

Why not?



**VENUKA
GOYAL**

Why not?

Venuka Goyal

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It was a Wednesday evening at the beginning of the monsoon season. The sun had set and it was almost dark outside. The wind was pleasant and the downpour was musical. Preeti would have enjoyed the rain had she been at home. As it turns out, she wasn't. She was standing on the porch of her office building and she was all alone. Well, almost. There was a security guard who was peering at his phone with utmost interest and there was a street dog that had taken shelter from the rain. But other than that, Preeti was alone. She glanced at her delicate silver wrist watch and then looked towards the heavens in a silent prayer. She adjusted the strap of her blue sling bag on her shoulder and was on the verge of just running through the rain and taking her chances at finding an auto-rickshaw without caring about what it would do to the state of her delicate pista-green kurta and white leggings.

What was I thinking when I chose this outfit in the morning? I'm going to end up ruining my nice clothes today, she lamented to herself.

The kurta had a conservative cut and the jewellery she wore was minimal. After having a swarm of guys moon over her back in the first year of college, Preeti had gotten into the habit of picking outfits that she thought made her look as plain as possible without looking dowdy. She thought that it would keep the guys who asked her out on a date to be minimal. She was from a conservative family and she didn't want any scandals. But there were guys who ended up asking her out anyway and to those guys her response was standard.

"I don't date"

It was as simple as that.

Preeti knew that with relationships you never knew how serious the guy was. You never knew if it would end up in marriage or not. She had seen the most promising and serious relationships among her classmates in college end up in breakups. She didn't need that drama in her life. Also, her mother had said in a very stern way when Preeti had got admission to college, "Girls from our household don't get involved with boys in that way. Remember, in the end, you will get married to a man from our community."

Preeti knew that one day her parents would look for a groom for her through arranged marriage and she had never questioned that. She had never

really been a rebellious kid. And now that her studies were complete and she had been working at the office for a while, there was no reason for her parents to wait any longer. In fact, as she stood on the porch of her office building that evening, Preeti knew that the day when her parents would start looking for an appropriate groom for her had all but arrived. It was at the beginning of that week that her mother had announced, "Let's go to the photo studio in the neighbourhood. We should get some good photographs for the matrimonials."

"Yes, Mamma," Preeti had replied, "I'll do that over the weekend."

But before the weekend could arrive, her life took a rather unexpected turn. On Wednesday evening, when she was just about to step out of her office building, it started to pour. She had forgotten her umbrella at home that day as it had not been raining in the morning. The street outside the office already showed signs of a traffic jam. Preeti cursed herself for not having had the foresight to leave a bit earlier than usual as there had been a forecast of heavy rain that evening. Then again, it's not like weather forecasts were all that accurate to begin with and she simply had to get that presentation done before she left otherwise she would have heard no end of the complaints from her boss.

Just as Preeti was about to walk out into the rain in the interest of reaching home at a sane hour and saving herself from the endless admonishments of her parents, she heard a deep male voice, definitely not that of the watchman, call out to her, "Excuse me. Ummm... Preeti, right?"

She turned around and found herself facing Arjun. A few strands of his thick, wavy medium-length hair had fallen on his forehead and the clear skin of his clean shaven face had an ethereal glow about it. Technically, he wasn't her colleague. They didn't work for the same company, that is. It's just that the offices of both their companies happened to be in the same building. But there was no way anyone in the neighbourhood hadn't heard about Arjun. He looked too good to be ignored.

"Hi, I'm Arjun," he said.

"Hi!" said Preeti and immediately wondered what was wrong with her voice. Had it always been so high pitched? Regardless, she began to ramble, "I know your... I mean... we were at that... I mean... I'm Preeti."

"Yes," said Arjun, "Hi Preeti. It looks like you're stranded in the rain. My car is parked around the corner. Can I drop you somewhere?"

Preeti was tempted by the offer. There was no guarantee how long it would take to get an auto-rickshaw in this rain and in this traffic but she couldn't quite get herself to say yes. She looked at her watch again and then at the traffic and then her gaze shifted back to Arjun. He was dressed in a light blue formal shirt and dark blue trousers. Pretty standard office-wear. But somehow, on his fit and muscular body, the outfit looked quite out of the ordinary. He had a laptop bag in one hand and in the other hand, Preeti noticed, he was carrying a black umbrella.

"You don't have to take a detour for my sake," said Preeti, "if you could just let me borrow your umbrella, that would be of great help."

"I don't mind taking a detour," said Arjun, "it's not like anyone is waiting for me at home or anything."

"Well..." began Preeti, not quite sure what she wanted to say, "I... I'm not sure... I..."

"Do you know how to drive a car?" asked Arjun.

"Well..." said Preeti, more surprised than anything else. Why was he asking her this question in the first place?

"I've seen you drive to the office on a scooter before but never in a car," he added.

"Yeah," said Preeti, "I can drive a car. I have a licence and my father lets me use his car on weekends when he doesn't need it."

"I know that we are practically strangers," he said, "if you feel more comfortable driving the car, I'll sit in the passenger seat."

Then he fished out his car key from his pocket and held it out towards Preeti.

Preeti just stared at him in amazement. What was this guy trying to do? Why was he willing to let a stranger drive his car? Was he crazy? What if she got them into an accident? Her own father used to give her ten warnings before handing her the key to the car and here he was, this weird man, offering to let her drive his car on a rainy evening.

"I... " said Preeti, "it's not like... I'm not saying that I think you'll kidnap me or something."

"Listen," said Arjun, "it's getting pretty late and I need to get home eventually. So will you just do me a favour and take the key please? Just drive to your house and then I'll take the wheel from there and drive back to my flat."

The way he said it, there seemed to be some sort of finality to his words. Like he would not tolerate any more arguments. And when Preeti looked at his face carefully, she felt like he looked a bit tired. If he was going to take a detour for her sake anyway then at least she should drive and allow him to rest in the passenger seat, thought Preeti. She took the car key from his hand and he turned around, opened his umbrella and stepped into the rain. Then he stopped and tilted his head to look at her.

“Let’s go!” he said.

She quickly took a few steps and stood beside him under his umbrella. He tilted the umbrella slightly to her side and they began to walk together.

Arjun was tired. The meeting had left him with a splitting headache. It had been a long day at the office and he couldn't wait to reach home. But leaving Preeti in front of the office, stranded in the rain, didn't seem quite right. Even though they didn't work in the same company, Arjun was very much aware of Preeti's existence. He had seen her at the inauguration of the new conference hall in the building about a year ago, a few weeks after he had joined his job at this office. One of his colleagues, who was now a close friend of his, had a crush on Preeti and had asked Arjun to be his wingman.

"Hey Arjun," Vishal had said, "you see that girl in the blue churidar standing in that corner?"

Arjun had turned around to take a look and when he saw her smiling face, for some reason, he wasn't able to look away from her for a full minute. It was weird. That hadn't happened to him in a while. Regardless, Vishal had continued, "Why don't you pretend to be rude to her and I'll come and save her from you!"

"You sound like a crazy teenager who is going to get suspended from school very shortly," Arjun had admonished him, "If you really want to impress her, try to be nice to her. Why do you need to save her from anyone?"

"How do I do that?" Vishal had asked.

"I don't know," Arjun had said, "just try the easy way first. Ask her out on a date."

Vishal had approached Preeti rather nervously when she was standing in a corner, sipping coffee from a disposable cup. He had come back with a rather disappointed look on his face.

"So?" Arjun had asked.

"She said she doesn't date!" Vishal had said, "Why did she have to give a reason at all if she was going to lie?"

"It could be the truth," Arjun had retorted.

"I asked her if we could be just friends," Vishal had said, "even friends can go out for coffee! But she just repeated the same line! She just said that she was sorry and that she didn't date!"

“It’s okay man, there are a lot of fish in the water,” Arjun had tried to pacify him. But Vishal had been smitten by Preeti and talked about her incessantly for weeks. Arjun had eventually relented and helped him in his elaborate plans of trying to bump into Preeti ‘by accident’ and in the process Arjun had found out a few things about her. She usually drove down to the office on her scooter at about 8:30 in the morning, she usually had lunch in the office canteen, once in a while she went to the corner coffee shop and had chocolate walnut muffins with some of her female colleagues and she usually left the office by about 5:30 pm. But despite ‘accidentally’ bumping into her at the corner coffee shop, ensuring that he stood next to her for as long as possible in the queue at the office canteen by allowing others to bypass him in the queue, and bringing her a bouquet of flowers in her favorite colour, Vishal had not been successful in making Preeti agree to go out on a date with him or give him her phone number. While Arjun had expressed his sympathies to Vishal in an elaborate manner and cursed the injustice of the dating world in general, he had felt an odd sense of relief every time it was confirmed to him that Preeti was still single.

Arjun glanced to his right and saw Preeti driving his car. She was tall enough to not have needed to adjust the seat of the car too much. Arjun imagined that if she had been wearing high-heeled shoes instead of the simple black flats that adorned her feet today, then she would have seemed to be almost as tall as Arjun when she stood next to him. Her kurta had a simple cut and sat on her slim yet curvaceous frame just right. Her long, straight hair were gathered in a ponytail at the nape of her neck. She was wearing simple pearl earrings and there was a hint of kajal in her eyes. She seemed to be totally focused on the road and seemed a bit nervous. She was doing a pretty decent job of driving in the rain though.

“Didn’t you bring your scooter today?” he asked her.

“It was very old and was giving too much trouble so my father sold it off a few days ago,” she told him, “and I haven’t managed to convince him to let me buy a new one yet.”

“Why doesn’t he want you to buy a scooter?”

“Well... he... actually...”

“It’s okay. You don’t have to tell me if it makes you feel uncomfortable.”

“You work in the same office as Vishal, don’t you?”

“Yes. Are you friends with Vishal?”

“No. I just... I just kind of know him.”

“Even Shalini works in my office. Do you know her?”

“Yes. I’m friends with Shalini. We have this group of girls... I mean, we sometimes go to the corner coffee shop together.”

“How about the South Indian food joint across the street? Do you go there sometimes?”

“Not really. I usually have lunch at the office canteen. How about you? Where do you have lunch?”

“Sometimes I go to that South Indian food joint with Vishal and a few other colleagues but usually my cook packs my lunch for me in the morning.”

“So... you like South Indian food?”

“Yeah. This place makes good masala dosa. You should try it sometime.”

“Maybe I will”

Arjun found Preeti easy to talk to and after some time he found himself talking to her about his trekking trip in the Himalayas.

"Yeah, we were in college back then. It was a lot of fun."

"Did you get to see snow?"

"We didn't experience snowfall but we walked through patches of snow."

"That sounds so cool. My parents took me to Shimla once when I was in 7th standard. I was so disappointed when it didn't snow. And then, when we came back home, the next day it was all over the news that it had snowed in Shimla."

"So you've never seen snow?"

"No. But I've always wondered what it would be like."

Time flew as they chatted with each other and Arjun felt a tinge of disappointment when Preeti stopped the car on the side of the road and undid her seatbelt.

“Is that where you live?” he asked her, peering out of the window.

“Actually, my house is on the next street,” she confessed, “I will walk the rest of the way”

“Why?” he asked her.

“My parents are very conservative,” she told him, “If they see me stepping out of a guy’s car, they will ask all sorts of questions and get all sorts of ideas.”

No wonder she doesn't date, thought Arjun.

“It’s still raining a bit,” he said, “take my umbrella.”

“It’s okay,” she said, “I’ll be fine. And you will need your umbrella too.”

“I won’t really need it,” said Arjun, “my parking lot is very close to my building. I’ll be fine.”

“Okay,” she said, “I’ll give the umbrella back to you tomorrow. Why don’t you give me your phone number and I’ll contact you... to give you the umbrella.”

“Okay,” said Arjun, and they exchanged phone numbers.

Then Preeti took the umbrella and walked away from his car.

After this interaction with Preeti, Arjun became quite certain that she had been telling the truth when she had said that she didn’t date. In fact it seemed like she avoided hanging out with guys in general. She would hesitate even if he tried to keep in touch with her as a friend, Arjun was sure. Even though he had Preeti’s phone number now, he wasn’t sure if this would be of much help in getting him closer to her.

Arjun followed Preeti with his gaze until she took a right turn. Then he drove his car to the intersection where she had turned and he peered in the direction where she was going. Finally, he saw her enter the gate of a small building. He figured that she was home safe now and Arjun made his way towards his flat. A few minutes later, while staring at a red traffic light, a rather absurd thought entered Arjun’s mind. At least in the beginning it sounded absurd, but then the more he thought about it, the less absurd it started to sound. The thing is, Vishal was over Preeti by now. He had a girlfriend now and seemed to be quite in love with her. And the thing is, Arjun needed to get married. More precisely, Arjun’s younger brother, Nakul, needed to get married. Nakul had been in a relationship for a while now and his girlfriend was hell bent on getting married as soon as possible.

“Listen, bhaiyya,” Nakul had confided in Arjun over the phone one day, “Smita’s parents are after her life to get married to the son of a family friend. We need to get married soon.”

“So... what’s the problem?” Arjun had asked him, “You want to get married, she wants to get married, so get married!”

“It’s not so simple,” Nakul had explained, “Maa and Dad are refusing to let me get married before you get married. They think that the whole... you know... the thing...”

“It’s okay,” Arjun had reassured him, “you can say it out loud. I know Naina broke off her engagement with me last year. You don’t have to walk on eggshells around me any more. I’m over her.”

“The problem is,” Nakul had said, “that Maa and Dad are not listening to me. So... just do something about this. Either get married soon or somehow convince Maa and Dad to let me get married.”

Arjun had been trying to get Maa and Dad to agree to let Nakul get married but they had not relented as of yet and Nakul was getting more and more impatient. He had been urging Arjun to seriously consider getting married soon. But after Naina broke off their engagement, Arjun hadn't dated anyone. He had plenty of options at the office and in his extended social circle, but somehow, he hadn't felt that connection with anyone. And he wasn't really interested in dating casually anymore. When he had joined this office about a year ago, he had done so for a rather sizable salary hike and also a promotion in his rank. He had a lot on his plate work-wise and didn't have the time to go about running after high-maintenance girlfriends. But when he saw Preeti walk away from his car, a thought occurred to him. It occurred to him that based on Preeti's surname, it sounded like she was from the same community as him. And she had said that her parents were conservative. So if his estimate of her age was nearly accurate, it was about time her parents would be looking to get her to get married. For all he knew, they might already be looking for marriage proposals for her. What if Arjun got married to Preeti? It could solve some of the problems in his life.

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Preeti glanced at her watch yet again and wondered, *should I drop him a message?*

It had been less than an hour since she had reached the office but the black umbrella that she had kept on her desk kept reminding her of Arjun. She kept reminding herself that she had to return the umbrella to him but for some reason she was feeling very nervous at the idea of contacting him. Suddenly her phone made a swooshing sound and Preeti realized that she had got a message from Arjun.

‘I hope you didn’t forget to bring my umbrella’

Although Preeti felt a flash of excitement when she realized that Arjun had sent her a message, reading the message left her strangely disappointed. Logically, there was nothing wrong with the message though and she decided to stick to a simple answer.

‘I have your umbrella’

Then she wondered for a while and sent another message.

‘Where and when can I return it to you?’

‘5:30 pm corner coffee shop?’

‘I have a meeting till 5:30 so might be a bit late’

‘It’s a date then’

The last message from Arjun made Preeti’s stomach feel a bit strange. What had just happened? She was not someone who dated men. But then again, this was not that kind of a date, she told herself. She was just returning his umbrella. But then, maybe she should clarify that somehow, she thought. She shouldn’t let him get the wrong idea. So she sent him another message.

‘I don’t date’

‘I don’t either’

‘I’ll give you the umbrella after my meeting’

‘I’ll be waiting at the coffee shop’

‘Maybe I’ll message you once the meeting is over so that you don’t have to wait’

‘I don’t mind waiting for you’

This message made Preeti feel really strange again. She wasn't sure if it was her stomach or her chest anymore but her insides were beginning to do something weird now. She found herself sending another message.

'If you're going to be there early anyway, can you order coffee?'

'Latte?'

'Hazelnut Latte'

'That's my favorite'

This message really made Preeti's ears feel hot for some reason. She didn't know what was happening to her. In the last one year of working at the office, she had received text messages from a lot of her colleagues, but this didn't feel like texting a colleague. Just then she received another text message from Arjun.

'I'll probably order a sandwich too. Grilled cheese?'

'Okay'

'And maybe a muffin?'

'Chocolate walnut muffin'

'Sounds delicious. Can't wait for 5:30'

'I might be late'

'They will take some time to bring the food'

'Okay'

'See you then'

'Bye'

In the meeting that evening, Preeti simply couldn't pay attention to anything anyone was saying. It's a good thing that her role in the project was a minor one and no one noticed that her mind was elsewhere. When the meeting got over, she found herself rushing to the coffee shop and she was a bit out of breath by the time she opened the glass door and stepped inside. She soon spotted Arjun sitting at a table at the back of the coffee shop, peering into his phone. She noticed that the shirt that he was wearing was the same shade of blue as the fabric of the kutra she was wearing. That made her smile for some odd reason. She walked up to him and said, "Hi!"

He looked up at her and smiled. She felt as if her heart stopped but it recovered soon enough and kind of overcompensated by beating too hard.

"The food just got here," he said, "drink your coffee before it gets cold."

Preeti sat across the table from Arjun, feeling rather self-conscious, and took a sip from her cup of coffee. The hazelnut flavouring was sweet enough and she knew that she wouldn't need to use the sachets of sugar that were

kept in the center of the table. She realized to her utter embarrassment that her hands were a bit shaky and the air conditioning vent on top of her head wasn't making things any better. It was a good thing though that Arjun didn't seem to have noticed.

"Actually," said Arjun, keeping his phone on the small square table that separated him from Preeti, "there is something I wanted to talk to you about."

"Okay," said Preeti, keeping her cup of coffee on the table.

"You see," said Arjun, not sounding very confident, "you told me... ummm... I... ummm... Will you marry me?"

He looked at her with an expression she couldn't quite read and she was sure he was pulling her leg.

"What kind of joke is this?" she said, her ears burning, anger flaming in her eyes.

She took his umbrella from her bag and kept it on the table.

"Thanks for your umbrella," she said and got up from her chair.

"Wait! Preeti! Just hear me out," he said.

For some reason, she couldn't get herself to walk out from there.

"Explain," she said, still standing.

"Just sit down," he said, "give me five minutes and I'll explain."

She sat down and he explained. He explained that he needed to get married soon because of his brother's situation and since it looked like both Arjun and Preeti were from the same community, it would be convenient if they got married.

"Why would you think that I would agree to something like this?" she asked him.

"You are beautiful and accomplished and I'm sure you will get plenty of proposals for arranged marriage," said Arjun, "Just pretend that this is a proposal for arranged marriage. Ask me anything. If you approve, I'll have my parents contact your parents."

That got Preeti thinking. In a couple of days she would have to go to the photographer and click photos for her matrimonial profile anyway. Maybe she could take this as a practice run for meeting a prospective groom for arranged marriage. But she hadn't really thought about what questions she would ask in such a situation.

"Let me think about this," she said.

"Okay," he said, "how long do you need?"

“I’m not sure”

“Actually... wait... there is one thing you should probably know. I was engaged about a year ago but then the engagement was called off.”

“Why was it called off?”

“There were disagreements about certain things between the families and she thought I was taking my parents' side too much. It was just a mess.”

“Was it an arranged match?”

“No”

“How long did you guys date?”

“Six months”

“How many girlfriends before that?”

“One”

“How long did that one last?”

“Three months”

“Why did you guys break up?”

“We were fighting all the time. It got tiring.”

“Why me?”

“Why not?”

Preeti paused for a bit after hearing Arjun's response. Was that it? Even though Preeti had never dated anyone, she had been asked out and proposed to before. Wasn't Arjun going to describe her beautiful eyes in an elaborate manner or declare that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen? 'Why not' didn't sound like much. But when Arjun didn't say anything further, Preeti continued with her questions.

“How old are you?”

“30. How old are you?”

“23”

“Wow!”

“You thought I was younger?”

“I thought... I thought you were older”

“That’s a compliment!”

“Sorry... I didn’t mean it like that”

Before Preeti knew it, she had spent more than 30 minutes asking Arjun all sorts of questions to which she got answers that seemed to be satisfactory. Arjun too asked her a few questions along the way and overall there didn’t seem to be any red flags that were raised during the conversation.

“I’ll get back to you about this in a couple of days,” said Preeti as she glanced at her watch, “I really need to get going now or my parents will freak out.”

“Can I drop you home?” asked Arjun.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea,” said Preeti and she walked out of the coffee shop with her sling bag.

When Preeti left without making it clear to him if she would be willing to marry him or not, Arjun felt rather strange. He had always commanded a lot of attention from the opposite sex. Right from high-school to college to the professional world, he had never had to work hard to get a date. In fact, on multiple occasions, it was he who was asked out on dates and he had to deal with a few obsessive fans and stalkers along the way. For Arjun, this feeling of anticipation after proposing to a woman was not familiar. The answer had been instantaneous in the past. He found himself playing his interactions with Preeti back and forth inside his head to search for clues as to whether she liked him or not. But he didn’t really find anything. Yes, they seemed to be able to talk to each other quite comfortably, and yes, she had met him in the coffee shop despite being someone who didn’t date, but beyond that, there was nothing. Women had always showered him with their smiles and flattered him on his physique and good looks. But he didn’t recall a single instant where Preeti had done anything like that. In fact, even in the morning, he had been the one who initiated their interaction over text messages even though, technically, Preeti should have been the one to approach him about returning his umbrella. Arjun glanced at the plate across the table from him and saw the half-eaten chocolate walnut muffin that Preeti had left behind. Wasn’t she supposed to like chocolate walnut muffins? That’s why he had asked her about muffins in the first place. And now she had vanished without even finishing hers. Was this a good sign? Arjun wasn’t sure.

Arjun settled the bill and walked to his car. He wondered what it would be like to walk to his car with Preeti every day. If they ended up getting married, she would move to his flat and then he would get to drive to and from the office with her. Would she be willing to drive the car every once in a while when he had a headache from an exceptionally frustrating meeting? Would they drive to a restaurant for dinner every once in a while after a meeting ran late at the office? Would they drive down to the mall over

weekends and eat South Indian food together? Or maybe pizza or even Chinese food. It would be nice to have someone to share a plate of gobi manchurian or chilli paneer with. As he imagined a possible life with Preeti, Arjun became acutely aware of how lonely he had become in his recent past. With the increased workload at the office and lack of a dating life, Arjun's life was pretty drab. Most of his friends and colleagues had their own hectic lives and their own families to go back home to. Even Preeti had her parents to go back home to. But Arjun had no one. As Arjun sat in his car and started driving towards his flat, he found himself wishing that he didn't have to switch on the radio to make himself feel less lonely. He found himself replaying in his head the conversation he had with Preeti the previous evening as she drove his car. He found himself wishing that they would have more such conversations in the future.

That night Preeti did not get much sleep at all. She kept tossing and turning in bed. As soon as she closed her eyes, Arjun's face popped up and said to her, "Why not?"

Why not indeed.

Preeti had never believed in falling in love and all that. That was meant for the movies. She was practical. And practically speaking, she was soon going to have to evaluate proposals for arranged marriage. In these arranged marriage proposals, her parents were going to use some criteria for shortlisting. Preeti imagined that Arjun would probably satisfy most of the criteria. Of course the fact that he had been engaged once and the engagement was broken seemed to be some sort of a negative on his CV, but it was not like he was divorced or anything. It wasn't something that bothered Preeti too much. So what if he had been in relationships before? She didn't care. And if there was some issue with his family background or the way his engagement had been broken off, her parents would do their due diligence and reject the proposal at their end. Preeti didn't have to worry about those things. All she needed to worry about was whether she could actually imagine getting married to Arjun. The idea of letting him hold her hand or kiss her didn't seem to be revolting. She was actually curious to find out what it would be like to be with Arjun. That was a good start, she thought. And then she closed her eyes again, and again Arjun's face floated into view and asked her, "Why not?" But this time the question irked her. She felt a bit offended actually. The only reason it was she who he had proposed to was that they were from the same community and... 'why not'. That was all. She was just a 'why not'! It bothered her a lot but she shelved that feeling away. She would just be practical, she thought. What was the harm in getting an arranged marriage proposal even before going to the photographer?

The next morning Preeti was late for the office. She had put her alarm to snooze way too many times. When she finally huffed and puffed her way to her desk and switched on her computer, she heard a swooshing sound on her phone. There was a message, apparently, but she didn't have the time to

check it. There was too much to get done at work. At lunch time Preeti finally had a little breather from her work and checked the messages on her phone. There was one from Arjun.

‘Looking forward to hearing from you’

Why? She asked herself. Why was he looking forward to hearing from a mere ‘why not’? Then she suddenly regretted not asking him for the names of his ex-girlfriends. Maybe she could have checked them out on social media. Were they much more beautiful than she was? Why had they been special whereas Preeti was just a ‘why not’?

Anyway, she didn’t have answers to any of these questions and she didn’t think that it was necessary to reply to Arjun’s text message. Even though she had made up her mind about giving him the go ahead for the formal proposal, she had asked him for a couple of days to think about it and she felt like playing hard to get. But when on Saturday morning, her day off from the office, she still saw no more follow-up messages from Arjun, she became a bit fidgety. It’s true that she had not responded to his last message but he was the one who needed this marriage of convenience of sorts. Wasn’t he going to woo her a bit? Wasn’t he going to beg or plead or flatter or flirt? She kept waiting till Saturday evening and then, when she was lying in bed staring listlessly at the ceiling fan, a thought occurred to her. She realized that there was another girl at the office, Reema, who was a couple of years older than Preeti and had the same surname as her. She too was single. If Arjun thought that Preeti was too young then maybe he would go and propose to Reema. After all, Preeti was merely a ‘why not’ to him and so Reema could be too. And Reema wouldn’t hesitate for a second to say yes to Arjun. In fact no girl at the office would say no to Arjun. Preeti was pretty sure that many of the girls would even be willing to totally abandon their current boyfriends for Arjun. Then why had Preeti not accepted his proposal right away? Why was she playing hard to get? It made no sense whatsoever! So Preeti picked up her phone from her bedside table and messaged Arjun.

‘Why not!’

Within a few minutes she got a response.

‘Great!’

And then another message.

‘Send me your parents’ contact details and I’ll forward them to my parents’

Preeti sent him the information and sat staring at the screen of her phone. It was up to the parents now. Her heart had managed to reach her ears and she felt kind of off. It felt like she had just bought a lottery ticket.

5

It hit Arjun on the day when he went to Preeti's house to meet her family for the first time. When he saw the whole drama with the saree clad women and men dressed in formal attire, with plates full of sweets and cups full of tea, it finally hit Arjun that this was actually happening. The parents had agreed to the proposal per se and it was time to hash out the details. Odds were that he was going to be married soon. He had given the go-ahead to his parents to pick the next available *muhurat* as Nakul was getting really impatient to plan his wedding too. At some point of time he noticed Preeti walk into the room, dressed up in an orange saree and elegant gold jewellery. She seemed to be a bit nervous. Things had moved pretty fast and he hadn't really had a chance to meet her again after their meeting at the coffee shop. She hadn't been too willing to chat on the phone either. Arjun wondered if it was a good sign. But then again, she had gone along with the whole thing and was now greeting his parents with utmost respect. It was going to be okay, he decided.

There seemed to be some tension about picking the date for the wedding. Arjun's parents had suggested a *muhurat* a month from that day but Preeti's parents seemed to be concerned as to how the wedding could be planned so soon. However, his parents were finally able to convince them citing the urgency of getting their younger son married too. After a while, Preeti and Arjun were made to sit next to each other on a sofa and some jewelry was exchanged. And just like that, they were engaged.

Arjun tried to catch Preeti's eye during the ceremony but couldn't. Even while she was sitting next to him, she sat with her head bowed, staring at her lap. She barely smiled the whole evening and when she was asked any questions, she seemed to prefer to nod or shake her head than actually say anything.

That night when Arjun was alone in his room he picked up his phone and messaged Preeti.

'Nervous about the wedding?'

'Maybe'

'Anything specific making you nervous?'

'Not really'

'You looked really nice in the saree'

'Thanks'

'Coffee after work tomorrow?'

'Why?'

'Does there have to be a reason?'

'Maybe'

'Why do you need a reason to meet your soon to be husband?'

'I don't know'

'Do I take that as a no then?'

'Maybe'

'Will I get to see you before the wedding?'

'I don't know'

Arjun was getting tired of the 'I don't knows' and 'maybes'. What was she trying to do? How were they going to get married and live together when she didn't even want to meet him? He couldn't do anything about it now, though. He had already suffered through a broken engagement once. He didn't want to end up in that kind of a situation again. He was beginning to regret his rash decision of getting into a quick marriage with someone who was practically a stranger to him. But he couldn't really do anything about it now. Not when he was the one who had set the ball rolling in the first place. But after two weeks of stressing out about the whole thing in between getting his outfits for the wedding and approving the invitations and all that craziness, Arjun finally took the matter in his hands. He worked in the same building as Preeti did but they hadn't met each other since the engagement. It was getting too weird. So he messaged her.

'I'm coming over to your office. I need to see you.'

'Why?'

'Why not?'

'Wait. corner coffee shop. 5:30'

'Hazelnut Latte?'

'Grilled cheese sandwich?'

'Chocolate walnut muffin?'

'See you at 5:30'

'It's a date'

When Arjun reached the coffee shop in the evening, he noted that he was two minutes early. He took a seat and placed the familiar order. Preeti arrived a few minutes later and took a seat in front of him without so much as a smile. She looked really beautiful in a purple kurta and small silver hoop earrings. She had done something to her hair. It seemed more straight or something. The look suited her.

"I don't have much time," she said, "some of the pre-wedding ceremonies start this weekend and I have a lot of shopping and packing and stuff to do."

"Is that why you didn't have time to meet me?" he asked her.

"Maybe," she said.

What kind of an answer was that? Arjun was getting really irritated by now. Why had he just agreed to marry a stranger? In fact he hadn't just agreed, he had pursued the matter himself and proposed to her! What had he been thinking? In fact, he probably hadn't been thinking! This was going to be such a mess, he thought.

"When are your parents coming over for the wedding?" she asked him.

His parents didn't live in the same city. They lived about four hours away by road.

"Actually, I have to go to my parent's place this weekend," he said, "They want to do some pre-wedding celebrations with the extended family and then they will all drive down a couple of days before the wedding."

"Are you regretting this?" she asked him, "I mean... are you... you know... us getting married... and all..."

"Why do you ask?"

"You don't look very happy right now."

"You don't look very happy either. Why did you accept my proposal if you didn't like me?"

"Why did you propose to me if you didn't like me?"

"Why do you think that I don't like you?"

"I don't know"

"I like you, okay," said Arjun, "I do. Otherwise why would I have suggested all this?"

"Why not?" said Preeti, "You told me that you did all this for your brother."

This was really annoying to Arjun. He just told her that he liked her and she didn't want to believe him. And that too when she had made no effort to

clarify whether she liked him or not or what her problem was. Was she trying to pick a fight? Was this going to be the kind of relationship he had with Kavya? Where they just kept fighting with each other all the time about the stupidest of things before they just decided to call it quits. But in this case, calling it quits would not be easy. They were to get married in two weeks.

After having a conversation that was not exactly a fight but not exactly pleasant either, it seemed like their time was up.

"I have to get going soon," said Preeti, "there is so much work to be done for the wedding."

"Yeah, I know, but we have to think about things beyond the wedding too," said Arjun, "How are we going to live as a married couple if we can't get along with each other?"

"We'll have to figure it out I guess," said Preeti, "I don't have the option of backing out of this now."

"Do you really want to back out of this?" asked Arjun.

"Maybe," she said.

"Then... maybe we should seriously consider calling off the wedding after all," he said.

Preeti seemed to be on the verge of tears at this point. She looked away from him and started staring at her lap. This was really annoying. He hated it when girls played the tears card. What was he supposed to do now? And why was she crying anyway?

"Let me drop you home," he said, "I'm not a random stranger any more, right?"

She gave him a nod and continued to stare at her lap even as a tear trickled down her cheek.

6

Preeti was a mess. She had never been like this before. Why had she cried in the coffee shop? This made no sense. She was not one of those girls who shed tears easily. Nobody other than her parents had seen her cry till now. And now Arjun. He had seen her cry. She glanced at him as he drove her home and she wondered how this had happened. Is this what getting married was supposed to feel like? In fact, hadn't he said that he wanted to call off the wedding? How easy it had been for him to say that. After all, she was just a 'why not' to him. He was regretting asking her to marry him. He was probably regretting not asking Reema first. After all Reema was older than Preeti and closer to Arjun in age.

"Do you like to watch movies?" Arjun asked her.

"Sometimes," she said.

"What kind of movies?" he asked her.

"Ummm... mostly hindi movies. Love stories and comedy kind of movies," she said.

"Who is your favorite movie star?"

"Alia Bhatt"

"Hmmm... Alia Bhatt is not bad... but I think Deepika Padukone is better."

"Why? Because she's older?"

"I don't know. I just like her more."

Somehow, that statement brought a fresh batch of tears to Preeti's eyes.

"Do you always cry so much?" asked Arjun.

"I..." said Preeti, even as she willed herself to control her tears, "I don't know... it... it makes no sense... I thought I would be okay with all this but everything happened so soon... Everything is just so... I'm usually not like this..."

"To be honest," said Arjun, "I'm a bit nervous too. But that makes sense, right? Getting married is a pretty big deal. And we didn't get much time to get to know each other. Should I switch on the radio? Or maybe you could connect your phone and play some music. What kind of music do you like?"

Slowly Preeti found it in herself to talk to Arjun and by the time she reached home, the situation seemed less hopeless. He seemed to genuinely

be making an effort to get to know her. It would all be fine eventually, she said to herself. She was a 'why not' right now but she would be his wife after two weeks. She would figure out a way to sort out her emotions. But the thing is that she couldn't. The whole wedding was an endless *mela* with too many people doing too many ceremonies that made her feel rather exhausted and uncomfortable. When she finally arrived at Arjun's flat with her suitcase, his parents and his brother were also staying there. The wedding had wrapped up at 2 in the morning and they had to leave for Arjun's parents' house at 10 in the morning. She was so exhausted that she didn't have any spare feelings left to feel apprehensive about sleeping in the same bed as Arjun. It's not like they had any strength left in them to lift a finger anyway. The next day, at Arjun's parents' house, she was welcomed in an elaborate manner. There were ceremonies and games that went on for a couple of days and there were so many guests around that there were not enough bedrooms in the house to give Preeti and Arjun any privacy.

"I can book a hotel room for both of you," Arjun's father suggested.

"Dad, it'll be weird," Arjun protested.

And Preeti ended up spending her nights in a room full of women from the extended family.

Before the celebrations for Preeti and Arjun's wedding were wrapped up, the preparations for Nakul's wedding had started.

"Dad, we have only so much leave we can get," Preeti heard Arjun explain to his father one morning, "We'll join you for the main wedding events after a week."

With that, Preeti and Arjun loaded their luggage in a taxi and drove back to his flat. They were really exhausted and Arjun slept most of the way. When they reached his flat, it looked like a bit of a mess. The wedding party had departed in a hurry the previous week. Preeti didn't know what to do. She just stood in the gallery at the entrance of the flat, staring at the living room. There were empty cartons, torn wrapping paper and wilted flowers strewn all over. It didn't feel like she had come home.

"The cleaning lady and the cook will come tomorrow morning," Arjun informed her, "they've been working here for almost a year. They know what to do. But now that you're here, they'll probably prefer dealing with you."

"Okay," said Preeti.

She had never had to deal with household help before. Her mother took care of all that back home.

“I wasn’t able to clear any cupboard space for you in the bedroom before we left,” continued Arjun, “Do you mind keeping most of your stuff in the guest bedroom for now? There is an empty cupboard there. We’ll figure things out as we go, I guess.”

That made Preeti feel really strange in her stomach. Maybe she was hungry. But maybe she felt like too much of a guest in the flat that was technically supposed to be her home now.

“Okay,” she said and continued standing in the gallery, staring at the living room.

“What’s wrong?” asked Arjun.

“I’m keeping my stuff in the guest bedroom... maybe I should stay in the guest bedroom,” said Preeti.

Arjun looked at her in a strange sort of way. Then he said, “If that’s what you want... why not.”

And again, Preeti was a mere ‘why not’ in his life. He didn’t even care if she stayed in the guest bedroom. Even though they were technically married to each other now, she was still a ‘why not’.

In the week that followed, Preeti discovered the downside of living with a fit and muscular man. Apart from their car rides to and from the office, he was never around. He woke up before Preeti did in the morning and played squash for over an hour. By the time he got back, it was time to get ready for the office and they never got a chance to sit and eat breakfast together. Then, after coming back from the office in the evening, he would have a quick snack and go to the gym. “Don’t wait for me to have dinner, I’ll be late,” he would say. After coming back from the gym, he would unwind in front of the TV for a while as he had dinner. And then he would be too exhausted to even talk and go right off to bed. It wasn’t like he was mistreating her or anything. He would make small talk with her in the car and even smile at her once in a while, but Preeti had never felt so lonely in her life. She was used to her father discussing the newspaper with her over breakfast. She was used to her mother being ready with a plate of snacks on the table and a smile on her face when Preeti got back from the office. She was not used to having meals all alone. And even though her parents were just a phone call away, it was just not the same. Preeti felt like she was living in some sort of solitary confinement. When on Thursday evening she got a text message from Arjun

that he was going to be late because of an important meeting, she had made up her mind to just go to her parents' place directly from the office and stay there for a couple of days. But then he sent her a message suggesting that they go out for dinner.

At least I won't be having dinner alone tonight, she thought, and decided not to go to her parents' place.

She waited for him in the corner coffee shop and when he came there about an hour later, he looked so haggard that she didn't have the heart to ask him to go anywhere else.

"They serve pizzas and all here," she suggested, "we don't need to go anywhere else."

"Are you sure?" he said, "there is this new Chinese restaurant in the mall that we could try out."

"Maybe next time," she insisted, "I feel like having pizza today."

They placed their order and chatted for a while. Then she asked him, "Trouble at the office?"

"It's this project where we're struggling to meet the deadline," he said, "I wouldn't have insisted on coming back from my parents' place this week if it weren't for this. Hopefully next month will be better."

That gave Preeti hope. It gave her hope that things would get better with time. And a couple of days later, when it was time to go for Nakul's wedding, she was actually quite excited. Even though she knew that most of the people at the wedding would be practically strangers to her, there would be so many people around that she was sure she would not feel lonely. And as the sister-in-law of the groom, she would be involved in some of the rituals.

Nakul's wedding was indeed a lot of fun for Preeti. She wasn't as tired as she had been at her own wedding as the focus was not on her. She got to use a lot of the fancy clothes and jewellery that she had received as gifts during her wedding. Her mother-in-law made it a point to include her in as many rituals as possible but didn't burden her with any significant responsibilities. Preeti got to know some of Arjun's younger cousins who were close to her in age and shared her enthusiasm for dancing. She even got to dance with Arjun, even though it was in a group, at the sangeet ceremony. This time around she could dance more freely than she had been able to at her own wedding as her outfits were not as heavy. Even Arjun seemed to be more comfortable dancing with her and Preeti simply couldn't wipe the smile off

her face all evening. At Nakul's wedding pheras that went on till wee hours of the morning, Arjun and Preeti sat next to each other on the carpeted floor with their backs to the wall. Arjun had been very busy during the wedding festivities as he was the go-to person for all emergencies. Whether it was an uncle who needed medical attention when he fell down while dancing during the sangeet festivities or one of Nakul's friends who needed to be dragged away from the dance floor after he ended up being too drunk to behave or whether it was Nakul's outfit that ended up needing to get ironed at the last minute, it was the elder brother, Arjun, who would have to rush to save the day. Even on the day of the pheras, he had to run around yelling at people when the horse for the baraath didn't end up reaching the venue on time. So it was not surprising that Arjun was really tired and he dozed off about half-way through the actual wedding ceremony. Preeti's entire body tingled and she had goosebumps when she felt his head as it rested gently on her shoulder. She tilted her face towards him a little and she felt his soft hair on her cheek. She was utterly disappointed when Arjun was jerked awake by his father and sent on another errand. Apparently the car that was supposed to take the bride and groom back home after the ceremony didn't have enough flowers on it.

On the last morning of the trip, as Preeti and Arjun were getting ready to leave, Arjun's father called him over to have a chat with him. When Preeti walked over to the other side of the room to pick up a box of sweets that she was supposed to take with her, she overheard Arjun say to his father, "It's different for Nakul. You don't have to book a honeymoon for me!"

It made Preeti's ears feel a bit hot. Her mood, that had lightened over the past few days, took a nosedive. Of course it made sense for Nakul to go on a honeymoon with his wife. He loved his wife. But it made no sense for Arjun to want go on a honeymoon with Preeti, did it? After all, she was just a 'why not' in his life. Clearly, Arjun didn't want to spend time with her. The last time when they had come to his parents' house after their wedding, he had refused to accept his father's offer for a hotel room. Even this time around she had spent her nights in a large room with the other ladies of the extended family. Now, he didn't want to go on a honeymoon with her. Why had he even asked her to marry him? Well... why not? His brother needed to get married and... why not? They were from the same community and... why not? She was just a 'why not' to him and she hated it.

On the taxi ride back, Preeti decided that she needed some time away from Arjun to clear her head. She was being too emotional about the whole thing. This was stupid. She wasn't usually like this. Maybe spending a few days with her parents would make her feel more normal.

"Arjun," said Preeti, "I need to go home for a few days."

"We are going home," he said.

"I mean, my parents' home," she said.

"Any specific reason?" he asked her.

"My mother was saying something about a ceremony where a new bride visits her parents for a few days," she said.

"Okay," said Arjun, "when do you want to go?"

"Can you drop me off today?" she asked, "I mean, we can go to my parents' house directly and then you can take the taxi back to your flat. I have a packed suitcase full of stuff anyway."

Arjun didn't say anything for a while.

Then he said, "Why not?"

Arjun was working out at the gym but his mind wasn't quite in it. It had been three days since Preeti had gone to her parents' house and he had no idea when she was going to be back. He had messaged her a few times but the chats hadn't carried on for too long. She had declined his offers to drop her home saying she didn't want him to have to take a detour. It was getting pretty annoying. Just then, his phone rang and Arjun saw that it was a call from Preeti's father. His heart leapt with joy. No doubt Preeti's father was calling him rather than Preeti as they might have some formality with regards to him picking her up from her parents' home, he thought. After all, this was the first time she had gone there after the wedding. Arjun would finally have his wife back home. There was so much they needed to discuss and plan together. He picked up the call excitedly but the smile on his face soon vanished. He was left speechless as he was flooded by a tirade of accusations. It ended with, "Just because we are from a conservative family does not mean that we will shy away from making our daughter get a divorce! In fact this marriage should be annulled!"

Arjun had no clue what hit him. What was going on in his life? Last year Naina broke off her engagement with him. And now this! His father-in-law was threatening him with divorce! What had Preeti been going around telling her parents? Wasn't she the one who wanted to stay in the guest bedroom? So much for giving her space while they got to know each other! It looked like she didn't even want to get to know him at all! He had had it with women by then. They always screwed up his life. But he couldn't just let this go like that. He would divorce her for sure, but before that, she would have to answer some questions. Arjun didn't even bother to change. He just walked out of the gym and drove down to Preeti's parents' house.

"I need to talk to my wife," he said to Preeti's mother when she opened the door.

She looked nervously to her left and then looked at him again.

"Your father-in-law is in his study," she said, "it's best you stay out of his way for now. You can go that way. Preeti is in her bedroom. It's at the end of the hallway."

Arjun walked to Preeti's bedroom and barged in without even knocking at the door. He was all set to yell at her for all the nonsense he had to endure from her father but he stopped in his tracks as he saw her tear-stained face. His anger melted away as concern for Preeti took seed in his heart.

"Why are you crying?" he asked her.

She rushed over to him and clung to him, her arms around his waist, her head on his shoulder. She didn't seem to care that her beautiful embroidered kurta was getting all soggy because of his sweat-drenched T-shirt.

"Why are you crying?" he asked her again.

"I didn't think that you would come," she said.

"You wanted me to come over?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said.

Arjun wrapped his arms around her waist and asked her, "Then why didn't you just call me?"

"It doesn't count if I have to call you!" she chided him.

"Do you know how childish you sound right now?" he chuckled.

"That's just the way I am. If you wanted to marry someone who was not childish, you should have proposed to Reema first!"

"Who is Reema?"

"She works at our office and she has the same surname as me. She is older than me. Maybe you should have proposed to her."

"Why would I go about proposing to anyone else when you are the one that I like?"

"Do you really like me?"

"Yes, I do. I've told you before and I'm telling you again. I like you. I like you a lot."

"Does it bother you that I'm so much younger than you?"

"No. I like you just the way you are."

"I like you too. I like you a lot."

"Why does your father want us to get a divorce?"

"What? Divorce!"

Preeti raised her head and looked at Arjun, shocked.

"Didn't you know that your father called me and yelled at me?" he asked her.

"My mother told me that he was really mad and he yelled at you over the phone. But I didn't know that he said anything about a divorce."

"But why did he call me in the first place?"

"He started asking me all sorts of questions about whether there was some trouble between you and me. He was so worried that you had hurt me somehow and then I accidentally let it slip that I was staying in the guest bedroom... He can always tell when I'm unhappy even if I don't say anything to him."

"But why are you unhappy?"

"Why don't you want to go on a honeymoon with me?"

"Why won't I want to go on a honeymoon with you?"

"Back at your parents' place, I overheard you talking to your father. You didn't let him book a honeymoon for us..."

"That's because I can afford to pay for our honeymoon. My father was asking me as a courtesy because he was booking a vacation for Nakul and Smita. Nakul is too young. He doesn't make nearly as much money as I do. He can't afford the kind of foreign vacation that Smita has been dreaming about."

"So, you want to go on a honeymoon with me?"

"Yes, I want to go on an honeymoon with you. Do you want to go in a honeymoon with me?"

Preeti lowered her gaze and gave a nod, a faint smile on her lips. Arjun brought the palm of his hand to her cheek and wiped away a tear with his thumb. Preeti looked into his smiling eyes and then he kissed her.

It was only when Arjun pulled his lips away from hers that Preeti realized that she had forgotten to breathe. She soon took a few rapid breaths and slowly opened her eyes. Arjun's hand left her face and she let out a gasp as she felt his lips and his tongue and even his teeth on her neck. She closed her eyes again and she was sure that something inside her was going to explode. She had never known her body to be able to feel so many things at the same time. Her hands travelled slowly from his back to his shoulders to the nape of his neck. His hand had found the slit on the side of her kurta and she could feel the warmth of the palm of his hand on the delicate skin at her waist. Slowly Arjun's mouth travelled from the side of her neck to her collarbone. He planted a few gentle kisses on her collarbone and then slowly let go of her. Preeti opened her eyes and slid her hands from his neck to his chest. He took a step away from her and said, "you have to move into our bedroom tonight."

The way he said it, there seemed to be some sort of finality to his words. Like he would not tolerate any more arguments.

Preeti gave a nod of approval. It took her a few moments to find her voice but she finally managed to ask him, "Where are we going on our honeymoon?"

"I had started looking for packages to Switzerland," he said, "but then I thought it would be better to go there on your birthday. You can see snow there. We might even experience a snowfall together."

"You remembered about the snow!"

"You told me about your trip to Shimla when you drove my car that time."

"And when is my birthday?"

"27th January"

"How do you know?"

"Why shouldn't I know my wife's birthday?"

"You never asked me about my birthday."

"Vishal told me. Last year, when he had taken to following you around like a puppy, he found out so many things about you..."

"And you remembered it?"

"I remember everything about you."

"What else do you remember?"

"Your favorite colour is blue but you hate blue flowers. Poor Vishal was so disappointed. He was sure that the blue orchids were going to win you over."

"You were in on all the drama Vishal pulled off?"

"He is my friend. But every time he came up with a new scheme to impress you, I prayed that it wouldn't work. I never told him about meeting you at the coffee shop. The first time we met at the coffee shop. He still thinks that our parents just came across each other for the arranged marriage proposal."

"So, we're going to Switzerland on my birthday?"

"Yes"

"And where are we going for our honeymoon?"

"How about a long weekend in Maldives?"

"Sounds perfect"

"I miss you. I miss you a lot when you're not around."

"Why are you never around when I'm at home? You're always at the gym or at the squash court."

“I’m sorry. I’ll make sure I fix that in the future. I’ve lived alone for a long time... You have to tell me if something bothers you. I don’t know you well enough to be able to guess what's going on in your mind all the time. At least not yet.”

“I’ll make sure I fix that in the future.”

"Let's go to a nice restaurant for dinner tonight."

"I want Chinese food. Hakka noodles and chilli paneer."

"Sounds great. I like chilli paneer."

"I hate the food that your cook makes."

"I have a diet that I follow. She is used to cooking according to that. We can figure out a menu that you're okay with and talk to the cook tomorrow."

"Are your ex-girlfriends more beautiful than me?"

"No. No one is more beautiful than you."

"I... I think I'm falling in love with you."

"I know I'm falling in love with you."

"I... "

"Let's go home now."

Preeti smiled at Arjun and said, "Why not"

Request to the Readers

If you like what I write, please post reviews on Amazon and Goodreads. I would really like to know what you think.

Acknowledgement

To my sister, Sharika, and my dear friend, Namrata. This story would not have been what it is without you.

About The Author

Venuka Goyal



Venuka Goyal completed her undergraduate studies from IIT Bombay and graduated as a department topper. She didn't restrict herself to the library though. She was captain of the table tennis team, manager at the Entrepreneurship Cell and fulfilled other leadership roles during college. Upon graduation, she gave in to her curiosity towards science and ended up in the USA to pursue a PhD. She finished her PhD from The Ohio State University with flying colours. In her six year long stay abroad, she was bitten by the travel bug. Venuka went skydiving in Ohio, she experienced a wooden roller coaster in Kansas City and she went camping at the Yellowstone National park. After an enriching foreign exposure, Venuka returned to her roots. She has settled down in Indore, a city in central India, and teaches at a University. She is a mother to pre-school going twin boys and enjoys cooking and going on road trips with her family.

Venuka Goyal has had the experience of working as a scientific researcher in India for several years and she published many papers in international scientific journals of repute. In the process of writing these technical documents she discovered her love for writing stories.

You can find Venuka on Facebook @venuka.goyal.author or Instagram @venuka.goyal

She also has an author page on Goodreads

Praise For Author

Venuka Goyal's first novel 'You're stuck with me for life!' was published in August 2021 and has been featuring consistently in top 100 hot new releases list of Kindle Store India. Here are the top reviews for her novel on Amazon:

5 star review posted in India on 24th Sept 2021:

'The author has created a fast pace read for the readers. There's hardly any room for getting bored. A simple story but powerful one. Wherein two people with different views come together and get stuck with each other for life time. Loved it... All the best.. Keep up the good work!!'

5 star review posted in India on 19th Sept 2021:

'An excellent Indian romance writer!! ... She manages to deal with trauma, grief and curd(!!) in the book with realism and a deft hand. I am a fan of Ms Goyal's work now, and hope to read more of her! ... Another six star story!'

5 star review posted in the UK on 16th Sept 2021:

'Read it in less than a day. Well written and love the happy ending. Definitely a feel good type of book.'

Books By This Author

[You're stuck with me for life](#)

The story of a modern couple from central India, stuck in an arranged marriage.

Neeti and Ronit both ended up in the city of Indore in central India as tragedies struck their families.

When Neeti got married to Ronit, all she wanted was to get away from her mentally unstable mother and get into a household that allowed her the freedom to work as a school teacher and the freedom to drive a car. In return, if she had to take care of her in-laws and manage the household, she was okay with that. Having witnessed her mother's utter inability to deal with life after her father's untimely demise, Neeti was determined to be self-reliant and to never have expectations from anyone. If she didn't expect anything from anyone, she would never be disappointed, and never end up like her mother who had forgotten how to live.

When Ronit got married to Neeti, he just wanted to get a daughter-in-law for his parents. His father had refused to undergo the bypass surgery that the doctor had recommended unless Ronit got married and Neeti came along at the right time. Living in a joint family setup with his parents and his younger college-going brother, Ronit was okay sharing a room with his mother's daughter-in-law. He didn't necessarily want a wife for himself. Having tried his hand at love and having failed at converting his previous year-long relationship into a love-marriage, he was not convinced that a woman could be both the wife that he wanted and the daughter-in-law that his family insisted on.

Ronit and Neeti had made their expectations with regards to their marriage clear from the very beginning and in the last one year of being married they had both held up to their end of the bargain. Love was never a priority. It was something deemed so unimportant that neither of them brought it up

before the wedding. Nor did they ever talk about it over the entire first year of being married. Will Neeti and Ronit continue to live in a loveless marriage, taking it simply as a responsibility? Or will love sneak up on them on a road-trip to Ranthambore?