

The Almost Love Story
By

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Code Red

The ride back home.

Prapti Sapkota

CODE RED

Author's Note

This story is based on real-life events.

It's a snapshot of a moment that changed everything; a chance encounter, a rainy evening, and the quiet beginning of something unexpectedly beautiful.

Though some conversations and details have been changed, the emotions are real. The conversations, the nerves, the laughter, the silence, all of it lived and felt.

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For Rohan,
My unexpected beginning,
my safe place,
my always.

With love,
Prapti

Prologue

*It began on a rainy day in Dhulikhel.
Not with fireworks. Not with grand gestures. Just a canceled
event, a missed ride, and a stranger on a bike who wasn't
supposed to mean anything, but somehow became
everything.*

*I wasn't looking for love. I wasn't even looking to be seen. But
in that quiet ride through misty roads, with my cheeks still
painted in rainbow and my heart guarded behind years of
silence, I found something I didn't know I needed.*

*He talked about dogs. I talked about dreams. We shared
coffee and awkward smiles. And somewhere between "Nice
to meet you" and "Let's talk again," the ordinary turned into
magic.*

*This isn't a fairy tale. There were no princes or castles. Just
two people, caught in life's chaos, finding each other in the
stillness between conversations.*

*This is our story. Unfiltered. Unpolished. Real.
And it all started with a ride I almost didn't take.*

Chapter 1

Prapti

The holidays were over. We were on our way back home, the car humming steadily along the wet, winding roads. The trip had been long; days spent weaving through hills and towns, hopping from place to place with barely a pause to breathe. I should have felt full of memories, of rest, of time well spent but instead, all I felt was tired.

I leaned my head against the window, watching the world blur past in streaks of green and grey, not quite ready to return to normalcy. I wanted silence, warmth, maybe a nap that lasted three days.

That's when my phone buzzed.

It was Usha.

"The LGBTQ rally is tomorrow, wanna come?" she said.

A rally? That was unexpected. I wasn't the kind of person who went to rallies; especially ones that meant long,

uncomfortable journeys on buses and standing for hours under the sun. My first instinct was to say no but I replied quickly, “I’ll talk to you later.”

The vehicle rocked gently as I put my phone away, willing myself to ignore the nagging thought that maybe I should go. But the exhaustion was real. I just wanted to get home and rot into my bed.



The next morning, Usha called again.

“Are you coming?”

I hesitated, rubbing my temples. “It’s too much travel. I don’t know if I can manage.”

That’s when she surprised me.

“Diwash can drop you off.” Diwash was a senior from my school, someone we both knew.

How could I go so far, especially alone, even though Diwash would drop me off on the way back? The thought of taking a long, rainy bus journey by myself all the way to Dhulikhel made me uneasy. But I didn’t want to say no, not yet.

Then, a name came to mind: Anuska.

We hadn't known each other long; college had only just begun, and she was the first person I really connected with there. We hadn't spent enough time together to be close, but there was a quiet comfort in her presence. Maybe, just maybe, she could come with me.

I imagined asking her, wondering if she'd say yes. My heart felt both hopeful and hesitant.

So I told Usha, "I have to ask a friend first. If she agrees, then I'll be there."



Chapter 2

Quickly I texted Anuska.

We weren't particularly close. In fact, we'd only met a few weeks ago when college started. But she had this warm, easy energy that made it feel like we'd been friends longer than we actually had. Still, I wasn't sure if asking her was too much, too soon. I stared at my screen for a while before typing.

"Hey, there's this LGBTQ rally in Dhulikhel tomorrow. I'm thinking of going, but it's kinda far, and I don't wanna go alone... Would you be down to come with me?"

She didn't reply for a while. I almost convinced myself she was going to say no.

But then the typing bubbles appeared.

"Hmm, that's pretty far. I'm not sure."

I couldn't blame her. Dhulikhel wasn't just a short ride away. And with the rain, buses were a gamble. She had a scooter,

but riding all the way there in the wet wasn't really an option either. Still, something in her tone felt like... she didn't want to say no. Maybe we weren't close enough for either of us to reject the other outright.

I decided to give her a way out.

"It's fine! I was actually planning to go with Diwash; Usha's classmate. He'd drop me off but if you're coming, I'll cancel that and we can take the bus together."

That seemed to shift something.

She replied quickly this time: *"Actually... Ishan studies there."*

I blinked. That name wasn't unfamiliar. Her ex. Well, ex-turned-friend, from what I remembered her saying during one of our random conversations. That kind of ex. One you could still rely on when needed.

"I think he'd agree to pick us up," she added. *"Let me check and I'll let you know."*

It didn't feel like a promise, but it was enough to make me wait.



A couple hours passed. I kept checking my phone every few minutes. Part of me was already half-convinced it wasn't

going to work out. That I'd end up cancelling on Usha altogether.

But then, late afternoon, her message popped up.

“Ishan agreed. We’re going.”

Just like that, something lifted in me.

I dialed Usha.

She picked up on the first ring. “So?”

“I’m in,” I said, grinning.

“Yesss! Okay okay, so here’s the plan.” She sounded thrilled. “It’s at the law college,” she said. “The bus drops directly at the gate. Super convenient. Come there directly, and we’ll meet outside. There’ll be face painting going on, you’ll love it.”

“Face painting?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah! Rainbow flags, hearts, slogans. Just for fun, you know? We’ll hang out there till 2, and then the rally starts.”

“Got it.”



Chapter 3

The day had finally arrived.

After all the back-and-forth texts, the uncertainty, the waiting, it was time. I stood at the chaotic Koteswor bus stand, where the air buzzed with blaring horns, impatient footsteps, and the occasional shout of bus conductors calling out destinations. I shifted my weight from foot to foot, standing under shade of the bus stand, eyes scanning the crowd until I finally spotted her: Anuska. She weaved through the crowd toward me.

The conductor was already shouting, hurrying people along, so we barely had a second to exchange greetings before we climbed into the already half-filled bus. We squeezed into a seat together, the kind that rattled with every bump on the road, and settled in for the one-and-a-half-hour ride ahead.

Though it was rainy season, the sky had chosen to be cruel that day. No clouds, just a harsh, unfiltered sun beating down on us through the smudged bus windows. With every passing minute, it got hotter, heavier. The sweat clung to our backs and our eyes narrowed against the glare.

Dhulikhel wasn't part of the core city, but it was still a city; bustling, busy, and today, unbearably dusty. Road construction had turned much of it into a dry haze of moving particles. Yet people moved like they always did, crossing roads, talking on phones, buying fruits from vendors under half-broken umbrellas. From the moment we entered the area, we were alert. We'd told the conductor to let us know when Law School arrived, but still, we watched every signboard like hawks, nervous about missing the stop.

Finally, just after 1 p.m., the conductor called out, "Law College!"



We got off, stretching stiff legs, brushing the dust from our jeans, breathing in the warm, dry air. The exhaustion from the journey and the hours since lunch were catching up with us. Hunger tugged at our stomachs, but we didn't have the luxury of stopping. Usha had asked us to arrive by now, and we were already pushing it.

So, we skipped the idea of food thinking maybe there'd be some light snacks at the program venue or maybe somewhere along the pride rally route and made our way to meet her.

Usha was already there, somewhere in the middle of a crowd, busy and moving quickly. She spotted us, waved with a quick smile, and without much conversation, introduced us to one of her friends, a girl with colorful streaks in her hair and a small container of paints in her hand. Before we could even process what was happening, Usha had disappeared again.

The girl she'd left us with had a tiny kit of brushes and color pots. "Face painting?" she offered.

Anuska sat first. I followed.

While I was getting my face painted, Anuska recognized someone, her high school teacher, and slipped into a conversation nearby.



After I was done, I stood alone for a while, awkward, scanning the area in hopes of finding Usha again. When I finally did, she wasn't smiling anymore.

She stood a few feet away, talking to Diwash. Her arms were crossed, eyes narrowed slightly in concern. Diwash spoke quickly, gesturing once, then disappeared in a rush, leaving behind a swirl of tension.

I walked over. "Hey, is everything okay?"

Usha hesitated, then looked up. “Diwash had to leave.
Some emergency. He can’t drop you.”



Chapter 4

The words hit me like a stone to the chest. I hadn't even realized how much I'd been relying on that plan until it disappeared right in front of me.

"Oh," I said quietly.

I turned away, trying not to show too much on my face, and found Anuska again. She was still chatting, but as soon as she saw me, she paused and frowned slightly.

"What happened?"

I hesitated for a second then told her.

She stayed quiet, letting it sink in. Then, after a moment, she smiled.

"It's okay. Ishan must have some friend who can drop you. And if not, we'll figure it out. We can always return by bus."

Her calmness didn't just reassure me, it anchored me.

I nodded.

In the chaos of the unfamiliar city, the glare of the sun, the surprise cancellations and hunger and heat, that one line grounded me. It felt like we'd marked the day in chapters already, arrival, colors, disappointment and now, this small promise of a solution. A little flicker of hope.

Maybe, just maybe, things were about to take a different turn.



Chapter 5

Finally, the time had come.

A voice called out, asking everyone to board the bus. We got in quickly. It was already packed, bodies shoulder to shoulder, energy buzzing.

Luckily, Anuska and I found seats together. The air was thick with excitement. Faces were bright with color; some painted with vibrant freckles and flags, some wrapped in pride ribbons, others dressed in bold, expressive outfits.

A group near the front carried the banner for the day, holding it up with pride and laughter. There was something in the air; anticipation, joy, maybe even a bit of nervousness, but it was all infectious.



When we finally reached the gathering point, we found ourselves in front of a departmental store, a strange but solid landmark. People spilled out onto the pavement,

stretching, adjusting their clothes, fixing their makeup. We stood there for a while, unsure what was next, but everyone seemed in good spirits. A few snaps were clicked, quick smiles, glitter reflecting sunlight. I bought a packet of Lay's, and we shared it, the salty crunch oddly comforting even if it didn't quite fill us.

About half an hour passed before the rally began just as a dark cloud crept over the sky. Still, we moved forward.

The rally wound its way through the area, heading toward the KU fountain; a wide open space where the main program was supposed to unfold.

At first, the energy felt low. The sun had disappeared, and the cloud cover gave everything a strange dullness. But Usha, walking a little ahead, turned back and reassured us, "The main program's just about to start."

But then, almost as if the sky had other plans, the clouds cracked open.

Rain.

At first, it was a drizzle, a gentle warning. People laughed and shrugged it off. A few carried on with dances and poems, standing under trees, their voices rising above the pattering drops. But within minutes, the drizzle turned into a downpour. The crowd began to scatter, umbrellas shot open like flowers, but not everyone had one.

We didn't.

We grabbed each other and ran, soaked already, toward the nearest building, which turned out to be the library. We weren't the only ones. Students, performers, and guests all crammed under the overhang. Stranded.



Moments later, the announcement came: *The program's been postponed to tomorrow.*

A shared groan moved through the crowd. Just like that, the hours of travel, anticipation, paint, and pride were washed away in rain.

Anuska and I looked at each other, trying not to let the regret settle too deeply. The bus stop was too far, and we were soaked, cold, and clueless about what came next.

Anuska took out her phone and called Ishan.

She asked him if he could come pick us up, and to please bring an extra umbrella. She also added, hesitantly, if he knew anyone who could give *me* a ride later. Ishan promised to be there in a few minutes and said he'd figure something out.



Chapter 6

Soon, Ishan arrived. We briefly exchanged our 'hello's. He handed us an umbrella and ushered us toward his place. Anuska and he exchanged easy words while I followed, quiet, still thinking about how nothing was going according to plan.

Somewhere between that conversation and the echo of rain, I remembered something Anuska had mentioned earlier that Ishan's semester exams were still going on. Engineering board exams, no less. Brutal schedule, just three days between each paper. The kind that drained your brain dry. But as luck would have it, on the exact day of the rally, his exam ended just around the same time our program was meant to wrap up. It was almost eerie how perfectly the timing had worked out. And now, here we were; wet, stranded, and unexpectedly depending on that coincidence.

Inside, Ishan showed us his room to stay for a while and went off to make a call.

“To his friend,” he said vaguely.

Apparently, this friend was the only person he could think of to help with the ride back. But convincing him was no small task. We sat awkwardly in the room while Ishan stood outside, deep in negotiation, trying to keep his voice casual while saying things like “just once” and “I owe you.”

Turned out, the friend had been about to leave for home. Ishan’s call came at the last possible second.



Finally, he returned, a satisfied look on his face.

“He’s coming,” he said. “Just give him a minute.”

When the door opened again, I saw him; Rohan.

Tall, quiet, and unexpectedly handsome. Anuska leaned toward me and whispered, “Damn, he’s cute.” Then added with a grin, “And fair. He’s totally your type.”

I smiled weakly, still trying to recover from everything.

Earlier, Ishan had told me that Rohan would be dropping me off **somewhere in Koteswor**; just to make it easier for

him. I'd said that was fine. I was familiar with the area and could easily catch a bus from there.

But when Rohan asked exactly where I lived and I said, "Chabahil," he blinked and smiled.

"I'm in Bouddha. That's like... ten minutes from your place."

Something inside me *exploded*; quietly, invisibly.

Ten minutes? From *me*?

I was over the moon, smiling on the outside but dancing wildly on the inside. What were the odds?



We were starving by then, but too nervous to ask for anything. Rohan had agreed to drop me off, yes, but just barely. We didn't want to overstep.

Still, somehow, we did.

Anuska looked at him and asked, a bit too gently, if we could grab something to eat nearby.

To our surprise, he smiled and said, "Sure."

We walked to a nearby café, Shitoshna. The sign buzzed faintly, flickering neon. The rain had slowed to a drizzle now, making the world feel softer, like everything had exhaled.

Anuska convinced me to try pork, something I'd never eaten before, and for the first time, I agreed. We placed our order. Rohan didn't order anything for himself. He just leaned back and let the conversation happen around him.

Before I could really join in, though, my attention was caught by someone at the next table.

Prajwal.

My high school batch mate.

Panic rose. I ducked slightly, using the menu to shield my face. I didn't want to explain myself, didn't want to run into anyone from that chapter of my life. While I was hiding, Anuska and Rohan had already started talking about mobile games, bike models, random stuff that made them both laugh.



The food arrived, and I snapped back into the moment. It wasn't a heavy meal, but it helped. Still, I didn't ask for more, even though I wasn't full. I didn't want Rohan to feel like we were pushing it. He and Ishan paid.

Back at Ishan's place, we stood under the porch, rain still dripping steadily from the eaves.

Rohan's bike was parked there.

A Yamaha MT-15.

Anuska's dream bike.

She had been talking about that model since almost the day we met. And now, here it was, polished and parked.

Rohan handed me his bag.

"Hold this," he said, strapping on his helmet.

I slung it across my shoulder, climbed behind him, and off we went, cutting through wet roads, the sound of the engine filling the silence.

That ride wasn't part of the plan.

But the beginning of something that was.



Chapter 7

I had expected the ride to be awkward.

Two strangers. One favor. A long, silent ride on a bike through wet, dusty roads, everything about it screamed *uncomfortable*. But to my surprise, Rohan didn't let it become that.

He talked.

Even with a helmet on, his laughter came through; warm, light, not forced. He had that rare quality of making silence feel temporary, not tense. He asked questions; about my college, my interests, how I ended up in Dhulikhel that day and in turn, he shared little pieces of himself too.

He told me about life at KU, about his classes and how exhausting Mechanical Engineering was. "Three days between exams," he said. "No time to breathe. But worth it, I guess." His tone carried pride, not complaint.

Then, somewhere between turns, he spoke about his family.

About Annie, his golden retriever. Not just a pet, but the “daughter” of the house. “She gets more love than I do,” he joked, laughing again through his helmet. “My mom literally calls her her youngest child.”

His dad owned a mobile business, and his mom, well, she had a knack for land. Buying, selling, flipping properties.

“Oh. He’s rich,” I thought.

He didn’t say it outright, but you could tell. The MT-15 wasn’t just a showpiece, it made sense now. But there wasn’t an ounce of arrogance in his voice. He spoke simply, as though these were just normal things, and in his world, they were.

I listened, nodding, smiling beneath my helmet. Then, he asked me about myself.

I told him my dad’s a government employee, and how I wanted to follow in his footsteps, give PSC exams, settle here in Nepal. “I want a grounded life,” I said, realizing it was the first time I’d put that into words for someone who wasn’t family.

He didn’t laugh or question it. He agreed.

“Same here,” he said. “I thought about abroad. But honestly, I don’t think I could stay away from family for too long.”

That surprised me.

Most people I met couldn't wait to leave. They spoke of Australia, Canada, the US like they were lifeboats. But here he was, talking about staying. About building a life close to home



The conversation flowed so smoothly, I almost forgot how tired and hungry I was.

But my stomach reminded me.

my stomach growled loud enough for me to hear it. I shifted uncomfortably, hoping he hadn't noticed. The last proper meal I'd had was lunch, and the snacks at KU hadn't helped much.

I didn't want to seem demanding, though. So instead, I wrapped my thanks in an offer.

"Hey," I said, "I know I've said thank you a lot already, but... can I at least treat you to a cup of coffee?"

I thought maybe I could sneak in a quick plate of momo while I was at it. Something warm, something filling.

He refused at first. "No, no. It's really okay. You don't have to. I was happy to help."

But after a few more gentle nudges, he relented.

"Okay. But only coffee," he smiled.



Chapter 8

We stopped somewhere between Jadibuti and Guheshwari, at a small roadside restaurant. Warm yellow light spilled out of the windows, cutting through the mist. It wasn't fancy, but it was perfect.

We were greeted at the entrance by a small pug waddling around the cashier's feet.

I froze.

I don't *hate* dogs, but they make me nervous. It must've shown on my face because Rohan who had already knelt down to play with it, paused, glanced up, and instantly read the discomfort in my eyes. With a gentle hand, he scooped the dog away and gave it a soft pat, motioning it toward the back.

He didn't make fun of me for it.

Didn't tease or question it. Just... understood. And that meant something.



I quickly washed my hands and sat down, trying to ignore the gnawing hunger. He ordered a cappuccino still sniffing from the cold and I went straight for chicken momo.

“No, you sure you don’t want some?” I offered.

He waved it off. “I’m good. I’m still full from lunch.”

The food arrived quickly, and I didn’t waste time. Every bite tasted like home after the long, tiring day. He watched me eat with a quiet amusement, sipping his coffee between laughs.

I was full.

When the bill came, I didn’t hesitate. Pulled out cash and paid it on the spot.

He tried to stop me. “Hey.. let me-”

But I beat him to it.

He shook his head, smiling. “Okay, fine. But next time, I’m treating you to boba. No arguments.”

I laughed. “We’ll see if there is a next time.”

We got back on the bike.

We talked more. About our families. About his liberal parents, and mine strict, more traditional.

And somehow, it didn't feel like a one-time ride anymore.

Somewhere between KU and Kathmandu, in the hum of the engine and shared stories under a drizzly sky, something subtle shifted.

Not a beginning, exactly. But maybe... a spark.

And that was enough for now.



Chapter 10

By now, the road had dried and so had the air between us. There was no rain, no awkward silence, no stiffness in how I sat behind him. Just the wind rushing past and our conversation; easy, unforced, slowly unfolding. my mind was drifting, pulled into memories as we passed through familiar turns and street corners.

We were heading toward Jorpati.
A place I once called home.

For a few years, we had lived nearby, my old neighborhood wasn't far from here, and it felt oddly comforting. Like the city was folding in on itself, reminding me how small the world could be.

That familiarity sparked an idea.

Rohan and I had been quiet for a few moments, the hum of the engine filling the space between us. But when I asked about East Pole School, "I studied there... is it still around?" he replied almost instantly.

"Oh, you know that place? It used to be somewhere around here," he said, pointing with his chin, "but now it's been

replaced by another property. My house is nearby from here.”

That was it.

That’s when I thought: *If he lives this close... maybe I can just get off somewhere and take a bus the rest of the way.* No need to bother him. He’s probably tired, or still has things to study. The plan seemed more considerate.

I offered gently, “You can drop me at the bus stop, it’s close from here. I can just take a bus.”

“Come on,” he cut in, turning slightly. “You really think I’m gonna let you take a bus now? I’ve already come this far. What’s a few more minutes?”

I stopped insisting.

He didn’t have to. But he *wanted* to.

He knew he’d have to come *back* down the same road after dropping me, that the trip would be double. Still, he didn’t hesitate. He just... chose to be generous.



I guided him through narrow lanes, slowly nearing my house. A few blocks before, I tapped again. “Right here’s fine.”

“I, uh... didn’t exactly tell my parents about this plan,” I admitted

“Could you please stop a few houses before mine. Not directly at the gate. My parents can be strict and even the smallest unknown detail could raise questions.”

As the bike rolled to a stop, Rohan didn’t just let me hop off.

He went a step further.

Pretending to be a Pathao rider, he held his phone up like he was confirming the ride, even mumbled something about “drop completed” before flashing a smile.

As I turned to head home, he just waited until I got inside safely.

That tiny gesture?

It made me feel protected. Seen. And strangely safe.

I got home, dried off, and changed.

And when I spoke to my parents, this time honestly I said, “Plans changed... Diwash had to leave, so a mutual of Anuska’s dropped me off. He lives nearby.”

It wasn’t a big deal.

But it also kind of was.



Later, while lying in bed, my phone buzzed.

“Anuska mentioned you in their story.”

I tapped on it.

Blurry photos. Colorful face paint. Rainbow flags. A few selfies. And a video of the last dance of two girls spinning in the rain before the program was finally cancelled.

I smiled and reposted it.

Then came another ping.

“Rohan Devkota replied to your story: *Wasn't the program cancelled today?*”



Chapter 8

Rohan:

Exams were still on, and even though I had three days between each paper, it didn't feel like a break. Today's paper had gone alright, but I knew better than to take it easy. I was already behind on revision for the next one.

I was just about to head back to my hostel when Ishan called.

"Bro... *red code*."

That phrase, our code for something urgent snapped me to attention.

He explained: his ex, Anuska, had come to KU for a rally with a friend, Prapti. The program had gotten rained out, the buses weren't running, it was late, and she lived far. He was still stuck on campus for his own exam, so could I help?

"Bro, just drop her near Koteswor. Please."

I let out a dramatic sigh. I don't give girls rides, he knows that.

“She’s stranded, man.”

He sounded genuinely worried, not like the usual chaos that followed Ishan and his exes. This was different. So I muttered, “Fine,” just to end the call, but even then, I had my assumptions. I mean, Ishan’s “friends” were usually a certain kind of messy. I figured Prapti would be no different.



Until I saw her.

Painted face, rainbow freckles shaped like stars on her cheeks, a soft tiredness in her eyes. Big eyes. Tanned skin. And something in her just... quieted the world. I blinked. *Oh*. This wasn’t what I expected.

Drop her home?

I would’ve driven her across the whole country if she asked.

I casually asked her where exactly she lived, expecting some random area on the other side of the city.

She said, “Chabahil.”

I blinked. “Wait. I live in Bouddha.”

We stared at each other, both realizing; *we live like ten minutes apart.*

Ten minutes.

I tried to stay cool, but inside, I was smiling like an idiot. All this time I'd been thinking I'd drop her near the ring road and bounce. But now? *She was basically my neighbor.* That felt like the universe nudging me and whispering, *hey, pay attention.*



We all stopped at Sitoshna for a bite. It was a familiar spot for me, but today felt strange. I didn't order anything, didn't feel like eating. I think I said something about my cold. The truth? I don't even remember what I said.

Anuska started talking about PUBG. I nodded occasionally, even smiled but the words barely registered. My thoughts were elsewhere. Locked on Prapti.

She didn't say much either. Just sat there, quietly eating the pork she'd ordered. I usually *hate* pork, but somehow it didn't bother me today.

I wasn't sure if she was bored or nervous or just polite. But something about her presence kept pulling me in.

Still, I didn't want to overstay. Wanting to talk to her more. Learn more.

I lied, said I needed to get back early to study.

Chapter 11

The ride back?

It felt... easy. Natural. We talked;really talked. I told her about KU, about how I go home every weekend even though I live in the hostel. About Annie, our golden retriever. About my dad's mobile shop and my mom's weird but impressive land-flipping hobby. Somehow, it all came out like I'd been waiting to say it for a long time.

She told me about her dad, he works in government. And how she wants to stay in Nepal, give PSC exams, and serve the country. That part struck me. Not many people say they want to *stay* here.

So I told her I wanted to do the same.

I didn't. Not really.

But in that moment, I just wanted her to know I understood her. That we were somehow aligned.

We talked the whole ride.



After a while, she asked, “Let’s grab coffee?”

I froze.

I *think* it was just a gratitude thing, a thank you for dropping her off. But still, something stirred. A quiet kind of hope.

We stopped at a Burger House, somewhere near Jadibuti. A pug came running the moment we stepped in. I bent down to play with it, until I saw her freeze in fear.

Without saying anything, I gently shooed the little guy away.



She ordered a plate of chicken momo. I just got a cappuccino, more to warm my hands than anything else. She offered me some momo, I said no. She didn’t insist.

The moment passed quietly.

When the bill came, she paid in cash; fast, like she’d planned it. I tried to stop her, but she brushed me off. I smiled anyway and said, “Fine, but next time’s on me. Boba.”

And somehow, saying “next time” didn’t feel like a line. It felt like a promise.



The ride back home was... different.

Not just in distance but in energy.

We talked.

About our parents; how mine were pretty liberal, and hers more strict.

She said it casually, but I could tell it mattered to her.

And somehow, it didn't feel like a one-time ride anymore.

Somewhere between KU and Kathmandu, in the hum of the engine and shared stories under a drizzly sky, something subtle shifted.

Not a beginning, exactly.

But a spark.

And that was enough.



Chapter 11

By now, the road had dried, and so had the tension between us. There was no rain, no awkwardness, no stiffness in how she sat behind me. Just the wind rushing past, and our easy conversation, slowly unfolding.

We were near Jorpati, and she had told me she once lived here with her parents for a few years and studied at East Pole School. I could tell from the way her voice softened, how the streets seemed familiar to her. When she asked about East Pole School, I didn't hesitate.

"Oh, you know that place?" I replied almost immediately. "It used to be somewhere around here, but now it's been replaced by another property. My house is nearby."

When she suggested I drop her at the bus stop, saying it was close enough for her to take a bus, I cut in without a second thought.

"You really think I'm gonna let you take a bus now? I've already come this far. What's a few more minutes?"

She stopped insisting, but I didn't have to be asked twice. I knew I'd have to come back the same way after dropping her off. The trip would be double. Still, I wanted to.



She guided me through narrow lanes, and a few blocks before her house, she tapped my shoulder.

"Right here's fine," she said.

She told me her parents were strict and that I should stop a few houses before hers, not right at the gate, so as not to raise any questions. I nodded and slowed the bike.

As we stopped, I pulled out my phone and pretended to be a Pathao rider, mumbling about confirming the ride and dropping her off. I even flashed her a smile to lighten the mood.

When she turned to go inside, I waited until she was safely behind her door before starting the bike again.

That small moment, holding back until she was safe, felt right.



I couldn't even wait to get home before thinking about texting her. But I knew better than to act on impulse. If she wasn't single, I wasn't going to push. No games. No drama. If someone else already had her heart, I'd respect that fully.

But if she *was* single?

I wasn't about to let the moment pass.

So I texted Ishan the second I parked my bike.

"Bro... is she single?"

He had her on Snapchat, knew a bit more than I did. He said, "Hold on, I'll ask Anuska."

That was enough to send my heart racing.

I was hoping for a "yes." When Ishan didn't reply right away, I figured he was talking to Anuska. The wait was killing me as I made my way home, my mind racing through every moment of the day.



Before even stepping inside, I called Annie, my dog, downstairs and sat out in the garden, scrolling through my phone, waiting.

I took a quick snap of the garden around me, captioned it "home," and posted it, a little silent hope she'd see it.

Then, finally, Ishan replied: “Yes, she is. And by the way, from what I see on her Snap, she’s got a great family, bro. You can go for it.”

My excitement peaked. Then I saw her story; blurry photos of colorful face paint, rainbow flags, selfies, and a video of two girls spinning and dancing in the rain just before the program got cancelled.

I stared at the screen, fingers twitching, typing and erasing messages over and over.

How do you even start?

This was the first time a girl had ever caught my eye like this. The last thing I wanted was to mess it up.

So, I kept it simple.

I typed: “Wasn’t the program cancelled today?” And hit send.

If this was something real, it had to start honestly.

And now... it had begun.



Chapter 12

Prapti:

Rohan's text popped up a few minutes after I'd reposted the story.

"Wasn't the program cancelled today?"

It was simple. Teasing. Innocent.

And yet... it made my chest tighten in a way I didn't fully understand.

Part of me felt warm; validated even. It was a nice message, nothing too much. But it also brought this strange feeling crawling up my spine.

Because I hadn't thought about *us*.
Not once during the ride.

Sure, the ride home was comfortable, safer than most. And sure, he'd been kind, thoughtful, even a little charming. But I hadn't allowed myself to imagine anything more. So now, as I stared at his text. I felt... unsure.

Happy, but hesitant.
Curious, but guarded.



I screenshotted the message and sent it to Anuska. She replied instantly with something even more surprising.

A screenshot.

Of a message from Ishan.

"Is she single?"

Rohan had asked. About me.

I froze for a second.

Anuska was practically giddy.

She replied, *"I like him for you already. He's a good guy. Knows boundaries. A gentleman, truly."*

And then came a flood of messages; her giving me the full scoop, as only Anuska could.

She told me how she and Ishan had a whole ride back, discussing Rohan. Apparently, he came from money but never acted like it. Not a single ounce of arrogance. Never used his privilege to show off or get attention.

And when it came to girls?

“He’s not like the others,” Ishan had said. “You know KU boys. Especially the engineering ones; new girl, new story, every other week. But Rohan? He’s never even glanced that way. The only girl he’s ever had a soft spot for was a friend. But she made a boyfriend. It broke him, I think. They don’t even talk now.”

Something about that hit hard.

Because I... wasn’t soft.

The age when I should’ve been learning softness, gentleness, emotional fluency, I wasn’t.

Instead, I dated a guy who was just as rough and blunt as I was. We were all loud words and silence. Arguments and apologies on repeat. We broke up a few months ago, but truthfully, I’d moved on long before we ended it.

Still, that relationship had taught me how *not* to be delicate.

How not to be the kind of girl Rohan deserved.

I read Ishan’s texts again and again, his last one sticking the most:

“He’s an innocent soul. I want him to be happy, whoever he ends up with.”

And that’s when I made up my mind.

**No attachment with Rohan.
No breaking his heart again.
He's someone's son. Someone's entire world. I won't be
another mistake in his life.**

I wouldn't let him fall into the parts of me I hadn't even figured out myself. The mess I carried, the darkness I never showed.

I wouldn't drag him into that.



I stared at his message for a while.

“Wasn't the program cancelled today?”

It deserved a reply, didn't it?

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized, he was trying. He had reached out.

And I... didn't know if I had it in me to start something. Not with someone like him. Someone careful. Genuine. Kind.

So I sent a smile emoji.

It didn't answer his question. Not really.
But it was all I could manage.

A part of me knew it would come across vague, maybe even dismissive. But it felt like the safest response. The most neutral. The least dangerous; for him, especially.

Because although a smile emoji wouldn't answer his question, that was what I thought was best.



Chapter 13

Rohan wasn't giving up.

Even though I'd tried to stay guarded; emotionally zipped up, he texted again. Genuine. Innocent. And funny.

"If a ghost attacks you at night, just scream. From Chabahil, I'd still hear it in Bouddha. We live that close 🙄"

I don't know why that text hit so hard.

It was silly. So unserious.

But so *us*.

The sarcastic use of the 🙄 emoji made me laugh quietly into my pillow.

I told myself, "Just for today. I'll reply just for today."

I wasn't supposed to be attached. I didn't want to lead him on. I didn't want to risk hurting someone like him.

But that text cracked something open, just a little.

I sent a smile emoji. It didn't answer his question, but it felt safe.

And what I didn't realize was that between those little texts, I had already begun easing in.

There we were, talking about ghosts, weird superstitions, food cravings, and why ketchup shouldn't be allowed near momo.

No opening up.

No deep feelings.

Just chaos and sarcasm. And it was enough.



At first, I was updating Anuska with screenshots and reactions. She was rooting for us more than I was. But after a while, I couldn't keep up with the pace of our conversation.

So I just texted her:

"He's like us. The vibe."

That was all I needed to say.

We never said "bye."

We didn't even plan to keep talking that long.

But somehow, the conversation never ended.

And somewhere between "you don't look like you'd like that" and "I swear the light in my kitchen flickered, that ghost's already here," we drifted.

3 a.m.? No, probably 4.
I don't even remember.

Just that when I finally closed my eyes, my phone screen
was still glowing.

And for the first time in a while, my heart wasn't as heavy.



Chapter 14

The next morning, I left his last message on seen.

It was time.

Time to part ways.

I didn't want to build something I couldn't commit to. Not again.

I told myself I'd stop here.

But then...

"Guess what..."

A new message.

Short. Innocent. Mysterious.

I tried not to open it.

I *really* did.

But curiosity won.

It wasn't anything huge. Just a small story. A random morning observation. But somehow, it pulled me in again. And before I knew it, we were talking. More than we did yesterday. More laughter. More ghosts. More nonsense.

This time, though, I told myself:

"I'll set the boundaries. Friends wouldn't harm. I'll let him know."

And I did.

I opened up. Just a little.

Told him about my recent toxic relationship. About how I wasn't ready for anything new.

How I didn't want to lead him on.

How I knew what Ishan had told Anuska.

"I just..." I typed, *"don't want to be someone's next heartbreak."*

He responded with emojis at first. A laugh. But not dismissive.

Soft. Reassuring.

Then he said "Why? Can't a guy just talk to a girl he thinks matches his vibe? Does it have to be *that*?"

I didn't reply immediately. I read on.

"And no, btw.. whatever Ishan told you, he doesn't know much. We're not that close."

He continued "He's probably talking about Sneha, my high school classmate. But ew, no. She was just in our friend group. She was struggling mentally at the time, and as a friend, I supported her. Not just me, we all did."

"We barely talked after high school. Just a few catch-ups here and there. She's religious, really spiritual actually. We

were never close like that. Never my type. She later got a boyfriend. I still wish her well, but it was never anything like what you're thinking."

And then came the part that made me freeze a little:

"I'm not that guy, Prapti. I don't usually talk to girls. Not because I'm shy or anything, just... I never felt the need. Never matched a vibe. Until you."

"That's all this is. A vibe I didn't expect but didn't want to ignore either."



I sat with that for a moment.

And despite myself, I smiled.
Just a little.

I know shouldn't have but I felt... relieved?

Like some quiet part of me had been hoping he'd say that.

And for once, I didn't feel like someone's replacement or someone's "maybe."

It made me feel... safe.

Which was strange. Because I wasn't supposed to feel anything at all.

This wasn't meant to be anything.

And yet, there I was, rereading his texts with a small, unfamiliar warmth.

Something inside me relaxed; like I'd been holding my breath since yesterday.

I couldn't contemplate this feeling. Not fully. Not yet.

But I knew one thing: This feeling, whatever it was, it wasn't disappointment.

And that was new.



But alongside that strange, quiet relief...

Another part of me felt oddly glad.

Glad that he wasn't *talking to me like that*.

That it wasn't flirtatious or layered with hidden intentions.

That maybe, just maybe, I could talk to him without the fear of another heartbreak trailing behind every message.

No pressure. No expectations. Just... conversations.

I could laugh at his sarcasm, reply to his "sometimes lame" jokes, talk about random things without the weight of "where is this going?" suffocating it.

That was comforting.

Safe, in a way I hadn't felt in a long time.

Still, I reminded myself, gently but firmly:

He may not be thinking that way now. But what if he does?

He seems genuine. Too kind. The kind of person who could care too easily.

And I? I'm not ready to be anyone's person.

So I made a silent promise:

I'll talk. I'll share. I'll laugh.

But I won't let him fall.

Not for me.

I won't be someone's heartbreak.



Chapter 15

It had been a few days now.

Texting back and forth; all day, all night, had somehow become our routine.

Unplanned. Unforced. Just... consistent.

Around that time, I shifted my room upstairs.

My brother's board exams were coming up and he needed to be closer to our parents for guidance, so he moved into my room, the one downstairs. I, too, needed focus for my upcoming PSC exams, and the room upstairs was quieter. We swapped.

That shift changed everything.

More privacy. More silence. More freedom.

Before, I had to worry about every step I took.

A notification sound, a late-night buzz; anything could get me in trouble.

But now, being upstairs gave me space.

I could text without worrying about who was nearby.

I could breathe a little easier.



But still I knew that I had to be careful.

I've had a history of my strict parents checking my Instagram and Facebook. I'd learned my lesson; chats needed to be hidden, unsaved, deleted. Even though this was just a friendship, the fact that it was with a boy made all the difference in my house.

I needed something safer. Snapchat.

"Umm... would it be okay if we talked on Snapchat instead? My Insta's kinda risky at home." I explained everything, how in my house, even a *friendship* with a boy could be misunderstood. and that snapchat felt safer.

He understood. Didn't make it awkward.

But he wasn't really a social media guy, barely used the apps he had, he was more present in the real world, the futsal-and-friends kind.

"I don't really use Snap, you'll have to teach me," he said.

I tried teaching him but typing it all out wasn't working. So out of nowhere, he said, "Wanna call? It'll be easier."

I hesitated.

What if my parents heard me? What if I got caught?

But something in me gave in.
I took a breath and said yes.

At first, I whispered. Carefully. Cautiously.
Then slowly, my voice changed.
It relaxed. Smoothed. Became *me*.
I didn't even notice it at first, but I could hear the
difference.

That one call was all it took. He learned Snapchat.
And from that day on, we were snapping all day and calling
all night.

It became a rhythm we didn't plan.
Some nights, I'd start talking in my sleep mid-call, unaware I
hadn't hung up.
Sometimes gibberish, sometimes half-asleep rambles.
It was strange.
But it felt warm.

And addictive.



Chapter 16

The late night calls and exchanged our snaps brought us much closer than before. I started noticing things about him.

Little things.

I'm not the kind of person who notices things.

Like... little details about people.

I've never been that soft. Never really paid attention unless I *had* to.

But ever since I met Rohan, I started noticing things.

And I didn't even realize it; it just... happened.

And every day, I kept noticing more.

And every thing I noticed was... good.

How he spoke in his snaps, that calm, unbothered tone.

The way his words were never too much, never too loud.

Just enough.

How his laugh felt effortless.

How he never tried to impress. But left an impression anyway.

I started noticing how he carried himself.
How clean he kept his surroundings.
How even in selfies, his room never looked messy, just simple, tidy, lived-in.

He wasn't polished in the forced, aesthetic kind of way.
He was just... real. Effortlessly grounded.

He had a sister, a dentist.
Maybe growing up with her had made him more aware.
Gentle.

Not feminine. Just respectful.
He cared for his skin, not obsessively ; just enough.
Didn't overshare. Didn't act like a boy desperate for attention.

He had nothing to prove and maybe that's what made me see him more.

He was a plant lover.

He had a whole garden too.

Nothing massive, but beautiful in a way only something well-loved could be. Not just there for the aesthetic. He actually *cared* for them.

How he checked on his plants first thing after getting home.

And fishes. He had a full tank with little swimmers he fed every morning, cleaned out regularly.

He once told me about a fish he had; well taken care of, healthy, loved. But one day, it just... died. Suddenly. No signs, no warning.

He never found out why.

But he cried that night. All night. Not because he was at fault, but because he couldn't save it.

I don't know why that stayed with me, but it did.

Maybe because people barely care for their own selves, and here was this guy, going out of his way to care for beings that couldn't even speak.

And he did all this; plants, fishes, Annie, futsal, family all *while* traveling to Dhulikhel.

Waking up early, coming home late, sitting through hours of classes, then hours on the road.

He'd be tired, I knew it. Anyone would be.

But he never made a big deal about it.

Never once complained.

How even after hours on the road, he'd still snap me something small, a sunset, a flower, his muddy futsal shoes,

or sometimes just his tired face captioned, “*I survived another day* 😞.”

And I’d smile. Every time.

Like a routine. Like a soft little start to the day.

I don’t know when, or how, but I had started looking forward to them.

To all of it.

Because somewhere between those snaps and sleepy emojis...

I was starting to let my guard down.

And that scared me a little.

Because I’d promised myself; I wasn’t going to fall.



That morning, like every other recently, began with a snap.

Annie, his dog.

This time with a treat in his hand, giving little commands.

“Speak,” he said. She barked.

“Spin,” she twirled.

“Sit.” She obeyed.

“Stretch your body.” She did that too.

I smiled like an idiot at my phone screen.

The way he bonded with her; it was soft, genuine, full of love.

I liked it. I really liked it. I shouldn't, but I do.



Chapter 17

Today felt different. Not because of anything grand, just... something in the air.

His mom was leaving for Thailand.

He sent a snap from the airport, casually turned the camera toward her and said,

“Mom, say bye to my friend.”

He snapped from the airport, turned the camera toward her and went,

“Mom, say bye to my friend.”

His mom waved sweetly at the camera, no questions asked.

But I knew. *She knew.*

The son who rarely used his phone was now always on it.

The boy who barely clicked pictures was sending videos daily.

He never asked her to wave on camera before.

And definitely never asked her to bring chocolates back from her trips.

This was her seventh (eighth?) time in Thailand.

No one in their family liked chocolates much ; but I did.

He remembered. And he asked.

And she agreed, smiling warmly at the lens, almost like she was accepting me without *saying* it.

Like she didn't know me... but already liked me.

And that small gesture?

It felt good.

Really, really good.



All this while, on the other hand, I had been having a really stressful month. My PSC exams were approaching.

The pressure was real.

There was so much to cover, and the headache of it all never seemed to stop.

My dad had been waiting for this moment for so long. Everyone around me was excited and that scared me even more.

What if I didn't pass?

This wasn't child's play. It was tough. *Really* tough.

Sure, I had joined the prep classes, but that was months ago.

The GK and IQ sections kept changing with time, and staying updated with every bit of news felt like chasing a moving train.

It drained me.

And in the middle of all that stress, there was Rohan.

Cheering me up.

Talking to me.

Becoming this unexpected, bright star in my life.

He would think of every small, possible way to lift my mood and he did it so effortlessly.

His mom returned a week after her trip.

She had brought a suitcase full of chocolates.

He kept more than half aside. For me.

"You're gonna love them," he said, smiling.

Someone, for the first time, thought of me like that.

Put in that kind of effort.

It wasn't loud or over the top.

Just real. Quietly thoughtful. Steady.

And slowly...

I was melting.



Chapter 18

Fast forward a few weeks.

We were still talking; texting, snapping, calling late into the night but I had been buried in my studies. The pressure was insane. Everyone around me, especially Dad, had high hopes. My PSC exams were finally here.

I was nervous.

Rohan still hadn't let go. He was right there, cheering me on, making me laugh, reminding me every now and then that I could do this. The first guy in my life to give this much... without ever asking anything in return.



Dad dropped me off for the exam that morning. The exam? It went okay. Not amazing, not terrible; mid.

I hopped onto a bus to return home and called to let my parents know. And then, for the first time, I dialed Rohan's number myself.

Usually, he was the one who called. I never wanted to seem too eager. But today? I just... wanted to hear his voice. Let him know. Tell him first.

One ring. My heart started pounding.

Second ring. He picked up.

His deep voice came through and I almost whispered, "Exams went mid."

He laughed softly. I could tell he was happy I called.

"Let's meet," he said.

My heart froze. My hands, legs, everything too.

"When?"

"4 pm?"

My heart said yes. But my brain screamed no. My parents would never allow it. 5 PM was my unspoken curfew. No questions asked.

We negotiated. 3 PM it was.

I got home and everyone was talking; consoling me, telling me it wasn't the end of the world even if I failed. But my head was somewhere else. Spinning. Panicking. Planning.

How do I tell them?

Then it clicked.

“I’m meeting Anuska today,” I said. “She’s had a rough day. Something about court work. We’re meeting for just a bit, around 3-4.”

No one questioned it. I had worked hard the past few months. They let it go.



I rushed upstairs, giddy and panicked. Hundreds of questions flooding in:

What do I wear?

How do I act?

Should I do makeup? No makeup?

What if he doesn’t like how I look in real life?

I needed to look normal. Nothing too sus. Something my parents would believe I wore to meet Anuska.

But still... I wanted to look nice. A little part of me wanted to impress him. To have him look at me and think, *She’s beautiful*.

At 1 PM, I started getting ready. Fixing little flaws. Adjusting every detail.

I settled on a basic pant and a crop top. Simple. Pretty. Just enough.



Chapter 18

Something came up.

Just when I thought the plan was set, Rohan texted me; his mom had asked him to groom Annie before going out, and of course, he couldn't say no. Annie came first. I understood. And just like that, the 3 PM plan shifted back to 4.



I reached the agreed stop right at 4. Waiting, nervous, adjusting my hair every five seconds. And then he pulled up on his bike.

After so long, I was seeing him again. But this time, we weren't strangers. Not really.

He looked... good. Better than I remembered. Clean, crisp. He smelled heavenly. And this time, unlike last time, I really looked at him. Everything about him.

I hopped onto his bike.

“So, where are we going?” I asked, trying to sound chill while ignoring the storm of butterflies in my stomach.

“You’ll see,” he said gently.

We drove through a familiar road. It felt like a movie, the wind in my hair, the music playing low in the back of my mind, my heartbeat louder than it needed to be.

And then, we stopped.

Aloha Café.

Our first date.

It was beautiful. Aesthetic. Plants all around. Dreamy lights. Soft music. Definitely looked expensive. My stomach twisted a little.

He got off and gestured for me to lead the way. I did, heart pounding.

We sat by a tall mirror; perfect lighting, cozy vibe. We talked, laughed a little. He looked a little nervous too, but also sure of himself. I liked that balance.

Then the waiter came with the menu.

And my panic returned. The prices were... not for people like me.

He noticed right away.

“Hey,” he smiled. “I’m paying, obviously. Don’t worry.”

I smiled back, still a little hesitant, and ordered something basic. I didn’t want to burden him.



Later, I stood up and went to take a mirror selfie nearby. Just a quick one.

After a few clicks, he quietly walked up and joined me. Standing beside me.

Butterflies. Everywhere.

It was so cute. I couldn’t stop smiling. I quickly sent it to Anuska like I always do and we returned to our table.

We ate, talked more. Nothing too fancy, but the comfort? Unmatched.

And then it was time.

We got up, walked out slowly, and he dropped me back home.

My first date.

Our first date.

And it felt just right.



On the way back, I casually mentioned that I was craving some sundae.

I knew it wasn't easy to find, especially around that time, but he still tried.

We stopped about 15 minutes away and walked into Bouddha.

Bikes aren't allowed inside, and the parking was far, but he didn't even hesitate.

He found the best one. The tastiest. The most expensive one, even.

And as we walked back, weaving through the crowd, he gently grabbed my hand while crossing the road.

It felt steady. Safe.

And in that small moment,

I felt so much.



Chapter 19

Maybe I was catching feelings.

But I didn't want to jump into it too soon. I'd been through enough to know that hearts are fragile and hope can be a little dangerous.

So, I told Anuska.

She, being the ever-rational one, suggested we test him, just to be sure. "Let's see where he really stands," she said.

We created fake Instagram and Snapchat accounts. New name, new profile, random posts.

Then we added him.

And... he instantly added back.

My heart sank.

I didn't know why it hurt, but it did. Maybe I expected him not to. Maybe I hoped I was the only one.

But then, a message popped up from him on the fake account:

"I know it's you. Stop playing."

Anuska played along. Denied everything.

"You've got the wrong person," she replied.

But he kept going.

"Don't lie. I know it's you, Prapti."

She asked again.

"Prapti? Who's that?"

And he said it.

"Prapti, the person I really like."

My heart stopped. Everything paused.

The conversation went on. And the more he typed, the more he kept circling back to me; gentle words, soft mentions, nothing flirty or desperate, just... genuine.

Only me.

Anuska finally looked at me and smiled.

"He's a good one," she said.

And for the first time in a long while, I believed it too. I was happy.

Really, really happy.



Chapter 21

It was one of those mornings that felt like it was meant for something different. The kind that carries a little thrill in the air.

College had announced a sudden holiday, and I didn't tell my parents. I just lied that I had classes and left. Because today, we had a picnic planned.

We were going to meet near college and head off from there. And maybe, a small part of me hoped it wouldn't be just another casual hangout. Maybe he'd say something. Maybe he'd *see* me; really see me.

So, I dressed a little differently.

A plain off white vest, soft and simple.

Still me, but just... a little more thoughtful this time.

Prettier..

Ready for him to see me in a different light.

Not just as a friend.

But maybe something more.

We met like planned.

He took me to this really fancy café again; *Lady Bon Bon*.

Fed me just enough to make sure I was full but not too sleepy for the picnic.

Then we grabbed a few snacks from the grocery store and headed off.

And still he didn't glance. Not even once.

He was just... respectful. Focused.

Almost like he didn't even notice.

And I wondered if he would; once we got to the picnic spot.



But on the way, something happened.

A bike came speeding out of nowhere and slammed into a scooter that was just trying to cross the road. The impact was horrible.

And the biker? He ran.

Rohan didn't even wait. He looked at me once, asked, "Ready?" Without hesitation, Rohan tightened his grip, leaned forward, and we chased. Me on the back of his bike, heart pounding.

We sped through bends, trying to catch even a glimpse of that bike again, but he was too fast. Gone.

We slowed down eventually.

I saw him glance back, thinking.

"Should we go back? What if the scooter guy's hurt?" he asked softly.

I looked at the time. We had already gone too far ahead, and we were running late.

So I shook my head. "We can't... not now."

He didn't argue.

But I could tell, he really wanted to.

His brows furrowed, his jaw tight, his eyes fixed on the road but not really there.

He cared.

And it wasn't performative. It wasn't to impress me. It was just who he was. Even if we didn't go back, his concern lingered.

And me?

I was quietly falling for a boy who didn't need to do grand things to steal my heart. It was the way he reacted when no one was watching.

How Rohan cared and how he didn't hesitate. not just about me, not just about people he knew, but even about strangers.



Chapter 21

The road incident had left a deep scratch on Rohan's bike.

The bike that he loved.

The one he treated almost like a part of himself.

I froze for a moment.

Not just because of the crash we saw, or the fact that we chased the guy and couldn't catch him.

But because of the scratch.

In my world, that would've been enough to ruin the entire day.

I'd seen it happen before — the smallest of things becoming the biggest mood-killers. Anger hanging in the air like smoke, ruining everything.

So I braced myself.

But then he just glanced at it and said,

"Pft. It's nothing. That's fixable. Don't worry."

Just like that.

So calm. So soft.

Like it didn't even matter.

Although it did matter to me.

Because I knew how much he loved that bike.

Because I'd seen how little things could shift entire moods.

Because I was already bracing myself for a cloud to hang over our day.

But he?

He let it go. Effortlessly.

As if the day, the plan; *I* mattered more than the scratch.

And that stayed with me.

More than he'll probably ever know.

And that moment?

That *showed* me who he was.

That's when I realized; maybe I wasn't used to this kind of care.

This kind of softness.

I didn't even know how much more I could fall for someone.

But there I was. Falling. Again.



We didn't know the exact way to the picnic spot, so we used the map.

The road was complicated; off-road, narrow, winding up a steep hill.

Google Maps had given us the worst possible path.
And I, being hopeless with directions, gave him the wrong
turn.

Told him to go straight when he should've taken a right.

A few minutes in, I realized the mistake.

Panic crept in.

We couldn't even turn back; one slip, and we'd tumble far
down.

I felt the guilt crash in heavy.

But he?

He smiled.

"No problem. That's even better," he said. "We'll see where
this road takes us too. Don't you worry."

And those words, so simple, so sure, held me together.

He didn't let me feel stupid.

He didn't make me feel like a burden.

And when he saw that I'd gone quiet, probably still beating
myself up over it, he pulled over.

Didn't even get off the bike.

Just leaned over, reached into a nearby bush, and plucked a
tiny wildflower.

He turned to me, gently offered it with his pretty smile.

No words. Just that smile.

And in that second; I knew.

I'd fallen for him. Completely.

I couldn't say it out loud yet.
I didn't have the courage.
But it was there, in every heartbeat.



Eventually, we found another route; a much easier one and
finally reached the spot.
And it was beautiful.
But honestly?
Nothing could top the way he made me feel on the way
there.



Chapter 22

Things went on the same.

More talks. More closeness.

Am I falling? I don't know.

A lot has happened.



One day, I told him how much I hated getting bouquets as gifts.

“How sad is it to watch something beautiful just die?” I’d said. “I’d rather someone handpick a few flowers, even from the roadside. That means something.”

A week later, he started planting rose bushes in his garden. Not one, but several.

And he told me he was taking special care of them. Because they were for me.

Once, I casually mentioned I was craving a sundae; something specific, something expensive.

Later that same day, at 8 PM, he showed up with it.

Getting it wasn't easy. He had to park far, walk 15 minutes, rush because my parents could arrive any second.

But he made it in time.

With the sundae. With handpicked roses. With a handwritten note.

Another day, in frustration, I told him how I wasn't as privileged. That I didn't know how to ride, and that traveling so far for college was exhausting.

"You wouldn't get it," I'd snapped.

So I challenged him:

"Try going to Dhulikhel by bus."

And he did.

Despite having the comfort of his own bike, he chose the crowded, sweaty, unreliable bus.

Just to show me that he was listening. That he cared.



Then the PSC results came.

I had passed. I was finally eligible for the second paper, a massive deal for me and my family. Everyone was celebrating.

But when I called him, he sounded even happier than me. He celebrated my success like it was his own.

Every single day, without even realizing it, he was stealing more and more of my heart.



Soon, it was time for my second PSC exam. The pressure returned, heavier than before.

I isolated myself.

No college. No friends.

Just me, my notes, and silence.

Almost depressing.

But his texts... his voice... his jokes, his reassurance; they became my light.

My daily dose of calm. My sanity.

And then the day finally came. Dad dropped me off like before. The exam went much better this time; I could feel it.

And like last time, Rohan came to pick me up.

But this time... he came with more.

A bundle of flowers, a box full of my favorite chocolates, cards, little letters, a warm smile...

So much effort, all for me.

I looked at him, and in that moment I just knew.

This boy; he's my lucky charm.
My brightness in a room full of chaos.
My calm.

With him by my side, I knew... I *will* pass my PSC.

Because now,
I have luck, I have hope, I have *him*.



Chapter 23

It went on. Things just kept getting better.

And I found myself falling; a little more every day.
Quietly. Silently. Fully.

But I never said anything. Never explained what I was feeling. Maybe I was scared it would ruin things, maybe I was just waiting for the right moment.

Then one night, something changed.

His maternal uncle passed away.

Not a close relative by relation, but someone the family was deeply attached to.

It hit his mom especially hard.

It was late; around 10 p.m. And even then, he called me. Still thinking of me.

He hadn't eaten, hadn't rested, and was still out; driving people back and forth, handling everything like the responsible son he always tried to be.

He sounded tired. Cold.
But still so calm.

I kept listening. Worried. Wanting to reach through the phone and do something. Anything. And as he said he had to get going, that he'd call again later, I whispered, barely realizing what I was about to say:

"Take care... I love you."

Just like that.
No build-up. No drama. No big pause.

It wasn't for effect. It wasn't even planned. It just slipped out; raw, honest, real. Out of worry. Out of care. Out of something far deeper than I had ever admitted before.

He didn't react. Didn't mention it.
Maybe he didn't hear it. Maybe he did.
But he had too much going on to respond.

Still; for me, it was a moment.
A quiet confession. A soft realization.
I didn't need him to say it back.

Because I knew now:
I had fallen.
And I wasn't scared of that anymore.



I was so ready to confess. Not that night, though.
That night, there wasn't space for thoughts like that,
Worry had taken over every part of me.
I was just hoping he'd eat, rest, stay warm, stay safe.

But even through all that, a small part of my heart; and
maybe a louder part of my brain couldn't forget what had
slipped out.
What I had *said*.

"I love you."
I hadn't meant to. But I had meant *every word*.

Days passed. Things slowly returned to normal. His mom
was okay. So was he.
And me?
I was more than okay.

But that overwhelming feeling stayed. This aching,
beautiful knowing that I had fallen for him; so deep, so
fully, there was no turning back.
No recovery. No denial.

And I knew I had to tell him.
Not by accident. Not in passing. Not because the moment
cornered me. But because I wanted to. Because he
deserved to know.

So I waited for the right moment. For the right words. For
the right silence between us; where love wouldn't feel like a
risk; but the only thing that made sense.



But then he went back to KU. Back to his hostel.
His roommate, Ravi, was still there, so I knew he wasn't really *alone*. And even then... we talked the whole night.

His actions kept telling me that he loved me. But not his words. And I was starting to ache for the words.
Because this; this was different.

It wasn't my first relationship.
But it was my first *love*. The first time it felt like *this*.
Deep, consuming, terrifying, real.

Not hearing from him for a single day made my chest tighten. And now, being apart, I felt that craving double in strength. The longing. The restlessness.
I just needed him to *say it*.

So that night, after hours of talking, when we were just about to say goodnight, I gave in to the feeling that had been bursting at the seams. And softly, with a shaky voice, I whispered into the call,
"Goodnight, baby. I love you."

The moment I said it, I panicked.
Threw the phone aside,
Buried my face into the pillow like he could *see* me.
Like he'd caught me confessing a secret I was supposed to keep.
My heart was racing.

And then; *ping*.

A message.

I didn't dare open it. Just stared at the notification, heart pounding.

"Goodnight baby"

"Love you 🥰"

"Yeahh ??"

"You told this"

Butterflies. Full-body blushing.

Another ping. Then another.

"...."

"okay baby Goodnight"

"I love you too 🥰😭"

"I wish I was alone rn"

"Fuckkk"

That was it.

My heart exploded.

It was real.

He said it.

We said it.

And in that quiet space between the words and the screen,

Everything changed.

Everything became *ours*.



Chapter 24

We were now *verbal* about it; the love, the feelings.

But still, I didn't want that to mark the beginning of our relationship. Not yet.

I wanted something special. A proper proposal. A day we could look back on and say, "*Yes, that's when it all started.*"

So we agreed, this wasn't *it* just yet.

One day, when we had more time, when the moment felt right, that's when it would begin.

Until then, whatever we were, wherever we were... it was enough.



In the midst of it all, Anuska met someone too.

Kamal.

She found him online, he was soft-spoken, sweet, an introvert. The complete opposite of Anuska, which somehow made perfect sense.

We both had something beautiful now.

So, we planned a double date.
And what better day than Ceci's birthday?

Before the celebration, I told Ceci and Khushi about *him*.
They lit up instantly, confused about the name, calling him
"Mohan" and "Roshan." We all burst out laughing and we
didn't correct them.

It was oddly adorable.
Something about that moment just felt cozy and safe.

After Ceci's birthday treat, we walked downstairs from the
café. And there they were; Rohan and Kamal, waiting for us.
We headed off to Karma Coffee, a small, warm café that
asked for payment upfront.

Me and Anuska quietly decided to pay.
Our men deserved a little gesture, a little thank you.

Later, they found out and were adorably hesitant, trying to
return the favor. But it was sweet. The balance, the care.
It was also my first time meeting Kamal; we all clicked.

After a long and easy conversation, we dropped Anuska off
nearby, Rohan took me back home.
The warmth of that evening lingered for hours.

The next day, our college had some programs,
And again, we planned a second double date,
This time at Chicken Station.

It was short. Simple. Fun.
But it meant something.

It was like our relationship had gently stepped forward.
No big announcement. No grand gestures yet. But still
something was changing.

Deepening.

And it felt so good.



Chapter 25

I love how Rohan planned most of our dates.

He'd take the lead, pay without hesitation, and in between, spoil me with the little things I loved; chocolates, flowers, handwritten letters, thoughtful cards, the foods I casually mentioned craving.

He *noticed* everything.

And gave, not just generously but intentionally.



And then... it was finally time. 21st November, 2023.

The moment we both had been waiting for. He couldn't hold it in any longer. Neither could I.

I skipped college for that day; for *us*.

We just wanted privacy. Something soft, slow, and just ours. We booked a cozy hotel, shopped for food, and carried along our quiet excitement.

He had stayed up the whole night before.

Not studying. Not scrolling his phone. But crafting handmade bouquets. With care. With love. With his hands.

We bought a brownie cake. Simple. But perfect. Like us.

And then, just like in fairytales... he knelt down.
On one knee. Eyes full of love. Heart wide open.
Asking me to be his girlfriend.

Of course I said yes.
How could I not?

It was the *best* day of my life. I felt loved. I felt chosen. I felt complete.

Rohan, if you're reading this:
I love you.
More than words.
More than all the moments that led us here.
Forever, thank you for being mine.



Epilogue

Two Years Later...

This storybook, all of this, is for us.

A celebration of two years together.

Two years since our story quietly began, and still, every time I look at you, I feel like we're on page one.

The butterflies?

They're still here.

In every call, every hug, every stolen glance.

If anything, they've only grown stronger, deeper, softer, more constant.

Looking back now, I realize how much we've truly been through together; the laughs, the tears, the exams, the long calls, the flowers, the confessions, the us we built, piece by piece.

And the most magical part? Nothing has changed; except that everything has only gotten better.

We still exchange gifts.

We still write letters.

We still plan cute surprises.

We still try to impress each other.
We still hold hands like it's the first time.

Neither of us ever got too comfortable.
We never let the title of "partners" become an excuse to stop trying.
We're still falling. Every day.
In love. With each other.

So here's to us; to the past two years of growing, giving, learning, loving.
To how lucky we are to have found this kind of love so young, so real, so rare.

And to the next chapter because our story is far from over.
If anything, it's just beginning.

I love you, Rohan.
Now and always.

Happy Anniversary, Devkotu <3

21.11. ∞

