



Undelivered Letters



What if you never knew
about a letter someone
had written for you
and you receive it
after 20 years?

by J . A L C H E M

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J. Alchem is actively involved in writing quotes and short write-ups which are often seen being circulated among the youth on popular networking sites. Recently, the author has signed a short movie contract on his award-winning short story.

It's for you, Sid ❤️



Undelivered Letters

Winner of *Amazon Pen to Publish* Award

Winner of *The Best Author of the Year* Award

Prologue

"Honey, take it easy. You are not supposed to lift heavy things," said Aron, moving back and forth in the living area, checking the cartons lying on the floor one last time.

"It isn't that heavy." Sara's voice echoed from the corner of the room.

"I have no doubt about that, but your stomach is upset," Aron replied, rushing towards the crockery unit, trying to help Sara who was reaching for the carton box kept at the top for the past few minutes.

They exchanged a smile when she finally managed to get it. Gently, they placed the box on the center table together, their fingers brushing against each other. A slight jerk of the cover, and dust flew and settled on the plywood, scattering randomly. The impressions of their sweaty hands got imprinted on the top of the carton. Perfect impressions that could be framed. Sara's gazing eyes moved to Aron from those imprints. Unaware of her affection, Aron was engrossed in planning how to pack the crockery still left in the crockery unit.

"How big is the transport van?" Sara asked, putting her hand on her waist and tilting her head like a baby. There were patches of sweat on her T-shirt. A strand of hair was caressing her right cheek. She tried to blow it out of her face but the strand being stubborn refused to move. Aron watched her, amused.

"The guy would visit to check how big a van we'd need," said Aron, pushing another carton towards the corner like a child parking his toy car. He clapped his hands to get rid of the dust. Sara looked at his athletic figure, which had remained the same even after 23 years of their marriage, not a single pound on either side. They had met the very first time 24 years ago when Aron was lost and searching for an address. Aron had a bag full of letters to deliver. He worked as a postman then.

“It is just two blocks away from mine,” answered young Sara, looking at the address.

“But I don’t know your address either,” Aron replied with a courteous smile.

“Oh, stupid me! Come, I’ll take you there.” Sara shook her head awkwardly and walked ahead, whistling. It was some folk song. Aron had never heard it before, but the whistling soothed him and a few second later he was humming it to himself as Sara whistled.

“You must know the address; you are a postman after all.” Sara kept looking at him for a bit too long. His clean-shaved oval face was glowed, not a single mark to be found. The hair was blonde and the color of his eyes was a perfect blue, reminding her of the beautiful skyline. His nose was sharp and with his childlike smile he might have wooed many girls before. Sara smiled to herself, looking how handsome this boy actually was.

“It’s only been two days.” Aron realized she have been looking at him for long. He gazed straight into her brown eyes, and it felt as if the Earth suddenly shifted on its axis. She blinked before he could explore the whole map in them. All he could see was a vague reflection of his image.

“If I keep meeting kind people like you, I would learn the addresses quickly,” Aron said, adjusting the bag on his shoulder. Sara stopped whistling, ceasing the song abruptly. She looked at him and smiled.

“Has anyone told you that you whistle really well?” Aron asked.

“Thank you, but you should know the right moment to compliment a woman.” Sara gave him a strange look.

“I am a novice at it.”

“And if you keep meeting kind people like me, you will learn that too, right?” Sara said wittily and then they both laughed.

“Is this your first job?” Sara asked, taking a turn into the street. Sara’s ponytail bobbed as she jumped over a speed breaker. Aron crossed it gently,

keeping a distance between Sara and him.

“Yes.”

“But you look older.” Sara knew the words came wrong. “Sorry,” she added. Sara looked back at his toned face and flat hair, with her teeth pressed together.

“Please blame my job’s requirements for my aged look,” Aron immediately replied, trying to fix his hair with his left hand.

“Okay, take this left, and then go straight and then the immediate right.” Sara gave the final directions and extended her hand towards him to shake.

“Left, straight and immediate right.” He relayed the directions once more so that it could get ingrained in his brain.

“Thank you.” He offered his left hand, adjusting his bag with the right.

“You must work on your etiquette too,” Sara said, moving ahead.

“If I keep meeting kind people like you, I would learn that, too,” Aron spoke a little louder ensuring that she heard it. Sara looked back and they both shared a smile.

“Why are you smiling?” asked Aron. He was searching for the lost ending of the duct tape.

“Oh, am I?” Sara questioned, scratching her forehead.

“Aren’t we leaving a golden time behind?” she asked, admiring his graying stubble. A three-day old spiked stubble that could bruise the skin. Something she still loved receiving on her soft skin.

It was the last moment rush they were managing. Aron had been sure he would be able to convince his department. He had tried hard too, but it hadn't worked out.

"Think about the rainbows the new place is going to give us," he said, though he did not know any place that could replace the love he had for this one; a place where he got his first job, a place where he met Sara, a place where they got married, a place where they had spent 23 years of their life, a place with which no other place could compete.

Aron found the lost loop of the duct tape. Sara lost herself to the past again.

There was a knock. Sara opened the door. It was a surprise outside. It was Aron.

"Hey!" she exclaimed.

"Hey!" replied Aron with the same excitement.

"Forgot the address again, huh?" she adjusted her stride. She knew she had to help the poor man again. She rested her back against the door panel with her hand clasped in front of her stomach.

"I am lucky. I found it right this time." Aron smiled, knowing that she misunderstood him and he loved it. There could be nothing more beautiful for him than this.

He read the name and address on the letter, to verify, and handed it to her. She stepped forward and grabbed it.

"Oh my God, Dad!" she shouted.

"Wait, wait! You have to sign here." Aron stopped her.

"Can't you wait till I read it, please?" Sara requested, holding the letter between her hands. It was something dear to her. Something she couldn't wait to open and read.

“Only if you offer me a glass of water.” Aron grinned.

“Of course, please come inside.” she bowed, letting Aron in.

The home was filled with big shelves loaded with books. Aron settled on a couch facing a door to another room where Sara vanished with the letter. There was a photo frame placed on the table – a trio; Sara, and two people who should be her mom and dad, hugging one another, the snowflakes clinging to their hair and pullovers. It seemed to be 4-5 years old.

Aron looked around. There were pictures of Sara’s mom on the side wall. Aron did not have to struggle much to read the captions of those framed pictures. In one of them, she was seen appointed as a literature professor at a university. In another, she was seen receiving her literature degree, and then there was a large picture of her mom and dad holding Sara in the middle.

“My dad is a musician. He keeps visiting new countries to perform,” Sara had returned with a glass of water for Aron. As she set the glass down on the table, in her excitement, she ended up spilling water.

“Oh, by the way, I am Sara Marcos,” she said, extending her hand again.

“I am Aron Paris.” Aron shook the right hand with her, this time. He’d been wondering about her name since he knew her, and he was glad she volunteered the information.

“So, how is your learning going on?” she teased him.

“Not well. I don’t get a chance to meet kind people like you these days,” he replied and they both laughed.

“It’s been eight months. I was dying to hear from dad and you brought me happiness today. So, keep your weekend free, I’ll introduce you to the city,” she said, tying her hair. Aron looked at her. He had lost something he was not aware of.

“Where are you lost?” asked Aron. Sara forgot to remove her hand from the

carton Aron was trying to seal with duct tape.

“I wish we could take this place with us, too.” Sara faced Aron.

“I know you love this place. But honey, we have no option other than to shift,” he said softly, removing the tape from her hand. The skin stretched when he was peeling the tape. It did hurt, but it was nothing compared to what Sara was going through.

“I know,” Sara said, making a smiling face to reassure him.

“That’s what I love the most about you,” Aron said, tapping her nose with his index finger.

“This face?” She asked, making the funny face. Aron smiled. Sara changed the face to that of a grumpy kid. Aron laughed.

“No, that you understand everything,” Aron replied and hugged her.

“I know,” Sara said and added. “Let’s get us moving then.”

Sara went to another room. The task was to empty the bookshelf and put a few uncountable books in the boxes. Sara owned a small bookstore like her mother. She loved reading, a trait she had inherited from her mother. When Aron was away from home for his job, she would spend most of her time reading and managing the bookstore. Sara read to children in the day and to herself in the evening.

Sara was putting the books in a box when she came across one book Aron had gifted her when they had spent their first weekend together.

“For a lady who loves reading,” Aron said, bowing a little and offering the book he had bought for her. Sara was clad in a pink polyester chiffon skirt with a long zipper at the back and boy, she looked like royalty!

“You are pretty,” Aron whispered in her ear.

Aron was wearing a white shirt, tucked inside loose gray trousers. His

rumpled hair didn't have any traces of oil.

"Thank you, handsome," said Sara.

"Thank you. I told you it was the requirement of the job," Aron replied, ruffling his hair.

They visited the city museum. Sara explained everything to him as she showed him around the museum. Aron was amazed at Sara's command over history, as if she had been living here since the place came into existence and witnessed the whole process of evolution of the town and its people. Sometimes Sara looked like a guide and sometimes a close friend when she pulled him across to see things.

They admired gorgeous, honey-colored towns and villages. Sara introduced him to different places mentioning which roads led where. She showed him the markets and the major shortcuts.

With night approaching, they sat at the beach with the water rushing to their feet and back again.

"I used to come here with mom and dad," she said.

"Dad would play his guitar and we would listen for hours, the waves touching our feet. But then Dad got busier with a project and then another project and then another. Mom and I still come here when we miss dad, but not together anymore."

Aron looked at her eyes. Sara's eyes were filled with tears, with rings that would take him into the past if he looked at them for long, but she blinked every time Aron was about to fall in.

"I write long candid letters to my dad when I miss him. I don't have his address as he keeps shifting. So I let them sail in the sea," she said, throwing a tiny bottle that she was carrying into the sea. It was a reply to the letter she got from her father.

"I know they would never reach him, but I feel light after doing it," she added, holding Aron's hand.

“Soon there would be a knock at your door and it won’t be just any letter but your dad himself,” said Aron, holding her hand, looking for the tiny bottle that had already travelled out of their vision.

There was a knock on the door that interrupted Sara. A fat man whose stomach bounced with every step he took, stood outside. Aron went to the door and shook hands with him. His cheeks looked like half-blown balloons.

“Everything is almost ready,” Aron said, nodding at the packed boxes. The fat man inspected the boxes to see if they were tightly packed. He could only check the larger ones; for the smaller ones, his bouncy stomach came in the way.

“Furniture?” he asked, looking at the bed and the couch. He had a soft childlike voice.

“No, we have sold it to the new owner,” replied Aron. The guy then calculated how big a van would be required and left, assuring he’d come back in an hour. Aron was looking at the man driving off when Sara screamed his name from the storeroom.

“Honey, look what I have found.” Sara’s voice was alarmed. Aron rushed into the storeroom.

When you are cleaning your room or shifting, you come across old, forgotten things; things that once held great value for you.

“Look.” Sara showed him a black leather bag – a dull bag covered in layers of dust. A bag she used to see on his shoulder. A bag that Aron used to take with him in his early days to deliver the letters.

“Oh my god! Where did you find it?” Aron asked, amazed.

“There is something inside,” Sara added, without hearing what Aron had said, unzipping the bag.

“Honey, you must see this,” said Sara, emptying the bag.

“Yeah, my documents, I got them the day I was promoted.” Aron laughed, looking at the pile of documents that Sara had emptied on the bed.

“No, look at these!” Sara had a few letters in her hand that she flashed before him. Aron’s eyes widened in horror, seeing the letters.

“No, no, it cannot be!” Aron screamed. He settled down on the bed and picked those letters and trembled saying, “Good God! What have I done?”

“How could I leave them like this, honey? How could I?” Aron hid his face in his hands. He closed his eyes in a vain attempt to reign in his emotions.

He shuffled the letters. There was a bundle of them. The addresses on them had faded a little with time. The stamps fixed on them had almost faded away. He looked closely at one of the stamps.

“1993,” it read.

Aron sank in, reading the letters. These were the letters he was supposed to deliver exactly 20 years ago. He turned to face Sara. Sara placed his head on her chest and stroked his hair.

“It’s okay.” Sara ruffled his hair, trying to calm him down.

“It’s not okay, honey, it’s not okay,” Aron spoke in a heavy voice. His face was red with guilt. An uninvited pain had enveloped him.

“It was the day of my promotion. I was supposed to deliver these last letters but I came straight home just to give you the news.” Aron recalled the moment. “And it rained for days and then I completely forgot it.”

Aron picked the letters once again. He counted them twice, read the names written on them one by one, and checked them from both sides; different sizes, different colors, and different addresses in different handwritings.

“What if someone is still waiting to get a letter from her dad?” Aron looked into Sara’s eyes. They held the gaze for a moment. Sara swallowed the lump

in her throat.

“I am sorry,” said Aron and took her into his arms. Minutes passed but they stayed entwined, for in that moment everything was fine. There is no fault that cannot be amended.

Sara’s dad had not written any letter for years and neither had he visited them. It had been 17 years since she received the last letter. There was no news of him being alive. They tried searching for him, communicating to the addresses they received letters from, but all the information turned out to be obsolete. Sara’s father could not be located.

However, Sara never lost hope. She never stopped writing letters to her dad. She still went to the seaside. She still put them in tiny bottles. She still threw them in the sea. She still remembered what Aron had said to her when they sat there the very first time. There was still no such knock at her door, not even a letter. Sara was still waiting.

“You must deliver them now,” Sara said, looking at Aron. She held Aron’s hands in hers.

“What if I am too late? What if I turn out to be the reason behind anyone’s misfortune in the years lost?” Aron was scared.

“Then, apologize.” replied Sara, and kissed him on his hand.

Chapter 1-1

August, 1998

Cathy walked into the room. The door behind closed silently. Kara was sleeping in her bed, holding a puppet. Cathy poked the puppet's stomach with her finger, the way Kara did. She pulled the blanket up and planted a soft kiss on Kara's nose. She moved to go back when she felt something holding her finger. It was Kara's tiny finger. She was smiling, holding her mom's finger.

"You still awake?"

"Your kiss woke me up," Kara replied, blinking her eyes in admiration.

"I should stop kissing you, especially on your nose," Cathy said, settling down on her bed. She took Kara's small hands in hers and rubbed them. It was not very cold, but it was something she liked doing. Something with which she could kill awkwardness.

"But I love it, mom."

"No, you said you get irritated," Cathy replied, rubbing the other hand.

"Mom, that's only when you kiss me in front of others," Kara replied, making a sulky face. Her mom smiled.

"You know what, mom?" Kara asked, holding Cathy's hand. She sensed it was cold.

"No, not again." Cathy stood up and adjusted her blanket, ready to leave. She didn't think she'd be able to answer the question again.

"But I love you, mom," Kara declared softly, something that always made her mom melt.

"How many times? Aren't you tired of asking the same thing?" Cathy asked.

"Do you get tired of loving?" Kara asked a small question that was too big for Cathy to handle.

It echoed deep inside Cathy's soul. Cathy felt miserable and proud at the same time. She bit her lips to stop the flood of tears that were threatening to fall. She took a deep breath and forced a smile.

"How stubborn are you?!" Cathy said, picking the puppet from her bed. She poked its stomach again.

"Yes, like you, like dad," Kara replied, unaware of the emotional turmoil she drove her mother into with her innocent questions.

Cathy felt broken, but somehow managed to force a smile.

"Okay, but promise you won't ask me to sleep here in your room after that!" she asked and Kara agreed.

She rested her head on her left hand, bending it at the elbow, and ruffled Kara's hair. They both closed their eyes as she started. Cathy always narrated the story from her perspective.

I was 24 years old then. A mountaineer and adventurer. My days would be spent in hiking mountains, crossing dense jungles, reaching new milestones and reading romantic novels in the places I crossed. It was summer when I was looking for a new trip, and searching for romantic novels in a bookstore. The love of an adventurer towards books was inexplicable. We did not have our favorite people around, but we did ensure we had books to accompany us to those places.

I read a few blurbs and picked three books to read. Three books were more than enough for a week's trip. An adventurer has to keep her luggage light. A thing she always kept in her mind.

I reached the counter, where a guy stood lost in a book. I had visited the bookstore earlier but it was the first time I saw him. I put the novels down on the counter to get them billed. I made sure it created a sound so I did not have to call him and ask for the bill. He looked at the novels, recalled the titles one by one and started talking about his experience with them while picking the bill book.

“Impressive,” I muttered. I had intended to keep this compliment to myself, but it was loud enough to reach his ears. He raised his eyes and smiled, bowing his head in gratitude.

He asked me about the last book I read and loved, while noting down the ISBN numbers to make the bill. I recalled my last read. He stopped making the bill and looked at me. His eyes were inquisitive. His cream shirt shone a little brighter when his head turned up. He thought for a moment, smiled and then started talking about that book. He shared a distinct perspective about the book. It made me love it even more.

It was as if I had read it again but found a different story inside. I loved it and he knew it. He saw it in my eyes. He then took all the books I picked and moved towards the romance section of the bookstore.

He got busy there for a couple of minutes and I kept looking at him, admiring his knowledge, his reading appetite, and his athletic body. He picked three different books one by one from different sections, before coming back to the counter. He put them down on the counter and moved inside.

“These are exclusively written for you,” he said picking up the bill book.

“What if I don’t like them?” I tried acting smart.

“Come back with this bill and get whatever book you want in return,” he replied, and we had our first affectionate eye contact.

He made the bill, I paid and left thanking him.

On the trip, I took the books along. I read them on mountains; sitting against the shadow of a rock, lying on the grass while crossing the jungles, resting on a hammock and in the lamp light in my camp.

I was so much in love with his choice. I felt like rushing to him in between the trip and discussing the books with him. It was a new feeling. It was the first time I wanted my trip to end soon as I couldn’t wait to listen to his reading experience with the same books. When I returned from the trip, the first thing I did was to visit the bookstore.

An old man greeted me at the store. He was the one who manned the shop all the time I visited, but I had never paid enough attention to him. It was just limited to greeting and getting the books billed.

I moved inside and looked for “him” in the counter. He was not there. I looked behind the shelves while browsing the books but couldn’t find him.

“Are you looking for Adam?” The old man asked lightly, picking books from the counter and placing them on the shelves.

“Sorry?” I asked, surprised.

“The curly haired guy,” he replied, gesturing with his right hand towards his head to indicate the curls.

“Many of my visitors come here searching for him ever since he joined me. Everyone loves getting books recommended by him and talking to him about novels,” he explained, adjusting the books on the shelves and his specs at the same time.

“He comes here only on weekends,” he added, looking at me.

“It is a children’s book,” the old man said when I was pretending to look inside. I felt a little embarrassed about it and pretended to deliberately pick the book. He smiled, I was really bad at it. I bought two books from the same author he recommended and left the bookstore. I had another hiking trip coming up in two days and I had to take a little rest before resuming.

This time I decided to cover Sherone Valley, a valley said to be the first love for the mountaineers because of the large rocks, waterfalls and cold mid-night breezes. The valley was believed to be a guiding light for all the wandering souls.

I set a camp near a mountain side river. A few meters away from the usual hiking camp. I took out the book and read a little from it. After exploring the beautiful vistas for days, I finally had some time to scribble in my diary that I was carrying along. I placed a handful of pebbles beside me and started throwing them into the river one by one. I loved watching the ripples in the water though they were short-lived because of the current.

“Be soft girl, it might hurt someone!” echoed a voice.

I turned back. A bearded man stood there, with a big bag and a cap. I stood up and walked towards him. He came closer and removed his sweat soaked cap and greeted me. His curly hair settled on his head. Adam.

“Hey, if I am not wrong, I have met you somewhere,” he said, pointing his cap.

“I doubt if you are ever wrong. I am Cathy by the way,” I replied. I was so happy and excited seeing him.

“Oh yeah, Cathy, we met at the bookstore, right? I am Adam,” he replied. His face lit up with recognition. We shook hands for the first time. His grip was soft but tight. The veins on his hands were clearly visible like green rivulets flowing throughout his body.

I thanked him for the novels he recommended to me and told him about my bookstore visit.

“You don’t choose the novels, they choose you,” he said and talked about what he loved in the books he gave me to read. It was again so fascinating listening to him talking about the books we both loved.

It was magical to know how two people read the same book and imagined different things.

He prepared something from a ready-to-eat-packet, putting it on a small burner he was carrying. We then settled down against a large rock, in the shadow, enjoying the food.

We discussed about the books and the mountains. He shared stories of some of his deadly hiking experiences with me that scared and excited me at the same time. We then talked about the stars, galaxies, aliens, and the afterlife while resuming our trip, together, the very first time.

We started seeing each other very often. We planned a few adventure trips together, meeting at bookstores, carrying out long discussions about different books and offbeat things and I fell in love with him.

It was his birthday. I gifted him a book. I found words on the pages that reflected my feelings and circled them with a pen. It took me three days to find all the words I wanted to say and highlight them. He loved it. He confessed his love and we got married the next week.

It was the winter of 1993, he left with one of his friends for a hike. He was so excited about it that he kept talking about it all the time before leaving.

A week passed by, but he did not return.

Sometimes you get stuck and it takes you days to find a way through the lurch, landslides and natural calamities. It is the life of a mountaineer.

Two weeks flashed by, and then three. At the end of four weeks, he still had not returned. I started feeling insecure. I did not want to face the facts that were staring me in the face. My heart was suffocating. I was not finding comfort anywhere. I looked out of the window and waited for him to come. I visited the bookstore to see if I could magically find him there waiting for me with open arms. I hiked at many places to find him somewhere, but he was nowhere.

My days and nights became painful. I missed him like hell. I cried looking at his photo and the book I gifted him on his birthday. I lodged a missing complaint at the local police station. They searched for him but were unable to track him down. I was completely shattered.

I sat in the balcony and wished for him to come, crying my eyes out. I prayed for him to come back and take me in his arms yet again and never leave me.

And one day, after 2 months, I heard a knock at the door. I knew it was him. It was like someone had tugged at my heart. I rushed and opened the door and almost collapsed. Tears gushed out of my eyes. It was him.

“I am sorry, sweetheart,” he said, and I grabbed him tightly in my arms. He had a long beard and was nearly unrecognizable. He was weak. There were bruises on his body. He limped inside.

I removed his luggage, his clothes, and his bandages. He was deeply wounded, screaming with every touch. I dressed his wounds, prepared some

hot soup for him. He slept in my arms. It took him three weeks to heal completely.

He was so stubborn about his mountaineering obsession that he resumed his life the very next week. I wanted him to stop it for a few weeks but I knew I couldn't keep him away from his obsession. He had a dream of hiking all over the world crossing mountains after mountains and I did not want to be a barrier between him and his dream.

It happened 3 more times when he was gone 'for a week or two' and returned after months. It became a part of our life. Meanwhile, you were born. You had your dad's brown eyes. I named you Kara after our favorite character from the novel I gifted him on his birthday revealing my feelings to him.

"When will dad return, mom?" Kara opened her eyes. It was like someone had switched on the light in them and the light hurt Cathy's eyes.

"He will, soon," Cathy replied, wiping her tears.

"It's already been three years, mom."

The room filled with silence. Cathy swallowed the lump in her throat and bit her lips as she looked at Kara.

"He will come, like always, right mom?" Kara replied on her own, wiping her mom's tears with her cold fingers.

"Yes," said Cathy, standing up from the bed after planting a kiss on Kara's nose.

Only she knew Adam never came back after he was lost the very first time. Adam only returned in her story for their daughter. Cathy walked out and the door closed behind her soundlessly, mimicking her inner silence.

Chapter 2-1

September, 1990

For a small city, where there were almost no crimes, a court proceeding was something disturbing. People didn't want any such thing to happen to their city. And when they did have something to witness, it was a matter of discussion for days, weeks and months for them. From a vegetable seller to a watchman, stories were circulated in the whole town and created an environment of insecurity and alertness amongst them and the city was no longer innocent to the people for a month, at least. Everyone had their doors closed in fear that some alien thing would come knocking around.

The court was fully crowded, with people glued to their seats. Two journalists sat in the front row with their notepads in hand to cover the judgment for their newspaper. Three lawyers sat at a square table; well prepared to put the evidence in support and against, to prove their sides as the only true ones.

A man, aged around 30, entered the courtroom. He appeared leaner on this Day of Judgment than people had seen him earlier. He was accompanied by two sheriffs. His hands were tied. He raised his eyes, looked at the crowd and then moved towards the confession box; with not a bit of emotion on face.

Everyone stood up as the two judges walked to their seats. One of them was in his 60s and looked like he had seen thousands of cases in his life and was great at delivering fair judgments. Another judge appeared to be in his 40s. He could easily be mistaken for an athlete from his body. The only thing that befitted his judge's role was his outfit and perfectly rolled up wig of white hair showing wisdom.

The judges took their respective seats, followed by the people and the lawyers. The assistant pushed two copies of the case file toward the judges. They picked up their own and started reading the summary. The courtroom was silent for a couple of seconds. The judges then looked at the accused.

"Start the proceeding," said the young judge. The plaintiff lawyer stood up, holding a pile of paper in his left hand. He looked confident as if he was

carrying true evidence and was sure of winning the case.

"My Lord, Mr. Samuel is accused of murdering my client Ms. Elizabeth," The lawyer said, and the room heated up. Everyone looked at Samuel. He shivered in the confession box, feeling as if a bunch of ants were biting his numb body. While the lawyer submitted the evidence to the judges, Samuel lost himself to his inner turmoil, remembering the past.

Samuel and Elizabeth were in the same college. Elizabeth was in her 20s. Her face accentuated by a pair of sky blue eyes and curved cheeks. Her hair was silky to the point that it made his fingers itch to run them through her hair. She had an excellent intellect and was way ahead of the other students of her class. Most of the girls were jealous of her because most of the guys were after her and paid less attention to them.

With messy hair and a shabby look, Samuel was her polar opposite. No one would fall for him. He was great at receiving 'F' grades in his exams. He was involved in all kind of crap that a good student is not supposed to be involved in. What Elizabeth loved in him was above anyone's understanding. The pair was like chalk and cheese.

Samuel and Elizabeth had the same classes and spent most of the time lost in each other's eyes while the teachers were busy teaching. Samuel would make funny faces that would make Elizabeth giggle and grin. They developed a different sign language that they used to talk when the class was silent.

After College, they would rush to the top of the building where they would sit on the parapets, legs hanging on either sides and talk for hours. They would sit and play their own set of games. They stared into each other's eyes to see who blinked first. Elizabeth always lost, but she loved it when Samuel wiped her tears, kissed her eyes and they ended up sharing secrets.

Sometimes they bunked classes and went to the nearby park where Samuel rested his head in her lap and she read Shakespeare to him. Samuel carried his guitar with him. Even though he knew only a little about the chords, Elizabeth still loved listening to him play. She found comfort and peace in his novice-ness. She enjoyed listening to things which everyone thought of as

crap. They were meaningful and realistic to her.

Samuel got a job soon after completing his English honors. It was not a lucrative one but it was enough to give him a promising life. Elizabeth decided to study further instead of getting a job. Samuel supported her in all her decisions. Soon they decided to get married so they could spend a lifetime together. Somewhere Elizabeth knew, with her college and Samuel's job they would not be able to get much time together except for the weekends.

Samuel asked her father for her hand in marriage. Samuel was neither good looking like Elizabeth, nor was he well established like her father, who was one of the biggest businessmen in the city. He told him how much he loved her but it made no difference in her father's eyes. Her father rejected his proposal.

Samuel and Elizabeth got married against his will. They moved to another city soon after the marriage. Their love grew deeper with time.

Present in the courtroom outwardly, but with his mind elsewhere, Samuel stood in the confession box, remembering his moments with Elizabeth. The proposal, the marriage, standing against her father's will, the seven short months they spent together, and the happiness they shared.

Samuel remembered every tiny thing; what Elizabeth looked like when she woke up, how she used to ruffle his hair, how she would put her arms around him, how she punched him lightly on his chest when she was angry with him for coming late from the office.

For the public, lawyer and judges, Samuel was in the court, listening to every evidence and every accusation, but his soul was somewhere else, in a place where there were no rules, no regulations, just the soul beyond the boundary of life and death.

"The Court finds Samuel guilty of domestic violence and immolation of his wife and sentences him to life term imprisonment," the judge passed his order.

The judgment echoed in the court, with the journalists noting down in their notepads. Samuel laughed at the judgment which was given to the one who was already dead since the day Elizabeth had met with an accident.

Elizabeth had burned to death while cooking food.

Samuel laughed at the proud face of Elizabeth's father, who faked innocent in the confession box despite knowing that he loved his daughter more than him.

Samuel laughed at the judges who thought they had solved another case and given the punishment to the culprit.

Samuel laughed on the broken promise Elizabeth had made when she was ill, but couldn't keep.

"We live in each other, we both will die if we fall apart," Samuel had said, shaking the bottle of medicine before giving it to her.

"None of us is going anywhere alone, I promise."

As the older judge found him laughing at the punishment he gave, he thought for a moment, looked at other judge and added another note with his judgment,

"Mental asylum till he gets sane."

Chapter 3-1

October, 1950

Someone was stealing books from the stores, libraries, and homes. In the last thirty days more than twelve such thefts have happened. At first no one paid attention, but when it happened so frequently in different stores, people got alarmed. It was something unimaginable to them. The news spread in no time across the town. The rumors, stories, and theories spread along with the news.

Some regarded them as a ‘theft of knowledge’. Some called it an ‘act of God’ who was calling back his wisdom to himself. Some called it a ‘holy happening’ of another type, as from whoever the books were being thieved, God was actually going to grant them something in return. Some called it a curse and an alarm of something disastrous which was going to hit soon. There were stories all over but no one was aware of the truth.

Every time a theft was reported, people gathered outside the spot, chanting religious slogans, and talking about the mysteriousness of the thieves and books stolen. They had made their own sketches of the thieves in their minds and started discussing it with everyone they met.

People started locking their books up in shelf with tight locks. Some kept them in the most sacred places in case it was an act of God. Libraries and bookstores started flooding with people. People were buying more and more books so they never run out of wisdom in case all the books were stolen. The rest of the people called it a marketing gimmick by the bookstores to increase their sales. They preferred to stay away from such news but they couldn’t help being curious and hearing stories from the people speaking about the thefts.

Many detectives came to the city with their magnifying glasses and cigars, claiming to be of the highest order. Then came the pseudo-religious with long facial hair and shabby looks. People offered them money and other valuables to unlock the mystery or save them from the curse if something was haunting them. The detectives visited the sites of thefts, gathered the clues, and promised to offer solutions. The pseudo-religious organized prayers in order

to appease the spirits and free the town from the curse.

People of high gratitude and intellect also gathered and planned to nab the thieves. A few men were appointed as vigilantes outside every bookstore, library and homes with a large number of books. Bells were tied to chair legs, tables, door handles, and shelves with the help of long threads in libraries and bookstores so that at night if someone barged in, the bells would ring and the thieves could be caught.

But another theft happened the very next day, and no one was caught. Vigilantes couldn't find out even when they were outside the store. The prayers by pseudo-religious didn't work, and the detectives couldn't offer any solution despite claiming they had clues. People now strongly believed that all of it was caused by God and he was calling wisdom back to himself. They had almost completely taken the mysterious thefts for granted.

Meanwhile, the famous detective Carl was called from the nearby town by the Mayor as a last effort. Silver hair, long overcoat, bowler hat, and spine a little bent with age, Carl came on a horse cart. It was believed that he had cracked more number of cases in his life than the number of hairs he had on his head. Though, no one saw him without his bowler hat ever.

Carl visited all the libraries and bookstores, walking with the help of his stick while his pocket watch danced around his neck on a chain. He inspected the last site of theft with his double focal specs, adjusting it multiple times with his free hand. He noticed the bells had not been installed at this store as the owner took it lightly. The vigilantes fell asleep in the middle of the night when the theft actually happened.

Carl called all the people of the town to gather before him. Some people gathered to honor such a big old detective while some came just as a formality as they believed it an act of natural force and had given up on finding the thieves.

"I have inspected the sites, the thief is not after your wealth. He is stealing the books for some purpose," he said and everyone looked at his face, blinking. There was nothing new about this revelation. The detective looked at all the faces, right to left.

"Your town is not the only town where these thefts are happening," he said, removing his specs and clearing it with a cloth. Everyone looked at him, surprised.

"There is one more nearby town where such mysterious thefts are happening," he added, putting on the specs.

"The same book thefts?"

A young man asked from the crowd. The people including the detective looked at him. The young man looked frightened with the number of eyes which were on him, assessing him. He stared down at his shoes.

"Yes! You cooperate with me and I'll make sure no more theft happens in the town," Carl said, looking from the young guy to the crowd.

The books from all the stores were recorded with proper notation and order, and the names of the bookstores and were shifted to the largest library of town. Homes that housed plenty of books were also asked to follow the same practice. Only one old bookstore in the outskirts was kept an exception. Rumors were spread that the owner decided not to cooperate with the detective. He himself protested at the gathering when the decision was taken publicly. It was a part of the plan. He was contacted by Carl earlier, before the gathering and was asked to protest.

Now Carl had to do only one thing, that was, to keep a watch on that store as the library was put under heavy locks and people were put on watch.

For three days, no one came to steal the books. Carl was starting to become more alert with each passing day and the public was becoming more relaxed, thinking that the thieves must have run away after hearing about the detective and his skills.

The next day at 2 AM, when Carl was watching the lone store, he saw a shadow. It was inside the bookstore. He hurriedly cleared his specs, put them back on his eyes and looked closely.

The shadow appeared again. It was short with two pairs of legs. Carl looked more closely, the shadow's face became clear to him. It was a monstrous

animal, with big pointed teeth and long hair surrounding its face. It was so large, heavy and frightening to look at.

Carl got scared when this monstrous animal looked outside from the window. His hand shook on his stick. He settled down on the grass.

He stood up with the help of his stick, adjusted his specs and looked carefully. The shadow was moving back and forth, picking the books and putting them in a sack. Carl cleared his sweating forehead with his hand. He had three options; first, to scream so everyone came and the monstrous shadow could be captured, but he doubted people would come after seeing a monster inside. Second, to enter the library, see, and catch whoever was inside, but that was scary and his limbs were not going to help him. The third and the last option was to watch what happened and follow the monstrous shadow. He chose the third as a wise option.

A few moments later, the shadow got out of the store, carrying a large bag at its back. There seemed to be 50-60 books inside. It came under a light and Carl got to see clearly. It was not a four-legged animal but a human being wearing a monster mask on his face. It looked like a dwarf.

He crossed the bush, heading to the jungle. Carl followed him, keeping a safe distance. He walked slowly, finding the right path with the help of his stick, his large overcoat flattening the grass behind.

The thief walked through the jungle, looking back periodically and then stopped at a large well. He put the bag against the wall of the well and heaved a sigh. Carl hid himself, looking at the dwarf thief.

He took out the books from the bag one by one and made a long pile against the wall of well. He put the sack aside and removed his mask. He was neither an animal nor a dwarf; he was a mere 12-year-old boy. He had covered himself with a sheet and carried a mask to elude everyone.

When he was about to throw the books in the well, the detective lit his cigar. The click of the lighter alerted the boy.

“It does not look nice,” Carl said, resting his back against the tree and taking a puff.

The little boy got scared on seeing Carl, who was taking a puff of the cigar. He couldn't gather the courage to run. Carl came closer to him, walking with stick in one hand and cigar in another hand.

"Why are you stealing?" Carl asked, looking at the dozens of the books placed against the wall of the well. The boy stepped back a little.

"I am not a thief," he replied.

"So, what are you? A saint?" Carl demanded, walking towards the well.

"Jesus Christ!" Carl shouted as he looked inside the well. There were more than 1,000 books rotting inside the well.

He looked back at the boy, who stood still.

"You know how gruesome a crime you have done?" Carl asked.

"I am taking revenge," the boy said.

"Revenge against whom?"

"The publishers."

"By destroying wisdom?" Carl asked, holding the boy's eyes.

"They denied my dad," the boy replied, innocent anger fueling him.

"What's your name?" Carl asked softly. He knew it was an emotional matter.

"Bakintin Lenit," replied the boy fearlessly.

"Okay, Lenit, you tell me your story and I'll help you with your revenge," said Carl and they settled down. Carl sat on a large plain rock, and Lenit on a small one. It took a few more seconds for the boy to open up.

"We were a family of two, my dad and me. My mom died just after my birth. My dad brought me up single-handedly. He was a bibliophile. My days started seeing him engrossed in his book, sipping his morning coffee and ended with him telling me a bedtime story. It was always so fascinating,

listening to him, running around his bookshelf and touching his books while he was busy in his writing.

“When I would be on my bed half asleep after listening to the bedtime story, he would work on his typewriter, tirelessly, sacrificing his comfort and sleep. He told me it was my mom’s dream to see his book published someday.

“He always was reading or engrossed in his writing. Above all, he loved spending time with me. He had no other life.” The boy said with a deep breath.

“I remember the day exactly, it was 13 October 1949, he was so happy. I had never seen him that happy before. Dad bought a pile of books from the bookstore. He sat by my side and talked to me about mom and her dream. He told me he had submitted his book to a few publishers. He was looking so accomplished. I was glad to find him happy. Dad spent the whole day with me, cherishing the success.

“Within two weeks, he received a letter from a publisher. The result of his many years of sleepless nights and painful days. Dad ran to his reading room, wore his reading glasses and opened the letter while I stood near the door. With every word he was reading, his eyes turned watery. I saw him breaking down. And then he folded the letter and took a deep breath. Suddenly his eyes fell on me, he wiped his tears immediately and hugged me so tightly. I did not know if he was giving me a hug or he was taking one from me. I had never received such a tight hug from my dad before or after.

“The next day onwards, I found him more lost in books. Dad’s days would be spent in writing and re-writing. Every day I found a pile of crumpled papers in his reading room. Every passing day Dad was moving away from me. His good night stories were becoming shorter day by day. His conversations with me were slipping away slowly. I hid myself behind the door and saw him working on his book tirelessly, waiting for him to come and talk to me like he used to do.

“Rejections one after the other were tearing him apart. Dad’s health started to deteriorate. He was getting weak day by day. It was painful to see him break in this manner. I was hurt seeing him going away from me like mom.”

“One day he returned from the market. He rushed to his reading room, closed the door behind him. I felt like knocking at the door and ask him for a tight hug.”

“He did not come out of the reading room the whole day. When he did not come out even the next day, I barged into the room through the window. There he was, hanging with a rope around his neck. I rushed to him crying, held his legs above my shoulder and shook him many times.” A tear rolled down the boy’s cheek. “He was no longer alive”. Determined to tell the complete story he continued. “There was a book opened at the table. I looked at the book, flipped its pages. It was the book written by my dad. My legs shook. With shivering hands, I opened the first page of it. I collapsed reading it.” With a stern look he told Carl, “On the cover page, there was another name as its author instead of my dad’s name. Next day we buried him with the same book by his side.”

Carl stayed motionless for a few moments after listening to Lenit. He then wiped the tear drops from inside the glass of his specs.

“You destroy one copy, there would be tons after tons printed. You know what would be the perfect revenge, Lenit?” Carl asked, looking at Lenit’s innocent face. He raised his eyes to Carl who stared intently at the boy.

“A perfect revenge would be ensuring that no writer commits suicide after rejection. No writer falls prey to such a publisher or agent. No writer becomes depressed when he does not get published,” he said clearing his glasses.

“Can you take this revenge?” Carl added.

Carl stood up from the rock, approached the wall of the well and looked at the books placed there.

“Stop others from meeting the same end as your father.”

“I am leaving the choice with you Lenit, throw these books in the well or stand by what could have saved your father or many like him,” Carl said and walked away.

He was walking away, when he heard a sound of something falling. He looked back at Lenit and then at the wall of the well. The books were no longer placed against the wall.

Lenit was walking with them, holding them in his arms to return them where they truly belonged.

Chapter 3-2

March, 2013

Aron's heart was crushed from the inside when he discovered the address he was looking for now belonged to someone else. But there was something more painful for him- it was knowing that the old owner had died more than a decade ago.

Aron looked at the letter he was holding. It was addressed to Carl Mantis. He faced the woman who had opened the door, welcomed him inside and gave this news to him.

"Carl was the best detective in town," she said.

"There was a huge crowd at his funeral. Everyone praised how seasoned Carl was at his work," she recalled.

She showed him the house that once belonged to Carl. There were a few things reminiscent of the time Carl was alive; like the hidden room, illusion door, and his cigars, overcoat, his watch and his hat that he wore till his last case. She felt proud about showing the things and talking about them. She told him about a few small incidents and stories related to his detective life too.

"Carl always kept a coin in his overcoat pocket which he flipped like a toy to get keyed up for operation."

While the old lady was busy showing Carl's belongings and talking about him, Aron was busy wondering whom he should deliver the letter to.

Aron decided to hand it to the woman who was enthusiastically showing off things about Carl. He was about to hand over the letter when something struck his mind.

Aron kept the letter back in his pocket, thanked the old lady for the coffee and moved out, looking at the back of the letter.

"Shakespeare Café", it read in bold letters followed by the complete address.

Aron got on the train and settled down on a seat adjacent to a lady. Her round specs reminded him of the ones Sara's mom used to wear. Coincidentally, she had the same surname too, Marcos, as the card hanging around her neck revealed to Aron.

Aron remembered the day when Sara's mom, Cecilia, invited him to her house. She had been lost in a book when Sara welcomed him at the door. She had immediately stood up from her sofa and greeted Aron, putting her specs away on a table above the book.

"He is handsome," Cecilia had said to Sara in a light voice. Aron overheard her and smiled.

Aron was clad in a pair of black trousers with white shirt and a bow tie. He had a two-day-old stubble that gave him a mature look. It was Sara's idea. Sara was dressed in a brown Palazzo with a white top tucked in.

Sara's mom had set the table and everyone settled in their seats, ready to dig into their plates. Aron opened the bottle of champagne which he had brought along and filled the glasses. Sara passed the glass to her mom and she thanked Aron.

"Sara was 16 when her dad went abroad for a musical concert," she had said, sipping the champagne. She raised her glass toward the side table where the picture of Sara's dad was placed.

"I don't want Sara to miss you the way she and I miss her dad," she added. Sara looked into her mom's eyes. She had never heard her mom talking about how she missed her dad. Cecilia's eyes were brimming with unshed tears. She took another sip, discreetly covering her eyes.

"If she isn't with me, I would be lost. For sure, I would never want my nightmare to come true," Aron said, looking at Sara.

"He is adorable too," Cecilia whispered in Sara's ear. Aron overheard her and smiled. She looked at Aron and everybody's smile turned into a heartfelt laughter.

Aron got down from the train and asked a passerby the way to Shakespeare's

Cafe. The man looked amazed at Aron having no knowledge of such a famous place and then gave the directions. In a short while, Aron was standing in front of a large auditorium. It had formerly been a theatre. The name 'Shakespeare's Café' was carved in bold letters in the front.

Aron got in and heard the echo of an applause. He was surprised for a moment and then noticed that a play had just ended and audience were clapping for the artists. A man got down from the podium, took a mid-way from the audience, who were glad to see him around, and entered into 'Serving Area' towards his right. There greeted him an old man, somewhere in his 70s, and asked him something. Possibly he was taking his order to eat something.

The auditorium was fully crowded. It was a mixture of people clad in expensive clothes and in casual ones. Aron settled down near a young man who smiled back at Aron as he excused him.

The auditorium was again silent. A man with a long beard and shabby clothes went on the podium. He held the microphone in his shaking hands. Everyone looked at the old man eagerly, to listen to what he had to say. Aron adjusted himself on the chair, feeling a little alien and a lot curious.

The old man cleared his throat and started telling a story. As his story approached the end, the crowd started to feel emotional, and as the story ended, the silence took a new turn as if the crowd was mourning. The old man put the microphone down, feeling less burdened after sharing his story. He looked back with a surprise when he heard a shout.

"Cheers!" An old lady stood up and shouted, clapping. It echoed and brightened the moment as if all of a sudden light had dispelled darkness.

"Honor is on me." She showed her thumb to the man on the podium and moved it towards the old man inside the 'Serving Area'.

The whole auditorium echoed with appreciation again. The man thanked the old lady, got down from the podium and approached the 'Serving Area' with a smile. The old man welcomed the artist the same way he greeted the last one. Smiling and asking him what he would prefer to have.

“How does it work?” Aron asked, facing the young guy who was settled beside him.

“You have to tell a story or a couplet or a poem. The one who likes it the most will buy you a cup of coffee or breakfast or lunch or dinner or whatever you want,” the young guy answered.

“Can it be claimed anytime?” Aron queried.

“The cafe opens only on weekends. And if you are successful in winning a heart, you are served with delicious food from the Shakespeare café,”

“And if I lose? If no one likes my work?” asked Aron.

“You still get it anyway. The café is all about appreciating art and artists.”

“How do they manage the funds?” Aron was not in the mood to let him go.

“The cafe is always full of artists, poets, storytellers, and art lovers. Many people who recited here at first are now big names. They offer donations as gratitude to keep the café going.”

“Who started it?” Aron was amazed.

“Do you see that old man out there? He is Bakintin Lenit, he started it,” the young guy said, pointing toward the old man in the ‘Serving area’. He was preparing something to eat for the last man who had showcased his talent on the podium.

Aron was about to ask another question when a young girl cleared her throat in the microphone on the podium. It was her turn to share her art. The auditorium fell silent once more.

Aron remembered something. He put his hand in his pocket and took out the letter. He read the name written at the back. Bakintin Lenit, it read. His head spun. He felt restless. He wanted to jump and rush to the old man serving the food and ask about this café and what this letter was all about. He put the letter back in his pocket while glancing at the old man and waited for the young girl to finish her poem.

“Do you need something?” Asked Lenit, welcoming Aron in the ‘Serving Area’. He knew Aron was not a performer, and needed something else.

“I need your time, only,” said Aron humbly, clutching the letter in his pocket.

“Jacob,” Lenit shouted, and a young guy came out of the cabin.

“Would you please handle for a few minutes?” he asked. Jacob nodded with a smile.

“Yes, please tell me.” the old man said so nicely that it melted Aron’s heart. He hadn’t heard such courtesy in ages. They both settled down in their chairs in a corner from where Lenit could keep a watch on the podium, something he loved doing.

Aron looked at his aging but well-groomed face. His grey beard and his smooth head caught the light and shone like spun-silver.

Aron took the letter out of his pocket and placed it on the table. Lenit grabbed it with surprise and saw it from both ends. He felt as if his heart dropped into the pit of his stomach, finding the letter he had written 20 years ago.

“Carl is no more, he never received it, sorry,” said Aron with his head down, facing the letter. Lenit looked at Aron and then at the letter. He couldn’t control himself. His limbs were shaking. He had tears in his eyes. He swallowed several times and took few breaths before he could voice his words properly.

“When?” Lenit asked heavily.

“A few years ago.” Aron informed with guilt. He didn’t know how he should react, seeing such a person crying before him. His shoulders slumped with guilt. He knew that somewhere he was also responsible for causing Lenit this pain.

“Before my letter?”

“I am sorry, I missed delivering it on time.”

Lenit closed his eyes and then opened them after a moment or two, trying to

push away the tears off his lashes.

He opened the letter, read a few lines and then folded it back with a sad smile.

“Do you know what he was to me?” he asked, after reading a few lines of the letter to himself.

“He was my Shakespeare café.”

Chapter 2-2

March, 2013

“Hi, I want to meet Mr. Samuel.”

A pair of black eyes looked at Aron from the square hole, scanning him from top to bottom, and then the gate opened.

The man who opened the gate was dressed in blue trousers and coat. He walked towards a small building wordlessly. Aron followed him, crossing a wide open space. There was another large building in the left with ‘Azakta Mental Asylum’ carved in bold letters.

The man took him into the room and gestured him to sit down while he settled in a chair across the table. There stood a large shelf behind him, full of files. The hospital had recently installed computers but old records were still there on the shelf.

“The place usually has more full-time staff. But it is Christmas time, and you know... they are on leave,” the man said. Aron nodded his head looking at his weird and sunken face.

“What name did you say?” he asked, staring closely at the computer screen.

“Samuel,” said Aron, looking at the old man’s obviously novice usage of the computer.

“Full name?”

“Samuel Jess,” Aron recalled the second name. The postman in him remembered it.

“When was he admitted?”

“No idea,” said Aron. He wished he knew this too. The man gave him a stare that read, now-there-is-no-way-to-find-him-and-this-meeting-is-useless.

“But he was here 20 years ago,” added Aron, connecting the stamp with the

name.

“Two people named Samuel Jess were admitted here, but as you said, one was here 20 years ago. It is now easy,” the man said, searching further.

Meanwhile Aron was lost in his queries about Samuel.

Who is this Samuel? How does he look like? What is his story? Why is he in a mental asylum? What is written in the letter about him? Who wrote the letter? Would he be normal enough to receive the letter? How would he react after receiving the letter?

“Hah, got him,” said the man, and looked at Aron.

"He was brought here 23 years ago. He immolated his wife."

Aron felt as if he had been electrocuted. His palms were sweating. He rubbed them against his thighs and took a few short breaths.

If I don't deliver the letter, no one would ever get to know, he thought. He had no strength to meet such an insane murderer.

He could harm me too, for knowing about the letter, Aron thought. He decided to walk back.

He almost stood up when he remembered something.

He remembered the last letter he delivered to Sara from her dad. She had been grieving her mother's demise. With her dad away from home, she was the only parental figure Sara had. With her leaving, Sara felt as if everything was snatched away from her. She was completely broken. And then the letter from her dad came as a hope for her. She read it, sitting at the sea side with Aron beside her. She wrote a reply and threw the tiny bottle in the sea, telling him about her mom and all the emotional lurch she was going through.

What if someone is still waiting to get a letter from her dad?

“I want to meet him,” said Aron, settling down.

The man heard him and went expressionless for a few seconds and then again

shifted to the computer.

“He was discharged within a few years,” he informed Aron.

The news offered relief and disappointment at the same time to Aron. He was happy knowing that the man was no longer insane, but he was disappointed on losing the last chance to deliver the letter.

“Any forwarding address?” asked Aron, trying the last hope he had.

“Why are you so worried, sir? As far as I know, he had no one who cared about him.”

“I have an old account that I have to settle anyhow,” Aron said, and the man looked at him awkwardly, possibly vacating a seat for him in jail in the near future.

“Hello,” Aron interrupted him.

“Yeah, yeah.”

The man nodded and searched again.

“He immolated his wife, so, he was awarded life term. He must be in jail,” he said, enunciating the word ‘immolation’. Aron hated hearing it.

“Which jail?”

“Orthur Jail,” he replied, this time without looking at the screen.

“Thank you so much,” Aron shook hands with him and left.

It took Aron two days to get an appointment to meet Samuel in jail.

“He was never involved in anything; no argument, no fight, and no protest. Hardly a few prisoners come to jail like him. We try to keep him away from violent prisoners so they don't hurt him,” said the jailer. Aron listened to him like he was Samuel’s lawyer who was collecting evidences to get him out of jail.

Samuel entered the meeting room. He looked closely at Aron, trying to recall if he knew Aron previously. He lowered his gaze, unable to remember. Aron said a plain 'hi' and winked at him indicating the chair opposite the table. The jailer had already left them both alone.

Aron looked at his aging body. Almost all of his hair was grey. His hands shivered when he placed them on the table to sit on the chair. He was not more than 50 kg in weight. If he had worn tight clothes his ribs would be standing out.

"I am Aron. I have something that I should have given you 20 years ago," Aron said, putting his bag on the table noticing if Samuel reacted in any way. He did not.

"I got this letter addressed to you, 20 years ago," Aron emphasized on '20 years' again. He took out the letter addressed to Samuel and put it down in the middle of the table.

Samuel looked at the letter. His fingers shivered, but he did not pick it up.

"Please, do read it." Aron added. He did not react.

"Do you want me to read it to you?" Aron asked, showing him the envelope. He blinked.

"It is from Mr. John Mathis." Aron read the name written at the top. Samuel raised his eyes and looked at him.

Aron tore open the envelope. There lay a letter inside it. He put the envelope on the table and looked at Samuel, who seemed a little-disturbed listening to the name of the sender.

Dear son,

Samuel took a deep breath.

I know how much you loved Elizabeth.

Samuel gulped, listening to the name. It was after 24 years when someone

called her name. Goosebumps rose over his flesh. Aron looked at him and then again proceeded with the letter.

I know how much you both were crazy about each other. I witnessed it the very first time I saw you together and it frightened me. It frightened me like hell! I have seen people who fell in love with this much intensity, madly-badly, but at the end I found them in severe pain. A never -ending pain because of the separation, or break up or death of one of them. Such love stories hold a painful end and I did not want that to happen to my daughter.

Her mom and I were in love with each other like you both were, head over heels in love, completely obsessed. Within two years of our marriage she died in an accident. I was shattered. I cried for days, months, years and then I decided I won't let it happen to my daughter.

When you came to ask to marry her, all those bad memories flashed before my eyes. It felt like she was going to have the same fate like mine. That is why I stood against the marriage.

When you both got married. I couldn't sleep for days. I missed her like hell. I spent restless nights crying and praying for your love. I prayed that none of you had to encounter such a fate and that both of you live for years and years. But then one day I came to know she burnt herself while cooking.

I was shattered. Completely broken. I regarded you as the culprit and decided to take revenge on you. I did whatever I could to ensure that you got severe punishment for killing my daughter.

I knew no one could love her like you did, like you still do. I saw the same in the court too when I saw you hearing the judgment and I hated you even more and this increasing of hate turned me into a monster.

I know no amount of apology can heal the pain you suffered because of me. No amount of punishment frees me from the crime I did. Still, I ask for your forgiveness. Please forgive a dad who was so blind in his love for his daughter that he forgot that he had a son too to take care of.

I wanted to come personally and ask for your forgiveness, but I had neither the guts nor the physical strength to face you in the last few days of my life. I

am completely paralyzed. I don't know for how many days I would be alive. I just want to hear that you forgave me before I die.

*Your Dad,
John Mathis*

Samuel stood up from his chair with his limbs shaking. He almost collapsed when he moved towards the door. He controlled himself somehow, grabbing the chair. Hands shivering, he approached the gate. He looked back before crossing it.

"Thank you so much," he said in an almost silent voice, and collapsed at the door.

Chapter 1-2

March, 2013

Aron knocked on the door and waited. He noticed the dust gathered on his black pointed shoes. He rubbed them against his grey colored trousers. They shone at the top, but the sides remained dusty. He distracted his mind from the shoes and caught a glimpse of a nearby building. It was a bookstore. "Kara Bookstore", the name board read, shining in the light.

He remembered Sara owned a children's bookstore too, "Saron Bookstore", she had named it. A combination of both of their names. She couldn't conceive a child, so they decided to adopt one and then the idea of owning a children's bookstore came in her mind. Aron felt happy when he found her around so many children, reading stories to them. When he got the time, he joined her and it felt like a whole family to both of them. Something they both loved spending time together in.

A girl in her mid 20s opened the door. She was clad in a white camisole and a printed pant. She had big brown eyes and narrow cheeks. She was lean and looked like she had spent a lot of time ill or bedridden.

"Ms. Cathy?" Aron queried, reading the name on the envelope he was carrying in his left hand. He was sure she was not the one he was looking for. The young girl shifted her gaze from the envelope to him and asked him to come inside. She directed him towards a sofa. Aron settled down.

"Mom passed away six years ago," she said, filling the glass with water. "I am Cathy's daughter, Kara," she added, offering it to Aron.

Aron felt as if someone had snatched something from his hands. He felt thirsty. He picked up the glass, but couldn't drink more than 2 sips. He knew he had made a blunder by not delivering the envelope 20 years ago. He repented it. He wondered how he should break the news to her.

"You okay?" Kara asked, unaware that her world was going to turn upside down in moments.

"I have something for you," Aron blurted, though he had planned to say it slowly. Aaron wanted to slow down the storm that was about to hit her.

He slid the envelope toward her. She picked it out of curiosity. Her mom's name was written at the top. She read it and shivered a little, goose pimples appeared throughout her body. It'd been six years; she had not received anything that was addressed to her mother. She raised her eyes to look at Aron, he nodded his head and then she read the name again.

‘Cathy Rose.’

"I am Aron. I worked as a postman. I received this 20 years ago to deliver to your mom, but I missed it," Aron said before Kara opened the envelope. He was unaware of the contents of the envelope, of what life was going to give them both. He was worried. He tried to prepare her for the onslaught of emotions she might have to undergo while checking the letter inside the envelope.

Kara looked at the stamp, ‘1993’; the ground shifted from beneath her legs. She stared at Aron like he had dug an old well and asked her to jump inside. She dropped the envelope as if she didn't have the courage to proceed.

"Please," Aron said, apologetically.

She tore it open from the side and a small diary and a note slipped out from inside. She picked the note, caressed the edges and finally brought herself to read it. Aron closed his eyes and then opened them again after a small prayer in his heart.

Hi Cathy,

I am Nicholas. I found an abandoned bag at Treelean Valley last week while I was hiking with my friends. We settled there and waited for some time. And when no one returned, we carried the bag with us. The person could have returned home as of now (that I unfortunately doubt) or had lost his life to a landslide or something worse. I am sorry for any misfortune.

I couldn't post the whole bag, so I am posting the diary to you. My address is

at the back. Do come and receive the bag as soon as you get this letter.

P.S. Sorry, I had read the diary in order to reach you. Just know that the guy loved you till his last breath.

Stay blessed

Kara was numb. She felt as if millions of needles pricked her body. The tears trickling down her cheeks reminded her of the stories that her mom and dad used to tell her. She remembered all of them.

Those stories were now meeting the climax and it was the worst and painful feeling for her, going through this all alone. She missed her mom. She missed her stories. She wanted her mom beside her at this moment but she was all alone, facing it. She shivered. She felt shattered. She couldn't understand.

She opened the diary and removed the bookmark from the last page to read. She closed her eyes to remember all those stories she grew up listening to before reading the last words her dad had to say.

Hi Cathy,

It's been more than a month. I am away from home and I am missing you and Kara like anything. I wish you both were here. I just saw a family of three passing by and I wished a dream that one day you, me and Kara would hike together.

You must be waiting for me standing at the window and telling about us to our daughter, but don't you know she is too small to understand this? Hope she is not giving you much trouble. Though, I feel she must be really troubling you a lot.

I know you get worried when I don't return back on time. I am sorry for that. I wish I could do something about it. I will be back in a week or two and then we would be building our own small, Kara Bookstore.

*Love you both,
Adam*

Kara folded the diary and stood up. Her legs felt heavy and her body light. Her gaze fell on the nameplate "Kara Bookstore" from the window as she moved to another room. A library her dad wished to have. A library that her mom opened 17 years ago. She squinted at the light coming from the bookstore's radium board. She approached the table and put that letter on it. She placed the photo frame carrying the photo of her mom and dad above it like a paperweight.

"Mom, you were right. You were sure that one day dad would come. See who has come home?" she said, bending over the table, looking at her mom in the picture. Her fingers were clasped together in a silent prayer. She was breathing heavily, she was crying. Her mom was smiling in the picture.

"Dad, you were right. Mom waited for you for 16 years, standing at the window and telling me about you and her." Her legs gave away; she sagged towards the ground and faced her dad in the picture. He was also smiling.

"Finally you both are together. Leaving me all alone."

Epilogue

Aron had a total of 9 undelivered letters with him which he got in April 1993. It was March 2013 when he realized his negligence and decided to complete the task he should have done 20 years ago.

It took Aron two weeks, 140 miles, and a lot of guts to face the recipients of 8 of those letters. Some of them appreciated his efforts and thanked him while some blamed him and threatened to sue him for his negligence.

Carl, Samuel and Cathy were 3 notable recipients of those undelivered letters. These letters couldn't be called ordinary as they left a huge impact on their lives.

Aron looked at his own reflection. In the mirror, he saw a young Aron; athletic body, blonde hair, and clean shaved oval face. His cheeks were shiny, flushed with the excitement of youth. He smiled and there appeared something in his right hand. It was the last undelivered letter. The ninth one.

P.S. Undelivered Letters will be out soon as a paperback with more letters and more back story of every character. ♥♥

The Highway Man

Dr. Rusenvelt, a physician cum psychiatrist receives a call. It is about a bestselling author who had created an illusion of fantasy around himself. The doctor is asked to bring him back to reality. However, he comes across a shock.

Rohan, broken on losing the love of his life, is driving on the highway. Suddenly a man intrudes in his life to place his broken pieces together. But Rohan has now another secret to witness.

Two stories to blow your mind. Download from Amazon:
<http://amzn.to/2gpw0fJ>

A Road Not Traveled

Niorgast Stinvins, grieving the separation of his love, receives an unknown call. On following the call he gets to know that he is not the only person who received the call. There are two others who have received a same mysterious call. Following the calls, the trio meets up in a closed room where they are attended by the visionary mastermind.

Meanwhile, a flashback of memories haunts Nio. A mystery person leaves a trail of letters asking him to visit different places which thereafter keeps linking to different secrets and mysterious events.

What are these mysteries? Who are these people behind the letters and the calls?

Follow this trio on their journey as they unleash deep rooted secrets and attempts to unite the world to form a 'One Country World'.

Get your copy from Amazon: <http://amzn.to/2yEABTH>

It's Forever

Jihan Zahir has a tragic past. He was physically and emotionally abused when he was a child. His roommate committed suicide when he was growing up. He is haunted by nightmares, but he has not given up yet.

Sidzy is a medical aspirant. She fell in love, twice. She was betrayed, blackmailed, and harassed by her own boyfriend. She has almost given up on her life until she realizes there is someone who loves her beyond eternity. Someone who loves her 'to the typewriter and back'.

"It's forever" is a true story of Sidzy, Jihan, Sheen, and Haider and the heaven and hell around them.

Watch out for its release in 2018!