



*Does the Altar choose the Bride...
or Bride the Altar?*



Love... Arranged

Geetanjali Jha

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To Hubby Dearest with Love (Coz this Simran has got her Raj)

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Prologue

I dream of vibrant butterflies and pure love, of white tulips and

melting hugs, of enchanted lavender fields and eternal happiness. I am a dreamer. I keep looking for my horizon of love. Distance makes the hearts grow fonder in the most incomprehensible ways. I know, deep inside, Aryan knows who he is, that he is kind, empathetic, gentle and often even funny, but

somehow his personality stuck somewhere between his heart and mouth.

I am going to meet him today after eighty-one long days. I chased my dream to be on my own and now it's the time to chase his ex-girlfriend, Samyukta. She must be looking for her answers too, the way I was once. I love dressing like a Londoner. Monochromes, boots, leather jackets and scarves portray me so differently than my casual tops and denim. Aryan lovingly calls me an angel in denim.

While I am sitting in a black vintage cab on my way to Heathrow airport, I realized a part of me will be in London. I felt so liberated in the land of strangers. After experiencing the serenity of solitude, I have got addicted to it. The city's scenic beauty, Victorian buildings, forever stretching parks with Maple trees, Tulips and Lavender, Iconic Red telephone booths on the roadside, clean highways, bustling tubes and double-decker buses will be etched in my memories for eternity.

I spotted Samyukta from far. She has big brown eyes, round face and silky jet black hair. I noticed Samyukta's chopped and straight hair. It gave her a modern look so unlike her photograph traditionally dressed in a Magenta Banarasi sari and long curls. My chain of thoughts was broken as Samyukta rushed towards me and we hugged each other like long lost friends. We settled in a corner in Starbucks. I was instantly welcomed by her heartwarming dimpled smile.

"Thank you for coming Kavya. It means a lot to me. I can see you have lots of questions in your eyes."

"Can you ever stop loving someone whom you loved deeply and passionately once?" I asked Samyukta while sipping my favourite Chocó frappe slowly. I have always believed in loving one person forever, always and beyond. The idea of second love intrigued me and I searched for the answer like Holy Grail.

"It depends how you said goodbye to each other and what are your strongest memories. When you start falling in love you do believe in happily ever after. It has been eight years and even today I feel that Aryan's amour for me was the purest form of attachment. No one has such an honest heart as Aryan's."

Samyukta replied reminiscing on her relationship with Aryan in her college days. The way they held hands when no one was watching, the way they compete who would eat more phuckas, the way Aryan never let her carry luggage, the way they missed each other in vacations and counted for days to meet again, the way Aryan made her smile after fights and was always the first one to apologize, it all looked like yesterday. Time flies but leaves its shadow behind.

I felt pangs of jealousy and my eyes glittered with tears. My heart pained as if it was pierced with arrows. I composed myself as I could not be weak in front of Samyukta. "I so wish I was his first and only love."

"Kavya, I will tell you something which helped me to move on. The last romance of man loves him the most and understands him most deeply. Trust me Aryan amours you from the deepest of his soul. I can see it on your face and your pictures. You both glow in happiness. Aryan is not even in my thoughts now." As Samyukta said this, her heart contradicted her. She would never confess it, but she was dying to know every bit about Aryan.

"Don't you ever wish to see him again? If I don't see Aryan even for a day it seems like ages. I have never waited for my flight so eagerly. What you adored most about Aryan?" I so wished I could trust Samyukta with all my heart. It would give me much needed peace. I have nightmares of Aryan comparing me to her.

"Aryan is your husband Kavya. For me he is my past, the most precious one. Over the years, we have just become two strangers who knew each other very well once. During those days, I esteemed his honesty & straightforwardness to the point of being blunt, I extolled the way he accepted people as they are and never tried to change them, I adored his unconditional predilection for his family in spite of differences, I admired that he never wanted to let me go and always accepted his mistakes. Remember this, "You have to start on an empty canvas for a new beginning. For me it's either complete attachment or complete out. There is nothing called in between in relationship. Either you are committed or not. It's that simple. I can't cheat on my darling hubby and my doting sons. They keep my hands full and I hardly think about the past anymore."

I realized Samyukta had moved on completely. Anshika had warned me time

and again not to befriend Samyukta as she will always remind me of Aryan's past, that I was not his first and only love. Samyukta was quite charismatic and I was attracted to her like a magnet. My inner voice told me to be on guard and I wished my face does not mirror my thoughts.

"So how is London treating you? You will grow old here?" I asked thinking Samyukta fits so easily in every role, be it traditional Indian daughter in law or contemporary NRI in London. I wanted to learn that from Samyukta. It was so natural to fall in love with her.

"I love London. It offers a host of opportunities to citizens from across the world. Central London is extremely elite where you are made to feel inferior whereas when you move away from downtown, you feel a part of it. I appreciate sanitation and orderliness. Even after years of living here, I am amazed by its picturesque roads. People literally work like robots. There is no time for reflecting, yet I have got used to it over time. Children's education is free, salary is in pounds, saving is good and in the middle of strangers, it's quite peaceful. There are no judgemental eyes shoveling over you and you can be yourself without a pinch of guilt. I miss my parents as it is quite far, but in entirety settling in London has been a wise and practical choice." Samyukta always made decisions with her mind considering all pros and cons. She had stopped listening to her heart long time back. Break-up had taught her not to be blind to realities of life.

Kavya's presence was reminding her of Aryan much more than usual. Samyukta was quite pleased the way life has unfolded itself after the break-up struggles. Pranav, her husband helped her overcome depression in those terribly tough days.

"I am so happy for you. We always have to find balance. Life does not come with a manual. Yet a dream is free and we keep dreaming and working to be the best possible version of us." I replied thoughtfully. The usually composed face of Samyukta was deep in thought. Past memories were haunting her. "So did you like London?" Samyukta asked curiously.

"Yes. The first week was daunting while I tried to adjust in different time zone, running around like a robot when in freezing cold environment. As I started exploring, London proved to be a platform to learn so much. Every

street, every building tells its own stories. It's like history has taken a form of the city and speaking to me. I have fallen in love with walking all over again. It's a pleasure to see the city as closely I could. The beautiful Christmas spirit I have watched in Hollywood movies since my childhood came alive with sky lanterns, amazing store windows, carols and smiles from strangers. I have started saying please and cheers much more. I never thought so, but I have lost my heart in London. I wish someday I honeymoon here with Aryan." I said in one breath as I did whenever I was excited.

"Wow. You have given me another perspective of London. So what are your happiest memories of London?"

"It's tough to pick one. I will tell few of my favourites. I went to Lord's cricket ground and I could visualize Indian cricketers playing there. The flawless and classy century by Rahul Dravid, his test debut, defeating the English team in their own fort and taking off his jersey by Saurav Ganguly in spur of moment, India winning the World Cup, I was overwhelmed with some of my most favourite memories. I entered visitor's dressing room, the room where Dravid would have come many times and walked to the ground with his bat. I savoured his name on the wall of honours. It was a perfectly crafted fan moment for me. I bought a leather ball for Aryan. He would ardour it as cricket is his passion. Many of our favourite memories are connected with cricket.

I enjoyed wandering in Warner Brother's studio and a ride in Hogwarts train. To see and touch platform which goes to the Hogwarts, to be in the great hall and imagine lavish feast, to enter in the Dumbledore's chamber, to be on the bridge, to see private drive, it made me realize how much effort, thought process and detailing has gone in making of Harry Potter. It was amazing to see people from all over the globe dressed as wizards and witches. Watching Harry Potter will never be same again. I wish someday I can create something so powerful and magical. I even managed to get the passport of the studio which was meant for kids." I chuckled.

"Aryan captained college cricket team for two consecutive years. I dote on your child like spirit. Never let it die. What about museums?" Samyukta wished that someday Kavya takes her sons for a tour. She was surprised by her own thought and how relaxed she felt with Kavya.

“I went to few of them and they were magnificent, to say the least. I admired the collection, sculptures, architectures, but to be honest, it was a lot of information to be processed. I was in awe of galleries and presentations. When I am old, I will remember palaces rather than museums. I felt like a princess from fairy tales in those palaces. I have often wondered how it would be to be born as a real princess.”

“You already are a princess to you Mom and Dad.”

Hearing of Mom and Dad made me smile. I wish to make them proud someday. I wonder how Dad would react to my unconventional path. For him, job security is of prime importance. We argue on it whenever I switch jobs which I do quite often.

“I know. I am the luckiest daughter in the whole world.” “How is Bangalore? Tell me more about the Garden

City.” Samyukta’s voice brought me back to the surroundings. “Bangalore is beautiful and I cherish its pleasant weather. It shelters numerous parks and lakes where I walk hand in hand with Aryan. It’s a lover’s paradise. The climate is romantic for most part of the year, and I adore the evening sky with an orange glow and chirping of birds. The rain in London is notoriously similar to that of Bangalore’s unpredictable drizzles and downpours.

Bangalore is a city of opportunity. There is a job for everyone if one is willing to work, be it corporates, or self-employed or for someone who is interested in start-ups. The city perfectly conglomerates tradition and contemporary. One can find age-old temples and can shop in towering malls of international standards. Bangalore bursts with energy and yet it has age-old lazy charm. Though I savour exploring new places and cultures, I cannot think of settling down anywhere else. Bangalore has blessed me beautifully. I love Bangalore and I am counting hours to be there with Aryan.” I was speaking in one breathe again.

“Wow. You make me want to come down there. How it was living in London alone?”

“ I have lived in hostel for a very long time and yet being in London, staying

in studio apartment was an entirely different experience. I lived amidst strangers who said fake hellos with fake smiles. By the time I reached my apartment, it's midnight in India. I survived on Google and Maggie. This is the first time I did everything on my own, be it finding directions on tfl.com, grocery shopping, cooking, washing, and ironing and so on. It is terrifying to come home to a locked door where no one waits for you. I learnt to be independent and the whole thing humbled me. I cherish my loved ones more now. The things I took for granted, I realized those are the biggest blessings of life."

"I am so delighted that you came here. Keep exploring. Travelling does you good."

"Thanks. Meeting to you is always a pleasure. It's time to catch my flight back home. Take care and this is for Adi, your cutie pie." "You will never grow up Kavya. Still endorsing Harry Potter books?" "I am born to make every child read Harry Potter. It's my life's calling."

"Ha haha . Grow up so that you can plan for your own child. Here's your present. It's a long flight and you need company. I promise; it will be most interesting read to you. Come, Give me a tight hug. Have a safe journey and stay loved." We hugged each other like BFFs knowing fully well that this might be our last meeting.

Samyukta had thought a lot about the diary before handing over it to Kavya. She had treasured it for many years close to her heart. Finally, her dreams will stop and she will be at peace. By giving the diary to Kavya, Samyukta will be free of the last reminder of her lost love.

She had wondered a lot about Kavya's smile. Samyukta had never seen such a genuine smile all her life. Though Kavya was not responsible for her breakup, Samyukta was startled that Aryan had finally forgotten her. Samyukta thought about the time when she meant the world to Aryan when he would do anything for her smile. She had moved on with Pranav and kids, but a part of her always wished to be flattered by Aryan. Samyukta was more heartbroken than actual breakup, when Aryan's mails finally stopped. Though she never replied to them, she had read Aryan's each and every letter. She wondered what was so special about Kavya and could not stop missing Aryan. Everyone in her college thought Samyukta and Aryan were meant to be

together.

One

It was our introduction to seniors and I had heard a lot about

infamous ragging of engineering colleges. I first saw Aryan in socalled interaction. He was 5.11' with athletic built and looked confident even as a fresher. I was fascinated by the way his lips curled to a side when he smiled on his friends' jokes and his curls fell on his forehead. Aryan looked handsome even in a rugged denim and white crew-neck tee. He was effortlessly cool. I had met more handsome guys in my life; it was his century-old chivalry which set him apart.

While we rehearsed for our duet for fresher's party as imposed by seniors, I got to know him slowly. Aryan would insist on dropping me till hostel which was only a few meters away from college auditorium, he would put a jacket on my shoulders if I wore sleeveless kurtas; he would get medicines for me even if I sneezed, and he would carry my guitar. He was an empathetic listener and I kept blabbering with him, about my childhood, sibling rivalry, my school, my roomies and my dreams to settle abroad. He would mostly listen to me in wonderment as if I was telling the most captivating story. We started our days by walking to the lake and watching Sun rise. The lake still holds my fondest memories, where we would sit for hours and envision our future together. He would save the delicious snacks prepared by his darling Mom for me while his friends would tease him.

I was head over heels in love with Aryan. He was the strongest drug of my life. Being with him made me high. I waited and waited for him to propose but in vain. I knew he endeared me, I could feel it every second, so I decided to straighten my crown and rule his heart. He had started drinking by the time we became the sophomore. He had a mini freeze always stacked with drinks in his room. One evening, I cooked his favourite kheer(an Indian sweet dish) and while Aryan was relishing it, I stole a bottle and hid it inside my pink tote.

I could not sleep the whole night with excitement and anticipation. Should I say it directly or give him subtle signals? I had given him enough hints and he was aware of my growing feelings. I wore his favourite baby pink suit, put

kajal, pink bindi and silver bangles tinkled on my wrists. I waited for him at hostel gate and Aryan arrived looking dapper than usual in his monochrome tee and denim shorts. As soon as we left the college gate, I entwined my fingers in his. He looked at me with his eyes which spoke volumes about his predilection. I wished he never let me go. I was so much in tune with my feelings and I wondered if it was the effect of alcohol.

“Will you go to temple drunk?” Aryan looked scandalized. “Yes. God knows everything. ”

“How do you manage to be so weird? I am enchanted by your weirdness.”

“You adore me just for this or more? I love you to the moon and back, to the infinity and beyond. Everything has changed since I have fallen for you, yet I am more me than I have ever been. All I want is to be genuinely happy and I am happiest when I am with you.” I finally said what I was dying to say for ages.

“ Love was just a word before I met you and yet I am afraid. Am I good enough for you? Am I capable enough to keep your dimpled smile intact?” This is not what I expected. I expected red roses and knee-raising kisses.

“Since I was born, I had to bear highest expectations of my parents, my relatives and my teachers. No achievement was good enough. Rather than appreciated for my efforts, I would always be compared to someone who achieved better. Over the years, it gave me an inferiority complex. I hide it with arrogance. I was despondent when I could not clear IIT entrance and yet instead of counselling, all I faced was the melodrama. I decided not to waste more years and take the available college. Life to me is a stage where I constantly have to prove myself. My priority is to get a job with handsome salary. I don't know where you will fit in. You deserve to be the priority, not an option. Would you wait for me till I build a successful career? I am very possessive, would you bear it? I am trapped in drinking, would you not feel depressed? Answer honestly Sam.”

“I cherish you and our love will conquer the insurmountable. Promise me that no matter what lies ahead, you will always hold my hand.” It was the voice of innocence. Now I know how naïve I was.

“Let me treat you in the best restaurant I can afford. This is the most cherished moment of my life. I promise to keep you happy no matter what.” Things changed between us after that. Aryan spoke to me with more vulnerability, we fought over his drinking and yet we were inseparable. I was addicted to him and he was addicted to drinks. I longed for intimacy, I wished him to explore me with kisses, and I wanted to be touched. I would have submitted to my desires if Aryan was not so traditional. He considered me his wife and insisted me to call him my Arya, which means husband in Sanskrit. Even though I proposed him, he was the one who was surer about us. I was always there in his future plans.

It was my last birthday in college. I challenged him to surprise me and Aryan accepted it sportingly. We did not possess cell phones those days and I wondered how he would wish me in midnight.

“Sam, you have a call from your local guardian and it’s urgent.” The hostel warden shouted as the clock struck twelve and I was preparing for hostel ritual of cutting a cake.

“Happiest birthday Sam. I cherish you more than the total number of heart beats we listen together; I wish we celebrate every birthday together. See you at the lake tomorrow morning. Don’t sound so excited, pretend to be sad or hostel warden will growl at you.” And we laughed till our bellies ached.

I could not wait for the morning. Aryan had gifted me a Kashmiri silk suit and I got dressed in anticipation to see him.

“Will you bunk the college today?” Aryan asked mischievously. “I never bunk classes. You know that.”

“There is always a first time.” I doted on his sparkling eyes. “Okay.”

“Let me take you to the boat.” He had decorated the boat with my favourite pink daisies and played songs on Sony Walkman. He held my hands and made me sit first. Aryan looked deep in my eyes, the eyes I had lost my heart to, the eyes which had cried and smiled with me. His eyes promised forever and beyond to me. We kept humming songs as we rowed the boat. Music always filled our silences perfectly. I wished to hear the divine music of our hearts forever...

Two

I did not want Samyukta to be in Bangalore for the obvious reasons and yet I could not stop anticipating what our friendship could grow into. The meeting left me with an unexplained longingness.

I need to call Anshika though she would lecture me thoroughly. Anshika is my bestie and she knows me inside out. We are soul sisters and despite growing up in different cities after our school, we never grew apart. We always found a way to stay in touch through hand written letters, chats, texts, mails and calls. The thought of Anshika made me smile. She has been the constant of my life since childhood along with my parents. I remember how possessive I was for Anshika. I sulked for days if she would sit with some other classmate. I am still possessive for her in a grown-up way. Thank God for Atul, she is in good hands.

The vibration of my phone interrupted my never ending and conflicting thoughts. I so wished I would not overthink. It was my most favourite voice, the voice I had fallen in love when we first spoke on phone, the voice of my one and only love, Aryan. It's amazing how I would still get butterflies in my stomach on listening to his deep voice.

"Hello Sunshine, I cannot wait longer to see you and hug you and kiss you. I cannot wait to look into your eyes which have more depth than the sea. I cannot wait to laugh with you." "Hi Sweetheart; how come you are so romantic today? I cannot wait to tell you about my expeditions and experiences in London." "Haha. My dearie, you have described them word to word in your eighty-one letters. Is there still something left to tell about London? I want you to talk about us. You sound so distant, Kavya."

"I am sorry; I have been running since morning. I know I have told you everything. Telling everything face to face, holding your hands with expressions of everything I felt would be more special than what I penned down in my letters." I wished our conversations too were as rhythmic and natural as my letters.

"I cannot wait to see my expression queen. Have a safe journey."

Eleven more hours and my Sunshine will be back. Finally we would talk

more than writing. Kavya's letters were elaborate. I could always picture exactly what Kavya would be feeling. "I wish I could express how much I cherish her. My words would never express what I feel for Kavya." I picture Kavya reading letters in her soft voice in a loving tone. I read one of Kavya's letters again. It was one of my favourites.

The subject read little things I love about you:

Dearest Aryan

As I am sitting so far away from you and missing you, I want to tell you that my heart is with you. There are million little things about you which make you so awesome. I adore you for those lil things...

Do you remember when I came to meet you in Bangalore from Chennai and you dropped me to Majestic station? I had the ticket of a day before and you just gave your sweetest smile and got me another ticket. I fell in love with you at that moment... We went to Gokarna and straps of my slipper broke. You just gave me yours and walked barefoot so stones did not hurt me. You fast with me on every karwachauth and it melts my heart every time...

I crave for your complements and I usually have a better day when you complement me. So do it more often (chuckles).

You remember what I need even when I mention it casually like a hair dryer, grey blazer and so on. I was touched when you gifted me library membership and drove with me to libraries.

I love you for being extra caring when I have my PMS and happily handling my mood swings. I savour you for being my biggest pillar of strength.

I admire the way you keep our home organised. I adore the way you when you call me by nicknames with so much affection... The list is never ending... So whenever you feel less loved, just read this letter again and again and again...

XOXO

Kavya must be John Keats in her last birth. She writes straight from her heart.

I could just say her to be safe, be careful, don't be over- friendly to strangers and so on. As I did web check-in for Kavya, I called her many times before Kavya checked out from her hotel in Sussex Gardens to ensure she had enough money, passport, ticket and documents. Sending her to London was one of the toughest decisions I made for Kavya, fighting my own concerns and worries, fighting my possessiveness, fighting my desires and urge to be with her, fighting my traditional parents. And yet in her every letter, I could feel twinkling of her eyes, the satisfaction of dreams fulfilled, I told myself, the sleepless nights were worth it.

My phone beeped and it was the phone I had been waiting for hours.

"Hey sweetheart, your princess is coming. Cheer up. I have checked-in; kept my luggage, tied the seat belt, and an old lady is sitting beside me, so relax."

"Good . Eat a meal on the flight."

"Yes Mister, I have grown up. Don't worry."Kavya teased. "Not for me. I will be there at five waiting for you."

"Yes my SRK. Simran is coming."

"Love you Seniorita"

"Love you my prince charming"

Three

Icherished our telephonic conversations which were getting

longer and longer. My favourite part of the day was listening to Kavya. She would talk about everything under the sun and more we talked, more I was intrigued by her. It was after a lifetime I was interested in a girl. I could wait no longer to meet her.

"You are exactly one hour late Aryan. And we are meeting for the very first time. I am very particular about respecting time."

Kavya looked elegant dressed in a quarter-sleeve green kurta and blue ankle-length denim. Her shoulder length brown and straight hair framed her slender face perfectly and highlighted her doe- shaped brown eyes. She looked engrossed in a book before she questioned and her passion was what drew me into her. Diving into the biblical world was her drug and watching Kavya do

so would be my favourite pastime over the years.

She was angry as she lifted her eyes quizzically from the book. My eyes were fixed on her. Her pictures were beautiful but could not portray the ebullience and joy that she brought to life. Before I explained my lateness, I was amused by the tinkling of multicoloured charm bracelet on Kavya's wrist and of Lavender fragrance.

"I missed the bus due to unexpected traffic and rain added to my woes. Trust me, I started two hours early for forty-five minutes ride and yet it happened. You have to be in Bangalore to trust how slow traffic can be. I had to take next bus and sit whole night next to driver to keep my date with you." I replied sincerely in a voice which melted Kavya's anger.

"Let me clarify mister, this is not a date. This is just a meeting arranged by our parents to judge each other. I have had such meetings before. We have two hours to decide whether we would want to spend rest of our lives together or not." Kavya told in her mock anger tone wondering how her parents managed to find so many prospective grooms.

Kavya was from Ranchi. She was staying in Chennai in a working women's PG. The fact that she was not trying at all to impress me bowled my heart. I tried to picture her in a traditional home set-up with both sets of parents. The very thought of Kavya bringing tea with a shy expression on her face amused me. I could not keep my eyes off her face, not because it was the prettiest. I marvelled at her changing facial expressions faster than lightening.

"I can look at her face all my life and be entertained." I thought and smiled.

"Are you buying any books?" I asked to come out of my far-fetched thoughts. I cannot lose my heart to a girl at first sight. I have to be cautious.

"Yes, while I was waiting for you to come, I got myself a book and chocolates."

"Which book is this?" I was curious.

"To kill a mocking bird. Just to clarify I don't share chocolates." "So where are we going for the date?"

“It’s meeting mister. Don’t dream about dating me. I don’t go to dates just like that.”Kavya replied haughtily.

“So how do you go on date? Here’s the deal. Spend the day with me. If you enjoy share the chocolate and we will call it a date.” “Done!”

Kavya had not thought of spending the whole day with me, she just wanted to meet for an hour and hang out with her gang. She was not yet ready to be married yet something inside her told to say yes.

“So where do we start our date?”

“Café Coffee Day”

“A lot can happen over a cup of coffee”

“Maybe or maybe not.” Kavya finally calmed down. I pulled the chair for her first and waited.

“What are y ou smiling at?”

“I am a huge fan of old age chivalry.”

“So you are not as modern as you claim to be” I was surprised by my own teasing.

“I never claim to be anything. I am just what I am”

“So tell me about meetings.”

“What do you want to know? Those are not interesting as you think. I am just playing my part to please my parents. I would rather have a date with intellectual minds curling with books.”

“Anything you would like to share.”

“Well don’t get me started. It will be evening by the time I finish.” “I am here, don’t worry.”

“I met a guy and he wanted to watch a movie with me. We had just met! I rejected him for that.”

“Hmm and other meetings”

“I met another guy and he was too matured for me. He understood that I was

not ready to be a bride yet. He kind of tested my football knowledge and I had none at that point. We had nothing in common and he conveyed the same to his parents. I could not be happier.

“Another guy I met was bald.”

“Bald people are supposed to be richest as per myth.” I teased her again.

“Why don’t you meet a bald girl then?”

“Continue. I won’t interrupt.”

“The other guy was too desperate. I met a really decent guy, but he was not settled in a metro. I met one more guy and he wanted me to wear only Indian wear. So I said no. That’s it.”

“Interesting! !!”

“I have said enough about me. What’s your story?”

“Well, I was in a very serious relationship with Samyukta. We were batchmates in college while we pursued Mechanical Engineering. She got married last November. I have not met anyone after that. It took me a long time to accept it and move on. You are the first girl I am meeting.” My voice was so sad and I felt like a loser.

“I am sorry it did not work out and I am curious too.” Kavya could be an emphatic listener when she chose to be.

“We broke up with mutual understanding as we both fell out of love. Our feelings changed for each other substantially, changing the whole perspective of us as life partners. Samyukta is my past now.”

Even though she was dying to know my love story, the fear of hurting me and lump in my voice stopped Kavya to probe further. I felt guilty whenever I thought of Samyukta which I did pretty often. Kavya’s question pierced my heart further. “Is it really possible to stop loving someone you have ardour so deeply and passionately? Will you ever love someone like Samyukta?”

“I don’t know, to be honest. One thing I am pretty sure about is that I don’t love her anymore. Loving someone all over again will be more difficult than the first time.” I was not looking forward to this conversation and yet I was

amazed how easy it was to talk to Kavya. She was not judgemental. Does it mean she was not feeling any attraction towards me? It was incomprehensible to my mind why my heart cried for her attention.

“I cannot comment since I have never been in a relationship. I will leave you at peace.” Kavya replied sensing hurt and bitterness in my voice.

“Thank you. But why you are wearing this melancholy expression on your face?”

“I love happily ever after. I believe in Cinderella’s stories. I hate goodbyes.” I could bet Kavya’s eyes had tears. She pretended to clear her eyes by tissue paper. I am amazed how women can cry in seconds, be it her, my Mom or my sister.

“How come you don’t have any boyfriend?” I wanted to know everything about Kavya even at the risk of intimidating her.

“If I had, I would have married him against all odds. For me, there is only one soul mate. I intend to make my future husband my lover, my best friend and soul mate.”

“You are pretty, you are charming, talking to you is so much fun and you are independent. How come no one proposed you?”

“I never said I did not get proposals. I never said yes. It is as simple as that.” Kavya replied in a matter of fact tone.

“Aye Mister, let’s turn the tables now and tell me about your likes and dislikes, moments of madness and anything you want to share?” The excitement and twinkle returned on Kavya’s face. I could not stop glowing in her presence. More Kavya talked, more I wanted her to. It was Déjà vu. I remembered listening to a girl’s chattering from another lifetime.

“I take time to trust people. Sharing does not come naturally to me. My younger sister is closest to me. My parents keep asking me questions to know if I am okay, but we have very formal conversations. I am passionate about cricket and SRK. I spend weekends with my gang.” I said it little sadly. It was tough to ignore my strongly resisting inner voice against my own words.

I guarded myself not to be vulnerable again.

“You talk much more over the phone.” Kavya teased and later she told me she was amazed how precisely I ate with a fork and spoon.

“Let’s split the bill.”

“I am paying Kavya. You pay next time.”

“How come you are so sure about next time?”

“Your smile.” And I finally admitted it. I was in awe with her smile. It created an aura of trust and warmth.

“Let me see. I don’t promise anything. It’s already evening. I have to go back to my hostel and you have to catch a bus.”

“I enjoyed listening to you. Hold my hand while we cross the road.” I felt so protective towards Kavya.

“I am grown up. I can handle this”

“Not for me.” I held her hand and took her to my right so I had to face vehicles and not her. There was a carpe diem tattoo on her left wrist. I could not stop noticing how well our fingers intertwined. Kavya felt the connection too and could not stop smiling.

“What now?” I controlled holding her any longer. I did not want her hands to let go and yet I pulled back. The connection was too strong to ignore.

“Guess what? One thing for which I have been scolded by my Dad, my cousins, my friends and everyone else in the world is crossing the road. You are my knight in shining armour.”

“Ha ha. I assure you if you ride on my horse, this will never happen again. Take a bow, my princess.” Kavya smiled and noticed the way I said my princess possessively. I did not want to be possessive yet.

“One last thing before I let you go. Can we go to the temple across the road?”

“You want to ask me from God?” I enjoyed teasing her. I would do anything to be with her for some more time. Kavya made me feel so myself.

“Don’t start building castles in the air. I just want to pray with you that whether I accept you or reject you, may it be the right decision for both of us.”

“What if I reject you?” I was amused.

“You have accepted me, mister. I can see it in your eyes.” We prayed and I was comforted by Kavya’s calm face. Kavya must be a regular visitor there. The priest smiled at her and gave her an Orange Marigold and prasadam.

“Let’s share the chocolate.” Kavya said happily.

“I will take once I drop you to your PG.” My heart was dancing again after years.

As soon as I boarded the bus, there was a text.

“Hi mister, your chocolate is still with me.”

“We will share it on our next date.”

“Reach safely.”

“I will. I have to see you again.”

“Goodnight. Dream about it.”

If Kavya marries me, I will always support her dreams no matter how far-fetched they would be. I had no idea then that Kavya’s dreams were really vivid and extended from being a traveller, to a princess, to a story-teller, to an entrepreneur depending on her mood.

The memories fill my heart in unexpected moments. It was our last day in Bhopal and our bags were packed. Most of the friends had already said their goodbyes promising to be in touch.

Samyukta glowed in a rusted rose suit. Tassel earrings dangled along with her hair. As we met outside college gate, I realized there would be no tomorrows like this. I wanted to say her many things, I wanted to thank her for being most beautiful part of my college life, for being my mirror which reflected things I would not see otherwise, for being my biggest cheerleader, for making me connected to my parents at deeper level and most importantly for making me a better person. I wanted to promise her a fabulous future together. My throat choked and eyes glistened with tears. I wished we had got

jobs in the same cities. Saying goodbye to Sam was the toughest part.

“We still have some time; shall we boat for one last time?” Sam said and her dimples deepened.

“Sure.” We ran holding hands to the lake. This was our horizon of love.

“I cooked breakfast for you. Let me feed you with my hands.” “I will miss you every minute.”

“We will be married soon. Till then, hold on to our memories. You have got a present.”

“Wow. When did you make this?” College years were captured chronically in the form of pictures, our write-ups, love notes, movie tickets, miniature Xerox of notes, platform tickets, bus tickets and restaurant bills. Sam had pasted ‘weirdo pendant’ which I had made for her in the metal lab. I laughed at our trekking picture with twisted tongues and funny faces. Our farewell pictures showed our emotions. She had written lyrics of Kal Ho Naa Ho title track, my favourite song on the last page.

“Hey, are you crying?”

“You have concatenated it so beautifully. I will always treasure it.” “Where is my farewell gift?”

“I composed a song for us. Would you like to hear it?” As we rowed the boat, we hummed together.

“This is the most romantic thing you have ever done for me. I am over the moon.”

“Wait till you become my wife, this is just the beginning.”

“I adore you more than my weirdness, I cherish you more than my girlfriends, I love you for protecting me like your daughter, attachment like your wife and respect like your Mom.” And suddenly Sam hugged me tightly. I would have done anything to frame our lives in that exact moment in her embrace forever.

The memories made me smile. In the middle of our ordinary lives, love gives

us our own fairy tale. Her dimpled smile tinkles my heart like nothing else.

Four

Days commenced with good morning text from Aryan and nights

ended with his sleep tight message. I was amazed how one person can change my world upside down. Suddenly, the lyrics of songs started making sense to me. I had started wearing rose-coloured specs. Despite working in cubicles separated by country miles, we never missed a chance to make our presence felt, thanks to small and big text messages. Aryan's texts always made me blush.

It was the time for the return of cricket world cup to its unofficial home, India. A country where it is not just a sport but a religion and Tendulkar its God!!! Cricket fever was in full fledge as India was dubbed as pre-tournament favourites along with Australia and South Africa. It was the last time that the game's grandest stage was graced by our God-Sachin and for his sake and for our sake, we all prayed with bated breath for our team to lift the trophy. India gave a perfect return of favour to the Kangaroos by knocking off their perch in the quarter-final, thanks to Warrior Yuvraj who not only defeated them but also came one better against his cancer. It was the much-maligned Australian Greg Chappell who broke the team apart that led to India's debacle in the last edition of the world cup (2007). This victory was sweeter as it helped in filling the wounds of broken hearts in 2003 world cup final, when we came so close to the prize possession yet was left so far due to the mighty Australians. As India qualified to semis, excitement was sky-high. We were just two matches away from lifting the cup. It was during the world cup, I discovered Aryan's passion for cricket. He would text me after every ball and we would have our parallel commentary on.

The next stop for the men in blue was in Mohali against arch rivals Pakistan. It was yet another "mauka" for them to break the jinx against India but for us it was a must win game. As Ravi Shastri set the tone with "mother of all cricket matches", I and Aryan exchanged texts right from the toss to the last ball. India was in a spot of bother losing two wickets in consecutive balls but with men in green could not keep hold of dolly catches; they paid the price with Master's fine knock that fell short of another ton. At the end, India won comfortably and we were all so happy, excited and ready for the final.

“Hey now that our meeting is done, would you like to go on a date with me?”
“I would love to know you better. When you are coming?”

“ I worked through my contacts and have got two tickets for world cup final. My friends are ready to buy them in black if you don’t want to.” Aryan teased.

“I would not leave this once in a lifetime opportunity. I will see you in Mumbai, Wankhede stadium.”

“I am keeping fingers crossed.”
“Me too.”

A ryan picked me from the airport and we drove to Wankhede stadium. We were twinning in blue denim and Indian Team jersey. My inner voice has been buzzing me since our first meeting that Aryan is the one for me. I loved his rare smile which made him look so handsome and vulnerable. His hair was parted and fell on his forehead slightly.

“Let’s go to the stadium. It would be super crowded and I don’t want to miss even a second of world cup final.”

“I always dreamt of watching cricket live in a stadium since I was a child. I used to sleep with my bat as my sister slept with her pink doll. We were very few families who had TV back then. Watching cricket with uncles and their sons had become a Sunday ritual. Even as a child I marvelled the way Mom would diligently prepare varieties of snacks and serve with smile to everyone. I miss those days.”

T he atmosphere was electrifying with the chanting of India, India. The Stadium was jam-packed and as we stood for National Anthem, a surge of patriotism filled my heart with pride. People had painted their face and sky was covered with tricolours. I wished to absorb this all and yet I was on the edge of my seat, keeping my fingers crossed, praying for the victory. Wankhede, not being a particularly massive stadium like Eden; it felt like we were much closer to the ground. We could go through the motions of the players. Sri Lanka won the toss and batted first to put a massive total of 274. Aryan didn’t miss the chance to make the most of the innings break. He brought pop-corn, Vada-pao and coke for me. I realized I was hungry and

Vada-pao is my favourite snacks ever since I tasted it for the first time at Linking Road. We clicked a few pictures of each other and he asked a guy to capture us together. With the lush green grass of Wankhede in the backdrop and the tension and excitement to know how India's innings going to unfold, we looked stunning together. 274 seemed like 320-330 because the pressure of world cup final was huge and runs on the board has always been the way to go in big games. All hopes were pinned on Sachin and Virupaji to give India a flying start but it was not to be. The crowd was stunned when Malinga got Tendulkar out cheaply and Sri Lankans knew the price of the wicket as they celebrated like the world cup was won. However, men in blues had different ideas. They fought with dogged determination. Gambhir and Virat steadied the ship and the crowd cheered every single, twos and boundaries. Another twist came when Dilshan plucked a beautiful catch of his own bowling to dismiss Virat. The tension returned, but then came the Captain Cool. We were expecting Yuvi to come in instead as he was superb in all games but MSD always has something new in his hat. So far in the tournament, he did not have the best time with the bat. But as they say; "cometh the hour, cometh the man" and how good he was. He converting ones into twos and didn't miss a single opportunity to give the right treatment to loose deliveries. He was simply at his brilliant best. At the other end, Gambhir was an epitome of concentration. Together they build a game-changing partnership that will stay in our memories forever. Unfortunately, Gambhir fell three short of three-figure mark but it was the most important innings of the tournament full of grit, determination and will to bring back the trophy home. After that, with Yuvi's flawless batting and Mahi's assured shots, the scoreboard kept ticking. The match went till forty-eighth over when Mahi finished it in style and sealed the trophy with his trademark helicopter shot. Stadium erupted. We jumped in joy along with forty-two thousand spectators and players. We could not believe that after the wait of twenty-eight long years, the coveted, the world cup is finally ours. We hugged and could not be happier after witnessing the history being rewritten.

"Thank you for one of the most memorable days of my life. To see India lifting world cup trophy live is like a dream come true." I was over the moon.

"I am bowled over by your passion for Game. What would you like to do now?"

“To take you to my favourite place and celebrate.” As we tried to get out, we could see the sky sparkled with crackers and celebrations were like euphoria. After all, India had won and Mumbai’s favourite son had kept his promise to his billion fans. “Where would you like to go?” Aryan asked me with a quizzical look.

“Marine Drive. I enjoy sitting on the inclined pyramidal rocks and watching the city that never sleeps while cool breeze blow my hairs and soothes me. Somehow, it sets me free.”

“I am exhilarated to watch the match with you. It is like sharing my intimate secrets with you. Cricket is not just a game to me. I watch it, analyse it, discuss it and even play it on my phone. I miss playing gully cricket as a child.”

“ I have watched cricket since I remember with my parents, cousins and in hostel common rooms. I hate to get looks of disbelief when I tell people I love cricket. After all, what it has to do with gender?”

“Pardon me, but I have never known a girl so passionate about cricket. My sis always teases me about marrying a girl who would hate cricket.” Aryan chuckled and his smile made me wish to watch cricket with him all my life. At that instant, he came to my right side so that I won’t face vehicles. His protectiveness, his passion for Cricket, his asking about my opinions made me fall for him. As we reached Marine Drive, we sat on the rock and talked about our childhood days, hostel life, dreams and aspirations.

“It’s time to drop you to the airport. I did not realize we had been talking for hours.”

“I enjoyed being with you. Thank you.” As we said goodbye, Aryan tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear and I could feel my fluttering heartbeats. I was glad that I have finally found someone whom saying goodbye is terribly tough.

Five

“Hey, I talked to my parents. Coming in such a short notice is

difficult .” I told Aryan thinking the shock my parents were in because of my recent behaviour. I always wanted to delay things as much I could when it

was about my wedding and now I was the one hastening things.

“My parents told the same. They are looking for an auspicious date and Valentine’s Day certainly is not the one in their calendar. They will be delighted if you could take leave and we get engaged in our hometown.”

“I have just joined here and I will have to take long leave for the wedding. My first project is in full swing. We have to wait for the engagement if that is the case.” I was bewildered by unrealistic expectations from my new family. It worried and angered me.

“I do understand your situation but my parents won’t. I will convince them though. I will come on fourteenth.”

“Taking off on Valentine’s day would look so cheeky.” I replied thoughtfully, composing myself.

“Think of something. I am coming. I want to celebrate now that our engagement has been finalized by our families.”

“Okay.”

I waited for next two days constantly looking at my watch. This will be like a real date and I wanted to make it special. I am not very familiar with Chennai but I have Google. I kept dreaming about my date till Aryan arrived.

“Hi Sunshine; I adore the way you carry both western and Indian wear with such panache. You are looking so radiant in this georgette yellow suit.”

Aryan complemented and gave me a giant, heart-shaped bouquet of red roses and fourteen boxes of Ferrero Rocher chocolates.

“Thank you for the chocolates. It’s my favourite. And yes, thanks for this wonderful bouquet. Your love is written all over it.” Aryan looked dashing in a linen white shirt with blue denim. His tanned shoes reflected his down to earth personality.

“What is the plan for the day? You are the host.”

“Beach is my favourite spot ever since I had been to one in Goa with my girlfriends. The tides talk to me and I dream of a house in the sea shore someday. It will become home sweet home when we will reside together. What about a long walk on the stretched sands of Marina beach in evening

and a laid back lunch?”

“It sounds like a good plan. I thought you would come up with something more romantic though.” Aryan teased.

“Give me your feedback afterward.” I replied mocking him.

We went to a traditional South Indian Chettinad restaurant. The ambience was like a village and setting was arranged like hut. It was a perfect place for conversations.

“Not bad. I like it here. After all you are an idea hamster.” “Good. Would you like a traditional meal or something else?”

“I will go for a meal. It gives me a chance to taste everything. Plus it saves time and effort of ordering.”

“You are so sorted.” I admired Aryan for being so down to earth and simple. I relish eating my food slowly tasting every bite. “I was not always like this, but as I am growing up I admire simplicity a lot. Look in my eyes and tell what you like most about me?” Aryan was curious.

“I am in awe of you speaking Hindi so confidently in the land of Tamils. I see a glimpse of my Dad the way you maintain a tough exterior when in fact you have a soft core.”

“Yo u know what? My friends keep teasing me when they got to know I am going for an arranged marriage. They are like will you ramp to altar or be a runaway bride?”

“Ha ha. So what do you feel about arranged marriage?”

“I don’t know how to explain it. I have always believed in breaking stereotypes and yet I am traditional when it comes to getting married. Marriage binds the two families forever, not only the bride and groom. I wish to transform my arranged marriage into a love match.” I blushed deep.

“You are on right track. I am mesmerized by your smile, not because it’s the most beautiful one. You smile from within.” “Tell me something I don’t

know.” I chuckled. I never knew I could blush so much.

“I love the tinkling of your laugh. It keeps ringing for a long time. It motivates me to keep you happy forever.”

“Okay. I know this too.”

“I esteem that you are strong headed, yet grounded, matured yet childlike, dreamy yet connected to the world.” Aryan replied after a thought.

“I am flattered.”

“Tell me more about your tattoo. I am intrigued.”

“I believe the present is the most precious gift we have. My tattoo reminds me to enjoy simple gifts of nature, a refreshing sunshine, a walk on the beach, a hug from Mom, a movie with girlfriends in PJ and so on. I got it done on my first ever visit to Goa.

I dream to be in Disneyland someday. I spent hours to sketch cartoons as a child and colour them.”

“I treasure your lens for life. Mine is so different. Let’s go. The beach is calling.”

“Give me a minute. I will go to changing room and wear something for the beach.”

“ Am I wearing an apt dress code?” Aryan could not stop noticing that choice of clothes was very significant to her. Aryan had never let clothes define him. He liked both brands and street wear as long as those were comfortable and functional.

“I have got a white shorts and yellow tee with tropical print for you.”

“You are amazing.”

“I know.” Aryan noticed how vibrant Kavya looked in the orange asymmetrical floral dress.

“Hey, are you going to stand here forever? I am going in the water to feel the tides.” I asked.

“You go and I will join in sometime.” Aryan replied as he watched Kavya playing with tides. Kavya sucked the elixir of life with all her heart. Tides were strong and Aryan noticed water dripping from Kavya’s hair on her face.

She looked so carefree. Her dress hugged her. Aryan wanted to embrace as he noticed her so closely for the first time. He could not hold back any longer and jumped into the water.

“You are splashing water on my face?” I exclaimed.

“Water is already all over you.”

“Aryan, Hold me.” I screamed on top of my voice.

He acted without a second thought when he saw me flowing along the strong tides. Losing love once had been pretty painful and he could not afford it twice. He swam quickly and pulled me to him. His athletic built-up and deep feelings for me helped him do so. I was saved by my prince charming.

He thought he might lose me and that feeling made him pull me towards him. We were close enough now to hear the fluttering of our hearts. Aryan put his hands around my waist. In that moment, I felt the longingness I had never felt before. We looked deep into each other’s eyes and could feel our desires growing by leaps and bounds. Just like the tide, our feelings were unstoppable and natural. He pulled me closer and caressed my face with the gentlest touch. We kissed each other. My kisses were exactly like me, vulnerable, passionate, loving and ethereal. We communicated so much without speaking a word.

“It was the best way of celebrating the day of love. I love you and waiting for you to be my bride is more difficult now.” Aryan hugged me tightly.

“Thanks for pulling me in right time.”

“I will help you learn swimming. Please be more careful.” Aryan closed my eyes with his hand and I felt his warmth. The sands beneath my feet were warm and comforted me. I could walk like this forever.

Six

“Guess what? I have finally found my guy. We are getting engaged on sixth of this month. I would love you two to meet. Be available.” I was talking in one breath as Anshika picked my call.

“ Congratulations. I wish I was there. I have my paper submission for Ph.D.

My mentor will never leave me. I am enthralled to see you and Aryan together. Do send me pictures.”

“I hate you. How can you even think of missing my engagement? Don’t you want to be there to share my happiness and awkwardness? Is your mentor’s work really more significant than this?”

“Don’t be a Drama-queen Kavya. Tell me more about Aryan.”

“ I have fallen head over heels with him. He is kind, he is caring, he is smart, he is confident and he believes in my dreams. I am relieved too that I don’t have to meet any more prospective grooms. I have had enough of that.”

“Tell me your weirdest common point.” Anshika so wished to be with Kavya and be indulged in their girly conversations.

“It’s really weird. We both look so brave from outside but are afraid of dogs. Forget dogs, we are scared of puppies.” I replied remembering how I had clutched to Aryan when I saw a street dog. Aryan pretended to be nonchalant and yet his face gave away.

“This is really funny. I am so excited.”

“Tell me something Anshika; what made you sure that Atul is the one for you?”

“Apart from the fact that we cannot be quiet more than an hour, when he gifted me a bouquet with two egg cells, two neurons and two tiny hearts instead of usual flowers on my birthday, I knew he is the one.”

“Tell me more.”

“He is my guy best friend. I can vent out all my frustrations, laugh at myself, bitch about professors, lean on to him when I am down without thinking twice. In spite of his love with everything scientific, he endeavours to understand my affair with literature.”

“ Awww, I really need to catch up with you. I will be there next month. I have to do my wedding shopping and tell you so much. I am worried about

being accepted in my new family.”

“It’s not the time to ponder over future issues. What are you wearing for your engagement?”

“I have chosen a traditional green and maroon silk sari. This is my first meeting with the family and I don’t want to take any chances. I hope they like me.”

“Wow. You will look pretty. See you soon. Don’t worry about anything. I wish I was with you. Keep me posted with every update in detail.”

Time seemed to stop this morning. I had waited for this day forever. Finally, after two months of waiting, we will be engaged. I can claim Aryan as mine officially.

“We will reach the hotel in an hour. Where are you?” Mom asked me as I answered her call.

“I am already there. I cannot wait to see you try saris I have got for you. Come soon.”

I hugged Mom tight and for a long time did not utter a word. Life was going to change no matter how much I would convince myself otherwise. I will have two families now and in the same twentyfour hours, I will be a wife, daughter, daughter in law, and so on. I so wished to take Mom and Dad to vacations before my marriage. Squeezing out time will be really tough considering my parents were leaving no stones unturned for their darling daughter’s wedding.

“You have grown up as a wonderful woman. Time just flies.” Dad said his thoughts aloud. He was tall and his face reflected strength and kindness. Even being an achiever throughout his life, he was very humble. I had inherited simplicity from my parents.

“Which sa ri you liked most? I wish I can carry sari the way you do.” I complemented Mom admiring how elegant and gracious she looked. I remembered wearing Mom’s saris as a little girl in nights and seeing myself in the mirror. I so wished I had my Mom’s beautiful eyes.

“I will teach you to wear sari today. I will wear the Green silk sari in engagement, Maroon Banarasi sari in your wedding and Golden one in your reception.” She said excitedly while Dad had a concerned look on his face.

“What’s the matter Dad?”

“Are you happy, Kavya?”

“Yes Dad. Aryan is everything I want in my future husband. At least in my eyes, he is. You have set my benchmark very high of being a perfect partner and I feel he is quite close.” I replied confidently keeping my fingers crossed hoping that my words will prove to be true.

I admire the way Mom and Dad were so much in love even after decades of their wedding and worked as a team. Though I wish they were less formal to each other and be friends. I wish they were not so restrained in showing their affection for each other. I wish they don’t use harsh words when they were mad at each other. Now that they were through with most of their responsibilities, I wish they spend more on their health care and leisure. I have told them repeatedly to get health insurance, but they won’t. I want them to make the best use of now. I want them to be little more relaxed and not worry about me constantly. I was always indulged and splurged, yet Mom and Dad hardly spend on themselves other than the basic necessities. They spent their lives with a black and white TV, often repeated clothes and simple furnishings to give me best of education and everything for that matter.

“I have got you an engagement gift. Open it.”

“You got me a laptop?” I exclaimed with joy.

“Actually I got exactly same laptops for both you and your Mom. Teach her to make video calls and basics.”

“Thank you Dad; Mom is already a tech pro. We will do it tonight.” I was super excited to teach Mom, for a change. Mom has been my first teacher. She made sure I had a good handwriting, that I respect elders and joys of giving.

“Take some rest. Tomorrow is your big day. I wish Aryan and you share all the happiness of the world.” Dad interrupted my chain of thoughts, thinking I will always be his little girl. I wished he told me more than that, but we had

never communicated on emotions.

My phone beeped and there was a text from Aryan.

“Hi Sunshine, Mom and Dad have reached with my sister. I am with them. Keep texting me whenever you get a chance. I won’t call you in front of them.”

“Somebody is shy. Be with them. I will see you tomorrow.”

Mom woke up very early to get me ready. She could not believe how beautiful her daughter has grown into and rushed to call Dad who was busy with preparations. They both thought Kavya looked resplendent in green and maroon traditional sari with intricate golden embroidery. Her eyes expressed more with kajal and mascara. Dangles adorned her ears. To them, Kavya looked every inch a pristine princess.

Walking gracefully and slowly with my Mom, I reached the stage. Though it was a close family affair, I felt quite conscious. I wished Anshika was there to laugh off my awkwardness. I looked for Aryan with the corner of my eyes. He was looking handsome in off white sherwani. Standing next to him, I relaxed a bit. We were adorned with red tilak on our foreheads and blessed by our parents.

As we exchanged rings, we said our vows of being together in our hearts. I had chosen a simple and classy platinum ring for Aryan whereas he put a sleek floral diamond ring on my finger. Our eyes met for a split second. It was our happiest moment and we wanted to dance with joy. Yet we maintained decorum, sat elegantly next to each other and posed for pictures.

Our parents talked about wedding preparations and decided to go to the temple before leaving. I could overhear their conversations and Aryan’s Mom commenting about my laughing. I would be judged for the smallest of things.

“I would go and change my attire.” I told Mom to not express my displeasure on hearing comments on my laugh. I needed to compose myself before someone notices my sad expression and I would be bombarded with questions. I wished to hug my Mom at that moment but taking her away would be inappropriate.

“I will come with you.” Aryan’s sister tagged along. “Why are you looking sad? Is everything okay? I had been waiting to meet you for so long. I have started loving you even before meeting. My brother doesn’t talk about anything else since he met you.”

“I never knew that. I never got to see his expressive side. He told me you are the sweetest sister of the world.” It was amazing how Aryan’s sis could calm me.

“Really? All he does is fight with me but he cares for me like a child. I would warn you not to expect complements and love letters from him. Though Bhaiya will love you more than his life, he will act nonchalant. Boys never came anywhere near me because of him. He would have beaten them to death. He is that possessive about me.” She replied with pride.

“I pity your future husband. I am glad to meet you finally.”

“You can always count on me for everything. You must be wondering about your new family. My Mom is the kindest human being I know. She had handled multiple responsibilities from a very young age. She helps everyone in the village. Mom gets hurt easily as everyone is not as good as her and her feelings are not reciprocated most of the times. So don’t hurt her ever. My Dad is a self-made man and he appreciates everything remotely related to knowledge. He is short tempered and comes across as rude when he is angry though.”

“What about you?”

“I value my family and three of them pamper me to no end. Now that would change as we have you as the newest member. All attention and affection will go to you. I must confess I feel jealous, but make sure you deserve the adoration. I just go with the flow in life. My parents are searching groom for me. I aspire to do Ph.D. and be a professor in some good college of repute.”

“Wow. I really hope your wishes come true.” I said lovingly and hugged her. “Let’s go to the temple. We will keep talking forever. Everyone is waiting for us.”

“Sure.” I was so eager to know everything about my new family members. I

wondered if I would fit there. My heartbeats were fast and I did not know if it was excitement or apprehension.

My phone beeped and the text read: “I am more possessive now.”

“I want you to be Aryan.” I replied with a smile though his sister’s words cautioned me. Both families went to a nearby temple and prayed. Aryan and his sister kept teasing each other and I wanted to join them. I realized I could not do that. Instead, I said my good byes quietly and went with Mom and Dad.

This had been his happiest day. Aryan felt on top of the world. Later he would celebrate with his friends and think about wedding invitation. His phone beeped.

“We are engaged, but I have not said yes for the wedding. You need to propose on your knee’s. ”

“I will do anything for you, “My Sunshine.”

Seven

“Hey, I am coming to Bangalore for store launch. I will meet you on Saturday.” The thought of meeting Aryan made me smile and my excitement was reciprocated in his reply.

“When are you coming Sunshine? I cannot wait to see you.”

“I am coming on Wednesday morning, the launch is on Friday and I have to work like crazy for next three days. Thirty thousand customers are expected so it’s really going to be big. This is my last project before I go home on a much-needed break and our last date before the wedding.”

“Sometimes you shift gears so fast that it’s tough to process. I would like you to concentrate on the project in hand first. You have one month to relax. Do you want me to pick?” I wondered how he could be so focused amidst chaos.

“No Aryan, I will directly head to store in company’s cab.” “I wish to see you but I won’t distract you. Be safe. I will see you on Saturday.”

“Bye. Love you.”

“Congratulations Kavya. You have done a wonderful job. I really wish I

could retain you and company's transfer policies were flexible" My boss beamed with pride.

"Thank you, I too wish to work longer with you. It has been a wonderful experience." I wished to enjoy my pre-wedding phase and yet job search occupied most of my thoughts. I cried coming out of the new store to my hotel thinking I would be jobless from today. Searching a new job means impressing the hiring manager, new boss all over again.

"Hey Sunshine, are you alive? I called you many times." Aryan was concerned.

"I am very much alive waiting to hit the bed. It was a long day both professionally and emotionally. I will miss working here." "I have a treat for you to make you smile. Massage is on the way to your room. Relax and sleep well."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

The vibration of my phone startled me. I had just slept after a long and refreshing massage.

"Are you awake yet?"

"What time it is Aryan? Why are you waking me at midnight?" I answered in half sleep.

"I am waiting in your hotel reception. Come fast."

"Are you serious? Can I sleep for some more time, please?" I was startled as Aryan never did things on impulse.

"No. We have only fifteen hours. You have to catch your train back to Chennai. "

"Okay. Give me some time. I will take a bath to wake me up." "Cool!!"

"You look ravishing in the red frilled-sleeve dress. I think you have become more beautiful in my love."

"I am in half sleep otherwise I would have ardently appreciated your surprise and complement." I was blushing and Aryan smiled seeing my cheeks turn pink.

“Come. Hold my hand. The car is waiting.”
“You hired a BMW?” I was wide-eyed now.

“A princess deserves the best.” Aryan opened the door for me and sat after I was inside the car filled with red heart-shaped balloons. I was enchanted by Bangalore’s beauty in the dawn. As the car whirled and my favourite songs played, I wished from all my heart Aryan to know little things about me, which makes me, me. I wish him to know a thousand thoughts that run in my mind, my favourite hue of yellow, my favourite ice cream flavour and my favourite lyrics. I wanted him to know that I love to keep the glass down of car window and feel the cool breeze on my face, that I love to get drenched in rains and petrichor, that I would do anything for Aryan, all he has to do is to ask.

“Where are we going?”

“Nandi -Hills. It’s a perfect dating spot.” As we rode around the steep curves, greeneries stretched as far as my eyes could see. The breeze blew away all my thoughts about the previous day and I cherished the chirping of birds and breathtakingly beautiful view.

“Wow. Thank you for bringing me here. Clouds are cuddling me in their arms. The painting on the canvas of sky never ceases to amaze me. See, the sun is rising. I want to hold you in my life’s every sunrise and sun set.”

“Let’s take a picture of us in this beautiful moment. I want to frame it in our home.” Aryan hugged me from behind as he clicked welfies.

“Kavya, my Sunshine, you are my glitzy exotica. You have made me realize that life’s greatest pleasures are moments, not materials. You are the reason I want to be the best version of myself. Will you keep doing all these by being my wife?” Aryan said in his deep voice sitting on his knees.

“Yes, my prince charming. I would be your wife in this life and next. I want to be your soul mate for eternity and beyond.” I shed tears of happiness. This was exactly the kind of proposal I have always wished for. As soon as Aryan put the ring on my finger, violins started playing and Aryan sang along with them. He really had a melodious voice.

“I have something more to propose. Open this.”

“It’s a customized journal made up of beige handmade paper. Oh, it has engraving too. Let me read it. “The story of our lives together.” This is awesome. Are you a mind reader?”

“Listen to my proposal. I know you have a penchant for writing and I propose you to write our love story. Will you do that?”

“Of course; this has been the most beautiful morning of my life. I love you Aryan truly, deeply and madly. Will you love me like this forever?”

“This is just the beginning. Don’t expect me to propose you every other day with a new ring though.” Aryan chuckled.

“So mean. I expected a romantic reply.”

“What about a romantic movie?”

We watched “Love AajKal” holding hands and eating popcorns. I could relate to the protagonist’s torn feeling of making a choice between love and career. I actually cried when she left her picture perfect life to return to her hometown after her break-up. “You really do cry at the drop of a hat?” Aryan asked as we came out of PVR. I marvelled at the storytelling and hummed the songs.

“Yes”

We drove to station and Aryan dropped me to train lifting my luggage. He brought lots of cookies, salted snacks, fruits and a water bottle.

“Reach safe Kavya. I will miss you more than I can ever tell. I am looking forward to being with you forever as your husband. My heart is truly yours.”

“I love you too. I will meet you as your bride now. Be ready to be mesmerized.”

“You amaze me every time we meet. I cannot wait for our wedding. Let me hold you one more time.”

“The train will start. Get down and call me once you reach home.” Aryan got

down and I stood at the door. Aryan kissed me on the forehead before leaving. I stood there till I could see my future husband walking.

Train journeys have always been my favourite, be it in a group or alone. The sound of wheels, passing greenery soothes me in an unexplained way. In the hustle bustle of life it gives me muchneeded pause and perspective. Perspective is what I needed now. The wedding is one of the most significant chapters of life and I am so enticed that I am marrying the man of my dreams. I am super excited for my longest vacation with my parents. I could not wait any longer to see them.

And yet when the train started, I could not stop my tears. I was already missing Aryan. I wondered about his first love. I did not say it to anyone, yet it hurt me in the most unexpected moments. One moment I would be happiest and basking in the glory of love and in another moment I would think about Aryan's first love. I often thought why Aryan would not tell me about Samyukta. Aryan loved me and I could see it in his eyes which spoke volumes whenever our eyes met. I could not worry about the past when I had so much on my platter.

I wanted to stop my chain of thoughts. My life revolved around him, how I loved his smile more than anything else and I wished someday Aryan realises how adored he is...

Eight

Amidst the big, fat Indian wedding and equally grand reception

with countless rituals and relatives, Aryan and I hardly had any time with each other. Aryan's Mom hugged me tight when I touched her feet to leave for Bangalore with Aryan and cried. It was totally unexpected, but then lots of unexpected things happened in last twenty days. My parents who never believed in show offs, were busy packing perfect gifts for my new family and the relatives whom I would never even meet. Hard earned money of my Dad was being spent to satisfy the ego of groom's side. Their list never seemed to end and my dream vacation with my parents remained a dream. I so wished I had saved some money and contributed towards my wedding. Suddenly, I felt guilty of splurging so much on me. Dad had told me time and again the importance of saving and I wished for once I had listened to his advice. The

wedding which was my dream till now, just looked like a marathon to win. The reality hit me hard and I just wanted the wedding to get over so my parents can start living the normal life again. Mornings started with discussions of marriage preparations and nights ended with the same. I could see the growing dark circles on my parent's face and felt so helpless.

I had lived in hostel half my life. I had not thought even in my wildest dreams that I will cry in the car while leaving for my inlaw's place. Yet I cried buckets and Aryan could not stop my tears even after trying everything he could think of. He even made funny faces. His heart tore apart with my sobs. I had seen my Mom crying, but it was tears in my Dad's eyes which kept flashing. My Dad was my hero since I was a little girl. I understood the enormity of marriage for the first time and responsibility that comes with it.

I missed my parents like never before and yet as a new bride I was expected to do lot of meetings and greetings and follow rituals. I even amazed myself and surpassed everyone's expectations. I politely smiled to strangers heavily clad in saris and jewellerys even when they commented sarcastically on my looks, on my ways, on the gifts. I wished Aryan had spoken then, but he was hardly present when ladies were gossiping. I cried to sleep remembering my parents and their unconditional love. Even the arguments with my parents seemed sweet to me then.

Those were the longest days of my life. After an elaborate adieu to family and relatives, I was relieved that finally I would be in Bangalore and start my life with Aryan.

"Welcome home. I hope you still like simple stuff after being treated so grandly." Aryan said still embracing me and looking deep in my eyes. He has changed my definition of home from place to person.

"I feel normal finally." I confessed.

As I looked at our home, I noticed how organized Aryan was, everything was neatly arranged and assigned a specific place, kitchen had all boxes labelled and the freeze was stacked with my favourite chocolates, fruits and vegetables. I would stick magnets from all around the world to it, I thought to myself.

It did not look like a bachelor's home except for packing boxes displayed on top shelves. The home was quite classy and reflected Aryan's personality well.

"How do you like it? Are you comfortable, Kavya?"

"I liked it. It is so you. I would want to make it little us. Help me in hanging our canvas painting of our wedding gifted by Anshika on the centre wall. I hope you don't mind making our abode little more colourful." I said and we hung the poster together. I could not stop admiring his athletic built up and toned muscles as he climbed on the tool.

"It's our home and you tweak it as per your likings. I have ordered food. Cook will come from tomorrow."

"Thanks. Let's remove these empty boxes. I will add some pictures of us."

We worked together for the whole weekend to add the feel of us in our home. Aryan had given me the bigger wardrobe, knowing my fondness for clothes. My clothes were too many according to Aryan and he could not stop laughing seeing my shoe collection. He wondered how much money he needed to spend on my wardrobe.

"You actually have thirty-six pairs of shoes?" Aryan was dumbfounded.

"Yes and I intend to buy more soon. A girl can never have enough pair of shoes. Relax Aryan."

"We can do an auction." Aryan teased.

"Help me in finding a job Aryan. My job is my identity and I feel lost."

"You will get a job very soon. In the meantime, relax and have fun, my Sunshine." Aryan said lovingly squeezing my hand. "I know. You will be going office from tomorrow. I don't know what

I will do whole day alone ."

"Don't rush, princess. Bangalore is a city of opportunities. I have got Kindle for you as the homecoming gift. Make the most of your free time. I have also mailed you an excel sheet to keep track of your prospective future employers and consultants."

"Do you know you are amazing?"

"Yes, I do."

It took me a couple of months and few interviews to get a job and accustomed to my new life as Aryan's wife. Instead of shopping for clothes, I started buying cushions and home decors. My first call was to Aryan's Mom instead of my Mom.

Aryan cared for me like his baby, getting all my favourite food, packing snacks for my lunch, surprising me with movie and dinner dates, helping me understand and remember roads of Bangalore, I had called him so many times as all roads looked same to me and I got lost easily. It took me days to remember way back to home from all four sides.

Talking over phone and texting was entirely different from being with a person. I was a chirping bird whereas Aryan talked only when there was something to inform. Time was filled more with silence than conversations and I often wondered what's wrong. I viewed the world through pink coloured glasses whereas Aryan was practical. I wished romance and he believed in actions. Though we appreciated our differences, at times it felt we are from different planets.

I wanted to stop my thoughts about the reality of wedding. Courtship seemed like another lifetime now. I was bewildered that we did not go for a honeymoon as I was needed to be showcased to his extended family. I dearly wished conversations about the reality of being married with Mom. It would have helped me set realistic expectations leading to a quicker adjustment in my new life. I regretted missed chances. The last conversation with Mom flashed. I longed to see my parents.

"Open this Kavya." Mom said me when I was fully decked up as a bride and ready to go to my in-laws place for the very first time. "What is this Mom? You have already given me a trunk full of wedding gifts."

"Those are the customary gifts. This one is special. Open it now. We don't have much time."

"Okay Mom. "

Here it was. A journal whose cover said, "Being happy is always in vogue."

"It's awesome Mom. Hold me tight. I am going to miss my home, my bed, and of course you people every day." And we embraced in longest and tightest hug.

“I promise to write in my journal Mom.” Mom had always encouraged me to express my truest and deepest feelings. On every birthday, she presented me a journal. Over the years, it had become a ritual for us.

“I love you Kavya.”

“I love you Mom. Bye. See you soon.”

I wondered when I will meet her again. I could not stop reading Mom’s letter which I remembered word to word by now. I always feel closer to Mom and grandma every time I read it.

My dearest Kavya

I am really proud of you. You are an amazing daughter. I have been closest to my Mom; your Grandma and seeing you make me remind of her a lot. In her wedding sari, you looked so much like her.

Most mothers advice their daughters to adjust, to compromise with in-laws. That is so much a norm in Indian society. Treat them as your own. Don’t try to be someone else just to please because you cannot fake forever. Always remember your dreams, things which make you happy, your spirituality, faith and goodness.

With so much going around you, the pressure of just married, the pressure of society to showcase your perfect life, don’t be afraid and just be you.

I am so glad you chose Aryan. Stay loved forever. Every relationship needs nurturing to reach its full potential and I wish that you both do it together every moment from now onwards. Your Dad does feel insecure now that you have another man in your life. (Chuckles)

This is a journal with a special marker so only you can read what you have written. I love you a lot and always remember you have two homes now. You are not going anywhere; you are just adding one more family.

I will miss you every minute, but I will not cry when you are beaming with joy.

P.S. You are the most beautiful bride.

Love and blessings

Mom

God has been kindest to bless me with my parents. I need to see them more often. It has been six months already. I wish Mom had continued her identity as a teacher along with wife, mother and daughter in law. She would be happier. How much she has sacrificed for Dad and me, sleep deluded me that night. I will always follow my dreams no matter how far-fetched they seem.

My new job is quite boring and I struggle to perform. I work on a laptop whole day and miss friendly colleagues from my previous jobs. Too much is happening in my life and finding a new job is a hurricanes' task. The never moving Bangalore traffic adds to my woes and I spend three long hours for travelling. By the time I reach home, I am completely drained out. Aryan would keep hot milk for me and cook would finish cooking by then. I could see the disappointment in Aryan's eyes. I want to ask but am afraid to hear the truth.

Aryan has been very patient but as months passed by, he is getting frustrated. He wishes I would learn housekeeping from his Mom. He does chores and waits for the day I would understand my responsibilities.

"It's midnight Aryan. Are you okay? Why you look so stressed?" Aryan never woke me up while I slept and his face worried me. To kill the time, he checked my phone and it angered him while I was sleeping serenely. One betrayal had affected him so adversely that he has got trust issue. He did not wait for morning and woke me up.

"I am not okay. Do you know why? I have told you I am possessive and I don't like you getting texts from your office colleagues. You have just joined. Focus on your work, not on attracting male friends."

"I don't even read those forwarded texts. What do I say to them? You checked my phone while I was sleeping!!! I cannot believe this."

"I don't want you to give the wrong impression to anyone. Do your work and stay away from boys. You don't know them and what they would be thinking. Don't let anyone take you lightly. You are no more a college girl." I

could hear his anger and suspicion.

“Don’t you trust me Aryan?”

“Trust is just a version of one’s thought. Don’t do anything which complicates our relationship. I married you for your simplicity. I had enough complications for a lifetime already.”

“I would make them understand. There won’t be any text from tomorrow.”
“Fine!!”

I saw Aryan engrossed in his phone and wondered whom he is chatting this late. I wanted him to trust me and I was shocked with his thought process. It startled me how quickly he raised his voice. I was getting scared about his temperament.

I wish Aryan would appreciate me for who I am. I wish he would have married a girl from a remote village. He would have been happier that way. I hate when my worth is being constantly judged for my culinary and housekeeping skills. I am much more than that. His Mom leaves no chance of scrutinizing me and comparing me with her daughter to prove she is a better manager of the home. My parents never heard any complaint about me even when I was in kindergarten and here I was, all grown-up and Mom had to hear sarcastic comments about my cooking skills. Aryan always took his Mom’s side when it comes to highlighting my shortcomings. I wish they had got his sister’s clone as Aryan’s bride.

Aryan could be meanest when he wanted to be. He closed the door and I cried myself to sleep. As of now, wishes are all I have.

Nine

I took two days off while Aryan was in Delhi for office meetings. I

needed time for me and our home. I smiled to see the refrigerator stacked with chocolates, milk, apples, pomegranates and sandwich spreads. He even painted a sad smiley on eggs saying miss you before he left.

I turned on the music and decided to organize our home. Aryan would be happily surprised once he is back.

I was dusting the stuff when I saw a crumpled long notebook. Mostly it had office and client address. I was about to keep it back when I saw a folded page from the corner. It read my dreams:

IIT- could not achieve
My first love- Break up happened
To be CEO – 15 years from now
ISB- 5 years from now

I kept it back as it was and put on my thinking cap. I cannot get his first love back, but I certainly can help him build his career. I need a high paying job and get our lives on track. Aryan was quite sensible, but when it was about drinking, he did not listen to anyone, not even his parents whom he loved most. I cannot bear to see him wasting his life on alcohol. We hardly had savings.

“Hi Aryan, I am super excited to see you after two long days. Please come soon.” I told as his flight landed.

“Hmm.” I wished Aryan shared my enthusiasm.
“I have cooked your favourite dinner. Bye.”
“See you.”

I arranged the table with red and white Lavender-scented candles and a note. I wished he would like the revamp I did while he was away.

“Welcome home. You look so tired.” I said concerned as we hugged.
“Six meetings and extensive travelling in span of two days is the culprit. I am fine. Let me unpack.”

“You got me my favourite cookies and chocolates?”
“See this.”

“Wow.” The most assorted and choicest of body lotion, moisturizer, shampoo and conditioner from the Body Shop was packed in a baby pink basket.

“It’s amazing.”
“I got the miniature versions of everything so that you can carry them easily

while travelling.”

“It’s so thoughtful of you.”

“The home looks so organized and welcoming. I really liked the photo wall you have crafted. It’s so vibrant, yet romantic.” “Thanks. Let’s eat.”

“The dinner is delicious and your note so heartfelt.”

The new found purpose motivated me. I started searching job from the next day. After three months of updating my resume and grilling interviews, I finally got a job near my home. Aryan was happily surprised as I shouldered house hold responsibilities and he complemented me on the smallest of jobs. I was elated to see him smiling.

“Do you remember yesterday’s conversation?” I teased Aryan while he flipped through sports channels.

“What?”

“First let me watch this movie.”

“Why you have to watch TV only when I switch it on?” “I hate watching TV without fighting with you for the remote.”

“Okay. Watch Serendipity. By now even, I remember it scene by scene with dialogues.”

“I would love if you watch all the Rom -com movies of the list.” “I will try. Tell me what I was telling.”

“You were blabbering about your childhood days.”

“What?”

“That you are scared to be a professional duff as you were a high school duff. I thought you have done quite well.”

“To be honest, I am afraid of embracing failures. I am tired of melodramas and I wish to prove that being a duff is not that bad, after all. The vicious circle of comparing marks with neighbours has grown into comparing salaries, houses, cars, kids and so on. I do things only when I am ready not when others feel I should be ready. Not everyone can accept it and it disappoints my parents. I want them to be happy for what I am, not what they wish me to be.”

“It takes a lot of courage to accept failures with grace, but failures give us a chance to do over and in a better way. I don’t consider you a duff. Don’t be so harsh on yourself, Aryan.”

“Trust me, I try.”

“What would you like to do for coming weekend?”

“Let me watch ESPN now and I would treat you in Leela Palace.” “Can we go for a long drive also? It has been so long.” “I love to stay at home and relax.”

“We do that every weekend. Let’s go for a change.” “Okay.”

Ten

I enjoy fighting for the silliest things, especially with my beloveds.

No one knows this better than my little sister. I would fight with her for sweets, for sitting in the centre chair while dining, for a window seat in school bus, for sleeping next to Mom, for getting new toys. Sometimes when I don’t know how to keep a check on my possessiveness, I just fight. I wish Kavya understand this and not cry buckets when I just fight with her for fun.

“Hey Kavya, don’t book cab back home. I will come to pick you up.” I have waited for this moment for so long. Kavya would be thrilled though she would make face for not letting her come with me to the showroom.

“Okay. I will wait for you.” I cherish the way Kavya smiles for the smallest of gestures.

“Wow. Did you get us a car? I particularly liked the colour and rich leather finish of seats. It is so classy.” Kavya complemented excitedly as she surveyed our grand new Maroon Punto Emotion.

“Yes!!!”

“Why you did not take me along? Let’s start the ride.”

“Here are red roses for you to make up for that. I did not want to distract you from your work.”

“You are a sweetheart.”

“I cannot wait to drive it myself. I have already enrolled in a driving class.”

“Wow. What about me?”

“I will teach you to drive once I learn.”

“I cannot wait for that day.”

“Thank you for the drive.” I said to the driver as we took another look at our car. Holding car key in my hand felt so empowering.

“Let’s pray for our car. I will get diya.” Kavya said as I turned to her. I could see my happiness reflected on her face. She came back in full prayer mode and reminded me of Mom. I had already got sweets.

“Let’s pray together.”

As soon as she lit the diya, fire caught in her stole and her thumb got cut by burning. It all happened in a split second. I rushed to get Dettol and took her to the nearest hospital. Seeing her in pain hurt me immensely. I realized how much I cherished her and while the doctor stitched her wound clinically in the consulting room, I prayed for her speedy recovery. I realized no one can fill the emptiness inside me and she is irreplaceable. I did my best to get her food on her favourite yellow plate, to help her in changing clothes, to help her tie her hair, to cut her nails, to help her lift her bag and so on. Kavya brought out my nurturing nature like no one else.

In the meantime, I learnt to drive every morning while she slept peacefully. I loved watching Kavya sleep. She slept as if she had no care in the world.

“Hey Kavya, would you like to go for a drive?” I asked her once we finished dinner.

“Yes.” Kavya would always be upbeat with prospect of being with me.

“Come.” I opened the door and made her sit carefully so that her cut won’t hurt. I was afraid to drive without a guide, yet I wanted to do it with Kavya. I ignited the engine and changed gears slowly. Every passing second I gained confidence. Driving is so liberating. It makes me feel in-charge. Kavya glanced at me admiringly as I took her for first ride. It was my shortest drive and yet the most memorable one. I would love to take Kavya on highways and let her drive someday.

Eleven

My Dad wrote me letter on every birthday, blessing me and

inspiring me to strive to be my best version. My earliest birthday memories are eating my favourite kheer cooked by Mom, and Dad giving me a five hundred note. I would always share it with my sis after making her bow to me five times. We would go to eat samosas post that. Samosas are the surest way of making my sis smile.

My favourite childhood memories is fighting and teasing my sister. She has been my favourite toy since she was born. I had fallen in love with her twinkling button like eyes when I saw her for the first time, but all attention and affection went to her and I felt envious. It took me years to love her completely without feeling a pang of jealousy. Even the thought makes me laugh now. The day she got married, I cried hard. It was like losing my most integral part. She makes me so proud the way she handles everything, be it her job, family and love she gives to everyone. I recalled fondly image of pulling my sister's hairs when we were young made me smile.

I wish I had replied to Dad 's letters to tell how much it meant to me. Instead, I would call him to update about the latest happenings. Expressing my feelings on a piece of paper is not my cup of tea. I am always amazed by the affection a hand-written letter conveys.

I salute Kavya's efforts and patience. I wish I could share her enthusiasm. After a hectic day at work, she managed to pull a surprise for me by calling my friends and colleagues at midnight. I wished to spend the day peacefully with her. My lack of excitement disappointed her and yet she managed to be cheerful and chirpy. I made up later by saying her sorry, a coffee date and long drive. I hate to hurt her. Kavya surprised me with a calligraphed birthday letter.

Dearest Aryan

Happy Birthday my man. What can I wish for you? You are already living life of your dreams, you have your dream job, you are the life and soul of every party, you have a family who loves and adores you so much, your friends look up to you, you are growing better version of yourself every day and you

have world's best wife. What more a man could ask for?

I am so proud of you not only because of your achievements, but for the person you are. Of course you are most handsome man in my eyes, but more than that you are the kindest soul I have known. I admire the way you help your friends whenever they are in need, be it with your time, your wise words, your money and by visiting them in hospitals. I esteem the way you motivate your team members to grow and you are so secure. I cannot express my happiness in words every time you receive thank you letters from your juniors, your colleagues, your friends for making them a better person. I felt really proud when you interacted with your college juniors, giving them a picture of the corporate world.

The day is not far when you will be CEO of the company and don't forget to thank me in your speech. I am and I will always be your biggest fan, loudest cheerleader. You know what, I cannot decide whether I adore you or admire you more.

Holding your hands has been the best decision of my life. I wish you many more years of success, love, recognition and health. I ardour you beyond words, so even if I write the whole book on how much I love you it will not be enough.

Keep smiling and keep enjoying every moment. XOXO

Twelve

I opened a recurring deposit and started saving. I cut down on my

shopping which was quite hard as I am a self-confessed shopaholic, I cut down on socialising, I cut down on dining out, and I cut down on watching movies to save every penny. The only thing I did not curtail was on travelling with Aryan. I adulate the way his eyes lit up whenever he drives. Travelling is like oxygen to me. After saving for eighteen months it was time to break the news.

“Happy Birthday Sweetheart.” I hugged Aryan tightly.

“Thank you. Where are the cake and surprise?”

“I did not get any since you don't like them much.” I remembered we had a fight last birthday when I called his friends to surprise Aryan at midnight.

“I feel relieved. Come let’s sleep.”

“I do have a surprise. I am your angel this birthday and I will fulfill one of your dearest wishes.”

“Really?”

“I have applied for your enrolment in ISB. It has been accepted. Next month is your interview.”

“What!!!”

“We don’t have savings. I will be in Hyderabad and you will be in Bangalore. How does it work? Nothing is more important to me than being with you. You cannot decide for both of us alone.” Aryan was fully awake now.

“Trust me. It will work between us even if we are on two different planets. I have figured it out. I will stay in PG for one year and it will save most of the expenses. Do you trust me?”

“I trust you with my life, but everyone is not like you. I would regret whole life if something happens to you in my absence. Don’t try to convince me otherwise, Kavya.”

“Even I don’t want to stay away from you. ISB is a lifetime opportunity. One year will pass quickly, trust me. I promise to call you every day and be cautious. I won’t roam around alone.”

“So you have thought it through? I am still not sure about it. I wish I had saved Kavya. I feel guilty about spending on countless parties. You don’t have to live a tough life to fulfill my dreams.”

“I am doing it for us. Now start preparing for your interview. Give it a shot first. We have all the time in the world to work on details.”

“Check with your boss if you can get a transfer in Hyderabad.” “I will try, Aryan. I am not his apple of eyes, you know that.” “I won’t be able to concentrate on you being alone.”

“I will do everything in my capacity to stay safe. Trust me.” “This is the best birthday gift. I can’t tell you how much I love you.”

“Then don’t tell.” I chuckled. It was so good to see tears of happiness in Aryan’s eyes.

Days passed quickly as we prepared for next phase of our lives. I always cheered for Aryan whenever he looked desolate. We sold most of the things on OLX. It hurt to sell the vibrant corner table and vase we had bought together.

Aryan kept looking for a decent PG. Nothing seemed like home to him. He wanted Kavya to be safe even more when he won't be around. Finally he got one next to her office. His heart was tearing. Kavya who was so free spirited, shopaholic had so much more in her than what he had initially thought. He wanted to grow old with Kavya to take care of her every day.

"All the best for your interview. Crack it." I kissed him goodbye. "Thank you my Sunshine."

"Hey Sunshine, would you want to hear good news or bad news first?"

"Bad news"

"I will be away for three hundred and sixty five days from you and course structure is so hectic that there is hardly any holidays."

"You cracked it? It's best news. Go for your dreams, Mister." I said thanking God for answering my prayers. I have been working for it for last two years.

"This is going to be the toughest one year of our marriage." "Why you are thinking so? You are going for your dreams. Nothing could make me happier."

"How can you be so selfless?"

"I love you."

"I love you too."

Time had come to say goodbye to our home. It looked so desolate without furnishings and though I had put up a happy face till now, tears rolled down as we bid goodbye to our home. It represented our beginning, the place where we had many firsts, first Diwali, first Karwachouth, first Holi, first Birthdays together, first fight and making up and so on. I gave one last look to our hand prints which we did on first Holi. I composed myself when I saw Aryan was tearyeyed too. It was my turn to be strong for both of us. I did not want him to carry extra baggage to ISB.

“No compromise on eating healthy? Okay? Promise me Kavya . You can stay with my parents if you want.” Aryan said with tearful eyes as he lifted my bags.

“I promise. Don’t start it all over again Aryan. We have discussed it countless time. I cannot take one year break and pretend to be a docile daughter-in-law. We need every penny to survive. I cannot believe how you even considered it as an option.”

“ I just want you to be safe. I agree with you.Do call my parents every night. They worry a lot about you.”

“I will keep them updated. I have lived in hostels half my life, Aryan.”

“I will miss you every day and every night.”

“You are going there to shine, not to miss me Mister.” “Hold me tight.”

“Have a safe journey.”

Thirteen

Joining ISB proved to be one of the best decisions of my life as it

introduced me to a world of like-minded people and a plethora of unexplored opportunities. This was not a place where getting the highest marks was going to secure future. What it took to be successful was the ease to talk to people, build connections and to sell yourself and your skill sets in the best possible way. And it was a blessing in disguise that this was what I was best at. Sales was my strongest pursuit as I discovered in my one year at ISB. The college taught me that sales was not a profession but a lifestyle.

While I got a fantastic learning platform, it was full of struggles personally. Studying, case studies and presentations deluded me as I had engrossed myself in clients and numbers. Concentrating for long lectures took loads of determination as my attention span had become short. My batch mates treated me like a vintage fossil and I hardly made friends. Working on individual projects was still convenient but when it came to group assignments, I struggled to get partners. At times I felt like a discarded low caste citizen from the ancient age. It embarrassed me every time when a professor had to nudge my classmates to work with me and they would make melancholy faces.

On top of these, I miss Kavya every minute. Nights are loneliest even though I always have multiple assignments. The deadline never seems to end and days go without talking to her. I even missed celebrating karwachouth with her and breaking her fast with a glass of water. I miss her face, her smile which melts all my stress, I miss her chattering. I wish I had made her feel cherished. Now I know how it feels to be out of place.

I know Kavya is used to the affluent lifestyle, yet there she is going back to the time, living in PG, working day and night and still smiling whenever we talk. She never complains about food that tastes bad, the space constraint she faces, that she could not call her friends for house parties, that she misses her favourite TV shows.

“Hello Mister, Got some time for your Wife?” Kavya chuckled. “Tell me Sunshine, how are you?”

“I am at your college gate. Come out.”

“Are you serious?” I could not believe my ears.

“I am in your favourite yellow suit. So come fast before someone asks me for a date.” Kavya teased.

“Your date will be killed instantly. I am there.”

“Cheers to our three terrific years. Happy Anniversary Aryan.”

“Happy Anniversary Kavya. I am so enthralled you are here. I missed you like crazy.”

“I missed you too.”

“Wow. You look so pretty.”

“Thanks Aryan.”

“You have lost weight. Please eat properly. Six more months and I will be there.”

“I am eating enough. You have grown more handsome if it is possible. I missed you and dark oak fragrance of after shave. I wish to see your campus through your eyes.”

“I wanted to do this since I stepped in here.”

“ISB has definitely made you more charming and confident.” “I am so glad you did it for me Kavya. I really mean it.” “We did it Mister. Cheers to us.”

“Let’s walk. This is the mess where we get everything, from snacks to meals. This is the auditorium, where we perform and attend workshops. I love the lofty arches and the mural paintings on the walls. You won’t believe I did modelling last month and was voted most popular model. It’s quite an irony as I don’t have any friends here; forget about being popular. Some of your fashion sense has rubbed on me. This is the presentation hall and this is the corridor where students spend most of the time. The resource centre has all the books I can think of. I have started reading and now I understand your love for books. It transforms you without lecturing. That side is our hostel. Let’s go there.”

“Wow.”

“Terrace is my favourite place in college. I come here very often, read books and brainstorm ideas. The dazzling stars remind me of you. You are my lucky star Kavya.”

“How it feels to be in college again?”

“It is good and I had to update myself a lot. Everything is quite technical these days unlike my engineering days. The place has taught me a lot and it has just been six months. I am humbled by being part of NGOs, volunteering for college activities, travelling to nearby villages. There is so much we can do in life along with job. My perspective of life has changed. I have become less obsessed with me and concerned about the greater good.”

“I am so proud of you.” Kavya could feel my loneliness and yet she admired how I was making best out of it.

“I wish I can be in your embrace forever Kavya. I mean it. I have fallen in love with you all over again. Not only because you helped me getting in ISB, but staying apart from you made me realize how much I love you. I know I have been quite distant and cold at times without any explanation. I always felt little insecure when fresher’s from good colleges used to get the same salary as me or sometimes higher even after years of experience. Trust me I always compared life’s standards with money, but you made me realize real

happiness is going for dreams, being content and being loved. I feel wealthiest now because I have you. I promise I will be your knight once I am back.”

“I just want you to be you. You don’t have to force happiness.” “What would you like to eat?”

“You; is that possible?”

“Anytime; I cannot wait to devour kisses on you. But I am asking about food which fills the stomach.”

“Let me gaze twinkling stars. I have been dazzled by them since childhood days.” Kavya said dreamily.

“I love you. Let me gaze you.”

We watched stars in silence holding hands. The sparkling stars reminded me of Kavya’s eyes. Surviving in ISB was much tougher than getting into it. Studying after a gap of six years was not easy and I struggled every day. I veiled my tears.

“Here is the anniversary gift, my Sunshine. I have made it for you.” “Awww, you made it by yourself? This is the most beautiful tiara. Sparkling pearls on silver crown looks so bright yet classy. It will dazzle even in the darkest corner. I have always wished for Hyderabad pearls. Let me read what it says.”

“My Sunshine.”

“Wear it. You are truly a princess.”

“Thank you. I feel the one today.”

“Now stand close and pose. This is for our anniversary memory.” Kavya would buy most expensive labels at times and yet be happiest with the simplest ones. I wished I could gift her everything she wished for.

“How much time you have?”

“I have to catch a train at eleven tonight.”

“You came by train. It would have been so tiring.”

“I will walk also if it’s you I have to meet. I am so glad we celebrated our anniversary together.” Kavya looked deep in my eyes. Her eyes reflected

simplicity of her soul.

“I will drop you. Eat fast. I have packed snacks for you.” “Thanks.”

“Let’s go to Secunderabad station. Thank you for the surprise visit.” “Hold me once more before I leave.” Kavya told tearfully. “Why you are crying?” “It’s happy tears. Let’s go.”

“I love you. You are the second most handsome man I know, you know that right?”

“Yes after your Rahul Dravid.”

“Reach Safe Kavya. Call me once you reach. Give me cab’s number you take from Majestic station.”

“Okay. Okay. You need to be little more relaxed. I will reach alright. Text me once you reach your room.”

“Goodbye till we meet again. I love you.”

“Let me dig my face in your lovely hairs and kiss you on the forehead. Now don’t blush.” I adored the way Kavya had grown her hairs after I told her that I would love to see her in long hair. Her hair always played on her face and it made her look more feminine and beautiful. I wondered why Kavya could not believe me when I said that she is beautiful.

Fourteen

I never thought being in a long distance relationship will be so

tough until I faced it on my own insistence. Aryan had workshops and presentations in midnights as well and most of the days we had to satiate ourselves with texts. To add to my woes, the PG food was tasteless and the environment was chaotic. Office pressure was getting insurmountable and I longed for the tranquillity of being in home and warmth of Aryan’s presence. I was in half- sleep when vibration of my phone jolted me awake.

Dear Kavya

The client called today evening and she wants design first thing in the morning. You need to work tonight and mail me so that I can approve and do the changes if any.

Please confirm once you send me a mail.

All I needed was a sound sleep. I started working immediately as there was hardly any time and forgot all about taking rest.

I rushed to reach office on time, skipped my breakfast to get time for changes and prayed client applaud whatever I had made. It was a long day and I loaded myself with coffee to stay awake and do the changes to satisfy the client and my demanding boss. I hit the bed as soon as I reached PG.

“Hi Mom, how are you? I have to tell you so much. I met Aryan and in spite of so many obstacles, he is doing well. I am really happy.”

“Why you are speaking in one breath? Is everything ok?” Mom had been overly concerned since I shifted in PG.

“Yes Mom; I am tired after the journey and office work never finishes. I wish two days off and shut the whole world out. As of now, it looks like a mirage.”

“I should not interfere but I feel you are shouldering too many responsibilities. It’s draining you. I don’t know how you are surviving on PG food. Take better care of yourself. You can see Aryan’s struggles but not yours. I worry about you running the whole day. And it’s not just one year, it will take few years to repay the loans. You will have to search a house and buy everything. It would be like starting from scratch again.”

I could hear the sarcasm and pain which was so unlike Mom. I did not need this today of all days. I reminded Mom of her initial years when she had supported Dad with his decision to support his sister’s education and wedding expenses. I wished I could convince Mom but it was never easy. On the pretext of dinner, I said her bye and promised to take better care of myself. I should not talk to Mom when I am exhausted. It magnifies her worries.

I applied for leaves and for a change my boss approved. I booked tickets instantly to home and planned to surprise Mom and Dad.

Fifteen

Birthdays are big deal to me. Aryan always goes miles to make my

Birthdays beautiful, be it by writing and singing a song about us, or treating me in Taj Vivanta. I am missing him more than usual today. I am turning

thirty and to me it is a milestone. The warden called me down and I am full of anticipation.

A chocolate cake in the shape of a sorting hat from Harry Potter fame and a bouquet of thirty red roses brought my smile back. The clock had just struck twelve. As I opened the vintage gift wrap, I was thrilled to see a monochrome literary linen scarf.

“Happy birthday Sunshine.”

“Thank you for making my birthday wishes true. I loved the scarf; it will go with all my solid shirts and tops.”

“I wish I was there with you, but I have my presentation this evening.”

“It would be a lie if I say it is okay. I am missing you like never before at this moment.”

“I wrote a Birthday toast for you.”

“What? I need to pinch myself to believe it’s real.”

“Kavya, stop being melodramatic and listen to your Birthday toast.”

“Okay. Read it in my favourite voice. I have waited for it so long.” “Really? Just now I told you about it.”

“I saw it coming even before you told about it.”

“Aha. Your sixth sense.”

“Ahem ahem.”

Here’s wishing Kavya, love of my life, my best friend, the most loving person, the naughtiest girl, happiest happy birthday. A girl who is crazy, to say the least, a girl who lives life on her own terms, a girl who gives a damn to social police and yet cares for whole world, a girl who made the most reserved me expressive, a girl whose childish pranks are as innocent as her, a girl who thinks whole world is hers, a girl who sees good in everyone, a girl who cries bucket for smallest of things, a girl who is so sensitive and so sensible at same time, a girl I wish was my first grade friend, a girl I want to grow old with, a girl who has lady-like elegance and childlike excitement side by side, a girl who can make me smile no matter what, a girl who has made me so caring, a girl who has made me responsible, a girl who cheers me every day to be my best version, a girl who has the simplest of heart and most stylish fashion sense, a girl who made my family her family, my friends her

friends, my life her life, my heart hers, a girl who completes me in every sense, a girl so secure and yet so much into me, a girl who accepted me in spite of being so different from me, a girl who never impressed me, but always expressed herself, a girl only you can be.

I may not say I love you all the time, but when I ask you have you reached, have you ate, have you slept, when I tuck your blanket from sides, when I put one extra chappati in your lunch along with apple and biscuits, when I add few notes in your wallet, when I smile instantly after seeing you, when I ask how your day was, when I ask you for movie dates and get you nachos and popcorn, when I get you your favourite mango flavour ice cream even when you say no, when I scold you for not being careful enough, when I open doors for you, when I hold your hands while crossing roads, when I ask if you started from office, when I make you sleep on time, when I let you watch Rahul Dravid's innings and interviews again and again, when I get you your favourite books, when I get you colourful stationeries, when I entertain your friends at home, when I let you chose the menu, when I keep clothes in washing machine and put them to dry, these are my ways of loving you.

I wish to continue doing all these till the end of time. I don't need anything to be happy, because you my Sunshine is my happiness. Just be you and follow your heart always.

So here's wishing you all the fun and happiness in life with me. Here is to the girl who believes in fairy tales. May all your dreams come true."

"I love you and as long as I have you my Knight in shining armour, my fairy tales will come true. This is so amazing. Your love letters are my second most favourite possession in the whole world after you."

"Now don't cry my Sunshine."

"These are tears of happiness. I am luckiest to call you mine. I was missing you like crazy tonight and you made my day."

Sixteen

"Stay happy forever." Dad blessed me when I touched his feet. He

looked concerned and fragile. I wanted to ask if he was okay, but I did not want him to worry further. He worried that we hardly had savings for rainy

days, nor we had invested in any property or mutual funds. I regretted his concerns about my decisions and unconventional choices. They worried about me day and night.

I hugged Mom tightly and instantly felt at ease. We were meeting after a year. The aroma of home-made spices and pickles reminded me of Mom's mouth-watering dishes and I tasted chhole garnished with coriander leaves and chopped onions. It melted in my mouth leaving behind the taste of tamarind.

"It's yummy. I missed your food."

"Eat properly Kavya. Why you took only a spoonful? I am worried about your dark circles under eyes. You look tired and malnourished."

"I will, Mom. Let me show what I got for you. Please unwrap it." "Wow. It's a coffee-table book on gardening. I would love to try the unique flower arrangements illustrated in this."

"Why you are spending money when you are dipped in a loan? When you will grow up Kavya? Stop acting on your impulses and start being practical." Dad asked angrily and my eyes met Mom.

"I was dying to meet you both. Who knows if there is a tomorrow?"

My reply melted Dad's anger to an extent and he finally smiled. "I have prepared your favourite coconut laddoos, peda and pickles." Mom said excitedly and it brought the atmosphere temperature down.

"You made it last night. When you will ever rest?"

"When are you going to settle in your career? How long you will keep changing jobs?" Dad asked the question I was dreading.

"I am learning to do projects independently. Once I learn what all is there to learn and get an international exposure, I will start something of my own."

"You still have two years to apply for government jobs. Think about it. At least one of you must have a secured job."

“I will think on it.” I lied to avoid an argument. We had discussed and argued every time on it. I knew Dad would keep pursuing me for government jobs. He wanted me to secure my old age as he was very much aware of my spending habits.

In the evening we went to divine Chinna masti ka Rajrappa temple. I could finally solve the puzzle of wearing sari perfectly after initial embarrassments. While standing in a long queue, I had time to reflect on the years gone by, those wonderful, carefree childhood days when Mom and Dad could meet all my demands without having to utter a word. Time flies. Days become months, months years and years turn to decades...I wish I could return some of the favour back to parents, but what they needed the most was my happiness, security and that carefree Kavya back...

While I was lost in my thoughts, Mom interrupted...

“Why are you so deep in thought?”

“How does it feel to grow old Mom?”

“It feels satisfying if you have lived life on your own terms. It makes you wiser and calmer. At times it terrifies you. I don’t want to leave the world before my daughter is mature, I don’t want to live without seeing my grandchildren, the wishes never end and yet you know you cannot live forever. You value your family and partner more. It all depends on how you want to take it.”

“Don’t you feel fragile? Don’t you feel sad that energy level has gone down?”

“Age is just a number. It all depends on how you think. Some people celebrate their birthdays and others take birthdays as the countdown to death. There are always two sides of a coin.”

“Kavya still looks like a child when she sleeps.” I could hear their conversations over the evening tea from the other room.

“For us she will always be our munchkin. Kavya has grown into a beautiful lady with grace and kindness. Aryan really complements her. I am so glad arranged marriage worked for her. I wish her days of struggles are short. She

deserves all the happiness in the world. Children are the greatest blessing. They make you a child again. It was so nice to have baby Kavya crawling and walking in every corner of our home. Did you ever feel otherwise?"

"I felt my life is outside my body. I always watched her. Even a scratch on her made my heart skip. And nothing has changed in all these years. I cannot see her in tears." Dad was quite emotional while he always maintained a tough and strong exterior.

"Don't worry. Aryan cares for her like a baby."

"I wish we could meet Aryan too." At times I envied Aryan. Mom loved him even more than me.

"Wait for three more months. We can plan a surprise party for him on his graduation." I joined Mom and Dad as they finished tea in our garden.

"You two will meet after a long time. He will appreciate peaceful transition. This year has been quite hectic. I know you love celebrating every moment, making everything grand, and yet sometimes it's better to be in the flow of life and see how it turns. Give Aryan the space he needs to settle down and spend most of your time with him. Be his biggest cheerleader."

"Thanks Mom. I feel you are right as always. He will be undergoing lots of changes and I will leave him in peace."

"Have you written anything in the journal I gave you as your wedding gift?"

"Yes Mom, the journal is filled with memories and my dearest wishes. The day Aryan will start taking care of himself as much he cares for me, the day he will be healthy, the day he will finally forget Samyukta, the day we will go on the world tour hand in hand, the day I will be an entrepreneur, the day I will have dinner date with Rahul Dravid, the day you and Dad will be the proudest parents and grandparents. I have a very long list. I will write about this vacation too."

"Since we are talking about writing, I will show thank you speech for the foundation day of organization. Read it and write it in your handwriting with modifications. I have told everyone that my daughter is an amazing writer." Dad never left a chance to flaunt me.

“Let me read it Dad.”

“Wow!!!”

“You have a fantastic flair for writing. Now I know where I have inherited my love for literature. It’s perfect. I will copy it on a new page and add names in the blanks.” Vacations unfold layers of personalities which we never knew existed.

“I appraise your handwriting.” Mom complemented me as I finished writing.

“It’s all because of you Mom. Remember, you made me rewrite the whole notebook so that it was readable? I miss our conversations. I wish we meet more often. Days have flown by. Why don’t you and Dad go for a health checkup?”

“We are fine. I have been luckiest to marry your Dad. He has worked diligently to be what he is today, right since his childhood. He used to walk miles to go to school and then tutored his juniors to afford his own tuition. He saved money for his sister’s wedding in our first year of marriage instead of indulging. He has carved his name for his honesty and strong work ethics. He helped me in sketching my practical notebooks when I was pursuing M.Sc. I am a super proud wife.

Trust me; marriage is like a bank account. More you invest in it, more valuable it becomes. You have to invest your trust, your time, your gestures, your heart and your life. I appreciate your Dad much more now as we can naked our souls with each other.”

“I aspire to have a marriage like yours and we are on track. It is our imperfections that make me and Aryan perfect together.” I purred in sleep on my soft and cosy queen-sized bed made up of pine wood. It calmed me down and took away all my worries. I wished to be curled on my bed, blanketed in my parent’s love forever... “Oh Mom, we have just met. I wish I could have stayed little longer. I feel lonely without Aryan. It was such a nice change to be so loved and cared for.”

“Three months will pass soon Kavya. Be strong. And we both are so proud of you already. ”

“Dad has got fruits for you. He has kept it in your bag. Eat them before they are rotten.” Dad has always been like this, loving me through actions, making me eat little extra every time, peeling bananas and papayas for me before I would leave for school, making me drink two glasses of milk instead of one, encouraging me to participate in every competitive exam and helping me with complex numericals.

“Dad! I love you. We both will come to meet you soon. Keep exercising. I will call once I reach Bangalore.”

Seventeen

Kavya’s mails are breath of fresh air in the campus. She is the only

one with whom I share the realities of my life. She understands my hectic schedule and never complains when I don’t reply. I wish to tell her thousand things, but I don’t know where to start. I worry for her; she has lost so much weight in just six months. I worry what she would do when she wakes up in middle of the night from a bad dream and hugs me tight, I worry what she would be doing when she feels like bitching about her boss and flushing her frustrations out.

I know Kavya is always on her toe these days. I forced her to be mature and responsible. I wonder if I would ever see her carefree side again. Her boss is making sure that she works extremely hard for upcoming appraisal. I wish she gets the much-deserved promotion.

I am super busy with my final semester project. Pleasing boss was a cake walk compared to pleasing my mentor. Redo is his favourite word.

Being in suits and tie had become a habit by now, yet it was not just another day...It was the first day of campus placement and there was as much thrill as worries and apprehensions. Head hunters kept calling but the competition was sky high. Shortlisting to top companies came as a shy of relief...

As I was done with grilling session by Bosch panel, I waited for a bated breath for the result. Minutes turned to hours and afternoon turned to evening, I heard nothing. Doubts and disappointment clouded my heart. I walked around the campus restlessly and could not sleep the whole night.

Dressed in a sharp Navy Blue striped shirt, Grey trousers and a tie, I was ready for my next interview in Dell. I missed Kavya while I shopped for my interview. She would make me try numerous garments before she would feel it's perfect. Four members of panel bombarded me with questions and suddenly interview hall transformed into brainstorming sessions of the boardroom. I was analysing pros and cons of Dell overtaking EMC, and why the company should be focused on its core strength rather than diverging into communication. They thanked me and started to pack their bags. I was the last candidate for Dell.

“Congratulations Aryan, you have cracked it. Dell India is pleased to hire you as a team leader for Inside Sales. We have two opportunities, one in Bangalore and another one in Mumbai. Sleep over it and give us a call back tomorrow.”

This was the best call of my life. Three months of sweating over the campus placement was over. I could not wait further to be back in Sales. It's where I belong. Negotiating and sealing the difficult deals excite me like nothing else.

“Hey Sunshine, I got placed in Dell. It is the company of my dreams. Hard days are over finally. So where do you want to live, Mumbai or Bangalore?”

“Congratulations!!!”

“I am so thrilled for you. What is the profile? When is the joining date?”

“I will be a team leader for a team of seven inside sales manager. Induction starts on the third of next month and post that I have to confirm where I would join.”

“I wish I was there to celebrate with you. Please say yes to Bangalore office. When can I see you?”

“After fifteen days or may be fourteen if come want to attend convocation. I wish you were here now.”

“I will not miss it for anything in the world. I will take a sick leave. There is no way I would get leave as work has piled till my neck.”

“Cool. When you have to join?”

“A week after college finishes. See you soon. Love you.”

In comes Graduation day. Kavya looked pretty in a black shirt dress and silver stilettos. The struggles of twelve months, the loneliness and her transformation from an indulgent shopaholic to spendthrift seemed worthwhile today. This was a major landmark in our relationship. Kavya's happiness conveyed that she also graduated with me. Proceedings started and she sat full of anticipation and excitement holding my hand in the second row. The names were being called one by one and hall echoed with clapping and cheering.

“ Now I would like to call Aryan on stage. He has contributed in the resource centre with his unique perspective on case studies, networked with different companies to enhance job opportunities, and taken classes for juniors to give them corporate insights. I am really proud to call him my student. Aryan, please come on stage and accept your award. ISB will miss you.”

“Hey, before you are lost in fanfare, let me congratulate you. I am a super proud wife.”

“Love you.”

“T hank you ISB. Life at ISB has been one of the best years of my life as I met so many people from different backgrounds, diverse cultures and different viewpoints. I learnt to make thinking out of box a way of life. I am grateful for all the opportunities, love and accolades I received. I have become a better version of myself.

It was the toughest one year of my life. I had to adjust to a completely different lifestyle, to live alone, to study after saying good byes to books many years ago, to be constantly judged by fellow mates, to not put my corporate logic in everything and be a student.

This day truly belongs to my lady, my Sunshine . It's only because of her I could fulfill my dream of being an ISB graduate, a dream which she made her own till it got fulfilled. She bets on me even when I stopped betting on myself. Here is something I would like to present her as the graduation present. Kavya, I took a challenge to detox and chose a healthy lifestyle. I have stopped drinking and smoking. I know nothing will make you happier than this. This is my way of saying that I love you more than anything in the whole world and I want to grow old with you. Thanks for being my inspiration.

Thanks for choosing me and accepting me completely. Can you please come on the stage to accept our graduation?"

The crowd cheered loudly and Kavya ran to the stage with tearful eyes. There could not be a better ending to our endeavours.

"I am super proud of you, Aryan. Enjoy the graduation party." "Prom night is for teenagers and I am excited like one. Will you dance with me tonight?"

"I will dance with you tonight and forever."

Eighteen

"I enjoyed every second of our first dance together. When did you

learn it? It was one of the nicest parties I have ever attended. I am honoured, happy, proud and exhausted all at a time." I was blabbering in one breath to Aryan.

"I am missing our road trips. I have saved enough from my internship. What do you think of celebrating in Goa?" "How do you read my thoughts? Are you a mind reader?" "Only for you, my Sunshine. Would you like to do some shopping?" "Yes, I need floral dresses, sunscreens and some beads." "Let's do it."

"I missed you so much Aryan. You spoil me like crazy." "This is just the beginning. In many ways, it's a new start for me. I am not proud of it but I could not take Samyukta out of my heart. In last one year I realized even though I cared for you, gave you everything, I was not totally connected to you. A girl like you doesn't need convenience, you need emotional connect. I would like to tell you that time away from you have made me value you more, I see how beautiful you are from inside. I am so proud of you the way you handled everything on your own. I promise to be your soul mate from this moment."

"I love you Aryan. I am glad that you came out of your past hurt. Trust me I felt insecure at times. Will you ever be fun loving guy you used to be? I had doubts and at times I doubted myself if I am good enough for you? I feared if you compared me with Samyukta. And yet I chose to love you with all my heart because I don't know any other way of loving. I would love to listen to your first love story if you are willing to. I won't judge you. It will remove remaining burdens from you."

“I have never shared it without drinks but I will do it now. We were young and away from our families for the first time. We both hailed from Bihar and could relate to each other instantly. Samyukta was the first girl I befriended with. I loved her simplicity and dimpled smile. She kept me grounded and aspired me to be an achiever. She loved me for my failures and vulnerabilities. I could share my weaknesses with her without getting judged. She loved to study and tried hard to make me attend all the classes. (Chuckles).

Samyukta brought my confidence back which I had lost it completely after failing to be an IITian. She focussed on being a good human being. She believed in YOLO and did everything she wished to do. She would not wait for tomorrow and I felt fully alive with her. We laughed and sang as if that was the only way of living.

And then we changed. We grew apart from each other. She called my parents to warn them against my drinking. It led to a big fight. In retrospect, I realize she was trying to save me. I used to drink whole night with my crazy friends, going to highways, sleeping in lectures.

As semesters passed by, Samyukta was getting serious about us. She wished to get engaged as soon as we graduated. The whole college wished the same. I focussed on cementing my career. I wanted to be worthy of her and she thought I was a commitmentphobic.

Next thing I remember, we both were in different cities. Longdistance was the last nail in our relationship's coffin. Samyukta was heart-broken. All these days, she would not take my call, I would write her mail every day to call back with no response. I was furious. I wanted to know why. I guess I knew the answer deep inside my heart.

To make her feel jealous I flirted with any girl I came across. She copied me and fell in love the second time. I got a call from our common friend that Samyukta was tying the knot. I guess we were not meant to be together. It was quite complicated as we had common friends. It makes me feel stupid, but I made them chose between her and me. So I lost some of my college friends over her. I do feel bad about this whole episode of my life. It makes me guilty even today. I have pondered over it countless times with ifs and

but.” Aryan never sounded so despondent and my heart reached for him.

“I promise no matter what, you will never be alone again.”

“ All this is a distant memory from a different lifetime. The past is past and I am ready to embrace our future together. I assure you now it’s only you in my heart.” I wished Aryan regain his boyish charms and laughter.

“You are my whole world. Look in my eyes and tell me what you see.” Aryan said in his deep, loving voice, the voice he used only when he had intense feelings of love.

“I see the passionate and intense love of my husband. Quitting would have been really tough for you. It makes me feel so proud of you, Aryan.” I had prayed every day since we got married about this.

“It was the toughest test of my will power. Old habits die hard and this was really old. There were days I would not feel like getting up, it would be all hazy, every bone and muscle of my body cracked, my eyes puffed and I felt giving up. There were days I will be in bad mood without any reason, and on few days I would feel very low in confidence and yet I carried through one day at a time. I read the book you gave me on thinking big and it really helped me to be true to myself. Initially my wingies mocked me, but when they saw I was determined, they encouraged and supported me. This victory over my habit has given me new confidence. I can achieve anything if I put my heart and soul to it with you by my side. I feel guilty to fight so much over it. It was not worth it and I fully understand all the pain and heartache you went through alone.”

“I don’t know what to say Aryan. You have given me the greatest gift today. Let me just hold you tight.” My eyes were moist. “Hey, we have come to Goa to celebrate. Cheer up, princess.”

“ I want to marry you again in a church. It has been my childhood dream to walk the altar as a Christian bride. Propose on your knees again. We will write our own vows, a promise to forever.”

“Okay, my Drama-queen. Your wish is my command. We will do it on our

fifth anniversary. Let's enjoy Goa. Life is here."

We spent the day on Anjuna beach, playing with tides and rapturing about the vivacious atmosphere. I was in love with Goa vibes, the ladies selling beads and colourful streaks, lovers holding hands while walking, the laid-back shacks, the sunny and bright sky and people making tattoos promising forever love. I marvelled at the orange glow of sky as the sun said adieu. Setting Sun always promises of a better tomorrow.

Nineteen

Aryan's new job constantly challenged him. He had been given

freedom and responsibility to take decisions. He had his own team whom he was grooming for next level. Aryan loved every minute of it. He was paid well but his calls never seemed to stop. The desire to excel has increased manifold in Aryan.

I worried for him as work engulfed him extensively. His work had become his life, nothing else mattered.

"Hi sir, how are you doing? We are working on your order. It's under compliance department. You will get it by next week." Aryan was talking with one of his clients and I was waiting so that we could converse. I longed to tell him about my days, my struggles with my over-demanding boss and finding joys by clicking pictures of my work, doodling and styling amidst them. I longed for conversations and cuddles.

"Try to make it faster."

"Sure sir. I will give it my best shot."

"Hey, what do they think of you? Do they realize it is ten thirty? Is there nothing called work life balance in your office?" I could not take it anymore.

"I have to be available for customers round the clock. I cannot turn away. They give business from which we get salary and incentives. This is how it works." Aryan looked tired.

"I understand the pressure Aryan. I truly do. But every day is same. Even I

have hectic days and normal days. We are hardly eating dinner together and it has been almost two months. I cannot stay up late as I have an early office. So let's eat and then you can continue working."

"It's not in my hand . I really admire the way you have compartmentalised professional and personal life. I wish to achieve it but I cannot at least for ten years. You have to accept it."

"Why are you so angry? Have juice. I will eat, don't bother. I just want you to take care of yourself. I don't want you to be rude and immune to emotions." I replied and shut the door quickly before Aryan could see my tears. It would not have mattered anyways. Lately, Aryan felt so distant. We talked in mono syllables. I wanted to feel what we felt in Goa, but memories of Goa seemed like a dream.

I ate alone thinking of ways we could repay the loan as soon as possible. Aryan is not getting younger and financial instability is taking a toll on him. I remembered Mom's advice to be patient with him. Maybe Aryan needed more time. It has been just two months or maybe he has got used to living without me. I have to be there for him. I once again cried myself to sleep on pillows like many other nights.

"Hey Aryan, I am always there for you. You can share anything you want to share with me. XOXO"

"I am fine Kavya. Please let me work."

Lately, I could not figure how to talk to Aryan. His bad mood never left him even when his career was on right track. I knew by now that Aryan loved his job and it meant long working hours, travelling and staying in hotels, so I never bothered him in his office. I expected him to be with me once he was at home. His promise after the graduation looked like a mirage.

"Hey, I will be travelling for my work for a week. Mukul said he will stay with you if you are fine." I called earlier that day to Mukul to check on Aryan and he happily agreed to spend time with him. He could not see much of Aryan these days. I am relieved for the first time in my life to be away from Aryan. I need time to compose myself and gain my sanity.

"I will call Mukul."

“I am going tomorrow for a week. Can we have a normal night today with no arguments?” I almost pleaded.

“Sure. Let me do my work and you can sleep peacefully.” “This was not my idea of the night. Let’s watch some movies or just be with each other.”

“I have so much going in my mind. I won’t be able to do this.” Aryan had said this quite often in last few months.

“Sure. Good night.”

I left the hall before tears rolled out. I wrote a note to Aryan as I always did when we could not speak.

Dearest Aryan

I wish you would share what is bothering you so that I can help you with it. Six months have passed since you are back and these months seem tougher than the time I spent in PG without you. What has come over you? I understand I love you a lot and you take me for granted at times, but for such a long time? You are rude even to strangers, the waiters and the delivery boy. What are you hiding beneath your arrogance? Are you regretting leaving the job offered in Mumbai or there is something else? Are you going through hormonal change due to quitting drinking?

Let’s work on whatever is troubling you together. I have been counting months, days and hours to be with you while you were away and it seems I am living with a stranger. I am going for a week and you have time to cool off and sort it out. I need my Aryan back.

Don’t forget to have breakfast on time and to miss me. P.S. Have fun with Mukul.

Love

XOXO

Twenty

A pang of guilt crossed my mind when I saw her note. Suddenly, the familiar fear gripped me and I felt tightening of my chest. I worried whether Kavya too would abandon me like Samyukta. I needed to break my shell before it was too late. My thoughts were broken by Mukul’s call.

“Hey dude. Have you reached home yet?”

“I will reach in half an hour, where are you?”

“I am in front of your house.”

“Make yourself home. I will leave as soon as my boss leaves.”

“Oh. I thought you don’t have to impress your boss once you are an ISB graduate.”

“What makes you think so? Boss will be boss.”

“I will grab something to eat and wait for you.”

“I am home at last. Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“I am neither your wife nor customer. Why are you being so formal with me?”

“Don’t talk about customers, man.”

“Last time I talked to you, you got a good incentive. Why are you so frustrated?”

“My numbers are good. Boss is cool. I like my job.”

“Good. Do you ever ask about others how they are doing in their lives? I am getting a promotion next month. I wanted to tell it to you in person. It’s high time you stop behaving like life is all about you. Aryan, don’t be so self-obsessed.” Mukul had hardly got any calls from me in last few months and he was hurt. I am hurting everyone lately.

“Congratulations. Where is the party?” I asked happily punching Mukul.

“Party is in my home. I am off partying at pubs.”

“This is one of the reasons I am acting weird. I mean I don’t do it intentionally, yet quitting is affecting my relation with Kavya. Whenever things are down, she always thinks it’s because of my past relationship. I have moved on, but Kavya has not. She does not trust me completely though she does everything she can for me. What do I do?”

“Hey, she was quite concerned when we talked last time. She loves you with all her heart and yet you are complaining.”

“That is the problem. She loves me way too much. I need to be alone to figure things out. At times, I keep testing her to see how far she would go for our love. I am afraid she has gone too far and might never return. I am guilty of mistreating her when she is the one I love the most.”

“Can I know what you are trying to figure out? You have a life people will die to have. You have got the most wonderful wife, who loves you day and night. Don’t let your past mistakes ruin your present. Share your deepest feelings with Kavya. You have a high paying job and you get to stay in five-star hotels. What else you want?” Mukul had often felt a pang of jealousy with Aryan’s seemingly perfect life. They both had been in same college and started their professional career in same company. Aryan switched jobs and got better perks. He had Kavya while Mukul was still looking for prospective brides.

“We have a lot of catching up to do, dude.” I replied sadly.

“What are you waiting for?” Mukul looked genuinely concerned.

“I have not shared this with Kavya yet. She is extremely sweet and loving, but when it comes to worrying about me, she is just like Mom. She will worry day and night if she knows it. I went to doctor two months back and got my tests done. I felt lots of changes inside my body after quitting drinks. I got frequent headaches, acidity and weakness. I make myself strong everyday not to touch the bottle. It’s not easy, but I am determined to do it.”

“So what does the report said?”

“I have very high cholesterol and sugar. It’s a lethal combination to have. Imagine my frustrations and fears to know this. I want to be there for Kavya till her last breath. She is quite independent yet she will be heart broken. I cannot do that to her. At times I wonder what would be better, her death or my death and I cannot decide. She is the girl I want to grow old with. At times I feel I behave badly with her so she misses me less when I am gone.” I was almost tearful and my heart broke into million pieces.

“Are you telling Kavya has no clue about all this? You should tell her as she can help you overcome your fears. In the worst case, it will prepare her in advance. But dude, you are going to die rich and old. So don’t worry.” Mukul chuckled and punched me to disguise his own fears. He had to be strong for me when Kavya was far away. He could now connect to my distant behaviour and it made me feel no better. I never wanted to be pitied. Jealousy, I could handle in a much better way.

“So what will be your profile after promotion?”

“I will be the boss of team leaders and more people will curse me.” Mukul chuckled.

“Shall we go for a drive?”

“Sure. Play my favourite songs from Beatles.”

“I feel light. Thanks for coming over dude.”

“ISB has changed you. I can see lots of manners.”

“It helps in business. Manner is what wins customers.” I stated in a mechanical tone.

“Wow! What about mannerism with friends?” Mukul had known me for a decade now and I felt better with him around. He was so drama free.

I thought of calling Kavya and thanking her for thoughtful gesture and about the doctor’s visit, but I thought to tell in person. To distract myself, I watched Serendipity, her favourite movie to understand why she liked it so much. It was beyond my comprehension and I tried sleeping. I longed to see her head resting peacefully on my hand.

Twenty one

“Hey Sunshine; I missed holding you before you left. I will make for it once you are back. Seal the deal.”

Aryan had called me Sunshine after a long time and I blushed. Today is a good day. I had three back to back meetings in Connaught place and had to prepare a lot. It was time to wear my professional hat.

I finished most of my meetings by Wednesday. I was looking forward to meeting Anshika since I got to know about Delhi tour. I wanted to share so much and dialled her number.

“Hey Anshika, I am in your town. Are you free tonight?”

“What? I always have time for you. Where are you now?” Anshika was shouting in excitement and got looks in her lab from everyone. We met last in

Anshika's wedding.

"I am in CP to attend Lakme Fashion Week and meet clients. After that I am free."

"Why don't you come to my home and stay over?"

"I won't stay for the night and invade in love bird's paradise." I teased.

"Are you mad? Come over. We both will be super jocular to host you."

"See you both."

"Knock knock."

"Hiieee!!!"

We shouted together and hugged each other. I brought her favourite sweets and a solar orbit necklace. Anshika's home was filled with books and souvenirs from travel. I particularly liked a vintage world map covered with hearts. This was Anshika's way of tracking her honeymoons.

"Lovebirds are flying all over the world. I am so happy for you." "We both are wanderers."

"I have missed you like crazy. I wish we would have settled in the same city."

"I know. Who knows our wish will come true in future? I am keeping my fingers crossed."

"So how is married life other than honeymoons?"

"I am really glad I married Atul as we know each other since college. It looks like forever now. I never knew when our fights stopped and changed into entanglement. Over the years our conversations have only grown longer and friendship deeper. Atul is my rock. You know how cranky I can be with stress. I mean all our classmates are settled by now and I am still studying. I want to earn a decent salary soon. I know it will take a couple of more years." Anshika could be super cheerful and super sad within seconds.

"Hey dear, don't compare your life with others. Everyone has a different journey. You have worked so hard for such a long time and it's just one more year. I am sure you will shine and achieve your dreams."

“I have already started the countdown. How is your married life? Can you believe it has been three years already? It seems like yesterday when we were running around like crazy in shops of Chandni Chowk to buy your perfect wedding lehenga. I miss being with you Kavya.”

“We were so carefree like every other child . I wish to have a time turner so we could be the giggling girls sharing our lunch together in our classrooms. Back then I wished to grow up and go to college and be cool. And see now we have lived three decades of our lives. We are so different from what we thought we would grow up into.”

I said looking far away. I felt a pang of jealousy when I saw Anshika’s wedding album. She was a beaming bride in pink and beige sari. The laughter remark during my engagement and stress on my parent’s face had made me very conscious. My wedding pictures portrayed my sadness instead of excitement. I so wished to have an abating and simple wedding where I could be myself without judgements.

“You did not answer my question?” Anshika sensed my masked feelings.

“I adore Aryan most of the time, I truly do. I respect him for what he is, his achievements, his care and his efforts for us, but there are days I feel I don’t even exist for him. Lately I am in not in love feeling and ignored.” Anshika saw my tears before I pretended to clean my eyes.

“What’s wrong? You know you can share everything with me.”

“I know. I really don’t know where to start. From outside everything is same as before. Aryan is always distant these days. He is too engrossed in his work and he always pushes me away. The transition is taking a toll on him. There is a lot going in his career. Yet there is a limit to a number of times I can take no from him. He is not there for conversation; he is not there even when he is there. We hardly do anything together. I know he is focusing on our better future, yet I feel so lonely. I know being in ISB was not easy for him. The filtered conversations, the halfhearted smiles and monosyllables have compelled us to be formal rather than friends. There is so much going in my life too. I enjoy my job, I hate my boss and I am working on my dream to be an entrepreneur. Every day I am in a dilemma to continue my job or work

towards my dream. I need to settle down in my career. I cannot make excuses to Dad forever. I hardly know what he thinks and feels these days. I doubt if he is having an extramarital affair.”

“That must be terribly tough for you Kavya. To live without your man even when you are together is sad beyond words. Give him some more time and he will come back to you. In the mean time live your life. I know your life revolves around Aryan, but when was the last time you did something for yourself? You loved reading books, going to libraries. When was the last time you did that? You enjoyed painting, you loved writing. Do these more often. You both cannot be unhappy at the same time. Don’t cling to him when he needs his space.”

“You have become an expert in the subject of relationship. I am amazed.”
“I have been in love for a decade. Practice makes a woman perfect.” Anshika chuckled.

“Tell me your love story, Anshika.”

“The college terrace was our meeting point. We studied there, made notes, prepared for presentations and stole kisses. One conversation led to another and I soon realised Atul is the one for me, that he loves digging deep when it comes to dissection. He loves loafers and hates formal shoes, he is crazy about his geek tees, he cries in movies and he is not a sports freak. We talked like lovers and laughed like best friends. By the time we graduated, we realized we could not live without talking to each other. That’s when we decided to get engaged. It’s a very simple story of friendship growing into love.” Anshika replied with twinkling eyes.

“ Atul is perfect for you, though I envy him that he gets to spend his whole life with you instead of me. It’s so good to finally meet both of you at your home.”

“I feel the same for Aryan. Tell me your happiest moment of marriage.”

“I cannot choose one. I am happiest when Aryan holds me tight. I feel so safe and at home. I enjoy our trips, cooking together, movie dates and trust. Deep in my heart I know no matter what life brings to us, we are a team. I won’t bargain the whole universe for Aryan.”

“Tell me about your favourite trip together.”

“I love Vitamin Sea more than anything else in the world and tides talk to me. Yet my favourite trip is our first vacation in Ooty. Those were the most romantic days of my life. Aryan showered me with flowers, chocolates and kisses. We walked hand in hand to most scenic locations and talked sweet nothings. We posed at every point and made a fat scrapbook out of it. He lifted me like movie scenes and we made love till the wee hours. I felt like the heroine of the most romantic movie.” I blushed deeply.

“If you two can put a pause on your never-ending gossip, dinner is ready.” Atul called from the hall.

“Why do you think that we always gossip? We do the most intellectual conversations too.” I replied making face.

“Oh sweetheart, why did not you call me?” Anshika winked at me and kissed Atul on her cheek.

“You exactly know the reason.” I loved and envied their friendly banter and missed Aryan. I wished and prayed for Aryan’s return to normalcy.

“You are really an awesome cook. It’s a three-course meal. Now I know why Anshika married you. You must have impressed her by your culinary skills while I was away in NIFT.” I teased.

“I am so guilty to steal your bestie from you Kavya.” Atul mocked. “I am not something to be stolen. Stop this nonsense and relish the food.” Anshika hit back with smile.

“It’s finger-licking delectable. I am impressed.”

“How is Aryan?” Atul asked once we finished oohing and aahing over food.

“He is doing well. ISB has boosted his career. I bet the company owner would be less involved than him.”

“This is the right time to solidify our careers so we can enjoy our old age in a farm house.” Atul replied and I regretted my sarcastic tone.

“I have an idea. Why don’t we plan our next trip together? It will be so much fun.” Anshika told to change the topic.

“I would love to. I guess we have to wait for some time.” “We will wait.

Let's celebrate Anshika's doctorate together." Atul always knew to say right words at right time.

"It would be great. I am really upbeat to meet you. Please come to visit Bangalore soon. I am excited to take you on tour of the Garden City, Cubbon Park, the magnificent Bangalore Palace, the Chinnaswamy stadium, the always busy Brigade Road and experience the soul-soothing weather. Thank you for having me." "We would love you as our host. Have a tight sleep Kavya."

I left with the widest smile for my hotel next morning. Image of me and Anshika playing together with dolls, sharing books and notes, lunches, getting ready together for school trips, competing against each other in exams, participating in debates, wearing a sari for the first time in school farewell flashed. Anshika had been wearing her studious look with specs and two ponytails since school days. Thank God few things are constant in my life.

Twenty two

Heart to heart conversation is so under rated. I longed for soul

baring conversations with Aryan. I worried if he would be eating properly. One more day and I will be back. Twenty-four hours looked so long.

"Hi Sunshine, what time you land?"

"Today evening at six." I loved Aryan's playful voice.

"I am coming to pick you up."

"Hey, office cab is there. You take rest. Tomorrow is not a Saturday."

"What if I say I cannot wait to see you any minute later than I can?" Aryan quizzed in his most seductive voice.

"Okay. See you soon."

"Hi Aryan, I am here. Where are you?"

"Just turn back."

"I spotted you Aryan."

"How was your trip?"

"Hey, are you really interested? You will not feel I am blabbering too much,

right? I had one of the best work tours. Meetings went well though few of the clients were unbelievably corny. I met few of younger entrepreneurs. I really want to start on my own soon. I could identify lots of future clients. I watched Lakme fashion Week and loved the experimenting silhouettes. It's time to update my wardrobe with key pieces of this season's trends. I stayed with Anshika at her place and we talked whole night. I am super analeptic to see her adulated and pampered by Atul. I miss her in Bangalore."

"How are Anshika and Atul? I wish we all could meet soon. I love them both. You are really doing great in your job. We have lots of catching up to do. I missed you and our conversations in last six months. I am sorry for being so uptight. I promise I will not be like that ever." Aryan squeezed my hand and I squeezed back his tighter.

"Hey do you have an off tomorrow?" I asked mischievously. Anshika had rubbed her playfulness in me.

"What is the plan? I don't have off but I can manage for you. "I should have asked for more. You are in a really good mood." I chuckled.

"I have you and it will keep me in good mood for the lifetime."

"I love you. I have two tickets for IPL match tomorrow. KKR is playing against RCB. Would you like to go with me on a date in Chinnaswamy stadium?"

"You are awesome!!! I love you Kavya." The happiness in his eyes is priceless to me.

"I will take a quick shower and be right here." I said once Aryan stopped the car as we reached home.

"Let me play your favourite music."

"Ah, romance is in again."

"You look gorgeous in the red silk dress. What is the occasion?"

"Homecoming. Welcome me in your arms. This is where I want to be forever."

"Would you like to eat? You must be hungry?"

"I am very much hungry. Let me devour you dearest." I kissed his forehead,

and he kissed me back. It was the kind of kiss which raised my knee backward.

Twenty three

Hi Sunshine

I love you much more than all the stars combined together. I am sorry for past six months. I know I have been rude, I have been arrogant, I have been distant and I have been too self-centred. I wish to assure you that it is a ghost of past now and I am my normal self. Thanks for an awesome date yesterday. It was so thoughtful of you to send Mukul, one person I am as comfortable as you.

Our conversations gave me a new perspective. I have to stop worrying about what could go wrong and look forward to what could go right. You know, what is my dearest wish? To complete life's journey with you till the end. I fear at times I might not have the chance, but why to spoil today for it? Today is terrific and it is what we have. I went to the doctor and my reports are really bad. Trust me, I am doing everything to make it a thing of past. It seems fifteen years of stock will not go down so easily. I need you in this. I have finally decided to choose a healthy lifestyle. What do you say if we walk hand in hand every morning?

I love you and will always do.

P.S. What we started is still unfinished that evening.

Love

Aryan

I read it and re-read it. I could not stop my tears and then I remembered I was in office. I took continuous deep breathes and composed myself. If Aryan was telling reports were bad, that meant those were really bad. I am not going to lose Aryan to some reports. I immediately booked a doctor's appointment for Saturday.

“Hi doctor, I have prepared myself to be strong. Please don't hide anything. Tell me how bad it is.” I said in my composed tone, yet my voice gave away. Aryan squeezed my hand.

“It is quite bad, but if you work honestly to curtail it with a healthy diet, exercise and lifestyle, you can still be okay in a year’s time. Here is the diet chart. Follow it religiously.” The doctor looked straight in Aryan’s eyes. The look was kind as well as challenging.

“I really want to be healthy and I will follow it.”

“We are together in this and we will make it work. When should we visit again?”

“I am so touched that you are a team. I have seen many couples grow apart due to this. Don’t let that happen to you. See me after four weeks.” I prayed to be strong enough to pass on my strength to Aryan.

“Thank you doctor. Have a nice day.”

“Is there anything you want to ask Aryan?” The doctor with his years of experience noticed the hesitant body language of Aryan. “Yes doctor. What do I do with my unusually frequent mood swings and desire to be alone?”

“I am so proud of you, Aryan. Most of the people are afraid to accept and share their weaknesses. Now that you know it is happening with you, you have to be more patient with yourself. It will go with time. Exercise and meditation will help you. You can also try maintaining a journal. Writing is quite liberating to some people. You are lucky to have an understanding wife. Don’t be too hard on yourself. You have already conquered the most difficult phase.” The doctor answered with the kindest smile and I squeezed Aryan’s hands.

“Thanks.”

“Hey Kavya, I was thinking if we could go to Shirdih on our anniversary instead of Andaman’s, would you be Okay? I need the power of prayer. I have wanted to go there for a long time.” Aryan asked hesitatingly as he knew I have been planning for Andaman’s for a long time. I had to wait to wear my new floral playsuit I bought for the trip.

“Sure. I went there once a long time back and Shirdih is really peaceful. I have a week’s leaves already approved.”

“My schedule is extremely full so I would just take one day off on Friday. We will start on Thursday night and will return on Sunday. Don’t be disappointed. We will go to Andaman’s soon.”

“I am fine Aryan. I understand your work pressure. Relax.”

The prayer of power pulled us closer. Of all the temples we have visited, Shirdih was most serene. There was no priest to ask for money, there were no temple agents and everyone was focussed on praying. Though there was a huge crowd, it was well-managed. Chanting of mantra made the atmosphere so divine. Aryan and I prayed together and felt we received the direct blessing from Sai Baba. We sat there for a while to see the most spiritual Kakkad aarti and it connected our souls. Aryan put vermilion on my forehead after aarti as he did whenever we went to a temple. These small rituals made our marriage rich and meaningful.

Twenty four

“Happy journey and take care.” I said embracing Kavya tightly.

“I found my home in your arms Aryan. I am going to miss you so much. Don’t leave me yet.”

“This is international flight Sunshine, better be early. I have crosschecked everything, the documents, forex card, your stay details, gloves, shocks, thermals, woollens and groceries for the first week. You should be fine.” I said squeezing her hand.

“Do you really want me to go?” Kavya asked half crying and making face like a child.

“No and Yes. I can’t bear to be away from you for so long. On the other side, this journey will take you one step closer to your dreams.”

“I have fallen in love with you all over again for your faith in me.”

“Remember this when you fight with me next time.” I teased. “I fight with you coz I love you so much.”

“I know.” I could not take my eyes off Kavya’s ever-changing expressions on her face.

“Tell me mister is it really possible for me to love you more than I already do?”

“Nothing is impossible.”

Still embraced in the hug, we both smiled and our eyes met. No words were exchanged and yet we conversed. Kavya left for departure and I stood there till I could see her marching confidently.

“I am going to miss her so much.” I thought and started our Punto. The front seat looked unusually empty without Kavya. To add to it, a sad song was playing in radio.

My Dearest Aryan

Love you loads. I have started missing you already. I know this is the toughest decision of your life. And yet, you let me go coz you love me lot. Your love has given me wings to go for my dreams. You know Aryan, I always believed in fairy tales and you made those fairy tales true for me. I cannot tell how much I love being your wife.

Thank you for being my knight. I will miss you, I will miss cuddling with you, I will miss your hugs, I will miss your smile, I will miss our praying together, I will miss the lingering perfume which reminds me of you, I will miss watching cricket and cricket analysis, I will miss just hanging around you, I will miss your voice, I will miss everything about you. I will keep you posted about everything with my love letters. Keep watching for this space.

And thanks for holding me on the airport. It's so unlike you to PDA. I will hold on to our airport hug until I see you again.

Love and hugs

XOXO

Kavya had just left and the home looked lifeless. Video calls and mails would keep me sane. I read the letter and reread it before exhaustion consumed me in sound sleep.

Days away from her finally made me learn to express through letters again.

We were in completely different time zones and hence could talk mostly on weekends. For rest of the days, we drafted mails for each other. Those mails

could create a beautiful collection of love letters for our grandchildren. I marvelled how my heart did not explode with overwhelming feelings of love and longingness. Kavya's letters described her struggles to adjust in the land of strangers, how her speed was considered below average, how her accents were mocked at and her interesting expeditions to beautiful Brighton Beach and how she could not go to water due to freezing cold and satisfied herself by walking on pebbles. She accounted her love for maple leaves and picked them from the Hyde Park, washed and dried them. She was bringing them to me with her. Kavya gushed about awesome craft shops and how she wished to join a craft class. She further described in another mail how much she missed me when she saw the whole city from the London Eye. London glittered like a new bride on thirty-first of December.

I so wished to surprise her by arriving unannounced, but it was the busiest quarter of the year. I dogged myself further in my work and earned handsome incentives. I waited and waited for my Kavya.

Twenty five

“ Welcome to Bengaluru International Airport. Thank you for choosing British Airways, we wish you a pleasant stay.”

The announcement of airhostess was music to my ears. I have fondest memories of Bangalore airport and long drives with Aryan. I love the food stalls, the wall graphics which depict its rich heritage and the hustle-bustle. It reminds me of going home together and to honeymoons.

Yes!!!

I am home at last . I don't know how Aryan will react to my surprises. I am a shopaholic. I cherished my off-white tee which read 'One who says money cannot buy everything does not know where to shop from'. Store mannequins were my friends and they literally invited me. I always picked things for Aryan whenever I picked for me which was pretty often.

“What you are getting for me from London?” Aryan asked when he saw me in a new gown in our video chat.

“Nothing, I spent all my money in travelling and exploring.” I replied making

a sad face.

“Good . So no extra baggage charges this time. I am so proud of you Kavya.” Aryan replied in a relieved tone. We had fought a lot about my shopping.

“Mmmmm” The airport bus took me to the port and I waited for my luggage. My eyes were fixed on the exit door to search Aryan.

“Hello Sunshine. When can I see you?”

“As soon I get my luggage. It is taking ages. Where are you?” “Sleeping in car”

“When did you come?” Aryan had not slept the whole night. “I reached two hours early. I could not risk falling asleep.”

“I would have killed you if you would have done that. I got my luggage. I am coming.”

“Are these your luggage or someone else’s? You had only two bags when you left!” Aryan could not stop grinning.

“I have six now. Don’t give me that look. I could not resist leather boots, spunky sneakers, the souvenirs and creative scrapbooks.” “I was expecting it.” Aryan chuckled.

“I am super hungry. The only thing I missed more than Home-made food is you. Get me some Indian food.”

We relished hot and spicy Indian food. Simple pleasures of life with Aryan are the most cherished ones. I was so relieved to say bye to bland foods.

“This is home!!!”

“Let’s go to our home princess.” Aryan took the luggage trolley and held my hand while we crossed the road. I felt relaxed as soon as Aryan ignited the car key. Jet lag was real!!!

“I am so exhilarated to be here and now. See what I got for you.” “Do you really want to open it now?”

“Yes, I have waited too long already. I have got you the brown leather duffle bag full of your favourite stuff. Check them out.” I showed him brown leather

boot, casual belt, crisp white shirt, khaki bomber jacket, black party shirt, fossil watch, wallet and organizer. Aryan kept rolling his eyes.

“ You have brought whole London for me?”

“Ha ha. I forgot to show you this.”

“There is more?”

“Check this ball from Lord’s.”

“It’s awesome!!! I hated watching cricket alone while you were away.”

“I wish to sip my favourite Choco frappe with you in beautiful, roadside cafes in London. We could talk forever there.”

I watched my city in wonderment. No matter where I go, Bangalore will always be home to me.

Twenty six

“Where are we?” Kavya asked in up beat tone.

“What, you have forgotten Bangalore just in few days?” I asked teasing her.

“This is not where we used to live when I left.”

“Welcome to our new home. Let’s get inside. I cannot wait to show you.”

I opened the door and first thing Kavya noticed was the white hallway full of books. I had waited so long to see her expression. Kavya and books were made for each other and I am glad I could finally gift her library.

“It’s exactly how I dreamt of my own library. It’s so surreal!” Kavya could not contain her excitement and hugged me tight.

Kavya wandered around. She went to the bedroom and it exuded old-age charm with dark chocolate mahogany king-size bed. The photos from our happy honeymoons adorned the beige wall. Kavya stood there to soak into memories. A picture in which I was wiping Kavya’s tears, another picture where our faces were covered with cakes, a picture walking hand in hand in Gokarna beach, a picture of paragliding in Goa, A DDLJ pose in a mustard farm which we clicked on the way to our village, A picture of me on my knees and Kavya saying yes on the hill top.

“These all are my most favourite photos of us!”

“I know.”

Kavya loved the cosy bed, with Mr Right and Mrs Always Right cushions, the orange lamp and my wardrobe which was always organized.

“Where is my wardrobe?” Kavya could never decide what she loves more, books or her clothes.

“Patience princess, first have a look at marble bathing tub.” “Wow!!!”

“Nothing soothes me like a long and uninterrupted shower.” “Why don’t you take a shower? You must be tired.”

“Sure.”

“The light of my life is here!!! You look so gorgeous in the peplum red dress. Where did you get it from princess?”

“In London, H&M store, Oxford Street.”

“I cannot take my eyes off you. It’s time to show you your favourite room.”

Kavya entered another room and gaped. It looked exact copy from her dreams. There was a dark chocolate wooden study table, full of colourful stationeries and notebooks. The bed was same as other room and her soft toys smiled at her.

At last, she saw her modular wardrobe with lots of compartments where I had arranged her clothes by colour and occasion. The shoe rack was full of sneakers and her only piece of red heel. She had bought heel only once for the wedding. She loved sneakers and flip flops as in them she could comfortably roam around and explore to her heart’s content. She was jumping with joy to see her wonderful wardrobe. I had put my most thoughts into it. Kavya turned around to smile at me and saw lighted candles. Soft music played in the background.

“The closet is big enough to get us entangled inside.” Kavya chuckled.

“I would love that.” I winked at her.

“I can smell my favourite Belgium dark chocolate cake. Am I forgetting something?”

“Welcome to our home. Happy homecoming.”

“This feels like home of our dreams, how much we are going to pay as rent for it?”

“This is our home, not the rented one.”

“What!!! Wait a minute. You bought home while I was away. Let me have another tour. I am on cloud nine.”

“You have all the time to do it. I know you hate goodbyes and shifting, so I did it for you.”

“Wow. It’s awesome. It’s like the home I have always dreamt of!!! Are you a mind reader?”

“I know you too well by now. You have an amazing sense of detail and I did not fail to notice.”

“So you actually listen to me when you pretend to watch TV? I am quite impressed. It is the best gift ever. I love you.”

“What about Birthday trip last year? You said it was your best gift ever.”

“Will you ever stop teasing me?”

Twenty seven

“ Good morning Sunshine.” Aryan kissed me on my forehead and I smiled sheepishly.

“Is it already morning? I slept just now.”

“You will get used to Indian time soon. Till then take your time and work for your enterprise.”

“Don’t mock me. I have no clue where to start my journey. I have applied in a number of portals and waiting for the response. I could use some rest in the meantime and relish being in our home. What’s the plan for the day?”

“Knock Knock, Office calling.”

“Ohhhhhh. Here are gifts for your office friends, your boss, and office boy.”

“I love you Kavya. I really admire your thoughtfulness and kindness towards everyone.”

“Come soon. I am going to miss you.” I pulled Aryan and hugged tightly. I adored the way small curl of his hair fell on his forehead, his brown eyes with big eyelashes, his cute nose and sexy smile. His face had an aura of confidence and optimism. Aryan was looking dashing in my favourite Khaki shirt and black trousers.

“I will come only after finishing my job for the day which is quite a lot.”

“Drive safe.” I stood at doorway till I could see Aryan. I took my own sweet time to really look in to our home. I had dreamt of owning a home since childhood. I loved travelling yet I wanted a base which will be constant in my life. Dad had a transferrable job, so I never had a home which I would call my childhood home. We explored different states; different people and I made friends everywhere in India. Yet I craved for my space where I could keep coming back and remember memories fondly. This would be our children’s childhood home. Aryan had gone into great details to keep the home as I had always wanted. I loved every nook and corner of our home. After wandering from one room to other, I finally settled in the balcony facing the greenery. The balcony has always been my favourite corner. I had inherited the green finger from my Mom. I enjoyed sitting there in a rocking chair and visualizing which all pots and plants I would put there. The orange and grey sky looked so beautiful and serene to the ever moving vehicles. Watching sky always inspired me. It didn’t took long for me to love in love with the best gift by Aryan, childhood dream, a place I can proudly call home sweet home.

The phone beeped and I picked it in the first ring. I craved companionship after three months of solitude.

“Hi Anshika, how are you? There is so much to share.” “I thought so.” Anshika chuckled.

“Last two days were like a fairy tale. I am the only love of Aryan now...I am his sunshine.

Remember as a child I devoured on mythology? Mom sent me Mahabharata, Ramayana, Bhagwat Puranas from my grandparents’ library. She got them repaired and they are as good as new for my library. I felt I got a piece of my grandparents.” “You must be super ecstatic!!!Aunty could not have chosen better timing for sending them. When you used to narrate the stories from Mahabharata, you looked so wise, even with your childish face. Draupadi intrigued me and still does. I miss reading books with you. I remember how you did not sleep till your book was finished in summer holidays.” Anshika said remembering fondly our book club in school where we used to buy a book and everyone shared it. Life was so simple back then.

“How come you are not talking about London? Going there was your dream.”

“London is the shopping paradise. Don’t even ask how much I indulged myself. Other than world-famous stores, I went to Notting Hills. I loved the colourful and vibrant shops on the street. And guess what, just like the commercial street of Bangalore and Linking Road of Mumbai, I bargained in those exotic shops of Notting Hills. I was in the land of fairies, princess, witches and wizards.

In spite of so much hard work and challenges, it was my longest vacation. I loved every minute of it even after surviving on minimalistic resources of vegetarian options. I always double checked the ingredients to be sure. I cried when I had to pay a surcharge for extra luggage, but it was impossible to resist buying them.”

“Wow. Did you see Pandora store? I am crazy about it.”

“Yes, I went to Pandora twice and marvelled at beautiful bracelets. I need to earn enough someday so that those precious pieces don’t feel expensive to me. What about you? When are you coming to see my home?”

“I will come as soon as my viva gets over. I am dying to meet you. Atul keeps me on my toes whenever I feel I am running behind in my life clock.”

“This too shall pass, Anshika. Tell me more.”

“Atul has been getting calls from many institutes but he is waiting for me to finish so we will join together. I wish his Dad takes a leaf out of Atul’s character. He measures people’s worth with their salary. Thank God I have Atul. I don’t know what I would have done if I would have got married to some male chauvinist.”

“I know you two will shine together. You have been making me proud since childhood days. You are almost there; just go for the last leap.” I replied wishing I could hold Anshika.

“I wish I could hug you now, Kavya. Over a couple of years as a wife, I have realized letting people sleep peacefully is one of the best ways of conveying love. We used to fight so much over Atul’s long sleeping hours initially.”

“I agree. Aryan is irresistibly cute when he sleeps and I like to caress his nose. I love watching him sleep though I hate his snoring. He makes up for it by telling snoring means he puts off all his guard with me.”

“Tell me; are you still in touch with Samyukta?”

“It’s not that I ever call her or write to her. I have just met her once and I don’t hate her as everyone expects me to.” I replied defensively.

“I am not against her, Kavya. Samyukta still occupies your thoughts. Don’t complicate your life. Till you will not forget the past, Aryan cannot. If I would have been you, I would not have accepted that diary of Samyukta. I still cannot comprehend why she gave it to you. It might have truth or it might have lies. When you love Aryan so much, why do you need someone else’s view? Let the past be past.”

“Thank you Anshika. I have not even opened Samyukta’s diary. I try very hard, trust me, to get over his past. I promise to you, one day I will.” I replied determinedly.

“You are the best judge of your life, Kavya. I hope that day come really soon. Till then stay loved and all the luck for your first step. I love you and always will.”

“Love you too. I will call you back super soon to update on everything.”

Twenty eight

It has been three months since I came back from London. I waited

with baited breath to get replies from my prospective clients. It’s frustrating to wait for getting work and I thought my job was boring. Aryan had to suffer my constant mood swings while I was struggling to find jobs and stable my career.

I had changed three jobs in five years. Nine to five jobs were not my cup of tea. I wish Dad understood this but it was tough for him as he was with the same company for last forty years. I hoped with all my heart that my decision to quit job proves right. I would make it right no matter what. I thought to myself.

Life will keep on teaching me patience till I will not learn it. I had done everything I could think of. I needed work desperately. After a series of rejections finally I got an appointment. Will it be my first step to be an entrepreneur?

“Good morning princess. Good luck for the day.”

“Good morning Lifeline. This is the best way to start a morning. I can’t say you how much I love you and how much I missed you in London. I missed your presence, I missed your voice, I missed your kisses, I missed our movie dates and most of all I missed your help in finding directions.”

“London days are over, Sunshine. We are here together now and forever. Breakfast is ready and I have taken the half day off so that I will drop you to the work. Get ready soon.”

“Awww. Have I told you that you are the best husband of the world?”

“Yes. Time and again.”

“So let me tell one more time. I love you for spoiling me, I love you for encouraging me and I love you for making me what I am today. I have evolved as a better person with you. And now the biggest question of all, what should I wear for the day? It’s a big day.”

“I can see your wardrobe overflowing.”

“My only wish is that you be serious about my wardrobe. I will see you in precisely thirty minutes.” I left making a face of mock disappointment.

“I am ready. Wish me luck.” I entered the hall beaming with joy. I looked every inch a professional in my Monochrome A-line dress. White sneakers, a statement neckpiece and white structural bag completed my look.

“Before killing people with looks, eat sandwich and drink juice.” “Are you saying I look perfect for my presentation?” I asked to cross-check. Though I was faking confidence, I was nervous as hell.

“Have you ever gone wrong?”

“Thanks Honey.”

“I can smell London tone.”

“Ha ha. Let’s go for the drive. I need a good luck hug.” “You will shine.”

Aryan hugged me tightly.

“Love you.”

“All the best Sunshine.”

“Your trust is my biggest treasure . You so much remind me of my Dad who used to keep sweets ready for me on my result dates.” I had never been so nervous in my whole life, not even during my campus placements. I had too many commitments and yet I had taken risk to give wings to my dreams. I prayed hard.

“I will keep sweets ready.”

“Love you Mister. Drive safe.”

“It’s time to be in professional mode. I have to crack this.”

This was the most fashionable reception I had seen in a long time. I could not stop comparing the colourful, bright vibes of India which was in so much contrast with black, white and greys of London. I missed colours in London. I had been to Maximus City and was surprised by its speed.

London was a different story. For the first time in life I felt I needed to work on my pace as I got constant feedback on improving my speed....

I was quick, be it in my school, college or jobs. Their working style was quite different and I wanted to learn it all. This was my only chance to polish my skills and establish myself. I had my share of corporate experience, and I felt right to do things on my own. London had made me more clear, straightforward and confident. After the initial struggles, I was shining in my project in London School of Fashion. It was not easy to survive being a vegetarian, yet London has so much to offer and it kept my spirits high.

“Kavya”?

My name brought me back to my environment. I have to be myself and give my best. I dried my sweating palms with tissue paper and went inside.

“Hi Kavya; tell us about yourself.”

“Well, creativity is a way of living for me. I am very passionate and love to do things differently. I love styling. I have eight years of experience with designing, styling and creating stories. With my experience and passion, I can now do projects on my own.”

“How do you describe yourself as a person?”

“I am quite detailed and organized when it comes to planning, yet I follow my instincts and at times do things on impulse. I trust people very easily and yet my judgement of people is usually right. I use the logic and follow my heart as well. I dream big as if there is no limitation and work diligently towards achieving them.”

“I see you started as a Unit Visual merchandiser. So how did a typical work day look back then?”

“The best part of being in a shop is that every day is different. Someday I plan for a campaign, another day I train people, another day I work for making a beautiful store from scratch, yet another day I observe customers and provide delightful customer service. So it's something new every day. People management is the biggest learning. It's amazing how everyone has a different perspective on a topic. To brainstorm them and get a common solution is so much fun. I am a better person because of my job. I travelled to places, made many friends, learnt so much because of my job.” I replied enthusiastically.

“I have never met someone so passionate and energetic. Can we see your portfolio?”

“Yes please. Here it is. This wedding set up with the crescent Moon as wedding chair and star-studded sky as the backdrop is my favourite. True love should make one free and give wings.” “I am impressed. Can you tell something about your London days? What was the most inspiring thing you experienced there?”

“Oh , there were many. The respect for time, the punctuality, the awesome public services, education and so on. I was particularly amazed by the

celebration of Chinese New year with huge pump and show in Trafalgar Square. It painted London's monochrome canvas into vibrancy and colourful. There was art everywhere, be it handmade umbrellas, or house décor, the dance performances, the presentation of stalls, the food and enthusiasm of people. I could spot people from every part of the world. This kind of celebrations actually make London global city."

"What about much Overrated Christmas celebrations? I see you were in London last December."

"I was totally soaked in festive mood. London was lit with lights so beautifully that even stars shone dimmer, full with merry sounds of carols and every shop was shouting sale. I have never seen so many Christmas trees in my whole life. I loved to be in church and streets and everywhere I was greeted with smiles. Yet the spirit of celebrating Chinese New year looked more powerful to me as it was the celebration of secularism and equal rights."

"Good. You have made the best use of your time in London. How do you want to go about this project as you don't have your team and it's one of the massive projects? We want perfection in everything."

"I have a team of vendors who will create and install props. I will be there from beginning to end to ensure it's as per expectations." I answered confidently.

"You are all set to become an entrepreneur. What is your vision for your company?"

"Thank you. It's my first step towards it and I do believe in marketing, yet I want my work to speak so I get my customers converted to fans."

"It sounds good. You need to prepare a proper business plan before you go to get venture capital. It has to be backed up with numbers and timelines. It has to state clearly why it is unique from other similar service providers."

"Thank you for your suggestion. I am working on the same with my husband. He is very good with finance."

"Good. You are on right track. We love your dedication and confidence. In

the long run, you will need your team and working space. Let's meet next week to discuss in details. Here is the blueprint."

"Thank you so much. You will be glad you gave this to me." I thanked them profoundly beaming with joy. This was my first independent project and I could not wait to start working.

"Hi Sweetheart."

"I am in the front of your office gate facing Outer Ring Road. Call it a day and come out." I was jumping with happiness.

"Wow. I had forgotten you can surprise me even after all these years. Give me ten minutes."

"See you."

"Hi Dad, I got my first project. Thank you for your faith and confidence in me. I am super ecstatic. Bless me. Work starts tomorrow."

"You always have my blessings Kavya. I hope you will find satisfaction and challenges from it. Talk to Mom."

"Hi Mom, give me a tight hug. Wish you both were here to celebrate with me."

"We are always there with you Kavya. Keep shining."

"Thanks. Bye Mom."

Twenty nine

"Guess what. I got the deal. Can you believe it?" I shouted as soon as Aryan came out from his office.

"Wow, I am a super proud hubby. So where do you want to celebrate?"

"I will treat you. You chose the venue. I am little scared though."

"Sure. Let me drive." Even after years of driving, Aryan was extra cautious whenever he drove with me. He could not let a loss of concentration harm me in any way.

"Where are we going? As long as it's with you anything is fine with me."

“Sure Dramaqueen. We will reach in sometime.”

“Welcome Mam. Welcome sir. Have a delightful dinner experience.” The security greeted politely and with a genuine smile. I wished Aryan was kind to service people as well. Instead of voicing it, I just smiled and greeted the security.

“This looks grand.”

“We are going on the top floor.”

“Wow, open air is my favourite. How can you do everything just in seconds?”

“Anything for you princess.”

The stars shone in the black sky with full moon, cool breezes touched our cheeks and ruffled my hair which I had let open. We looked deep into each other's eyes. It could very well fit in a movie. “This is just like Yashraj movies.”

“Special moments need to be celebrated in a special way. I am so delighted that you have finally found your niche after struggling for years professionally. I wished I could have helped you do the same earlier, but I was discovering my own trajectory.”

“Hi Mam; your husband has requested to dedicate this song to you. Here we are.” A girl with the sweetest smile and a guy with guitar greeted us.

“Sure.” I smiled throughout humming to the tune along with them on KalHoNaaHo title track.

“Thank you so much. It was melodious. Sonu Nigam is my favourite. Take a bow. You two nailed it.”

“I cannot believe this. When did you do all these?”

“Just before we reached here. Let's eat. I am starving.” “I will have crispy baby corns, veg cutlet and a fruit punch.” “I will have usual chicken starter and soup.”

“Cheers.”

“Have you thought a name for your enterprise?”

“It’s my first project. Let me complete it nicely. There is plenty of time for processes.”

“You should be professional from first project Kavya. Don’t procrastinate and if you will not take it seriously then who else will. You need a team too. I have shortlisted few of them. The final call is yours.”

“I thought I will do it with my friends.”

“Don’t mix business and friendships. Both get hurt by it.” “How do you know so much? Sometimes you are much wiser for your age.”

“I had done a lighting business on a very small scale with my friends while I was in college. It did not work.” Aryan said sadly. “It did not work so that you will be CEO someday.” I replied reassuringly squeezing his hands.

“I love you. But I am serious on this. You have worked very hard and now you deserve success. Planning always helps.”

“ Cheers. Thank you for the dinner date. I loved it.”

“I love you. I have an early meeting tomorrow. I need to sleep.” “Hold me tight before you sleep.”

“Are not you sleeping Kavya?”

“I want to check the blue print before I sleep. I don’t want to lose a second to start on my project.”

“Sure. Don’t be very late. Goodnight then.”

I went to my study table and opened the blue print. It looked really complex and yet magnificent. I went to get my journal. Jotting down always made me think with clarity and confidence. I meticulously filled few pages with steps, possible vendors, timelines, and feasibility. Satisfied with my first draft of the workflow, I kept things back and a bright yellow journal fell. This was my favourite journal given by Mom and I smiled with memories.

Thirty

“ **Hey** Sunshine! Have you applied for the leaves?” Aryan asked me after dinner.

“Leaves?”

“We will be celebrating our first anniversary next month. Don’t tell me you forgot about it.”

“Are you mad? Tell me the plan.”

“I know you love exploring. I was thinking about Manali.”

“I cannot wait!!! I will apply for leaves tomorrow. Please book the tickets.”

“Great.”

I called Anshika next day to finalize on my holiday outfits. “Guess what? I am going on the second honeymoon.”

“Wow. Where?”

“Manali!!!”

“Great. Have you decided on outfits?”

“I called you for that, Anshika. My wardrobe is full and still I have nothing to wear.”

“Why don’t you ask Aryan to choose your outfits? It will be fun and you would get to know his taste.”

“You are a darling. Let me do that. How are you?”

“I am still the same slogging for my Ph.D. Mom is pestering me to get married soon.”

“You love Atul, right?”

“Of course I do. Yet I need some more time. I really want to enjoy my marriage and being in the lab with microbes every waking hour is not my idea of enjoying.”

“Ha ha. Chill Anshika. Soon you will miss your lab days.” “I know. My mentor is watching me like a hawk. I will call you later. I cannot wait to see Aryan’s choice. Love you babes.”

“Take care. Bye.”

I loved her idea and Aryan obliged happily. He did not let me see what he selected and packed my bag himself. I was super excited. It was a much-needed vacation for both of us. As we travelled in flight, Aryan made me sit in the window seat. He was intrigued by my love for the clouds and the sky.

“Would you please order Maggie for me, Aryan? It keeps my headache away in flight take-offs.”

“Sure. Take something else, too. What is so special about Maggie?” “Maggie has saved me many times when I stayed in hostel. What about you?”

“I love omelette with salt and pepper.”

“I will learn to make omelette for you.”

The hotel cab driver was waiting for us at the airport and as he drove us, he told about the culture and oldest temple of Manali. I could not wait for our expeditions. The receptionist greeted us with the widest smile and brightest lipstick. Cake and red roses welcomed us in our room.

“I love you Aryan. This has been the most happening year of my life.”

“I know life would not be a cakewalk with me, but we would always be together on this roller coaster. I love you too.” Aryan pulled and hugged me tight. I wanted to be in his embrace forever.

Aryan opened the window and what I saw was breath-taking view. The snow-cladded hills stretched as far as my eyes could see and I wanted to be there.

“Let’s go.”

“Wear your boots and overcoat. I have teamed them with rugged denim and yellow tee.”

“I am impressed!!! I can save much time in the morning if you do it for me daily.” I chuckled.

“ I am glad you liked it, but don’t even think about it. I have picked a black lace dress for candle light dinner tonight. For tomorrow, I have brought your denim jumpsuit and cap.”

“I love your style. It is so chic as well as comfortable. Let’s go now.”

We walked holding hands as cool breeze greeted us. It was the first time I touched snow. It was whiter than milk and colder than anything I ever experienced. I started making snow balls and hitting them at Aryan playfully. He followed me and we laughed without care. Though I was shivering with cold, I was in no mood of going back.

“Let’s make a snowman together.” I shouted excitedly and Aryan agreed to my astonishment. I loved his playful side and how accurately he collected snow. As we clicked pictures with our snowman, I could feel the soft and crystal white snow on my palm.

“It’s snowing!!!”

“I have always loved cloud-cladded sky and the sound of rain. No matter what, petrichor always made me smile. I have watched the rain in amazement from my balcony whenever I could. I never thought I would love something more than getting drenched in rain but snowfall is magical. I have experienced it for the very first time. Please click a picture of me with snow. I want to frame this moment forever.” He obliged with a dozen of those...

Thirty one

“Hi Sunshine, I was planning for a housewarming party. Atul called

me to plan a surprise for Anshika. She has officially become Doctor Anshika now.” Aryan conveyed me my most favourite news once he was back from office.

“Wow!!! It would be super fun. Let’s make a guest list.” “I would prefer five of us.”

“Okay. When is the party?”

“Saturday.”

“Congratulations!!!” Anshika, Atul and Mukul screamed in unison as Aryan opened the door.

“I cannot believe we all are here.”

“So where are our gifts from London?” Mukul screamed in the top of his hoarse voice as music was too loud.

“Let’s toast Anshika first.”

“Aha. You did not get anything. Don’t tell me. We heard someone got three bags full of gifts! Is it true or rumour?” Atul mocked me.

“Ok. Here it goes. London freeze magnets, London notebooks, coin bags, teas and chocolates for all of you. I have taken really long to select them. So handle with care.”

“Thank you Kavya. You have no idea how much we missed you. But all of us combined, Aryan missed you much more.”

“Aha. Thank you for coming. I was in the land of strangers. Don’t ask me how much I missed familiarity. There is an exclusive gift for each one of you too.”

“Wow! You got me a coffee mug which looks like a camera lens?” Mukul’s smile made my wandering in the Notting Hill streets worthwhile for finding a gift for him which he would connect to.

“It’s for our shared love of photography. Cheers.”

“I loved my ‘Geek is cool’ backpack.” Atul said flaunting it on his back.

“Show me what all you got for Aryan.”

“You are a lucky man!!!” Mukul punched Aryan playfully as Aryan proudly flaunted his gifts.

“I cannot agree with you more.”

“Let me show our Housewarming gifts. We got a type writershaped keyboard for your love of writing and a cricket stadium lookalike clock for you Aryan.” I exclaimed in joy as I unwrapped Anshika’s gifts.

“I got you a bamboo plant and laughing Buddha. These are considered lucky for new beginnings.”

“Thanks Mukul. The Buddha has been so intricately sculptured. I will place it at the entrance.”

“Let the celebrations begin. Let’s go to the other room.” Aryan said once we all stopped oohing and aahing over our gifts.

I switched off the music and slide show started. It depicted Anshika’s journey as a school girl. She always carried a book and pen. There were compliments from her favourite biology teacher. Next slide showed her as college girl holding Atul’s hand on their college terrace. She looked super studious in her white long-sleeve apron. Her lab picture with mentor had a funny caption. We all laughed. The last slide showed her presenting thesis in viva with a popping congratulation.

“Take a bow lady. I am super proud of you.” Atul beamed proudly bowing to Anshika.

“Thank you for gifting me this. I will cherish it forever.” I noticed tears of happiness in her eyes.

“Aye Anshika, give me a hug. I am a super proud bestie.”

“I loved that you have made my wedding gift as the focal point of your hall. I cannot believe Kavya you are the same girl who cried buckets if you stood second in class. Look at you now, you have faced life’s ups and down with courage. I am so proud of you.” Anshika whispered as we hugged each other.

“Congratulations Anshika.” Aryan and Mukul said in unison. “Thank you.” “Let’s eat. I am starving. Mukul and Aryan helped me in cooking.” “You are a sweetheart, Mukul.” Anshika thanked him profusely.

“It’s my pleasure.” Mukul replied with a smile. He longed for a life partner when he saw his friends engrossed in making each other eat.

“Thank you for being amazing host Aryan and Kavya. You have a beautiful home!” Anshika complemented as she knew this home was straight out of my childhood dreams. She pinched me and we both smiled.

“It’s all Kavya’s ideas.” Aryan replied beaming proudly. “I just dreamt of it and Aryan made it real. Who need Santa when you have lifelong Santa staying with you?”

“Let’s plan for next reunion soon.” Mukul voiced our wish. “We will meet in Mukul’s wedding. What say mate?” Atul punched Mukul lovingly.

“Sure.”

“Goodbye till we meet again.”

Thirty two

“Hi Dude. Tomorrow is my bachelor party. Be there.” Mukul said excitedly. He was on cloud nine to marry the girl of his dreams finally.

“Sure. Where is the party? Where is the wedding?”

“Goa!!!”

“Cool. Congratulations buddy. I will reach Goa by tomorrow afternoon. See you there.” I have been waiting for Mukul’s wedding for a long time. Mukul had rejected all the girls his parents arranged for. He had confessed to me that

he has lost hope of getting married and then at last he found love in his office.

Memories of my bachelor party flashed back. My friends had planned it for me in Club Cabana and after a decade we were reuniting. I would be going home next day. Last three months had been a roller coaster. I loved being with Kavya. I worried for her as she is quite independent and it would require a lot of adjustments to be part of my traditional family.

A part of me still longed for Samyukta. We had planned our wedding and honeymoon so often in college. I loved Samyukta with all my heart, the heart she broke into pieces.

Logic and reasoning made no sense when I met Kavya. She was so full of life and totally unbothered with life's cruelties. Falling for her was as natural as breathing. I wish I don't compare Kavya and Samyukta, yet it keeps happening automatically.

Mukul had come to pick me. He was the first guy I met in engineering college and we had been inseparable since then. Luckily, we both got jobs in Bangalore and met every weekend. Though I have never been vocal about my feelings, Mukul could sense my heart's conflicts.

"Hey Aryan, enjoy your counted days as a bachelor. Post wedding, you have to follow wishes of your future wife." Mukul punched me playfully.

"I am looking forward to it, Mukul."

"Then why you have such a sad face now, Aryan?"

"I could not stop thinking about Samyukta. We had made such vivid plans of getting married. I feel a sense of loss and guilt. A part of my heart will always be hers no matter how hard I try. I am erasing her memories. The day I got engaged to Kavya, I burnt Samyukta's letters, cards and photos. I have only one mail from her which I read almost every day. I have not deleted it yet. "

"What is it?" Mukul asked concerned.

"It's her last mail to me. Give me some time alone. I will read and delete it finally. I need to empty the blocked space in my heart for Kavya. I don't want

to cheat her.”

“Do you still miss your Samyukta?”

“No. I don’t miss her. We both have parted for good. But I cannot change the fact that Samyukta is my first love, I fell in love with her when I was a carefree, cool and innocent college guy. You have seen both of us how hopelessly we were in love. I just need to be alone for some time.” I replied with such sadness that Mukul’s heart tore. He did not know whether he should stay back or wait for me.

“Sure. I will wait in parking. Do what you need to Aryan. It seems tough today, but with time it will be easier. I am sure Kavya will fill voids of your heart and soul.”

Hi Aryan

This is my last mail to you and I want to tell that I have moved on. I have stopped loving you and stopped hating you as well. You don’t exist for me now. It’s sad that you have become a completely different person to the guy I had fallen in love with. We both were so simple, innocent and weirdly similar when we fell for each other.

Since the beginning of pre- final year, you began to change. May be you started taking me for granted, may be you thought I will never have enough guts to leave you, I don’t know exactly what your thought process was. You hardly were there even when we were together. The boyish charms I had fallen for turned into flirting with every other girl; the guy who had never touched drinks started drinking every night. The honest and simple guy started taking money from friends and parents by lying. I am in no position to comment but I wished your parents had given you more time than money. I tried to inform them, but they trust you blindly. At least don’t break their trust.

In last five years, I have thought about death more than living. I wished more than once both of us are dead or at least one. I knew you would try very hard before letting me go. I tried everything to be with you, from understanding you, to bonding with your sister, to convincing my orthodox parents that you are the one for me. Trust me I wanted to grow old with you back then.

I want my husband to be a role model for my children, not someone whose first priority is drinking. Trust me; I have not been hurt with anything else as much as I have from your drinks and lies. I want a relationship where I don't have to force smile.

I wish you get your kinda girl and be blessed in life. Please don't stalk me anymore.

P.S. your blackmailing will not work as my future husband knows everything about us.

Goodbye forever

The bride who got her Mr Perfect (finally)

I remembered every word of the mail by heart. I had drunk countless bottles reading this mail of hers. We had broken up nine months back after numerous making up attempts. In my heart I also knew that we will not trust each other again. And for the final time I read my reply. It was the last mail I had written to Samyukta or to anyone else. Samyukta was the only one I wrote to.

Hello Samyukta

I am calling you by your full name after a long time. I promise you I won't bother you ever. I wish I have to never see you. I felt a duff when you deserted me. The monsters of being not good enough from my childhood days haunted me again and again.

I flirted, I made mistakes and I am not perfect. Just look in your heart and tell me if you were faithful. I don't want to blame you for our break up. I still miss you and perhaps I will always but it's good for both of us that we said goodbye. I have enough proves to prove you wrong. I will delete all of them permanently so your future life has no scars of past.

I wish you all the happiness in the world.

Goodbye

Your first love(you cannot take that away from me)

Thirty three

I am a maverick in many ways and I found my perfect match in Sam.

Samyukta or Sam as I called her lovingly was the kind of girl who you would take you to your Mom. She was the epitome of sweetness and gentleness. Samyukta could be anybody she wanted to. I first saw her clad in baby pink suit during our ragging. The curls on her face made her look like a Barbie doll. Surrounded with girls prettier, smarter and chattier than her, she looked so calm.

It was the most melodious Voice I have ever heard. Her introduction sounded like a Song which takes away all your pain. It was my turn to introduce and I was told to sing. The seniors ordered us to prepare a duet together for our fresher's. I could not be happier to get an excuse to talk to her. I noticed she had a dimple on her left cheek and it made her look cuter.

Over our singing practice, we became friends. I loved being around her. We walked early morning together from college hostel to nearby lake and she cooked breakfast for me. She literally fed me with her softest fingers and stroked my hairs.

It was in those moments I wanted to make her mine and be with her forever. Whenever I tried to pamper her with gifts, she would get mock angry and tell to bring gifts when I earn. That never happened.

She wrote down my practical note books, helped me with my presentations and gave every signal that she loved me more than a friend. I was a fool not to propose her. To be honest I was scared if I was good enough for her. Sam deserved all the happiness in the world. Though I loved to be with her, I was quite protective of her. I did not want people to mock us. Every night before I slept, I dreamt of proposing her, but I wanted to be someone first.

Sam brought out my best version, she inspired me to study harder, helped me being connected to my parents at a deeper level, and she even wrote letters to them on my behalf on my parent's anniversaries. She helped my lil sister overcome her girlish inhibitions and prepared her for college life.

Once on my birthday she cooked three-course meals for my whole gang to surprise me. My friends were floored by her delicious dishes. She gifted me a voice recording machine which she had built. It had our practice songs, our conversations, our dreams of future and our silly fights. We listened to it

together once everyone left. She gave me a peck on my cheek before leaving for hostel. I can still feel the tingling and happiness which kept me awake whole night.

It was during our campus placement I realized how serious she was. Sam put more time and efforts for my resume than hers. As we went for walk, she tied a sleek metallic Fossil watch on my wrist. I had always dreamt of wearing a Fossil watch and wished to buy it from my first salary. I was shocked more than surprised. She could not afford it. I asked her how she got it and she showed her ears. Sam had sold her favourite gold earrings for my watch!!! This was the first time I had cried in my life for being so loved. There was a note from her too:

No matter how far time and distance take us, always have time for us. You are my rock star.

Love

Sam

I wish I could be her hero for the lifetime. She would still be mine if I would have told how much I adored her before the distraction happened. I kept waiting for the right moment, to become worthy and was busy in my own life, the vague life of fake happiness and drinking. Samyukta kept pleading me to be my real self and I distanced myself further. Feeling dejected, she allowed others to fill the space she has only allowed me into. I often wonder what she did to the journal she gifted me on the last day of our college. It broke my heart when she asked it back, but I had no choice.

The realization hit me the hardest. I had never cried myself to sleep before. I left behind my self- respect and ego to bring Samyukta back and kept apologizing. I mailed her every day as she would not take my calls. We fought in vain and both of us knew Samyukta had gone digging holes in my heart forever...

Thirty four

“Are you going to be there forever? I have been waiting for ages.” Mukul said once I picked his call.

“I am done. See you in parking.” I realized Mukul had waited for thirty minutes.

“So all set for becoming groom?” Mukul punched me to make the mood light.

“Yes . I wish Kavya was my first love. She is so simple and sorted.” “Kavya is going to be your wife. That’s even better. Cheers.” “Cheers.”

Images of Kavya as my bride made me smile. Her eyes spoke hopes and happiness. Time stopped and everything else was a blur. Kavya looked ravishingly beautiful in red and golden lehenga. Bindi on her forehead made her face shine brighter. I wanted to capture her image as my bride and this priceless moment forever. All my doubts, fears and apprehensions melted away as Kavya reached the stage decorated with roses and jasmines. She flashed a quick smile to me. Kavya was instructed to act shy and docile by her relatives. I could sense how difficult it was for Kavya not to be her real self. She loved to laugh. I was on cloud nine as I visioned my new life as Kavya’s husband from that day.

The doorbell brought me back to present. I so wished it was Kavya. I cannot wait to share about Mukul’s wedding to her. Kavya loves getting decked up and this would be her perfect excuse.

“I am from big basket sir. Here is your order.”

“Thank you.” I said without smiling. Kav ya had always encouraged me to force smile even when I did not feel. She wants me to be kind and gentle. I stocked fruits, vegetables and chocolates in freeze and groceries in the kitchen. The clock seems to stop when I have to wait for Kavya.

In hindsight, marrying Kavya is the best decision of my life. I could not stop thanking my stars for gifting me Kavya. She is perfectly imperfect and imperfectly perfect for me. A smile crossed my face and I dozed off wishing to hold Kavya in my arms.

And finally the doorbell rang.

“Hi Sunshine. How was the meeting?” I was all smiles.

“The blueprint has been approved. It seems they don’t trust that I can handle

it alone. I have to get my team on board soon.” “They don’t know you are a super woman.”

“I will make calls tomorrow to shortlisted candidates. I have to do a little tweaking to make this place look like my work place.” “Sure. Do you really think smileys look professional?” “It’s not your boardroom Mister. It’s a creative space.” “Fine!!!”

“I love you because so much has changed yet I am more me than ever with you.” Kavya said in a reflective tone.

“ I have to tell you something really exciting. Mukul’s Bachelor party is tomorrow in Goa and I am going. Please pack my funkiest tees and shorts.”

“Wow!!!”

“ Has Mukul finally liked a girl? I am exuberant. Have fun. I will miss you though.”

“I don’t tell you very often Kavya, but I really love the way you bond with Mukul.”

“How could not I? We both are passionate about photography. He is after all, our unofficial photographer for life. Jokes apart, Aryan.”

“In our college days, I and Mukul talked about getting married on the same day in the same venue. We have so much of baseless thoughts when we are young and innocent.”

“When is the wedding? A wedding in Goa seems like a dream!!! I will not miss your best friend’s wedding for anything in the world.” Kavya already started thinking about our wedding attire.

“Wedding is after six months in Goa and his fiancé is a Catholic.” “I will design his wedding card. Don’t you think you are celebrating bachelor’s party little too early?”

“This is just the beginning of celebrations.”

“Our fifth anniversary is also exactly after six months. Both you and Mukul could marry together as you planned in college.” Kavya’s eyes twinkled with the prospect.

“I know what you are suggesting.” I chuckled.

“Tell me what!”

“Are you planning Christian wedding on our anniversary?”

“You know me so well, Aryan!! I don’t know how to surprise you anymore. The timing is so perfect. I have my gown, veil and tiara ready since ages.”

“Buy me a suit of your choice.”

“Sure. I love to shop for you.”

Thirty five

“Hey Sunshine, here’s wishing you all the best for being an

entrepreneur. Have a wonderful first day in your own office. You both complement each other so well though I love teasing you about your colourful choices. Thanks for filling my life with colours of love. I am so proud of you. I will call you once I reach Goa. XOXO”

Working as an entrepreneur was not a cakewalk. My to-do list seems to get longer and longer. I lost track of time while I was managing meetings, coordinating with vendors for the exact finish of props, getting stationaries as well as guiding my young team. After lots of rework and touch-ups, I finalised everything and was satisfied with the outcome. The last minute change of my client’s mind meant redoing most of stuff. I felt frustrated and disappointed. My journey as an entrepreneur has not even started.

I gathered all my energy and negotiated with vendors to give me the required job by midnight. I could not risk for tomorrow. Three months of dancing on client’s tune had exhausted me. I was determined to make it a success and not let anyone treat me as a novice. This project was my stepping stone. In moments of doubts and frustrations, I pondered if I had chosen right first project. I had no luxury of choice.

The project was much bigger than I had anticipated first. The queue never seemed to stop. The customers gushed over store window, display and mannequins. Three months of sleepless nights, brain storming and running around was worth it after all. My client kept thanking me. It definitely called for celebrations.

“Hi Sunshine, how did it go? I am all ears to you.” Aryan asked as he

returned from office.

“My inbox is full of congratulatory message!!! Media will cover my work in tomorrow’s paper. It’s all possible because you let me work day and night without complaining.”

“How would you like to celebrate, my Sunshine?”

“All I want is to hold you and relax. Celebrations can wait.”

“Take some time off before you start on next project. I am super proud of you.”

“Can you believe my calendar is full for the whole year? I still pinch myself to believe it. I have finally learnt networking and credit goes to you.” I said gratefully thinking of so many things Aryan taught me by example. He had made me a better professional.

“I know. I remember how easily you did favours to people without asking anything in return and when it came to you, you never asked for it. Give people chance to be good and it makes the bond stronger.” Aryan replied thinking how selfless Kavya was.

“I will follow it Aryan and when I forget you are there to remind me.”

“I love you the way you are Kavya.”

“Hold me tight. I just want to be here forever.” Aryan pulled me closest as I slept and relaxed in his arms. Aryan watched me for hours, caressing my soft hair with his hands in the gentlest way possible.

A NEW STAR IS BORN

Bangalore. March 12th. One MG Mall was the place to be and it hosted fashionistas across the country as the designer boutique launched. Considering the designer is of international fame, huge speculation was going around when she gave to design her boutique to Kavya, a fresh face. Many had come to criticize and judge, but once they entered they could not help but admire the intricate work done with dedication, passion and professionalism. Every corner told stories of collection strongly, props brought life to space and mannequins looked so tempting. One could not stop

but indulge in shopping.

The designer was all praise for Kavya saying this was one of the best transformations of space she had seen in a long time. She added Kavyahas to go a long way from here and this is just the beginning. She even recommended her and introduced to big names.

When asked about her success, Kavya politely thanked everyone and told she might be new as an entrepreneur, but she has been blessed with years of experience where she got to do all kind of stuff. She is confident that her work will speak for her and thanked her team. Even in her first project, she gave a chance to college graduates to shine. Once asked what the most important ingredient of success is, she replied attitude. Kavya signed off with thanks and her dazzling smile.

Aryan cut down the article and kept it on the bedside table. He added his own note too.

“I am a super proud husband, Kavya. You were sleeping so peacefully, I kissed very lightly on your forehead so I don’t wake you up. Take some rest before you start something new. I know you will reach the sky. Love and hugs. XOXO”

The vibration of my phone woke me up and I answered in half sleep. It was already afternoon.

“Hey Kavya, I read your article and I am making everyone to read it. I feel so proud of you. No matter how hard and long it seems, you always go for your dreams, be it staying alone in London for working or being on your own leaving such a convenient career.” Anshika was beaming with joy.

“Thank you dear. I wish you were here to celebrate with me. It all seems worthwhile now.”

“How is life after becoming Dr.Anshika?” I asked proudly.

“To be honest, it’s same as before. I was slogging for Ph.D. then and now I am running around to do post-doctorate from a reputed institution. Atul has got offers and once he zeroes on them, I will study for next two years. I have been with books forever.”

“It suits your studious look. Jokes apart, I wish you all the best to reach your goals.”

“Boss is calling me. Why bosses always call in the middle of something so beautiful? I will catch you later. Bye for now.”

“Hi Mom, I have been missing you and Dad a lot. I wish you were there to bless me and celebrate. My first baby is out in the world and I am elated.”

“We read the article so many times. Neighbours are coming since morning to congratulate us. Your Dad leaves no chance to flaunt you.”

“I will schedule my work and will be in home for your anniversary. It’s high time I do something to celebrate my favourite love story.”

“I will be counting days to see you.” Mom’s voice made me long for my home.

“Would you like to go for vacations or celebrate at home?” Planning reunions and celebrations was my favourite thing.

“It’s after two months, Kavya. We have all the time to plan it.” “Okay Mom. It’s time to be in work mode. See you soon. Say my love to Dad.”

Thirty six

“Hey, you have got mails.” Dad told Mom as he picked letters from the mailbox.

“Wow. Who has mailed me letters?” She asked excitedly.

“There are two letters. One seems like an invitation and another one is from our darling daughter. Which one would you like to read first?”

“Let’s see the invitation. I will read the letter from my darling daughter later.”

“Okay. As you say. Let me open the invitation.”

Dearest Mom & Dad

I wish to seek permission from both of you for your dearest daughter’s hand again. These five years have been the most wonderful years of my life. I have evolved as a better human and my confidence has reached a new height. I am

so grateful to both of you for choosing me as Kavya's life partner.

I would like to invite you to our wedding in the church at Goa on our fifth wedding anniversary. Enclosed are tickets and Hotel details.

P.S. Your presence is a surprise for Kavya . So don't tell her yet. RSVP
Aryan

"These two are always up to something or the other. I can see Kavya's delighted face from here. I have learnt to be more expressive about love and feelings from them. We were so restrained back then."

"I know. I am so proud of Aryan. All their struggles were worth it. It's our chance to celebrate honeymoon in Goa."

"What do you think we should gift them?" Dad asked thoughtfully. "They have each other. I will think on this."

"What about the letter from our daughter?" Mom asked full of anticipation. "I thought you forgot about it in excitement. Here it is."

My Dearest Mommy

Happiest birthday. Many congratulations on hitting a half century. Words could never describe how much I want to hug you and wish in person. I am sure Dad must have planned it to make a memorable one.

All I want to say is thanks. Thank you for everything, for carrying me for nine months inside you, for feeding me, for waking up with me whole night when I was down with fever, for dressing me with so much enthusiasm for fancy dresses, for being there in every PTM, for always answering my calls with a smile, for sending me miles away to study for my bright future, for calmly handling my teenage tantrums and telling me on my face when I was being a brat. You know me like no one else does. You are my life's manual with answers for everything. I may not always follow your advice, but I want you to know I appreciate your wisdom and kindness. I love the way you are ageing gracefully.

I can never thank Dad enough for choosing you as his bride. You and Dad

are my favourite couple. Seeing you two deep in love strengthens my faith in the institution of marriage. As I am growing up, I really get inspired by how you and Dad have carried yourselves in every phase of life, not giving to temptations when you could, living an honest life, working hard, doing little acts of kindness, giving back to society, and in the process being my role model. I may not have always expressed my feelings as freely as I do now, but I have always appreciated you two.

I admire the optimism and patience with which you have handled adversities. It makes me strong.

Nothing makes me happier than getting complements about my root. I am the luckiest to be your darling daughter. Please know I will always need you and Dad. Promise me to take the best care of yourself.

Enjoy your day with Dad.

P.S. I have attached postcards from everywhere I went in London with my notes. Read it with Dad. My life's goal is to get my passport tattooed time and again.

See you soon.

Love and regards

Kavya

“Are you crying?”

“These are the tears of happiness. I am so proud of our girl. I am dying to see my darling daughter and adorable Aryan.”

Thirty seven

Mukul was super excited as his wedding day approached. I

stopped keeping count of bachelor parties we celebrated in last six months. I took leave long back and went along with Mukul on a road trip to Goa.

“Let's stay in a shack for tonight just as we did a decade back while we were in college.” Mukul suggested as we stopped for breakfast. I was happy to drive with him.

“I would love to do that. I can do this only with you.”

“How is your health now? Let’s have a glass of beer.”

“I am much better than before . I hardly drink now, but this is a special moment. What is the point of being in Goa without beach and beer?”

“Cool. I need both to calm my nerves. I have waited quite long to get married and yet when it’s happening, I am nervous.”

“It is natural. You would be fine, dude.”

“Tell me Aryan, how does it feel to be a husband?”

“I would tell you without any filter. Being hubby is not easy, but it is fun. There would be days when I feel on the top of the world and there would be days when I would feel like getting away. Between these two extreme poles, you need to fall in love with your wife again and again. At the end it’s not who you love, it’s how.”

“Oh, is it like that? I am so excited that we are getting married in the same church. Thank you for keeping your promise. I know you are capable of flushing out all my fears. Cheers.”

“Cheers to your new innings as husband. Tell me more about your fiancée. How she caught your eyes and heart?”

“I met her in office and we were in same team. Fate crossed our paths again and again as we got to do different projects together. She is a no-nonsense girl and quite independent. The fact that she repaired my car when we got stuck on highway impressed me. I asked her out for a date and we started hanging out. The more time we spent together; the more we wanted to be with each other. I love when she leaves her hairs open, but she is irresistible in her messy bun engrossed in work. I popped the question with my grandma’s ring and she said yes. I am so excited to finally make you meet her.”

“I am sure she would complement you as your life-partner.” We drank silently listening to the tides.

The college gang joined us in the evening and we went for trekking. The doze

of drink after so long was telling but it was worth it for the much awaited bachelors' party. Once we all were done with it, we huddled around a bonfire. Mukul played guitar and I sang the songs on demand by our loud and an over-enthusiastic audience. It brought back flashes of our college fest. I and Mukul always performed along with Samyukta.

Thirty eight

I could not contain my excitement of being a beaming bride again. I felt butterflies in my stomach. I felt as if I am in La La land. To keep myself sane, I needed some tranquillity and a day by myself.

There were times I had debated with my friends on love marriage versus arranged marriage. I have always spoken my mind since an early age. My childhood friends expected me to fall for someone. I trusted my parents knew me best. I had the freedom to meet as many perspective partners I wanted. Holding Aryan's hands has been the best decision of my life. Marriage is not a noun, it's a verb.

In these years, Aryan's sis had become my best friend and we bitched about our respective hubbies and laughed it off. Somewhere, my image of ultra-modern girl vanished from his Mom's eyes as she got to know me better. I learnt to cook Aryan's favourite dishes from her and cooking them is the surest way of making him smile. I bonded with her over photography as she learnt about social media. We both helped each other knowing my hubby and her son better. She would tell me Aryan's childhood stories, how he cried for an expensive car in one of the fares and would not stop till his Dad bought it, how he would tease his little sister and loved her when he thought she was not watching in her sleep. I would share his thoughts and experiences as a grown-up man with his Mom. I learnt how to pamper and make people at home when I was the host. After my first visit to Aryan's native as a new bride, I had always been pampered in my subsequent stays. His Mom goes extra miles to make me at home, by cooking my favourite foods, booking massage appointments for me and teaching me rituals by examples. I particularly love the way she gives me a token of love in the traditional way in front of deities whenever we part. It has been a roller coaster journey and I am so relieved that we all are ourselves with each other now. Aryan's Dad has always flaunted my smallest achievements and encouraged me to go for

my dreams. He insists we all eat together so that we get extra time to talk. His conversations are full of wisdom. I admire his intellect and diligence.

I have cemented a special bond with my house help lady. She has made me a better homemaker and I taught her about savings. Every family member is not always from same blood.

My chain of thoughts was interrupted by the rising and falling waves. Beach beckoned me. The tidal motion reflected the resemblance to Life's ups and downs. I let the sea embrace me. Jumping with waves took all my worries away into the deep blue sea.

Cool breeze blew my hair and I kept walking barefoot on the stretched sands. As I watched the horizon in wonderment, I wrote my vow. It made me smile.

"Hi Sunshine, where are you? Tomorrow is the day. I have booked church hall, priest, florists, cake and whatever else I could think of. Do you want me to pick you? I hope you will like it as much as you have dreamt about it. I would not have done this in my wildest dreams, but you always made me explore my sides I never knew existed."

"I am on my way to hotel. I am exhilarated to walk the altar for the second time."

"I am waiting for you."

"How are you? I can see you had fun. What does your vow look?" I rushed to Aryan when the cab stopped. He took my luggage out. Aryan had tanned in a week. He flaunted his toned legs in his nautical-print white shorts.

"You will know it tomorrow. I have called our parents too." Aryan said putting a strand of my hair back from my face.

"Yiyee!!!"

"I love you. How could I forget about it? You are an expert in pulling off surprises. I am super excited. I need to go for a massage to look like a radiant bride."

"You are glowing with happiness. I am so joyous we are doing this." "Me

too. See you tomorrow. Here is your duffle bag with all the stuff you would need to be my groom.”

“What!! Are we not sharing the room?”

“No, I will be with my bridesmaids and we will recreate the excitement of seeing each other as bride and groom. Anshika and your sister are waiting for me. They have arranged my bridal shower for tonight and we have to finalize their costumes for tomorrow. I am super excited to be with them tonight.”

Thirty nine

Since our anniversary is on twelfth, I had fixed timing for the

ceremony at twelve noon. It’s wonderful to marry again to the man who is answers to all my prayers. The best part is I will be walking aisle with Mukul just as we thought in college days. It would be a new beginning for four of us.

Kavya had chosen my wedding outfit. I loved when I saw myself in a life-size mirror. I looked dapper in a black waistcoat with pocket detailing, Slim-fitted white shirt, black shiny bow and black trousers. Mukul had ordered same for him and we clicked some pictures to capture his last moments as a bachelor.

Last week, we ran length and breadth of Goa to reach best wedding planners. As I entered the church hall today, I am amazed by its marvellous transformation. The wall is covered with white roses and pictures of Kavya and me. Red satin clothes with white ribbon and roses adorn every chair. The altar looks like a ramp from a redcarpet event. The melodious corals soothe the souls.

I stayed transfixed when I witnessed Kavya. Kavya wore a white floor-length frilled gown and a veil made up of white georgette fabric with lace border. She crowned her head with silver tiara which I gifted her in ISB on our third anniversary. She looked every inch a princess in those moments. Bracelets made of white flowers made her look like an angel. Simplicity suits her. I could not take my eyes off even after seeing her every day. Today my Kavya was a beaming bride so unlike in our actual wedding. I watched her every step as she walked gracefully in between her parents. It was her Cinderella’s

moment. I waited patiently with Mom and Dad who stood proudly. Unlike our actual wedding, I was not nervous at all. It seemed like an eternity by the time Kavya reached near priest and reminded me of my eagerness to see Kavya as a bride when we married five years back. Those five years have been the most fantastic five years of my life, I chuckled.

The priest pronounced us as man and wife, though we did not kiss each other after that unlike movies. We touched feet of our parents and sought their blessings. My Mom was so glad she could finally see me getting married with her own eyes. Though our parents are quite traditional, they have got used to Kavya's ways of celebrations. The red convertible car with just married banner arrived along with a white car.

"Explore Goa and be free. This is the best place to be." Aryan had arranged for cars and guides for our parents.

"We love you both. Enjoy your honeymoon. You two still look like love birds in their courtship phase." They waved till car started. "After you my Sunshine." I opened the door and let Kavya in. "What about the vow?"

Kavya asked impatiently as soon as we were alone.

"I wondered how you could wait so long. I cannot read a love letter in front of our parents. I have written it." I teased her.

"Let's ride to the beach." We reached Anjuna beach and a corner was decorated with white roses. Wooden logs formed a square and it was perfect for clicking memories of lifetime.

"Let's go there. I loved it."

"It's ours. Here are the photographer and our friends." "You may kiss the bride now." Mukul mimicked priest. "You too." Kavya mimicked him back.

"Wow." I looked into Kavya's eyes for a long time and then slowly kissed her as crowds cheered.

"Every time I look in your eyes, I fall in love with you all over again Aryan. Hold me forever."

"Would you like to hear my vow, Sunshine?"

"Yes. I have been waiting for that forever."

“I promise to be with you forever, when you laugh and when you cry, when you are close and when you are far, when you are working like crazy and when you are relaxing, when you love me and when you are mad at me, when you cook delicious meals and when you just want me to order food, when you are mature and when you are childlike, when you are healthy and when you are sick, when you are at your best and when you are at your worst. I will hold you forever. You are my home and I promise to do everything which keeps you smiling. I love you and I promise to be in love with you only even when Miss World proposes me.”

“Wow. It was really you; a perfect amalgamation of romance and quirky humour.”

“That’s me. Now read your vow.”

“To the man I have loved since we met, and fallen in love more every day. I promise you my smile, I promise you my tears, I promise you my happiness, I promise you my tantrums, I promise you my mood swings, I promise you my indulgence, I promise you my time, I promise you my dreams, I promise you my youth, I promise you my old age. I promise you my best version and I promise you my worst. I will keep irritating you and make you laugh till the end of my life. That’s the way I know to love you my man and I don’t intend to change it ever.”

“Ahem ahem . I am so glad you are mine, Kavya. I love you. I really do.

“You are the queen of my heart and nothing is going to change it.”

“ It has been the best day of my life so far.”

You keep saying this every other day.”

“I am having the best day of my life over and over again. We are blessed.”

We shouted at top of our voices and stayed on the beach till evening. It was refreshing to be with our best friends. Now that we all were married, we could plan group honeymoons.

“**W** here is my anniversary gift?” Aryan asked once we were back in our honeymoon suite. Finally we will be celebrating our honeymoon after five long years. Aryan had gone to great lengths to make it the most memorable

one. I could not stop admiring how beautiful and magnificent our suite was. It had a vintage feel of a mediaeval palace and I felt its queen. The suite had a French window and the amazing view of the sea. Every corner was filled with red and white roses.

“ I gift myself to you. What more do you want? Living with you is like living my dream every day. I am still pinching myself to believe it. The whole thing was as beautiful as real marriage. And you know, what was the best part? We did it for us with closest people who love us and for the society. I could see the happiness on Dad’s face. His face was so contrasting to our marriage when he was worried for thousands of things. The most difficult thing in the whole world is to marry off your daughter. I wish Dad could have enjoyed that day.” I replied thinking about my parents. Mom had texted me about exploring Goa sometime back. It was heart-warming to see her excited like a child.

“That’s true. I felt same on my sister’s wedding. Even after arranging things for months, there was so much to do till the time groom arrived. I am glad it’s done. What about you? Did you enjoy your wedding?” Aryan wanted to know.

“I enjoyed the anticipation of decking up as a bride more than the actual wedding. I mean no offense, I love rituals and believe in them, but the whole drama of entertaining guests, seeing my parents worried for smallest of things even after months of preparations, random people commenting on my looks and arrangements, the sanctity of marriage is lost. The marriage has become a competition to show off status and money. I will prefer a simple wedding for our kid.”

“I agree. I also did not like smiling to strangers who pretended to be happy and next moment were commenting on different things. Nobody forces anyone to attend a marriage. Why they have to be so insensitive?” I am so glad that it was all worth it because I married you. I actually felt like running away in the middle of all these dramas but your love stopped me.”

“I would have come for you anywhere.”

“I know my Sunshine. Thanks for being you. Let’s play the video Mom made for us.”

The video was a laughter riot, perfectly capturing moments of marriage. We laughed till it hurt when video showed my serious face. I looked so unnatural without my smile. Aryan had his awkward moments too sitting in the off-white jacquard sherwani. It showed blessings from all the guests who pretended to be wellwishers and the funny ritual of stopping the groom from entering bride's room. We could not stop laughing and thinking how much has happened since then.

“No one can stop me from coming to you now except you. You are mine and only mine. Would you allow me to make love to you today, tomorrow and forever?” Aryan's deep voice and the loving look was something I could never resist.

“Yes, my prince charming.” I replied and my cheeks got redder by blushing. “Let me undress my bride.”

This was the most beautiful night. We listened to the whispering winds cuddled in a soft blanket and the sky was painted with dense, black clouds and silver lightening sparks. The God has painted His canvas for starry-eyed us. I placed my ear to Aryan's heart to listen to his succoring heartbeats as I inhaled petrichor deeply. Aryan's woodsy pine fragrance lingered on me for a very long time.

I woke up with fluttering in my heart. Aryan still had that impact on me. Dressed in his old blue tee and my black shorts; I could not stop wondering about our lives. I had fallen in and out of love with Aryan countless times over the years. Our efforts worked wonders and our home is truly our abode.

In another three months, we would be celebrating our sixth wedding anniversary. I have kept my schedule light now that I have the luxury to choose. Watering my balcony plants is revivifying to me. Roses and daisies bloomed, while money plant is following the light wire. Red and yellow bean bags added colourful vibes and I sat on my favourite swing. The mark of Aryan's and my palms on side wall made me smile. Aryan could not be more analeptic and I am totally, madly and deeply in love with every inch of him. Aryan and I have been through thick and thins, seen best and worst of each other and yet retained the mirthfulness and spark of love. Life could not have been more beautiful.

I smiled as I watched the moon. The full moon smiled back at me in its full glory. The star-studded sky looked magical. I was holding the parting gift of Samyukta. It read “the love story which did not work.” I was often tempted to open and read it, but Anshika’s warnings stopped me. Aryan would answer anything I would ask. The story of failed love was no more valid as both Aryan and Samyukta had moved on. It was pointless to keep the diary. After a long look on the cover, I burnt it wishing peace to the broken hearts.

“I should have done it before but the timing seems perfect now. There is no point of pondering over love triangle which does not even exist.” I thought with a long sigh.

“It’s time to write the journal which Aryan had given me when he proposed me on the hill top. I am enthralled to write our love story. Mom was right about love that it grows with time if properly nurtured, like Mom is right about everything else.” This would be the perfect anniversary gift for Aryan and I smiled my dreamy smile which was exactly the same whenever I thought of Aryan.

Epilogue

Happily ever after exist even in today’s world where face to face

conversations is on the verge of extinction, where we celebrate more number of break up parties than the wedding anniversaries, where live-in has become a norm. Being married is not easy as we see in movies; we have to work on it every day. There are beautiful days and there are days you want to run away. It’s the decision to stick on those days which gives couples a chance to celebrate a lifetime of togetherness. Kavya’s parents have retired and living in their house in country side which Kavya revamped last year. The house is the most colourful and vibrant in the locality. There is a study room where they teach poor children. They are going to celebrate their fortieth anniversary this summer. Kavya and Aryan have already sent invitations to friends and family. This would be a grand celebration about which Kavya’s parents have no clue. Anshika has got her dream job and settled in Amsterdam with Atul. They are honeymooning every month now. Atul recently purchased a home in Bangalore. Anshika and Kavya talk everyday how it would be finally living in Garden City. Kavya is running her successful enterprise and chose her own projects now. She has learnt how to

meet clients' expectations without doing the same job again and again. Mukul goes to church and temple alternatively on Sunday with his lovely wife. Aryan meets his gang for Guy's night once in a month. He has climbed corporate ladder really fast and got three promotions in a span of two years. He will be a CEO soon. In personal front, he is an expecting Dad. Since the day he has known about it, he has been on cloud nine. It was the missing piece of his life's puzzle. Though he had been always a caring husband, his fussing never seems to stop around Kavya. Kavya often wonders how life would be with their child and whom Aryan would love more; Kavya or the child. Aryan's parents have already planned celebrations and rituals that will continue for a long time. Kavya has started creating a lemon yellow nursery for the baby. Her new interns are assisting her. Kavya's fairy tale has come true eventually. She is glowing and her dazzling smile is more radiant than ever...