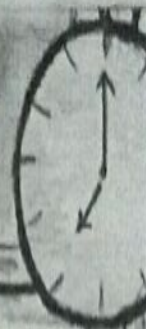


CHENNAI

KATHGODAM



# SEVEN...

(years, days, minutes)

-ADITI NATH

## SEVEN...

(years, days, minutes)

“For every birthday, we will visit a hill station together. Pinkie promise, okay?”. Swara remembered these words again as the fresh air of Kathgodam hit her face. For the past seven years she has been travelling alone. She stood up as she heard the voices in railway station. Picking her mobile, she dialed her tourist guide, Aditya.

Aditya was waiting in the station when his mom was pleading him to marry Diya. “Ok, just one week. Within these seven days you have to tell me a good decision.” His mother didn’t wait for his reply. “How could a person fall in love and decide their life partner within seven days? Are they mad?”. He was fuming in anger when he felt a pat on his shoulder. She stood there with bags and he hurriedly handed over the flowers to her.

“Hey, Swara right? I am sorry, actually I was in a call. So how was your journey?”, he tried to maintain a casual tone. “Yes, fine. So shall we take a cab to Nainital?”, she stopped when the sound of the clock hit their ears. It was sharp seven. They took a cab to Nainital. “How long will you be staying here Swara?”, Aditya’s voice distracted Swara as she was lost in her thoughts. “Seven days and six nights”, she replied. They reached the hotel in Nainital. “Okay, when you are ready just give me a call. I will be here”, Aditya took his leave.

Swara looked at herself in the mirror. Seven years of life and love, smile and pain. All of a sudden, life seemed so tiresome for her. She remembered her old days with Deep. He was a big traveler. For every vacation he would have planned a surprise trip. “Mom should have named you Deep-the traveler”, she used to mock him. Those pleasant days seemed like a dream for her. Hours later when Aditya and herself were in the lake, she handed him a chocolate. “My husband’s birthday. I am giving it on his behalf.” “Oh, wow. Wish him a very happy birthday. But, where is he? Busy man I guess”, Aditya gave a smile. “Yes, busy man since years. So you have been doing this work for how many days?, Swara asked. “For the past seven months in Nainital. Before that, in Delhi. Simply speaking, I am a big wanderlust. I just want to earn, travel and sleep. That is why I took this job. Simple yet happy life.” Swara looked at him deeply. “My husband too wanted to travel, like you do. He even drafted a perfect plan for our world

tour. With him, I wanted to travel the whole universe.” Swara hid her tears with a broad smile.

Aditya took his mobile to make a call. But Diya’s message flashed on the screen. “Shall we meet today evening ?”. He felt irritated and guilty at the same time. Even she is not much interested in this marriage, yet she is trying hard to patch up with me. He looked at Swara and asked, “Why are these marriages always complicated? We haven’t met each other so far. Yet this seems to be a big deal.” Swara remembered her good old days with Deep. How happy they were. But there was a gap now. A big gap enough to dig people in. “I met my husband two months before marriage. Even we didn’t know each other much. He was a military man. He wanted to quit his job and stay with me forever in our hometown. We were happily married, we lived together for seven days. Eighth day morning, he received a call from the headquarters to come over immediately. After few days, we just got the news that he had gone missing during the chaos that arose between the two nations. They told us to wait for a few days. Days turned weeks, then months, then years. Seven complete years, still no clue about him. Every moment seemed to hurt me when I was in Chennai, I shifted to various places. Every morning and night I used to call the headquarters and enquire. Just the calendar sheets changed, not their reply. “

She left a huge sigh as she narrated him the story. She sat on the green grasses that seemed to have pity on her state. “A girl who has been waiting for seven years. Hey, you are incredible yaar. Do you even know what you are doing? Did you think life is a cinema? You can keep waiting for your husband till the movie ends or your husband would just give a heroic entry. Just think Swara, Will he ever return? At least a phone call or a message? With what hope you have been waiting these many years? I have seen many tourists in my life, but you are different“. He was completely startled.

“Like everyone around me say, Deep may or may not return. That doesn’t mean that my love for him would reduce . But I believe, as long as I am waiting for Deep, something would make us become one again. That is the power of love. Once you have fallen for someone, you can never come out from their thoughts. If Deep had gone to foreign or somewhere, will I leave him? I would have waited right, that is what I am doing now. “ Aditya couldn’t believe his eyes. It felt like not a woman, instead a novel was in



front of him. Later that night, Diya texted him. He replied, “Let’s talk after seven days, I am busy.” Diya replied, “I will be waiting for your decision. I hope to receive your call by the seventh day.” That evening Swara called the headquarters again, yet no positive reply.

The second day afternoon Aditya asked her, “Why have you come to Nainital? That too, alone. Usually everyone comes here as couple or even a family. You are the only one with a tourist guide, probably, he laughed. “Because Deep wished to. He promised to take me to all the hill stations during his birthday. He wanted to celebrate his birthday there. I always wanted to fulfill his wishes. Even if he is not here, I will travel for him. It is hard to live without someone being present actually. That is why we create memories. Not just to remember, but to travel along too. As time passed by, Swara looked more beautiful. Not just in her looks, but in the way she actually was. That evening when Swara waved him bye, he stared into her eyes deeply. The eyes that wouldn’t have slept peacefully in the past seven years still had its glow. A glow that her husband would come back someday.

The third day, they saw the tallest peak. As they reached the top, Swara held his hands tightly. For the first time, he realized, he was admiring her. He adored her as a strong, confident and positive woman. He stood at the top, holding her hands even more tighter. He was sure, “This is love”. Not just because she was beautiful. She had something that attracted him. She held his hands for complete seven minutes. “Seven heavenly minutes”, he thought. “What happened to that girl your mother wanted you to speak? All set? Ready for marriage”, she winked at him. “No, didn’t speak to her yet. I am not yet ready for those seven day games. After seven or eight months I may be ready. Ok, are you in any idea to remarry?”, he was just curious to know the answer. Without even thinking for a second, she answered, “Obviously, once Deep comes back, we have to marry again. We should make our bond even more stronger.

She bought a collection of ‘seven word stories’ book on the fourth day. “I am really obsessed with seven. Even I could write a book you know, we made that much promises and dreams. I have millions of stories in my heart too. Once he comes back, I will narrate him everything”, Swara kept on talking continuously. Inside his heart too there were a million stories. “This is not lust. I am not into her physically or anything like that. I just want her to be with me. Even I know her past too. I don’t want her to go back now.”

Aditya was confused by these feelings.

On the fifth day, Aditya received a phone call from an unknown number. “Hey, this is Swara. Actually, I broke my phone. It...it fell down from the stairs. I just don’t know what to do. Still I haven’t called the head quarters since morning. I sense something wrong. Please come soon”. He rushed to her immediately. He just entered the hotel and she came running and got his mobile phone. “Yes, Swara here. Any information about Deep? Ok, if you get any information just give a call to this number. My phone is broken, please.” He was wondered by her patience. Seven years of monotonous dialogues, still she hopes. She felt relaxed after talking to them. “They said they will inform. Please keep your phone safely. They might call you.” She kept on talking with the innocence of a kid.

He didn’t actually expect a call. He wanted Swara to move on. That night, to his surprise, he received a call. “Swara there? I am speaking from military headquarters, Delhi. You actually won. Your hope and trust has brought back your husband back after seven years. Yes, he has come. For the first time I believe in miracles. You can take your husband along with you and start your life fresh.” He kept on talking while Aditya’s world turned upside down. He felt like a thousand thunders hitting him altogether.” This means Swara will go, and my love too will move away. No, I can’t believe this. This is a dream actually. A nightmare, a worst thought. I cannot leave her. This is true love too. I am accepting her and I can share my life with her.” He was shouting with pain.

It was the sixth day. Aditya’s eyes were red since yesterday night. The morning rays of sun still didn’t touch the earth. “How did I become so mean? Swara had been waiting for years to hear this news. A single mistake of mine would ruin her happiness. Who am I to share her life? She already has someone for that. Swara would never accept anyone other than Deep. He remembered her words on trust. “Yes, I trust people. It is the base actually. Without trust, how could I share all my thoughts with you? You are my trustworthy friend.” How could I betray her? Once he reached the hotel, Swara came running to get his mobile phone. He told her, “We have to go to Delhi, at once.” He told her about her husband. “Hey, really? Are you telling these stories just for convincing me? These are lies right? My husband, is he really there?”, she realized that she was going out of control.

Within next two hours, they were on the flight. Swara was silent, calm and composed. All her words were vanishing one by one in the air. She remembered all the years she had spent waiting for him. The words that pierced her, the society that mocked at her, the loneliness that killed her. Finally everything was over. She could start another fresh life with Deep, making the bond more stronger. She can touch him, feel him, thanks all those memories that kept her alive. Aditya tried hard to control his tears. Finally his new found love has got her love back. "She could have been just a friend to me. I would have celebrated this. Why did you enter my life Swara?", he looked at her who was peacefully looking at the clouds. She didn't achieve success, she is the success.

They reached the office. Aditya didn't want to go inside. He heard people talking there. "God is real, he is there, for sure. Else how could a person return from coma after years? He has been in coma for six and half years in some other country. He didn't come here, it was actually the love that brought him. Strong girl she was. Best couple in today's world...."and even more. He realized the truth, the fact that he cannot own her. During their return journey, they both were happy, talking, laughing and playing like children. "Deep is your perfect match, beautiful and pure. You both are really lucky to find each other", he said.

The seventh day arrived. Aditya realized how the situations were, a week back. "How could I fall in love within seven days?", yes he fell in love. Not even in seven days, just seven minutes. Swara and Deep came near him, "A big thank you. Without you, we wouldn't have become one again". Swara started speaking, "Your seven days are getting over today. Speak to Diya, the girl who didn't disturb you after your single text. Talk to her, she is the one. At least give a chance, just seven days", he saw the train move away with them. The clock stuck 7'o clock. She looked at him with bags in her hand, he handed over another set of flowers to her, as he did a week back. But this time, with mixed emotions.

He looked at the seven word stories book in his hand. The first story read, "Fall in love, you'll learn to live". He dialed Diya's number. This time, he will talk, for sure, at least for seven minutes. Maybe, to find love....