

Half Past Five

The night had darkened to its fullest. The lonely sky, with its eternal companion—the shimmering moon, cast a spell of silence over the city. There were no sounds of trucks, buses, or cars disturbing the city's quiet demeanor with the clatter of brakes and the blaring of horns.

Siddharth lay resting on the cold, dew-covered grass, his hands clasped behind his head. He gazed at the bright golden moon, which appeared larger than usual, admiration gleaming in his eyes. Meanwhile, Siya sat beside him, her arms wrapped around her knees, silently watching him as she absentmindedly twisted the wet grass between her fingers.

The silence between them broke when Siya said, “It’s been two months now!”

Siddharth’s focus on the shimmering moon was disrupted. He turned to Siya and said, “Yeah, time flew like the Vande Bharat train.”

Siya, quite annoyed, responded, “Don’t be poetic, if you cannot!”

Siddarth responded playfully, “I have learnt it from you.”

She responded swiftly, “Don’t dare to compare your pathetic line with my poetry.”

She continued to change the topic, “Let it go, when are you going to say yes to our marriage?”

Siddarth held her hand, “Some more time, please.”

Siya did not respond in a way in which generally girls do, maybe she knew about the space which the other person requires in a relationship, she just gave a cheerful smile which kept her away from the guile nature of this world.

“Do you remember the first day when we met?” she asked.

Siddarth, now sitting in the same posture as Siya, “In a typical arrange marriage setup!”

“Rakesh Babu, now that we have met your daughter, it would be great if my son and she could spend some time together while we finish our lunch,” said Siddharth’s father.

A medium-sized, cream-colored dining table stood at the center, with four chairs placed opposite each other. Seated around it were Siya, Siddharth, and their families.

“Absolutely, Mohan ji” responded Siya’s father.

Both Siya and Siddarth went out of the Rajasthani family restaurant.

“This mall is quite huge!”, Siddharth exclaimed

“This is the city's biggest mall”, replied Siya.

“Shall we go to that cafe, we will grab some coffee”, Siddharth suggested, pointing opposite to the Rajasthani restaurant.

“Yeah, sure”, Siya nodded in agreement.

“You got so nervous to ask for a coffee that day!” Siya exclaimed, her laughter filling up the silent space around the park.

“Oh madam, it was my first time in such an arrangement”, Siddharth tried to defend himself.

“Like mine was for the hundredth time, right?”, she teased.

“You didn’t pull the cafe’s door for me either”, she continued to tease.

“You forgot one thing!” Siddarth responded.

“What?” she asked swiftly.

Siya sat at the corner-most table, where two chairs were placed opposite each other. She watched as Siddharth approached with a tray carrying two cups of coffee.

Siddarth settled down, “Here is your coffee.”

Siya took the cup of coffee and smiled. ‘Thank you!’

Siddarth asked, “Your father said, you are coming to Delhi, right?”

Siya answered, “Yeah, I got a transfer, I will shift in next two weeks.”

Siddarth said, “It has been two years since I started working in Delhi, my family is in a hurry to get me married!”

Siya replied playfully, “Then say no to this proposal.”

Siddarth conveyed, “See I just need time for it, maybe it would be great for both of us.”

He took a sip of coffee, “To meet with each other for a few days and then decide.”

Siya replied, “I understand, to be honest it would be great to know each other.”

Siddarth asked, “What should we tell our family?”

“The thing you said to me! This much you can do, right?, she reacted.

Siddarth responded, “Yup!”

Siya asked, “It seems you have never been in a relationship, were you?”

Siddarth put his cup on the table, “if you don’t mind, can you talk about it later?”

Siya said, “Yeah, no issues.”

Siddarth got up from the wet grass, patted his track pants to take off the sticky grass. Siya offered her hand to Siddarth to lift her up, “You did not discuss your relationship yet.”

“Will talk about it some other day!” Siddarth responded.

“Don’t forget to come at five o’clock tomorrow, okay.”, Siya reminded him.

“Why?”, asked Siddarth.

“I want to tell you something”, she said.

The sun cast the shadow of the light pole as the evening began to descend. The clock ticked at five, Siya settled on the sofa, checked her phone to see if there was any text from Siddarth.

"No text," she murmured as the clock struck half past five. Meanwhile the doorbell rang.

She rushed to the door and saw Siddarth at the entrance.

“See I am on time, it is five o’clock” he said showing his watch.

Siya flashed her phone, “Then what is this?”

“Aree, let me get in first” Siddarth gently pushed her and got in.

“Sorry, you know about the traffic, right?” he continued and went towards the sofa.

Siya trailed him, “Hmm, you know what happened?”

She continued, “I got promoted today!”

Siddarth got closer and held her hand, “Oh great! Don’t forget to give me a referral.”

Siya pulled her hand away. “Is that something you say when you’re holding someone’s hand?”

Siddarth smiled, “First tell me, what about the party?”

Siya responded, “Dinner at Saporì d’Italia, seven o’clock”

Siddarth checked his watch, “It is near six o’clock, get ready!” His phone was constantly buzzing with someone’s notification.

Siya pointed out, “who is texting you so much?”

Siddarth tried to brush off her question, “Nothing just random app notification.”

Both of them reached Saporì d’Italia. The waitress led them to their booked table. A round shaped table, two chairs kept opposite to each other.

Siddarth pulled a chair for Siya.

Siya teased, “Something you learnt in these two months!”

Siddarth too settled down on the opposite chair.

“You order something, I’ll be back from the washroom,” he said.

Siddarth left his phone on the table, and it buzzed repeatedly with notifications. Siya hesitated for a moment but couldn't resist picking it up.

There were nearly twenty messages from someone named Meghna.

When Siddarth returned, Siya held the phone up to him, the screen glowing with unread texts.

"Who is she?" she asked, her voice softer than expected.

"I will tell you but listen patiently" he requested, holding her hand.

"Sure, go ahead", Siya said, her voice steady, but a small teardrop welled up in her eyes.

Siddarth began speaking in a steady, calm voice, "Before I met you, I was in a relationship with Meghna. But by the time we met, we had already broken up."

Siddarth continued, "We were in a relationship for three long years and all the things ended abruptly."

Siya interrupted, "You forgot her so easily?"

He answered, holding her hand tenaciously, "I was looking for a closure and I found you, Siya."

Siddarth's voice held some kind of attestation though Siya was not sure.

Siya scrolled through the messages, reading each one carefully. Siddarth hadn't replied to any of them, yet Meghna kept texting.

Still looking at the screen, Siya murmured, "Siddarth, I think she still has feelings for you. As a girl, I can tell—she's not making it up."

Siddarth sighed and insisted, "Siya, once a relationship ends, there's no way to fix it. If there were still feelings between us, it would have lasted."

Siya insisted, "I really think you should go and talk to her." She paused for a moment before continuing, "We've only known each other for two months, Siddarth. I will forget you. I haven't even told you that I like you... not yet."

She tried to mask her feelings for Siddarth with her words. In these two months, she had come to know that he had been there for her at every moment. Yet, with those very words, she held back the tear that threatened to escape her eyes.

Siddarth said in a concerned voice, "It seems you are not happy though."

She took a sip of water from the glass, "If you don't go then I will not be!"

In the following days, Siddarth booked his flight ticket. During this time, he and Siya did not meet even once.

The sun, as usual, casted the shadow of the electric pole in the street as the evening started to descend. Siya scrolled through her old messages to Siddarth, lost in thought. Abruptly, she noticed the time—it was five in the evening, the very hour she used to remind him to come.

She got lost in those messages once again, but this time, it didn't feel like she was just reading them. It felt as if Siddarth was sitting beside her, holding her hand, whispering those words himself.

The door was slightly ajar, as Siya often left it that way to let fresh air circulate through the flat.

"Siya!" a voice rang out, echoing through the living room.

Siya was startled. She stood up and saw Siddarth standing before her, holding a bouquet of dark and light roses.

She was awestruck; meanwhile Siddarth came forward, kept the bouquet on the table and embraced her.

Siddarth calmly said, 'I've told my parents yes for our marriage.' He paused for a moment before continuing, 'Now it's your turn to say yes to your family.'

Siya remained silent. Siddarth took a step closer and said, 'You are my truth, Siya.'

As the sun dipped below the horizon, the evening gracefully melted into a breezy night. Once again, the shimmering moon bathed the city in its soft, glowing light.