

Love Via Arranged Marriage.....

About the Author

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I hope you this book will be able to strike a chord with you. Kindly let me know how you feel about this.

Can't Thank You All Enough....

How it Began...

"Mom..Enough!!!!" Kashish screamed on phone "How many times I have told I am not going to consider any other proposal!"

Kashish was a 24 year old whitish complexioned pretty girl with shoulder cut hair and really lovely smile. She was working in an IT company for past two years and in these two years ,her biggest problem in life had been her mother forcing her to see new proposals every time. For one and a half years, she was successful in declining all the proposals that came her way as she didn't find those per her 'standards'.

Her mother had been really furious at her and she had declared that if Kashish kept on going this way, she would definitely end up as an alone, unmarried, moody, snappy, cranky old woman. The free spirited Kashish had never paid much attention to all these warnings and forecasting from her mother and had declared to her that she would rather be alone and moody than to be with a guy who was not good enough for her.

But soon when all her girl friends started getting either committed or married and when gradually all of them stopped being available for weekend outings, the realities and disappointments started dawning on her.

"Ditchers!" She had thought when her last surviving girl-friend had bailed out on their movie plan because of the surprise visit by her fiancé. What she would not give to get old times back when they all used to make various plans on the fly and used to go out and enjoy themselves without a care in the world.

But she had to accept that she would have to start giving consideration to some proposal if she didn't want to end up as a misanthrope. But as sincerely as she might have tried, she didn't find even a single profile whom she could consider as worthy of her.

Even after days, weeks, months of scanning, analysing and scrutinizing thousands of profile, she didn't encounter even a single one that would made her say "He is the One!", not a single one till she landed on Deep's profile.

"Kashu..And how many times I have told you not to bank on that guy, Deep, so much." Her Mom voice brought her to present "You don't understand it happens in arranged marriages. There is no obligation for that guy to take it forward with you and had he really wanted so, he would have reverted by now .And look at you! you have not even looked at a single proposal in past 6 months. He is not going to come back Kashu, the sooner you realize this the better."

"He will..Mumma..l know He will" Kashish said and cut the call.

The memories of the old times surrounded her. It was true that they had met only twice in six months, which was reasonable as Deep was working in Germany and could come to India only once to meet the prospective brides .But during these couple of meetings, Kashish had fallen hard for him.

The first time was when he had flown down to Delhi and had come to meet her family along with his. It felt as if it was yesterday.

She had a lovely time speaking to his little sister and his sister seemed to have taken a great liking in her too. Kashish had taken the sister to her room and had shown her the movie collection, the collection of songs and they had a great chit-chat regarding their common love for nail-polish and budding hero Aditya Roy Kapoor.

The sister had felt really comfortable with her and had started asking her about all the little nitty-gritty of Deep's and her communication over the phone and Skype.

She had told her that it all started with the serious talks about what they wanted from life, what was their goal and aspirations, where they would prefer to settle in future, was she okay to live with her in-laws, was she okay to settle in Germany....blah-blah.

The days had passed and the conversation had moved to "Which movie they liked the most ?" to "Who were their respective best friends" to "What was the most embarrassing moment of their childhood" to "I think you should listen to this song.... (in other words I am dedicating this song to you)"

Daily, at his 1 AM (GMT time) and her 6:30 AM, he would give her a wakeup call. She would answer the call with sweet "Good Morning" and he would ask her to come on Skype.

Considering, it would be cold early morning; she would just put her face outside the blanket and would try to open her eyes.

She would look so adorable to him that he would gesture pulling her cheeks over the video-chat which will make her dive back into the blanket again and then he would beg her to come out of it and it would start all-over again.....

Another day, he had bought a huge white jacket and he was showing it off to her, smiling and posing like a WWE champion. He told her that he knew that he was looking damn cool in the jacket and was merely asking for her opinion..just for the courtesy sake.

"Yeah! Totally! You look totally Great..Like a Great Giant Polar Bear.." She had laughed, and after that, she had nicknamed him as Polar Bear...

Sometimes there had been few little fights between them because of the insecurities resulting from this long-distance not-exactly-a-relationship, but they used to make-up quickly. The patching up usually involved a lot of tears from her end and hundreds of Sorry from his.

She had not told her mother that she had been talking to this guy for such long hours. Although, this was an arranged marriage and the parents had liked his profile but then again, it was an arranged

marriage only and nothing was finalized till the guy actually flew down to India and both the families met.

An Arranged marriage is as complicated and as effort demanding as its name is.

First the guy and girl or their respective families, have to create their profile mentioning the age, education ,horoscope details, birth star, hobbies, siblings ,job description, location, salary, parents job description and what not.

Then both the candidates will go through each other's profile and rate the other against their respective desired partner's parameters.

The matter with prospective candidate is taken to the next step only if the above rating screams either "Awesome" Or "Good" Or At least "Above average with No deal breakers".

In Kashish and Deep's case, they both had instantly liked each other profiles and had forwarded the same to their parent's, And as soon as they had got a green signal from their parents, of course after horoscope matching and background verifications, they both had started talking to each other (Deep had started calling Kashish, to be precise).

The First Meet

And so finally when he came to meet her family, she had already gone on cloud nine.

He looked exactly the same as he did on Skype, may be even better in his Van Heusen's white shirt & black trousers. His electrifying laugh had the same crackling sound; his face had the same charm and appeal.

She couldn't help smiling from ear to ear, listening to the voice that had woken her up every morning for past six months. But her constant flashing of her 32 bits, in-turn horrified her mother that the guy's family would consider Kashish to be complete lunatic.

She had also caught him casting mischievous glances in her direction when she was adjusting her hair talking to his sister and this had lead to her blush tomato-red.

This was undoubtedly the best day in her life where she was surrounded by her current and future family.

But things are never as flawless as they appear to be. Every perfect scenario is always cursed with some or other loop-hole. Deep's mom, although a very affectionate one, couldn't take the bonding between her son and Kashish in a very positive note.

The level of comfort they were sharing was too much for two people meeting the first time and she was feeling that although it was an arranged marriage but somebody had snatched the steer from her hands and taken control over her plans for her son's wedding. And considering her being an Indian mother, this was something she would never ever bear.

"So Deep *beta*, do you have any inclination towards drinks?" Kashish's father asked casually but kept his ears open for the response.

"No Uncle. I don't drink." He replied, truthfully and Kashish's father heaved a sigh-of-relief. He always wanted his son-in-law to be teetotaller.

"Yes Papa!" Kashish said seriously "He doesn't like beer. He likes only Polar Bear."

A silence followed her response and then, Kashish and Deep burst laughing out loud, remembering the jacket-episode. This lead to further twitching-of-nose by Deep's mother.

Finally when they left, he handed over to her a BIG box of Swiss chocolates which he had promised to her during their call and shook hands with her.

His little sister hugged her before leaving but the mother gave a very cold nod to her "Namaste" and left........

The Wait...

Kashish's family was really happy to meet Deep's family and were eagerly waiting for their response .They had already communicated to the latter that they were happy with their proposal.

Anytime the father's phone used to ring, Kashish's ears would come to an alert to check for the identity of caller .But the much awaited call never came and gradually and finally, the day came for Kashish to leave for her working city, Pune.

With time, Kashish's family started losing hope for their response and started revisiting her Matrimonial account .Also, they started urging her to look at the new proposals that were coming to them but she was stubborn not to consider anybody before she got any response from Deep.

"But How long will you keep waiting" Mom argued over call. "And look at your age ... You are not growing any younger. Very soon, these entire proposals, which you are taking for granted, will also stop coming .Get real Kashu, he won't call...nobody keeps an agreeable alliance waiting like this."

"Oh Mom..you are such a paranoid." Kashish retorted "He is in India after a long time, he doesn't have Indian SIM to call me, plus his parents would eat him alive if he says "Yes" for me without even meeting any other proposal..Give him some time Ma..He'll call.."

"You are just like your father. So stubborn!!" Her mom said and hung up.

But no call came. It was going to be three weeks since the day they had met and there was not a single sign of Deep's whereabouts.

Dejectedly, after another BIG row with her mother which involved lot of tears and lot of emotional blackmailing from both the sides, she checked the other proposal that had come to her parents.

It was from a guy named as Varun, who also worked in Pune and looked at least three times the size of her.

Seeing the profile, made her feel even more miserable. She grew so angry at everything that first she called up her mother and declared 'Okav' to meet Varun if this that she was was what **she** wanted (implying and accusing that what her mother actually wanted was to see her daughter unhappy). Saying this she cut the call, threw the phone away and fell on the bed, crying badly.

Few hours later and after crying her eyes out, she got up from the bed, composed herself, dragged herself out of the blanket and went to wash her face.

Again the phone rang.

Unwillingly, she checked the number and saw that it was an unknown one.

She felt really angry at her mom, just now she told her that she is okay to meet the guy and her mother went jumping to the guy asking him to call her.

"Aargh!!!!" She grunted, frustrated.

"Hello" She picked up the call, almost barking on the phone. "Hey Kashish" the voice said, and she was not mistaken in recognizing the same "Its Deep...I am in Pune..."

The Confusion

"Deeeep!!! It's YOU??" she screamed on the phone, going mad with the surprise and the happiness.

"Yeah...It's me" he smiled...

It took a minute for the happy surprise to sink into her. And then, the happiness changed into sheer indignation.

"Where the hell have you been?? I have been waiting for your call for so many days?" She blurted out, angrily.

"Listen to me.." Deep said, gently.

"I missed you soo much. You know how much tough time I had?"

"Shut up Kashu..Listen to me please.." Deep said again.

"I was waiting and panicking and you couldn't even call?? And on top of that, Mumma was asking me to look at other proposals.."

"Then you should have looked at those" he said.

This indeed made her shut-up.

"What do you mean by that??" she demanded.

"So when are we meeting" he asked, ignoring her question.

"I don't know" she said, angry and hurt.

"What?"

"I said I don't Know."

"Whay??? You don't want to meet your Polar Bear" He asked innocently and her anger melted away for the moment.

"Okay.. You decide" she said, surrendering.

"Let's meet at the Cafe Coffee Day closest to your house. I'll reach there in 30 minutes tops."

"Okay..I'll start in 30 mins minimum" she said and chuckled.

"Don't worry..Take your sweet time. *I'll be right here waiting for you...*" he sang Richard Marx's song.

"Shut up , Idiot " She blushed , and cut the call

She started getting ready to meet him. It was their first casual meeting and she was already feeling the butterflies dancing madly in her stomach.

She put-on her favourite pink salwar-suit ,wore a little *bindi*, beautified herself with hanging *jhumkas*, wore her favourite *Celine Dion's Always Belong* perfume , placed a small clutch on her hair and settled down to apply nail-polish .

On their Skype chat, he always used to ask her to show her nails and used to become very happy if she was wearing ping colour, so no price for guessing what colour she chose for the same. After getting all-set for the Pune' beauty pageant and after admiring herself in the mirror for an hour at least, she started to meet Deep.

She took an auto to the Cafe Coffee Day, settled down and waited impatiently to meet him.

"Am I looking good?" She thought, checking her face in the reflection of her Smart-phone.

"What would I talk to him about? What should be my first words? Will it be as comfortable as it used to be on Skype?

Should I take some gift for him?

OH Shuck!!! I didn't buy anything for him .What an Idiot I am!

He will think of me as a dumb girl.

But I think he likes me.. That's why he came down till Pune to meet me..

Yay!! I think we are almost through!!!

But then why did he say I should have considered other proposals..Has he decided otherwise?

May be he was simply pulling my leg?

But his tone didn't suggest that...

Oh GOD!! I'll go crazy..will you please stop all these thoughts in my mind..."

"Madam..Madam..our stop has come" Auto driver told her. Caught in the web of her thoughts, she had not realize when she reached the CCD.

"Ohh okay..Sorry *Bhaiya*.." She told the driver, checked the meter, handed him 30 Rs and stepped-down from the auto with a bit shiver in her legs.

And there he was, looking as great as ever, with the same charismatic smile which had the potential of making even sadness feel happy.

He spotted her, came closer, stretched his hand for a shake and said

The Last (?) Meeting

You look different" He said, shaking her hand

"Different???" She thought "What kind of comment is that? He could have said I am looking good if not great. Or is it some of his sophisticated manner of paying the bad complement gently..Like Zor-ka-Jhatka-Dheere-Se OR am I looking so good that he was taken off guard and couldn't convey his thoughts properly. After all my efforts of dressing up, Just Different is the word he could come up with.."

"Bad Different...?" She asked, trying to sound casual so that he won't come to know that she fishing for some complements.

"As if that's possible?" He said, winking, and she blushed.

"Shall we? " He said, opening the door and gesturing her to go in

"OMG..he is so chivalrous!" she thought. "Handsome, Funny, Witty, Flirty, Chivalrous and awesome in giving surprises, is there something which he lacks in "

"So..how is everything at work ?" he asked , offering her a cup of cappuccino .

They had taken a corner sofa and were sitting facing each other.

There was a soft music playing in the background .The red-sofa, the coffee aroma, the dim-lighted room had made the ambience really romantic.

And there he was sitting opposite to her in his white denim shirt, blue jeans and wearing *Hugo Boss* perfume with slightly spiked hair, a little stubble and the most charming smile ever.

"Oh! He looks and smells so delicious:) "She thought and blushed.

"Helloooo!!! " Deep's voice and continuous waving of his hand brought her to present and she realized ,to her embarrassment, that she was gaping at him with her mouth slightly open and she actually didn't hear his question.

"Am sorry?" She asked, trying to compose herself.

"Never mind" He changed the topic, sensing her discomfort.

"So the weather is usually like this?" He asked, searching for a safe topic to talk about.

"Yeah..why?" She responded, confused.

"Weather?? Of all the topics in the world, he could think of only weather..he is leaving back for Germany in 2 days and the most important decisions of our lives is yet to be taken and all he could talk about is weather?"

"Oh because I was planning to take a Job in weather department" He replied, faking a serious face and they both burst out laughing.

And then they both started recalling all the funny moments of their Skype chat.

Like how once they both were chatting and his partially dressed roommate had walked into the room, unaware of the fact that a girl, sitting in faraway land, was looking at him dumbfounded, and Deep had become so embarrassed that he switched-off the monitor without realizing that switching-off the monitor at his end would not turn-off the camera and finally when he heard her scream from the speaker did he come to know about the catastrophe.

Like how once he was sharing screen with her to show his Europevisit pics and had accidentally opened a 'be-careful' folder and which had turned him completely red and sent her in fits-of-laughter.

Soon it was the time for him to leave.

"But so many things are still pending to be discussed. "She thought, getting impatient. "When will he get his next leave so that the wedding could be planned? When should I apply for my Visa? Should I plan for a sabbatical..ok ok..I think am thinking too much ahead in time but when will this dumb idiot will talk about sensible things? Okay..I'll only drop him hints around the topic"

"So..When are your parents expecting to see their son again" she asked, cautiously.

"Not sure..Let's see "

"Hmm. Your flight is day after tomorrow's morning, right? So can we catch-up sometime tomorrow?"

"I am not sure. I have to meet a girl's family tomorrow" He replied getting up.

This was definitely a blow for her.

"Oh Okay" She said, not being able to hide the sadness in her voice.

"Hey..You okay?" he said.

"I don't know.." She said, hurt "What do your parents feel about us?"

"Lets parents only comment on that "He said, awkwardly."

And to suppress the gawky silence that had crept between them, he gave her a big box of chocolates and said "I saved another one just

for **you** and believe me, it was a tough job" he added wiping imaginary sweat off his forehead.

"Thanks" She said and smiled and called for an auto.

When her auto was about to depart, she said "So...?"

"So.." Deep replied, shaking hands with her "All the best then!"

"All the Best????" She thought and the auto sped-off...

Meeting Varun

"All the Best then.." the phrase and the finality in his tone kept her occupied the next couple of days.

She expected a call from him before his departure to Germany but he never called.

After waiting for long and shedding many tears finally she messaged him thinking that maybe he was also expecting the same from her and in this vicious circle of expectations, they both would end up feeling really bad.

"Hey!I had a lovely time the other evening. Hope you are done with your packing and stuff. Happy Journey and let me know once you reach Germany"

She kept her eyes glued on the phone for the response, but didn't get any.

"Well he must be busy. International travels do eat-up all your time and energy" she consoled herself.

The day passed. She repeatedly checked her Cell phone, Gtalk , Skype , Facebook..Every possible source of communication but there was no message from him.

She left him an offline message on Skype, asking him to call her once he had overcome the jet-lag but again, he never responded.

Meanwhile, the Mom was back in form again. Kashish had told her that Deep had come to meet her and was really nice to her. Although , this had caused Mom to stay be in peace for some time but once she came to know that he didn't give any clue on the proposal status and neither his parents have reverted back , she became restless again and started pestering Kashish to meet Varun.

"What's the harm in meeting one time *beta*? We are not asking you to say '*yes*' to him straightaway .You just go and meet him ,and meanwhile if Deep's parents come up with positive response , then you won't have to meet Varun ever. Okay..you are my darling daughter no.." Mom said in sweetest tone ever

"Hmm..Okay.."

So, the coming weekend she decided to meet Varun .She was so unhappy about meeting some random new guy that she didn't even put any effort in dressing up.

In fact, she first went out for shopping with some of her friends and then decided to meet the guy directly from there.

By the time she was done shopping, her neatly done hair were totally messed up, her face was looking completely flushed due to the sun and her eyes were completely tired and drowsy.

Varun called her up to ask where she would like to come and she asked him to choose the place. She was surprised when he chose the same Cafe Coffee Day where she had met Deep the previous week.

She reached the CCD with multiple shopping bags in her hand and found Varun waiting for her in front of it.

He didn't look as fat as he did in the picture, maybe he was working out or something or may be the photo was really old one but he didn't look *that-fat*, also he had this vibrant glow on his face which you see only on people who live content life.

He was dressed up in neat shirt and jeans and looked very simple. His eyes were deep and his smile had the warmth that was definitely infectious.

Seeing her struggling with her bags, he came forward and took the same from her, and then he opened the Cafe Coffee Day door for her and politely gestured her to move in.

She liked him instantly and immediately felt guilty for the same. The very same morning, she was desperately waiting for any contact from Deep and here she was, meeting somebody else and developing a liking for that somebody as well.

"But it's just a *general liking* for a good person and there is nothing romantic about it like it was for Deep" she justified herself.

They both started discussing about their work, their preferences, their hobbies, likes and dislikes.

"Well...I love *Chat-Wali-Gali* in Delhi" Kashish said, trying to keep her mouth from watering "Every time I visit my parents, first evening itself I pull them to the place"

"I love it too...the ethnic taste and smell of the *aloo-tikki* topped with *chaat-masala* and *imli-chutney*..yumm" Varun replied, with dreamy eyes

"And that *Chola-Samoasa* ..." they both said together and started laughing.

They both started discussing about how they used to sneak out of the school or on the way home, to eat some *Chaats and Gol-Gappas* from their pocket money.

"No wonder..it all shows up in my tummy" Varun commented, stroking his stomach and she laughed.

"Not bad" She thought "A person with some similar tastes like mine and who is able to laugh at himself.. Interesting."

Suddenly the song playing in background changed and with the very first note of the music, he said

"Tum Hi Ho...I love this song..."

She was amazed. She had always loved this song from *Aashiqui* 2 and had always asked Deep to listen to it but he first didn't get time to listen the same and after listening as well, he never really liked it.

"What happened?" Varun's question brought her to present.

"Nothing "She said, the sudden thought of Deep had saddened her "We'll go?"

She got up to leave.

"So..?" Varun asked standing up, a bit anxious to know about the outcome of the meeting.

"I'll let you know Varun..." She said and left, determined to call Deep and demand an answer.

The Decision

By the time she reached home she was furious. The song has rekindled all the memories she and Deep had shared .She was furious with him for placing her in such a situation where she had to meet another guy. She was partially angry at herself as well, as she had decided that she would just meet the guy and reject him, but she found the new guy to be good and thus was actually feeling guilty about it.

She called Deep up and her heart-beat increased as the call was getting connected. When the phone started ringing, she cleared her throat and waited for him to pick up but the call went to voice-mail. She didn't leave a message, as she knew that he would revert on seeing her call. But multiple hours passed and he didn't call her.

Finally she saw him online on Skype and she ,intentionally, logged out and logged in again , so that he would get a notification and then he would ping her himself. But that also didn't happen.

Depressed, she only pinged him

"Hi.."

And he didn't respond and went offline after couple of minutes.

She felt so depressed and miserable, that she started crying badly. This had never happened before. He had never ignored her earlier; it was just too much for her to take.

She sobbed and sobbed and went to sleep. After waking up, she saw there was a new message on her Skype.

Deep: "Hey! sorry...didn't see your ping earlier. I am okay...reached Germany alrite. Was caught up in whole loads of stuff so couldn't revert to you. Hope you are doing good."

She felt really happy after seeing his reply.

"So he **was** busy and wasn't ignoring me. I was unnecessarily getting so scared. But then, why didn't he call me now? Didn't he see my call? And what was "Hope you are doing good", instead he could have said that he would call me soon. He didn't even mention seeing my call."

She checked for his status but he was offline again.

She left him an offline message.

"Glad to know you are good. I called you but looks like you were busy"

When she got the response, he was offline again. This kept on going for a week but whenever he replied, he never mentioned about calling her and neither did call her.

On the other side, Varun's parents had come back to hers saying that Varun was happy with the proposal and they would like to proceed further if Kashish was okay with it.

Kashish's parents were really happy to hear from them as the horoscope match had come out to be exceptionally good, also Varun, unlike Deep, was posted in India and was in the same city as Kashish. They told his parents that they would revert to them shortly after checking with Kashish.

"But Kashu for how long are you planning to wait for Deep .It cannot be possible that he is still jet-lagged and also it's not possible that he is so occupied with his office work that he

is not getting time to say a simple 'okay' for the proposal. I think he is simply delaying the thing. And if a guy is still undecided even after talking to you for six months and meeting you twice, then I personally don't think that guy can be banked upon." Mom said

Mom's wisdom made her depressed again and she cut the call saying that she was going to sleep.

It was past midnight but she decided to call Deep. She wanted to ask him why was he doing like that. Why was he making her suffer? There used to be a time when he couldn't stay without calling her every day and now 2 weeks have passed since his arrival in Germany and there was no contact from him.

Her heart was thumping badly while his phone started ringing and this time he picked up.

"Hello.." he said

Listening to his voice after these many days, brought the flood of emotions in her and she felt a lump in her throat.

"Hello Deep.." Kashish said in a low voice, trying to keep her voice as normal as possible

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Who is this? He couldn't recognize my voice? How is this possible? And what does he mean by who-is-this? Hasn't he stored my number? Why is he doing like this? Why is he driving me crazy"

Kashish couldn't stop her tears and said in a very low voice "It's me..Kashish. You didn't recognize my voice, Deep?"

"Hey Kashish " He said , his voice turning serious and then after a pause , his voice returned back to casual "How are you?"

"How do you think I am?" She couldn't stop herself anymore "I am waiting for your message, your call day and night. But you don't have time .My parents are asking me to see new proposals all the time and honestly, they have a point as well. For how long will I keep

them on hold when I am not getting any response from **YOU**? On what basis they or I should wait for you?

And you know what, I met another guy last week .Do you even know how horrible that made me feel? I couldn't say an 'Okay' to him because I like *you* Deep and I couldn't say a 'No' to him because I don't know what is there in *your* mind .Why are you doing like this? Why are you playing with me?" She burst out, wailing.

"Kashish! Listen to me.." He said, quite seriously this time "I understand what you are going through..."

"No..You don't.." she said, crying.

"Yes..I do..Please listen to me.I *liked* you as well but..but..I don't know what to say..Umm...I don't think we share what it takes to make a couple"

"WHAT????"

"I know this doesn't sound convincing.."

"Convincing???" Kashish shouted "This is the most ridiculous and hypocrite thing I have ever heard of. And if you think that we don't share what it takes to make a "couple", then what the hell were you doing with me for past 6 months. It took you this long decide the same!!!"

"I agree, we have spoken to each other for long but that was only on Skype. Virtual world is far different from the Reality, Kashish"

"On Yeah? Then why on earth did you come to meet me in Pune? Why didn't you say 'NO' after the first meeting?"

"I just wanted to give it another shot. I knew the second meeting would help me in deciding better, so I came there"

"Oh My God!!! Oh My God!!" She exclaimed "You just did not say that? When I was waiting for one communication from you, keeping all the proposals at hold, fighting with my parents..What you were actually doing was playing the *inki-pinki-ponky* game in your mind about our relationship. And even after deciding as well, you didn't have the courtesy to call and tell me **your** decision."

"I am sorry Kashish...." He started

"No...don't say that. I am sorry...I am sorry that I liked a spineless creature like you..." She screamed"Aargh!! I am feeling disgusted. You have failed my trust Deep."

"Please don't say that Kashish..Please. I want to remain your friend always."

"DON'T!!" She shouted "DON'T YOU DARE USE THAT WORD? Of all the people in the world, I don't want YOU to be my friend..."

"Please Kashu..don't say so..Please" Deep said, his voice shivering a bit

"Bye Deep" She said and cut the call.

That night he kept calling her but she didn't pick up....

Moving On..

The next morning when she opened her eyes, the conversation of the past night came rushing to her. Nobody had ever made her feel so humiliated, so uncomfortable and so angry. She was feeling so restless that she wanted to run down to Deep's place and slap him hard and punch him hard on his face. Somehow she tried to control her outburst and called up her mother to say that she was 'okay' to give Varun another try and would want to meet him again.

"You okay..Kashu?" Mom asked her, concerned.

She could feel the sudden drop in Kashish's energy level and was worried about her health. Also, she was amazed that what made Kashish change her decision overnight about Varun "Something happened, my bachcha?"

"Nothing Mom" Kashish replied, giving every ounce of energy to prevent her voice from shaking.

"Tell my baby.. What happened to you" Mom asked in the most sweetest and gentle tone.

"Nothing much Mom" She couldn't control her tears anymore. She felt so grateful to her mother for being so supportive and melted at her voice.

Also, she felt guilty for fighting with her Mom for such a guy who was uncertain about what he wanted from life himself. "I have got to go Mom. Will you please inform Varun's parents that I would want to meet again"

"Of course, I will beta .. You just take care" mom said, gently. She knew sometimes it was best not to probe Kashish much and to give

her some time and space .When Kashish was ready, she herself would tell her the things.

"I will Mom..Thanks" Kashish replied, wiping off the tears tricking down her cheeks.

So, the following weekend Varun and Kashish met. Deep had not called her post that night but he had dropped her occasional messages on Skype requesting her to talk to him just once.

This time Kashish tried to dress up a bit formally to show some reverence to the guy. Though, she had not put any make-up but she did apply some Kohl on her eyes and there was a hint of gloss on her lips. Her hair were also neatly tied into a pony and she had let some flicks of hair to cover her fore-head.

When she reached the Cafe Coffee Day (yes! again Varun had picked up the same Cafe Coffee Day), he was waiting for her outside the door. He was looking thinner than the previous time, it looked like as if he had been spending some considerable time in gym and his face was looking more electrifying than ever.

"Hey.." he said, seeing her approaching.

"Hi" She replied, trying to smile .They stood there for a moment without exchanging a word, and then to overcome the awkward silence, she said "We'll go in?"

"Umm.." he replied , looking for words "I was ,kind of, thinking that we would have tea at a different place today. Actually, I wanted to show you a place."

Then seeing no response from her, he added hesitantly "Only if **you** are Okay."

"I am in" she smiled

"Thanks" He said, relieved "Please give me two minutes, I'll just be back"

"Sure" She replied, confused where he had to go suddenly.

Few minutes later, a black Hyundai i30 stopped quite close to her. Surprised, she looked at the driver and saw Varun stepping out of it. He got down, went to the other side, opened the front-door for her and politely gestured her to come and sit. Her mood uplifted at the display of such gallant behaviour. She came and sat in the car and he pushed the door close.

Once he settled down on the driver seat, he turned to her and enquired "Shall we, Ma'am?"

She nodded, trying to hide her smile.

Past many days had been so pathetically bad for her that she had almost started thinking that maybe she was the one who didn't deserve to be loved, maybe she was the one who messed the things up. She had revisited all the moments of the past six months in her mind and had gone through each dialogue of the conversation that happened the other night , that she felt that she would never feel happy again.

Her chain of thoughts was broken by a song that was playing on 93.5 Red FM "Kaise Mujhe Tum Mil Gayi.." from Ghazini. She had always loved this song and couldn't help thinking that

whether these were some hints from the God about this new budding friendship.

"Nice song.." She said

"Yes..very nice "Varun replied, with dreamy expressions in his eyes "I had always thought that I will dedicate this song to the girl who will like me "

"Who will like **you**?" Kashish said, confused "Shouldn't it be the other way round? You should be dedicating this song to the girl whom **you** like and not vice-versa."

"See.." Varun said, in a serious tone "I am a guy and thus, I like all the girls (he added with a wink) But the problem is, that the girls are not blind and they happen to notice my pot-belly before noticing me." He said stroking his tummy.

He continued, while Kashish laughed "I tried everything but looks like the belly-fat loves me more than any girl could have ever loved me and it had decided not to leave me. So one day, after getting tired of all my efforts..I decided that I would not dedicate any song to any girl until and unless she liked me"

They both went to fits of laughter and finally Kashish had to hold her tummy to stop it from aching and was gasping for breath.

"Come on.. You are not that fat" She said, controlling her laughter

Soon the car came to a halt and she saw that they had reached the shore of a lake. The area was really clean one and was covered by many trees. There were a couple of families that had come to watch the sunset. Nearby, there was a tea-vendor with a big kettle on a cycle. Varun got down from the car and brought two cups of tea from him and handed over to Kashu.

It was a lovely evening with huge amount of greenery around them, sun was setting in front of them, the sky was changing colours from yellow to deep orange to red, number of birds were chirping on the trees, a couple of ducks were floating on the water and Kashish and Varun were discussing about their childhood, their likes and dislikes.

She was having one of the most amazing evenings of her life but somewhere within her body, her heart was aching. She was getting reminded of Deep again and again as for such a long time she had craved to spend such quality time with Deep.

"I don't believe myself" She thought "Here I am .sitting with one of best gentlemen I know of and my thoughts are wandering to that *jerk*. What's wrong with me.."

Varun noticed the change of expressions on her face and said "Think it's getting late for you..we'll leave?"

She nodded while praying to God to give some clarity and stability to her mind...

Undecided...

A month passed and Kashish and Varun grew closer. For Kashish, Varun was the best guy friend she had never had. Daily after coming back from office, she used to tell him about her day, what she ate, about her arguments with the managers, about the appreciation she received from clients, her little crushes, about the new recipe she tried, about the little puppy she used to see on her way and so on.

Varun turned out to be a great listener with awesome sense of humour.

"You know, the little puppy I told you about na..looks like he is sick " Kashish told him, sad.

"Ohh! " Varun replied, seriously "Did he try the bread-pudding you prepared yesterday?" He said and chuckled.

"Varun!!!" She shouted " You are so mean..! am never talking to you."

"No No..I meant did he try the bread-pudding you prepared yesterday because if he eat it na , he will recover very soon. Your hands have that magical curing touch."

"Shut up..you idiot" She said and blushed.

She had also told him about Deep. All about how when she thought everything was final, the guy bailed-out. Varun had become a bit serious after listening about Deep but still, boosted her up saying that Deep did never deserve her.

Also he had, carefully, added for her information "You know that I am not looking at any other proposal ...right?"

He had to tell her this explicitly because Kashish had still not given a go-ahead for the "proposal" although she was talking to him daily.

Kashish was in a dilemma regarding Varun. She knew he was a gentleman but this time, she didn't want to rush into the things.

Her mother also kept on trying to extract some response out of her.

"So Kashu" Mother asked her "What do you think about Varun?"

"I don't know Mom" Kashish said "I think I need some more time"

"Hmm...Okay! Take your time " Mother said , trying not to pressurize her in light of what had happened with her recently "But do remember that its already one month and we cannot take very long time for any proposal and moreover, to me he sounds like a reasonably good guy"

"I know Mom" Kashish sighed "He is really good. I feel really comfortable with him or rather too comfortable, I should say. I don't feel the need to impress him. I don't wonder about what I should wear when I meet him. In fact, I don't need to keep a check on my words while talking to him. I can tell him everything; actually I have told him everything. I told him about Deep as well."

"Are you out of your mind Kashu" Mom said, alarmed "You cannot tell your current-proposal-in-process about your previous ones that didn't work out. It can make the current one step back."

"He is not going anywhere, Mom" Kashish said, confidently "I told you na I don't need to impress him and to tell you the truth, I find him more like a friend than a suitor. I do not feel any romantic association with him"

"What?" Mom said, shocked by such bold declarations of her daughter "What's wrong with your generation? In our time, what

mattered to us that the guy was from a good family, was educated and earned decent money. But your generation is full of all sham things like romance, frequency, and charm blah blah."

"You won't get it Mom " Kashish said "Okay..! am getting a call from Varun. I'll call you later."

"Yes Varun" She switched on to another call "Yes..was talking to my Mom. Nothing..simply. Yes, we'll go for the movie.7:20 show should be fine. See you then"

She cut the call and went to grab a hot cup of Espresso.

Yes, she had sounded very confident and casual in front of her mother and although whatever she had told her was true, but she had to use every bit of energy in her body to sound like that. Even after all the efforts of trying to hate Deep, she was still not over him. Some of their moments still haunted her.

She was still not able to stop herself from checking his FB account every now and then, just to check any addition of a 'female' friend. Just to prevent herself from stalking him, she had blocked him multiple times from FB and had unblocked him every time whenever the urge to check on him became too big to handle. She knew she definitely needed a closure.

The evening they both met for the movie and went for a coffee after it. Varun was insisting on dinner but she told him that she is too tired to eat anything and just wanted to go home and sleep.

"All right! I'll drop you home then.." He replied opening the door for her.

After she settled down in the car, he said "Did I tell you that you are looking really pretty today"

"Kuch bhi Varun" She smiled "You always say the same"

"Because you always do "

Silently they drove through the place. Kashish was so tired that she slept sitting in the car. Varun looked at her and smiled as she was looking really adorable.

A slight breeze through the window was hitting her hair and a flick of hair was moving and was teasing her closed eyelids. Varun felt a sense of jealously for that flick and carefully stretched his hand, caught the flick and gently placed it behind her ear. She smiled in her sleep. He felt happy seeing her smile, hoping that its him she was dreaming about.

When they reached her place, Varun stopped the car and gently said "Kashu! Get up..We have reached your place.."

"Umm.." She mumbled in the sleep and rested her head on his shoulder and went back to sleep.

Varun felt a rush of emotions through his body. He had never seen her so close to him, though he had always hoped that the day would come really soon. He kept staring at her wishing that the time would stop there itself and she won't leave. But as desirable as she seemed that time, somewhere down within his heart Varun knew that Kashish is resting on him only because she is asleep, had she been awake she would have never done that.

He stroked her head gently, fighting the urge to place a gentle peck on her forehead, and said "Kashish! Get up. We are home"

"Ohh!" Kashish got up suddenly and was embarrassed to find her head on his shoulder.

"I am so sorry" she said, visibly uneasy." I don't know how..."

"It's alright Kashish" Varun comforted "It's not a big deal."

"Hmm"

"Go home. It's getting late "

"Yup. Good Night Varun. Message me once you reach home"

"Sure.Good Night."

She started climbing the stairs feeling uncomfortable. She was feeling guilty, as she knew that it was Deep she was dreaming about. She could control her conscious actions but how to keep a tab on her sub-conscious mind was something she was yet to achieve. Caught in her thoughts, she reached her house and was unlocking the door when she noticed a huge courier near the door step.

She knew that Varun was great in surprising her and would have sent her one of her favourite teddy-bear.

She took the courier inside and tore the wrapper open and then she saw a huge Polar Bear sitting in front of her and a note saying

"I am really Sorry Kashu. The guilt of what I have done with you is killing me; I need you to forgive me. I daily login to Skype so that I could see you once, talk to you once, ask for forgiveness face to face but you seem to have blocked me. Please come to Skype once .Please. I am waiting...."

Forgiveness

Her hands started shivering, reading the note. She re-read it again to ensure that it was actually happening.

"No..I must be dreaming." She said to herself "Soon, I will wake up and laugh at myself for believing that this was actually happening. I should go and wash my face and then come back to check whether the Bear and note is still there."

She went to the bathroom, washed her face, splashed water on her eyes, rubbed them hard and came back to the living room. And of course, the teddy and note was still there.

The sudden surprise had brought a tide of emotions in her. She didn't know what to do. She definitely was not in a mood to forgive Deep but she also knew she couldn't keep dragging the resentment for long as it had started affecting her. If the relationship was not supposed to work out, then she definitely needed a closure.

She couldn't control herself anymore and thus, switched on her laptop. She logged in to Skype and saw that she had blocked Deep, she took a deep breath and unblocked him.

Within 2 minutes, she saw the expected pop-up. "Deep Calling.."

With a throbbing heart and tensed face, she clicked on Video chat and there he was sitting so far away from her yet so close to her, his face as charming as ever, his eyes, though missing the usual twinkle, demanding her undivided attention.

"Hi Kashu.." He said, in a low intense voice.

"Hi Deep.." She replied.

Seeing him face to face after more than a month, she realized that how much she had missed him. She felt the pain rising in her heart and she found herself welling up but she, somehow, cleared her throat, took a sip of water and continued in a normal voice "How are you?"

"I don't know.." He replied, in a very low voice. His voice seemed shaky, his eyes looked red. If Kashish hadn't known that he was a teetotaller, she would have believed that he had taken a couple of vodka shots.

"I am not able to concentrate on anything, Kashu.I had found my best friend in you and had thought that you would never leave me whether the relationship works out or not. But then, you left me all of a sudden. I could stay without talking to you but I can't stand the fact that you are never going to talk to me. I just need your forgiveness, nothing else."

Kashish felt as if somebody had stabbed the sore on her heart.

"So this guy just wants my forgiveness. He still doesn't want **us** to get back together. He is telling me that he is not able to carry on with his life but he didn't spare a single thought about my life, my feelings

How selfish of him?

But why am I analyzing his words? I have already made peace with the fact that he doesn't love me..Haven't I?

So what the hell...I just need to forgive him and he would never come back

But I soo badly want him to be back..

No.. I have to be strong.. I won't go begging him to love me.

If he does..good for him.If he doesn't..it alrite.."

"Kashu..you listening to me?" Deep saskedaid, breaking her chain of thoughts.

"Umm..Yes.." Kashish said "It's all right Deep.No issues."

"You mean it?"

"Yep!!!"

"Thanks Kashu" Deep said, sudden energy coming back to his voice "You know how much I missed you all these days? You know how much your friendship means to me. And may be you didn't notice but I changed my Skype pic to that of Polar Bear because you used to call me that."

"Is it? " Kashish asked, in spite of herself and checked the picture. It was indeed a Polar Bear pic, the same one which she had sent him the day he had shown her the white jacket.

She felt herself becoming weak, she felt she would again give in the temptation for this guy, she felt she would fall for him again, she felt tears forming in her eyes..

"It's getting late for me " She said "I'll go to sleep."

"So soon ?" he asked her , disappointed. He wanted nothing more than to talk to her throughout the night.

"Yes..I have to get up early" She replied.

"Okay then" he said , disappointed "I'll call you tomorrow morning like how I used to call you."

"Bye Deep" and she hung up.

For many hours she kept tossing on the bed and didn't get even a wink of sleep.

The whole incidents on the evening, the courier, the note, the call, Deep's face and eyes kept revolving inside her head. Finally, she fell asleep for couple of hours only to find herself dreaming about

weird sequences of her trying to run and then falling down and with intermittent glimpses of Varun's and Deep's face.

She woke up with a startle when her phone started ringing. She checked the phone to see who was calling her so early in the moring and saw that it was Deep's number.

"Hello" she said in a sleepy voice.

"Hey Kashu..Good Morning " Deep sang at the other end "Get up..Get up Kiddo..Your polar bear had come to wake you up.."

"I want to sleep for five more minutes.." she replied , not opening her eyes.

"You had slept enough for a month now and I want to talk to you.."

"Okay..tell me then.." She surrendered.

So Deep started telling her about her recent trip to Paris and how much he missed her and then he bought a miniature Eiffel Tower thinking about her and he would gift it to her when they meet next. Also, during the previous one month, he had missed her so much that he prepared her favourite *mushroom masala* recipe that she had suggested him and it turned out to be pretty good and he took a pic of the same.

"I'll share with you the pic.." he said, enthusiastically.

"Hmm..Okies.." She replied "Hey Deep! I am getting a call..I will talk to you later"

"From whom??" asked Deep, amazed that who could be calling her so early in morning.

"Somebody you don't know" Kashish replied and switched to the other call.

"Hey Varun! Good Morning.."

"Good Morning Kashish , you were talking to someone..."

"Oh yes...I was talking to my Mom" She said, before she could even stop herself.

"I was talking to my Mom??? Why the hell am I lying to him...."

Moving Far & Getting Close

was talking to my Mom??? Why the hell am I lying to him...."

"Cool.She is okay?" Varun enquired.

"Yep..she is good." Kashish replied, with guilt increasing in her with every word she uttered. "So wassup?" She asked to change the uncomfortable topic.

"Everything all right. Was thinking if you wanna catch up for coffee in the evening.."

"Umm..." Kashish hesitated "No..I have got some work to finish..." She lied.

"Okay then..no issues.." Varun said, disappointed "We'll plan some other time. You take care.. Okay? Bye"

"Bye".

She felt really uneasy. This was for the first time she had lied to Varun and that too for no apparent reason.

On the other side, Varun felt a bit disappointed too. In past one and a half month of them knowing each other, for the first time she declined the offer of meeting up. Rest all the time, she had been the one to propose the meeting as she used to say she felt really happy talking to him and his jokes made her forget all the stress of the day.

"But she said she had work, so it's not a big deal" he consoled himself.

So, that evening Varun didn't call her as he thought she would be busy and would call him herself when she would get the time. Moreover, he thought he was getting more and more habitual of her and it was good to take a break every now and then. Anyhow, she had still not given a clear go-ahead for the proposal, thus it was better for him to not to have many expectations from her.

Varun was a very stable guy with very mature and practical approach towards life. That's why, he was not able to believe that he was thinking so much about a small thing like her declining their meeting.

"Dude! Whats wrong with you?" He scolded himself "She just declined meeting for coffee and Not the proposal itself, so will you please stop being such a girl about it? And even if she declines the proposal..it shouldn't be that big a deal. She has no obligation to say 'Yes' to me and anyhow, we are progressing very nicely as friends, so why not be content with it."

"But she looks so pretty!!!" His heart argued and he sighed "and last night, that little flick of hair, the fragrance of her perfume, the feel of her face resting on my shoulder, her sleepy voice, the smell of her hair..Oh Man...I am going crazy for sure. Whatever I might say, I think I can never be friends with her...."

So he went to sleep thinking about her, her smile, her skin, her hair, that naughty twinkle in her eyes....

On the other side, Kashish was sitting in her home with her head between her hands.

"What am I doing? Why did I lie to Varun?" She thought "But giving current circumstances, I think there are too many things going on and I should give myself a breather. With me getting involved with Varun and Deep coming back, my life has become a complete mess. On one side is a guy, who is supposedly my best friend and who likes me truly but I do not have **that** feeling for him and on the other side is the guy, whom I like truly and would badly want him to be

with me but who doesn't see me more than just a supporting friend..Ohh God!!!! Why do you do this to me? Don't I deserve a simple life?"

Her circle of thoughts was broken by her phone "Deep Calling....."

"Hey Deep.." She picked up

"What is my lovely Kashu doing? " Deep enquired, in the sweetest tone possible.

"Nothing.." She replied, her voice automatically turning childlike listening to him.

"Come to Skype, dear " he cajoled her

"No..am too tired " Kashish said, trying to resist the temptation of looking at his appealing face

"Pleashhhh..." He said in a very adorable manner.

"Umm...Okay..but only for five mins" She said, surrendering.

"Anything for you Ma'am" he said, in his usual charming way.

Thus she logged into Skype and then, they started talking. They spoke to each other for a long time. He told her about all the things he did in past one month and she also chatted about all the little-little events of past many weeks but carefully avoiding mentioning about Varun.

This carried on for many days. Kashish had started declining the coffees and movies to Varun and had started spending more time talking to Deep.

"Somebody has become really busy these days" Varun commented, when she said 'No' for a movie again.

"Nothing Like that.." She said "It's just one work keeps coming after another"

"Is it?" Varun replied, mischievously "I soo wish I were your work..you would be spending more time with me then;)"

"Done with your drama? " She replied and he laughed.

"Hey Varun...I am getting call from my Mom..call you back."

"Ohh Okay" Varun said , again disappointed "Nowadays your Mommisses you a lot it seems."

"What was that suppose to mean?" She demanded.

She was angry because she knew that it was she who was at fault. She was angry because she knew she had been lying to him. She was feeling really guilty and she used to get really aggressive whenever she felt that she was about to get caught and she, for sure, didn't want to lose her place in Varun's eyes

"Ohho..am kidding baba" Varun said, "You take her call, idiot"

"Okay Bye."

She switched to another call "Hello Mumma" (Yes..this time it was really her Mom calling her).

"How are you beta?"

"Am okay Mumma..how are you?"

"I am fine.Okay Beta listen! I wanted to talk about Varun"

"Ohh!! Not Again! "Kashish said, irritated. "Will you please give it a break?"

"What??" Mom said, equally angry. "Do you know how much time you have taken already? They are not going to wait for our response forever and if you remember, Varun is not looking at any other proposal till he gets a response from you"

"Oh Yes! I remember that "Kashish replied, her volume increasing with every word "I perfectly remember that. And do you know Why? Because you and Varun ensure that you keep reminding this to me 24*7.I am tired of listening to "He won't look at any other proposal until I respond to him" (She mimicked her Mom's voice). It's his problem not mine..okay?"

"What has got into you Kashish" Mom said "When did you start behaving like this? And another thing is, Varun is a gem of a guy and you are really lucky that he is still waiting for your response."

"Oh Yeah?" Kashish shouted again , angry because she knew very well that each of her Mom's word was true "If you think he is such a gem, then why don't you only go and marry him. I am pretty sure , I don't deserve such gems..okay? And can I please go now..I am getting late for office.."

"I give up beta " Mom replied , very sad. "You respond if you wish ..Dont respond if you don't want. I won't ask you again. But just one thing I want to tell you, You don't have any rights to punish Varun for what Deep did to you" and Mom cut the call.

Mumma's words shook Kashish "You don't have any rights to punish Varun for what Deep did to you".

"Am I really doing so? Am I really punishing Varun for Deep's sins??"

The Unexpected...

"Am I really doing the same? Am I really punishing Varun for Deep's sins??"

The thought kept her occupied for whole of the day. She couldn't concentrate on a single thing. She messed up the code she was working on, she had a little argument with a fellow passenger in the bus, she burnt the curry she was preparing, she over-boiled the milk and it got spilled and so on. Irritated with all the happenings of the day, she decided to not to attend any call from Varun and Deep, till she got some clarity of the mind.

Thus, she stopped picking their calls altogether. Mostly, she would put her phone on silent or would switch it off altogether to escape from the temptation of attending their calls.

First few mornings she got up to see 10-15 missed calls from Deep and Varun. There would be a couple of messages from Varun asking whether she was alright.

"I am doing good.I had got a bad headache that's why couldn't take your call." She messaged him.

"Ohh. Hope you are okay now. I was really worried about you. Call me when you are free" was the response from Varun.

But she never called him up and never took any call from him as well.

Anytime Varun would call her, she would cut the call and reply "Busy. Can't talk"

"Okay.NP. You alright na?"

"Yup"

She never attended any of Deep's calls as well, thus one day, he sent her a mail :-

"Hey Kashu,

Hope you are doing good.

I tried to call you multiple times but you have again stopped taking my calls. :(

Why are you treating me so badly? I am a poor Polar Bear na...

Also,I need to tell you something very important. Please come to Skype once. Please.

Yours Deep"

"Yours Deep??" she thought "Did he want to indicate something by saying so. He could have written "-Deep "but he chose to wrote "yours"..why???Did he mean something special? Or am I over thinking just a single word like I always do?? Offo..I am a crazy girl myself..I will do one thing..I will login to Skype and see what he wants to tell me..Yes..I will do that only"

So, Kashish logged in to Skype and waited for his call. As expected, within few minutes Deep called her..

"Hey Kashu.." he sang, brightly.

"Hi Deep" Kashu said, she always had to fight a lot to not to give in the urge to fall for that face.

"Where did you go??" Deep asked, making a puppy face.

"Have been busy" Kashish replied, keeping her voice straight

"I missed you soo much, you know" He continued, adding more sugar to his tone.

"You did??" She said, giving in to that puppy face and immediately she took a control of herself and added "You did want to tell me something..rite? What happened?"

"Oh Yes..." Deep said "Actually the thing is..."

Deep was interrupted by Kashish's phone beep .She checked and found out that it was Varun's message asking her whether she had food and how was she doing.

Since, the day Kashish had stopped talking to him, he used to check on her health and safety through SMS only.

"I am doing ok and Yup! I had food as well" She replied.

"Who was that???" Deep asked, seeing whole of the thing through video chat.

"Somebody you don't know" Kashish gave her standard answer.

"Ooh" Deep exclaimed "and that somebody is *that* important that you can't tell *me* his name"

"Who said it's a he?" Kashish replied, smartly.

"Just guessing. So who is the person?" Deep asked, not letting go of the topic.

"Deep!!" Kashish said "You were about to tell me something..rite? So tell me that."

"Ohh Yes! Actually it's my sister's convocation the coming Saturday and my family wants me to be present over there and so..."

Again an SMS tone interrupted him. Kashish checked and it was a long message from Varun..he had written

"Good. Okay listen. I know you are very busy of late and I know we have not been talking to each other for past many weeks, so I don't know where does our friendship/relationship stands as of today. With the current circumstances (with you not talking to me and declining our meetings), I assume that you have given up on our relationship as well and may be, for some reason, you are finding it tough to tell me that on my face. Again, I want to repeat that this is just my assumption. Don't worry, you are an independent girl and you have every right to make the decision suitable for you. I don't want to pressurize you at all but my family is looking for an answer. I am travelling to my native this weekend and would pass on your response to my parents. Will it be okay if we can meet and talk..Let me know.Good Night"

Kashish expression changed reading this message. She had never heard Varun talk so seriously and the finality in his words and clarity he sought from her, shook her a bit.

She just replied a "K" to him.

"The same guy?" Deep enquired at the other end.

"Huh?" Kashish said, still lost.

"Never mind. Listen I am coming to India in two days and I badly want to meet you. I have booked my tickets for Pune .I'll land there, will meet you at the airport and then will take the next flight to Delhi. Is that fine?"

"Huh? " Kashish said, totally confused.

Her mind not able to process whatever she read and heard in past 3-4 minutes.

"Kashish, you listening to me?" Deep said "I thought you will be happy to hear that I am coming"

"Of course..I am " Kashish said , brightly. Her face had suddenly lit up after grasping what he had just said. "Can't tell you how happy I am. See you very soon"

"Okay take care..my honey bunny" Deep said and cut the call.

"Honey Bunny!! Did he just call me that? OMG! ".

So the day of Deep's arrival came.

Kashish was so excited to meet him after 2 months that she pulled out her best pink dress. She gave a nice wash to her hair, dried them and let them loose .She accessorized herself with golden hanging ear-rings, matching pink bangles and a small *bindi*. The nail-polish and a lovely ring looked extremely pretty on her nicely manicured fingers. She was wearing the sweetest smelling CK's perfume and was looking extremely appealing. She took an auto to the airport and was waiting impatiently for Deep to arrive.

After 20 minutes of wait, the display board said the arrival of Emirates flight and within 10 minutes the gate opened and the passengers started filing out of the airport. Her eyes searched for Deep and finally, the whole wait and the search paid off as he emerged out from the gate in black shirt and blue jeans, with spiked hair, a little masculine stubble, with a fast-track bag hanging on his right shoulder and looking as dashing as ever.

"Hey " he said, coming towards her and then suddenly, he stopped two steps away from her, had a good look at her and said "Oh Man! You have become so pretty!"

"Really?" She said, unable to suppress her smile

"I swear on all the Polar Bears in the world" He said and she started laughing.

"Come on..you really want me dead now?" he said, seriously.

"Am sorry?"

"What I am sorry? Have you heard your laughter..it takes the receipient's breath away.."

"Okay enough..stop it now"

"Okay Okay." He said, raising both his hands up "See, my flight to Delhi leaves in 4 hours now, so let's sit in cafeteria"

"All right"

So they both went to the Airport cafeteria. He chose a secluded place and asked her to make herself comfortable. Then , he went to buy cappuccino and some snacks. Kashish observed him going to the cash counter.

"Is it really happening? Has he really come to see me all the way to Pune? Am I really sitting with him even after knowing that there is nothing for me in the relationship? Why am I doing this? Is the happiness of present moment more important than the pain it's going to cause in future? I don't know what am I doing? Here I am sitting with this guy who doesn't even love me and there Varun is waiting for last response from me, so that he can convey the same to his parents. Oh shucks! This reminds me I have to meet Varun at the Cafe Coffee Day in sometime. Oh God!!! Why is my life so messed up "

"Hey..you okay?" Deep said, settling down in chair.

"Umm..yup" Kashish replied, coming out of her thoughts.

"Here is your coffee ma'am ..Only one spoon of sugar and 2 spoon of milk ..just as you like it.."

"So, what brought you here ?" Kashish asked him , directly

"Whoa Whoa!" Deep replied, raising both his hands "You are amazing..came directly to the point.You don't believe in wasting time..do you?"

"Yeah..learnt to value my time after a lesson I learnt in past six months"

"Listen Kashish.I am really really sorry for what I did.I know I have already apologized to you multiple times in past 1 month and I know you have forgiven me as well, but there is more to it."

"What?" Kashish asked, confused.

"Well...When all these proposals for marriage started coming, you were the first girl with whom I spoke so much. The kind of comfort I developed with you, the level of bonding that we shared, the degree of attachment was simply amazing. You became my first girl best-friend. I felt such a level of comfort with you, the same which I felt for any other guy friend. I didn't have to hide anything from you. I didn't have show myself a perfect gentleman in front of you. With you I could easily discuss my past relationship or my fantasies about Spanish women. I never felt the constraint that I was talking to a girl. When I came to India, I was determined to take it forward with you but then, for my mother's sake, I met other girls and there I made the mistake. I got caught in the web of finding the prettiest girl for me, finding the girl who would be more feminine in her approach of life, finding the girl whom I could show as my trophy wife in front of everyone..."

Kashish was listening to the whole thing in complete silence.

"When I came back, I did not have the courage to call you to tell all this and thus I could never call you. Moreover, I was speaking to a few of the girls whom I had shortlisted after my India visit and who satisfied the criteria I told you about. Initially, I had a great time talking to them, getting to know them..but as the time passed I

started feeling that something was missing. Although, I had a great time talking to those girls but whatever I did, I couldn't feel the same warmth with them. Our wavelength never matched, I started realizing that I have to put in lot of effort and have to be always my best self in front of these girls. When you were there, whether I was sick or I was feeling low, you were always there to cheer me up, to show me the silver lining but with those just-pretty-girls, it was always and always about making them feel special. Very soon I realized, that by losing you I lost the best person in my life, I lost my support system, my anchor and my best friend. And then, I desperately wanted you back. And thus, I tried to contact you once again, for just being a friend. And then, when I started talking to you once again, I realized that yes...I want you back but Not as a friend .I want you to be in my life, I want you to be my life partner, so that my life doesn't loses its anchor once more. I realized something and that thing was that I loved you Kashish..."

When he stopped speaking, tears were trickling down Kashish's cheek. All the moments of the six months of their courtship, 1 month of their separation and another month of their reunion came rushing to her. She was speechless, her lips were shaking..

"So Kashish" he said, taking her hand in his "Will you please marry me?"

Current Day-The Engagement...

The day had finally come.14th February – the Valentine's day..the day of their engagement. They both have agreed to make this day the day of celebration of their mutual love ,the official announcement of their relationship and commencement of their new lives.

Kashish was looking really pretty that day. She was wearing bottle-green *lehanga* with red embroidery on it. Her matching red and green accessory was making her face look even more magnificent. The little *maang-teeka* was illuminating her fore-head ,and the little *bindi* was just kissing the centre of her bow-shaped eye-brows. The matching long earrings were beautifying her face as well as the either sides of her slender neck.

The red bangles and the green *kadas* in her wrists, made the most rhythmic sound whenever she moved her hands to put her flicks behind her ears. The deep red colour of her henna showed on her palms which clearly signify their love for each other.

The beautician had made a bun of some of her hair and had let rest all the hair loose to play hide-and-seek with the *duppata*. She had pinned the red net *duppata* to the bun, and had tied both the ends of the *duppata* to the last bangle in each wrist.

When she stepped into the engagement hall, followed by some of her giggling friends, her presence made people completely awestruck. Her presence resulted into complete silence in the otherwise noisy hall, and it won't be an exaggeration to say that people forgot to breathe for a couple of seconds.

When his eyes fell on her, he couldn't believe his luck. He had already started feeling that she was actually becoming more pretty day by day but today, she had just reached the pinnacle of beauty.

The red *duppata* was touching and teasing her shapely waist and her back-less blouse ,which was flaunting her flawless back , was adding to her aesthetic beauty , the matching silver ear-rings and necklace was simply Piece de resistance and the low-waist *lehanga* was making her look really desirable .

He himself was looking no less than a showstopper model for groom wear. He was wearing a knee-length cream-coloured Sherwani with light maroon-thread work on it and had a maroon colour *duppatta* draped around his neck. He had spiked his hair and the small stud on his right ear was adding to his aristocratic looks. Clearly, had they both wanted, that day they could have given all the leading models a run for their money..

When she reached closer to the stage, he stepped down a stair and offered his hand to her. She held his hand, feeling really shy. He took her hand and tightened the grip and pulled her closer. Bemused, she looked up to meet his eyes. His deep eyes were reflecting his desires. His touch felt so familiar and so comfortable to her, that she wanted to surrender herself totally to the moment. They held the gaze for a moment and then he....

THE CLOSURE!

"So Kashish "Deep said, taking her hand in his "Will you please marry me?"

When he stopped speaking, tears were trickling down Kashish's cheek. All the moments of the six months of their courtship, 1 month of their separation and another month of their reunion came rushing to her. Her lips were shivering when she spoke..

"Deep..I have dreamt about this moment for past 8 months .And I really want to thank you for coming back to my life and turning this moment into reality because now I know for sure what I really want. Now, I know that my answer is a big 'NO'. I will not marry you Deep." She replied wiping off her tears.

"Wha.? Why..? Means? How?" Deep said, dumbstruck.

"As appealing as it may seem to me to lecture you on all your Whats and Whys and Hows but I cant. I have to go .I have to meet someone." She replied, her voice getting stronger and more confident with each passing word. She got up and collected her bag.

"Where? Whom?" Deep demanded.

"Oh Yes..I can answer this." Kashish replied, flatly "I have to go and meet someone you don't know or rather someone you need to know about .I am going to meet my fiancé OR to be precise my would-befiancé"

"Your What???"

"My Fiancé.." She said, stressing on the word "F..I..A..N..C..E"

"Ohh! I get it now..It's the same SMS guy..Isn't it?" Deep said, getting angry.

"May be or May not be" She replied, playfully.

"Oh Cut the crap Kashish! I demand to know how long this has been going on?"

"Two months...I think."

"TWO MONTHS!!" Deep shouted "And you are telling me now?"

"Ohh ..I am really sorry Deep" Kashish said , innocently "I am so sorry to tell you so late. I think I should have told you this when you were out comparing me with all those pretty girls of yours and I was fighting with my family for you. I think I should have told you when you were looking for a more feminine girl for you and I was keeping all other proposals at hold. You are absolutely right, I should ..no rather I must had told you this when you were searching a trophy wife for you when I was crying and was waiting for your call. I should have told you when you were impressing thousand other girls on the Skype and I was..."

"Stop it...Please stop it Kashu.." Deep pleaded, almost in tears. "Tell me you are playing a prank with me. Tell me it's a joke..."

"Joke?" Kashish smirked "It's not a joke, Deep. I am totally serious about it. In fact, I have never been more serious about anything in my life. May be you think it's a joke because that's what you considered my life to be —a joke. You said I was your support system, I was your silver-lining, you need me in your life for you to be stable, for you to fulfil your dreams but where does my life, my dreams comes into picture. What about my stability, my support system? The truth is you never ever cared for me Deep. You never loved me. The only person you care and love is you. You need me because you are going through a bad phase. You don't need me because you love me"

"Please don't do this to me Kashu? Please?"

"I know what you are going through because I went through the same couple of months back. But I can assure you, you will be alright"

"No..I won't be. I won't be alright without you. I want you in my life. I need you to be with me to feel alright. Please say you love me..please"

"Umm...I loved you Deep but ..but..I feel you don't have it in you, what it takes to make a couple"

"WHAT??? This is what you think about me? Then, why the bloody hell did you continue talking to me on the Skype? Why didn't you say this there only? I would have never ever come to meet you then."

"Oh That!!! That was only on Skype, Deep. Virtual world is far different from the Reality, you remember."

Deep was speechless.

"Anyhow, I have to leave now. It was nice meeting you, Deep and hope we never cross our ways again. Happy Journey."

She called for an auto.

"Please ..dont leave me ..Please don't go Kashish" Deep pleaded.

"All the Best, Deep and if possible, please grow a backbone" She said, as the auto was about to leave "And you know what, this is what I call as CLOSURE"

The auto started and Deep stood there staring in her direction, flabbergasted.

On the other side, Kashish was at her best and most confident self. But her heart had never raced more badly. The butterflies in her stomach had never danced so madly. Shifting on her seat, she waited impatiently to reach Cafe Coffee Day. She kept on fidgeting with her bangles and purse.

Finally, after what looked like a decade the auto reached the Cafe Coffee Day. She handed over the money to auto-driver and stepped out to see Varun standing over there, his face as sweet as ever..his eyes as innocent as that of a 2 months old baby. But there was a hint of disappointment in his gestures. He had lost so much of weight that it was impossible to believe that he was fat some months back..

She looked at him for a moment, then walked up to him, gulped down the funny lump in her throat and told "What is this?? 3 Weeks we didn't talk and you stopped eating altogether?"

"Huh?" Varun said, really sad and confused.

"I Love you too, Idiot" She said and hugged him tight, tears tricking down her cheeks

Varun looked at her amazed. Finally, he smiled and said with a shaky voice "I Love you"

"I know" She looked up at him, smiled and hugged him once more and added, after some time

"Let's go to that lake...I need to tell you lot of things.."

== Current Day- The Engagement ==

When she reached closer to the stage, Varun stepped down a stair and offered his hand to her. She held his hand, feeling really shy. He took her hand and tightened the grip and pulled her closer. Bemused, she looked up to meet his eyes. His deep eyes were reflecting his desires. His touch felt so familiar and so comfortable to her, that she wanted to surrender herself totally to the moment.

They held the gaze for a moment and then.... Varun turned to DJ and signalled him.

"Kaise Mujhe Tum Mil Gai..Kismat Pe Aaye Na Yakin..." the lyrics of the melodious song filled the hall. Kashish looked up at him again with tears in her eyes again and stepped up the stage.

"Did I tell you that you are looking breathtakingly pretty today" Varun whispered in her ears.

"You always say the same."

"Because you always do" he said looking straight in her eyes and added "You know *na* I love you."

"I know" she said, looking back at him with affection and respect in her eyes "Thank you Varun..."

***********THE END*******

THANK YOU

Dear Friends,

Hope you had a good time reading "Love Via Arranged Marriage..." and hope the story was able to strike a chord with you .I really want to thank all you wonderful people for the constant motivation, the nice and generous words and for your confidence in my writing skills. I am honor-bound to all the people who took out time to provide me comments and feedback through mails. I had a great time writing "Love Via Arranged Marriage..."

Can never thank you all enough..

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