

Dearest Chitti,

Hello. It's me. The small person you are already irrationally obsessed with. I am some months old, which means I have very little control over my neck, my sleep cycle, or my facial expressions, but somehow, I already know you. Thank you for the steady supply of diapers. It brings me great joy to poop on your hard-earned money. This, I believe, is our bond.

Before I arrived (loudly, might I add), you had already barged into my mother's life in 2016. She says TISS gave her perspective. I think it gave her you, which explains her tolerance levels today. You don't knock. You don't ask. You simply arrive and decide you belong. I admire this. One day, I aspire to show the same entitlement especially to you.

You and my mother don't speak every day. I see her ignoring your calls while feeding me or trying to put me to sleep. But somehow, miraculously, you continue texting. Asking about me. Repeatedly. Relentlessly. This is commitment.

You don't agree on everything. And yet, here you are, firmly planted, like furniture that cannot be moved and must not be questioned. I am learning early that permanent love looks like this: loud, invasive, deeply loyal, and slightly exhausting.

I hear stories about you. About your opinions- strong, plentiful, and generously distributed across every corner of my mother's life. About how you steal her clothes and secretly pray she grows bigger so your wardrobe expands without guilt. I am only months old, Chitti, but even I understand this is not friendship. This is long-term planning. Strategy. Mum says she feels the same. I respect the honesty.

On my parents' wedding day, while others were busy looking nice, you were feeding my mother hot Horlicks with a spoon. This is important family lore. You were not concerned with photographs or aesthetics. You were concerned with her coughing. With her makeup. With her survival. These are the stories Ma will tell me when I'm older, proof that some bonds don't announce themselves, they simply show up.

You pester. She listens. She rants. You draw swords sometimes imaginary, sometimes very real, for or her and now, apparently, for me. I am three months old and already have security. This is excessive. But reassuring.

You are always there. Sometimes too there. You believe everything my mother owns also belongs to you. Along with me. I am told you apply this philosophy generously. I am learning from the best.

I will grow up hearing how you cried, thrived, broke down, and occasionally lied like a crocodile, convincingly, without shame. But through all of it, my mother sees you. The same you. The unedited version. I may be small, but even I understand how rare that is.

Now, Jahnavi, it's me; Baban er Ma.

This friendship doesn't need tending or reminding. It has outgrown effort. It is now a banyan tree- thick, tangled, stubborn. It will survive storms, distance, extreme weather, and your continued theft of my clothes. One day, my son will climb it. You will probably supervise and give instructions no one asked for.

Happy 31st birthday, Chitti.  
You are not just my mum's friend.  
You are family to me, uninvited, unavoidable, and fiercely loved.

Now please stop being corny with me. (Baban)

With drool, judgement, and permanent attachment,  
Megh (aka Baban, depending on the day and mood you are in) 🌻

This birthday is extra special bcz Baban is around! 🎉