

National Bestseller

# ACCIDENTALLY



# CUPID

A  
Romantic  
Comedy  
Novel

PRACHI GUPTA    SANCHIT GARG



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CUPID**

**BY**

**PRACHI GUPTA  
SANCHIT GARG**

# Acknowledgement

I would like to say a massive thanks to Sanchit for making the book look beautiful - Sanchit, without you the book would be doomed to be ugly forever.

This book is dedicated to my little brother, who had the first privilege to read it. It was because of you that I could complete it. The immense help you gave by not irritating and goofing around for a short while. Thanks for your motivation and suggestions as well.

To my dearest friends whose qualities I have pictured in the main characters who would probably kill me after this. But guys I love you.

And at last, dedicated to those who are reading this book right now. Without you, this story wouldn't be in your hands now.

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# CHAPTER-1

## The Unplanned Surprise

I opened my door and found Nishi with her 6 month baby boy Aayush.

“Hi, baby!” I smiled and waved at him.

Since our friendship of 6 years back, my house has been her favourite spot. Back in college our houses were 10 kms apart and now after her marriage they are further apart but still, she hasn't got tired of travelling and bumps at my house randomly. I have got used to her untimely arrivals by now.

“What's it this time?” I asked her at the entrance.

She ignored my question. “I'm in a very bad mood today.

One should never fall in love and all love marriages are useless.”

She went in with the kangaroo baby carrier and landed straight on the couch in the living room.

I closed my door and went to sit on the couch beside her.

“Once you get married and have children, all the love just disappears,” she added.

“Looks like you had a fight with him again.” I smiled.

Nishi snorted in anger. “He forgot my birthday. I'm going to kill him.”

I was kind of enjoying it. Before I could utter anything else, my doorbell rang again.

“Wait, I will be back in a minute,” saying so I rushed to the door. I didn't want her to wait long as she never liked waiting and in anger she always turned into a mini monster.

r.

I opened the door and there he was, the man she was furiously angry at; her husband.

He peeped inside from the gate and whispered, "Is she here?"

"Yes!" I hissed. "And in a very bad mood. You are probably going to be dead today."

"Please help me out. I cannot think of anything right now," he pleaded.

I shook my head. "Nope. You made a mistake."

A deep sigh emanated from him. "I didn't forget her birthday!"

I rose a brow, "really."

"Yes." He looked at me helplessly.

"It was, she wanted me to be the first one to wish her and it was you who called first. Then when I wished her after you did, she just assumed your call reminded me and got all angry," He whined at me.

"Oops!" I bit my lower lip. "Don't worry, I will do something. Wait outside and when I message you, ring the doorbell again." I closed the door and quickly walked back to Nishi. "Sorry!"

"What took you so long?" she enquired.

"Nothing dear, someone was asking for an address." I sat down again.

"Sweetie, I shouldn't have told you but I guess it's the right time to tell," I started to build up a story, "Actually he didn't forget your birthday. I got an invitation call from him yesterday evening for your birthday party."

She looked at me suspiciously. "So why didn't he tell me about the party." She rose a brow. "What's the venue? You are not saving him, aren't you?"



“Stop acting like Sherlock Holmes,” I scolded her.

“It’s a surprise, you silly. Why would he tell you and spoil the fun. And about the venue, I Don’t know where the party is. He said he would message the address today.”

“He better have planned something or else he’s dead,” said Nishi, firmly.

Seeing Nishi cooled enough, I quickly messaged him ‘Mission accomplished’ and a few seconds later there was the doorbell again. I opened the door.

“Is the territory safe now? Has she cooled down?”

I smiled. “Don’t worry, everything is under control. Come in.” I closed the door behind him.

He went to sit on the couch beside Nishi. “I think I should shift to Radhika’s house permanently,” he commented, sarcastically.

Nishi shot him a side glance, “May I ask why?”

“Because my wife is found more than half of the time here. Shifting will save my time.” He laughed.

“No one can bear you, except me” scoffed Nishi.

“That’s true!” I giggled.

After a while, Nishi looked at him. “I think we should leave now.” She stood up to leave.

“Ok, let’s go.” he stood up too and we followed Nishi to the exit.

At the main exit, he whispered to me in amazement, “Thanks, did you hypnotise her?”

“No!” I smiled. “I just told her that you have a surprise party planned for her.”

His face turned pale from shock and he could only utter “WHAT.”

“It’s already late. You better be going fast,” I whispered with a wink.

“Oh No! Her remaining angry was better than this,” he murmured.

Turning back, Nishi asked, “What are you two whispering?”

“Nothing sweetheart, just asking about work. Let’s go fast.” He hurried to the car.

I closed the door behind them and reached for the fridge. I was about to sip water from the bottle when the doorbell rang. I now seriously doubted my decision of getting a transfer from Pune back to my home city.

“Argh! Not again. I should better change my house. No, city,” I murmured to myself.

Leaving the bottle, I speed walked to the door. At the door was my cousin Varsha who had just returned from an interview. She went in and I closed the door.

“How was your interview?” I asked her.

“Good.”

She picked the bottle I left on the kitchen counter.

“I have to go for a birthday party in the evening. Do you want to tag along?” I asked her.

“If it’s fun, then sure.” She had few sips and left the bottle back on the counter. “Who’s party is it?”

“My best friend, Nishi’s”

“Okay.”

At 5pm, a message pops.

‘Royal hotel at 7pm’

Around 8 in the night, we two reached the hotel gate. I was astonished to see the arrangements. He did a splendid job in so less time. Going further in, we saw Nishi dressed in a beautiful blue gown, she was

on cloud 9. Her eyes glowed in pride. Her husband looked the same, tensed as he was in the morning. Maybe he was worried about the heavy bill which was about to get him bankrupt after the party. The party was great but still Varsha wasn't entertained much. After meeting Nishi and her husband, she looked completely baffled.

Exhausted, we reached home by midnight. After turning into our pyjamas we headed to the bed to sleep. My family was still out of station and was to arrive soon. I slipped into my futon beside Varsha and saw her lying straight on her back constantly staring at the ceiling as if she was counting the invisible stars.

"You didn't like the party?" I asked her.

"No, it was great."

"Then?"

She diverted her gaze from the ceiling to me. "I'm a little confused. Your friend Nishi and her husband ..."

"What's with them?"

"They are sort of... the most mismatched couple I have ever seen," she took a pause "they had arranged marriage or love?"

"I'm sure arranged," she added.

"Love marriage." I smiled.

"What. You got to be kidding," she said as she sat up in one fluid motion.

I shook my head in no.

"But How can love even happen, they looked poles apart."

I smiled and said, "you must have studied physics. One law says OPPOSITES ATTRACT, similarly is the law of attraction of opposites. It applies perfectly here."

"OK. That's quiet interesting." Her eyes shined. "Tell me everything about them, all from the start till the end;

I insist,” saying so she laid down again lying on her stomach.

I turned facing my back at her. Dragging my futon to my ear I said, “It’s a very long story. Will tell you in the morning.”

She swayed me, “No! I’m not letting you sleep till you tell me.”

“Ok, relax. I’m telling.” I turned towards her.

“Start from the very beginning without missing a single detail. I don’t wanna miss any part,” she said, overjoyed.

I laughed. For the first time in her life, Varsha was more interested in listening than sleeping.

## CHAPTER-2

### Meeting The Stranger Again

This story started on a beautiful sunny September morning at my new college. One of the best engineering colleges, that was what the people called. But honestly nothing was so great about it, apart from its canteen. The campus was big but not that lavish, which I hoped. Seriously, I wanted a drop and find some better place to study but it would have taken one more extra year so, there was no backing off. Let's move on. Our batch was the most special one, not because there were any extraordinary students there but because it was the only batch which started one month later than the usual. All thanks to the university, which rescheduled and again rescheduled its counselling. The whole campus was filled with new flock of students and parents. Stoked, I headed straight towards the reception to enquire. The reception was fully occupied. All chaos, nothing audible. Disheartened, I started to retreat. I pulled the reception gate and was about to step out when a firm voice from behind stopped me, "Excuse me, are you in search of something?"

I turned back and saw this average height boy in white shirt and black trousers. He had flawless pale skin and deep catastrophic eyes. He looked a perfect gentleman with that appearance and voice. "I just wanted to know about my class," I replied, calmly.

"Fresher?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Freshman classes are in block A. May I take you there?" he suggested.

"No thanks, I will manage."

“Go straight from here and then take a left turn. The first building is block A.” He smiled.

I quickly moved out and walked to Block A. I was so nervous that I even forgot to thank that kind boy. The next thing I saw after entering block A was a corridor adjacent to 12 classes in a column. All students were divided alphabetically irrespective of their branches. I got section I, the 9<sup>th</sup> one in series. The class looked no different from my previous schools, only the faces were new. As I was a studious kid I quickly grabbed the front row seat. The girl next to me was from a small town and wore a loose salwar kameez with a high pony. Fully desi which by the end of the year turned into a sexy chic. The only good thing about her was her lank hair. Tress as straight as chopsticks.

It was a boring class. None appeared interesting to me. After the last class, I quickly headed to the registrar's office. I had to deposit my bus fee cheque and there I saw this big eyed, petite brunette with serious expressions on her walnut dark skin, that glowed. Short but with a confidence double her height. On her lean body she wore waist length hair tied in a pony, a blue top and a black jeans.

“Sir,  
I need to change my bus. Its already full and I can't travel standing everyday,” she said in an angry tone.

“But that's the only bus on your route. I can't do anything,” he said.

“Sorry sir, but having to pay so much I can't go in there,” she said, firmly.

“You have to travel in that only,” said the registrar.

“What the hell is the management doing, making fool of us,” she said in an angry tone.

“You have to arrange something, there are other kids too. Start a new bus,” she added.

I kept staring at her in amazement. *Whoa she's so small, just like a doll but somehow there's this hateful as if you had get eaten if you missed one step.* A palmtop tiger would be the best name to describe her. Small as to fit in a palm and furious like a tiger. Totally fits her personality.

"Starting a new bus is not possible but I will talk to the bus committee. It will take around 2-3 days to sort this problem, till then manage in this bus," said the registrar.

"Excuse me, sir." I interrupted, "I need to deposit a cheque."

While I handed over the cheque to him I saw her vigorously searching for something in her backpack.

"Sir! I have a cheque too," she said.

He took our cheques and said, "you two wait till I bring you your receiving slips."

After the registrar left, that girl smiled at me. "Hi! I'm Nishi Verma from IT."

"Hey, Radhika Gupta from IT as well." I smiled.

"Thanks," said Nishi.

"For what?" I asked, flustered.

"I totally forgot about my cheque, yours reminded me."

"Oh," I smiled.

"If I had missed it, I would have to see that stupid bald head registrar again." she laughed.

I giggled in return. Meanwhile the registrar appeared with the slips and handed them to us.

"I should rush now, the buses are about to leave. Nice to meet you. bye," said Nishi and smiled.

"Nice to meet you too," I waved at her with a smile.

The third day evening, there were two surprise additions in my no. 10 mini bus. The only white one with more than half occupied by teachers, which was the reason of us never being ragged in that bus. We used to call it dolphin.

I stepped inside the bus.

“Hey, Radhika!”  
standing up Nishi waved at me. “Come sit here,” she indicated towards the empty seat next to her.

The bus started and I walked slowly in the narrow space between the 2 columns of seats on my either side and got seated next to her.

“Hi Nishi, what a surprise. How are you here?” I asked.

“Nothing dear, there was space in this bus so they got me shifted here.”

“They got us shifted here,” a voice came from the seat behind us.

“Okay Sid,” Nishi rolled her eyes. “They got us shifted,” she reiterated.

I turned to look back and saw a silly looking boy with a lingering smile, leaning from the back of our seat.

He was a thin dark boy wearing a red hoodie and blue jeans with green rimmed square glasses. Hair, curly. “Hi! I’m Siddharth Malik.”

“Hi! I’m Radhika Gupta”.

“He’s also from IT,” said Nishi.

“Means she too...” his eyes widened. “Awesome! Next year we three will be studying together,” said the overjoyed Siddharth.

“He’s my friend and neighbour,” said Nishi.

“Which section are you in, Nishi?” I asked.

“G”



“And you Siddharth?”

“You can call me Sid,” he smiled. “Its J and yours?”

“Ok Sid, I’m in I.”

Sid took a deep breath. “Thank god, we got shifted here. It was a boring bus. No one talked there.”

“But this one looks good,” said Nishi.

I smiled at them.

“Hey! Radhika, are you single?” popped the most stupid question from Sid’s mouth.

What. I was shocked. Who asks such a question on the first encounter to a person. *We just met. Duh! We aren’t even friends yet.*

“Yes,” I replied, quietly.

“You are really single?” asked Nishi, in amazement.

“Yep, what’s so surprising.” I looked at her shocked face. “Do we need to have a boyfriend to qualify for college.” I smiled.

“Well said!” Sid showed me a thumbs up.

“You are not single?” I asked her.

“No, she’s not” said Sid and smiled.

“Sid. I can answer. Will you please sit now” said Nishi, angrily.

Meanwhile my stop arrived. I stood up and walked to the bus gate. “Bye Nishi” I waved at her.

“Bye,” Sid waved.

“She said to me not you, stupid.”

I smiled as I walked out of the bus. The best thing happened in the first three days, I made two really interesting friends. While Nishi looked a social butterfly, Sid’s first impression on me was that of an overly idiot person who was funny.

Next day after college in the same bus,

“Hey Girls! have you heard the rumour?” asked Sid.

“What rumour?” I asked.

“There is one senior who offered free college tour to freshman girls on the introduction day,” said Sid.

“So, what’s wrong in that. Its good, someone is helping,” Nishi interrupted.

“Oh Madam! let me finish,” said Sid.

In a scary tone he started, “Once you accept his help and talk a little to this guy, he starts troubling by following and acting too desperate.”

“Radhika. Stay clear of that guy,” he added.

“Why only Radhika, not me?” Nishi snapped.

“You need not worry, he only follows pretty girls.” Sid stuck his tongue out at her.

Nishi shot him a dead look, “You idiot! One day I’m surely going to kill you.” She punched on his arm.

“Hey Stop! It hurts,” said Sid rubbing his arm.

“Say it once more and you are seriously getting it from me,” scolded Nishi.

“Okay buddy relax. It’s cool,” Sid grinned.

“OMG! I remember now. I met this guy,” I said in mock horror.

“Which guy?” asked Nishi.

“The one Sid is talking about.”

“Really. Where?” asked Sid, anxiously.

“At the reception. I was there to enquire about my classroom but it was flooded; so he offered help.”

“Then did you accept his tour?” asked Nishi.

“No. I just asked the directions and left.”

“Well done. You are safe. He won’t trouble you,” said Sid and smiled.

I took a deep breath. "Hope so."

Few days later at lunch in Nishi's class,

"Hey Guys, I'm getting bored. Let's do something interesting," I suggested.

"What?" asked Nishi.

"Ragging is on, right? So why not rag someone. All are new, no one will doubt us." I smirked.

"Wow Girl!" Nishi winked at me. "I must say you are a sweet devil."

I rolled my right hand outwards in admiration, "thank you." They smiled.

"Cool, let's do it!" said Sid, determined.

"So what's the plan?" asked Nishi.

"Right now my class is empty, only two girls are there. So I will go to my class, scare the two timid dayski's there. Meanwhile you two get there and rag them," said I with glowing eyes. "But listen, be easy on them they are my friends."

They both nodded their heads in agreement.

So as planned, I reached my class and ran to the two girls there.

"Girls, you know two seniors are ragging badly in the next class. We are next. I'm too scared," said I.

Just then Sid and Nishi entered the class. Their confidence really got a silent shriek out of the two girls.

"Still sitting, don't you have the etiquettes to greet your seniors," said Sid, loudly.

"Sorry sir," they said.

"You dark one, introduce yourself," said Nishi.

"S-sir ma'am I... " muttered the dark girl.

“Stop blabbering. Don’t you know how to talk,” scolded Nishi.

“Leave it. Both of you come here,” Sid called the two girls with me. “You two have to pretend to be a gorilla and take 2 whole rounds of the class.”

They enacted well. The sight was so comic that I couldn’t stop my laugh bubbling inside my throat. Nishi and Sid laughed as well. Stopping them midway I said, “Stop girls, you are pranked. They are my friends.”

“You naughty girl, I nearly missed a heartbeat,” said the pale one.

“But please don’t tell anyone of us being pranked,” requested the darker one.

“Okay,” said I and we all kinked.

Pointing towards Sid and Nishi I said, “girls they are Siddharth and Nishi from sec J and G.”

“I’m Preeti, civil,” said the dark one.

“Rashi, EC. Nice to meet you,” said the other one.

The bell rang and after bidding goodbye, both Nishi and Sid left for their classes.

Soon Nishi became my best friend and Sid unwantingly tagged along. For me it was more like a buy one get one free deal. With a best friend, I got a crazy tag along friend free.

That evening in the bus we laughed again. The flashback was too amusing.

“That was awesome,” said Sid with a thumbs up. “You are a genius rather quirky.”

“Those girls were nice,” sighed Nishi.

“That Rashi, your friend. Is she single?” asked Sid.

“Sorry. No,” I smiled.

“Bad luck,” teased Nishi.

Sid's face went pale and we laughed at his disappointed look. We laughed so loud that the teachers turned back to see.

"Easy girls, what's going on there?" asked one teacher.

"Nothing ma'am, Sid just cracked a joke," said Nishi shrugging her laugh.

"Sid, don't keep that joke to yourself, share it with us all" ordered the teacher.

Sid gave a dead shot to Nishi. His face turned red of fear. I'm sure he must be cursing Nishi beneath. He paused.

"Speak Sid, everyone is waiting," teased Nishi.

He took a deep breath and started, "A newlywed couple went for a horse ride. The husband's horse was pretty okay but the wife's horse seemed to be a crazy one. On the way that horse jumped up suddenly, making the wife topple over. Recovering her position from the ground, she patted the horse's back and said 'That's one'.

She again got on the horse. After a while, it joggled again. This time she again was calm and said 'That's two' and continued.

When the horse dropped her a third time, she just took out a revolver from her purse and shot the horse dead!!

The husband shouted: 'what did you do you psycho. You killed the poor thing. Are you crazy?'

.

The wife gave a silent look and said: 'That's one!!!'"

Everyone laughed and giving Nishi a silent look with a raised eyebrow he said, "that's one." He got seated back on the seat adjacent to us.

"Huh!" grunted Nishi.

“Nice joke, where did you get it?” I asked.

“It was original. On spot made.” Sid grinned.

“Really! How you got the idea?” asked Nishi.

“It was easy.” Sid Smirked. “I just imagined you in place of that horse.”

“What,”

Nishi’s mouth dropped open and she shot him an angry unamused look. Sid and I laughed. Meanwhile, my stop arrived and I left.

A month passed. Sid had great sense of humour. He was so antic that he could even make a corpse laugh.

One day, there was a notice at Block A’s noticeboard. That very evening in the bus,

“Hey guys! Checked the noticeboard?” I asked.

“Do we have a noticeboard?” asked Sid, surprised.

“Yes silly, there is.” I laughed. “You would see it if you keep your eyes away from girls.”

Nishi laughed. “What’s the notice about?”

“We are having our fresher’s party this Sunday at 6,” I said in a happy tone.

“That’s great, only 4 days left. I thought we will never have one,” said Nishi.

“So, how are we going?” I asked.

“I’ll bring my mom’s car, pick you two on the way and we will get their together,” said Sid.

“That’s cool,” said Nishi.

“The car been standing for so long. It’s going to be its day out,” said Sid.

“I hope the car’s working,” I confirmed.

“It will have to work,” Sid smiled.

“Ok done then. The plan fixed. Message us the pickup time that very morning,” said Nishi.

A message pops that Sunday morning,

Sid: B ready at 6. V wil pick u from ur stop.

Me: Ok.

It was 30 past 6. I had already called them 5 times and every time I called I got the same reply, 'just 2 minutes.' Peeping inside every car that passed, made me more irritated. At 7'o clock, a red Maruti 800 of 80's with bits of paint scratched from here and there stopped before me.

"Get in fast. We are late," said Sid from the driver's seat.

Nishi opened the back door for me and I got seated next to her. Sid started the engine and the car moved towards its destination.

"What took you so long. 2 minutes more and I would have returned home," said I ,angrily.

"It wasn't my fault. She read the map wrong," shrugged Sid.

"How long have you been standing here?" asked Nishi

"From past 1 hour," I whined.

"Sorry! it won't happen again," said Nishi.

"It better not," I said.

Our college was half hour drive from my place but in the mid-way the car stopped. After pushing that cart we somehow reached the college at 8 but by then the party was already over and everyone was ready to leave.

"Damn! It's over!" Nishi pressed her palm on her forehead.

"Lets go back," said Sid.

I took a deep breath and said, "I'm not going back in that thing you call car."

“Let’s go in an auto Radhika,” Nishi suggested.

“Hey Girls! Wait! It won’t be safe now. Stop here, till I arrange something.”

We were the only ones standing beside that red car outside the college gate while others were leaving. Twenty minutes later, we saw Sid 100 meters away coming with two boys.

“N-N-Nishi!” I gasped, clutching her arm. “You seeing?” My heart sinking horribly.

“What?” she asked.

“That boy with Sid.”

“Oh! Him. He’s Manas,” said Nishi.

“OMG!” My jaw dropped open, “You know that senior?”

“Which senior?” she asked.

“The one who gave free tours the first day.”

“No dear, you have mistaken. He’s my classmate, Manas Goel.”

I looked at her and whispered, “I’m not talking about the tall guy. The other one.”

“Oh! You sure he’s that senior?”

“100 percent,” I nodded.

Nishi stared at him, surprised. “He is kinda cute. It’s strange, seeing him no one can tell that he acts so bizarre. Troubling girls around.”

“Hmm,” I signed.

Meanwhile, Sid arrived with the two boys. The senior one left to get the car leaving Manas behind.

“We are going with them,” said Sid.

Nishi grabbed Sid’s arm. “Radhika come along,” she ordered and took us to a corner.

“Sid, we are not going with them,” said Nishi, firmly.



“Sorry dear, we don’t have a choice. They are the last ones left. Me and Radhika are going but if you wish you can stay,” said Sid.

“I’m not going without her,” I sighed.

“Don’t worry he’s my friend,” said Sid.

I took a deep breath. “ok, let’s go Nishi.”

A spotless silver I10 stopped before us. Sid tied a rope between the two cars. His car at the back. He opened the I10 back gate and said, “girls sit.”

Scared, we two got in. Sid went to his car’s driving seat and signalled with a horn. We were now on our way back. The graveyard like outside silence added more to that nasty feel. The car was totally silent till midway. Sameer adjusted the rear view mirror. “Hi I’m Sameer,” said he, eyes on the front road; driving

“I’m Nishi.”

“And you miss?” asked Sameer, his eyes still on the road.

“Radhika.”

“Do you want to hear music?” asked Sameer.

“No thanks,” said Nishi.

Again the deadly silence for 20 minutes crawled inside the car.

“Stop! My home,” I said.

Sameer pulled the brakes and I got out of the car. After bidding goodbye to Nishi and waving at Sid, I started walking towards my lonely colony lane.

“Radhika! Wait!” shouted Sameer and ran behind me.

“I guess your house is a little far. May I walk with you?” asked Sameer.

“No, it’s just five minutes walk from here, I’ll manage.”

“It’s not safe walking alone at this time of night. Let me,” he insisted.

“OK,” I agreed.

Sameer waved his hand to the others and shouted, “guys I’m dropping her home, will be back in a minute.”

We started walking. After few steps in silence he uttered, “So you are Sid’s friend, right?”

“Yes.”

“Not classmates I guess,” said he.

“Bus mates.”

“Bus mates?”

“We go in the same bus,” I replied.

“Ok, and that girl with you?” he asked.

“Nishi! She also goes in the same bus.”

“Which trade yours?” asked he.

“IT”

“You talk less. You always that quiet?” asked he.

“No, sometimes,” I smiled.

Few seconds later I said, “My house. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Bye.” He smiled.

“Bye.”

He quickly ran back to his car. After entering my house, only one thing was on my mind, why such a sweet boy acted so insane, following girls and all? Don’t he have a girlfriend? Tomorrow I will ask Sid about it.

An hour later, I got a call from Nishi.

“Hey! You ok?” asked Nishi.

“Yes, dear. What happened?”

“I was just confirming. The way that psycho jumped to help you, I got really scared.”

“Everything’s good. Meet you at the bus tomorrow. Good night dear.”

“Good night.”

Next morning Sid overslept and missed the bus, but we caught him at lunch.

“You idiot! What were you thinking last night,” scolded Nishi.

“Hey! Calm down, what have I done?” asked Sid.

“Oh god! He’s being so innocent. You don’t know what happened,” said Nishi.

Sid shook his head, confused.

“You left us with that psycho senior last night,” said Nishi.

“Which senior?” asked Sid, perplexed.

“The senior, who gives tours and follows girls,” said Nishi.

Hearing it Sid got a laugh attack. Tears rolled out from his eyes.

“Why are you laughing?” I scolded him.

“What! Wait! I can’t take it any more” said Sid wiping his tears off. He came to a still, “Who told you Sameer was that senior?”

“No one, I know that,” said I.

“How come?” asked Sid.

“He was the one who helped me out with directions the first day” stated I.

“Oh! So it was him who helped you.” He laughed again. “Silly, you have mistaken. He’s not that senior. He’s my classmate, Sameer Khurrana.”

“OMG! I misunderstood,” I said, palm faced.

“Don’t you two know, he’s this year’s Mr. Fresher,” said Sid.

“How could we have known that when we were busy pushing that rickety cars of yours,” I huffed.

“And by the time we reached, the event was already over,” snapped Nishi.

“Sorry! My fault” said Sid with hands rose up.

We all had a good laugh that day.

Next Semester was much boring, rather irritating I would say. One evening in our bus, Sid was absent.

“You look troubled,” said Nishi.

“Some people are damn irritating,” I said.

Nishi wiggled her eyebrows, “what Happened?”

“Nothing dear, I just rejected the stupidest proposal of my life.”

“Proposal!” her eyes widened, “who was it, spill out,” she teased.

“It was an idiot of my class. You won’t believe, he asked a common friend to deliver it verbally.” I flashed a filthy look.

“He might be sacred. After all you’re so strong, who knows you might have slapped him,” said Nishi and giggled.

“Yeah! Could have been a possibility.” I smirked. “But how could he even think of it. I never gave him any hint or something, just talked a little; casually.”

“You angry because he indirectly proposed you or how dare he thought of proposing?” Nishi smiled.

“Both,” said I with a sickening look. “Let’s forget about that idiot. How was your day?”

“Definitely not as eventful as yours.” Nishi laughed.

“Stop it,” I flashed her an angry look.

After that event few days went by calmly. That idiot maintained distance from me. I really felt thankful of him for doing so but the peace was short lived. Shortly, I

started getting messages from a stalker which tensed me a lot. Finally, I made a decision to scold the stalker and everything was in place after that.

Few months later,

“Girls! It’s our last day of being fresher’s,” said Sid.

“Yeah, So what,” said Nishi.

“Smile,” Sid flashed an ecstatic gaze at Nishi. “We three are going to be in the same class.”

“He’s looking fired up already,” said I and laughed.

“I can’t wait to be in the new class. I’m really looking forward to it,” said Sid. His eyes gleamed.

“Duh! It’s just a new semester,” said Nishi, nastily.

“I wonder what kind of students will show up,” said I

.

„ Sid smiled. “I’m sure there will be lots of pretty girls.

“How can you tell? You saw the list or something?” I asked.

“I can smell pretty girls. My nose does not fail, it works like a radar” said Sid and grinned.

Nishi laughed. “Ya! his sense of smell is really something when it comes to girls.”

## CHAPTER-3

### Sid The Joker

I'd not been a morning person since I joined college, but today, I was up at the butt crack of dawn, having only slept a few hours. The excitement to be in a new class with my friends didn't let me sleep. I quickly entered the bus which was already late and saw Sid sleeping. He was having a really deep sleep, snoring. I guess he was awake last night dreaming of the new class and its girls. As we were approaching closer to college, so were his snores getting louder and louder. Luckily, he slept on the front seat where the motor sounded the most. So no one noticed him because his snores matched the bus motor. The college arrived. When everyone stepped out, Nishi swayed him hard.

"Sid! Get up!" she shouted.

"Why'd you start the party without me?" said Sid, yawning.

"Party! We are in college idiot. Get up, we have a class to attend" said Nishi.

"What happened?" asked Sid rubbing his eyes.

"You were asleep and snored loud." I giggled.

"Oh god! Did anyone notice me?" asked Sid.

"No one noticed it," replied Nishi.

"Thank God! I'm saved from embarrassment."

"Now hurry up, we are already late," said I.

"What's the time?" asked Sid.

I looked at my watch, "8:55 am. Class to start at 9."

Sid quickly grabbed his bag from the seat and moved out of the bus with us. "Crap! I don't wanna be late on my very first day of senior class."

“Hey Nishi! Don’t you dare tell anyone that I was snoring in the bus. Radhika won’t tell, she’s not into gossips; but you, I can never trust on that.”

Nishi grunts.

“Don’t worry. We won’t tell anyone that you have put your T-shirt inside-out,” I chuckled.

He looked down at his shirt and fidgeted.

“Argh! Stop it,” Sid groaned. “It’s fashion.”

“Sid! Watch out!” shouted Nishi.

‘BUMP!’ Sid runs into a boy. “Walk properly you idiot,” shouted that boy.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t see,” saying so he moved really fast, leaving us behind.

“Sid! Stop! Where are you going that fast? Class is not that way,” I shouted.

“I’m going to the washroom. See you in class,” said Sid.

“Washroom! To correct your shirt?” Nishi laughed.

Sid replied to her turning his head back a little while walking, “no. To wrong it for anti-fashioners like you.” He flashed a fake smile at her.

“Sid! Watch out!!” I shouted.

‘CRASH!’ Sid bumped into a girl who was coming out from the library holding a pile of 4 big fat books.

“I’m sorry.., I was in a hurry” said Sid and helped her pick her books.

“That’s ok. I was in a hurry too,” said the girl.

Similar plot when you bump into a member of the opposite sex, causing one or both of you to drop whatever you’re carrying in a hilarious fashion, then congratulations, you’ve just fallen in love. A perfect Bollywood scene. *Only in the Movies*. Here happened the unexpected.

Me and Nishi quietly spectated the scene as we thought its best not to barge in. Her boyfriend who was a wolfish guy, solidly built, came into the scene.

“Hey! Hey! What the hell kinda plot are you trying to pull by bumping into my girlfriend?” snapped her boyfriend.

“Plot!” Sid’s mouth got open.

“Ritika,” he hugged her. “Are you ok sweetie?”

“I’m sorry. Here’s your book,” Sid tried handing the last book to Ritika.

Her boyfriend snatched the book from Sid’s hand and scolded him, “I told you to keep your damn hands off her!”

“Well then, I’m in a hurry, so...” Sid starts to walk fast.

“Don’t ever show your face again,” shouted her boyfriend.

“Dammit! I’m not gonna run into anyone now,” Sid murmured and hurried to the washroom.

“We’d better hurry up!” I suggested and Nishi nodded in agreement.

We quickly walked and entered our new block, D. It definitely looked better than the older one. As the lift was out of order we had to climb up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

Nishi took a deep breath.  
“We are finally 2<sup>nd</sup> year students starting today.”

I gasped,  
“Not good. Having to go all the way to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor every day, I think I’m gonna lose heart if the lift remains unavailable.”

Reaching the last step to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, we went crazy looking for our class.

Few seconds later,



“I have no idea how to find this class. But it’s not just because I’m stupid, right?” said Nishi.

“Just look for the palette of IT-B, silly” I said..

Nishi took a deep breath and said, “Dammit! Now where is this IT-B.”

I suddenly stopped and pointed at a palette, “Ah! There it is.”

“Finally!” sigh Nishi.

I peeped inside the class, “it’s empty. Where’s everyone?”

“I think they are late,” commented Nishi.

“Look!”

I pointed at the time table outside the noticeboard of our class, “first lecture is at 9:30.”

Nishi looked at her watch, “it’s only 9:20, we reached early.”

“Doesn’t matter,” I smiled. “Let’s get inside.”

After entering the class, we scanned each and every corner. There were double seater tables arranged in 4 columns and 8 rows. Middle two column tables joined together.

Suddenly our gaze dropped on the two boys at the corner of the 3<sup>rd</sup> last row, totally busy talking. Shocked Nishi, speed walked towards them.

“Hey! What a surprise, I wasn’t expecting you two here.” Nishi smiled at them.

“Hi,” said the two boys in sync.

“You were in EN, so how come here?” asked stoked Nishi.

“Actually I wasn’t happy with my trade and scored quite well last year so the management allowed me to change it,” answered Manas.

“And you?” asked Nishi.

“I was already in this branch” said Sameer, flatly.

“Oh great then, It’s going to be more fun now.” Nishi smiled.

Meanwhile, Sid arrived with his T-shirt corrected.

All jazzed up he asked, “Hey girls, how’s the new class?”

“Seems good” I said, calmly.

Sid’s gaze dropped on the two boys. “Hey Buddy,” Sid waved to Sameer. “Happy to see you.”

We occupied the second row and Sid took the last one.

I turned back to look at Sid. “Hey Sid! class is still not full, you can sit a further ahead” I suggested.

“No buddy, I’m in the backbencher’s lot. Too happy here.” Sid smiled.

I turned back. “No backbench thing,” Nishi shake her right palm in no. “It’s just the perfect spot to get a glance of every girl in the class.”

“OH!” said I with my lips forming a complete O.

Soon after, the class got filled. Every seat occupied by a new face. At exactly 9:30 entered a good looking man in his 40’s with shoulders that seemed mitered at perfect 90 degree angles. He smiled and said, “Welcome to second year. You have the misfortune of having me, Rajeev Awasthi as your HOD. It’s not going to be easy. I want hundred percent result, got it?”

“Yes sir, I will score a 100!” blurted Sid.

“Introduce yourself?” ordered the HOD.

“I’m Siddharth Malik.”

All heads turned towards Sid. Me and Nishi got shocked by his audacity. Everyone else chuckled.

“Tsk. But at least this means no one could be as ditzy as he is, right?” said I.

“Mm-hmm!” nodded Nishi.

“Now I will have you start by introducing yourself,” said the HOD.

“Hey look, here’s the girl who bumped into Sid this morning” whispered Nishi.

“Where?” I asked.

“Look at your extreme left,” indicated Nishi.

I looked to my left. “She’s also here, Good!” I smiled.

After the lunch bell,

“Geez... looks like we have got a weirdo in our class, ” someone from the front row made a caustic remark.

“Who are you again?” asked Sid.

“Vibhor Singh. Forgot, you ran into my girlfriend this morning” he said, angrily.

“God! He’s also in this class. It’s going to be an eventful year for sure,” I chuckled.

Nishi giggled.

“Considering how you are, I bet you didn’t fit in with your class in school because you creeped people out.” Vibhor smirked.

“Yeah! So what?!” Sid snapped.

“Ha-ha! Just FYI, I was a star player in my basketball club. On top of that, I did well in school. So, I was very popular,” boosted Vibhor. “What you have to say?”

Sid ambiguous, “I can’t think of any specific examples off hand, but I had lots of fun every day.”

“What’s your problem?!” snapped Vibhor.

“What’s your problem?!” snapped Sid.

“Stop it!” shouted Nishi and dragged Sid from his harm to a corner.

“And if you dare lay a hand on my girlfriend again, you are dead; got that?” barked Vibhor.

“Whatever, not interested” said Sid, nastily.

“Sid, that wasn’t nice. Try to learn a little restraint,” I said.

“We are in college now. You should try getting along with your classmates,” advised Nishi.

“Totally!” I nodded.

“Ok!” sighed Sid.

We three left the class and headed towards the canteen . On the way,

“Why was that prompt jump on 100 percent thing before the HOD?” I asked.

“I thought I’ll show off how cool I’m and stand out from the rest. I’m sure I’m popular among girls now. Did I sound cocky?” asked Sid.

“No,” Nishi whacked on Sid’s head. “Maggot, You looked a total idiot.”

Sid started squirming, “my saga of popularity ended before it could actually begin.”

“How are you going to survive with that sense of yours,”

I laughed.

“You will get plenty of chances to boost your popularity. It’s only the first day,” said Nishi.

“Mm-hmm!” nodded Sid, happily.

As we walked into the canteen, laughing, I could actually feel some of the guys looking at us. I realised we did have a lot more attention than normal; all because of Sid’s grace. It was hard to hear with the low roar inside.

The air was thick with the smell of fried foods, but somehow everyone seemed to be more energetic than usual;

because of the first day of the new semester I guess. We luckily found an empty table in a corner and sat there.

"The smell of food is making me hungry. Let's eat something," suggested Sid.

"Here's our old Sid, who's always hungry." I laughed.

"Fast! Open up your lunchboxes," said Sid.

"You forgot your lunchbox again?" Nishi asked.

"I think so," said Sid scratching his head and brought his hand in an attempt to grab a piece of sandwich from Nishi's lunchbox.

"Keep your hands off my lunch," Nishi slapped his hand, "I'm not sharing it with you."

Sid looked at me, helplessly. "Me neither," I said.

"Go, buy something for yourself?" Nishi suggested.

Sid went to the billing counter and after 5 minutes returned empty handed. "How about the one who did better last year treats the other to a burger?" suggested Sid to Nishi.

"Shut up!" scolded Nishi.

"I was kidding," Sid flashed an embarrassed look.

"Nishi, there's something I need to talk to you about." Sid adjusted his square lenses. "I'm very hungry and forgot my wallet. I have only 10 rupees."

"How's that?" Sid wagged his eyebrows at her, making me chuckle. "Can you overcome the guilt of not treating your poor friend. Now, can you?"

"Just eat a samosa or something" said Nishi, flatly.

"What are you saying, a samosa, it's nothing close to a burger. Don't try and dodge the issue by making a stupid comment like that," said Sid.

"So first you suggested a bet when you already knew you had lesser scores, then you get on my case for making

ng an alternative suggestion. Has your brain become crap, too?" scolded Nishi.

"It's true... that my act of trying to force you to buy me a burger by any means necessary might have been beyond low but I'm going to do it," said Sid and grinned.

"Starve to death." said Nishi, nastily.

"Okay then." He took a deep breath. "I'm going to tell our underclassman that you have a crush on Sameer." Sid starts to leave.

"Wait, don't use my name!" said Nishi.

"What? A crush on Sameer," I threw a sharp sideways glance at her.

"Stop!" Nishi handed him 50 rupees, "I'm not treating you. Make sure you repay me later."

Sid nodded in agreement and went to buy his love, the burger.

"Wow, Sid knew it too," I whined at her.

"It's nothing like that," Nishi blushed.

Sid returned with 2 burgers. One half eaten and the other one in hand, "let's go, class is about to start in 5 minutes."

"Your burger?" I asked.

"I will finish it on the way," said Sid.

We walked out of the canteen, Sid munching onto his burger and Nishi looking irritated.

"How you got to know about her crush?" I asked him.

"I didn't," he grinned.

"What!" Nishi's jaw dropped open.

"So where did it come from?" I interrogated.

"It was a trick which got successful," he laughed. "Every girl in college fancy him, so I thought she might be

too.”

“You are dead now,” Nishi groaned. Her eyes turned red of anger.

Sid and I, chuckled.

After the last class, me and Nishi quickly grabbed our bags and rushed to our bus stop. We wanted to reach the bus early. Dolphin, our bus vibrated the most at the back two rows so we never wanted to reach last and get those seats. Sitting there was such a pain in the back so we always tried to make our seniors sit there. Overly wicked we were.

In the corridor of our floor,

“Hey girls, wait for me!” Sid rushed to us.

“This class is really cool. I’m totally in love with it” said Sid, enthusiastically.

“Oh really. In love with the class or the girls in it, huh?” teased Nishi.

“It’s none of your business,” snapped Sid.

We walked out of the building and reached our stop. “You know that hot chic from your row. She has an eye for me,” said Sid.

“Who?” I asked.

“The one with white top. She was constantly staring me without a blink,” said Sid.

“Probably the case of weak eyesight,” commented Nishi with a wicked smile.

“Hey look, she is still scanning me,” said Sid.

“Where? I can’t see,” said Nishi.

“Look straight,” Sid’s eyes pointed to a group of 3 girls near the red bus, few metres opposite us.

“Did you see, she is smiling at me.” Sid blushed.

“Ok!” said Nishi.

“What should I do, should I smile back?” asked Sid.

“Do nothing” said Nishi, flatly.

“Excuse me! I asked Radhika not you,” snapped Sid.

“Look. Girls stare only in 2 conditions; she might either be admiring you or criticizing you,” I stated, calmly.

Sid looked at Nishi.

“In his case, I guess it’s—”

“Criticizing” said I, interrupting Nishi and laughed.

“Correct,” said Nishi with a kink.

“You too Raks,” said Sid, shocked.

“Sorry Sid, but it was funny,” said I and sniggered.

“It’s Radhika, you idiot. Stop cropping names” said Nishi, angrily.

“But RAKS sounds so cool.” Sid looked at me. “Hey Radhika, do you mind me calling you Raks?”

“No problem,” I smiled.

“Damn! You are so sweet,” complimented Sid.

“Stop flattering her,” said Nishi.

“Guys please help me out with that girl,” he pleaded.

“Ok we will talk to her and let you know what she feels, is that fine with you?” I asked.

“Cool!” Sid flashed a thumbs up.

“Climb guys, the bus is leaving” ordered Nishi stepping inside the bus.

Next morning, Sid missed the bus. Me and Nishi were standing in the corridor near our class entrance.

“Sid’s late again,” said Nishi.

“Don’t tell me he’s still asleep?”

“Don’t know,” replied Nishi.

I saw Sid walking towards us, “Sid!” I sighed.



“Whew! That was close.  
I was almost late for class,” said Sid.

“What happened?” I asked Sid.

“I overslept.”

“Idiot.” whispered Nishi.

“Siddharth,” a low voice came from behind. Sid turned to look and saw Ritika there. Her eyes low in embarrassment. We went inside to get seated so as not to disturb their conversation.

“I’m sorry for what Vibhor did yesterday,” said Ritika.

“You don’t need to apologise,” said Sid.

“He’s too protective and gets mad when something comes related to me.”

Vibhor came running, his eyes red with anger. He grabbed Sid’s collar and barked, “you bastard, stay away from her.”

“Huh! Let go off me. If you pull that hard, you’re going to tear my shirt,” shouted Sid.

“Stop, the professor is coming,” said Ritika.

Vibhor and Sid went inside flashing dead shots at each other. Sid went to sit at the third row, beside him were Sameer and Manas. We were seated next to Sid’s new crush and her friend.

“Will it ever end?” I asked.

“Not in this lifetime,” replied Nishi.

The next thing we did was to try befriending Sid’s new crush.

Nishi turned to Sid’s crush. “Hi! I’m Nishi.”

“I’m Radhika,” I smiled at her.

“I’m Shreya, nice to meet you.”

“Hi, I’m Mansi.” said the girl next to Shreya, her friend.

“Did you like the class?” I asked Shreya.

“Yeah, it’s good. Very funny indeed,” Shreya smiled.

After talking a little and gaining confidence on her, Nishi asked promptly “Shreya! Did you see that boy, on the left corner behind us?”

She turned her head back and had a quick glance. “He’s cute, what’s his name, do you know him?”

Me and Nishi got completely shocked, it was the first time we heard someone calling him cute. She surely had a weak eyesight but we got happy. Finally there was a girl who liked Sid. To give him a positive sign, I looked back at him with a smile but instead I smiled at Sam. He smiled back and I quickly turned my head away in embarrassment. Sameer was on Sid’s seat. He might have gone outside and after coming back shoved Sid to sit at his place. I signalled Nishi to look back. She had a quick back glance. Holding her laugh hard Nishi looked at me.

“No. We don’t know him,” said Nishi.

“Did you see the boy next to the cuter one,” Shreya whispered to us. “He’s so funny. An idiot. I can’t stop laughing whenever I see him.”

“Hmm! He’s funny,” said I.

We couldn’t utter more after her comment on Sid so, we kept quiet for the rest of the lecture.

At lunch we secretly departed to canteen. We didn’t want to confront Sid but somehow he found us.

“So here you are,” said Sid and sat on the chair in front of our table. “I was searching over the whole campus for you two.”

“Did you ask her?” he enquired.

“Mm-hmm,” Nishi nodded.

“What’s her name? What did she say? I know she likes me, should I ask her out?” uttered Sid in a single breath.

ath.

“Easy Sid,” said I.

“She’s Shreya and she doesn’t like you,” said Nishi, sharply.

“You got to be kidding.” Sid laughed. “Why would she smile at me when she doesn’t like me.”

“I’m sorry but she thinks you are an idiot,” said I.

Sid took a deep breath in grief and leaned back in his seat. It looked like he would pass any moment. I felt sorry for him.

“You know she isn’t good enough for you, a complete chatterbox.” I took a deep breath. “God knows how we bore her. All she talked was about boys, clothes and made fun of others.”

“Hmm,” that’s her true colours,” Nishi nodded in agreement with me. “Your typical princess is spoiled, selfish and tyrannical.”

He looked heartbroken for a minute and then “I’m hungry. I need to get —” Sid stopped midsentence as his eyes rolled and spotted a girl. He was instantly side-tracked by this girl with long, black straight hair and a tight jeans who just entered the canteen.

“Girls, I found someone better,” he followed her with his eyes.

“He’s never gonna change,” said Nishi and laughed.

“Nope,” he winked at Nishi.

“I’ll catch up with you guys later,” said Sid. In a blink of an eye, he ditched us and jogged in the girl’s direction.

“Lost cause.” Nishi rolled her eyes. “That idiot has eyes in the back of his head when it comes to girls.”

“Very true,” said I and laughed.

In a moment we made a fool of ourselves. It looked now silly that we were trying to console him. I was stuck between two messy people, totally opposite my character. People who didn't fit in a box or stay between the lines but still I loved them. I made friends with a weirdo and an unconventionally rebellious girl. The ones who refused to be ordinary.

## CHAPTER-4

### Crazy Nishi

A month later was the recap of what happened a year ago. Coming out of our bus we saw the college flooded with new flock of students. All anxiously looking for their classes. For the first time we got the feel of being a senior.

“Oh, fresher’s arrived,” said Sid.

“The new lot looks smart. Especially the girls, all are quiet fashionable,” said I.

“Hmm” Nishi nodded, “But this lot has more confidence and good looking boys than our batch.”

We went to our class. Nishi looked quiet, something was troubling her. Sid went to sit with Manas and Sameer. Nishi whispered to me, “can you skip classes after lunch with me?”

“Why?” I asked, instantly.

“I urgently need to go shopping,”

“Not now,” I replied.

“Please, it’s a matter of life and death.”

“Really! Then also, NO.” I flashed a cheesy smile.

She groaned and pulled away, looking at me with the cute puppy dog face again “skip with me,” she pleaded, pouting slightly.

Skip with her? Oh crap I hated skipping college, that just wasn’t me at all! “Um, Nishi, I can’t.”

“Please,” she begged.

“How long you gonna take?” I asked.

“Maximum 2 hours, travelling included.”

“Ok. We will go after college,” said I.

“Fine.”

I loved my classes and was quite popular amongst friends. I always did my assignments, and was never tardy; I prided myself on it, though I wasn't a nerd.

After the last class, Nishi grabbed my hand and tried to pull me in a hurry, “Wait! Let me pick my bag,” said I.

“Ok, do it fast we don't have much time.”

“Where are you two going that fast?” asked Sid.

“It's important, we have to leave. See you tomorrow,” waved Nishi.

“Tell the driver we will not be boarding the bus today,” I shouted while Nishi dragged me out of the class.

“Ok, see ya” waved Sid, smiling.

We quickly took a public bus from the college exit and landed straight on the gate of the mall.

Moving inside,

“Nishi, I need to call my mom. She gets really tensed when I'm late.”

“Ok,” said she and sat on the nearby bench. “You call. Till then, I will wait here.”

“Don't you need to call and inform?”

“No need,” said Nishi adjusting herself on the seat. “My family doesn't care much.”

“Call and inform aunty. You can't roam like that,” I scolded her.

“Ok, I will” she nodded.

Nishi called her mom “I'm going to get late today, I'm shopping with Radhika.”

“Ok,” said her mom. Phone disconnects.

“Good girl,” I patted on her head and smiled.

“Mumma, I’m shopping with Nishi. So, I will get late today,” I said.

“Try reaching before it gets dark,” said my mom.

“Ok.” Phone disconnects.

“Now let’s shoot towards Globus,” I smiled to her.

Inside Globus, Nishi got crazy looking for cute clothes . She had to try every nice piece that hung there. It was n’t like I didn’t buy anything. You send two girls shopping and they don’t buy anything. That’s impossible. Outside the trial room I got really tired suggesting her what to buy and what not to.

“Why do I had to come shopping with you?” I groaned.

“Sorry dear, but I can’t lose to those newbies” said Nishi firmly from inside the trial room.

“You don’t have to treat them as your rivals. They are just our juniors,” I said from outside.

“How can I not,” said Nishi.

“But still, stop now. It’s not like you have got that much money to spare.”

Nishi came out of the trial room with a pile of clothes and said smirking, “I don’t give my rich granny a shoulder massage each night for nothing.”

“Crazy girl,” I sighed.

Nishi laughed as if she got a victory on something.

“If you are done with shopping, can we go to our homes now,” I said.

“Mm-hmm!” Nishi nodded.

I headed towards the billing counter with Nishi holding a stack of clothes. “You shopped a lot. I don’t think you’ll need to shop anymore till the next year,” said I.

Nishi smiled and after paying the bill we quickly headed towards our respective homes. She looked really funny

struggling with those dozen packets which hung from both her hands.

Next morning in my class,

“What was so urgent yesterday?” Sid asked from the seat behind us.

“Nothing,” replied Nishi.

I laughed.  
“Nishi wanted to go for an emergency shopping spree.”

“Why?”

“Because....” Nishi shot a side glance at me, indicating me to stop. “She felt jealous of our juniors.” I laughed.

“Oh, competition.” Sid chuckled with the other two boys beside him.

Nishi angrily looked back to pick up a fight and saw Manas and Sameer smile and wave at her. She forged a smile and after returning her head to the front, she slid 4-5 inches down the table. I could see her melt in embarrassment, her face turned pink.

After lunch we quickly moved out of the canteen to reach our class. We were waiting for the elevator and when it opened, we saw Sid inside.

“Where are you two going?” asked Sid, stepping out.

“To the class,” answered Nishi.

“Don’t go. There’s no one there.”

“Why?” I asked.

“All the students have decided to bunk next 4 classes.”

“For what?” asked Nishi.

“We are in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, silly. We don’t need a reason to bunk classes.” Sid smiled.



“Ok, but when did it got decided?” I asked.

“Yesterday, after you two left.”

Nishi looked at her watch, “its 2 we still have 3 hours for buses to leave. What should we do now?”

“Let’s go to the library,” I suggested.

“No way Radhika, I’m not reading anything,” Nishi revolted.

“Why don’t you guys hang out with us.” Sid smiled.  
“Come with me to the canteen.”

“With us, who else is with you?” I asked.

“Sameer and Manas,” said Sid. “Now hurry up, if we keep talking here we might get caught.”

“Ok, let’s go” said Nishi, jazzed up.

Crazy girl. You just need to say Sameer and she would go all fired up.

On the way I asked Sid, “what were you doing up when no one was there?”

“I was making sure that no one reaches the class,” Sid flashed a grin smile.

The canteen was scarcely filled, only 4-5 seats occupied in that 30 table room that too by couples chatting in the corners. I saw Manas and Sameer talking on the big middle table. We went towards their table, me and Nishi took the bench opposite Manas and Sameer. While Sid shoved Sameer to the left.

“Hi,” they greeted us.

Usually it was Nishi who talked with ease to new colleagues but today I was talking on the same radar with hers. I quickly made friends with Manas and Sameer. They were not like the typical guys who made talking a bit uncomfortable for girls. They didn’t brag about their smartness or popularity. It was fun talking to them and it was then that we came to know that Sam and Manas were school friends who went in different buses. Then Sid dive

rted everyone's attention by narrating the whole story of how I misunderstood Sameer as the psycho senior from the introduction day and how me and Nishi were scared to go with him on the fresher's eve. Everyone laughed. My face turned into a bright shade of pink.

"I guess I don't scare you now?" Sameer smiled at me.

"No," I said quietly and blushed.

After few more minutes of chit chat, Sid interrupted us, "guys its 5. Let's go." We said bye to both the boys and left for our bus.

On the way, Nishi spoke to me "What happened to you today."

"Nothing. Why?" I asked, confused.

"You sounded so different," said Nishi.

"Really?" I asked in amazement.

"When did you start talking that much too new fellows?" Nishi wiggled her eyebrows.

I smiled. "Those boys are good."

"Mm-hmm," Sid nodded.

"OMG! That stupid driver is leaving without us," screamed Nishi.

"What!" said I in a complete state of shock. Running towards the bus, "why is leaving early."

"Hey! Stop! Stop!" shouted Sid at the bus driver, waving madly at him with both his hands up in the air "Stop!" We ran towards the bus. Thank god he stopped the bus and we got in just on time otherwise we would have to endlessly wait for a public bus at the exit. Going in public buses was hell. Always full, no seat to sit. Forget about seat, you could only stand that too if it had space to stand. People dozing over each other when the driver hit the brakes. Thank goodness we were saved from that trauma.

As Sid was Manas and Sameer's friend, they both became our friends too. We sometimes used to hang out together in the canteen but we weren't as close to them as the trio was.

A few days later we had our first lab. Sid was troubling over computer. A girl of our class then came to his rescue. They were not friends then but for a boy like Sid, a girl who is not even his friend, was never less than an angel from heaven who came without being asked for help only because she liked him. It was love at first sight for him. After lab, Sid came to us "Hey girls, I finally found my true love."

"That's good." I smiled at Sid.

"You know Seema, the girl that sat next to me in the lab," said Sid.

"Seema, that tall dark twiggy?" I asked.

"Mm-hmm," Sid nodded. "She helped me out without me asking for it. I think she likes me."

"Ya I know, I saw the whole scene," said Nishi with a smirk. She further added, "Radhika you know why she helped him?"

"Why?" I asked.

"Because Mr. Sid was the only one there who forgot how to open the turbo C window," she flashed a horrible smile at Sid. "Duh! Anyone would have helped you, not a big deal."

"It's nothing like that, you just being jealous," said Sid.

"Huh? Are you out of your mind. Jealous for what?" asked Nishi.

"Jealous of my happiness."

"Haha, what a joke." She faked a smile. "Sorry, but I have seen her many times wagging around Sameer to grab his attention."

“I hope it’s not being nice and good for a selfish motive,” I commented.

“I don’t think so,” said Sid.

“Then it’s good,” said I.

“Wake up Sid. You are being stupid again,” said Nishi.

“Fine, we will see who’s wrong,” said Sid, aggressively and left.

Few days went only with a formal hi, hello. Sid desperately wanted her mobile number, simply to give things a push. He asked Sameer for help as he was an expert in all love stuff. He advised him to befriend her on Facebook. He started chatting with her. They soon became friends and finally he got her number. Everything went well until one morning in the bus when Nishi popped her advice at Sid.

“It’s been a month, you should propose her now,” advised Nishi.

“Ok, I should ask Sam to help me in this,” said Sid.

“Sam? Who’s that?” I asked, surprised.

“Sameer,” Sid smiled.

Nishi took a deep breath, “Oh god! He again cropped a name.” Sid grinned.

In the lunch break Sid went to Sameer,

“Nishi saying me to propose Seema. How should I do it?”

“You know why I’m popular with girls?” said Sameer.

“Because of your chocolaty looks,” replied Sid.

“No, because I’m sincere. Sid, just listen to your heart and tell her exactly how you feel. That’s, how you can move her heart.”

“Ok. Got it,” nodded Sid.

That very night he texted her, “can we take our friendship to the next level?” this is exactly what he wrote in that text. She didn’t reply to any other message after that. He got the idea of being screwed. The thing he was fearing from happened the next day. She came to him and asked the meaning of that message. Although the meaning was quiet clear from the message but of-course for a pea sized brain like hers it would have been difficult to understand that one line text. Sid couldn’t say a word and asked her to meet him after college. He thought his method was not good enough and proposing her properly again might solve everything so with this weird thought he said what he shouldn’t. She clearly said a ‘NO’ as expected.

By the next morning, Seema had already broadcasted the proposal in the whole college and girls hostel. This is what happens when you ‘Act without thinking.’

Next morning in the class,

Manas walked to Sid’s seat. “Hey! I heard Sid, what a reckless thing you did.”

“I just figured, what if there was just a slight chance that she liked me?”

“Oh please, that’s impossible,” said Manas. “You must be quiet a blessed child, Sid.”

Sameer plopped on the seat next to Sid. “Your bad luck doesn’t end huh?”

“Yeah! Poor thing,” said Nishi and laughed.

“It’s all your fault,” Sid scolded Nishi. “You were the one who popped that stupid advice.”

“Who told you to propose her twice,” Nishi snapped. “The problem is in you, idiot.”

“You are a bad luck. Buzz off,” snapped Sid.

“More than me,” Nishi snapped.

“Stop it guys,” I scolded them. “Do you have to fight at a time like this and didn’t I warn you of her motives

.”

“You are the target of gossip every morning,” I said to Sid.

“I’m sorry. I’m causing trouble for you guys too,” said Sid with a sad face.

“It’s nothing like that and don’t worry, people will forget everything in a week. So, cheer up!” said I.

In the next two days Sid was normal as usual, chasing girls of the college again. What could have been a year of embarrassment in college for any boy was nothing for him. I guess he was used to rejections by now. Unabashed, Sid kept trying. While Sameer was struck by the charisma arrow, the cupid had mistakenly hit Sid by the love spell arrow. Therefore, he fell madly and deeply in love at first sight. Once his eyes lock, that’s it! He was intoxicated with infatuation and desire. It was no wonder why he was bound to fall in love so fast.

By the end of that semester, there was hardly any hot or average girl left in our college he wasn’t attracted to.

“Oh my! She’s so hot. Wow! She’s pretty. Oh! That girl should be my girlfriend,” were his unruly thoughts that kept cropping up every now and then.

## CHAPTER-5

### Tension Tension

College was good, as usual; our group was quite popular due to the fact that one of our friend obviously Sameer, was one of the most wanted boys there.

He had those deep captivating eyes and the kind of face that stopped you in your path. I think he got used to the sudden pauses in people's natural expression when they looked his way. He would glance back at them with a nonchalant gaze and a weak smile. He was so modest with it which altogether made the girls fall for him all the more.

Most of our free time was spent in the canteen, where Sameer paid casual visits. He was always busy with his girlfriends, the girlfriends which were renewed every few weeks. One afternoon we four—me, Nishi, Manas and Sid were sitting in the canteen for lunch.

“Oh, Mr. hot is coming over!” Nishi pointed to the door with her eyes, “Look he is with a new girl.”

I looked up from my plate and saw Sameer coming towards us with a girl. Reaching our table he bid bye to her and sat opposite me. After the girl left the canteen, Sid asked “Who was she?”

“My new girlfriend,” answered Sameer. His hand crawled to my plate to have a piece from my Dosa.

“I’m not sharing that,” I said with a sigh, dragging my plate more towards me and farther from him. He pulled his hand back.

“When did you broke up?” asked Sid.

“This morning,” said Sameer.

“And you got a new girlfriend the very morning,” asked Sid in amazement.

“She heard about my breakup, so proposed me today itself and I agreed.” He smiled at me. “I can’t break a girl’s heart.”

“Oh really!” said I with a brow raised, “so why broke off and smashed a heart.”

“She was double dating. She had a boyfriend already before asking me out,” said Sam. “I hate cheaters.”

“So you dumped her?” asked Nishi.

“No, it was a mutual breakup.”

“How do you manage these breakups?” asked Sid. He had a curious expression on his face, “aren’t you scared that your ex might ruin your present relationship?”

“I start acting psycho and clingy to scare her away. I annoy and irritate her so much that she agrees for a mutual breakup,” said Sam.

“Pretty smart!” sighed Sid.

I finished my food, hung my bag to my shoulder and said to Nishi, “I have to go. Catch you later.”

“Wait! Where are you going?” asked Nishi.

“Library,” I replied. “I have a book to return.”

“Wait, I’m also coming,” Nishi grabbed her bag and ran after me.

After returning my book. I reminded Nishi who was right beside me, “where’s the book?”

Her right hand toyed with the bracelet on her left wrist. She stared straight ahead, the taut expression on her face was telling me that she might be physically present, but she wasn’t in this room.

“Nishi,” I shook her arm.

“I didn’t miss that.” She started digging around in her bag, pulling out a book.



We walked out of the library, I slide my hand down the strap of my bag. "Can I say something?"

"Yes"

"I'm noticing from few days that you are acting weird," I looked at her. "Whenever Manas is around, you are quiet, act shy and spaced out like a young girl in love."

"It's nothing like that," Nishi shrugged.

"Really!" I eyed her. "Look at you. You have already gone all red and restless on just hearing his name." I smiled at her, "won't you tell your best friend".

I started tickling her and she couldn't stop laughing, avoiding my hand she said, "ok, ok. I'm telling you." She blushed. "I have a small crush on him."

I raised an eyebrow, "Small! That doesn't look anything like small."

Nishi giggled.

"But what about your boyfriend. Are you planning cheating on him?" I asked.

"No, our relationship is not that serious. Breakup won't affect any."

"Oh! Cool then," I gave her a thumbs up. "Let's get to the class silly birdie." We giggled.

Reaching our class we sat at our usual 3<sup>rd</sup> row seat, "Uh..uh!" I rolled my eyes pointing to Manas who sat exactly behind us. Nishi gave me a dead look "don't you signal"

"*I will,*" I smirked.

"*Please don't. Sir gonna see,*" she pleaded with her mouth.

"*Fine,*" I smiled at her.

"You two seem to be magically communicating using your eyes," sir pointed at us, "what is it?"

"*Look, I told you*" Nishi flashed angry eyes at me.

“Nothing sir,” said Nishi, quietly.

“Ok, sit down,” he signalled Nishi to sit back with his hand. “That’s all for today. Submit your assignments by the last class.”

The professor left and after 15 minutes when the next lecturer didn’t appear, it was sure he wasn’t present because in our college the professors were so punctual that they always arrived before time and now it was 15 minutes late. To confirm Sid went to the staffroom and came running with the good news that the professor was absent.

As we had no class after that, everyone started to depart. Only few boys were left in the class with Sid who still had to finish their assignments. Including Manas, whose assignment was with Sid and Sameer to accompany him. Sid was busy copying when we left for the staffroom.

After submitting our assignments we walked out of our block.

“I guess Sid will be late,” said I.

“Mm-hmm!” Nishi smiled.

“I’m going home, you coming?” I asked.

“Wait! Come with me to the library. I want some notes photocopied,” she grabbed my hand and took me to the library.

“Why didn’t you get them earlier when we went there in the lunch?”

“I forgot.” Nishi flashed a shy smile.

“Silly,” I smiled.

Meanwhile, in the class. Sid is still copying with 3 random classmates. Manas and Sameer sat at a corner table, talking.

“Do you think Radhika has a boyfriend?” asked Sameer.

Manas gave him a confused look and Sam instantly got nervous, “No, It’s just that whenever I ask her out for

a coffee or movie. She always turns me down saying she has something important to do.”

“Well, she is quiet pretty and smart. It wouldn’t be strange if she had one,” said Manas.

Sameer puts his head down on the table hiding it behind his arms. “So, she does have one” he murmured, completely heart broken.

In the library’s ground floor, was the photocopy machine and the old guy which looked same from past year. The attendant, he was so paper thin that even a slight wind could shake him off. It looked he didn’t eat for ages. Cheeks sunken in.

“Bhaiya, do you have software testing notes?” asked Nishi.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Do you want them too?” she asked me.

“Nope.”

“One set please,” ordered Nishi.

He looked inside his mini steel almirah and took out a file. “Which professor notes you want?” he asked.

“Rajeev sir’s,” Nishi replied.

He flipped over some stapled sets and said, “Sorry, his notes are not there. Should I give someone else’s?”

“No,” said Nishi and we walked out.

I took out my mobile from my pocket. “It’s not opening, my battery gone.” I took a deep breath. “What’s the time?”

She slid her hand in her pocket. “Gosh!” completely terrified, “I left my phone at the desk carrier.”

“What? You forgot something again,” said I. “Aargh! How can you be so clumsy.”

“Let’s hurry to the class,” said Nishi.

We ran towards our class and stopped at the gate when Nishi heard her name. Some boys were talking about her. We hid behind the wall of our class to clearly hear what all they were saying.

“Have you seen Nishi, the shortest one,” said a boy.

“Mm-hmm,” sighed another boy.

“She’s vexatious. Moreover, she’s so dark. Why is she that dark, anyhow?” asked one boy.

“I wonder if she goes to a tanning salon,” said another and laughed.

“You morons!” Sid ranted annoyed “she used to be on the swim team. That’s why she’s so tan.”

“Don’t go spouting nonsense when you don’t know what you are talking about,” Sid scolded them.

“Sorry,” said they, apologetically.

Nishi looked all emotional as if she would cry any moment. After waiting for few minutes she went inside to grab her phone. She had a tendency to be lucky, to be in the right place at the right time. This may be connected to its innate sense of rhythm, timing can be measured in seconds or in years, by the beating of the heart or by the movement of the stars. It’s all only a matter of scale, either way, she seems to be in tune with the cyclical nature of our surroundings.

We left our block and waited in the library for college to end. In the bus that evening,

“That was really sweet of you,” said Nishi, lovingly. “But why you lied?”

“What are you saying? I’m totally getting nothing,” Sid asked, confused.

“She heard you scolding the boys in the class earlier,” said I.

“You heard it all?” asked Sid.

“Mm-hmm,” Nishi nodded.

“Don’t worry. In any case they will never figure out my lie.” Sid smiled.

“But why you lied?” she asked again.

“I lied because no one can insult you, except me.” He smirked.

I laughed.

Nishi’s face turned pink, from blushing pink to angry pink. “You—” she ranted annoyed.

They had a squabble and looked like two cute cats. Adorable.

Next morning, as usual our bus reached college first. Silly Sid, missed the bus again. It was becoming a habit now. Me and Nishi were talking inside the class close to the front gate when Sameer and Manas arrived.

“Good morning,” greeted both the boys.

“Morning,” returned us.

“Where’s Sid?” asked Manas.

“Dunno,” replied Nishi.

“Perhaps he overslept again.” I smiled.

“Indeed,” nodded Sameer, laughing.

Meanwhile, someone appeared at the gate. We all looked at the entrance and got shocked.

“Hey Sid, what’s up with that hairstyle?” asked Sameer.

With a shaggy bob cut he came closer. “What’s this smell?” asked Nishi.

“I guess a kid wouldn’t get it.” He smirked, “its cologne. Co- lo-gne!”

Nishi gave him a flabbergasted look, “It smells more like a bathroom air freshener.”

“Huh?” He ignored her. “You wanna know why I’m so cool?”

“Well, not really” said Nishi, flatly.

He ignored her statement and turned to us. “Since you are so insistent,” he took a teasing pause. “I’ll tell you.” He smiled. “It’s because of...” He showed us a text on his mobile, “this!”

Sameer grabbed his phone and read the text, “I’m in love with you. I’m always watching you.” That was what exactly written in that text with a lot of smileys and hearts.

“A love text!” said Manas, shocked.

“No way! It’s for you, Sid!” said Nishi.

“But the text doesn’t have a name,” said Sameer.

“Do you know the sender?” asked Manas.

“Not of anyone that I know,” said Sid.

“Try calling it,” suggested Sameer.

“I did but it’s off.”

“Then you can’t dismiss the possibility that someone’s playing a prank, huh?” said I.

“No! I’m sure she’s just shy!” Sid snatched back his phone and went to sit at his seat.

“I guess he just wanted to brag,” said Nishi.

Sid removed his bag from his shoulder. Sat down looking at his phone and read the text again.

He blushed as he read. “I’m always watching you.”

“Huh? Wait a sec!” Sid mumbled, “does it mean that the sender of this message is nearby?”

Sid suspiciously looked to his left and then to his right. “Who on earth is it?”

Entering inside the class, Mansi greeted me “Good morning!”

“Hey! You are early today,” said I.

“I was hungry so I woke up early,” said she.

Sid looked up at Mansi and mumbled, “could it be her?” He smiled. “Oh I understand why I had a dream of burger last night.” He looked at the text again. Pause. “No, there’s no way that potato girl can write a girly text.”

He sweat. “Oh I wish I had a dream like that,” then thought, “but wait, is it possible...” He went into fantasizing her. Imagining Mansi holding his hand and saying, “Sid! Let’s go on a lunch date.” In return he said “sure. With you, I feel like I can eat a lot.” He dreamed of going to a restaurant and Mansi ordering and eating a hell lot.

“No!!” He came to his senses. Terrified he said, “she’d spend everything I have on food!” He then looked at Shreya who just entered the class. “She’s elegant and cute.” Looked at the message again, “she perfectly fits the impression of this text. Could it possibly be her?” Sid going pink at that thought. “Was she putting on an act earlier?” Sid again went dreaming. Shreya pushing Mansi away, saying, “Sorry dear.” Shreya blushing, “Sid, I...”

Sid came out of his imaginary smiling wide, “Oh, it’s my sweet goddess.” Suddenly his smile disappeared seeing Nishi, “It can’t possibly be her, right?” He panicked. “God!” Sid trembled. “But if she had written the text like that, well it wouldn’t be so bad.” He went again dreaming of Nishi saying, “sorry Shreya” she hugged Sid tight and said “but I’m the one who’s gonna marry Sid.” Shreya shocked. His dream ended.

“Argh!” Sid got frustrated. “Now every girl in this class looks suspicious!”

That very moment, “Sid! I need to talk to you about fest activities,” said our Senior Neha, leaning from the class gate. Sid looked at her. “Meet me after lunch,” said she and left.

“Whoa!” Sid again went fantasizing. This time he saw his four suspects fighting for him. Mansi pulling his hand “Sid’s mine.” Shreya snapping, “leave him he’s mine.”

Neha ma'am grabbing his other arm, "sorry girls I'm your senior so, he's for me." Then Nishi saying, "I'm always tough on you but to tell you the truth..."

Sid still in the dream, with both his hands on his ears he shouted, "Err... there are just too many to pick from! What should I do?"

His voice dragged our attention towards him and we all— me, Nishi, Sam and Manas went to his table. He had his head down.

"What the hell is your problem?" said Nishi.

Sid was lost in his thoughts, he wasn't listening at all.

"Hey, Sid. You're getting caught up in a fantasy world," said Manas.

"Wake up," scolded Sameer.

"Your brain's definitely having a problem," said Nishi.

"Wait... if, by any chance, it wasn't any of them then..." murmured Sid.

He finally looked up and saw me right in front of him with Sameer and Nishi on my either side and Manas on Sam's right covering Sid's entire table.

"Raks?" he said looking down again. "No, can't be!" he whispered, "that had be too good to be..." He looked up again and flashed a cheesy smile on his usual half as sed face, "actually, yeah, I can see that."

"Creepy!" commented Sam with an awful look.

"Uh..." a sound came from behind Sid's seat. He turned his head to look back and got shocked. "Seema?"

"I need to talk to you," said Seema to Sid.

Sid's face got flat, *could it be her?*

"What is it?" Nishi asked.



Everyone looked at her and Sid's head oscillated to front and back in their direction when they spoke.

"I need to talk to him," said Seema.

"I'll give him the message. What is it?" asked Nishi again.

"Thanks, but I'll tell him myself," Seema snapped.

"It's no trouble at all," said Nishi, flatly.

"It's no trouble for me, either" said Seema.

"It's pretty crowded in the classroom in the morning so moving around can be a pain," said Nishi, flatly.

"We don't have to worry about that, right, because for some reason there's no one around us," snapped Seema.

I took a deep breath and whispered, "the dream match is happening again!"

"They are scary!" whispered Sam in return.

"What's going on?" I interrupted.

Nishi ignored me and said, "that's enough. I'm done listening."

"It's pointless," said Seema.

"Hold on a second," Sid jumped from his seat. "Stop it. Don't fight over."

Nishi dodged Sid and shouted at Seema, "buzz off. No one is interested in hearing you."

Seema leaves with an angry look. After about 5 minutes the professor arrived and we all went to our seats. Sid looked at Seema from his seat thinking could it really be her?? Maybe she changed her mind and is now sorry and wanted to patch up with him.

In lunch we stopped in our class, Sid was still in his thoughts. *Was Seema the one who Sent that text? But that text wasn't from her number. Maybe she changed her number.*

Seeing him thinking so hard, Manas who sat on the table next to him said, “I want you to listen to me without getting upset.” Sid turned towards him, “you aren’t popular among girls, so you should face the reality of the situation.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sid.

“I think Radhika was right, It’s a prank.”

“No! It’s real,” said Sid.

Beep! Beep!

Sid gets a message. He quickly took out his phone and read the text, “Please meet me behind the D-block after 7<sup>th</sup> lecture.” Sid smiled and went into his dream world.

Me and Nishi went to his seat. “Sid!” Nishi shook him.

“Here it comes,” Sid smiled. “Today is the beginning of my sweet life.”

“He clearly made up some parts of that conversation, didn’t he?” said I and laughed.

“He must be really happy,” said Sam, sitting next to Manas.

“Well, his glory days are finally here, so let him enjoy” said Manas.

“Sid, don’t you have to go and meet Neha ma’am,” said Nishi.

“Oh! I forgot.” Sid left in a hurry leaving us laughing behind.

Our last lecture was free, so after the 7<sup>th</sup> class Sid requested us all to accompany him. He was very nervous and wanted some support.

“Sorry Sid, but I have to reach the staffroom urgently,” said I. “Nishi, come with me. I need your help.” I grabbed her arm and started to leave.

“Don’t worry. We will try to hurry up,” said Nishi.

“You guys should hurry up too,” said I to the three boys from the class gate.

“I won’t listen anything. You two are coming with me,” said Sid.

“Ok. We will hide somewhere near,” said Sam.

“Ok,” nodded Sid.

They went behind our block waiting for the unknown girl to appear. Manas and Sam hid behind a tree. No one appeared for 20 minutes. But then a message came.

Sid beckoned, Manas and Sam walked to him, “She has asked me to meet up at our class immediately.”

“So let’s hurry up,” said Sameer.

The three boys rushed to the class gate. Sid went in and the other two were peeping from the back gate of the class. A girl sat on the first bench facing the board.

Sid tried to act cool but inside he was nervous, “did you wait long?”

The girl stood up and turned towards Sid.

“Nishi!” screamed Sid. The two boys got shocked as well, their jaws dropped open.

“It was you who sent that text?” asked Sid.

“Well I guess,” replied Nishi.

“I was surprised,” with a flat face he said. “So you did this to get my attention?”

Nishi remained quiet.

“I get how you feel about me. So...” He flashed a stupid smile. “If you really insist, I can go out with you.”

Hearing that Nishi’s face turned red of anger. She didn’t speak but shot a murderous look at him but Sid didn’t seem to notice that, instead he bragged, “of course, a guy like me is very popular. But you mustered up the courage to send me a love text, so...”

Nishi went closer to him and punched on his arm, “forget it.”

“Ouch!” Sid rubbed his arm.

“I was trying to be nice but you pushed your luck too far,” she said, angrily.

“What do you mean?” asked Sid.

“The text wasn’t sent by me, it was Radhika.”

Sid’s eyes widened and the tips of his mouth instantly shot up. “Really!”

“Don’t assume anything stupid. That text was nothing but a prank.” Nishi sniggered. “Radhika’s prank.”

“Whaaaat?”  
screamed Sid, feeling betrayed. “A prank.” He stood there in stunned silence, frozen without a blink. As if been bit by a snake.

I came out from behind the podium where I was hiding. “Yes!” I gave Nishi a high five. “You are officially pranked now,” I laughed.

“Awesome!” whispered Sam and laughed. Manas laughed too.

“I’m totally in love with her,” Sam mumbled.

“What?” asked Manas.

“Nothing,” said Sam.

They both came inside clapping, “great job!”

I rolled out my hands in appreciation and smiled, “thank you.”

“This can’t be happening to me. There’s no way that my first love text was a prank,” Sid muttered shaking his head. “That can’t be a prank.”

“What!” said Sameer, confused.

“Sid, wake up. What are you saying,” said I.

“Was the shock so big that you lost it?” said Nishi.

Manas shook him, “Sid!”

Sid came back to his senses, blinked his eyes. With a sad face he said, “that’s not fair.” Everyone laughed.

Nishi grabbed Sid’s arm, “let’s go, the buses will be leaving soon.”

We all went to our respective buses. In the bus Sid sat by the window looking heavily sad.

“Hey Radhika!” Nishi smiled. “How did you get the idea of this awesome prank?”

“I got a new number so, thought of using it in a much better way.” I winked. “I’m giving you a miss call, save it and delete the previous one.”

“Why changed, it was so good. I really liked that number of yours,” said Nishi.

“It got circulated too much. I was getting stalked again. So, I thought it’s better to switch it off.”

“Did you destroy that sim?” asked Nishi.

“Not yet.”

“Can you please give it to me?”

“If you want stalkers. Then Fine.” I smiled.

“I love stalkers,” Nishi smiled. “I don’t usually get them.”

I took out the sim card from my bag and handed it over to her. “You are insane,” said I. Nishi smiled.

## CHAPTER-6

### Tension Continued

E

arly winter, a time when the temperature gradually decreases, and more students start to wear long sleeves. It was then that all of our class was hit by a different source of tension. We had our last sessional of that semester. Sam entered the class and glanced up at the front rows, where a few people he knew were sitting. That's where he should have gone but instead, he eased his way down the row of seats. I still hadn't noticed he was there.

"Morning sweetheart!" came a deep voice.

I jerked like a startled cat, twisting in my seat. Surprised into speechlessness, I watched Sam slide into the empty seat next to me. I was a little slow on the uptake because I knew I should've said the seat was taken or tell him to move, but all I could do was stare.

He settled back, looking at me sideways. "You look a little rough this morning." And he looked remarkably refreshed for someone who had been studying all night. Hair damp and all over the place, eyes bright. "Okay."

I dig my gaze back to my notebook, "if it's over. Can I study now?"

"Ya sure." He stood up and went straight to Manas who was studying at the front bench.

Few minutes later Nishi came in with a notebook in hand. "Raks, help me with this. I'm totally not getting it."

"OK. Show me." She sat beside me. I was busy solving the problem when Sid came in running, terrified. "Big trouble."

I stopped and looked towards him. "What happened?"

"I can't find my glasses," he screamed.

“What are you on about?” asked Sam.

“Exam will start in a hour and I can’t read without my glasses.” He moaned, “what am I going to do now.”

“He is hopeless,” sighed Nishi and dropped her attention back to the notebook.

Seeing him stressed enough, Sam and Manas came forward to his rescue. “When did you lose them?” asked Manas.

He tried to recollect, “Probably when I was washing my face in the bathroom just now.”

“Maybe you dropped them in the washroom,” said Sam.

I looked properly at Sid and suddenly my gaze hung up at his head. *What?* I was surprised. They are on his head. What’s this all about? Why doesn’t anyone point it out to him? So it’s that kind of joke? They know, but they are going along with it which means the timing of the punch line is important. The 3 boys headed to search in the boy’s washroom and returned after 5 minutes. Sid still looking poopy. He sat on a chair and put his head down in helplessness.

“Hey! They are on your head,” Sam chirped.

Sid touched his head, “Yeah.” He smiled the silliest of smiles, “thanks.”

“Sid, you are such an idiot,” Nishi laughed. Sid got up and went away.

It was still half hour to the exam. I tried hard on that problem. Dropping my pen, “I’m not getting it. Let’s go to ma’am.”

We went straight to the staffroom and heard someone pleading from Anita ma’am’s cabin.

“I think I heard Sid,” said I, surprised.

“Me too,” said Nishi.

We stopped behind ma'am's cabin and peeped to see. Sid was on his knees. "Mam please. Just one question."

"No," ma'am replied.

"Mam please, just one. I swear I won't tell anyone," he cried.

"Still no," she shook her head.

"Ma'am please," he pleaded. "If I fail this time I will be kicked out of my house."

"Ok, but last time," she warned.

We were shocked. Sid came out of the cabin smiling, and we turned our backs so that he won't recognise us.

"Such a cheater," said I.

After getting our problem solved we quickly moved back to the class. The exam and day both ended well.

Three days later, all the papers got corrected and we were having shocks from the morning. Every professor came with the answer sheets and bombarded us with strict marks. Though it was winter yet students were sweating in anxiety. There was hangee feeling in most of the class when came our HOD, Mr. Awasthi with the test papers.

Mr.

Awasthi placed the answer sheets on the podium and said, "when your name is called. Come forward, and those idiots who failed the tests will take the retests next week. Keep that in mind."

"Manas!" called Mr. Awasthi.

"Yes sir."

"Perfect score," said Mr. Awasthi and every head turned at Manas in amazement.

"Whoa!" mumbled Nishi.

"Nishi! Come here," called Mr. Awasthi. She went to the podium. "What do you think you are doing," scolded the HOD.



“Sorry,” she apologised.

He handed her the answer sheet, “go, you need to work hard.” She nodded and returned back to her seat. After everyone got the papers and resubmitted them, Mr. Awasthi left.

It was lunch. I went to Surbhi, the class topper and a good friend of mine to ask the answer to a question I did wrong. Nishi remained seated on our table, consumed in thoughts. Sid lingered on her table, “If anything, I’d like to hear your trick for staying sane after flunking the HOD’s subject.”

She saw Manas leaving and called him, “Manas, please stay and help me study!”

“Sorry, but I gotta go, I have a function to attend. See ya!”

Manas left but Sid and Sam stayed at her table. “Ah you can go. You are a jerk. So,…” she shoved Sam.

Sam got angry, “you didn’t have to tell me that.” He left too.

“As things stand, I’m gonna be a failure,” Nishi stressed out.

She scanned the room, “Argh! Who else could stay and help me study?”

Sid jumped in front of her. “Oh all right, fine then.” He grinned. “I can teach you the trick, but unfortunately for you, I’m gifted. So all I can tell you is to feel it.”

“You got all zeros, didn’t you” she scorned.

“No, I passed all except one.”

Nishi grunts. “I know how you pass.” She pushed him aside and saw Seema smiling and moving out with others. The class was empty, just me, Surbhi, Sid and Nishi remained now. Nishi got angry and landed straight in front of Surbhi’s table. “It’s all your fault. You should really fix your personality,” she pointed to me.

I got completely shocked by her sudden rage on, “What?”

“You have always been like that. You help out other people too much.”

“I’m seriously not getting anything. What are you angry for?” I asked.

“Didn’t you give your pen to Seema in the exam?”

“So, what?”

“I got scolded because of you.”

“Huh?”

“What has the pen got to do with you getting scolded?” I asked.

“If you haven’t given her the pen that day, she would have failed. And it wouldn’t have been me alone failing.”

“What.” I laughed. “Dear! If I wouldn’t have given, someone else would have. There’s nothing to get angry about.”

She smiled, somewhat dumbfounded. She understood her stupidity. “Out in the real world, people will just take advantage of you. So, learn to say No. Swear you won’t help people anymore,” said Nishi.

“No.” I smiled.

“That’s not what I meant,” said Nishi.

I raised a brow, “anything else?”

“Please help me study,” Nishi pleaded.

“For the retests?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm,” I pretended to think. “No.” I laughed.

Nishi’s mouth dropped open, “why?”

“You just lectured me to learn to say no.” I winked. “I’m a quick learner,” I teased her.

“Ok, my fault.” Nishi laughed. “Don’t learn. Help me please.”

“Okay,” I smiled and called Sid who was watching the drama from Nishi’s seat. “Sid, would you like to study with us too?”

“Okay. Let’s study together,” said Sid.

“Meet us in the library after lunch,” said I.

“Ok,” said he and left.

After lunch, me and Nishi went to the library and took a peaceful corner table there.

Nishi dug out a book from her bag and opened it on the table, “Well then, let’s start, shall we?”

“Huh?” I turned my head all around to find Sid. “Where’s Sid?”

Nishi moved her head to find him, “Where the heck did he go?”

“Don’t tell me... he forgot about it and went home,” said I.

“Well, let’s forget about him and start studying,” ordered Nishi.

“OK”

After all, Nishi cleared the retest and got saved from the extra scolding. Meanwhile, Sid forgot about the retests. Though he didn’t fail the HOD’s subject but still he was automatically put in front of the HOD.

## CHAPTER-7

### The Breakup Season

The start of the fourth semester brought in a lot of surprises with it. Shock would be a more appropriate word for those surprises. The first such surprise came on the very first day when the whole group ganged up in the canteen. We sat on our usual table. Suddenly Sid started talking about his newest love. He kept on boosting about her till we all got bored and from then on whenever he got the chance he had start admiring her. He wouldn't miss a single opportunity to boost about his girlfriend which was really annoying for some.

The first time I heard about Avantika, the name by which he addressed his girlfriend; I was baffled. Where did she come from? Why I never had a clue about her. To me a girl would be Sid's girlfriend, only if she was blind or was imaginary. The way he talked about her beauty and how perfect she was, it seemed to me more like a virtual girlfriend. Even Sid's chuddy buddy Nishi had no clue about her. The whole we knew about her was all that was told by him. Apart from her so called perfect image we only knew that she was one of Sid's friend's little sister. Every time he boosted about her, Nishi would go mad. But one day when Sid started talking about Avantika, Nishi was all cool. Maybe she wasn't listening what he was saying. This incident took place after a month.

"You are looking too happy today, what's going on?" I asked Nishi.

"Nothing," replied Nishi with a smile.

"You didn't even shout at Sid. There is something for sure."

"It's not a big thing," said Nishi.

"Whatever, spill out?"

"Today is my 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary," said Nishi.

“What anniversary?” I asked, confused.

“4 years back the very same day, me and my boyfriend met,” she said with a blush.

“Oh!” I smiled. “So what are you guys planning for today?”

“We will be going for dinner and I already bought him a present.”

“Aww! So cute,” said I.

The very same day Nishi met her boyfriend. He called her to meet him at a nearby Chinese corner. They ordered noodles and soup. She was too happy in the beginning but gradually her smile faded.

Midway, stopping the fork to her mouth she smiled, putting her fork down on the plate “do you know what day is today?”

“Our 4 year anniversary,” replied her boyfriend.

Her face turned devil in a second. Angrily she said, “but instead of getting me a present you wanna breakup with me?” grinding her teeth she said, “are you toying with me?”

His head still down in guilt to his plate like a 4 year baby getting a scolding from his mom. “I’m sorry,” he replied, quietly. Looking up he said, “and honestly, I never toyed with you.”

“Fine, let’s just forget about this” she took a deep breath. “I mean, it’s just me who has to forget about this, right?”

“I’m sorry,” he said again.

“I never got dumped by a younger kid before,” she said, cockily.

He Dropped his fork, feeling betrayed. “I thought I was your first boyfriend.”

She stood up, annoyed. “You believed that?” She grabbed her purse from the table

e, “don’t feel too bad about it, I was gonna end it anyway!”

She left, leaving the boy behind, still consumed in his plate.

Nishi was all grumpy the next day. After college in the bus, I asked her, “what happened, why are you so sad?”

“We broke up yesterday,” she sighed.

“I’m sure he got frustrated by your tantrums,” Sid commented from the back seat.

Nishi remained quiet. I turned my head, “What are you doing behind us?”

“Listening.” Sid grinned, leaning on our seat.

“She’s in a bad mood. Will you please leave us alone.”

“Ok!” Sid sat down.

“Why did you guys breakup?” I asked.

“He is leaving the city to graduate.”

“What?” my jaw dropped open. “You were in a relationship with a junior.”

“Hmm, he is 2 years younger than me and is now thinking to get someone his age at the new college.”

“Ok, forget it.” I smiled. “You are single now, hunt a college hunk,” I winked at her.

“Mm-hmm,” she smiled.

“How about Manas?” I smiled. “Go talk to him.”

“I don’t think he likes me.”

“Why so?”

She looked at me with a sad face. “He never gave those interested vibes.”

“Maybe you didn’t see well. Give it a try,” I tried to convince her.

“No,” she said, shyly.

I pushed her, “go” but she clinched my hand and took me with her to Manas. He was talking to Sameer in the corridor of our floor. “Hey, Manas” she said and he turned back to look at her. Suddenly Sid appeared from nowhere.

“Hey Guys, I just got a message from Avantika. How cool she is. You know what she’s saying,” said Sid.

“Don’t you dare start that nonsense again,” Nishi warned.

“Why, you jealous,” said Sid with a smirk.

Nishi grunts. “Jealous, my foot. I’m bored you idiot.”

“Nuh-uh! You are jealous,” teased Sid.

“Ha-ha! Who can be jealous with a non-existent girl,” said Nishi.

“Who said she doesn’t exist?”

“Then prove it. Why don’t you bring her to meet us,” said Nishi.

“Okay, this Sunday at Dominos. Wait for me there,” said Sid shoving his phone in his pocket.

“And until we meet her, no more talking her. Got it?” said Nishi.

“Fine!” said Sid, angrily.

“Sorry guys, I can’t accompany you. I have a date,” said Sameer.

“I’m out too,” said Manas.

Nishi looked at me and slowly nodded. “Okay! Then me and Radhika will be there.”

“Okay,” said Sid and left. We also moved back to our seats.

“Why are you so eager to meet his girlfriend?” I asked her.

“Because I know there’s no one and I want to end this monomorphic obsession of his.”

“Let him be happy with his imaginations,” said I.

“No ways, I can’t hear his stupidity anymore. It’s dam irritating.”

On Sunday, inside the dominos we were anxiously waiting for Sid who was already late. After an hour of ruthless wait, arrived Sid looking pale and upset. Seeing him alone our anger outraged and Nishi started bombarding questions at him.

“You’re finally here, you idiot! I’ll crush you with all my might,” Nishi scolded him. “Where the hell were you and where’s Avantika? She’s coming or not?”

He sat there in silence. It looked as if he would cry any moment.

“What’s wrong?” I asked him.

“Speak up you moron!” scolded Nishi.

With teary eyes and faint tone he replied, “she refused to come.”

“What. Why?” Nishi shot him a confused look.

“No tears please. Boys look horrible with them. Nishi won’t scold you more, I promise,” I said.

“Stop it. Everyone is staring at us,” said Nishi.

“So what’s the matter?” I asked.

“I made a mistake again,” said Sid.

“Huh! That’s not a new thing,” commented Nishi.

“I misunderstood her flirting as love,” he lowered his head to avoid our gaze. “When I explained her why my friends wanted to meet her, she got all angry and broke off our friendship.”

“I knew it. You are a total gone case,” said Nishi.

“Don’t worry she wasn’t nice enough. If she would have been a good girl, she would have never broke off the



friendship. Her action showed her immaturity. Forget her and move on,” said I.

“I don’t have a problem forgetting her...” He paused for a second then looked up at us. “It’s just that now I’m going to be a topic of joke for Sam and Manas.”

“But who’s gonna tell them, when we didn’t see anything.” I smiled.

“Who’s Avantika, do we know her?” pretended Nishi.

Hearing this Sid got cheered up. He Wiped his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve. A broad smile crossed his lips. He hugged us and said, “you two are the bestest of all.”

“But I don’t get it, after trying so hard why I never ended up having a girlfriend,” said Sid looking totally confused.

“Because you act desperate. It scares people away,” said Nishi.

“Everyone knows about your desperation in college and after that Seema case, I guess no one would like to pair up with you” said I.

“What should I do?” asked Sid.

“Go for suicide,” suggested Nishi and laughed.

“After you,” said Sid with a fake smile.

“Don’t fight guys.”

“Geez. Aren’t there any girls who appreciate my character?” said Sid, depressed.

“I think you should look for your soulmate on social media,” I suggested. “A stranger would definitely say yes to you.”

“Nice idea, surely gonna try.” Sid smiled.

“Surely try. You’ll fail, it’ll be hilarious,” said Nishi with a wicked smile.

“We’ll see,” said Sid.

“Enough of this drama, can we order something. I’m hungry,” said Nishi.

“Go fetch something or else this little monster will eat us,” said I.

“And the bill is on you. A small bribe to shut our mouths,” said Nishi.

We had two medium pizzas. Sid ate the least and Nishi tried to grab the most.

After the whole lot drama everything went normal the next day. Manas and Sameer asked nothing. They were consumed in their own thoughts. Maybe Sam again had a breakup and Manas, no one can figure out; he was too secretive of a kind.

Two months later came Nishi’s birthday. Her first birthday with us all five. She was pretty excited as finally after pleading for a year her parents agreed to present her a new phone. A day before her birthday she was proudly showing off her new big touch screen phone in the class. It really looked cute with the purple cover she had on its back.

“So finally your wish got granted,” I smiled.

“Mm-hmm,” she smiled.

“Looks awesome.”

Sid jumped from our seat’s back and snatched her phone. “Wow man, this thing looks cool.”

“Give it back, its mine,” shouted Nishi.

“OK, OK” said Sid scared and handed the phone to her “why new phone?”

“It’s my birthday present.”

“Your birthday! when?!” asked Sid, confused.

“Tomorrow.”

“Cool, where’s the party?” asked Sid.

“I’m thinking of McD at EDM Mall.”

“It would be good,” said I.

“Done then,” said Sid.

“Ok, tomorrow at 5 in EDM,” said Nishi.

Sid instantly got fired up. Unable to control his urge to spill, he shouted “hey Sam, Manas.”

They looked up from the corner table. “It’s Nishi’s birthday. Tomorrow at EDM. Be there, sharp 5,” said Sid, loudly.

“OK,” said Sam.

“He already did your work,” I smiled.

“Idiot!” murmured Nishi.

After college we were walking towards our bus when suddenly Sid said, “god! please give me a cute and sweet encounter at her Birthday.”

I whispered to Nishi, “Are we by chance really bringing that along?”

“Even if it weren’t by chance, he’s in, no matter what,” said Nishi.

“Well, putting that aside, gather at 5, okay? I’ll leave you behind if you are late,” she added.

“Ok,” said Sid.

Next day morning, I was half asleep on my bed thinking over when my mom came in, “Radhika! You are always so lazy on Sundays.” She picked my half open book from my bed. “If you have nothing to do, then at least tidy your room a little.”

“I will mom,” I stood up from my bed. “But first help me out. It’s Nishi’s birthday and I can’t figure out a gift for her. What should I get for her?”

“Buy something she loves like a book or an accessory?”

“Mom, She’s not into reading and accessories.”

“Ok, then gift her a teddy.”

“Yeah, Good idea.” I smiled.

In the evening on the very same day, I got all prepared and left for the party. After reaching the destination, I stepped out of the auto rickshaw. Few meters ahead I saw Nishi, Manas and Sid waiting at the mall’s entrance. I waved at them.

On reaching to them, “hey, you looking fab,” commented Nishi.

“Thanks, you look good too” I replied, smiling and handed the packet in my hand to her “happy birthday sweetie.”

“Thanks.” She smiled.

We waited outside for ten more minutes. “Sam sure is late,” said Sid.

Nishi looked at her watch, twenty past five. “Maybe he ditched us to see his girlfriend.”

“Can be,” said I.

“Everyone is already gathered. So, leave him, let’s go inside,” ordered Nishi.

“Everyone?!” Sid shocked. “You didn’t invite others?”

“No.”

Her no was depressing for him, “Oh god! how am I going to have a sweet encounter now?” he moaned.

“Shut up and Move in,” Nishi scolded him.

We reached McD and took a peaceful corner table. We started chatting. Short while Manas got a call from home. He had an emergency, so he left. Few minutes later, Sid got a call from Sameer asking where we were. He disconnected the call. We started our casual chit chat.

Then suddenly Nishi asked me, “what do you think about Sam?”

I was surprised by her spontaneous question, “in what sense?”

“Like, I think he’s lively.”

“Lively is an understatement. It’s actually more like he’s made out of liveliness itself.”

“Hey!” Sam came from behind and sat in front of me. “What you said. Should I interpret that as a compliment?”

Shit. I closed my eyes. I wished the ground open and swallow me in.

“Yes it’s a compliment,” laughed Nishi.

Huh? What? I was being sarcastic. But I guess they misunderstood me.

“I’m so glad. I always thought you didn’t like me,” said Sam smiling widely.

“No, you are wrong,” I said, trying to stop him. But he wouldn’t stop “But seriously I’m not lively as you think. Not lively as you,” said Sam.

“It wasn’t a compliment. It was a mockery,” I said.

“Hey! don’t you cover up now,” giggled Sam and handed a gift to Nishi.

No one brought a cake. Poor Nishi or can be said lucky she that she didn’t get a face pack of cake which would have destroyed her hours effort of enhancing her features with makeup. Imagining her face covered with chocolate cream, my stomach would pain laughing.

I tried to dodge the topic, “let’s order something?”

“Good idea. I’m already hungry,” said Sid.

“Orders please,” said Sam.

“Happy Meal,” said both Nishi and Sid in sync.

“Wait! what!” Sam howled. “Does that just mean you two are kids or is it the complacency of the bourgeois?”

I pressed my lips together until the urge to laugh subsided and then I said, “you guys are really perfect for each other.”

“I don’t believe that,” said Nishi.

“You should just go with each other to see if it works out,” advised Sam.

Sid got angry, “why would I go with someone who had remind me of my stupidity.”

“I don’t want an idiot like you either,” snapped Nishi.

“You don’t have the right to choose, shorty!” snapped Sid.

Nishi tapped her palm on the table and angrily replied, “If I really wanted one, I can get a boyfriend anytime.”

“Ha-ha! Then I had like to see you do it,” said Sid.

“I will then, I’ll show you what I’m capable of. I’m going to find a boyfriend before you find a girlfriend.”

“Oh!” Sid raised an eyebrow. “So it’s a challenge.”

“Yeah! I challenge you. Let’s see who can get someone faster” said Nishi, firmly.

“Let’s do it.” said Sid, determined.

“I’m not going to lose,” said Nishi.

“Me neither,” snapped Sid.

I interrupted, “If you two had your talking, can we order now?”

“Sorry,” said Nishi.

“Ok then, a veggie burger and coke for me” said I.

Sid turned into a hungry monster and ate a lot, maybe to cover up his investment made on her gift. It was 6:30 now, we were having a lot of fun. I excused myself to leave, my house was the farthest, nearly 15 kms from there. But she urged me to stop, “It’s only been an hour. You can’t leave now.”

“Sorry, but I have to go. It’s getting dark.”

“Please stay, we will drop you” said Nishi.

“I don’t wanna bother anyone. It’s better to leave now.”

“It won’t be a problem. Stay,” said Sid.

“Ok.” I smiled.

“Are you afraid of the dark?” asked Sam.

“No. Why?”

“You said you wanted to leave because it was getting dark,” said Sam.

“Oh!” I signed.

“Then you are surely afraid of ghosts,” said Sid.

“No, I’m not.” I smiled. “In fact, I would like to see one someday.”

“Seriously!” Nishi shocked.  
“You are not afraid of ghosts?”

“Nope.” I smiled.

“Me neither,” said Sam.

“Nishi has phasmophobia, at night she even gets scared on seeing herself in the mirror.” Sid’s comment triggered laughter. I couldn’t stop laughing and so Sam.

“You idiot! I’m going to kill you!” Nishi ranted annoyed.

I looked at my watch, the hour hand touched 8. “Guys it’s late. I should really go now,” I smiled. “So, who’s dropping me?”

“I will,” said Sam, smiling.

“I can too,” said Sid.

Nishi chuckled.  
“You two decide, till then I look my gifts.” Sid and Sam left the table and went to a nearby corner to decide while Nishi started unwrapping her gifts. She was too excited and happy. I chuckled on seeing how fast she was in tearing the covers. She first did mine. I was happy that she liked it. Next was of Manas who gifted her a beautiful

ul pair of earrings and then Sam who had bought in a cute mug. The last one was of Sid. Knowing how Sid was, I was curious to see what would he bring and so was Nishi. Before opening she twisted it, “what do you think it can be?”

“From the packaging, it can be a perfume” I guessed.

“Hmm! can be,” she nodded and flashed her biggest smile.

She began tearing the green florescent paper. Suddenly her smile disappeared in anger. She didn’t say anything but I knew inside, she was burning like hell. She shoved all the gifts back to a polybag and called out the boys. They both came back and it was decided that Sam was to drop me. Unwillingly, I had to agree to it. Sid had a bike, so he could only drop one. Manas had already left. So, I had no other option, but to go with Sam. Moving out of the McDonalds my attention went to the McDonald statue, lonely sitting on a bench. I smiled at it. “Guys! Don’t you think we should take a picture with this guy,” I chirped.

Everyone laughed and we had a group epic pic, lingering over that clown character. Though it sounds silly now after so many years, but who doesn’t have a click with that yellow jumpsuit guy. I guess every student and many more would agree to me on that.

After the pic, we moved out of the mall and went straight to the car parking area which was in the mall’s basement. Nishi and Sid followed us. I heard an “Ouch!”

I turned back to look and asked, “what happened?”

“Nothing,” said Nishi.

“Something went in my eye,” said Sid rubbing his eyes.

“Is it ok now?” I confirmed.

“Yeah.” said Sid, smiling.



The parking was flooded with cars, Sam searched for his car but couldn't find it. It was Sunday, it had to be full. So, he got an idea, he pressed the keyless entry and the car headlights flashed light twice. He got the car. We were standing in front of the bonnet, about to bid goodbyes when Nishi said, "text me when you get back to your house."

I laughed, pulling back. "Seriously?"

She shot me a look, "you know I'm serious. It's late. A lot of people fucking suck in the world, so text me."

"Don't worry, I'm there for her." Sam smiled.

"And if I don't?" said I.

Her eyes narrowed, "you will."

"Okay, I will." I laughed at her look. "See you tomorrow. Nishi, Sid, bye."

"Bye," they both waved at us.

Climbing in, Sam pushed opened the car's door for me from inside. He smiled as I climbed in, talking the seat next to him. "Hey, take this," he said, handing me his jacket. I frowned at it, knowing I had one of my own. Why would he offer me this? "Er.... thanks?"

"I'm not giving you to wear it," he smirked at me "I can't drive wearing it, it's hot." He laughed, and it was followed by an awkward moment of silence. I smiled and dropped my eyes to my phone. Sam started the engine and we left.

Nishi was still angry at Sid. They were walking for the bike parking when Sid said, "I'm pretty sure I've lost some eyesight because you have been poking my eyes all day." He gave a side glance to Nishi.

She walked straight with a flabbergasted look, "you pitiful mongrel, drooling while checking out Radhika's dress."

Sid got surprised by her words. His head turned straight. Blushing he said, "I was just thinking..." he scratched

his forehead. "That her smile was so bright."

He moved his head sideways and saw Nishi giving him a murderous look. He stopped immediately, crossed his hands and hid his face beneath them. "sp- spare my eyes!"

Nishi scoffed, "if I continue. My fingers will be contaminated."

Sid removed his hands off his face, "Damnit..." Walking further, "do you think Raks has a boyfriend?"

"No, she doesn't," saying Nishi started to walk leaving Sid behind.

Sid moved fast to catch up with her, "Maybe she has a boyfriend and is hiding."

"No, she isn't."

"But even so..." said Sid.

Nishi stopped. "You should stop assuming things."

"Huh?"

She prided, "I'm the only one who truly understands her!" With a flat face she continued, "it will only add to your fifth level." Sid stood in surprise, sweat rolling from his forehead.

Nishi looked at him. "Ew, How gross! Keep your distance from me, you're so disgusting!" She started walking.

"Hey, Nishi! What's with your tone, you are so cold!" He walked to her.

"Stay away from me!" Nishi shouted. "And since when have I *not* been cold towards you?"

"Now that you mention it..." Sid starts to recall.

Nishi punched him on the arm. "Ouch! it hurt."

"Stop that crap and move fast," she ordered.

They got the bike and left home. Their houses were only 1 km from there, so they reached home in 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, Me and Sam drove till midway where we got stuck in traffic.

“How long do you think this will take?” I asked.

“Why? you got a hot date tonight?” asked Sam.

“No.”

“So, what’s the rush?”

Admitting that I was seriously uncomfortable being out here would be embarrassing and rude, so I said “I just want to reach home on time.”

“Or maybe you worried that I’ve brought you here for my own notorious plans.”

I came to a complete stop. Knots formed in my stomach. “What?”

Sam turned toward me. His grin slipped a notch. “Hey, I’m Kidding. Seriously.”

Heat swamped my cheeks and the knots unravelled, replaced by a strong feeling of total lameness, “I know. I’m just...”

“Jumpy?” he supplied.

“No,” I looked down to my mobile, letting the long strands of my black hair create a curtain between us. Few minutes later my mobile rang, saving us from the slightly weird silence. It wasn’t an awkward silence though, just strange, like he seemed perfectly content just to drive me home. The caller ID said it was Nishi. “Hey Nishi, what’s up?” I said, cheerfully.

“Hey, reached home?”

“Not yet.”

“Why?” her voice showed signs of terror, “It’s been long now. You ok. Is he misbehaving?”

“It’s nothing like that.”

Sam gave me a quizzical expression so I putted my hand over the mouthpiece and whispered, “I’m ok. We just got caught up in traffic.”

He widened his eyes slightly before giving me his smirk. “Don’t worry, I’ll drop her safely” he said loud as to make her hear, making me smile.

Nishi got embarrassed and immediately disconnected the call.

The traffic cleared and we drove further. I was doing my favourite pass time, looking at the sky, out from my side window. Every time I look at the beautiful sky, I feel happy, watching the stars twinkling. Sparkling like little diamonds, tempts me to grab a handful of them and stick them on my ceiling.

Sam was quiet, something was going on in his mind. *‘It’s just the two of us. Is this what you had call a chance?’* He thought.

He gave me a quick side glance, I was still busy with my stargaze. He looked back at the front and dropped the speed some 20 points and I could notice it. His voice trembled of shyness “Radhika,” Sam faltered. “Do you have a boyfriend?”

I remained quiet for few seconds. “Sameer have you..” and then turned my head to him, “ever seen a ghost?”

“Huh? No, I haven’t...” he replied.

“I believe that ghosts exist. But I have never seen one, and I don’t believe the stories from people who have.”

“I see,” said he in a deep tone.

“And then, you see, I think of something the same way.” I shot my gaze back to my older star view through the side window. “I believe that one day I’ll be in love, get married and be happy. But there’s nobody who has had it spelled like that, is there?” I smiled. “I think that the existence of people in the world who are meant to love

ve one another is a bit farfetched. I mean, I can't see them." I looked down at my phone, "'there really isn't any thing like ghosts, so I'll never see one in my life'- is how I have resigned myself." I smiled again. "And because of that, there is no answer to your question." I looked at him, "what about you? are you someone who can see ghosts?"

"I think... I want to see them." His tone went calm, "you see, I think that people who are insensitive to spirits would be shocked the first time they saw one, wouldn't they?" He added further, "I think there are people who have seen them, but then they tried to deny their existence, and on the other hand, there are those who put in an effort to finally be able to see them. Because of that, I think that you don't have to resign yourself to never seeing one in your life." He smiled. "I think it'd be great if you could see ghosts sometime, Radhika."

"Huh?"

"Because I think there's a ghost out there that wants you to see it" he smiled again giving me a quick side glance.

"Maybe I'll see one someday," I whispered.

"Huh?"

"No. Nothing." I blushed.

Few minutes later we reached my house. I bid him goodbye and quickly moved inside my house.

Next day wasn't like the usual days. For the first time my best friend Nishi looked different and as usual Sid missed the morning bus again. Me and Nishi were talking outside the class when Sid arrived. What? he again had a new hairstyle. This time spikes. I was sure it was again a girl thing. Nishi stared him with wicked eyes and then she couldn't resist and poked his hair, "what the heck is that?" she laughed, "a brush?, A sea urchin?"

“Geez... this is why you are still a kid,” he swiped his hand sideways on his hair, “It’s fashion.”

“Oh really,” she poked him again.

“Stay away,” Sid avoided her hand. “Today I’m a new man.”

“Let me fix that for you.” Nishi jumped on Sid again and forcefully ruffled his hair.

“Don’t touch me, Idiot” said Sid, annoyed.

Nishi gave him a flabbergasted look, “trying to look cool, huh? , how sickening.”

He ignored her comment. “Starting today, my popularity is only going to increase and then you will be embarrassed to lose.” He smirked.

Nishi scoffed. “Suddenly changing your hairstyle won’t make you popular.”

“Same goes for you.” Sid laughed. “What good will it do to start wearing makeup all of a sudden?”

Whenever they had a funny squabble, I tried to stay away because their fights were amusing. So I would just lay back and enjoy. You can call me cruel for that but who doesn’t enjoy silly fights and when it is between the two weirdos Sid and Nishi, it’s never not funny.

We were having fewer classes because of approaching exams. So, Sid suggested us to hang out with the trio in the canteen at lunch. We were having casual chat in the canteen when Sid complained, “you ruined my perfectly styled hair.” Making a sad puppy face, “after it took me so long it almost made me late for college.”

Nishi completely ignored him and started thanking us and telling how much she liked the gifts. Sid felt isolated and jumped in the conversation, “I’m hungry, let’s eat something?”

“I’m hungry too,” I smiled.

We all went to the billing counter and Sid said, “one burger please.”

“One for me too,” ordered Nishi.

After ordering we returned to our table with the tokens and waited for the screen to flash our order numbers.

“Why don’t you two try going out,” suggested Sam.

“You share same interests. Your compatibility must be high,” he added.

“You should try,” I insisted. “You guys are same.”

“No we are not!” said both Nishi and Sid together.

“And in perfect synch,” commented Manas, smiling.

“No we are not!” said both of them again.

“Yes you are,” I teased them.

“It’s a coincidence!” they shouted together.

And then began their usual fight again. Ignoring us three they started their hatred act. Totally grownup babies.

“Don’t copy me, shorty!” said Sid.

“Don’t call me ‘shorty’, mongrel!”

“Don’t talk like that to a gentleman!”

“Don’t talk like that to a lady!”

Nishi scoffed, “gentleman! You are a gentleman?!”

“And you are a lady?!” Sid smirked.

“Shut up! mongrel” said Nishi.

“Shut up midget! Drink milk and grow taller!”

“Shut up and rot!” She started cursing him.

“Hey! what the hell is your problem?” he huffed. “You have been cursing me since your birthday.”

“That’s right.” She smirked. “I’m going to curse you and make you shrink 1cm every day. In 165 days you’ll vanish completely.” She laughed her most wicked one.

“I can’t help but think she’s been possessed by a demon,” commented Sid.

“You are an airhead,” snapped Nishi.

“You are an eyesore,” snapped Sid.

Sam and Manas were giggling.

“Please, can we have a day you two not fighting,” I scolded them.

“Don’t blame me. This idiot is spouting pointless crap and getting in my way,” whined Sid.

“An idiot like you shouldn’t be calling me an idiot,” snapped Nishi.

Sid got irritated. “Just what is wrong with you? You have been upset since back then.”

Nishi gave him a dead shot. “Are you saying you really don’t know what you did? That gift of yours—”

“What?” Sid interrupted, “I gave you what exactly you needed. You should show some gratitude.”

“Oh! I’m thankful for that.” Nishi forged a smile. “I was so happy that I thought I’d die.”

“Right.” Sid smiled.

“Huh! You moron, forget it.” She whacked on his head.

“What the heck is wrong with her? Why is she so angry?” Sid asked me.

“I don’t think it’s technically called stupidity anymore. You are insane.” I laughed.

“Who gives a DEO to a girl. You dolt,” I added.

“What the hell. I haven’t done anything,” said Sid, confused.

“Oh boy! how are you going to live with that sense of yours?” Sam ruffled Sid’s hair. “It is an irony.”



Nishi shot him murderous looks and Manas just saw them quietly. The orders arrived and after eating, the silence was broken by Sid again, "hey Raks, do you have a boyfriend?"

Oh god! Why is everyone after my boyfriend. First Sam and now Sid. Why he has to ask that same stupid question every year. And why only me be the target, there are other people too. Please for once, ask someone else. This time I just replied, "No." He looked at me with suspicious eyes.

"What?" I asked him.

"In a country of 27 states, 7 union territories, thousands of cities with billions of people and yet single. I can't believe you," said Sid.

"What's wrong with that. I don't need someone to make me happy which already I am." I stated.

"Strange. It's not possible that no one asked you out," said Sid.

"I said I don't have a boyfriend not that I'm not dating anyone." I winked at him.

"Mystery queen." Sam laughed.

"Honestly, I had rather prefer to be alone than to be with Mr. wrong," I said.

"What kind of boy are you looking for?" asked Nishi.

"I'm not looking for anyone... he will find me," I replied with a smile.

"So what's your definition of Mr. right?" asked Sam.

Good question, He picked it right.

"He should be smart, generous and loyal," I said.

"Intelligent and generous..." Nishi gave a thought and then her eyes glowed. "That's exactly like Manas." I shot her a dead look so that she stop talking but she ignored, "You two should go out."

Manas blushed. I tried to divert the attention from me  
“So, what kind of boys do you like?” I asked her.

“Anyone with a good heart will do,” said Nishi.

“Good choice,” said Sam.

“Manas, what kind of girls you like?” asked Nishi.

“Smart and confident.”

“And you Sid?” asked Nishi.

“Any type, until it’s a girl.” He grinned.

Everyone laughed.

“God! he’s really too desperate for a girlfriend,” said I

“Hey Sam, what kind... forget it you already have a girlfriend,” Sid trailed off.

“I don’t. We broke up.” Said Sam, immediately.

“And when did this happen?” asked Sid.

“Five minutes ago.” Everyone stared him but then removed their gaze. Breakups wasn’t a new thing for him. Yes, but that five minute thing was really fishy but I didn’t pay much attention to it.

“So what should a boy do to be your boyfriend?” asked Nishi.

Not again. I’m really going to kill her after this. “I would prefer someone bold enough to convey his feelings directly instead of sending signals for me to catch, which won’t be happening. I’m too slow at that,” I laughed.

Sid got up from his chair and looked towards me. Nishi gave him a dead shot *‘don’t even try.’*

“What?” he jerked his leg. “My leg fell asleep.” He sat down.

Sam stood up to leave, but stopped at my end of the table.

“What?” Nishi asked loudly but he ignored her. I tried to ignore him for as long as possible, but when I looked up, Sam was staring at me. He smiled at me in what I assumed was his most charming expression. He oozed charm and rebelliousness with his buzzed, black hair and those glittering eyes, and I rolled my eyes at his attempt to lure me in.

“Don’t even think about it, Sam. You’re not her type,” Nishi hedged.

Sam feigned insult, “I’m everyone’s type!” I peeked over at him and smiled.

“Ah! A smile. I’m not that bad after all,” he winked and left.

“Nishi!” Manas called. “You just told him no. He’s never gonna stop now.”

“Hey guys I’m going to the library.” I stood up and asked Nishi, “you coming?”

“Mm-hmm!” she stood up and picked her bag.

In the library, I was searching for a particular book from a thousand pieces which were placed on the shelves when Nishi remembered something, “I totally forgot.”

“What?”

“My parents are leaving for a distant relatives wedding. So do you think it would be alright if I just slept at yours tomorrow and day after tomorrow night? I don’t really want to stay on my own,” she said in a small voice.

“Um sure. You don’t have to ask. You can drop in anytime you want.” I agreed reluctantly.

“Great! I’ll come over at about nine then, OK?” she chirped, sounding excited.

“Ok.” I smiled.

I found the book and we walked out of the library.

“What were you doing earlier,” I said, angrily.

“What?”

I looked at her, expressionless. “Pairing me with Manas, what was that?”

“Oh... that.” She smiled. “He’s a good boy and I think he likes you too. So, I was just being cupid.”

“So what. You know I can never eye on your crush.”

She laughed. “I have a crush on every other boy. If you gonna think that way, you never going to have a boy friend in college.”

“Crush on Sid too,” smiling I elbowed her.

“Just not him.”

“I know Manas isn’t into me,” she added.

“How can you say?” I asked.

“He never showed any interested signs,” she smiled. “So, you can have him.”

“Whatever, Manas is too tall for me. I would prefer someone an inch or two shorter,” I said.

“You are making a lame excuse,” she laughed.

We reached the college exit and after bidding byes we left for our respective homes.

Next day, Nishi was happy that she was to stay with me but seeing Sid trying hard to get a girlfriend she asked for help, “Please arrange me up with someone.”

“Was that your plan?” I asked.

“Not in the first place but there are things we can do, and then things we can’t.”

“That’s right,” I nodded.

“Find someone, please. I can’t lose to that idiot.”

“You know I can’t,” and then I smiled, “If suppose I could, what kind of guy you want?”

“Anyone. I don’t care what he’s like, just as long as he’s good looking.”

“Ok.”

After college we were going down the stairs, at the ground floor Nishi spotted someone, “wait!” she clutched my hand.

“What?”

“Arrange me up with him,” she pointed to the bulletin board of electronics batch. Two boys were checking the board.

“Which one you want?” I asked.

“The shorter one.”

I looked properly, those two boys were from my first year. “What, both jokers together.” I shook my head and laughed, “not him, please.”

“They share the same name it won’t matter. Select the other one,” I added.

I looked at her unamused face. “You serious?”

“Yes,” she nodded. “Why are you laughing?”

“I don’t know but whenever I see him, I burst into laughter. Have you seen him.” I chuckled. “He looks so suicidal. Someone from a draught prone area.” I smiled, “la me like a chick.” I pushed her from the back, “come, we will find someone better for you.”

We went to our homes and at night Nishi’s parents dropped her at my place. I grabbed her hand and took her to my room. She dumped her stuff on my floor and threw herself down on my bed. Suddenly she rolled over and grabbed my pillow beneath her, smiling she asked “So, who’s the one you are dating?”

I smiled back “I’m not. I just said that to stay away from Sid’s questions.”

“Oh,” Nishi grabbed my hand and made me sit next to her “do you have a crush on someone?”

“I don’t know, there’s no one really special.” I smiled.

“Come on, you never had a crush.”

“Have you ever seen me acting that way over some stupid boy?”

“Umm – No,” she shook her head.

I took a deep breath. “You know In order to fall in love, you need to feel that you need love. Because if you don’t believe you need love, you’ll reject it — whether consciously or subconsciously. So, the more intelligent you are, the harder it is for you to find love.” I smiled.

“If that is the case, I’m happy I’m not that intelligent,” smiled Nishi.

My mother called us to dinner, “let’s eat, I’m starved,” I pushed myself up off of the bed.

“I already ate.” She smiled, “eat and come back soon.”

I opened my laptop for her, “till then you enjoy some music.”

I walked out from my door to the dining table. “Where’s Nishi?” my mom asked.

“She has already eaten, so chilling in my room,” I said.

Eating fast I returned to my room and saw Nishi fishing my Facebook account. I wiggled my eyebrows, “what are you doing?”

“Where’s Rohit? he’s not in your friend list?” she asked.

“No, but how do you know his name?”

“Remember you told his name in 1<sup>st</sup> year when I saw you laughing at him.”

“Oh, yeah!”

She searched and found his account. “Look he’s here.”

“Are you still thinking on him?” I asked.

She nodded.

“Dear, he’s not that good for you and I have heard he has a girlfriend.”

“I just wanna win the bet. I can’t choose someone Sid knows. This guy would be perfect for this.” She looked at me helplessly, “you have to help me in this.”

“No way, I can’t. It would be really embarrassing.”

“Embarrassing. Why?”

“I can’t talk to him after I rejected him in first year,” said I, flatly.

“Oh!” her eyes widened. “So that proposal was from him.”

“Yes.”

“Doesn’t matter. It’s an old story now.” She sends him a friend request from my account. He accepts it in an hour and at midnight I got a message from him saying ‘Hi’.

I got terrified, my hands trembled, “What should I do?”

“Just talk to him,” said Nishi.

I tried talking casually and in a few minutes I made myself clear that I wasn’t chatting with him again. I typed bye and after noting down his phone number from his account, I closed my laptop.

“Nishi, I’m sorry. He still likes me. I can’t talk further.” I handed her the slip. “It’s his number, use it as you wish. I’m out now.”

“Okay,” she replied and we went to sleep.

Two days later her parents took her from my house. She didn’t use that number at my place but she saved it in her phone. So, it was sure she would use it but how and when she was going to use it, I had no clue. Short while we had our end semester exams. As usual Sid scored his trade mark 60. I wondered if he would ever get more than that and Nishi, she was contented with 65. I s

cored 76. Manas 80 and Sam 68. Highest gone to Surbhi with 88.

We left our bus after 2<sup>nd</sup> year. It wasn't of much use now. College ended at random times. On half days we had to stay till evening because of the bus, so we decided it's better to quit. So, now we three—me, Nishi and Sid were coming by our own.



# CHAPTER-8

## Never Ending Stupidity

Nishi and I were sitting on the last bench of our class, Manas and Sam on the bench before us. Everyone looked tired and gloomy.

“Unbelievable! it’s already the 1<sup>st</sup> day of July,” said Nishi.

“Geez! I really don’t need this.” I hid my face behind my arms on the table. “It feels like the after semester break only just started but it’s the 3<sup>rd</sup> year,” I moaned.

“Yeah, you are right,” nodded Nishi. “I didn’t get to enjoy. I had to cancel my vacation trip as well. Was it okay to spend our summer like this?”

Hearing us talk, Sam and Manas turned back at our table. “Well don’t expect it to be how it is in movies and dramas,” said Manas.

“I also didn’t get time to improve my physique,” said Sam.

Sid came in with a smile, “morning everyone.” He walked to our seat holding his mobile. “Hey take a look at this pic. I found this while deleting stuff from my laptop yesterday.” I looked up at Sid.

“It’s only the 1<sup>st</sup> day after the short break, don’t come in with that fresh smile of yours.” Nishi shot him a bored look. “The pic that you want to show us will just be one of your random shots of bikes. We are not interested. You stupid.”

“No, it’s not that” he showed the pics to the two boys.

“Oh, It’s of you three in 1<sup>st</sup> year,” said Sam.

Me and Nishi jumped from our seat to see. I smiled and remembered the first day I met them. Nishi got excited.

d and started telling the two boys how me and Nishi met at the registrar's office. "So, because of that dolphin, the 3 of us became good friends. Fate has a strange way of doing things, doesn't it?" she chirped.

I smiled, the gloominess disappeared completely.

"By the way, Raks wasn't our 1<sup>st</sup> meeting really good," said Sid.

Before I could speak Nishi jumped in, "no, it was the worst." I laughed and nodded to tease Sid. "And you were the cause of it," Nishi stuck her tongue out at him.

"No, it wasn't" he shrugged. "It's just that I easily give people the wrong impression."

The moment Sid finished speaking, our new professor Mr.

Sen entered. He was an old man in his 60's. Sweet and polite. He was the only professor I liked in the entire four year span. Sam and Manas were so bored that they ran away after the 3<sup>rd</sup> lecture and Nishi kept dozing over because of boredom. After 5 boring introductory lectures the college ended. Coming out of our building with Sid and Nishi, I said, "Such a beautiful day. But I felt so sleepy. I wanna do something fun."

"Like you never do anything fun," laughed Nishi.

"The 3<sup>rd</sup> year of college is about studying and depression," said Sid with a gloomy face.

I laughed. "Like you guys ever studied enough to get depressed."

Nishi hits me, "let's go see a movie!"

"Ok," I smiled.

"Since you are too busy studying. We gonna go by ourselves," Nishi smirked and both of them walked leaving me behind.

"Hey, wait! I'm also coming," I rushed to them. "You know I don't study that much. Why you people be having jealous?"

We went to see a nice movie. It wasn't what you had call a perfect end of the day. Except the movie of Salm an Khan, it was really good.

At night, I got fever so I was absent for the next two days. On the 4<sup>th</sup> day of 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Thursday; I went to college. The last class before lunch was of Professor Sen. The lecture ended and before leaving he said, "okay, that's it for today. Those who haven't decided on their topic, consult your allotted partners and please come to the faculty office later."

"Partners?" I said, voice low as I frantically looked around the classroom. Almost everyone was turned in their seat, talking to another person. I turned my head to my side to see Nishi, but she was already at the back on Sid's table talking to Manas. Sid and Manas were sitting together.

I was flustered, "when did we pick partners?"

Sam was sitting on the seat behind me so, he heard me. "On Tuesday," he said, closing his notebook and shoving it into his backpack, "you weren't here."

My heart thumped in my chest as I scooted to the edge of the seat. *Shit*. Professor Sen had already bounced from the room.

"Radhika," Sam called.

How in the hell was I supposed to get a partner now? I really shouldn't have missed college on Tuesday. This was all my fault.

"Radhika," he called again.

Where was the Professor's office? I was going to have to find him and explain I didn't have a partner. Looks like everyone has partners, I bet I'm in danger of being partner less.

"RADHIKA," he said louder this time.

"What?" I snapped, turning to Sam. Why was he still sitting here staring at me?

His brows rose, "We're partners."

"Huh?"

"We. Are. Partners," he repeated, and then sighed.

"Partners, in what?," whipping my gaze on him. I was sure I looked stupid on asking that.

"Mini Project," replied Sam with a smile.

He looked overly happy. His look gave me the feeling of me being in danger. Oh god why I had to be partnered with this boy. Any dumb would have been better. I could only utter "okay."

Everyone left but I remained seated in my anxiety of how I'm going to complete the project with that boy. Nishi came to me. I enquired if any of our friends were left with whom I can pair up. I just didn't want Sam because I knew, with him I had to complete the whole project on my own. His reputation was that of a player, who was always busy with his random hook-ups. So contribution from his side would definitely be less than Sid's girlfriends that is, nil plus tension added. Nishi told me that we didn't had a choice to select our partners. The pairing was done on the basis of marks, one strong with one weaker. Everyone had partners. Nishi was paired with Manas and Sid with the class topper Surbhi and me unfortunately with that lover boy.

"Why didn't you inform me about the pairing," I scolded her.

"I wanted to give you a surprise," she winked at me.

"Surprise!" I scoffed. "More of a shock I would say."

"Come on," she threw her arm around my shoulder, "he's not that bad." She smiled, "you know, all girls of the class wanted to partner with him but it was your luck to get him."

I pushed her hand off my shoulder, "My bad luck."

"You should give it a thought. He's smart and generous," said Nishi.

“What about loyal,” I said, promptly. “He’s a jerk. Only good for a friend. And it was you who told him to stay away from me, didn’t you. Why this transforming stuff today?”

“I’m saying this because I have seen him reform. I haven’t seen him with a girl since my birthday,” said Nishi.

“That might be because of the exams.”

Nishi sighed, “how the hell can you be unaffected by how freaking hot he is? I mean, you’re so lucky to be partnered with Sam! I would love to watch him walk around all day,” she purred, fanning her face.

I pretended to gag, “Nishi, he’s just a friend. How on earth can you get past the man-whore behaviour? He’s a big flirt” I shrugged.

I didn’t get why, but every girl in this college was in love with him, Nishi too. Sid was a good person, he never cheated anyone but instead got betrayed, and Sam, well Sam was just an all-round jerk.

Nishi flashed a grin. “Anyway, all I’m saying is he’s an opportunity you might not want to pass up.”

I didn’t even give that a thought, “why are we even talking about this?”, “We are just friends and share the same class—”

“And you’re partners for the rest of the semester,” Nishi added. “Kind of romantic, hanging out and spending lots of lonely time together.”

My stomach tightened, “It’s not romantic. Nothing is romantic.”

“Liar,” she groaned.

I rolled my eyes. “Well, hello, Nishi. All I’m saying is that I don’t like him and I’m sure he doesn’t like me as well. He’s just a flirt. This is just probably how he is. That’s all. So can we just keep this all romantic thing aside and forget about it?”

“Okay, don’t be angry” she opened up her lunchbox and started eating.

I stood up, picked my bag and started to leave. “Where are you going?” she asked.

“I’m going to the Library to search for the project topic.”

“Shouldn’t you be taking Sam with you,” she suggested.

I reached the class gate. “He might be busy with his new fling. So, I will do it myself.”

“And your lunch?”

“I don’t have time for that right now, Bye.”

I reached to a peaceful corner in the reading room, closer to the AC. I sat my backpack on the floor, and collapsed into the chair, bending down to fish my laptop from my bag. I popped up to set it on the table. The Wi-Fi worked best there. I was about to search the net when Sam fell into the empty chair next to mine. “Good. You started working on the topic,” he said.

I stared at him in shock, “what are you doing in here?”

“I was preparing a list of topics for us to choose from.” He smiled. “Remember we have to finalise and submit it by today’s end.”

“Mm-hmm,” I nodded. Nishi’s words from earlier slink into my thoughts. Maybe she was right, he wasn’t that bad.

He offered a cookie to me. I denied. He quickly shoved it in my mouth. “Don’t be shy. Munch on.” He chewed another cookie and smiled, undoubtedly his most charming, “you just had fever, you shouldn’t miss lunch like this.”

I ignored him and he pushed one more cookie in my mouth, “I’m not hungry.”

“Okay,” he stopped.

We had a quick discussion on the list of 5 topics and in 15 minutes it was decided that we were going to work on 3G and 4G signals.

“We won’t get much time like the other hostellers. It would be best to start early,” he said.

“So from tomorrow, in the free classes; we will work on the project together,” he added.

“Okay,” I nodded and shoved my laptop back to my bag. Carrying my notebook in my hand I stood up to leave for the next class. He walked with me. I was amazed by his sense of responsibility. He wasn’t that dumb what I had thought of him. “You don’t need to work hard on this. I know you are busy with your girlfriends” I explained, “I can do this by myself.”

He stopped so suddenly in front of the doors that I nearly had a repeat of Sid’s crash on Ritika the very first day of second year. “Why would you want to do all the project— and if you look at his class outline, there’s a lot— all by yourself?”

“Well! I don’t really want to.” I shifted my weight from one foot to the next. “But you don’t have to be my partner. I mean, you don’t owe me or anything.”

“I don’t get what you’re saying,” Sam tilted his head to the side.

“What I’m saying is that...,” I trailed off. What the hell was I saying? The problem was I just didn’t get him —

any of him. He was never serious with studies, always busy with his girlfriends. Never paid much attention to us and yet he was sitting here today searching the net for me all by himself. *So... so nice and responsible today.* The next words just came out of my mouth, “why are you being extra nice to me?”

A brow rose, “Is that a serious question?”

“Yes.”

He stared at me a moment. “Alright, I guess I’m just a nice guy. And you’re obviously pretty.”

I couldn’t tell if he was joking or not, but there was a distinct gleam of amusement in his eyes.

“And you’re pretty,” he repeated with a smile.

I blinked, “What?”

That smile had faded as he opened the door, ushering me out of the reading room and into the hall. “Do not tell me you don’t know you’re pretty. If so, I’m about to lose all faith in mankind. You don’t want to be responsible for that.”

“I know I’m pretty—I mean, that’s not what I meant.” God, I sounded vain. I shook my head, “I don’t think I’m ugly. That’s what—”

“Good, Now we’ve cleared that up,” tugging on my bag, he steered me toward the stairwell, “Watch the door. It can be tricky.”

I ignored that, “what does the whole pretty comment have to do with anything?”

“You asked why I’m so nice to you. It’s mutually beneficial.”

It sunk in and I stopped on the stair below him, “you’re nice to me because you think I’m pretty?”

“And because you have black eyes. I’m a sucker for mysterious black eyes,” He laughed. “I’m a shallow, shallow boy. Hey, it helps that you’re pretty. It brings out the nice guy in me. Makes me want to share my cookies with you.”

I stared at him with my left brow raised. “So if I was ugly, you wouldn’t be nice to me?”

Sam pivoted around, facing me. Even a whole step below, he was taller than me, “I’d still be nice to you if you were ugly.”



“Okay,” Said I with a flat face.

A wicked grin slipped over his full lips. He bent his head down and whispered, “I just wouldn’t offer you any cookies.”

A laugh bubbled up my throat and came out, sounding a bit hoarse, “You are really...”

“Amazing? Astonishing?” He paused, brows raised, “Exciting?”

“I was going to go with bizarre.”

“Well, hell, if I had feelings that might actually hurt.”

I grinned, falling into the easy banter with him, “I guess it’s a good thing that you don’t have feelings then, huh?”

“Guess so.” He went down a couple more steps and stopped on the landing. “We better hurry or we are going to be late for our next class.”

I looked at my watch 2:30, Holy shit! He was right. Sam laughed at my wide eyes. We rushed to our class. Luckily the professor didn’t arrive by then. I quickly made myself seated next to Nishi, and Sam to the table adjacent to ours.

“Where are you two coming from?” Nishi wiggled her eyebrows.

“Library,” I replied.

After the last class, Sam said to me, “you go, I will submit the topic.”

“OK, thanks.”

Nishi smiled. “I told you he isn’t that bad.”

Sid was obviously happy. He has to be, he got the best partner by his side. He didn’t need to do anything. Just flash his smile and make her laugh by joking which was not a big deal for him and so was Nishi. Manas was the perfect partner she could get, sincere and nice.

A month passed in peace. Thank god Sam wasn't irritating. The project was half done. We were really working hard on it. Sam and I were sitting in the reading room. I was totally consumed in the project taking notes from the net. Sam tapped the pen on the notebook, beyond curious, like obsessively curious as to know who was the one I was dating. "So are you dating anyone?" he asked.

I was too engrossed in taking notes that I didn't notice who was asking the question. With my eyes juggling between the laptop screen and my notebook I promptly said "No one."

"Really!" he was shocked and smiling at the same time.

His voice diverted my attention and I suddenly realised what the hell lot of stupidity I did. I wanted to kick myself for saying that. Pretty smart, he asked when I wasn't prepared. I was trapped in his plot. It was sure this one word was going to cost me my peace in college.

He was staring at me smiling looking overly enthusiastic "I wonder how someone as pretty as you made it this far without ever being in a relationship."

Sighing, I cast my eyes to my notebook "I thought we were supposed to be taking notes?"

"Cruel," he said.

"What?"

"Nothing," he giggled.

After a while we left to attend the last class. We were walking in the corridor close to the class when suddenly Seema appeared from nowhere. Reacting out of instinct, he shot forward, dropping his own bag and wrapping his arm around her waist. Her hand around his neck. Holy shit, that raw-boned just ran him over.

Still in that position Sam said, "you should be more careful. You almost hurt..." She moved her fingers on his neck. His face turned angry, grind

ing his teeth he said “ME” and jerked his hand holding her waist making her fall hard on the ground. She stood up in shock rubbing her back.

“Whoa,” I said. “you okay?” No response for about a minute.

“Hey,” I tried again, voice louder, “Are you okay?” When there was still no response, I waved at her. Wondering if it was possible for a person to pass out and remain standing. I chuckled and slipped my mobile into my pocket.

“Seriously, Seema, if you touch me one more time I’m going to go speak to someone about it. This is bordering on sexual harassment,” Sam growled. She looked extremely put out and silently stormed off. The rest of the girls were laughing at her back. You could practically read their thoughts on their faces: *completely deserved it*.

“That was rude,” I laughed.

“She’s a pain in the head. She keeps on bumping into me intentionally.” He scoffs “as if I would fall for her.”

Bending down, he picked up his bag and slung it over his shoulder. Knocking his hair out of his face, he smiled at me the kind of smile that usually got him what he wanted, “well, let’s make our grand entrance,” said he.

We were at our class door. I saw the professor coming so I left Sam and quickly hurried to sit. He was still recovering from the shock of my action when a deep, slightly accented voice called out, “Mr. Sameer, are you joining us today?”

Shit. He closed his eyes. He didn’t see the professor coming. He turned back to look at the professor. “Or are you planning to stand in the corridor the remaining time?” Professor Awasthi said.

Sighing, he turned around, “joining the class, clearly.”

“Clearly,” the professor repeated, holding a set of stapled papers.

Moving up to his seat his eyes searched me. I smiled at him. He smiled back and uttered, "Cruel."

The class ended and we all left towards the exit, "Nishi, you should have seen it" Sid chirped.

"What?" she asked.

He laughed. "Seema bumped into Sam. And he dropped her flat on the ground."

"Really!" her eyes gleamed.

"Yeah," he grinned. "Raks was also there."

I nodded. "It was too amusing," I sighed and laughed with them. We reached for the public buses and left. It was a funny end to the day.

My alarm didn't wake me up so, I was late for college the next day. I already missed the first class. The thing I was fearing from happened. My peace was in real danger. Sam was extra flirty. Oh god, I never wanted this.

"Running late this morning, sweetheart?" he asked with a smirk.

I gave him a drop dead look, making him chuckle, "Shut up, Sam!"

I went to sit at my usual seat next to Nishi, Mr. Sen entered the class and threw a bomb, "the first project presentation is in 2 days, be prepared."

"Presentation." no problem. I was good at demonstrations so it wasn't a big deal for me. The project was also going good. The class ended and everyone got up to talk to their project partners. "Meet me in the reading room after lunch," I said to Sam who was sitting behind my bench.

He nodded.

I was busy making the slides for the presentation when Sam arrived. He sat quietly staring me.

"You should go on a date with me," said he.

Oh, he's trying the same tactic of before but I won't fall all this time. I kept my voice low, "I'm not going out with you." I kept my gaze fixed to my laptop screen "you should give up, now."

A slow smile crept across his face before he spoke.

"I haven't asked you out with me," his eyes drifted to the ceiling in thought, "have I?"

I didn't speak. He turned his head toward me, "go on a date with me."

Transforming stuff he says. This boy is such a dope. I sucked in a sharp breath and looked at him, our faces were inches apart and he was way too close. My gaze fell to his eyes. I never noticed that they looked so beautiful. It should be illegal for a boy to have lashes as thick as his. Forgetting everything for a moment I kept staring at him.

"Do you like me?"

I blinked slowly, "Huh? Yes."

Sam grinned. "Yeah... she likes me."

"What?" I quickly removed my gaze from him, "NO!"

Sam chuckled softly, "you really haven't been listening to me at all, haven't you? You've been too busy staring at me."

"No, I wasn't."

He nudged my shoulder, "yes, you were."

I screwed up my face, "you are so beyond the acceptable level of arrogance."

"Arrogant? I'm just telling the truth." Sam tossed his notebook on the table and leaned back on his chair, eyeing me. That damn, unbearable lopsided grin was on his face. "There's nothing wrong with staring at me. I like it."

My mouth dropped open. How in the world was I supposed to respond to that? "I wasn't staring at you. Not r

eally. I sort of... dazed out. That's how *thrilling* talking to you is."

"Everything about me is thrilling," he said.

"About as thrilling as Mr. Awasthi's class," I laughed.

"Uh-huh! Keep telling yourself that, sweetheart."

"Keep calling me sweetheart and you're going to be limping."

Ah! He liked it. He smiled "Go on a date."

"I'm not sure I'm following this conversation." I snapped my laptop closed and shot him a hateful look.

"It's really not that complicated," he laughed at my hateful look, "We should go out on a date."

I stared at him a moment and then shoved my laptop into my bag with lethal force, "I don't understand."

I looked at him. He looked so content. He stretched his arms above his head, "typically going on a date is when two people go out for a lunch or movie. It can be a dinner or a walk in the park too but as I don't do walks in the park maybe..."

"I know what a date is," I snapped, getting up from my seat.

"You said you didn't understand," he pointed out gamely, "So I'm explaining what a date means."

Frustrated, I crossed my arms. "That's not the part I didn't understand and you know that."

"I was just making sure we were on the same page."

"We're not."

He lowered his arms. "So now that we both know what a date entails, we should go out on one."

"Uh..."

Sam laughed as he stood up in one fluid moment, "that's not really a response, Radhika"

“I...” A date? , A date with Sameer? , Two things rose at once: unease and disinterest, “No,” I said, flatly. “Don’t you have a girlfriend?”

His brows shot up in surprise and he laughed, “A girl friend? No.”

“Strange. What happened to your previous girlfriend?”

“We broke up, two months ago.”

“And you didn’t get a new girl in 2 months. Unbelievable!”

“I didn’t wanted.”

“Whatever, but if you thinking. I’m not like that.”

“Like what?” he asked.

“I don’t just hook up with guys for fun, okay? So I’m not interested, Sorry.”

I bent and reached for my bag, but Sam grabbed it before I could get my fingers around the strap. I sighed as I held out my hand, “give it to me.”

“I’m trying to,” said Sam.

I shot him a disgusted look.

Chuckling, he stepped forward and laid the strap over my shoulder. His fingers brushed my neck, and I couldn’t stop my body from jumping at the slight touch. He stepped back and picked up his bag, “See, I was just being a gentleman.”

“I don’t think you’re a gentleman,” I said as my fingers tightened around the strap, “but thanks.”

“So, what about it?” asked Sam.

“What about what?”

He eyed me with the same intense interest he had earlier, “going out on a date with me.”

I stiffened, “Why?”

“Why not?”

“That’s not an answer,” said I.

“Why shouldn’t we go out on a date?”

I was really getting irritated now, “I’m not impressed by your boyish charm, or your forced indifference, so you can stop the antics, okay?”

“Ok.” He was infuriatingly impervious to my rudeness.

I felt the vibration of my phone in my pocket. A text message? Probably from Nishi. I quickly took out my phone and after reading the message shoved it back into my pocket. Sam stood there watching me “can we go yet?”

I ignored him. “Can we go on a date?” he repeated.

“Oh God, you don’t give up.”

“Nope.” He smiled.

I laughed, couldn’t help it, and his smile spread in response to the sound. “I’m sure there are plenty of girls in our college who want to go out on a date with you. Take them.”

“I want to go out on a date with you. Not them.”

“I don’t understand why.”

“I can think of a few reasons. You’re not like most girls. That interests me. You’re awkward in this really adorable way. You’re cute. Want me to list more?”

“No. Not at all,” I told him quickly. I needed to nip this in the bud. Reputation aside, he was a hell of a lot more than I could handle. He would expect things I couldn’t give him. Holding a conversation with him was difficult enough sometimes. “I don’t want to go out on a date with you.”

Sam didn’t look surprised by my response or undaunted, “I figured you’d say that.”

“Then why did you ask?”

“Because I wanted to.” He smiled.



“Okay. Glad you got it out of your system.”

His brows rose. “I haven’t gotten it out of my system.”

Oh no, “You haven’t?”

“Nope,” He flashed a charming grin, “there’s always tomorrow.”

“What about tomorrow?” he asked. “I’ll ask you again,” he smiled.

I shook my head, “the answer will be the same.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.” He reached out and tapped the tip of my nose. “And maybe you’ll say yes. I’m a patient guy, and hey, like you said, I don’t give up easily.”

I took a deep breath, “Great,” I muttered.

“Knew you’d see it that way,” He smirked. “Don’t worry. I know the truth.”

“The truth about what?”

“You want to say yes, but you’re just not ready.”

I frowned.

“It’s okay,” he smiled. “I’m a lot to handle, but I can assure you, you’ll have fun handling me,” said he, cockily.

“Don’t you get it,” I scolded him “I’m simply not interested. Is that so hard to understand.”

“I’m never gonna date you in this life,” I added.

He laughed, totally unaffected by my words. “You will. One day you will be my girlfriend,” he smirked.

“Ya sure,” I flashed a false smile, “In your dreams.”

“We will see,” he grinned.

“You’re delusional,”

“I’m determined.”

“More like annoying,” I retorted.

“Most would say amazing.”

“Only in your head.”

“Cruel.”

I walked away from him. He watched me heading towards the library's exit. I stopped halfway and peeked over my shoulder at him. He was still watching me standing there.

“I will make the presentation myself. Just be there at the time of display,” I said.

“But I wanna help.”

“Not needed,” said I and walked away quickly.

Back in the Class, I dropped my bag on the chair and collapsed next to it. Go out on a date with Sam? Was he insane? He had to be joking or just flirting.

Standing there a few more seconds, like a creeper, he finally turned back to head towards the canteen and saw Manas behind him. Manas looked at him with a curious expression, “Why were you staring at her?”

“How do you know?” asked Sam.

“I watched you.”

“Nice,” he laughed. A couple of seconds passed and then he said, “I asked her out.”

Manas didn't look that interested, “Okay.”

“She turned me down.”

His head swung toward him, his brown eyes sparkling with interest, “what?”

“Yep,” he grinned, “turned me down flat.”

Manas laughed so hard like he hurt his stomach, “I like this girl.”

“So do I,” he said, sighing, “So do I.”

After college I hurried out the door and down the building. Just when I felt sure I was at a safe distance, Sam

was at my side.

“Have you thought about it?” he asked, slipping on his sunglasses.

“No way” I shook my head and went straight to the college exit.

Next morning, when I entered the class Nishi came to me “Yuck, RAKS, You look totally unfashionable!”

“Good,” I said, smiling at my ensemble. My hair was piled on top of my head in a messy bun. I didn’t apply my favourite strawberry flavoured pink tinted lip balm. Sporting a plain casual white t-shirt and blue jeans, I shuffled along in a pair of flip flops. The idea had come to me hours before that either way, unattractive was the best plan. Ideally, Sam would be instantly turned off and stop his ridiculous persistence. If he was looking for a girlfriend, I was aiming for too homely to be seen with.

“I’m not trying to impress anyone,” I said “Obviously.”

Sam entered the class with Sid. Sid looked at me and laughed, “what happened to you?”

“She’s trying to be unimpressive,” said Nishi.

“Speaking of the presentation, have you completed the one for tomorrow?” asked Sam.

He didn’t bat an eye at my messy hair, and I frowned at his reaction, “I finished it yesterday.”

“If you need any help just tell me,” said Sam.

“Okay.”

Much to my relief Sam was quiet for next few days. I was happy that the idea worked.

One day, I was talking to Nishi and Sid in the corridor close to our class. The class was empty. Sam arrived from nowhere and threw his arm around my shoulder. “I

just wanted to see my girl. I know you've been missing me not seeing me all morning, and all," he said cockily.

Nishi sighed and stared at him longingly. "Will you get your stupid arm off me, Sam, for goodness sake; I don't want to catch anything!" I scolded, shrugging him off.

"Didn't you tell them?" Sam chirped.

"What?" said I, flustered.

"We started dating," he flashed a grin.

My jaw dropped open. What the hell. When did I say yes to him? , Was I dreaming? , Did he actually said that? , I wanted to punch him in the face.

Nishi and Sid got a shock, "so, that's how it was." Sid smiled. "I was wondering why you were together so often, but now that I think about it, you two fit together so well."

Damn! What the hell was going on? , Someone please tell this idiot it's just a joke. We were together for the project, nothing else. I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me immediately.

Nishi head moved from Sam's face with a smile bigger than usual to mine, "why are you surprised. It should be us."

"Because this is the 1<sup>st</sup> time I have heard it too," I justified.

"Hey Sam, where had this come from?" I scolded.

"What's the problem? We have known each other for long."

I jumped to hide behind Nishi. "No way in hell."

"You are so selfish," sigh Sam.

Nishi moved to the right, so I was not behind her now but straight in front of Sam. "Well you are free to love whoever you want." she smiled at Sam, "I had approve of it."

*What?* My jaw dropped open. Everyone is crazy today. It's insane. I wanted to shout *please somebody help me*. But much to my bad luck there was no one. God are you punishing me for nothing. She has to be kidding, "What?, you joking, right?" I said to her.

She shook her head and smiled.

I shot her a murderous glare, "Come" I grabbed her hand and took her to a corner. Sam wanted to eavesdrop so he moved a few steps towards us, "Just stop there," I ordered him.

"Are you nuts, what was that?" I scolded her.

"Having fun," she grinned.

I wanted to murder her at that instant. "Please could you introduce him to one of your friends?, I can't bear this."

"Okay, I will try."

Waiting there eagerly, "you guys are awfully rude," said Sam, loudly, making it clear it reach us. He was noisy but I bet he was enjoying it because a constant smile was on his face.

"Well Sam, you are really strange. So just wait a minute," said Nishi, loudly.

"Why is he doing this?" Nishi asked, tipping her head to look at Sam and smile.

"Don't you think if I knew why I'd find a way to stop him," said I.

"Point!" she agreed.

"Let me find out."

"What you gonna do?"

"Try something" she smiled, "let's go and talk to him."  
..

I nodded. We walked to the two boys waiting for us.

“Sam, I have a friend in CS. She really likes you. Desperately wanna hook up with you. You wanna try,” said Nishi.

Sam groaned, “No way! I’m trying impressing someone,” he stated confidently.

I was baffled and shifted uncomfortably on my feet.

Sid’s face snapped in his direction, “you’re impressing someone? , as in, like, seriously? , you don’t do that stuff,” he said, frowning and looking at him disbelievingly.

“I’m crazy about her,” Sam replied, shrugging.

Crazy about her? Sid looked like he nearly passed out. He was looking at Sam like he had grown another head , “you.... What?” ,he stuttered, shaking his head violently .

Sam just laughed, “as of now, I’m too busy and off to the market. So dear, tell your friend that I’m not interested,” he instructed, turning to me and giving me a wink.

*Oh gosh! He was talking about me.* I got scared and was about to shiver but I controlled my anxiety and tried looking normal. Totally unaffected by him.

*This guy doesn’t get a no, idiot.*

“I will. Wow, so a reformed man-whore, maybe there is hope for you after all, Sam” Nishi laughed.

“No way, I give it a week and Sam will be back to his old self, flirting with anything that moves” Sid stated confidently.

“I don’t know Sid; he looks pretty serious to me,” Nishi said as I stood there in speechlessness.

Sam smiled at me, he obviously liked what Nishi said.

“Finally, you’ve learned to use the head that’s attached to your neck,” Sid joked, making her flinch at his words.

She wasn't in a mood to fight so simply ignored him. "I think it's sweet, Sam. She's a lucky girl; hopefully you won't break her heart," she muttered.

"I won't," said Sam and smiled at me.

She saw him smiling at me and went into a silence for a few seconds. She looked like she was trying to solve a complicated math problem, her face all scrunched up in concentration and then she gasped and looked at me with wide eyes, then looked at Sam, then back to me, silently asking if it was me. Holy crap! what is she, a mind reader or something? I shook my head rapidly, trying not to be obvious, making her gasp again and giggle in confusion. Manas entered the corridor.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Sam has fallen over some mystery girl who he's crazy about, apparently," Sid scoffed, rolling his eyes.

"Okay!" he sigh.

Sam got an idea, "why don't you hook your friend with Sid? He's single and very much interested to mingle." Sam winked at Nishi.

"He would scare her away with that face," said Nishi.

"What do you mean?" snapped Sid.

"She is too hot for you."

"Not that, about my face" he walked closer, eyeing her angrily.

"Stay away." She pushed him away. "Your stupidity is contagious."

"What the hell. You are the worst, midget."

"Hey! don't call me that."

"Guys, Stop." I interrupted.

"She's vexatious, short tempered, fight-picking crazy woman," commented Sid.

“If you keep talking like that, I’m gonna punch you,” said Nishi, angrily.

“I’m not impressed.”

“I don’t care about him. You little damn lame-faced. Get outta my sight,” said Nishi.

“That’s so mean, girl.”

“Come on, let’s leave the two idiots alone,” I said to her but she ignored me.

I saw Sam smirk at me from the corner of my eye. I murmur, more to myself than to her. I started to walk a way from them and reached our class. Nishi saw and followed me. I could hear Sid and Manas quizzing Sam in the corridor and I didn’t want to be there for it.

After college, Nishi and Sid were still busy guessing the mystery girl. I guess they were having fun. It was like a crossword for them. They grabbed hold of Sam and started interrogating him. After getting a no on about half the IT girls their interest started to build more. I didn’t wanted to be embarrassed in case Sam spouts my name, so I quickly moved out to exit. I was happy that they didn’t notice me.

Though it was night, I wasn’t sleepy. Tossing my networking book on the edge of my bed, I flopped onto my back and smacked my hands over my eyes. It was Thursday night and I already felt like I was about to crawl out of my skin.

I guess I could read something interesting.

Yawn.

My phone beeped from the nightstand signalling that I had a message. I looked at the wall clock, it was 11 p.m and none of my friends messaged me that late. I rolled over, grabbing it. Half afraid to look at the screen, I did so with one eye closed. Like that somehow made things less scary if it was some friendly, stalker.

It wasn’t.



Sitting up, I opened the text from Sam. Two words and I immediately got the idea of getting irritated soon. 'Missing me?'

Hell, this boy never give ups. My brain oscillated whether to answer or ignore. I wasn't sleepy, getting bored so talking a little won't harm. But if I did answer he's gonna start some stupid flirting. Answer/ignore, It was like being caught between two opposite magnets. After about 5 minutes, I responded back with a: No.

The response was almost immediate.

Sam: If u were Pinocchio, your nose would span the city.

Crossing my legs, I leaned against my headboard.

Me: Pinocchio? Sounds like your reading level.

Sam: Ha. U wound me. Deeply.

Me: Thought you didn't have feelings?

Sam: I do. I have so many feels for u.

Before I could respond, another text came through.

Sam: When I lie something else grows on me.

Me: Gross, I'm leaving.

Sam: Don't get the wrong idea. I'm talking about a moustache. A moustache grows on me.

Me: Oh! Thnks for sharing.

Sam: Ur welcome. Just keeping u updated.

Me: U can keep dat to yourself.

Lying back I grabbed the book again to give a short read, I texted back.

Me: shouldn't you sleep now.

Sam: Can't. Family showering me wid love. U could l earn from them.

*Oh god! This boy is so irritating.*

Me: I think u get enough attention.

Sam: I'm needy.

Me: Boy, don't I know dat.

There was another span of minutes.

Sam: What r u doing?

"Not again," I whispered. Lying on my back, I crossed my ankles.

Me: Reading.

Sam: Nerd.

Me: Jerk.

Sam: Bet u miss me.

Me: Never.

I was getting a headache now. Answering his text was a bad choice.

Me: Bet u hav better things to do right now.

Sam: Nope.

Sam: Are you single?

What? ,I was confused. Why was he asking that? ,There was something fishy. A few seconds later,

Me: who is this???

I frowned as I sat up. And then,

Sam: Sorry, my brother just stole my phone.

I relaxed,

Me: Sounds like a desperate brother.

Sam: He is. Sometimes. He's needier than I am.

Me: I need to sleep. Bye.

Sam: Bye.

He wrote that with a lot of sad smiles.

I did a short read of a page. It was twelve-oh-five when I ended and slid my book on the nightstand just to go to sleep. About a minute later when I finally closed my eyes to sleep, I heard my cell chirp again.

Damn! Not again. Why is he like this?

Sam: Are u asleep?

Me: Yeah.

Sam: Go out wid me.

Me: Asking me over text is no different from in person.

Sam: Thought I'd give it a try. What r u doing now?

I scoffed,

Me: Dancing.

Sam: wish I was there. I love dancing too.

My eyes widened. What the what?

Me: I'm trying to sleep ,u disturbing dolt.

Sam: Damn. At least I hav my imagination.

Me: dat's all u will ever have.

Sam: We'll c.

Me: No u won't.

Sam: Plz go out with me.

This is the limit. I don't want this crap anymore.

Me: Get dis indented in ur brain. I'm never going out on a date wid u. So, for goodness sake stop asking.

Sam: I won't.

Me: Then I guess I hav no other option but to stop talking to u right from this moment.

Sam: R u serious?

Me: Yes, I'm.

Sam: Sorry, Sent he with a crying smiley.

Sam: Please don't. Won't trouble now.

Me: Ok. I need to sleep.

Sam: Good night. Tc. Bye.

Me: Bye.

I switched off my phone and slide it back on the nightstand.

As the days went by, we fielded the persistent rumours about a relationship. Sam's reputation helped to quiet the gossip. He had never been known to stay with one girl longer than a month, so the more time we were seen together, the more people understood our platonic relationship for what it was. Even with the constant questions of our involvement, the stream of attention he received from his co-eds didn't recede.

The project ended and so that stressful semester. We got a new mini project but it was fun this time. Thankfully we got to choose our partners and I straightaway chose Nishi and Surbhi. A perfect trio for the project. Everyone was busy with their projects. The colder weather began to take more stronghold throughout the early part of January, widespread frosts and dense fog patches became a quite prominent feature for many. One morning, Nishi and I were talking in the corridor next to our class.

"It's Sid's birthday today," Nishi reminded me.

"Oh!" I smiled. "Where's the birthday boy?"

Nishi signalled me to look back. I turned to see Sid coming towards us with his hands shoved in his pockets. His full lips were dry under his red nose, and I laughed when he put an imaginary cigarette to his mouth and blew out a puff of misty air.

"Hey!" Sid grinned.

"He has got a really long life," I smiled. "We were talking about you only. Happy birthday."

"Oh! Thanks, you remembered it?"

“No, Nishi told me.”

He looked at Nishi, “Happy birthday,” said she.

“You remembered my birthday,” he said excitedly, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Duh, we are neighbours. I heard the sounds coming from your house, midnight.”

“Oh!” his lips formed a complete zero.

“So where’s the party?” I asked.

“Not today. I’m busy. Tomorrow.”

“Busy,” Nishi laughed loud “when did you get so busy.”

He took a deep breath trying to look calm, “Project.”

“Like you do anything in that project,” she sighs “its Surbhi who does all the work. You just sit there and make silly faces.”

He ignored her, looking at me he confirmed, “tomorrow?”

“Okay.” I smiled.

“Tomorrow at dominos. Same old mall,” said Sid.

Nishi sneezed. “Don’t sneeze like an old man,” Sid scolded her.

“I think I caught a cold recently,” said Nishi.

“Hmm, it’s too cold!” I sighed.

“Just confirming, are you seriously looking for a boyfriend?” Sid asked Nishi.

“Of course I am. Our challenge isn’t over yet.”

“Good. Keep trying, but it’s me who’s gonna win this bet,” he smirked.

Nishi stuck her tongue out at him, “You won’t.”

In order to hook them up I asked, “So, what kind of girl you looking?”

He smiled, “well, not the type who sneezes like an old man, at the very least.”

“When a girl sneezes, she should cover her mouth with her hand,” he added.

Nishi dodged the topic, “at what time is the party?”

“Keep the time early. It gets late in returning,” I pleaded.

“Ok then, how about 2 in the noon?” asked Sid

“Awesome,” said I with a thumbs up.

“Okay, I will tell the boys then.” He left to his seat waiting for Manas and Sam.

“Did you see him? His eyes were sparkling. I’m sure there’s something going on in his mind,” said I.

“There’s always some stupidity going in his mind. Let’s see what’s next in store,” said Nishi.

“Mm-hmm.” I smiled.

I forgot my lunch and Nishi knowingly didn’t bring in hoping of getting a birthday treat from Sid. So, we headed straight to the canteen for lunch. We entered the canteen gate when suddenly Nishi elbowed me.

“What?”

“Look its Sid,” her eyes pointed straight in the middle of the room. It was an epic scene. Three tables joined together in a row with only girls filling the space on those tables and there he was, Sid exactly in the middle surrounded by around 10 girls of our class. That was all girls we had in our class except me, Nishi and Seema. It was funny. Really funny. With that stupid face he looked more of a Casanova of the poor. I was sure the girls were just there to enjoy a free lavish lunch and Sid surely did this to impress. So this was the reason of that twinkle in his eye. With that face of his, it was surely a lame idea.

“So, this is the reason of him being busy today,” said Nishi.

“Tsk. But at least this means no one could be as ditzy as he is, right?” I smiled.

“Idiot, Simply idiot,” commented Nishi.

“But look, he is happy. So let him enjoy for the time being,” I winked at her and laughing we came out of the canteen, so that he won’t feel busted.

“We will see him tomorrow,” Nishi smirked.

“Mm-hmm,” I nodded, laughing.

“You know this world is made up of two types of people; who either impress with intelligence or amaze with stupidity,” I said.

“True and Sid is the latter case,” laughed Nishi.

“Yeah,” I laughed.

The next day was Sunday, we were to get a party from Sid. As decided I reached the mall entrance and saw Nishi waiting for me there. She was the first to reach.

“I had like a margarita pizza,” Nishi chirped “But a double cheese would be better.”

“What will you have?” she asked me.

When she didn’t get a reply she turned to look back and saw me rushing behind holding 3-4 pamphlets.

I smiled at her, “I got too many.”

“Don’t take them all, they are useless.”

“But it’s so hard to say no,” I said.

“Just ignore them and look away.”

“It’s so difficult to stand all day outside and distribute.” I folded the pamphlets in half “why can’t we be nice and throw the papers afterwards.” I smiled and threw them in a dustbin inside the mall.

“You are strange,” she laughed.

“You should call Sid and ask where he is,” I suggested.

She was about to call, when Sid came waving with Manas.

“Oh here he is,” said Nishi.

“Where’s Sam?” Nishi asked.

“On the way. He will reach soon. Let’s go,” said Sid.

We were walking when Nishi asked Sid, “how was the canteen party yesterday?”

Sid squirmed, “What are you saying, there wasn’t any.”

“Really, but I saw 10 girls-” she stopped when Sid shot his eyes to her, and he shook his head. ‘NO!’ he mouthed to her pleadingly.

We moved inside dominos. It was scarcely filled, so we took 2 adjacent tables. Nishi sat opposite me on one and Sid with Manas on the other.

“Where’s my gift?” asked Sid.

“Gifts are for party on the same day. Birthday gone, gift gone,” Nishi teased.

“Oh! so you convinced everyone, to not buy anything.”

“Yes,” she grinned.

“Doesn’t matter. I can say ‘better luck next time’” said Manas.

When Nishi didn’t tease him more he got relaxed and started bugging Manas with his vampire fetish. But it looked he was enjoying too as he was active in that chat. Me and Nishi sat there listening their conversation. Their mood was contagious and I found myself laughing as Sid tried to convince Manas that if a vampire married a werewolf and they had a baby then it would be a vampire werewolf while Manas was convinced that it would be a werewolf vampire. I chuckled at their interpretations. For



once I thought to shout, ‘guys they are rivals. That’s impossible.’ But I was more happy remaining quiet, their derivations were incomparable. Nishi looked like she was hoping a werewolf would crash through the wall and bite them.

“So what are you doing this valentine’s?” she asked me.

“Just staying home,” I said, and then added my ready made excuse, “I don’t want to catch an unwanted eye.”

“Understandable.” She picked up a rolled up napkin and tossed it at Sid, but he was way too busy with his werewolf/vampire fetish.

“What about Sam, what is he doing?”

Stupid question. How could I know. Before I could respond, Sid whipped around like someone had yelled his name. “What about my boyfriend?” Sid left his table and sat next to Nishi facing me. Manas took a chair from his table and placed it next to Sid. So now they all were facing me.

Nishi laughed, “I was asking Raks, what is Sam doing this valentines.”

“What’s he doing?” Sid asked wiggling his eyebrows.

Tucking my hair back, I shrugged, “I don’t know.”

Sid brows lowered, “what do you mean you don’t know?”

“Um, I just don’t know and why I be knowing anyway.” I used two fingers on each hand as quotation marks when I said, “I’m not his best friend.”

The two of them exchanged a look and then looked at Manas.

“I’m just listening,” Manas rose his hands. “I don’t know anything.”

Nishi said, “I’m kind of surprised he hasn’t said anything to you about it.”

Confusion rose. “Why are you surprised?” I asked.

Sid shot me a duh look, “I wouldn’t mention it, but the two of you seem to be the topic of conversation.”

“Oh my God.” I dropped my face into my hands.

Nishi giggled, “You scared her.”

Sid laughed. His white teeth gleamed against his tanned skin. “People just don’t understand your relationship. You have to admit, it’s a bit ambiguous.”

Nishi smiled, “everyone thinks, you two are in a relationship.”

“What?” Lifting my head, I stared at her. “I am not having a relationship with him. Trust me, he asked me —” I cut myself off. “We were just together for the project and that too is over now.”

“Whoa. Whoa. *Whoa.*” Sid practically fell over, “he asked you what?”

“Nothing.” I sat back, crossing my arms. “He hasn’t asked me anything.”

Sid looked at Nishi. “Is it just me or is she just not that smooth to pull off a lie?,” said Sid.

“Not that smooth,” Nishi commented, leaning on the table “What has he asked you?”

“Nothing!”

“Liar!” She punched me in the arm. “You’re lying!”

“Ouch! I—”

“We are your friends. It’s the law of friendship that you tell us things you don’t want to tell us,” grinned Nishi.

My mouth dropped open, “What? That makes no sense.”

“It is the law,” Sid nodded solemnly.

“What has he asked you?” Nishi persisted. “Did he ask you out on a date? Did he ask you to be his girlfriend? How about marry him? Or to just hang out? Did he —?”

“Oh my God!” There was no way out of this. I knew Nishi. She’d just keep going until the whole then thought I was getting married and having baby. “Okay. I’ll tell you if you promise not to freak out and scream.”

She nodded, “I promise.”

I took a deep breath. “Okay. It’s not a big deal. Sam has kind of been asking me out—”

“What?” Nishi screeched, and few heads turned towards us.

“Shhh! be quiet. Everyone is watching us,” I scolded her.

“Sorry. I just got excited,” she grinned.

“I can tell,” I said, wryly.

Nishi’s hands were clasped in front of her chest. “He’s been asking you out, like in the plural sense?”

I nodded. “Mm-hmm, but I’ve said a no every time.”

“You’ve said no?” Sid said loudly, and I shot up and smacked his arm. He flashed a smile, “sorry.”

Sitting back down, I eyed him. “Yes. I’ve said no.”

“Why?” he demanded.

“And he keeps asking?” asked Nishi at the same time.

“Yes, he keeps asking, but it’s like a running joke between us. He’s not serious,” I said.

Manas seriously listened without uttering a word but he wasn’t stunned. I guess he knew about Sam asking me out. He was Sam’s best friend he must have told him everything.

“How do you know he’s not being serious?” asked Nishi.

“Come on,” I raised my hands. “He’s not serious.”

“Why?” Sid was stunned apparently, “You’re a smart and funny girl. Apart from that you are also nice and pretty, and that kind of makes up for that.”

I didn’t say a word.

“What I’m trying to say is how do you know he hasn’t been serious?” asked Nishi.

I shook my head. “He’s not.”

“Get back to the important question,” Nishi said. “Why would you tell him no?”

“Why would I say yes?” *Could a hole open up and swallow me? Please?* “He’s just a flirt.”

Nishi smacked her hands to her cheeks “How can you be so judgemental, maybe he’s being serious this time.”

Sid shook his head. “He’s not a serial killer. So going out with him once won’t harm you.”

“Why are you two taking his side so much. Has he bribed you or something?” I asked.

They both giggled, “No.”

“I just don’t like him. There’s something about him which draws me away,” I said.

Sid stared at me, jaw slightly unhinged. “You really don’t like him”

“I don’t understand what you didn’t like,” Nishi said “He is one of the most eligible bachelors on our campus.”

“He’s too flirty,” I said, angrily.

Her jaw dropped open, “What! Flirty.” She shook her head slowly, “That’s a stupid reason. Someone please capture this with a picture.”

“Ha,” Sid grin made my anxiety rise. “Here comes Sam. Great timing bro.”

Nishi’s gaze got hung up on the upper part of his shirt which had 3 buttons open perfectly showcasing his bare

chest which was shaven.

“Isn’t he looking hot?” She whispered to me, leaning forward.

“Pervert,” whispered I with a grunt.

Nishi’s cheeks flushed several shades of pink.

I quickly picked my mobile from the table and opened the text box.

“Uh, what are you doing, Radhika?” asked Sam.

In my head, I strung together as many bombs as I could come up with, because I knew—oh, I knew—that Sid would not keep quiet. “Texting.”

“Texting?”

“Yeah.”

Sam tugged on the back of my chair “Why do I think that’s not what you’re doing?”

He sat beside me. If I moved my head *just* a fraction of inch to the right and tipped my chin down, which I had about three minutes ago, I could see his shaven chest. To avoid his gaze I face planted the table. Under the table, Nishi kicked my leg. I groaned as Nishi started giggling.

“Are you sick?” asked Sam.

“Aw, he’s so concerned, too cute” Nishi exclaimed.

“Thanks,” said Sam in a low tone with a blush.

I lifted my head to look at Sam, “I’m not sick.”

“Okay.” Sam glanced around, and Nishi broke out into a fit of giggles.

“What’s going on?” asked Sam, confused.

Before they could answer, I jumped in “aren’t you guys hungry?”

Nishi frowned, “no-one’s hungry. Don’t dodge the subject.”

I opened my mouth, but freaking Sid swept in. “Raks has just informed us that you’ve been asking her out and she’s been saying no, and we’ve been explaining to her that she’s insane.”

“Well then.” The hard look slipped off his face, and I wanted to slide under the table. “I like this conversation.”

Ugh.

“So it’s true?” Sid crossed his arms. “You’ve been asking her out?”

Sam cast me a sideways glance. “I have been, at least a dozen times since the beginning of August.”

On the front of me, Nishi squealed like she was a plush toy that was squeezed. “Since August?”

Sam nodded.

Nishi turned wide eyes on me, “and you haven’t said a word?”

“I’m sort of offended,” said Sam.

I elbowed him in the side. “No, you’re not. And it’s not like it’s everyone’s business.”

“But we’re your friends,” Nishi sounded so pitiful that I started to feel bad. She turned to Sam. “We totally support her going out with you.”

Okay. I didn’t feel bad for her.

“I love you guys,” Sam grinned at my arched look.

“We also told her you weren’t a serial killer, so going out once won’t harm” Nishi interjected.

Sam stared at me, amusement twinkling in his eyes. “Wow. This just keeps getting better.” Turning back to Sid and Nishi “She keeps turning me down. Breaks my little heart.”

I sighed. “He’s not being serious.”

“He looks serious,” Nishi said, all doe-eyed as she stared at Sam. He’d roped her in, dammit.

Sam made the most pitiful sound known to man, and I rolled my eyes. “And now she thinks I’m the next evil queen of snow white.”

“I don’t think you’re the next evil queen.” She smiled. “Besides, she has the wrong hair hairstyle for evil queen,” Nishi said and the boys laughed at her words.

“Uh-huh,” I murmured.

“Anyway, this is not about evil queen. This is about you, Raks” She grinned as I glared at her. “This fine young gentleman, who is not a serial killer, is asking you out. You’re single. He’s hot. You should say yes.”

“Oh my God.” I scrubbed my hands over my hot face, “aren’t you guys hungry, yet?”

Sam leaned on the table with his elbows, his brown eyes fixated on mine. “So what’s your story, sweetheart? Are you a man-hater in general, or do you just hate me?”

“I think it’s just you,” I grumbled. He laughed once, amused at my mood. “I can’t figure you out. You’re the first girl that’s ever been disgusted with me before dating me. You don’t get all flustered when you talk to me, and you don’t try to get my attention.”

“It’s not a ploy. I just don’t like you.”

“You wouldn’t care talking to me if you didn’t like me.”

My frown involuntarily smoothed and I sighed. “I didn’t say you’re a bad person. I just don’t like to be one of your ex’s.”

His eyes widened and he quivered with howling laughter. “Oh my *God*! You’re killing me! That’s it.” He looked at me “Trust me, you won’t.”

Sam’s deep chuckle crawled under my skin. “Go out with me, Radhika.”

Stunned, I turned to him. I couldn't believe he'd actually ask me out in front of them after all of this. I took a deep breath and said, "No."

"Ouch." He slammed his free hand against his chest. "You wound me." He turned towards others, "See, she keeps turning me down." He then started his stupid drama "That's enough, I wanna die. Somebody please kill me. Shoot me in the head."

Nishi shook his head. "You're an idiot, Raks."

"Whatever,"

I grumbled, grabbing my handbag. "I'm going home."

"We love you," said Nishi, smiling.

"Uh-huh."

Nishi giggled. "We do. We just question your decisions."

"I'm sure you two are bribed by him," I said.

Sam laughed, "good idea. I'm going to try it next time."

"I seriously doubt you are my friend," I said to Nishi.

"Uh-huh." She smiled. "Best friend dear. Your best friend."

Shaking my head, I stood. "Bye."

"Wait!" she said, jumping up and grabbing my hand "we didn't eat anything yet. You can go after eating."

"I'm staying only if you promise to stop this discussion."

"Ok, done." Nishi smiled.

Sid went to order at the counter. About a minute later my phone rang. It was from home. The sound was unclear and Nishi noisy, so I stood up and walked a few meters away. Turning back I saw Nishi and Sam murmuring.

Coming closer I heard them talking about a movie. Sid returned and asked Sam and Manas to help him bring



the orders. They returned shortly with the food. We finished eating.

“We are seeing a movie next. Are you coming?” Nishi asked me.

“Movie.” Sid gave a surprised look.

Under the table, Nishi kicked his leg. “Yeah! Movie,” he laughed, slyly.

“Are you coming?” she asked again.

“No, I’m not in the mood today. Maybe later,” I said.

“Me neither,” said Sam.

“Ok, its 4 pm. We are leaving for the 4:20 show.” Nishi turned to Sam, “will you drop her?”

“Okay,” Sam nodded.

“Bye guys I’m leaving. Enjoy,” I said and smiled.

Of course, Sam was already on his feet, waiting for me. I arched my brow at him. “Following me?”

“Like a true serial killer,” he said.

I cringed as we crossed the dominos and headed outside.

“I can go by myself,” I said.

Shoving his hands in his pockets he stopped. “I have nothing to do right now. I will drop you. I insist.”

We reached his car and drove towards my house. On the way I said, “you know they weren’t being serious, right? And I’m sorry about saying something to them about it. They just started pestering me about you and the next thing I know—”

“It’s okay,” he cut me off, by midway. “I don’t care.”

Looking up at him, I squinted. “You don’t care?”

He shook his head, and I was sort of floored. What person would want anyone to know that they’d been asking someone out and that person had been repeatedly turni

ng them down? I wouldn't want that known. And why was Sam still asking me out? It wasn't like I was the only option for him. With the unruly dark waves, the luminous brown eyes, the face and body to covet, Sam was the kind of guy that was never single for too long.

Sam had a lot of options, so why not explore them? Maybe he was. Contrary to what Sid and Nishi thought, I wasn't around him twenty-four-seven. I always saw him with other girls around campus. The asking me out bit had to be something he didn't take seriously. It couldn't be, not after almost 6 months of it or maybe he took it as a challenge when I turned him down and it was all ego thing going on. Whatever it was I just wanted to stay away from his trap.

"Uh-oh," he said.

"What?"

"You're thinking."

"I am."

"About what?" he asked.

"Nothing important." I smiled as I pushed away thoughts of him with other girls away.

"What are you doing this valentine? ,  
Going out with someone?"

I shook my head. "I'm just going to hang out with a good book and get some reading done."

"Cruel."

"Huh?" I snap out of my thoughts to find him staring down on the road with that smirk on his face, implying he said something to me and I missed it because I was too busy gawking. I clear my throat, my ears burning with the rest of my face. I want to ask him why he keeps calling me that, but all I can manage is, "Pardon?"

"Nothing," said he and laughed.

We reached my home and coming out I said, “thanks.”

“My pleasure,” he said with a smile and I quickly moved inside my house.

## CHAPTER-9

### The Missing Love Letter

Few weeks after Sid's birthday, the cold subsided. It was as March and from past 2-3 days Manas looked a bit gloomy. I never saw him that way. Something was troubling him. He was quiet.

Me, Nishi, Sid and Manas were talking outside the class in the morning when came Sam running towards us.

"Guys! check this out," said Sam.

We encircled him.

"What is it?" Sid asked, enthusiastically.

"Funniest video of the year" He opened his phone gallery and played a video. We all bent a little to watch.

The video began with a woman in her mid-forties draped in a blue sari holding a belan in her hand.

She was running after a twenties boy in a colony. Maybe the boy's mother. The faces were unclear but yeah it was damn funny. The lady threw her belan at the boy but it got missed, "Nalayak ruk. Kahan bhag raha hain," she shouted. "Aj tujhe mar ke hi dum lungi." She quickly pulled out both her chappals and threw one at him. SMA SH! it hit his head. Rubbing his head he kept running. The bare foot woman now with a chappal in one hand was running after him, "suicide karega. Ruk main khud tera gala daba dunggi. Ek bar hath toh lag ja aise sutungi. Sar a pyaar ka bukhaar utar jayega." She threw the other chappal, it hits his leg. The boy fell and she grabbed his collar and then 4-5 slaps everywhere. "Tu gar chal, main karati hu suicide tera." Holding his ear hard she forcefully dragged him inside the house. "Ouch! Mom, it hurts. I'm sorry."

"It's going to hurt more once you are inside," she said.

We laughed till the video lasted.

“Awesome bro, where did you get this from?” Sid asked laughing hard.

“YouTube.”

I saw Manas, he wasn't laughing. Moreover, he looked flustered. Not upset, but unnerved. His face turned pale and two drops of sweat slid from his forehead to his chin. There was something. I asked Sam to play the video again and saw it carefully, checking each detail this time. Then suddenly, I caught something.

“Isn't this the same shirt Manas was wearing yesterday?” I said.

Everyone looked at him in shock, Sid pointed at Manas's wristwatch “and look the same watch from the video.” We looked at the video, it was the same watch. Manas tried to escape but Sam held him, “where are you leaving buddy?”

Nishi looked at the video and then to Manas. Her voice trebled as she moved on “it's-its true? It's Manas” Faltered Nishi. Sam nodded, smiling.

We were confused as to why was he beaten so badly and hold on, suicide, love. When did he get a girlfriend? We always thought he was single. He never said a word about his girlfriend. What was going on, we were shocked and speechless.

Manas tried to snatch Sam's phone, “delete that stuff” but he kept it out of his reach.

“No, I would keep it as a souvenir,” he grinned.

“This thing is on YouTube?” asked Sid.

“No, I got this filmed myself,” said Sam and smiled.

“How come?” I asked.

“I went to his house yesterday. Entering his lane I saw aunty running after him and immediately shoot this” h

e flashed a wicked smile. Manas face went low. Watery eyes. I felt really bad for him.

Sid went to him and put his hand on his shoulder “I know how it feels- being heartbroken,” he said, heavily.

“How can you understand? You never had a relationship silly” said Nishi.

“But I got rejected so many times. So, I know the pain” snapped Sid.

I looked at Manas, really confused as to how a mature and sensible boy like him can go for such a thing as suicide. Unimaginable. “Why did you try to suicide?” I asked him.

“My girlfriend dumped me and I couldn’t take it. She was my first girlfriend.”

“Why did she dump you?” asked Sid.

“Because she thinks I was too serious too soon.”

The lamest excuse I can ever hear. How can someone breakoff because the other person is serious for him. I guess she didn’t had the thing called brain.

“Buddy, then she didn’t loved you. You should be happy it ended,” said Sam.

“Really, that girl was an idiot. If I had a boyfriend like you, I would never ever dump him,” said Nishi and he quiet liked it because his gloominess disappeared.

“She was stupid,” I mentioned.

“Show us her pic?” Sid demanded.

Manas opened his phone and showed us the picture of the girl. I was shocked to see that raw-boned dark girl. She had noodle hair up to her shoulder dyed in brown and her upper jaw was so intense that I could see it protruding from her skin. Upper lip slight up showing the upper teeth line. Eyes as small as buttons and clothes, the stupidest fashion sense anyone can have. It can’t be said sense. Sid had a better fashion sense then

her. How on earth can someone suicide for her. Manas was way too handsome for her. Even my dearest friend Nishi was way more prettier than her. I now understood why he never spoke of her.

“You joking. How on earth can someone suicide for this thing” Nishi said, surprised.

“Heinous. I would never date her,” said Sid.

“Seriously, it’s a crime to have a girlfriend like her,” said I and everyone laughed.

“How can you even propose to her,” said Nishi with a flabbergasted look.

“I didn’t. She was my neighbour. She proposed me.”

“That makes sense. No one can propose her,” laughed Sid.

“She was a party animal. But I always believed she would change.”

“Dude, you are lucky that she’s out of your life, cheer up and smile. You deserve better,” said Sam.

Manas mood got lifted instantly.

“Yeah!” Nishi smiled.

“Your mom is really cool,” said Sid with a wink.

She was a policeman’s wife. Can’t be expected less from her. But she did the right thing beating him. It was really needed. I smiled as I thought this. Few minutes later the professor arrived and we rushed inside and got seated. Nishi was consumed in thoughts. God knows what she was thinking about but she was calm the whole day which was not normal. After college everyone moved out. I was left with Nishi in the class.

“Nishi,” I said.

She didn’t respond.

“Nishi,” I called again. “Don’t you have to go home.”

She snapped out of her thoughts snickering at me “Why are you snickering at me. You are in love with someone, aren’t you?” I pestered her.

“No! Don’t be stupid.”

“I can tell. You smell love,” I teased her.

“I was just thinking about Manas. He’s so nice. I feel like hugging him.”

*What?* I saw her with a puzzled look.

She looked at me “I mean, who in this world suicides for a girl. And that too for a girl like her. Its rare.”

“Hmm!” I agreed. “So you love Manas, right?”

“You are kidding,” she gave a broken laugh “we had look ridiculous. A comic duo.”

“So, you love him,” I said that with a wink.

“Leave that. Let’s go home.”

Manas was absent the next day and two days after that. He never missed college for three consecutive days. Nishi was tensed, I could sense that but she remained calm. In lunch, Nishi went straight to Sam’s seat, he was showing his notebook in his bag. I too went up to him. She pointed at the seat next to Sam which was Manas’s. “Come to think of it, the person who sits at this desk hasn’t come to college.”

“Oh, you mean Manas? , He’s ill” said Sam.

“But he never missed 3 days in a queue, no matter what. He might be terribly ill,” said Sid, sitting next to Sam.

Sam looked a bit tensed “Yeah.”

“Why don’t we go check on him after college,” Sam suggested.

“Hey, you lot!” came a firm voice.

We turned back. “Mr. Awasthi!” whispered Nishi.



“You guys are the ones who haven’t submitted their assignments yet. I shall get them by tomorrow and inform Manas too.”

“And if you fail, I’ll put a zero on him and the whole lot of you. Got that?” he added.

“Ok, sir” we nodded and he left.

“Whew!

He really gets scary at times,” Sid smiled and everyone laughed.

“Let’s go to see Manas in the last lecture, it’s free” I suggested and everyone agreed.

After the 7<sup>th</sup> lecture we followed Sam, took a public bus to Manas’s stop. Walked into his colony and finally reached his house. Sam pressed his doorbell. The lady from the video opened the door. The moment I saw her I urged to laugh as I had a flashback of the video but I somehow managed to subside that urge.

“Hello aunty,” greeted Sam.

“Namaste! Aunty,” I greeted her.

Sam pointed to us, “they are Manas’s college friends.”

“Come in,” said his mom.

“Who’s on the door?” a voice came from inside.

“Dad its Manas’s friends,” answered she.

Moving inside, I saw an old man in the drawing room. He was so close to the TV as if somehow the man from inside the television dropped out of it, he would instantly catch him.

“Tsk. Old geezer, his grandpa. Watches Astha channel all day” said Sam.

“You kids go to his room till I bring something for you to eat,” said his mom.

“No aunty. Please don’t. We will be leaving soon,” said I. others nodded.

Headed by his mom we climbed the stairs up to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and reached his room's door. She knocked his door. "Manas open the door. Your friends from college are here to see you," she said.

He opened the door and she left. We went inside, Manas was wrapped up in a futon and looked sad. All the windows were closed. I felt a bit uncomfortable.

"How are you feeling now?" asked Nishi.

"I'm ok."

"Hey, Manas. Doesn't that make you feel hot?" asked Sam indicating to his futon.

"Not really," said Manas.

"It's suffocating. You should get some fresh air in here," I said.

"I can't," he brought his futon more to him. "I'm feeling cold even when I'm wrapped in this."

"That's understandable," Sid pointed his finger to a hole in the futon. "It's getting thin since it has a tear in it."

Nishi and me giggled.

"What?" Manas looked at his futon, "you're right."

"Maybe you should buy a new one," suggested Sid and laughed.

Sam got up and pulled his futon from him. "Tsk. Give me that! You are ok now." Seeing Manas defeated face, everyone laughed.

"I'm going to McD," Sid stood up "you people coming?"

I stood up, "yes." Nishi and Sam started to leave as well.

"Wait for me!" Manas stood at once. Quickly pushed his toes in his shoes and came running.

"What. You aren't feeling cold now," Sid teased.

“No. that was just to gain some sympathy,” he grinned making us all chuckle.

“Are you coming to college tomorrow?” asked Sam.

“Yes,” Manas said.

Smiling we went out of his house. We reached McD, ate and left for our respective homes.

I wondered how Sam and Manas were best buddies and then remembered me and Nishi and a smile of satisfaction crossed my lips. While Sameer was a stud, Manas was an introvert. A one-woman-man who prized thoughtful conversation above lipstick and high-heels. He was handsome alright, but inside he was beautiful.

Next morning, Sid arrived on campus, weirdly early for probably the first time in his life. Nishi came after. I was sitting at my middle row seat and Sid leaned over my table talking. No one was there, “Morning” she greeted.

“Ah, Nishi, morning” said I.

Nishi got long waves, her hair was unknotted unlike other days. “You changed your hairstyle today. What’s up sweetie?” I teased her.

“Nothing,” she blushed and made herself comfortable next to me.

I took two short sniffs. “Hey, what’s that smell?”

“Reeks of perfume,” Sid commented.

“Really? , Is the smell that strong?” she asked.

Sid nodded.

“You are a bio-hazard for wearing so much perfume,” said I and laughed.

“I bet you can kill bugs with that smell. Can work as pesticide,” Sid flashed a grin.

Nishi stood up and went towards Sid. “Hey, smell and insects have nothing to do with each other,” she faced him.

“You stink,” Sid pressed his hand on his nose. “Don’t come so close.”

“But this is rather unusual for you to change your hairstyle and come to college wearing perfume, that is—”

“Yeah!” Sid interrupted me. “Come to think of it, you never cared about things like that except your clothes,” said Sid.

“Did something happen, Nishi?” I wiggled my eyebrows.

“It’s nothing really,” she blushed.

I narrowed my eyes, “how suspicious.”

Nishi got flustered. “It’s love, isn’t it?” I smirked.

“Huh? Nishi’s in love?” said Sid, shocked.

Nishi gave an immediate reply, “no, it’s not like that.”

Sam entered the class and quietly saw the drama standing in one corner. We didn’t notice him.

Sid gave a wicked smile, “TRAITOR DETECTED.”

Sid curled the fingers of his right hand and used it as a mike. “How you feeling baby?”

“Yikes!” Nishi bit her lower lip.

“What’s happening?” asked Sam to Sid.

“She’s been brought in the traitor corner.” Sid grinned.

Sam looked at him, confused. “In this corner are those who get teased and bullied in many ways,” replied Sid.

“Speak up.” I pestered at her. “How’s the feel?”

“Oh god! It’s nothing like that,” she shrugged. “I was bored of the old look, just wanted a change.”

“Oh,” Sid’s face looked defeated.

But I was sure there was something. I was her best friend, it wasn't difficult for me to sense. I knew her so well. I smiled at her. After a minute, the rest of the faces started appearing one by one. Mr. Awasthi entered the class and Manas after him. He headed straight to the last as all the front seats were occupied.

"Radhika, have you done the assignment?" she whispered in mock horror.

"Mm-hmm," I nodded, smiling.

"Pass on. I forgot." she whispered.

I handed my notebook to her, at that moment "Nishi," a slow voice came from the bench behind us, it was Sid. Nishi bent a little backwards and Sid leaned forward to whisper, "have you done the assignment?"

"No, but Radhika has" she whispered.

"Raks," called Sid, slowly.

"Yes."

"I want your assignment," whispered Sid.

"It's with her."

"Nishi," he poked her "give her notebook to me."

"I haven't completed yet. Let me finish."

"Pass on hers once you are done."

"Ok," she hissed and Sid laid back on his seat.

We were on the middle row. Sir in the front. Mr. Awasthi was too strict. He could easily see us from the foot raised platform, so Nishi dropped the idea to copy in his lecture and putted the two assignment notebooks onto the support shelf below the table. When Mr. Awasthi was busy tracing a whole program on the board, Nishi whispered to me "Someone has asked me to meet today."

"Oh, so it's a date," I teased her. "I knew it."

She slowly pulled out a letter from her notebook and showed it to me. "I have also written a love letter for him."

"Wow girl, that's so romantic" I whispered.

"Is love letters good? Will he be impressed?"

I smiled and whispered, "totally."

"Good," she said and sir saw her "Nishi, what are you talking?"

She got hell lot nervous and quickly shoved the letter in one of the notebooks on the support shelf. She stood up, "nothing sir. I was just asking about the next class."

"First pay attention to this class," scolded sir.

"Sorry," she nodded and quickly sat down totally forgetting about the letter. Mr. Awasthi went and arrived Mr. Sen. As Mr. Sen paid more attention to the board and less to the students, she got the chance to copy. It took her the whole lecture to complete. After finishing, she passed my assignment backwards. "She is saying to submit hers, once you are done." Said Nishi.

"Okay," said Sid.

The professor was late so, Nishi left the class to drink water. After 2 minutes, "Raks, pass on Nishi's assignment," said Sid.

I looked at the support shelf and handed it to him, "Submit it too."

"Okay," said Sid.

We had no class after lunch so everyone left. I was alone with Nishi now. After having lunch, we went to the washroom as Nishi wanted to correct her appearance. She looked in the mirror and applied pink lipstick. "So at what times the meet?" I asked.

"After lunch," she smiled. "He will message me when he's free."

“Who’s the boy?”

“Rohit.”

“Who?” ,I frowned.

“Rohit. Your old classmate,” she repeated.

“Are you mad.” I ranted annoyed. “I warned you then also. He’s a complete jerk and has a girlfriend, you idiot.”

“I know,” she said.

“How can you be so stupid then?”

“It’s just for the bet.” She tried to calm me. “Sid doesn’t know him or his girlfriend. Once I show It to Sid, I’m gonna breakup the next day.”

“Moreover, it was fun talking to him. He’s really funny,” she added.

“I really don’t understand,” I shook my head.

“I can’t lose to that idiot and getting Rohit hooked was easy,” she winked.

“You really don’t need a love letter to impress that moron,” I said.

“I do,” she said with a slow voice and I could immediately sense something fishy.

“I want to confess something,” she said.

“What?”

“He asked me to meet him because of you.”

“What?” I was totally confused. How come I get in the picture?

“Actually I was...” her voice trembled. “talking to him being you.”

“What!!” my jaw dropped open “You used my name.” I fidgeted, “You idiot, what were you thinking. What the hell I’m going to do now.”

“Calm down. It’s not that bad.”

“Oh really! Its hell lot bad. You were talking to him for so long and god knows what you told him. I’m screwed. Completely screwed,” said I, terrified.

“Don’t worry, just come with me. I will explain everything to him,” assured Nishi.

“I don’t trust you. You are the worst friend anyone can get,” I huffed. “My good image is shattered forever.”

“I will get everything corrected. Just give me a chance,” she pleaded.

“Ok. But I’m not going with you,” said I.

“Ok then, I resume to my old plan,” she said.

I rose a brow, “what was the plan?”

“I’m going to meet him. Tell him the truth. Hand on the letter and leave rest to him.”

“Stupid plan,” I scoffed. “You should have told him the truth before.”

“I’m sure he won’t say a no. I kind of impressed him with my chats,” said Nishi.

I smirked. “Don’t get the wrong idea, that idiot can be impressed by anything.”

It was 2:30 when Nishi’s phone beeped. She opened a text. “He has asked me to meet him in the canteen in 15 minutes.”

“Ok, go.”

“Let me put that letter in my pocket first,” she fished for the letter in her bag and then her face went pale “where’s the letter,” she screamed.

“What? Look properly it should be there.”

“No, it’s not” she looked at me in mock horror.

“Why are you so scared?” I asked her.

“Because I signed it with my name.”



“That’s a matter of tension then. Maybe you dropped it in class,” I said and we quickly rushed to the class. We looked at our support shelf. Under our table and then crazily searched for it in the whole class.

Nishi screamed, “it’s not here.”

“Wait! When did you last saw that letter?” I asked.

“When Mr. Awasthi called me, I put that in —” she trailed off and quickly searched for her notebook in her bag.

“My assignment notebook, where is it?” she said loudly, terrified.

“What! It was in that.” I pressed my head with my palm. “I gave it to Sid. Call him quickly.”

“God! You are a stupidity queen,” I added.

She called Sid. “His phone is unreachable. What should I do now.” She fidgeted.

“Then call Sam and ask where Sid is.”

She quickly dialled Sam’s number “Hello Sameer. Where’s Sid?”

“He went home.”

“My assignment?”

“Submitted.”

“Ok, bye.”

Nishi looked at me in horror, “he submitted the assignment”

“Awesome,” I scolded her. “What are you going to do now?”

She cleared her thoughts, “I have to get the letter back before Mr. Awasthi finds it.”

“You mean you are going to sneak into his office” I asked, shocked.

“I have no other option” she looked at her watch. “2:45. Rohit will be waiting for me. What should I do” she looked at me “will you please meet him and talk till I return.”

“No way,” I countered.

“Please,” she pleaded.

“Hey!” I shouted. “Don’t bring me into your little love nest.”

Her eyes got wet, she was about to shed tears. “Please?” she begged with palms tightly pressed together. “I won’t ask for anything after it. It’s the last.”

“Ok, don’t cry here.” I was about to say more when her phone beep interrupted me. She read his text, “sorry the doctor’s taking time. Will be there in 5 minutes.” Nishi texted back “doctor, what happened?” she got an immediate reply “I’m having fever.”

“Good,” I smiled of relief. “Tell him to take rest and plan to meet some other day.”

She texted him, “take rest. I’ll meet you later.”

She got an immediate reply, “no, I’m done. Coming in 2 minutes.”

*What the hell?* I sweat in anxiety, “but Nishi what am I going to say to him. It was you who was talking.”

“It’s simple,” she smiled. “You just need to talk less. Just ask and smile.”

“But ask what?” I frowned.

“His likes, hobby, family, anything. Just keep him busy till I reach.”

“Ok, but come fast. If you get late. I’ll leave.”

“Ok, I’ll be there. Now run.”

I speed walked to the canteen. He didn’t arrive by then. I took a seat and waited for Nishi’s message. A minute later,

“Hi!” said Rohit. And my gaze lifted from my mobile to his stupid pale face. That moment I looked calm but inside my head I’ve killed Nishi 10 times, in 2 minutes, in 10 different ways.

There were moments in my life where I had no idea how I got where I was. Like what exactly had occurred to create the situation I was in? ;all thanks to Nishi.

It was too difficult to sit there and talk to an idiot who you never wanted to see again. He was more nervous than I was. After few seconds the silence was broken by him. He started talking about first year. Then he offered to bring something to eat. I strongly said No. I didn’t want to stay long. He insisted to bring soft drink. I said NO but still he went to bring something. I quickly messaged Nishi, “come fast. It’s irritating.” She texted back, “I’m outside staffroom waiting for sir to leave. Will be there soon.”

He returned with 2 frooti’s. I tried to scare him away by being boring but he looked impervious. Nishi words flashed. Just ask, don’t tell. I asked about his hobbies. But he had only one, playing basketball. Such a useless fellow. Even though I knew he probably suspected I didn’t know squat about basketball, he went along with it. “I was the point guard, I did best in defence.”

“Oh!” I nodded like I had a clue what any of that meant.

He then told me that he dropped his school friend, Barkha which was in the same college to the bus stop yesterday. “She wanted to go home,” he said that in a way like I didn’t know she was his girlfriend. Or maybe he was trying to see if I showed any signs of jealousy. But I was unaffected. How can I be affected, I never liked this boy. Under the table, I messaged Nishi “can’t hold more. Come ryt now.”

She texted back, “Leaving. Will be there in 5 minutes.”

I took a breath in relief, just 5 minutes, I can handle that.

I smiled and then asked about his family which was a mistake I did. Such a big family. He kept on talking about his cousins and the way they looked. By the time he stopped I could point out his cousins with their names, if I ever meet them.

I looked at my watch, it was 20 minutes past that message. I couldn't hold and left. That 1 hour was the hardest hour of my college life. Even Sam wasn't irritating that much. Moving out of the college exit, I took a bus and was midway home when I got a call from Nishi saying "I'm coming."

"I'm in the bus, going home. He left. Talk to you later."

After an hour I got her call again.

"Hey! you reached home?" asked Nishi.

"Yes, half hour ago."

"I just reached."

"Okay."

"How was it?" she asked.

"Shut up, why didn't you arrive?"

"Mr.

Awasthi caught me coming out of his office and then I had a good scolding about my grades."

"Did you get the letter?" I asked.

"No, it's with Sid. Sir said after checking, Sid took the notebooks with him. I'm going to his house. I'm sure he didn't see it. He's too careless."

"That's good."

"Coming to college tomorrow?" Nishi asked.

"Sure, if my head stops hurting. That nincompoop got me headache. See you tomorrow."

She laughed, “Poor girl.”

“And I forgot, that moron was asking the route to railway station. So text him the route,” Said I.

“Ok,” she said.

“Wait!” I shouted.

“Just give him the wrong route and let him disappear forever,” I laughed.

She laughed, “I guess he irritated you to hell.”

“Yeah. Now buzz off you too, I need some sleep.”

After disconnecting the call, Nishi messaged Rohit and went straight to Sid’s house. Sid opened the door and she went in.

“I want my assignment notebook,” said Nishi.

“Wait Here. I’m bringing,” Sid went in and after a minute returned with her notebook. He handed it to her. She vigorously flipped the pages but much to her shock the letter wasn’t there. She got angry, “where’s the letter?”

“Which letter?” he asked, surprised.

“The one which was in my notebook.”

“I didn’t see any.”

“You lying,” said Nishi.

“I swear, I know nothing of any letter. I didn’t see any.”

“Okay,” she left his house.

I had just fallen asleep when my phone rang. I looked at the screen with eyes half shut. It was Nishi.

“Please die,” I murmured. This girl can’t let me sleep in peace. I rejected the call and after switching off the phone went to sleep again.

The next morning when I entered the class, Nishi came in running. “Radhika!”

“Wait, catch your breath. What happened?”

“It’s not with Sid,” she said.

“What?”

How can the letter just disappear to nowhere? Did it get legs?”

I got scared too but then I an idea stuck me. “Just forget it. It’s not a big deal. If someone finds out just say you didn’t write it. Someone played a prank or so.”

Nishi face gleamed. “Wow, you rock. That’s an awesome idea.” She hugged me.

“Easy girl.” I pulled her back. “We are in class. Others will be coming soon.”

Sid entered smiling. He saw her hugging me. He handed me my notebook.

“Thanks,” I smiled.

Sid went to sit and I flipped the pages to confirm if it was there. “Your letter did get legs,” I giggled.

“Mm-hmm,” Nishi grinned.

After having our lunch, me and Nishi were talking in the class when Manas arrived. “Nishi,” he called from her back. I signalled her to look back. She turned, “Yes.”

“I need to have a word,” said Manas, calmly. “Come with me.”

“Okay.” They moved out of the class and walked to the corridor. They were far from me but I could still see them. Manas looked serious. I couldn’t see Nishi’s face as her back was towards me but I saw her nod her head twice.

After Manas left Nishi ran straight to me. She scrambled to her feet, so happy she felt as though a balloon was swelling inside her. Her cheeks were red and she couldn’t stop laughing.

I thought some shock made her go mad. “Nishi, what in the world just happened?” I asked.

She wiggled the letter showing me, "Where did you get this?" I asked.

Before she could answer, Sid jerked the letter sharply out of her hand and ran in the class. "That's mine," shouted Nishi, trying to snatch it back by running after him.

"What's in there?" Sid sneered. Nishi caught him but he held it high out of her reach "I can't imagine what's inside since I didn't peek" Sid shake the letter open with one hand and glanced at it. For a moment it looked as though she would faint of embarrassment. He read the first line "Stop reading it," said Nishi, furiously "That's mine."

"Oh, a love letter" Sid smirked.

"You moron, give it back to me" Nishi shouted trying to snatch again.

I went straight to them and snatched the letter, "Enough Sid," I scolded him. Defeated he left the class. I handed the letter back to her, "you should be more careful."

We went to sit at our seat. "So, where I was" I tried to remember "oh yes! Where did you get this letter?"

She smiled, "It was in my assignment notebook. Manas found it and kept it with him."

"Okay I got it." I smiled. "So Sid asked the notebook for Manas. After taking it from me he passed it and that's how the letter landed into Manas's hands."

Nishi nodded, happily.

"But why are you so happy?" I asked, flustered. *What was there to laugh?*

"Manas thought that letter was for him and loved the idea. We are now a couple," she flashed a grin.

"Oho, lucky girl" I teased her.

She smiled widely, but then her face grew troubled, “Oh gosh,” she uttered pressing her palm hard on her forehead.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Rohit.”

“Where?” I frantically looked at the corridor.

“He’s not here but what should I do now?”

“First, bring me out of your mess. Tell Rohit the truth,” I said.

“Yes I will,” said Nishi and typed on her mobile but then backspaced the text. She looked at me in mock horror.

“Now What?” I asked.

“I once saw Manas talking to Rohit. I guess they are friends. If I tell Rohit the truth and anyhow it reaches Manas ears and as he hates mean and flirty girls, I will encounter a breakup before my relationship starts.” She looked at me helplessly. “I don’t wanna lose him but I can’t tarnish your image as well.” A tear oozed out from her eye, “it’s all my fault. I’m an idiot.”

I wiped the tear off her cheek, “don’t worry. I have a solution.” I smiled.

“Really!” she stood up at once, “you are a keeper. You always come up with great solutions. I doubt what had I do without you,” she smiled.

“Buttering,” I smirked.

Nishi giggled.

“Forget you ever talked to him,” I said.

She looked at me, perplexed. “I didn’t get you.”

“I mean, let him think it was me who was chatting.”

“But that’s wrong. I have to clear it out,” she insisted.

“Listen! I really don’t have any problem.”



“I can’t be that selfish. I will tell him and whatever happens next, I will deal with it,” said Nishi.

“Sweetie he doesn’t matters to me, so I don’t give a damn at what he thinks. You are more important than him. So just forget about everything and don’t message him.”

“You sure?”

I nodded. She hugged me tight. “You are the bestest friend anyone can get. Love you.”

“But I hate you.” I laughed.

She didn’t move back. “Okay, that’s enough. Two hugs in a day. I can’t handle it,” I smiled pulling her away.

“And if he asks you out again just in case, but I’m sure he won’t, because I tried to appear as boring as I could to draw him away; just ignore.” I added.

“I guess ignoring won’t work. Did it work on Sam?”

“No,” I said.

“Hey, I got it” her eyes sparkled “how about clingy, Sam’s idea” she winked at me. “It’s really gonna scare him. He will be running away in no time,” she smirked.

“Cool,” said I with a wink. “This whole date stuff will be our secret forever. Never disclose it ,Okay?”

“Okay,” she smiled.

“Now enjoy.” I ruffled her hair “silly girl.”

“My hair. Now I have to set them again.”

“That’s a small punishment for your idiocy,” I stuck my tongue out at her.

The next morning Nishi announced to Sid about her dating Manas. Nishi was happy and Sid lost the bet. He looked mournful. His sadness continued till the last class. He was quietly seated behind us with the defeated face. When everyone left, I went to him to talk.

“Crap! I lost to that damn Nishi,” he pushed his lower lip forward.

“How long are you going to mope for?” I laughed. “Come on, cheer up. It’s just a bet. Let’s leave now.”

“Okay!” said he and we all left to your houses.

It was an eventful week, a lot happened. Nishi was happy. Sid tried to look happy. Sam was the same. Manas happy too. And fortunately my headache was gone.

There was almost 30cm difference in their heights because of that, they attracted unwanted attention easily whenever they were together but it never troubled them. Nishi was a confident adrenaline junky. A girl of 4 feet 9 inches, she was shorter than the average girl, and Manas, a quiet homebody, 5 feet 10, was taller than the average boy. They were a couple that seemed completely ridiculous for each other from the outside but completely right everywhere else.

## CHAPTER-10

### Cupid Again

Monday; two weeks before February. We were in the computer lab. “He’s definitely staring at you,” Nishi whispered, leaning back to peek across the room.

“Stop looking, dummy, he’s going to see you.” I scolded.

Nishi smiled and waved. “He’s already seen me.”

“He’s still staring,” said Nishi. I hesitated for a moment, and then finally worked up enough courage to look in his direction. Rohan was looking right at me, grinning.

I returned his smile, and then pretended to type something on my computer “Is he still staring?” I murmured.

“Yes,” she giggled.

After lab, Nishi and I made our way down the stairs from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor to the ground. Manas was on a 2 day holiday to attend a cousin’s wedding. She was still laughing on Rohan’s behaviour when Sid and Sam approached from the lift.

“What’s so funny?” asked Sid.

“Oh, a guy in the lab was staring at Radhika all hour. It was adorable.”

“Who was it?” Sam grimaced.

I readjusted my backpack, prompting Sam to slide it off my arms and hold it. I shook my head, “Mare’s imagining things.”

“Raks! you big fat liar! It was Rohan, and he was being *so* obvious. The guy was practically drooling,” said Nishi.

Sam’s expression twisted into disgust, “Rohan Sharma?”

Nishi nodded, laughing.

A minute later Rohan stopped me in the hall, “Radhika.”

Sam was glaring at him, and I had the impression he was trying to shoot lasers out of his eyes to make him stop speaking. I giggled at his exasperated expression and pulled away from him to answer it.

“Yes” I replied, subsiding my laugh that was building up inside.

“We will be going now,” Nishi grabbed the two boys and took them a few meters away from me. I saw them leaving and instantly became nervous.

“We have never talked much,” said Rohan.

“Mm-hmm.”

“Are you free this weekend?” he asked.

“Actually I have plans this weekend.”

“Then what about next week?”

What the hell am I going to say? Without being too obvious, I frantically search the hall for my best friend. Where is she? Gone, leaving me here to deal with. Sam saw me looking a bit uncomfortable and beckoned “Radhika!”

“Hurry up! we are getting late” Sam said, loudly.

“Coming” I said, loudly. What a relief. I was happy he interrupted. At that moment I actually thought of switching my best friend with Manas’s. *Thanks*. I looked back at Rohan who was waiting for a reply.

“Got to go. I’ll tell you later,” I smiled and rushed towards them. Rohan left.

“You traitor,” I whacked hard at Nishi’s arm.

“Ouch, I just thought we’d be in your way” said Nishi rubbing her arm.

“Your concern was completely unnecessary,” I scoffed. We all walked back to our class.

The end of next day wouldn't be called a perfect end. Rohan tried to talk and whenever I saw him coming towards me, I would make an excuse and run from there. Nishi surely enjoyed that but Sam and Sid sat quietly without uttering a word.

I was a bit irritated, so skipped college the next day. On Thursday, I went to college and found Sam on the entry gate. As we walked together in the class, everyone looked at us. Their look made me uncomfortable. I absolutely loathed being late. I hated for people to turn around and stare, which they always did when you entered a classroom a minute after class started. Every working day I would leave fifteen minutes early so I would arrive ten minutes before my nine-thirty class began but today I wasn't late so why the class was staring at me, maybe the gaze was because I entered with Sam so, I chased away all the silly thoughts coming to my mind.

In the lunch break, Nishi left to drink water and Surbhi came to me. “So it's true that you and Sam are a couple now.”

“What?” ,my jaw dropped open “we aren't.”

“Hot and smart. You've got a real winner on your hands, Radhika!” Surbhi shouts extra loud so both of the boys behind me, Sam and Sid can hear. I grab hold of her arm and tug her away. She's already sputtering apologies. “Jeez, Radhika. I'm sorry.”

I saw Nishi coming back, “please excuse me.” I walked straight to her. “Why did you do that?” I scolded.

“Do what?,” she said, flustered.

“Imaginary pair me up with Sam when you know I'm not into him,” I said, angrily.

“It wasn't me,” said Nishi.

“Now I’m mad. If you didn’t do it, then who else would.”

“It was Sam,” said Nishi.

My eyes widened “Why didn’t you inform me?”

“He told me yesterday that you two are dating but I thought it was a joke so, I just ignored him.” She smiled. “He even told me that you kissed him.”

I stood there in stunned silence, but beyond the shock, anger simmered in my veins like a slow-burning brushfire. I angrily went to Sam. I grabbed his arm and dragged him out of the class. “Easy sweetheart,” said Sam. Nishi and Sid chuckled and Sam smiled at them. I brought him to a quiet corner of the corridor.

“Stop sprouting crap about me,” I scolded him. “If it’s a joke, stop it right now. I’m not entertained.”

He shook his head and smiled.

“When did I kiss you? , where and when?,” I frowned.

“Oh dear, don’t you remember” he blushed. “A night before yesterday when I proposed you. You finally said yes and kissed me.”

What the hell, earlier Rohan was irritating me and now Sam. “Are you out of your mind?”

He nodded, smiling. “From tomorrow.”

“Don’t instigate me to slap you,” I said, angrily.

He brought his cheek closer to me, “all yours.”

“Oh god! This boy is such a big flirt,” I huffed.

“Ok” He turned to serious. “I did this to save you from further stupid future proposals.”

I shot him a dead look “That’s none of your business.”

A residual smile lingered on his face, making the dimple in his cheek sink in. The more he smiled, the more

I wanted to hate him, and yet it was the very thing that made hating him impossible.

“You are going to take responsibility for that. This disaster is all your fault,” I scolded him. “You are the reason for that crazy rumour to spread around.”

“You didn’t tell anyone else that we kissed, did you?” I asked.

He nodded with a faint smile.

“Idiot! Idiot! Idiot! What did you do that for? I’m sure it’s spread everywhere by now. What I’m going to do now?” I fidgeted.

“Isn’t there anything you can do about it,” I added.

He got serious “Yes, there is.”

“Really,” I chirped.

He came too close and whispered in my ear, “we can just make the rumour the truth.”

I pushed him away, “hell with you. I will end it myself.”

I went to the class and sat there thinking hard of a solution. Sam came later and quietly rested at his seat.

“What happened?” asked Nishi.

“Nothing. I have to get it fixed myself.”

After college I went home still thinking of a solution and few minutes later it strike my head. If I ignore Sam from now and avoid talking to him, people will get the idea that it wasn’t true and the rumour will subside. So, from the next day I avoided him as hard as I could. Everything came to normal few days later. With the end of March the rumour lost its effect gradually and I was happy it ended. I started talking a little to Sam again.

It was 1<sup>st</sup> April today, April fool’s day. I had to make a fool of someone. I looked around and saw Surbhi busy taking notes, then I remembered Surbhi’s words on valentine’s day and her disgusting look at couples wandering

around holding hands. I never saw her talking to a boy except Sid, that too because he was his project partner and after the project ended she stopped talking to him too.

If there ran an anti-man campaign she would surely be the head of it. I decide to pull on a prank at them. From the morning I didn't make a fool of anyone to make sure everyone thought I had forgotten about April fool's day.

Then in the lunch break, Sid was having lunch with Sam and Manas. I beckoned. Sid came to me. "You called me?"

I nodded, "I have to tell you something really important. Listen carefully. I was talking to Surbhi yesterday and she kind of got flown in the conversation and then she confessed she likes you."

"What?" Sid's eyes gleamed "really, is it true?"

"Yes." I smiled.

But then he stopped. "I don't believe you. She didn't say anything to me."

"No. She's too shy to confess it to you," I assured.

"It's a prank again." He smirked. "I won't fall for it buddy."

"Ohfo, I'm serious." I took a deep breath. "Let's make it safe, go propose her and if she denies say it's April fool. You are out of danger this way."

"That's a cool idea," he smiled.

"Should I go now?" he asked.

"Propose her after college. I will make an excuse to stop her in the class."

"And please don't tell her that I told you. She will feel offended that you proposed her after knowing this," I added.

"Mm-hmm!" he nodded and smiling went back to sit at his seat.



at.

After college, everyone moved out from the class. I stopped Surbhi to help me with a query. Sid ran to the lawn adjacent to our building and quickly brought a flower from there. As he entered Nishi left the class. I saw her moving out.

“Excuse me surbhi. I will be back in a minute, I forgot to return a notebook to Nishi. She just left.” I quickly moved out of the class and ran to Nishi.

By now I had already pictured in my head Sid proposing her and getting beaten badly by her. Hell lot amusing sight it would be.

“Nishi,” I stopped her. “I have to show you something hilarious. Come fast,” said I while I grabbed her arm and started speed walking towards the class.

“Okay, but what is it?”

“I pulled a massive prank on Sid. He’s going to be dead today.” I flashed a wicked smile.

“Really?” ,Curiosity filled her brown eyes.

I nodded, smiling.

We peeped from our class back gate. Sid was holding a flower looking at Surbhi.

“Why you pulling a prank on him again?” whispered Nishi.

“Because he’s an easy target,” I grinned.

Sid turned his head to the door with that half-assed face. He acted confident but he was always on his edge when confronted with such situations.

I signalled from my hand to move forward. He went straight to Surbhi.

“S-

Surbhi,” his voice trembled. She looked up at him. He instantly went on his knee and offering her the flower said “I like you. Will you be my girlfriend?”

She stood up at once and walked to him. She stared him for few seconds. The next thing I thought she would do was to pull out a sandal and dent him with it but she picked the flower from his hand.

“You took the courage to say that.” she smiled, “So, I would say yes.”

“This is . . . I don’t even know.” I couldn’t believe my ears. I laughed, somewhat dumbstruck, “Really crazy”

Nishi pressed her lips together until the urge to laugh subsided and then she winked at me, “Cupid again.”

With a defeated face I could only whisper, “ACCIDENTALLY CUPID.” She looked at my face and chuckled.

Sid stood up. “Thank you my lady.” And came rushing out of the class, “hey thanks dear. You are the best. Love you. Totally,” he smiled at me.

I was speechless. I flashed a false smile and saw him leave. He was not cartwheels-in-the-daffodils happy. Certainly not singing-in-the-rain happy. It was a new flavour of happiness he had never known before — like the final sip of champagne after an exhilarating ceremony, the final resonant note of a symphony, the first page in a life-changing book that’s simply ... started.

Surbhi was still inside the class looking at the flower and blushing. I went to her, “Surbhi, you said yes. But I thought you hated the idea of relationship in college.”

She smiled. “It was just to cover up. Actually no one asked me before. And he’s funny. After he showed so much courage, how could have I said no.”

“Okay. Good luck buddy,” said I and she left for her hostel. Nishi and me left to our houses too.

Next few days, I saw Nishi and Sid whispering seldom times. They didn’t had any fight, moreover they looked overly friendly. I was sure some stupidity was going on in their minds. One day after the last class Nishi said,

“let’s go Sid” she looked at me and smiled “we will be back soon.”

“I have to go too,” I said and left but forgot my book. Returning, I heard Nishi and Sid talking.

“Sid, remember, Radhika’s mission” said Nishi but he didn’t listen. She looked at Sid and found him going with Sam. She grabbed his collar from behind, “huh?”

“Where do you think you are going?,” asked Nishi with a brow raised.

“Library to study.”

“Liar!” She dropped his collar. “We are supposed to find a boyfriend for Radhika. After she helped you, secret mission, forgot.”

“But I want to study for sessionals. I want a 100 this time,” Sid moaned.

“This and that are two entirely different issues and you are never going to get 100. So, follow.”

I laughed. They looked at the door, gloating.

“Stop guys. You don’t owe me anything. Just chill and leave that boyfriend thing to me,” I said.

“Okay,” said Sid and we laughed.

A week later, Nishi and me were talking outside our class when Sam arrived. He fished two tickets from his pocket. “That new movie of salman is out. I heard you wanted to see it the other day, so I thought I ask you out to see.”

“No pressure. I can go with Manas if you have plans,” he said with a shrug.

“Sorry, Mr.  
Awasthi has called me and Manas to his office. So he can’t go with you,” said Nishi.

Sam flashed a sad expression, “I would have taken Sid but he’s busy.”

“So it’s not a date?” I asked.

“Nope, just friends,” he replied.

“And we’ll see how that works out for you,” teased Nishi.

“Shut up,” I scolded her. “thanks for the ticket, I will go with you,” I smiled at Sam.

His eyes brightened, “would you like to get some pizza or something before?”

“Pizza’s great,” I nodded.

“That’s uh... that’s good, then. The movie’s at three, so we’ll leave from college at two thirty or so?”

I nodded again and Sam waved goodbye.

“Oh, god,” Nishi said. “You’re a glutton, Raks. But it would be a good date I can assure you” she winked at me.

I smiled. “You heard him. It’s not a date. And I can’t think of a date with him. Not in this life for sure.”

“You never going to let that attitude go, are you?”

“Probably not. No,” I smiled.

Sam and me left from college and reached the restaurant. The waiter handed us menus and took our orders. Sam updated me on his spring schedule, and talked about the progress in his studies for the CAT. By the time the waiter served our pizza, Sam had barely taken a breath. He seemed nervous, and I wondered if he wasn’t under the impression that we were on a date, regardless of what he’d said.

He cleared his throat, “I’m sorry. I think I’ve monopolized the conversation long enough,” he shook his head. “I just haven’t talked to you for any length of time in so long, that I suppose I had a lot to say.”

“It’s fine.” I smiled. “It has been a long time.” Just then, the door chimed. I turned to see Manas and N

ishi walk in. It took Nishi less than a second to meet my stare, but she didn't look surprised. Rather she smiled at me. I immediately realised that it was all staged. It was a double date. She knew I would never say no to a salesman's movie, I was a big fan of him. So, they made a plot to make me go out with Sam.

"Cheater," I muttered under my breath.

"What?" Sam asked, turning to see them sit on a table across the room.

"There's McDonalds up floor, we can go there if you say," Sam said in a hushed voice. I didn't listen to what he said. I was just thinking a way out from here as soon as I could. He was as nervous as he was before, but now it had been taken to a whole new level. He probably guessed from my expressions that I understood their plot.

I looked at Sam with a false apologetic smile. "I'm sorry. I have to go."

His eyebrows shoot up, "are you serious?"

I nodded. "But we haven't seen the movie yet," he added.

I stood up, "you can still call Sid, right?"

"Please don't go," the corners of Sam's mouth turned down infinitesimally.

"I'm really sorry. I totally forgot that I have an important work at home." I turned and walked off as fast as I could, just wanting to be away from it all. After a minute I could hear Nishi running to catch up with me, she grabbed my hand pulling me to a stop. "Seriously, I'm not in the mood," I almost shouted, turning to her, but it wasn't her, it was Sam.

"Oops, Sorry. I thought it was Nishi" I apologised. "Why are you here?"

"I don't like seeing a movie alone. So, I handed the tickets to Nishi and Manas." He smiled. "Let's go pick a

bus.”

I smiled, “Okay.” We took a bus and reached our homes.

The last event of 3<sup>rd</sup> year ended but not their stupidity. They remained the same, fighting over small things. But the change was, they both weren’t single now. They were happy in their relationships. The best thing was they stopped looking for a boyfriend for me and that was the best part because their choice was really bad. Everything was normal in 4<sup>th</sup> year. All peace.

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Months passed and college ended. We all got placed in different companies. Nishi, Manas and Sid got placed in Delhi. Me in Pune and Sam at Bangalore. It was the last day of college. We were all emotional. Me and Nishi were clicking random double selfies at different locations, like we didn’t want to miss a section of college. We laughed when we saw our Seniors weeping and clicking on their last day but today I realised what exactly they felt. We both went to have a last meal at our dearest canteen.

“I’m leaving after July,” I said.

Nishi rested her head on my shoulder. “I’m going to miss you.”

“Me too.”

“You’ll be bereft without me,” said Nishi.

“I know.”

She sat up, eyes glimmering with excitement. “You know, I can look up a job at your city.”

“Oh, Nishi...” I wanted to hug the girl or cry. That seriously meant a lot to me. “Thank you, but Manas will be alone then and you gonna miss him.”

“Hmm,” the tips of her mouth turned down. “Why don’t you leave this one and look up a job here?”

“Later for sure, but right now I want to explore a new city. You know how much I like visiting new places.” I smiled.

“Well, think about it. If you change your mind, text me and I’ll zip you away,” She took a drink of her soda.

“Sure,” I smiled.

After hours of whipping we left to our houses. Next month in July, I left for Pune.

# CHAPTER-11

## End Of The Love Stories

Six months passed in Pune. It was a beautiful city and I was enjoying my new job. One night, I just fell asleep and woke up from a bad dream. I looked at the clock on night stand, it was 1' O clock.

“Whew! As expected from Nishi and the rest, they can even pressurize me in my dreams.” Wiping the drops of sweat from my forehead, I went to sleep again.

Buzz! Buzz!

I jerked straight up in bed, confused and disorientated. It was damn near close to two am when I'd finally fallen asleep again and I had no idea what woke me up. I blinked my eyes open, confused. Green light from the clock on the night stand flashed a quarter after two in the morning. The bell came again. Smacking around until I reached my cell, I picked it up and squinted at the screen. It was Nishi who was calling. For a brief moment I considered ignoring her call, but my body seemed to have a mind of its own. I was going to want to karate-chop myself in the morning for this.

I sat up, frowning and took the call “Hello, Nishi. Why are you calling at this hour?”

She didn't utter a word but cried.

“Is everything okay?,” I winced at the sound of my voice.

“No,” she replied, crying.

“What happened?,” I asked, scared.

“Manas's mom is not happy with our relationship. She's looking for a girl for him to marry,” she moaned.

“Don't worry. I'm coming next week. Manas is not marrying anyone except you. And stop crying you gonna b



ring tsunami in your apartment.”

“Okay.” She stopped crying.

“I’m coming over for new year. I have 10 days. I will sort out everything. Now sleep,” I said.

“Okay, I will be waiting” she said. I disconnected the call and went to sleep again.

A week later on Saturday, I took a flight, reached home and went to meet my friends on Sunday. She asked me to appear at a cafeteria near her house. It was 11 am. I moved from my house and reached the place. Outside the cafeteria was a flower shop. I stopped by the beautiful flowers.

“I think I know you,” a voice came from behind.

I turned back to look, “Jeez. You haven’t changed a bit.”

Wearing a pair of dark shades. “It’s you, Raks.” Sam smiled. “You look more pretty now. Good.”

“Drop it, okay?” I started to walk.

“Hey, you pretty girl!” he walked to catch up with me. “Hey, give me a break!” he shoved his hands in his pockets. He kept staring the pass by girls, “they look so nice and shiny...”

I scoffed, “Stop staring. You’ll sprain your eyes.”

“No, it’s just that they look familiar,” he said.

I sighed in exasperation. Why does he have to be such a flirt?

“Anyway, what brings you here. Missed me so much that you had to skip work?” he smirked.

“No,” I huffed. “I was forced to come here.” I tugged my hair to the back of my ear. “I’m wasting my time when I really have other important things to do.”

“Yeah, like meeting some silly boyfriend,” said he.

“Argh, stop that crap!” I frowned. “People like you really make thinking of having a boyfriend undesirable.”

Stopping mid-way, he looked at me and smiled “What do you mean?”

“You are a pervert and a playboy,” I sighed.

“I may be a playboy, but not a pervert” he smiled again.

“Whatever, why are you here?” I asked.

“Manas called me.”

“And you?” he asked.

“Nishi.”

We moved inside the cafeteria. I swear Nishi was waiting at the door like an eager pet for the sound of the unlocking mechanism, because the second I step through on Sunday morning, she barrels into me, “I missed you so much!”

Sam went to the table, “friends, how have you been?”

“Great, dude!” Sid tapped on Sam’s palm.

“Look at you. Life in the south has done you well,” said Manas.

Sam took a seat next to Manas. Me and Nishi returned to the table. “Hi, Raks” Sid’s beaming smile greets me at the table. I took a seat next to Nishi.

“So, how’s everyone?” I asked.

Before anyone could utter Nishi replied, “not good.”

“Ok, so let’s sort this out.” I smiled. “Have you thought of a solution?”

“No,” said Nishi.

“Any suggestion boys?” I asked.

“Thinking,” said Sid.

“First tell me who is against your marriage. His family or yours?” I asked.

“Mine. My mom more,” said Manas.

“My family has little objection but I will convince the m,” said Nishi.

“Good, so half the problem is done,” I smiled. “It’s only Manas parents we have to convince. I guess his mom.” Nishi nodded in agreement.

I looked at them four with a smile, “so, who’s going?”

Everyone shot me a gaze and I uttered, “What?”

“It’s you who started this story, so it’s your responsibility to set everything up,” said Nishi.

My mouth dropped open, “Huh? , You’re joking, right?”

She gave me a piercing gaze. “Don’t pull that gaze on me. I’m not going anyway,” I countered.

“Please, you have to; it’s a matter of life and death for me,” said Nishi. Tears rolled down her eyes.

Tipping my head back against the chair, I took a deep breath and moved my head back to forward. Tightly pressing my right palm on the café table, in a strong voice I said, “all right. I guess I’m the only one to rely on. So, let’s do it. I’m ready.”

Nishi whipped her tears and smiled “I knew you would go.”

“But I need someone to accompany me. Who’s coming?” I wiggled my eyebrows.

“I’m,” said Sam. “I know his mom. Maybe I can help.”

“Okay, decided then, me and Sam are going.” I stood up, “let’s go.”

We all reached Manas’s colony. Sam and Manas parked their cars a bit far from the house. Sam and me were walking when I saw the others following us. I stopped a

nd turned around. "Why you guys following us?" I asked

"Because you know..." said Nishi.

"It's not because we don't have anything else to do," said Sid.

"That's exactly why. Just stay here, you people are going to make me more nervous," I said.

Leaving them behind, Sam and me walked till Manas's door. My index finger went to press the bell but I stopped.

"I have a feeling of foreboding," I whispered. "It feels like we're surrounded by danger."

"I know. Don't worry," said Sid.

"Shouldn't we go back?" I whispered.

"We've come too far to go back now," whispered Sam in return.

"Hmm."

Fearing, I pressed the bell. 2 minutes later when the door didn't open. "I think there's no-one home" relieved, I turned back to move. "Let's go, we will come sometime else." I smiled. Manas mom opened the door behind me. "Namaste! Aunty," greeted Sameer.

*Shit*, I closed my eyes. Turning to her I greeted, "Namaste!"

"Manas isn't home right now," she said.

"We know. We have come to meet you," said Sam.

"Ok, come inside."

We went to the drawing room and got seated at the sofa. Manas mom went to the kitchen and brought two glasses of water. Keeping the tray on the table, she sat in front of us. "What do you want to say?"

I gathered courage and said, “we want to talk about Manas and Nishi.”

She frowned, “What about them?”

I started talking “Aunty, I don’t question your decision . I can’t, I’m too small for that and don’t have the right also. But I can just plead, please don’t make Manas marry someone else. He won’t be happy. Nishi and Manas love each other. Please accept Nishi.”

“Sorry,” said his mother, flatly. “I can’t accept that girl as my daughter-in-law. Never.”

“But why aunty. She a good girl. I assure you won’t have any complains,” I said.

“She might be good but she doesn’t fits in the family.” She looked determined. “Have you seen the pair. If I somehow agree and get them married, all the relatives gonna make fun of us. They look comic together.”

“Aunty why are you thinking about others. Think of your son’s heart,” I said.

“This Nishi, is too short, isn’t pretty and not of the same caste. On what bases should I marry my son to her? Think from a mother’s perspective, I’m not doing anything wrong,” she countered.

“On the basis of Manas’s love for Nishi,” I said.

“He’s a stupid boy. First he was mad for some idiotic girl. Now this midget. He will forget everything once he gets married.”

“I can understand aunty but I can just plead you to think once more.” I could feel Sam’s eyes on me as I lifted the glass of water and took a sip.

“What do you think about Manas?” she asked.

I put the glass back on the tray. “He’s a good friend.”

“As a person?”

“He’s kind, good looking and intelligent. A wonderful person in total,” I said.

She smiled. "I like you from the very first day I saw you. Well-mannered and pretty. I can't agree on Nishi, but if you like 'will you marry my son?'"

My jaw dropped open. "Aunty you are joking, right?" I asked.

"No. I'm serious."

I was shocked. I never thought she would say anything like that. It was like someone sucked out the blood from my body in a go. What was I going to say to Nishi, that I worsened the situation more for her. For a moment I was petrified, Dumbfounded. Catatonic to her words.

"And as you think my son is a wonderful person, I don't think you will have any problem in marrying him."

I was speechless. I wished the ground would open and swallow me immediately. *God please save me*, I pleaded in my head. *Just one miracle, please. Just one.* Then suddenly Sam said, "no aunty, that's not possible."

"Why? I will ask her parents if that's the problem," she said.

Slinging his arm around my shoulder he said, "we love each other."

Manas mom's smile disappeared.

"This is . . . true." I laughed, somewhat dumbstruck. I let go of my breath in relief. Thank god I was saved.

"Okay, but I won't agree for Nishi," she said.

"Fine. I think we should leave now," said Sam.

I nodded and we got out of his house. We walked slowly towards the car parking. His hands shoved into the pockets of his jeans. Taking a deep breath he said, "aren't you forgetting something?"

"No."

"Don't you think you should thank me," said Sam.

“For what, that comment. That was lame.”

“But atleast it worked.” He smiled.

“Ya, you can say that.”

“As a token of thanks, you should go out with me on a date,” said Sam.

“Don’t start that, I’m not in the mood.”

“But what can we do, you tried your best,” said Sam.

“Mm-hmm! But I’m still not going out with you.”

“Then hang out with me.”

“How’s that any different from going out with you? Anyway, I’m not going,” said I with my brow raised.

“How is me asking you to hang out with me tonight any different than us hanging out on Sunday?”

Ah, he had a good point. “No way” I frowned. “Let’s go, others must be waiting for us.”

We reached Sam’s car. I tried to avoid Nishi’s gaze.

“What did she say?” Nishi asked.

“She is stubborn. I don’t think she would ever agree,” said Sam.

“Sorry. I tried my best,” I said.

Nishi started crying. “Don’t cry,” Manas wiped off her tears from her face. “We will think of something else,” he assured her.

An idea strike me. “Hey guys, how about getting Manas mom kidnapped,” I smirked.

“Cool!” Sid eyes widened. “And then we won’t free her until she agrees to their marriage.” He smirked.

“I don’t think it would work,” said Manas “she won’t give up so easily.”

I looked at Sid in surprise, he hasn’t changed. His stupidity was still prevalent. “That wasn’t my idea.” I took a small pause “how about

Nishi saving his mom from kidnappers.” I smiled. “I’m sure she will get impressed by her courage and will agree.”

“Good idea,” Nishi smiled.

“Yeah!” said Sid.

“Hmm, this might work,” sighed Manas.

I looked at Sid and Sam with a smirk, “so kidnappers, when should we do it?”

“What! Me, kidnapper. No-no,” Sid fidgeted. “Don’t you remember his video, she’s too dangerous.” He rose his hands, “I won’t.”

“I’m also not,” countered Sam.

I looked at Nishi indicating her to use her tactics and convince them.

Nishi started her tactic of emotional blackmail, her best attribute. “You guys can’t do this small thing for us.” She started crying. “I hoped you people will help your friends but I guess I was being selfish. Forget it, let him get married to someone else. I will live with the pain forever.” Nishi pressed Manas hand to signal, to help her in the drama.

He made a sad face, “no pressure guys. If you don’t want to help, we won’t pressure you.”

They got trapped in the drama. Their faces showed signs of guilt. Few seconds later Sid said, “Ok, I will do it.”

“Me too,” Sam nodded.

I smiled. It was too easy to convince them, I wished Manas mom got convinced the same way. So, it was decided that three days later, that is on Thursday when his mom goes to the nearby temple, the plan will be executed. All preparations were done. Me, Nishi and Manas were waiting in Manas car some 200 meters away from his house. We saw his mom coming out of the house and called Sam to arrive for action. She had walked few meters



when that old red maruti 800, Sid's car, stopped in front of her. Two guys in black monkey caps and gloves were inside. They were fully covered and looked like the typical goons that go for robbery. One of them got out of the car. Grabbed her arm and tried to pull her inside with full force. I pushed Nishi out of the car to run to rescue his mom. But she stopped midway. Her jaw dropped open, me and Manas just saw the scene in stunned silence. We never hoped of anything like that. Nishi returned terrified.

Manas mom had jerked her arm from his hand, took out her sandal and was showering the kidnapper with it. The one at the driver's seat got so terrified that he ran with the car leaving the other kidnapper behind. She ran after the one she was beating but Manas stopped her, "what happened mom?," asked Manas.

"That idiot was trying to kidnap me," replied she.

"You wait here. I will get him."

Manas ran after the kidnapper. Inside the car, I was guessing who was beaten by her, Sid or Sam. It was difficult to figure out as they were totally unrecognizable. Sid was right, this lady was too dangerous. Seriously, she should be in police. She would surely shove all the thieves away then. Some meters away the red maruti returned and the kidnappers ran away.

Manas returned to his mom. "Mom they ran away," he gasped.

"Don't worry, I taught him a lesson. He won't think of doing it again," she smirked. "Why you returned, you had an urgent work at office," asked his mom.

"I forgot my wallet at home," replied Manas.

"Ok mom, I'm going now and please return home it's not safe," he added.

"Ok," said she and returned.

Manas walked back to his car and quickly called Sam to ask where he was. When we reached them, I saw Si

d moaning in pain. He was rubbing his arm and Sam smiled at him. So, Sid was the one who got hit. I giggled and tried to stop my smile when I reached closer to them.

“Sorry Sid,” said Nishi.

“I told you, she’s too dangerous,” moaned Sid.

“I’m really sorry,” she apologised.

I took a deep breath. “This plan failed, what’s next?”

“I can’t think right now,” said Sid, moaning.

“I’m blank,” said Manas.

I asked Nishi if she had something in her mind but she shook her head in no and then Sam suggested, “we have only one option left, a runaway marriage.”

“What? That’s definitely not a good thing to do,” I said.

“I’m ready,” said Nishi.

“And you?” asked Sam to Manas.

“Okay.”

“Guys, listen. That’s not the right thing to do. Think of your parents’ reputation,” I said.

“Why should we, when they can’t think of us?” said Manas.

“And the bases of her rejection are her outer imperfections. No matter how hard we try she won’t agree” said Sam.

Unwillingly, I had to agree on supporting that idea. It was decided that two days later we will help them run and have a court marriage. Sam got them registered for the marriage and two days later we five quietly moved from our houses to reach the court. Manas and Nishi’s families had no clue what they were up to. In front of the registrar they both exchanged rings. Sighed. Me and Sam

sighed as witnesses and the marriage was done. The photo of the newlywed couple was taken. Then we all left to our respective homes. After the holidays ended, I returned to Pune.

A month later when the marriage certificate arrived, Manas told everything to his parents. He was scolded and beaten properly, which I had hoped. And as nothing could be done his parents agreed to his marriage again. A proper marriage this time.

Few days later from Manas's beating, I got a call from Nishi inviting me to her marriage. Sam's plan was successful. Their wedding date was scheduled to be 14 Feb, Valentine's day. A perfect date for a love marriage.

I took three days leave for her big day. Arrived home and got picked for the wedding venue by Sid and Surbhi. Both the love birds were still together and I wondered how they managed so far. I guess she got used to Sid's stupidity or maybe he stopped being stupid. Whatever it was they looked happy. Inside the car, "I need your wedding card soon too," I said.

"It's gonna take 2 years. Our parents are not that opposed. Once I start earning well, you will have the invite," said Sid and Surbhi blushed.

After we reached the venue, I ran to the bride's room. Nishi was dressed in a beautiful red lehenga. Her mehandi was dark, half covered by the bangles she wore from her wrist to a few inches below her elbow. The dupatta of her lehenga had those pretty small golden beads that kissed her forehead. That day she looked too pretty. Her smile made her stand out more.

"Hey, you looking too pretty. Manas would love to run again," I teased her.

She hugged me and smiled. "The bride's best friend is looking pretty enough too in this lehenga. Beware, many boys are going to wander around you today." She winked.

Just then, my phone beeped in my hand. I opened it. It was a message from Sam. I leaned forward, reading the message three times before the light faded from the screen and the text disappeared. Shock made me stupid. I had to have read it wrong. Three times? Not likely. Muscles in my back and neck locked up. I don't know how long I stood there in stunned silence, but beyond the shock, anger simmered in my veins like a slow-burning brushfire.

I again got a text from him, "look at the door." I looked straight to the door and there that idiot was, leaning against the doorframe, one leg slung casually over the other, his arms folded across his chest, a smirk on his face. I speed walked to him. "Hey! You looking too pretty."

I ignored his comment. "What's this text, are you mad. Don't send this to me again." I shot him a murderous look. Sam held up his hands apologetically, "Kidding. Jeez, I'm kidding!" he said quickly, but I could tell by his face that he was actually serious. He left the room.

"I LOVE YOU" he wrote that in the text. Maybe he was serious. No. I instantly chased out those thoughts. The guy I grew up picturing in my head is definitely not Sam. I just know that I didn't belong in the future picture with him.

Me and Surbhi took Nishi to the stage where the jaimala was done. After the relatives photo session with the bride and the groom, Surbhi and Sid left to eat and I was with Nishi in the bridal room. I didn't accompany them, I was not hungry and wanted to spend few more moments with my best friend. An hour later I got a call from Sid to come out. It was late and they had to leave. I hurried to the exit and went to the lonely parking lot. It was a huge parking. I saw Sam emptying a full beer bottle close to his car. Drunken people always scared me so, I tried to keep distance from him but he saw me. "Radhika. Wait!"

I ignored him and kept walking. He quickly rushed to me and grabbed my hand bringing me to a stop. I got s

cared and pulled my hand with a jerk. He takes a step toward me and I instinctively retreat, only to find my back pressed up against the wall. A broken smile crossed his face. Closing the distance, his arms stretch out, his hands pressing up against the wall on either side of my face. His entire presence boxing me in. I was scared and suddenly can't breathe. It was suffocating. I tried peeping around him, looking for Sid, but I can't see anything. Finally, I mustered up the courage to glance at him. His determined eyes bore into my face. I tightly grabbed his arm, trying to pull his hand away, "put your hands off me," I said, nastily.

I turned to walk away but he grabbed my hand again and pulled me back to him. "Radhika." he paused for a second, "Today you have to tell me."

"What?" I said, angrily.

"Why you hate me so much?"

"That's because..." I paused. His eyes stared me, unblinked.

In an angry tone I started, "I'll tell you just one last time, so listen carefully." I looked straight in his eyes. "I'm flabbergasted by your sight, I hate your flirting, your behaviour, your acts; in short, I hate everything about you. You disgust me."

"Radhika, you know I'd never hurt you," he moaned. His voice cracked slightly, it sounded like he was in pain. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that, I didn't think but now I won't trouble you more," he said apologetically and left.

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I went to the balcony. Resting one arm on the grill, Varsha came to me. "What happened to him then?"

I stared at the sky as I gulp down the steamy coffee down my throat. "I tried contacting him to say sorry but no one saw him after that day. No contact, nothing. No one had a clue about him. He just vanished to nowhere."

I paused for a minute and then took a deep breath. “You know the kind of romantic love that’s shown in the fairy tales and movies— at least how we perceive it now — is non-existent. If you think about it, it’s funny. There are no boys perfect as prince’s and no girls totally like princesses. So, there are no happy endings. The whole idea is imaginary. The love that is successful is that which is far from bodily perfections. So what happens when two imperfectly perfect people fall in love is, they start to know each other. They look only the essence of the person, not the shell. This was the case with Nishi and Manas. And that’s why, when you really connect with a person’s inner self, any physical imperfections disappear or become irrelevant. Therefore you can’t fall in love with beauty. You can lust after it, be infatuated by it. You can love it with your eyes and your body but not with your heart and your soul.”

“Then there is this one feeling, stronger than love and more powerful than hatred, that’s guilt. It’s the smaller things that take up larger space in your heart.” I looked at her. “That guilt, when you remember that you don’t have enough courage to confess the truth to someone. When you speak out something you never meant to. When you feel like going back in time and correct mistakes of the past. The mistakes that were forgotten by all, except you.”

After he left, I felt the same guilt because it wasn’t his fault actually. Everyone has a heart. It’s his/her right to love anyone they like. Like the heart can’t stop beating, so the feelings. I could never figure out, what I truly hated him for. His flirting or his closeness with other girls or maybe I never hated him, it was just his image which was projected that I hated. I sometimes thought why I never gave him a chance, maybe he wasn’t that bad. If he didn’t pulled that playboy image, the ending would have been different. But it doesn’t matter now, he was gone forever and I had no hope of seeing him again.

Sometimes in life you make a decision and you find yourself questioning it. A lot. You don't regret it, exactly. You know that you *probably* made the right choice and that you're *probably* better off for it. But you do spend a lot of time wondering what the hell were you thinking.

"But Sameer was so perfect. Why you never gave him a chance?" asked Varsha.

I smiled. "He wasn't a bad boy but not good enough for me." I winked at her. "As young girls, we all think we want that one mysterious, romantic 'bad boy'. The one which has feelings deep as the ocean, and knows exactly what to say and how to act around a girl. Who knows exactly how to flirt to get anyone fall for them madly.

It's natural to want to be part of that enticing image painted in movies and novels with handsome bad boy characters. However, the reality is often not as enchanting as the dream, that guy isn't really the best guy. The excitement wears away quickly when instability starts to swallow in and then you have stress and heart piercing breakups.

I saw my friends in school weeping and moaning over breakups by such guys and I never wanted to be a part of it. As 'prevention is better than cure', why not avoid a stupid relationship now and prevent the weeping's of later."

"So what kind of boys should one choose?" she asked

"The men who stay with you forever are the ones who have dependable, honest and caring nature. They are the ones who have big hearts and put you first. They try hard to bring simple smile on your lips and happiness in your life rather than stress. They are laid back and positive. They don't just try to consume you. So always aim for a simple good guy not the bad one and if you can handle and convert the bad boy to good, then that's the best thing you can do," I smiled.

"That love story was really fun. I'm happy that I know it now." Varsha smiled.

I smiled back at her. “I tell you a secret,” I whispered and her eyes glowed in interest. “The smarter and more independent you are, the harder it is to find love. Believe it or not, falling in love is partly a decision. Love isn’t magical on its own; we make it magical. And because, the kind of *‘true’* magic as seen in fantasies doesn’t exist, the magic we’re familiar with, happens when you accept the answer to life is not knowing the answer.”



## **More to come**

Read how Radhika's life takes a turn when she shifts to a new city where she meets a new love interest and someone from her past. Who is she going to choose? Everything with a lot of twists in her love life, in the next volume. Launching soon.



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