After that, I had more fights, and, as expected, using foul language became common for me. In fact, it seemed necessary to survive there.

I was in 5th grade at the time, and that's when I first discovered masturbation. And I was at least the first one in my class to break anyone's record, and as a result, I was often found in the lavatory. 🤔

Everything was fine until one day a guy complained about me to Amit Sir. He was trying to irritate me, and I filled him with abuse. He then explained every exact word to Amit Sir. I wasn't worried about the punishment but about losing Amit Sir's trust. I could sense what was going on in his mind. The following month, he also left the school.

We were now in the 6th standard. As the exam approached, I focused on my studies and stayed up late to prepare. I felt confident, but during the exam, I realized I had only concentrated on Maths. What frustrated me was seeing the English version of the questions below the Hindi ones. Why didn't they allow me to choose English from the start, instead of wasting my two years? After the exam, I was sure I wouldn't pass.

By this time, we had moved into our new house. Now in the 7th standard, my principal considered giving me another chance. But all I wanted was to leave that school. Still, I took two more entrance exams for JNV and Sainik School that year but didn't pass.

Since I was quite good in academics, I skipped the 7th grade and was placed in the 8th grade. While many of my classmates left, new students joined our class. Abhishek was one of them. He was kind, interested in science, and a good artist. Since we shared the same interest we became good friends.

While Abhishek would draw good pictures, I had become a naughty artist by this time. I had a collection of naked pictures that I had drawn myself. 🤔 They looked very realistic, but they weren't something to show in public. If I had dared to show them, I'd have

received slaps instead of applause. Therefore, only some got the opportunity to see them before I destroyed them.

Among the girls, Farhat was different—she was open and friendly, which made her the only one I could talk to. Otherwise, there was a drought of girls; only a few were in the hostel. It seems almost impossible that during my entire time there, I never got seriously interested in anyone. After all, I am Pritam. But the school just wasn't my type. Maybe that's why I never got to be my true self.

Rahul Bhaiya, a college student, was around as well—you know him very well. He was sometimes a friend, sometimes a teacher, and sometimes a love mentor. He was a passionate cricketer and a successful lover. I shared a room with him and Ashish Bhaiya, the principal's son.

I still had a bad habit of teasing some of the religious guys. To them, I was a villain. Your brother, Taslim, was in the 5th grade. He would come to me frequently; maybe he liked my company. But I made fun of him for his religion. He was a sweet guy. So, I didn't feel good about teasing him. But when you're the leader of a bad gang in your class, it becomes your job to keep it up. And that's why you might think of me as the bad guy.

Gradually, coming here started to feel like the biggest mistake of my life. I realized how much I had changed. By that time, I had also lost my singing skills. You know well that there were no opportunities for skills or creativity. The only thing running through my mind was that I needed to leave this place and get admission to a better school.

What if we had shifted to America? Our life would probably have been so different. But wait—if we had been in America, how would I have ever met my Umaiya? So, plan canceled! Let's stay in India, where my sweetheart is.

Anyway, forgive me. Next time, I'll be back with none other than our own story. So cross your fingers, Umaiya, 🙌 our story is about to begin. Excited? Catch you soon, Umaiya!

Yours Pritam

6. My First Love

Dear Umaiya,

Today's story is going to be really romantic, so if you're not in a good mood, turn off the lights and go to bed. Otherwise, be ready to challenge yourself not to fall in love. 💖

In every school, there's always that one love story that stands out—unlike any other. Ours was that story, the one that changed me forever. November 15, 2016, is an unforgettable day for me; It was the first time I took my first glance at you and I got my Umaiya.

It was on the 14th that you arrived, and I kept hearing news that a girl had enrolled in the 6th standard. It seemed ordinary, and I didn't think much of it. Later I found out that the girl was Taslim's elder sister. During the evening prayer, you were in the girls' queue, but I was too shy to look at you that day. The next morning, I tried again but couldn't gather the courage.

It was during the morning assembly when I truly looked at you for the first time. There you were, standing in the queue, with that cute face. Wow. And your dress... absolutely lovely. You had short hair, kind of like Shraddha Kapoor in *Chhichhore*. I wish I had a time machine; I would live my entire life just looking at you. 😍

I wouldn't say it was love at first sight, but the feeling was... different. You looked truly amazing. Back in the classroom, I couldn't stop thinking about you, even though I didn't know why.

Nothing really happened, but something inside me changed; I stopped teasing Taslim.

A couple of days later, I heard your name—Umaiya Tasnim. ✨ To me, your name is more than just a word; it's something incredibly special. *It reminds me of who I am.* You are my entire world, Umaiya—my love, my happiness, and my obsession.

I don't know what true love is. But in everyone's life, there's always someone who feels different—you can't explain how or why, it just happens, and suddenly everything starts to feel special. That's what I started to feel. For the next few days, I couldn't understand why I couldn't stop myself from looking at you. It was the first time I'd felt something different for a girl.

I often saw you passing by, and I started interpreting Newton's law in a new way—your every action seemed to trigger a reaction inside me. It was as if there was something about you that set you apart from everyone else. Something special, the kind that makes your heart say, "She's the one you've been waiting for."

It was your very first Saturday there, and most of the teachers were absent. So, Rahul bhaiya took our class. We decided to sing a song. Since I was a terrible singer at the time, I didn't join in, but the others were singing. When it was Farhat's turn to sing, she didn't sing but said something I will always be grateful for: "Umaiya sings well." And the next moment, you were called.

I'll never forget the moment you walked into our class. With a smile on your face, you looked like Cinderella. You sat on the front bench, and I was two steps behind you.

Then.. you started singing, 'Ae mere humsafar..., ' and I can't explain what I felt. Every single word from your voice was so pleasant that it felt like it was flowing through my entire body. It was the most extraordinary voice I had ever heard in my life.

When you finished the song, the bell rang, everyone left the class, and I was still there, completely captivated.

I didn't realize it yet, but my story of becoming Pritam had already begun. I was changing my clothes, and a faint smile lingered on my face. Honestly, I had never smiled like that before.

I rushed to the terrace to join Rahul bhaiya, Abhishek, and the others. They were busy talking, but all I had was that smile. Down below, you came with some girls to have breakfast, and as I looked at you, I whispered, "Umaiya's voice is impressive. How talented she is." Hearing this, Abhishek guessed my feelings and yelled, "Pritam.. Aren't you in love!" and everyone started laughing.

On Sunday, I was sitting alone in the classroom when you came with Taslim to talk to your parents on the phone. Since you were speaking Bengali, I couldn't understand a word, but I liked your voice. I tried to focus on my favorite subject, science, but I couldn't concentrate. I tried several times and failed. Eventually, I went to the terrace, and there you were again, talking with Taslim.

I somehow felt that Taslim was talking about me—or maybe it was just my imagination, since I was watching you. For the next several days, I don't know why, but I couldn't stop thinking about you.

It became a routine to find you on the terrace, and I kept feeling anxious, wondering, "What if he's saying something bad about me?" It felt strange to watch you, but I couldn't stop myself from doing it. I'm so sorry if that was irritating.

Gradually, my happiness turned into a headache. I started losing sleep at night. From morning until night, your name, your song—everything seemed to circle around me.

I began to see you everywhere, all the time. It frustrated me because I couldn't focus on anything else. Whenever I saw or heard you, my heart would suddenly race, my breath quicken, and a strange warmth would spread through me. And all I could do was sit there, hands over my head, completely overwhelmed.

It was all new to me, and I couldn't bear the headache any longer, so one day I told Abhishek about it. He started laughing and said, "You might be in love." I said, "Umaiya sings well, and she's beautiful, but I have a wheatish complexion. There is no way she could ever like me." He replied, "If you truly love her, then you don't need to worry about your appearance."

But that wasn't my real worry. There was something else, something I couldn't pinpoint, but I didn't know what it was.

It had only been two weeks since your arrival, yet my behavior had completely changed. After many sleepless nights and restless days, I finally had to accept that I was in love. I was sitting in class as usual, and I can't describe the happiness I felt the moment I admitted my feelings for you; it was as if magic had happened, and my headache vanished instantly. I cried out: "I love you Umaiya."

This was just the beginning of our story. I'm not sure what you're feeling at this moment—are you smiling? Keep smiling, Umaiya; you look wonderful when you do. 😊 The story is far from over. Until then, keep me in your thoughts.

Yours Pritam

7. Her Words, My Challenge

Dear Umaiya,

Like every other story, ours had its own challenges along the way. And what kind of love could it be that comes so easily? Just look at our own story—so complicated that it hasn't been solved yet. Now imagine how special our love is.

You probably have no idea, Umaiya, how much impact every word of yours has on me. And this story is about something you once said—something that completely changed my life.

I was so happy after realizing I was in love with you. I then shared my feelings with Rahul Bhaiya. This wasn't new to him. He smiled, gave me a hug, and led me out of the classroom, explaining something about love as we walked toward the hostel.

That's when I found out that your classmates, Sonu, used to make comments about you in class. But a simple warning was enough for him—he said he didn't know about me and wouldn't have done it otherwise.

In any case, I had nothing to do with him or anyone else. For me, if someone loves you, they aren't my enemy—they're my friend. What matters most to me is you yourself.

I don't know how, but within a short period of time, almost half of the hostel knew about this. Maybe someone was working against me behind the scenes. Even Aashish bhaiya found out, but why would he have a problem?

And of course, Taslim knew too. The only thing left was to figure out whether you had any idea. Surely, by then, you had noticed me.

Next, I approached Farhat and told her everything. Thankfully, she agreed to help. That day, we secretly made a deal: I was supposed to help her with her crush, whom I knew very well. 🍷

Within a few days, she came back with all the details about you—your family, your interests, your date of birth, and more. I carefully wrote everything down in my favorite science notebook and committed it all to memory.

Since it was winter, I usually sat outside while you stood on the terrace. With my head down in a book, my eyes were always on you. And I know you knew it well. I would often say to Abhishek, "Look, the moon is visible during the day," and he would search the sky before realizing which "moon" I was really talking about.

Not only that, but you hadn't even realized that while you studied in the classroom, sometimes I would look at you through the window during evening prep and during the prayer, I kept my eyes open, just hoping to catch a glimpse of you.

One Saturday, I asked Rahul Bhaiya to call you to sing. For the second time, you were invited. While my eyes were fixed on you, Rahul Bhaiya and the others were watching my expressions closely.

Your entrance felt like a romantic song playing around me. You looked fantastic in your winter outfit. I remember how I tried to indirectly ask you to sing the same song, but you were clever. Instead of repeating it, you started a different song, *Kaun Tujhe*.

As you sang, I found myself completely lost in your voice. I swear, I would have given you a warm hug, but... No.

Even today, it feels so romantic when I imagine reliving that moment, but in my own way. It's just... I don't want to express this in words. Just think about how powerful your hug could be.

You hadn't finished the song yet when you stopped, saying you didn't remember the lyrics, and then switched to another song, *GF BF*. My reaction was, "I will.. be your bf."


This time, Rahul bhaiya told me to sing. I hadn't sung for about three years, but I thought I could still manage, so I started my favorite song, "Tum Hi Ho." While I was singing, two emotions were bombarding me at the same time: first, regret for losing my voice, and another, embarrassment in front of you.

The moment I heard you needed the lyrics for the song, I jumped in to help. Since phones weren't allowed, Rahul bhaiya was my only hope for getting the lyrics. He had the song, but it wasn't a smartphone. Late that night, I stayed up searching through his thousands of songs, listening, pausing, and replaying it, as I carefully wrote down the lyrics in my best handwriting.

It wasn't until I finished writing the last line that I realized something: you didn't understand Hindi, and I, being born stupid, had written the entire song in Hindi. It was already late, and I was supposed to turn off the lights. That night, I went to bed feeling disappointed, and the song remained with me.

While my friends and others could easily talk to you, I don't know what happened the moment you appeared in front of me. I couldn't even say a word or look into your eyes. I admit that I'm an introvert, but it was still so strange. That's what happens when an introvert falls in love.

I had my own way of talking to you—it was only through our eyes, wasn't it? For me, you're still that sweet Umaiya—the one with that flirting smile, who had hair like Shraddha Kapoor, a cute face with those beautiful eyes, your heart-shaped pink lips (with the lower one being slightly fuller). Your nose—like inherited from your papa but smaller, a chin that stood slightly forward, and those tiny earrings always hidden behind your hair. Remember?

Should I go on? That blue dress  you wore with those black bottoms—I don't even know what they're called. And those slippers with the flower designs. Alright, I'll stop now. If you want, I could describe your entire geography, but I think that's enough for today.

Damn, I feel like such a mischievous guy right now—this moment reminds me of the portrait scene from *Titanic*! Well, don't worry—I'm not going to draw any of your pictures. I'm no longer an artist, after all. 😊

Alright, let's get back to our story. Do you remember, Farhat had once asked you what you thought of me?

Okay, let me remind you. I insisted Farhat to ask you about me, and she probably did. And your reply... was heartbreaking. According to Farhat, you said I walked with my head down and that I was "black."

"I am black." My siblings had teased me about this before, but I had never felt as much pain as I did hearing it from you. It was as if, in one swift moment, you clipped the wings of the flying Pritam.

This is the harsh reality of life. Well, it's not your fault, Umaiya; this is just how the world is. That's why I refused to believe that Krishna was black. Have you ever seen a black-skinned Krishna on TV?

And I completely understand how you used to think of me. Yes, I was exactly that—quiet, with a boring personality. My appearance, the

way I dressed, and the way I walked—just as you said, with my head down. There was nothing about me that you could have liked.

After all, it's looks that make the first impression. Unfortunately, I don't have the kind of looks you do, but maybe love doesn't care about that. If only I had a charming appearance, I'm sure I would've been the Casanova of the 21st century!

Afterward, I tried to distance myself from you, but how could anyone run from their own feelings? For the first time in my life, I felt truly depressed. Let's just skip over this part.

After some days of unbearable pain, I decided I wouldn't pursue you anymore. Frustrated by always hearing "Bhaiya" from you, I went directly to the same guy from your class and said, "Whether you love her or not, I don't care. I no longer love her." He seemed happy.

I was just walking away after saying this when I saw you coming from a distance. Like every day, you looked cheerful with your friends, and I felt frozen in place. At that moment, all my frustration melted into the same old smile. And guess what? Pritam took the challenge against your words. I immediately went back to him, saying, "I was just kidding." 😊

How was this story, Umaiya? I know you haven't even realized how things were unfolding on my side. Just hold on for a moment to see how things unfold in the future. Until then, keep smiling and stay awesome.

Yours Pritam

8. Goodbye, Not Forever

Dear Umaiya,

Have you ever wondered why you're so special? You may not even realize it, but I'm convinced you have some kind of supernatural powers. When you're with me, it feels like I can do anything—win any race and tackle every challenge life throws my way. You make me feel extraordinary, fearless. You are my Stargirl, Umaiya.

But how unfortunate it is that even when we were together, you were never truly with me. Well, I can't change the past, but I can tell you the story. Let's see what happened after I heard those heartbreaking words from you.

Hoping for some ideas, I went back to my true friend, Rahul bhaiya, and told him everything. Then he said something that not only gave me a boost but would change my life entirely. He said, "Think—why would Umaiya like you?" He continued, "Girls like talent, and you need to have some, just like Umaiya—she sings well." 💡

That's when I started to reflect on what talent I had. It definitely wasn't good marks in Maths or Science. I once had a good singing voice, but I'd lost it. So, I went to him and asked, "Will you teach me to dance?"

And there, my journey began the very next day. I woke up earlier than usual, eager to start. Since Rahul bhaiya never got up before 8, I made him wake up, and he showed me a simple hand wave, telling me to practice. That was the first time I tried dancing.

Day or night didn't matter to me—I kept practicing until I got it right. Then, I started to truly feel the movements. That's why body waves

became my signature move; they were triggered by love rather than my passion.

As I started gaining confidence, I began visiting the girls' hostel every evening around 7. Remember?? How I used to walk down the stairs without looking back? And that surprised look on your face... just superb. 🧡

One day, when you seemed particularly happy, you gave me your best smile. Without waiting, Farhat seized the moment. Although I didn't want to talk to you that day, Farhat pulled you toward me and started urging me to express my love. I didn't want to push things, but other girls began cheering, and then Farhat asked, "Say it—do you love Umaiya?" I had no choice, so I said, "Yes, I do."

Ohh... that angry face of yours. You went back to your room, and I thought, whatever happened may not have been good, but at least now you knew that I loved you. After a while, Farhat returned, saying, "Please, say no. She's really angry." Just as you came back looking like an angry bird, I sensed your mood. You asked, "Say you don't love me?" I had no choice but to say no this time.

Every story has a villain, and in my case, there were several. One day, while I was sitting outside as usual, you waved at me for the first time, asking me to come up. Without thinking, I rushed up the stairs, not caring who might be watching. When I was about to reach the top, I found myself standing before you.

You have no idea how happy I was. But the moment you started speaking, it felt like I was losing the ground beneath my feet.

You asked, "Why did you say we're friends now? I never told you that." You continued and I was dumbfounded, unsure when I had

ever said something like that. Just as I was trying to figure it out, Taslim arrived, and our conversation was cut short.

Later, I realized what had happened. Two days earlier, while chatting with my classmates, I had said something that didn't mean that. Prince, your classmate and my true enemy, overheard it and asked you if you have made friends with me—his real intention was to ruin my reputation. It was too much to handle, but I know him well; he's rude, so I controlled my anger because I didn't want to escalate the situation further.

I continued visiting you every evening, and you responded with your smile. We often found ourselves going upstairs at the same time. One day, just as you were about to go up and I was heading there too, you stopped and, in your sweet voice, said, "I will not go." I can't explain how impressive that moment was.. For the rest of the day, I couldn't stop smiling because of it.

Then I realized something—I was going to leave this school next month. I had to do something before that. I came up with a fantastic idea to propose to you on January 1st, 2017. It was a bit filmy and imaginative, and honestly, I'm too shy to tell you because it would reveal that I still lived in my imaginary world. But if it brings you a smile, let me tell you my idea.

I imagined myself standing on the terrace wall, refusing to come down until you accepted my love. I hadn't thought about what would happen after that—how foolish! 😂 I even went to check out the spot, picturing how it would all play out. But it was too ridiculous, so I switched to a different idea—something more realistic.

Once again, Farhat helped me find out what your reaction would be if someone proposed to you. As expected, you said, "I will go to my parents."

Our story was going well when another problem found its way to it. Like every day, Taslim was sitting in my class, but neither of us said a word to each other. He was flipping through some pages in my science book when, suddenly, he left the room.

One of my classmates then said he saw Taslim take something from my book. It was nothing but my death certificate! I remembered one day I had written my name alongside yours on a wedding card and kept it in my science book. That was the same card he had taken.

I still had a chance to save myself. I could have chased after him before he got too far, and I knew how to handle the situation once I had the card back in my hand. But I didn't move. If it were someone else, they would probably regret it.

Now, I knew what was going to happen. The strict Brahmin principal, who could punish a student for an hour just because he had asked a girl if she wanted to celebrate Teacher's Day, would see my case as an atomic bomb—a Hindu guy writing his name next to a Muslim girl's name. 💣💥

Just 10 minutes later, a summon arrived. Principal ma'am was calling me. When I went there, I saw you and Taslim standing with Principal ma'am, holding that card in her hand. I had thought Principal ma'am would react similarly, but instead, she said, "Why, Pritam? I never expected this from you. Should I tell Principal sir?" I simply replied, "No." And she let me go.

I was completely worried, and my plan to propose to you had failed. The next day, Farhat told me that you didn't want to complain about me, but Taslim had gone directly to Principal ma'am. Hearing that gave me some peace.

No story remains the same forever, and ours was also heading in the right direction. I started to see some response from your side as well, but that's just my perspective.

Since we were in different classes, we didn't get much time to interact, but your eyes were enough to say everything. This gave me the confidence to make eye contact with you, though never for more than three seconds.

Every action of yours felt like a joy blossoming inside me. It became my daily routine to visit your hostel, to recharge myself with your energetic smile. Do you remember how I used to stand outside even on the coldest winter nights after dinner, just to catch one last glimpse of you as you looked out from the window?

Time was drawing closer. I would have to go now. While I always wanted to leave this school, why was it becoming such a hard decision for me? But I knew very well that I had to go to improve myself. If I stayed there, I would never be able to become the Pritam I wanted to be.

I had to leave for you, Umaiya—to change myself. Your words, "I am black, and I walk with my head down," still echoed in my mind. I admitted that this was when I started to discriminate against my own face.

But how could I tell you about my feelings? How could I tell you how much I loved you, Umaiya? I wanted to play with your beautiful hair while you were busy studying. I wanted to hold your hand, close my eyes, and feel every breath. I wanted to live every moment and every season with you. I wanted to grow up with you and watch our story being created.

You were the girl who changed my perspective on religion. For the first time, I started focusing on my creativity and skills rather than just excelling academically. I didn't even realize when all my bad habits disappeared, and I no longer used harsh words or got into fights.

If your presence alone made so much difference in my life, there is nothing that I cannot achieve if we are together. The line from a song best fits here: "Tum jo pakad lo haath mera, duniya badal sakta hoon main."

It was January 14, 2017, and our 60-day love story was coming to an end. I was leaving, but I knew one thing for sure: our love story had not even begun properly, so this could not be the end. I wanted to talk to you for the last time, but... now you know why.

Do you remember that day, Umaiya? I don't know what you thought back then. What I've shared is just how the story unfolded from my side, but how was it going from your perspective? Was I truly a part of your story? And if I was, how much space did I really hold in it?

Should I tell you a top secret, Umaiya? Whatever it was so far, it might be love, but something that we call true love was yet to happen. A love that doesn't care about anything—neither looks nor talent. One that doesn't ask anything, it just knows one thing: 'Tum koi aur nahi, main hoon.'

Therefore, this might feel like a goodbye, but it's not a '*forever wala goodbye*.' I'll be back—until then, take care and stay happy. 🧡

Yours Pritam

9. Early Days at the Academy

Dear Umaiya,

Have you ever thought about going back to your past? If given a chance, where would you want to go? If you ask me, you already know my answer. But still, if there's anything in the past besides you, it's those days at Colonel's Academy. I wish I could go back there, I would have done so many things that were left unfinished.

By the way, it's really possible. If you want, I can take you to your past. But for this, you'll need to hold my hand. Will you, Umaiya?

Anyway, my life wasn't all that bad. After I left that school, a new story began to unfold before me.

I was rejected by Vidya Vihar for making an excellent impression in the interview and because I was considered too old to study in 8th standard. I was supposed to go into 9th grade, but my father enrolled me in 8th grade without even asking me.

Eventually, I was admitted to Colonel's Academy on April 2, 2017, but again in 8th grade. Fortunately, the school was less than a few kilometers from our previous school.

My entry wasn't like a hero's. I felt weak in almost everything except Science. When I first stepped onto the football ground, the feeling was amazing, but when the first ball came to me and I tried to kick it just like the others, hoping to swing it high, the ball didn't move at all. Instead, my foot got injured. ⚽

It was the same for volleyball, then basketball—one after another, I kept realizing my inability to play. As I already had a fear of water since I had nearly drowned in Patna when my stepbrother saved me, I didn't go near the swimming pool when some seniors forcefully pushed me inside. And that's how I learnt it.

While I stayed with my roommate Rajeev most of the time, Aditya J became my school-time partner. He was the one who introduced me to other classmates: Sameer, Shashwat, Shivanshu, Rashid, and Rohan. Among them, I really liked Shashwat's character. He was a young, funny fellow. He always had stupid questions to ask in the class.

There were many new students who later joined the class, and among them, Ankit, Priyanshu G, and Vikrant became my friends.

To my surprise, most of the top students in our class were from the girls' side. While many girls in our class were talented, two of them stood out for their awesome characters: Sakshi P and Nourin.

Among the boys, I liked Akarsh, Shivanshu, and Shashwat the most because each had his own unique character. Akarsh was a singer, Shivanshu was a photographer, and Shashwat was a good dancer.

I felt very happy with them, but what I liked most there was our hostel seniors. Mrinal bhaiya was my favorite. He was the only one there who helped me learn football. I remember when he asked me after my very first class there, "Did you like any girls in your class?" How could he know that I already had someone in my heart?

We had two movie sessions a week, and my first movie there reminded me of something I had been ignoring until now. The movie was *Step Up Revolution*, and I remember how I held myself back from everyone while coming down from the auditorium, trying to mimic a

dance move from the movie. It was just the beginning, and how could I forget about dance? After all, I wanted to impress you.

From then on, I kept practicing some steps. I learned a few moves by rewinding movie clips and some from the Dance Plus show. Despite my busy routine, I still managed to practice for at least half an hour each day. Although I wasn't a good dancer at that time, seniors frequently told me to show off some of my best moves. This was when I began diary writing.

Since my previous school was much closer, I could have gone to see you, but I had no idea if you were still there or not. It had already been a long time, and your exams were likely over in January or February. But I couldn't resist making at least one visit. For this, I needed help from the seniors to cross the school boundary. So, I revealed our love story to them—but nothing about you specifically.

Next, your birthday was approaching, 🎂 so I somehow managed to call, but unfortunately, it was your father's number. Still, I wasn't ready to give up. After many unsuccessful attempts, In August, I got another chance. It was August 16 when I finally made a successful visit.

It was raining, and I tried to climb up to the girls' hostel, which was on the first floor. The window ledge was completely slippery, and it was too dangerous to go any further. With no other option, I went to the boys' hostel window and called on some of the trusted students. I was happy to hear that you were still there, but sadly, Rahul bhaiya and most of my friends had already left the school.

Life in Colonel's Academy was unforgettable—we all, as hostellers, would agree on that. Our only job was to enjoy every moment. I remember we would create challenges for adventurous activities, like climbing trees and crossing buildings. Sometimes, I would even have

friendly fights with the seniors, and my flexibility gave me an advantage.

One day, I took on a challenge to cross to the library balcony. There was a 90-degree gap between the two walls, but I somehow managed to complete the challenge. However, I was terrified, as I found myself on the 2nd floor with my legs dangling over the edge.

Our hostel seniors had their own way of enjoying the moment. Every night, they had their plans ready. Sometimes they would light a fire 🔥 in the hostel to roast snacks themselves or arrange for dinner outside. The nearby medical college was often their destination, and we had to accompany them. Many of them also had phones, which the teachers could hardly ever find.

It was around this time that I went on my first school trip. Although it was meant for the 10th graders, I got the opportunity to go along with the hostel students. Our destination was Vikramshila University. The return trip was even more enjoyable. I danced until the very end on the bus, and Mrinal bro joined me. I can honestly say it was one of the happiest moments of my life.

Then came another event: Sports Day in December. While I didn't want to participate in the sports because I wanted to dedicate my time to dance practice, Rajkumar bhaiya signed me up for almost all the events.

I was active in every sport, but there was another reason why I never really wanted to participate. The reason was that I got scolded more than I received opportunities. I remember when I first came here, I didn't know any sports, and instead of teaching me, the good players would just shout at me. Our sports teacher didn't do much either, except blow the whistle.

In volleyball, I was always placed in the back corner. While I would see players on TV participating equally, here only the players in the front got the chance to smash or block the ball. Then came the middle players, but the two on the sides, like me, just kept waiting for the ball.

It was the same in football, but at least my running ability gave me some advantage. Kabaddi and athletics were the only sports where I felt like the king.

To my surprise, I turned out to be a good player. I got a good position in the cross-country race. Our house teacher, Samit sir, seemed very happy about this.

Though my football and basketball performances were poor, I managed to score well in Kabaddi and other athletics. That year, I made the longest jump and won the 200m race. For my good performance in Sports, Taekwondo and dance seniors gave me a new name, *Baaghi*.

How wonderful it would have been if you were there too! I would have shown you my best martial arts move—the Tornado Kick—just like Tiger did in *Baaghi* for Shraddha.

So, what do you say—will you be my Shraddha Kapoor? Still deciding? Just say yes before it's too late. But remember, I'll always be here for you, even until my last day on earth. That's a promise.

Yours Pritam

10. A Wrong Decision

Dear Umaiya,

You already know how mindless I can be when it comes to making decisions. Almost every decision I've made has turned out wrong. This story is about the worst decision that I have ever made in my life.

After I left your school, there was hardly a day when I didn't think of you. Whether it was the entry of an actress in a movie or the letters "U.T." written at the top of a Unit Test paper—everything kept reminding me of you. Sometimes, I would stand outside the hostel, gazing at the moon, while other times, I would journal your memories in my diary.

Somehow, I managed to keep myself busy, distracting myself from your memories, but then another event took place. My father wanted me to join Sainik School, so he filled out the form for the 9th standard. I neither wanted nor succeeded, as I didn't pass the exam.

When I went for the entrance, I met Taslim and others from that school. Some of his classmates were helping me, and that's when I found out that you were still studying there.

After returning, I started thinking about you a lot again. I remember how I used to dream about you and even imagined you watching me practice Taekwondo from the top of the school building. Were you really watching me? 😊

It was an exciting day, Basant Panchami in January 2018, when I danced in front of our German ma'am. But my real happiness was

something else—meeting you. I quickly jumped over the wall, making my way to your hostel.

When I arrived, I tried to go upstairs directly, but the juniors quickly recognized me and started their usual shouting. Just then, Ashish bhaiya arrived. We talked a bit, and I asked him to manage a chance for me to talk to you. But Principal sir was there, and he denied my request.

I noticed some girls watching me from the terrace, and of course, you were among them. Even though it was dark, I could easily spot you in the group. I quickly came up with a plan. I pretended to leave to distract Ashish bhaiya, but instead, I took another way and returned through a different street.

Do you remember that day? All the girls were cheering loudly, and you—you were pretending to hide, weren't you? But I couldn't take my eyes off you. And there I was, showing off on the road, waving at you.

When I came out, I didn't realize that Mona di (the Principal's daughter) was nearby. Only when I got closer did Mona di and I notice each other. I tried to hide my face, but she recognized me and asked how I got there. I just made a simple excuse and made my way back.

The following month, everyone in my class was celebrating Rose Day, Kiss Day, and who knows what else. But the most important was Valentine's Day. How could I wait to meet you? So, I made another visit to your hostel. Even this time, it was impossible to enter the hostel, so I had to return after speaking with one of my classmates there. You have no idea about this.

That year, we didn't go home for the Holi festival; instead, we enjoyed it with the hostellers and teachers. Mrinal bhaiya tricked me and threw me into the prepared mud. While I enjoyed the moment, other feelings were troubling me.

Soon, I started realizing what I was doing—constantly trying to meet you and only facing failure. Your memory kept haunting me, and these distractions began to affect my academic performance.

I clearly remember being in my practice room, thinking about all of this late at night. I didn't even have time to dance or study! It was getting harder and harder to keep crossing the school boundary, hoping for some response from you or just a little conversation. But all my attempts kept failing, one after another.

Finally, I asked myself: "Either choose Umaiya or dance." That night, March 3rd, was one of the worst of my life.

How could I believe that I was choosing dance over you? I had started dancing only to impress you, and now I was making choices between you and this.

But the reality was different. It wasn't the choice between you and dance—there is no comparison, Umaiya. It was the choice between my love and a passion that had never truly been mine. It was the choice between my friends and academics, which I never cared for. And it was the choice between my true self and something that I never was.

It was just my mindless imagination that somehow, I'd convinced myself that achieving something in life was the only way I could ever get back to you.

In a way, it wasn't wrong at all. Even if I kept chasing after you, there was no way you'd ever like me and I cried bitterly as I came to terms with accepting that situation.

But I could never have imagined how this decision would spoil my entire time there. You'll know it as I tell you the story further. How just because of this decision I only tried to push myself into something that I am not and letting myself away from who actually I was.

But I could never have imagined how this decision would spoil my entire time there. You'll know as I tell you the story further—how, because of this decision, I tried to push myself into becoming something I was not and distancing myself from who I truly was.

I have no words to truly explain this to you, Umaiya. If only you could ever forgive me for this. I just hope you'll understand. Waiting for your response... have a good day, Umaiya.

Yours Pritam

11. Those were the Days

Dear Umaiya,

I might have decided to forget you, but to be honest, I could never forget you, crazy one. The truth is, I remember you almost every day. But enough with this nonsense romantic talk—let me tell you about the good times I had there. Life at the academy was full of drama.

When we reached 9th grade, our time was even more exciting. Although my class was always considered disciplined, there was no limit to the things we got up to. The classroom felt more like a fish market than a class, and more often than not, our geography teacher, Mr. Sanjay, was the target.

While I rarely found myself involved, almost every class in the school had the habit of playing a newly invented game—*Chintu*. We could barely hear his lecture over the nickname being shouted around. Once, Shashwat even dared to ask him a silly question, “Which jungle is it where only a single snake is found?” 🐍

Vikrant and I made a real terror of a pair. There wasn't a class in which we didn't laugh, and that ultimately became the reason for our separation too.

We had various club sessions, and Vikrant and I always found ourselves workless during these times. While our physics teacher, Mr. Vijay wanted me in his science club, I had no interest left in science.

So, we wandered one day into the sports club, then another day into drawing. I threw myself out of the pottery since the pot made by me

really didn't look like a pot. Ultimately, we had no option left but to go to the science club, since we were being caught by the principal.

One day, our math teacher scolded Vikrant so badly that he had to go to the last row in the class. After that, we were rarely found sitting together.

Even in those days, we all held certain myths about sexual matters, and of course we can't expect sex education in the curriculum. I remember a dramatic moment when we were taught reproduction in class. The girls were quiet, and the boys had their usual smirks; some were even scolded and sent out of the classroom. Mr. Harinder, a.k.a. Hariya stood before us, reading his notes. Strangely, no one seemed to have any doubt about this chapter. 😂

Our hostel was a kind of zoo, where you could find almost every kind of animal. Everyone had nicknames like Bull, Horse, and Alien. We had a Bruno bear and even different "species" of dogs, like German Shepherd and Montmorency.

There were a total of seven of us in the hostel from 9th standard—Nilesh, Pratik, Rajeev, Jaydeep, Aditya & Sujal brothers, and me. Everyone had something special about them.

Nilesh was popular in our hostel. There's an interesting story behind this. One day, I was sitting with him when he left to go to the washroom. Somehow, I sensed what he was about to do next. I secretly followed him. When I got closer to his stall, I heard a mysterious sound. You might have guessed what was going on. I had caught him fapping. 🍌🍌😂

How could I miss this moment? I called the other hostelers, and within seconds, everyone arrived with a chair to peek inside. I can't explain the look on his face when he realized we were watching

him... let's just say, he shouted! From that day on, he got a new nickname, "Sexa."

While all the hostellers were bathroom singers, Rajeev and another junior guy Aditya G were star singers of our hostel. Pratik was often teased as 'Alien,' but he was studious and became the school captain during our 10th grade. Jaydeep was a clean guy—who had never masturbated or watched adult films. So, our job was to introduce him to those things.

Aditya and Sujal were both excellent players. I spent most of my time teasing Aditya since he was much closer to me. Aviral Bro was another excellent player. I was a fan of his football shots.

Have you ever wondered what would happen if a character from your imagination came to life? Of course, nothing like that actually happened, but I tried acting like a villain from my imagination—a horrible Joker. 🤡 There was a guy from 8th standard, Sachin, and I chose him as my target.

One night after dinner, I went to his room. He was sitting with a few other guys. First, I started telling a horror story to set the mood, and he was listening very carefully. Once I felt the moment was right, I did my part. I pretended to be the Joker, bent myself backward like a ghost in a movie, and made a dreadful sound.

I never expected him to be so frightened! He started shouting, while everyone else around him was fine. He was terrified, even though I went back to normal and started laughing. He only relaxed after I left the room.

The next time I pulled a similar stunt on another guy, he nearly had a shock when I suddenly appeared behind him by crossing through the

rooms over the tops of lockers. After that, I never did it again to anyone.

We hostelers always had plans ready for pranks like this. Once, Sujal got hold of a packet of condoms. He came to me with an idea. We went to each of the other juniors, one by one, asking if they had tried this "chocolate."

But Umaiya, don't rush to judge my character here. I've always been a good guy, and ever since you entered my life, I've become even nicer. I don't fight, not even now, and I don't tease anyone for their religion, nor do I use harsh language.

Even most of the teachers considered me a good student. Karim Sir, our English teacher, became our class teacher in the 9th standard. He was also our hostel warden and liked me. To him, I was a mastermind because I never got caught, even though I was often involved in various activities.

Once, during the mid-term exam, some hostel students leaked the question paper. Although I wasn't part of it, my classmates kept coming to me with questions. That's how I learned some of the questions, but I never cheated. When the results came out and I scored well in Physics, the Physics teacher suspected me of cheating.

Festivals like Holi were truly dramatic, where teachers ended up losing their shirts, and Diwali was celebrated inside the class with someone using sticks to burn crackers. The same went for our school trip. I still have the amount noted down in my diary, where we managed to rack up a lunch cost of 27,000 rupees during our trip to Mandar Hill.

How was my story? Truly wild! 😜 I'm really eager to hear about your happy moments, Umaiya. I hope that one day, we'll have our own happy moments to share. Am I right??

Yours Pritam

12. Facing the Truth

Dear Umaiya,

One wrong decision is enough to ruin an entire life. And my decision—do you remember it? Today, I'll tell you the story of how one wrong choice completely ruined my school life, and another story where I faced the hardest truth that shattered me completely.

While all of this was happening, another story was unfolding—I was losing my friends. When I decided to focus on dance, it became more of a necessity than a passion, as I was compromising my love for it. I began avoiding friends in class because the classroom was the only place I could find time to study.

As a result, one after another, my benchmates kept changing—first Ankit, then Priyanshu, followed by Vikrant, sometimes Aditya or Sujal, and then Rashid or Rohan. But I couldn't maintain lasting friendships with them. And I remember how alone I felt during the trips with my classmates.

I didn't want anyone to know about you there because I knew how I would react if anyone brought your name up in any situation. But one day, Jaydeep secretly read my entire diary. When I came back after class, he kept saying things like, 'You're great,' and I was wondering why he was saying that.

Then he said, 'I know why you chose dance over your love.' That's when I understood everything. From that moment on, I never spoke to him until we were about to leave school in the 10th standard. That's how I lost another good friend of mine. Later, I really felt sorry about this.

Soon I started feeling more anxious about dance as well. I was unhappy because I had no proper source to learn. Shashwat told me about dance classes, but it was nearly impossible to leave the school and attend them.

I started with hip-hop dance and initially struggled with cramping, tutting, and sometimes even tried b-boying. Later, I shifted to freestyle since it's quite popular in Bollywood.

Next, I brought dance tutorial videos with me and started practicing in the auditorium. Aviral Bhaiya handled the music system, he helped me get access to it. A big broken mirror became my partner. I began practicing flips in the swimming pool, and soon, I could do backflips, and my dance was improving a lot, but not my confidence.

Everything was going fine until one night, after hearing a song in the mess, I started missing you a lot. The feeling was so intense that I quickly ran up to the hostel roof. I barely managed to sleep that night.

Just two days later, on October 31, I was in class. My class had this habit where, whenever a girl or boy entered, someone would joke by pairing their name with someone else's. That day, a senior girl from the 11th standard came to our class on her birthday. Vikrant, who was sitting next to me, teased me by adding my name with hers. We both laughed, and I casually told him that she was my girlfriend.

From that day onward, I somehow started giving her more attention, not just because I wanted to, but because, in a way, it distracted me from your feelings and at least with this excuse, I was trying to think about someone else.

But my bad times began when I actually felt some attraction toward her and my friends began triggering my feelings. Soon, I found myself looking for chances to meet her. Her name was Naina. It felt awkward for me to be involved with a senior girl, but things just unfolded that way. Are you jealous, Umaiya? 😊

Well, don't worry. Nothing happened, and it shouldn't have—it was just a stupid act of mine. So, our story didn't last long. One day, she told me she already had a boyfriend, and that's how the story ended.

Since I had taken this step, I had to face the consequences as well. As a result, I felt alone again. This time, I found a new company with Sameer, the laziest guy in our class. While I wanted to walk around the ground or play a game during break, I ended up sitting under the tree with him instead.

That year, my Sports Day performance was much better. I won the cross-country race, finishing in first place. 🏁🏃 I also made the longest jump in the entire school for the second time and won the 200m race again, securing first position. The Kabaddi match that year was the toughest. I remember my team getting into a fight with the opponents, but I didn't get involved since the teachers were around.

Now it's time to hear the second story—no others but ours only.

As I told you, your memories kept coming back to me. It was February 10, 2019, again Saraswati Puja, when my love for you grew even stronger. Without a second thought, I made my way to your hostel.

When I got there, the first person I met was Mona di. We kept chatting until you came down for dinner.

Just as I looked at you, all your memories were refreshed. Ah, there's my Umaiya. But this time, you looked quite different. Maybe because I was seeing you after two years. I realized I was probably 3 or 4 years older than you. I'm not sure what your exact age is, but others have always said this to me. While it didn't matter to me, it might have mattered to you. Did it, Umaiya?

Now, the rest of the story is very emotional. I don't even want to write it, but I have to tell you. Because this is the moment when I realized what your love means to me.

I tried waving at you, but you didn't respond, not even looked up. Then I gestured toward your friend, and she tried to signal you to look at me, but you didn't.

That small moment was enough to say it all. Before my tears could fall, I left the hostel.

Back at my own hostel, my friends were excited to know what had happened. Being a good actor, I told them I was happy to see you. But what was I really doing? Just trying to hide my tears. I knew then what I had just understood. 🥹

Umaiya, you never really loved me na; your smiling at me was just your kindness. And poor Pritam had mistakenly taken it as a sign of love. Even today, I am nothing to you, and maybe I never will be.

I still don't understand—why do I love you? This question is something that every lover in the world is afraid of.

Do you think I love you only because you're beautiful or just because you sing well? Is it just looks that matter in love? If yes, then it's not love. My love goes beyond every limit, and only time will show you how far I can go for it.

Maybe your cuteness was enough to lighten my feelings for you and your voice to turn them into fire but If you think this is the real reason then why can't I fall for anyone else? Why even now, no one else feels beautiful to me—not even Ananya Panday.

While I could write an entire book on why I love you or pen down my entire diary about every time I've remembered you, it wouldn't make sense. The best you could do is ask me this question when I'm standing right in front of you—or even better, wait until I'm angry with you someday. That's when you'll get the truest answer to *why I love you*.

But if you still want to hear it, then let me just remind you of something. You are not just Umaiya—you are my truth. You're not someone else; you are me, myself. And Pritam is no one but Umaiya herself. And I don't care if this Umaiya loves me or not. *For this Krishna, you will always be my Radha.*

The grief was too strong. I didn't have the courage to face the truth I had just understood. So I chose to forget everything about that day and returned to my life.

Damn... I got emotional. Thankfully, I wiped my tears in time, or there'd be spots from my tears.

Alright, that's enough nostalgia for now. My life always finds a way to make me cry, but don't worry—I welcome the pain if it's connected to you in any way. I know it's all my fault; I never should have left you. Just forgive me, Umaiya and take care of yourself.

Yours Pritam

13. The Last Lesson

Dear Umaiya,

I wish I had expressed my feelings to you; maybe then, you would be with me now, not just in my story. After I accepted the truth, I started focusing all my energy on dance and studies. Though my practice felt more like a punishment than actual dancing.

From this moment, you might think that I stopped trying to contact you, but it doesn't mean I stopped loving you. In fact, the more I tried to distance myself from you, the closer I felt to you.

One morning, while we were out running, we ended up on the same road leading to your hostel. Sujal insisted that I go, and I eventually agreed. We took permission from our sports teacher and arrived there. Unfortunately, the principal, ma'am, caught us. I said I wanted to meet a friend, but she knew my real intention and replied, "He's out," so we had to go.

Now I was in 10th standard and it felt like my problems were not enough, so another problem entered my life. I wanted to take a break from sports so that I could get the chance to practice dance. I was trying to get a fake prescription from one of my classmates whose father was a doctor. But to my luck, my dream came true. A strong pain started in my stomach, and the report showed that I had developed kidney stones.

Afterwards, I felt like I had gone mad. Late at night, I kept crying, and I seemed to be worthless for about three months. I remember how I tore the pages of my math book and threw them outside the window, and how I shouted on the ground at night.

While everyone in my class was busy talking in the library and playing Truth or Dare, I found myself reading psychological books from the library.

One day, a ma'am noticed me sitting outside. She came over to ask why I had used kohl around my eyes, and I explained that it wasn't kohl, but rather my dark circles, which had appeared due to my distress.

That time passed, leaving two gifts for me—first, permanent marks on my face from the medication, and second, poor health. After that, I found myself struggling with my health more than anything else.

So far, I've only told you that I want to do something, to be something. But what exactly? I didn't know myself until now. It was during this time that I found the answers to my questions. So, let me tell you the story of how I found my real passion.

Our principal announced that now we can perform on the stage. Now I got a perfect chance to demonstrate my dance. I started making plans for this. But soon I realized I am not ready yet. That time Prashant sir came to help me. He himself had given me a perfect beat for practice, but by then I already had accepted my defeat.

Although I got many chances to go on stage, I always avoided them. Once, our class was preparing a drama performance, and Pallavi said that my personality was best suited for the role of an army officer in the play, but I didn't want to get involved in one more activity, so I withdrew my name. Instead, I clapped 🙌 for them as they performed.

In my three years there, the only time I went on stage was to deliver the news headlines. The principal said, "You have a good voice. Why

don't you start anchoring?" This is my old habit—hiding the things I'm skilled at and banging my head over things I don't know.

But before I could lose interest in dance, something new began to heal me. Prashant Sir selected a few hostellers to create a drama video about an Army Officer, and I was chosen to play the Major's role.

Wearing my costume, I stood in front of the mirror and tried delivering my lines. That was the first time I felt a spark of excitement for acting. It wasn't just about the dialogues; it was more about the expressions. My voice, my gestures, and the way I tried to embody the role—it all felt like I was lost somewhere in my imagination.

But soon, I withdrew my name because they were recording at night, and for foolish Pritam, waking up early to practice kicks seemed more important. When the video was finally completed, and Aditya J played my part, I realized what I had missed.

From that day onward, I started delivering dialogues to myself for no particular reason. I managed to get the key to our hostel terrace, and every night after dinner, I practiced my newfound skill. I decided to keep this a secret, so sometimes I was found in the auditorium, while other times, late at night, on the stage.

Time changed, and so did the season. 🎅 Of course, your memory had to return. Once again, my immortal story began to unfold before me, and hope was awakening once more.

Sadly, I could only seek you in my dreams. Whenever a thought of you came to mind, I would either go to the auditorium, play the song *Fakira*, and dance with my imaginary Umaiya, or I would find myself lost, kissing your pen that I still kept with me. I used it only to write special things, so it ran out only after I left this school.

It doesn't matter whether you like me or not. After all, being together isn't always essential for love, right? And anyway, at this time, even the moon remains incomplete, doesn't it? 🌔

The ratio of boys to girls was about 2 to 1 in every class, so it was challenging to have a girlfriend. Yet, by the time we reached our final year, many of my classmates had their soulmates—or at least many were fully single—but I was the only one left hanging between being single or in a relationship.

I had a good relationship with the juniors there. Ashad from 9th standard was one of them, and he was the one I trusted the most. I once asked him to observe my character and point out any bad habits.

After a week, he told me he couldn't find anything wrong with me. Instead, after watching me develop my first HTML website, he said, "Is there any skill left that you haven't mastered?"

Aditya J was our house captain, and he gave my name for all the sports. My poor health played its part. This time, I came in 11th position in the cross-country race, while Jaydeep secured 1st place. He had been working for it the entire year, and his hard work paid off.

The same went for all the other games as well. Although I made the longest jump again, I was disqualified because my foot had crossed the line. What luck!

Our last time in that school was even more enjoyable. We hostlers had our own way to enjoy the moment. Sometime our destiny would be a new school building which was under construction, something it would be a party on trampoline.

“Sexa” came up with a fantastic idea to cure our exam frustration. He brought his special *hot* pendrive, and what we did next was totally ridiculous. All of us seniors gathered in a secret room, watching the film on the projector. And that’s when Jaydeep, for the first time, did his *handiwork*. 🤔

We had our last trip at that school, but I didn’t go. I remember that day as if it happened yesterday. I was alone at the hostel and feeling lonely, so I put on my shoes and started dancing.

Within a minute, I felt off and stepped outside. In front of me was a scene—the school building and some kids playing in the children’s park. I sat on the ground, with a question echoing in my mind: “Why did I come here?”

I came here to improve myself, didn’t I? I wanted to become worthy of you, Umaiya. Isn’t that right? I wanted to make friends, to shout, to laugh, and I also wanted to be a part of my class.

So why did I end up alone and depressed? Why did I prioritize work over love and friendship? Why did I always hide myself?

I had skills like anyone else. I was good in academics, even in sports. I was a good dancer, and I had a good voice. I could speak, yet I always stayed silent in the classroom. Why? Was it just because I’m not good-looking, or because I had no money to show off?

Even today, if you search for photos from our sports day during my 10th grade, you won’t find me anywhere in the group—except while receiving medals. That’s because I was always hiding.

I still remember a junior once coming up to me and asking my name. When I told him, he said, “I know everyone in your class, just not you.”

When I first came here, I felt like talking to the girls in my class. But after arriving, I realized that girls sit in a different row, and boys in another. During break time, even if by mistake you talk to a girl, remember, the principal will definitely be watching you. Forget about it, in three years, I didn't talk to a single girl in my class.

I still remember when I was in 8th grade, Priyanshu G. told me, "You're perfect in every way. If only your skin was a bit fairer, you'd look like a hero." Funny, isn't it? Just because I'm not "good-looking," I can't be a hero?

I've always been a hero, and stupid Pritam kept trying to prove it. I didn't need to choose between my love and passion, or my academics and friends. They were all part of my life. And of course, I was good-looking. What I was lacking was confidence, not looks.

If I had been given the right opportunities and the right environment, there's nothing I couldn't have achieved. I was born a devil, but it was the world that eventually spoiled me. Otherwise, it's not an easy job to act as an introvert for such a long time. Sadly, by the time I realized this, it was already too late.

Just like me, you must have faced ups and downs in your life too. But I know you better than you know yourself. The girl who gives me strength can't lose her confidence. Stay strong, 🍊 Umaiya—you're the rising star.

Yours Pritam

14. This is Who I Am

Dear Umaiya,

How beautiful is this life? And if you have someone you truly love, life becomes even more inspiring. Maybe we're not together, but your love has always stayed with me. It was Umaiya who kept me alive, even during my toughest times. Today, I'll tell you how I discovered my true happiness, my true self.

Before I could think of doing something, the coronavirus played its part, leaving me at home with all my new passions. Starting in 2020, my life began to take shape on its own. While problems continued, I missed my friends and my love remained the same for you; now I found myself happy in my own world.

I had time to pursue anything I liked. So, I poured all my strength into my passions: acting, dance, and martial arts. A new dream opened up before me—the glamorous world of Bollywood.

I continued my dance practice, and now I had everything I wanted. Although I longed to dance in person with actual learners, the lockdown left me feeling handicapped. Mihran K. became my dance tutor, while Steezy boosted my confidence in this pursuit.

Since it was difficult to find a martial arts coach in my hometown, Master Alex started his classes online for his students, and I began marking my attendance there.

In acting, I went really crazy. Wearing my brother's school uniform, I tried to play the role of a policeman. I spotted some people a little distance from my home playing cards. The police often used to make

them run away. One day, wearing my uniform and holding a yellow pipe, I attempted to chase them. Of course, seeing a single policeman in the distance, they showed no reaction. Instead, I returned home, and my neighbor lady said, "Won't you help me a little to chase some around my house?"

I began to understand what I needed to do. While I constantly practiced dialogues, Drama School Mumbai helped me work on my voice, and soon I started focusing on characterization. Sometimes the lights, camera, and action energized me, while other times, Stanislavski started to appear on my desk.

To the children watching me practice monologues, I was a madman, and to the lady who always found me shouting my dialogues loudly, I was a lawyer.

Health continued to bother me, and I completely blamed our diet for it, along with the usual family matters. During the lockdown, my father's business kept slowing down. As I mentioned earlier, I was born into a middle-class family. That's the reason I always faced challenges, whether it was purchasing something or going to my dream schools. This time, even after the lockdown, I chose to study from home.

And this was again a wrong decision. Soon, I started to feel like I was in a prison. First, I found myself struggling with devotees shouting into loudspeakers. But I'm not one to stay quiet. When the man came to my house after I told him to stop using the loudspeaker, I gave him a solid lecture. However, how could I really change anyone's mentality?

After all, this is India. Here, religion is more important than anything else. Only if we could remove religion entirely from the world and

erase the boundaries between the countries, almost half of the world's problems would then be solved.

To save myself from further frustration, I approached a life coach. Although I couldn't pay her, Mrs. Shiwani Gurwara listened to me and helped me realize that my problems weren't the real issue—I had created them myself. She gave me a mantra: "I am strong."

The mantra "I am strong" came alive, giving me a new imaginary hero—Strongman. And that hero was none other than me. And you were my Stargirl.

Whether it was raining outside or the scorching summer heat, I kept moving: sometimes walking alongside the river, sometimes scaling the tallest trees, or jumping from them. I slept in the jungle and swam in the river.

Whenever I felt down, I made my way to the Ganga River. One day, I saw people heading to an island-like land that appeared in the middle of the river. Though it was far, I joined them.

It became a completely life-changing moment for me to walk in the river without knowing proper swimming. While everyone returned, I stayed behind. I took off my clothes and stood naked, shouting, feeling the sun, and listening to the relaxing sound of the river. 🌞🌴

Now that I'm grown up, my imagination feels as real as actual events. And guess what? I used to talk to Umaiya—yes, you. She told me many of your secrets. But was that really okay? I walked with your hand in mine, and together we ran through the strong wind just before the storm. How was that experience, Umaiya?

If you also want to meet any of the characters from my imagination, then let me know, but I can't make you meet Umaiya. Do you know why? Because when you'll come, this Umaiya will break up with me.

While I continued to give a little attention to my studies just to pass the HSC exam, Adult movies were highlighted more than my lecture videos.

I worked hard to improve myself in every way. I started learning communication skills, body language, and listened to various podcasts and audiobooks for motivation and improving my English. And of course, I practiced the Alexander Technique so that no one could ever say I walk with my head down again.

There were times I felt down about my future, knowing that becoming an actor is incredibly challenging. But I wasn't worried about that, because I knew I had to act, whether it was on a screen or a stage. I just lived in the moment, enjoying it for what it was.

Without thinking about problems or worrying about my future struggles to become an actor, I took my admission at CSJMU in August 2022. Though I wanted to pursue Performing Arts, choosing Mass Communication wasn't the wrong decision for me.

I was the one to stand out during our orientation with my excellent performance, especially when I gave a solid response to the chief guest's question.

This time, I didn't hold back my inner devil. Although I couldn't change my complexion, I didn't walk with my head down anymore. I was real, and I was confident. I didn't try to stay quiet, I didn't try to hide, and I didn't see myself as less than anyone. I said what I wanted to say, and I did what I wanted to do—and magic happened.

Within two or three days, I had more friends among the girls than the boys. Riya, Anamika, and Gungun became the closest. And instead of sitting with my friends Priyesh or Dev, Riya became my classroom partner. Soon, my friend list extended to the boys as well.

One day, our Communication ma'am asked us to introduce ourselves, and I did my part. After hearing my voice, she said, 'Your voice is really good—you'd do well as a Radio Jockey.' This was the second time I had heard that. Riya said, "Your constant practice is paying off."

There, my dreams seemed to be coming true. I felt so close. I had all my plans ready, whether it was to join a theater group or to think about FTII in the future. I even found a Martial Arts trainer, and soon, acting diploma courses were set to start at our university.

Until then, I continued my acting classes through online sources and kept practicing. The library provided me with the books I wanted to read, and the sports ground was calling me to kick the ball once again.

This was the real me, Umaiya. I never realized that everything happening in my life was coming together to create something special. Life as an actor was like living my stories in the real world. Sometimes, I was a beggar roaming the streets, and other times, I was Othello from Shakespeare's plays. I was a wandering vampire at night and flying Superman in the early morning. Characters were always moving around me like my shadow.

How about you, my stargirl? Are you still following your dreams like I do? When will I get to hear your voice again? You know me—I'm not exactly known for my patience, so come back soon, Umaiya. I have so much to tell you. Until then, stay unstoppable, just like the Umaiya I know. 👍

Yours Pritam

15. Could this be the End?

Dear Umaiya,

This might be my last letter to you. Life is constantly kicking at me. Just wait before I knock out. This story is something I never want to talk about, but I promised not to keep any secrets from you. Well, yes, I still have a few, but we'll leave those for another time. How about being together? 😊

The story was going great so far—Pritam was having the time of his life. But little did he know, things were about to take a turn for the worse! Means “Pritam ki ab lagne wali thi”.

I was enjoying life to the fullest when, suddenly, my body started swelling. At first, I thought it might be due to staying up late nights, especially since my roommate had just arrived. But the swelling kept getting worse. Then, the medical report revealed that I had a problem with my kidneys.

I remember the day we had a visit to an acting workshop, and I so badly wanted to be a part of it. But I had to return to Patna to see the doctor. It felt like being hungry for something, and just when you're about to eat, someone pulls the plate away.

Still, I came back happily, thinking it might just be kidney stones again and I'd be back in a week or two. Little did I know, my life was about to change from that moment onwards.

I don't even know when the month passed and when I reached the hospital. It was discovered through a kidney biopsy that I have *IgA Nephropathy*, and I am in the final stage.

My kidneys had already failed, and I could see my future with painful clarity. Finally, my childhood dream was coming true. I'm dying.

This was the time when I developed a strong hatred toward my parents. I'm young, and I have the strength to handle any problems in my life—but my parents...

Seeing my condition worsen over time, my mother lost nearly half of her body weight, and my distressed father began selling his property to cover my medical expenses. He put aside all his work and started visiting almost every top nephrologist, hoping to hear just one line: "Yes, there is a cure."

Love beyond limits always brings pain, whether it's my parents' love for me or my love for you. Both cause pain. And that's exactly what happened. From that day onwards, there wasn't a single day when I didn't cry.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't even smile. I was dying inside, constantly thinking about suicide, only because I didn't want my loved ones to suffer because of me.

It was a sight worth seeing: me standing in front of Marina Beach in Chennai. It felt like the sea was calling Strongman to create a memory. And indeed, it was no ordinary moment—Strongman was actually standing nearby, with his dialysis kit around his neck.

Finally, in Feb 2023, I had my transplant. Once again, my mother gave me a new life. But what about me? What am I now? I have nothing left. It felt like I lost everything all at once. Now, neither is my Umaiya with me, nor are my dreams. I can neither run like before nor be as happy as I once was.

Then, I had no options left other than to change my path. This decision didn't feel as painful as imagining myself struggling in the

future. So, instead of lights, camera, and action, it became HTML, Python, and Django. 🤖

Now, I dance when the mood strikes, act when the moment calls, and sing when your thoughts return. And this time, my love, Umaiya, is with me. Just yesterday, I saved her from a giant alien, Remember??

Yet once again, a question is reflecting in my mind—Is this what I wanted to do with my life? And I don't want to face the truth. I'm afraid to walk down that path again, where all I encounter is struggle. I'm scared to step back into your life, fearing I might even lose the memories of you.

Therefore, this was not the story of my prosperity, but of my destruction. I learned five lessons from these experiences.

- First, never give more importance to your work than to your loved ones.
- Second, you can do anything, but not everything—more things bring more problems.
- Third, do what makes you happy, not what the world brings to you.
- Fourth, live in the moment. Say what you want to say and do what you want to do before it's too late.
- And finally, Never think of yourself as less than anyone else, even if any Umaiya says you are black and that you walk with your head down. You are the hero of your life—sorry, I mean heroine! 😊

Anyway, Umaiya, I'm healthy again, just like before. It's November 2024—the time when everything began. Now, the time has come to finish what was left unfinished. Are you with me? Did you just say yes? Don't lie, I heard it!

Today, I miss you just as much as I did yesterday, and the day before, and the day before, and the day before that. My heart keeps beating 24/7, and I even got my blood pressure checked—everything's normal. I don't know where you are or how you are now. But for me, you're still the same sweet Umaiya, for whom I would give up my life just to see your smile.

Just this August, someone pranked me with a call saying it was you. My mother hung up, saying it was a wrong number. But I was still in doubt because I thought I heard your name. There was no way you could've gotten my number, though. Still, I saved the contact and tried to trace the owner, but found nothing, so I deleted it. When I asked Mom what name the caller had mentioned, I nearly died hearing it was yours.

I tried all my technical skills and even talked to the service center, but I couldn't recover the number. For once, even Google let me down by not syncing this contact to the recycle bin.

I asked everyone where you could have gotten my number but came up with nothing. Since then, I rush to pick up the phone whenever anyone calls, especially unknown numbers. I still don't know who pranked me—or if it was even a prank. Was it really you, Umaiya?

I really miss you a lot, Umaiya. It's like I'm burning in the fire of your memories. I can lose everything, but not Umaiya. If I lose Umaiya you know what I am going to lose. And don't be confused about what I mean by Umaiya—remember, it's not just a name!

You might be thinking, if I love you so much, then why don't I come and meet you. Yes, Umaiya, I'm trying my hardest to get out of this prison. But you know well, there are still many stories left before I could win your love. And for that, I have to go wherever you are, because just one meeting... is not enough.

And never think that I'm insecure about anything like maybe you're already in love with someone. But remember, my love is beyond anything that humans have made—it's out of this world.

And your doubt—why did I change my name from Pritam Jaiswal to Pritam Umaiya? It's because I wanted a name that didn't reflect any caste, religion, or gender. With this change, there's no difference left between us.

And always remember this: As long as your name is connected with mine, I will never give up and will always remain a good person, just like I've always been. And the day you're not with me, that will be my last day—*that's a promise from Pritam Umaiya to Umaiya Tasnim.* 100

Well, you might have heard countless stories about love and may have even watched *Hamari Adhuri Kahani*. Will our story also remain unfinished, just as it was once, back in 1001? Can we only watch our story unfold, or do we have the power to write it ourselves?

Every story is supposed to have a happy ending, but right now, there's no happiness in my life. I am incomplete without you, Umaiya. Could this really be the end?

I don't know if this is the end, but I have one last request, Umaiya. Even if I were to die from the ache of your memory, please don't return to my life unless it's out of love. But do it soon, Umaiya; I don't know how long I can survive without you, and I have no strength left to repeat the story of *Veer-Zaara*. We'll definitely meet again. Until then, take care and keep smiling, my dear Umaiya. 💖

Yours Pritam

A Journey Of Love, Dreams & Self-Discovery

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