**S**he was an epitome of benevolence. A girl, named pooja who in her twenties possessed a heart of a warrior and innocence of a child. Untouched by savagery and virtue lightening up her path, she just wanted to make her father proud. With these small dreams dug deep inside her heart she was chasing life.

**O**n her midway she never thought she would be struck by love. Love, she never knew what it was, had no idea how it would be and so, Pooja meets Rohit. Pooja falls in love with Rohit and believes him to be the man of her life. it was a magical experience for her.

She entirely devoted herself to him never expecting or asking anything in return but ***“Just to be loved”.***

Piece by piece she was fabricating a new dreamland of her, pervaded with his memories. she loved him with her heart and soul and missed him as if there was no one else in the world. Pooja tries to confess her love for him. Pooja constantly tries to attract the attention of and learn more from Rohit.

She made him, her everything. She lost herself completely to him and that’s where she went wrong. He wasn’t nature that would love her back in any condition, rather a mere human being.

Darkness peeped into their relationship as a curse on her happiness. When she visits him, it begins to rain and take shelter in a temple. However, when pooja tries to declare her love, Rohit cuts her off. He rejects her. she tried to save but he revolted, she cried and he made fun, she loved but he pushed her off. Pooja leaves Rohit behind into the rain in tears.

In the long prolonged fight finally she broke, shattered into numerous pieces with no hands to put her up. Again she gave up. Pooja is distraught by Rohit’s rejection. Everyday she woke up with his thought and every night she cried on her bed for him.

Hours, days and months went by but forgetting him was the toughest part. In the fight to forget him, In the fight to nurture herself. She was lost…

Innocence, generosity, carefree and caressing nature that defined her once, seemed some distant parts of memory now.

By keeping all this in mind she went to depression.On one fine day, she decided to commit suicide by drowning in sea. she went to nearby beach. It was around 7 PM. Beach was fully crowded. So she decided to stay there for sometime so that when that place was less crowded, she would be able to implement her plan perfectly.

She sat on the bench. All of sudden she felt uncomfortable as more couples, holding hands together, were visiting the beach. Her desperation to die was increasing. She moved to another bench.

She saw a toddler walking towards her little by little. Kid fell down just before her. She stood up and raised the kid. Kid’s father came hurriedly and took out her kid by hand and left her saying “Thank you”.

At that moment, she remembered her father and told herself ***“He sacrificed so much to brought me up, smiled when I visited home after so many days, cried when I left for studies and loves me more than he loves himself. There is no meaning to put an end to my parent’s 20 years of unconditional love and affection in a pathetic way like suicide for the sake of my short period of love”***

The memories with her parents were flashed in front of her eyes. She opened her mobile and saw her parents picture and it brought tears into her eyes. She told herself that the toddler was a good omen for her.

After very few days of this incident she got news of her father’s death. She was shaking and cracking her voice. Then before hanging up, she started crying. She recollected all the memories of her father with her and broke down.

After few days, she got a call from her cousin. Instead of cutting the call, she attended it and talked with her for almost 45 minutes. Out of so many words spoken by her cousin, she remembered only these sentences ***“By being depressed you didn't bring your father back, but by following his footprints and his dreams, his soul must be ultimately satisfied and happy”. And There are so many people in this world who lost more than what you had lost. Your loss is very minimal when compared to their loss. Still, they are living happily and trying to influence others life by understanding the basic fact “Past memories won’t make our future better. It is present that makes future better".***

That words from her influenced Pooja a lot.

Then she told herself...In my case, I had a break-up. The Boy whom I loved most left me said no to our love. he decided to follow his path. He made his choice. I don’t have any angry with him. Everyone has a right to make their own choices. Okay, agreed, it was True love, very difficult to forget but not more than our parents love and affection. Sooner or later, i will get my true love. But before doing that, I need to focus on other important things”.

Today, though she may not be what she was, she may not be very strong. But she holds a fire beneath herself not to just fulfil her father’s dreams but to conquer the world and show what she can achieve,

Then she decides…

Pooja later went to stay in Delhi with her friends to study further. she knew education was the only way to get out of the situation her mother and family were facing after the loss of her father, so She worked as hard as She could.

With help and encouragement from her friends and relatives , Pooja took her final exams and scored 88.5%.Pooja choose to do D.Ed (Diploma in Education) in spite of scoring so well, because this was the cheapest course she could afford to do to get a job as a teacher and support her family. She completed her D. Ed and also pursued a graduate degree in Arts from an open university simultaneously. And finally, she was able to start working as a teacher. This was like a dream come true for her family.

But, deep down, it was not what Pooja really wanted to do. After few days of getting a job She took the first step towards her dream by earning sufficient amount of money. Pooja went to Pune to prepare for the UPSC exam, taking a leave of six months from her job.

She did not even know the meaning of MPSC and UPSC at that time. She did not depend on anyone for money to take coaching classes either. So, the first thing she did was to meet one of the teachers of these coaching classes, just to understand if she was eligible to take the UPSC exam. She requested one of their teachers to write down the answers to a few of her questions, like what is UPSC, am I eligible for it, etc. And he told her there was nothing to stop her from taking the UPSC. It is only because of that one statement that she finally did it,”

Pooja appeared for the UPSC exams but unfortunately didn’t make the cut. In the meantime, she had also formed a Social organization with the help of some friends. Her mother stood as a volunteer for that organization. The mission of the organization was simple – to come to power and help the distressed.

Pooja's mother for being a widow, faced several humiliations after volunteering and for raising pooja like this. but that incident did not break Pooja. Instead, it gave her the strength to stand up and fight back again against the system. On the same day, she announced in front of all the members who were humiliating her mother, that she was leaving the place and would come back only when she became a powerful officer.

After this, no one could stop Pooja. She left her job and cleared the State Institute of Administrative Careers (SIAC) exam – this gave her a hostel to stay in and a stipend as scholarship. She draws paintings to take care of her expenditures. And finally, she cleared the UPSC examination with an all-India rank of 313, without any coaching.

Pooja was selected for the IAS. And, as per her promise, she came back to her place after finishing a long journey from being Pooja to becoming Pooja Mathew, IAS.

After some days she received a text message from a familiar number ***“Pooja this is Rohit. I'm so happy for what you have achieved in your life. I’ll be always sorry for breaking your heart. I had to make that decision at that time. I hope you will understand”***

She replied him ***“Dear Rohit, never ever feel sorry for what you have done. In Fact, you helped me a lot by breaking my heart. Earlier, I was sensitive, but now not anymore. I learned so much after you left me. I became a matured and responsible girl. Now, I have a full clarity on my life. Don’t worry about me”***

he sent another one ***“Will you live happily without me?”***

“Why not Rohit, I lived happily before you came into my life. Now you are leaving from my life. I will continue to live happily. Of course, you have given so many happy memories to cherish for. I loved you from the bottom of my heart. I always wanted your happiness. Earlier, you used to stay with your parents, in future, you will stay with your wife. My wish is you should be happy irrespective of the place where you live, person with whom you will live and if you need any help, I will be always there for you as a well-wisher.

Their friendship continues…

Although her life is successful but still, she remains as that innocent girl yet to found her true love…Will she successful in finding her love?

It is quite amazing how true the cliché – “opposites attract” holds true for pooja & Ayush. They met through a mutual friend, Rohit (Yes! You heard it right, he is Rohit’s classmate in graduation) in Pune. While Ayush was shy and an introvert, Pooja, on the other hand, was a bold and ambitious IAS officer.

It was Mr. Ayush, who made the first move. He invited pooja, Rohit along with other friends to dinner. Being the only girl, she refused at first. But impressed by Ayush’s persistence, she agreed to meet him the following day at Shakahari restaurant on the Main Road, Pune.

After few days, they became good friends. The two intellectuals used to bond over intelligent conversations about books and Pooja’s past experiences. He gave his ultimate support on hearing her past life.

Pooja’s friends insisted that Ayush was trying to impress her because he was interested in her. But she kept denying till one day at dinner, Ayush said something , that changed everything.

***“Ayush said, I want to tell you something. I knew this was it. It was coming. He said, I am 5’8” tall. I come from a lower middleclass family. I can never become rich in my life and I can never give you luxurious life. You are beautiful, bright, intelligent girl with a well-settled and respectful position. You can get anyone you want. But will you marry me?”***

As Pooja did not want to reply in haste, she asked him to give her some time. When Pooja told her mother and uncle about the proposal, there were some natural inhibitions.

When Ayush first met Pooja’s parents, they had a troubling start to the crucial meeting.

***“Her parents agreed to meet Ayush in Pune on a particular place at 10 a.m. sharp. Ayush did not turn up. How can I trust a man to take care of my daughter if he cannot keep an appointment, asked her mother?”***

And, after two hours, Ayush showed up at pooja’s place. As far as pooja’s mother was concerned, she showed her discomfort with Ayush as her future son-in-law. But what happened next, made things even more complicated:

***“Her Mother asked him what he wanted to become in life. Ayush said he wanted to become a social worker to serve the poor and wanted to open an orphanage. Her mother gave her verdict. NO. I don’t want my daughter to marry somebody who wants to become a social worker and then open an orphanage when he himself didn’t have money and secured job to support his family”***

After this incident, their relationship hit a state of limbo – pooja’s mother insisted that Ayush to get a steady job but Ayush never did things under pressure from someone.

She was caught between the two most important people in her life. For the next 2 years, their relationship remained in limbo. They met each other, went for dinners and movies.

Though things didn’t improve much between Ayush and pooja’s mother, one thing was clear to pooja by this time – ***she had developed a liking towards Ayush, which could only be termed as love.***

But pooja promised her mother that she would not marry Ayush without her blessings, though at the same time, she would not marry anybody else.

Ayush joined as General Manager in some private company for the sake of Pooja’s mother’s wish. Being happy of Ayush’s steady income, pooja’s mother also gave his consent to their marriage.

Finally, the two tied the knot in Mumbai…

After two years of marriage, Ayush realized his big dream to start a Social organization. Though his passion was strong, he lacked capital.

This is where ***“Pooja came to the rescue.”***

Pooja said ***“We were living a comfortable life in Mumbai with a regular pay check and I didn’t want to rock the boat. But your passion about creating an organization is more important to me than rest of all.”***

Pooja decided to support her husband. Typical of Ayush, he had just a dream and no money. So, she gave him all her savings till then without his knowledge and told him,” ***This is all I have. Take it. I give you 3 years sabbatical leave. I will take care of the financial needs of our house. You go and chase your dreams without any worry.”***

For some time, the two worked shoulder to shoulder to bring that Organization up. However, they realized that family time was being invested in raising this one.

Ayush made it very clear that it would either by me or him working for the

*Little heart’s* foundation. Never the two of us together. He said ***“If you want to work with that organisation, I will withdraw happily. My goal is to setup an organization to help the poor and orphans. Either by me or you… Anything is fine for me.”***

And then Pooja happily chose to take a backseat and took the role of a nurturer and homemaker along with her respectful job. And, Ayush has always credited Pooja for being an understandable wife.

Ayush says, ***“Pooja, I stepped on your career to make mine. You are responsible for my success”***

***Now-a-days, when words like marriage and soulmate are losing significance, the inspiring love story of pooja and Ayush still makes you believe in true love. And, it brings out an important point- successful marriages need much more than ROMANCE.***

She might have been given up her interests for her husband’s sake, but that does not make her a doormat…What is right for one person might be wrong for another. It is up to the individual to make a choice that is effective in her life.

Ayush’s dreams encompassed not only himself, but a generation of people. It was about creating something worthy, exemplary and honourable. It was about creation and distribution of wealth.

They had home and two little children, named Ayaan and Ahana. Somebody had to take care of it all. Somebody had to stay behind to create a home base that would fertile for healthy growth, happiness, and more dreams to dream. She became that somebody willingly. she can confidently say that if she had a dream like Little Hearts foundation, Ayush would have given her his unstinted support. The roles would have been reversed. They are not bound by the archaic rules of marriage. They trust each other implicitly. The Little hearts foundation was born with the sole objective of uplifting the less-privileged sections of society. They have built hospitals, orphanages, rehabilitation centres, libraries etc mostly near the rural areas amongst women and children.

She said that… The greatest difficulty in having money is to teach their children its value. Bringing up children in a moneyed atmosphere is a difficult task. They have seen money from the time they were born. But she can lead by example. When they see Ayush clean the house every day, they realise that no work is demeaning, irrespective of how rich we are. This doesn’t mean she expect her children to live an austere life. Her children buy what they want, but they have to follow certain rules.

Her children haven’t given her any heartbreak yet. Her daughter Ahana studying medicine, and her son studying MBA in Bangalore. They don’t use their background in vain. They don’t want to be recognised and appreciated because of their father or her, but for themselves.

Have pooja lost her identity as a woman, in Ayush’s shadow? No, she might Mrs Ayush. She might be Ahana and Ayaan’s mother. She might be the trustee of Little hearts foundation. She might be a respectful IAS officer. But still she is Pooja Mathew. Like all women, she plays different roles. That doesn’t mean she don’t have her own identity. Women have that extra quality of adaptability and learn to fit into different shoes. But they are their own selves still.

And we have to exact their freedom by making the right choices in their lives, dictated by them and not by the world.

***Most of the times, we tend to focus on the success. But I feel that there is a need to speak more of their relationship that is based on the social foundation of sacrifice, patience, empathy and honesty.***

**Every man needs a woman to motivate him and to give him a reason to live…**