



AISHA: THE LOVE OF MY LIFE



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Chapter 1: The First Glances

I still remember the first day I saw you. After a long class, my head felt heavy from the numerous lectures I had attended. I was walking fast through the busy corridor near the business block. I had my bag on one shoulder and my phone in my hand, pretending to check something, but I was tired and just wanted to find a quiet spot. Then I looked up, and there you were.

You stood nearby, tall and calm, talking to another girl and laughing softly. That laugh reached me before I even noticed your face. I did not know your name that day, but something inside me said, "Remember her."

I walked past you so slowly that day, trying not to stare. I went straight to the bench near the garden and sat down. I opened my bag and took out my notes, but I was not reading them. My mind kept going back to you. Who is she? Which year is she in? How have I never seen her before?

That day, when I reached home, I dropped my bag and sat on the edge of my bed, talking to myself. "Calm down. She is just another student. There are thousands here." But my heart didn't listen. Later, I texted my friend S and told him what happened. He replied, "Bro, just talk to her. Tall girls don't bite." I laughed at his message, but I knew I didn't have the courage yet.

About two weeks later, I saw you again near the cafeteria. It was a Wednesday, after my economics lecture. I came out hungry and annoyed because the lecture was so boring. I planned to grab a sandwich and eat alone at my usual table in the corner. But there you were again, standing with the same girl from before, chatting casually.

I stopped in my tracks. I pretended to tie my shoelace near the table so I could look at you again. Your hands moved when you talked, and your smile changed my mood. I forgot my hunger for a minute and thought, "What if she notices me? What if she smiles back?" But you never turned.

I bought my sandwich and juice and sat where I could still see you. I even tried to listen to your voice, but only caught your laugh. That laugh stayed in my head the whole day. When I got home, I didn't tell anyone. I just lay on the couch and smiled like an idiot.

Another two weeks passed. One Friday afternoon, I saw you again. This time, sitting outside near the steps of the library. You were alone, reading a book and taking notes. You looked peaceful, like nothing in the world could bother you.

I stood far away, leaning quietly near a parked cycle, just watching. I whispered to myself, “Say something. Ask about the book. You’re not a statue.” But I didn’t move. I froze. You closed your notebook, packed your bag, and stood up. I turned quickly and walked away in the opposite direction, my heart racing.

That evening, I sent a voice note to my friend instead of texting. I told him everything—where you were sitting, how close I was, how I still didn’t talk. He replied, laughing, “One day you’ll graduate without ever saying hello.” He was probably right.

I didn’t sleep much that night. I lay in bed with my eyes open, asking myself, “Why is this so hard? She’s just a student like you.” But something about you made me feel nervous and bold at the same time. It wasn’t just how you looked—it was the way you moved so confidently, the way your laugh came out so naturally, like you weren’t trying to impress anyone.

After another week, I saw you again during lunch hour. You were sitting on the grass with three other girls. You all were passing around snacks, laughing at something on someone’s phone. I stood behind the big tree near the fountain, trying not to be obvious.

A friend of mine walked by and noticed me staring. “Who are you staring at?” he teased. I replied, “Just waiting for someone.” He followed my eyes and said, “Oh, the tall girl? Yeah, good luck with that one.” He chuckled and walked away, and I just stood there feeling like I had been caught.

That day, I promised myself something. “Before I graduate, I will talk to her. Even if she doesn’t care, at least I’ll know I tried.” It was a quiet promise, but it felt big to me.

Seeing you became part of my routine after that. Some days you were at the library gate, other days near the cafeteria, sometimes sitting near the science block. I knew the paths you walked, even if I acted like I didn’t.

Another rainy afternoon came, and I saw you running to shelter near one of the campus arches. You held your bag over your head, trying not to get drenched. I was standing under my umbrella

across the road, watching you. I wanted to run to you, offer the umbrella, walk beside you. But I didn't move.

I walked home in the rain that day, soaked completely. My clothes stuck to my skin, but I felt warm somehow. I sent a voice message to my friend and told him about it. "You love the idea of her more than the person," he joked. "Next time, just talk." I replied with a laugh, but his words hit me.

Some nights, I stared at the ceiling, talking to myself like I was in a movie. "What if she's not single? What if she thinks I'm weird? What if she never remembers me?" But then another voice inside said, "So what? You've got nothing to lose."

One night, I stood near my study table and looked at the calendar. Final exams were close. Two months left. Two months, and I'd leave this place forever. If I never said a word, I would carry that regret for years.

So I told my friends about it during dinner one night. We were sitting at a small restaurant outside campus. The place was noisy, full of students. Between mouthfuls of biryani, I said, "Listen. Before final exams, I will talk to her. No more excuses." My friend S clapped loudly. "Finally, our hero wakes up. Don't chicken out, bro. We're tired of your drama." We laughed so loudly that the waiter gave us a weird look.

Later that night, when I got home, I stood in front of the mirror in my room and whispered, "You will do it. You will say hello. You will ask her name. Don't mess this up." I rehearsed a few lines. "Hi, I see you around..." No, too creepy. "Hey, are you in second year?" No, too random.

That night, I hardly slept. My books stayed open, but I was too busy preparing imaginary conversations in my head. I woke up early, made tea in the chipped blue mug I always used, and sat down to review notes I didn't read. Outside, the sky was cloudy. It was raining again. I smiled. At least the weather matched my mood.

By nine, I packed my bag, grabbed my umbrella, and headed out. I told myself I'd study in the library, but let's be honest—I knew why I was going. I walked into the building, found my favorite spot behind the shelves, and placed my books there. But I couldn't focus.

Around ten, I stood up, stretched my legs, and picked up my water bottle. I started walking around, acting like I was just bored. And there you were. Sitting near the study area, with two other girls. Reading something on your laptop. You looked calm, focused, in your own world.

I stopped near a fake plant and peeked over the edge. My mind screamed, “Go now!” but my legs took me right past you. Coward.

I walked to the far end of the hall, where my friend S was sitting. He was half-asleep on his notebook. I banged my bottle on the table. He opened one eye. “Did you do it?” I shook my head. He rolled his eyes. “Hopeless. Don’t come crying to me later.”

I couldn’t sit still. My heart was racing. I said, “This is it.” He didn’t even respond.

I grabbed my umbrella and walked back. One of your friends had left. Only you and the other girl were there. I paused. What if they both leave? What if this is it?

I rushed back to my spot, packed my things with trembling hands, and clutched my umbrella like a sword. “Go now. Don’t waste this,” I whispered.

I walked slowly toward your table, trying not to fall over myself. I looked at the study room door like it was the most interesting thing in the world. Then I took a breath and turned to your friend.

She looked up and smiled. I cleared my throat. “Excuse me... the tall girl, where did she go?” The words just fell out. I wanted to crawl away.

She laughed, kind of sweetly. “She’s in the washroom. You want to speak to her?”

I nodded. “If that’s okay.”

She patted the seat. “Sit. She’ll be back soon.”

I sat down quickly, pretending to be calm. Inside, I was screaming. My hands were sweaty. My legs bounced under the table. I tapped my fingers on my bottle like a fool.

Then I heard footsteps.

You walked up holding your phone. You saw me sitting next to your friend, and your face was a mix of surprise and curiosity.

You looked at her, then at me. “Hi?” you said, with half a laugh.

“She was just telling me you wanted to talk,” your friend said.

I panicked for two seconds. Then I smiled. “Hi... I see you around sometimes. Just wanted to say hello.”

You raised your eyebrows, then smiled. “Hello. I’ve seen you too. You’re always with that loud group.”

I laughed, maybe too hard. “Yeah. Sorry about them.”

You sat across from me, placing your phone on the table. Your friend packed her things and quietly left. Suddenly it was just you and me.

I scratched my head. You waited. Finally, I said, “I’m in my final year. I’ve wanted to talk for a while.”

You smiled. “Why me?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. You just seem calm. Confident. And yeah... graceful.”

You laughed again. “Thank you... I guess?”

We both stared at the table for a second, but it wasn’t awkward.

“Can I ask your name?” I said.

“Aisha. And you?”

“Saad.”

“Nice to finally talk, Saad.”

“I’m glad I didn’t chicken out today.”

“Me too.”

We talked about small things. Your course. How group projects suck. My assignment stress. We laughed, quietly but freely.

My phone buzzed. A message from my friend: *"Did you faint yet?"*

I showed you. You laughed. "Your friends sound fun."

"Yeah, but right now, I think you're more fun."

You looked away, hiding a smile.

When I stood up, you asked, "Will I see you again?"

"Definitely."

I walked out of the library that day, shoes wet, heart full. For the first time in weeks, I wasn't just the guy who watched from afar. I had said hello. I knew your name. And this was just the beginning.

Chapter 2: Bitter Beginnings

The day we finally talked, everything felt different. I walked home like I wasn't touching the ground. My shoes were soaked, my bag was heavy, but none of it mattered. I had spoken to you. I had said real words. You had laughed. You had told me your name, and that one moment had flipped something inside me.

I got home, dropped my bag by the door, and went straight to my room. I sat at the edge of the bed, shoes still on, just staring at the floor. My heart was still racing, like it hadn't realised the moment was already over. My phone buzzed. I grabbed it quickly. It was a text from my friend: "Did she run away after your hello?" I replied with a single word: "Nope." Then I locked my phone and smiled to myself quietly.

The next morning, after brushing my teeth and struggling to find matching socks, I rechecked my phone. I opened your chat. No message. But your name sitting there on the screen was enough for now. I got ready and left for class, but the day felt lighter, like I had let go of something I was holding for too long.

That evening, I finally texted you. "Hey. It was nice talking to you yesterday." I sent it without giving it much thought. Ten minutes passed. No reply. I convinced myself you were probably busy. Maybe you were eating dinner or studying. I put my phone down and didn't touch it for the next hour.

When I picked it up again, there was a reply: "Yeah, same here :)" That tiny smiley face felt like a green signal. Not a big one. But enough to take the next step.

We started texting slowly—just short messages at first. I asked what you were studying that day. You said statistics, and I pretended to know what that meant. You asked if I was always that awkward in real life. I said, "Only when I'm nervous." You sent a laughing emoji.

Our chats became part of my day. I would wait for your replies without looking desperate. Sometimes I would stare at the screen, trying to find the right words. I didn't want to say too much, but I also didn't want to sound boring. I would type something and delete it five times. Then, finally, send something like, "Do you like tea or coffee?" And you'd say, "Neither. I like juice." And I would save that detail in my mind, as if it mattered more than anything.

You told me a few things. You liked sitting in the corner seat of the library. You hated loud chewing sounds. You used to wear glasses in school but switched to contacts recently. I don't know why it all made me smile, but it did. I liked learning about you, even if it was only through a screen.

One night, we were talking about favourite seasons. You said you loved winter. I asked why, and you said, "It makes everything slow and quiet. People look softer." I had never thought about it like that. I wrote, "I like that," and meant it.

I didn't tell anyone we were texting. Not even my closest friend. I wanted to keep it quiet. It felt personal. Likes something small and new that needs to be protected.

One day, possibly after two weeks, your message arrived late at night. You said, "Can I ask you something personal?" I stared at those words for a while. I typed "Sure" and hit send.

Then you asked me, "Have you ever been in a relationship before?"

I knew that question would come. I didn't expect it so soon. I sat on my bed, holding the phone tightly. My room was dark. The only light came from the screen. I could feel my heartbeat in my hands. I knew what I had to say.

I typed slowly. "Yes. Once. A few years ago."

Then I added, "It didn't last long. I learned a lot from it."

I pressed send.

Then I sat still, waiting. The clock on my wall ticked loudly. The fan turned slowly above me. Five minutes passed. Ten. No reply.

I opened her chat again and checked the message. Read. But no typing bubble. I locked my phone and set it aside. My chest felt tight, like something was closing in.

The next morning, I checked again. Still no reply. I went through the whole day trying to stay normal. But my eyes kept going to the screen. I opened our old messages, reread your jokes, your small facts, and your voice in my head while I read them. But you didn't say anything.

At night, I texted again. "Hey. I hope I didn't make you uncomfortable." No reply.

Two days passed. —stillence. I couldn't stop thinking. Was I too honest? Should I have waited longer? Maybe I ruined it before it even started. I talked to myself in the mirror again. "You didn't lie. That should count for something. She deserves honesty."

I kept checking your online status. I noticed that you were active at times, but you didn't respond. It was hard not to take it personally. I knew you needed time. But time moves differently when you're waiting for someone.

In the quiet days that followed, I thought about everything. I replayed our texts. I remembered how you had laughed when I said I liked your calmness. I remembered how I smiled when you said you liked soft rain. I kept asking myself what you were thinking now. Were you unsure? Did you feel disappointed? Did my honesty push you away?

I kept checking my phone even when I didn't mean to. During classes, meals, and even amid conversations, my eyes would slide to the screen. I wasn't waiting for anyone else. I wasn't chatting with a bunch of people. It was just you. Just one message. Just something small like "hi" or "I'm thinking." But nothing came. The last message I sent sat there, read but unanswered. I started to hate seeing that blue tick.

My head kept spinning with thoughts. Maybe I should've waited before telling you. Perhaps honesty was too much to bear. Maybe you just needed space, and I was being impatient. I didn't know how to stop wondering if I had ruined it all. I replayed our early messages. I even scrolled through our first texts and read them as if they were from a different lifetime. You seemed so close just days ago, and now you feel miles away.

Ramadan began soon after. I tried to shift my focus. Waking up early, attending the mosque for Fajr, reading more of the Quran, and breaking my fast with my family—it gave my day some rhythm. Still, no matter how many tasks I filled my time with, your silence followed me around like a shadow. At the mosque, before Fajr, I sat quietly with my head bowed. I whispered in the dark, words only Allah could hear. "Fix it if it's meant to be. Clean my heart if I'm being selfish. Show me what's right, even if it's not what I want."

Those early mornings felt like the only time I could be sincere. There was no one else around: just me, the cold floor, and my thoughts. My heart was carrying both regret and hope. I was sorry for rushing. I was proud I didn't lie. I was sad because I felt something real slipping away. But I still hoped—somehow—that silence didn't mean the end.

Sometimes when I couldn't sleep, I would go back and stare at your profile photo. It hadn't changed. I didn't dare send another message. I didn't want to be that guy who kept knocking when the door was shut. So I waited. Quietly. Awkwardly. And every time my phone vibrated, I secretly wished it was you. It never was.

At suhoor, while eating dates and toast, my mind was still busy with you. I wondered what you were eating. I asked if you were also planning to go to the mosque. I thought about your laugh, how it sounded through a screen. I remembered how you had said you liked winter because it made people feel softer. And here I was, trying to soften myself too, trying not to be angry or bitter or pushy.

Even without talking, you were everywhere in my day. When I walked past the library, I looked for your corner. When I saw a girl in a blue scarf, my heart skipped, even if it wasn't you. Every tall girl on campus made me look twice. It was a little ridiculous, but I couldn't help it. You had settled into my daily thoughts without trying.

I started writing things I wanted to tell you in my notebook. Not to send. To get them out of my head. Like "I liked your answer about winter. I think about it sometimes." Or "I hope you're sleeping well during Ramadan." It felt silly, but it helped a little. My brain was too noisy with all the things I couldn't say.

There was one night, around the tenth fast, when I came back from the mosque and just sat in the dark. I didn't switch on the light. I leaned back against the wall and let my thoughts wander. I thought about how strange it was—that you could feel close to someone and still be so far from them. I thought about whether you missed talking to me, too. Or if maybe you had already moved on.

But even as I wondered all that, I still hoped for a text. Something simple like "Sorry for the delay. I was thinking." Or even just a question, like you used to ask before. I wasn't asking for big feelings. I just wanted to know you were still somewhere on the other side, reading, thinking, maybe smiling.

The silence stretched longer. I didn't talk about it with anyone. I didn't post sad quotes or hints online. I just kept everything quiet. It was my silence, just like yours. I carried it with me like a pocket full of tiny memories. I didn't know if they would mean something again. But I wasn't ready to throw them away.

One afternoon, I bumped into my friend while buying fruit. He asked why I looked tired. I just said, “Ramadan,” and smiled. It wasn’t a lie, but it wasn’t the whole truth either. I didn’t tell him I was up half the night thinking about a message that never came.

In the second week of Ramadan, something in me started to shift. I still cared. I still miss our chats. But I stopped checking your profile photo as much. I started writing more in my prayer journal instead. I asked for fewer things to go my way and more for clarity. “Let me feel peace,” I wrote once. “Let her feel peace, too. Whatever that means.”

I wasn’t sure if this was growth or just tiredness. But something inside me had become quiet. Not in a hopeless way. In a way that accepted that not everything was within my control. Maybe we weren’t supposed to talk every day. Perhaps you needed silence to figure things out. Maybe I needed it too.

But even in that silence, I still thought about you every day. Not with desperation. But with softness. With the kind of care that doesn’t shout or chase. I didn’t know what would happen next. I didn’t know if we’d talk again. But I knew this—if we did, I’d still be the same me. And I’d still be honest.

Chapter 3: A Text, A Chance

It had been quiet for days, and the silence was becoming part of everything. Even the smallest things reminded me of you. The empty space in my chat list where your name used to light up. The way my hand still reached for my phone in the middle of the day, only to find nothing new. It wasn't dramatic. Just quiet. A kind of stillness that stayed.

One evening during Ramadan, I sat on my prayer mat after Iftar, not in a rush to get up. The air in my room was soft, a little warm, and I could hear distant traffic outside the window. I wasn't thinking of anything in particular until your voice echoed in my head, from that early conversation we had. "You better let me read your dissertation when it's done," you had said with a light laugh, probably not even meaning it that seriously. But I had remembered it. For days. Maybe even weeks. Your words stuck more than I realized back then.

That one memory started circling in my head, like a quiet idea knocking for attention. I opened my laptop. The dissertation file sat on the desktop. Final draft saved and submitted. I looked at it for a long minute, and then opened my phone. I went to our chat. It had been still, untouched for so long that even typing felt awkward. I stared at the keyboard, thinking twice, then typing anyway.

"Hey," I wrote, slowly.

Then I added, "I finally finished my dissertation. Want to read it?"

It didn't sound too emotional. Not too needy. Just casual enough to carry the truth behind it. I sent it before I could overthink it again. Then I threw the phone on the bed and walked away, pretending I had something better to do.

I paced around the kitchen, drank some water I didn't even want, then sat back on the edge of my bed. I kept telling myself not to look, not to care, but of course, I picked up the phone in less than five minutes. No reply. I locked the screen again and dropped it face down.

Time moved slower after that. I watched the clock like it was messing with me. Ten minutes. Fifteen. Twenty. Still nothing. I lay back on the bed, one arm over my face, trying to stop the heavy feeling in my chest. "Maybe she won't reply," I told myself. "Maybe this was a bad idea."

Half an hour passed. I didn't move.

Then my phone buzzed. Just once. My hand flew to it like it had its own mind. There it was. Your name.

I clicked.

You'd replied.

"Hey, oh wow congrats! I actually do want to read it. Been meaning to ask but didn't want to seem nosy."

It wasn't long. It wasn't dramatic. But it was warm. Kind. Like you hadn't erased me. Like the silence didn't mean goodbye. I read it twice. Then once more.

My heart felt like it had taken a breath after holding it for days. I wasn't expecting a full conversation. I didn't even know if we'd go back to how it was. But that one reply—that one small line—felt like a door slightly opening.

I typed back slowly, trying not to show how relieved I was.

"I'll send it to you. But warning: it's boring and long."

You replied with a laughing emoji and said, "Don't worry, I'll read only the beginning and the end. That's how I survive long documents."

That reply made me smile without even noticing. I replied with a thumbs up and attached the file. After that, we didn't talk much that day. You replied once more with, "Got it, thanks!" and then nothing. But I didn't mind.

That one chat brought back something I thought I'd lost. Not in a loud way. Just enough to feel seen again. The gap that had grown between us didn't disappear overnight. But a message had crossed it. That mattered.

The next day, I woke up before Fajr again. I didn't feel heavy this time. I stood on the prayer mat quietly, feeling something small but strong inside me. I didn't make a long dua like before. I just said, "Shukr." A simple thank you. Not because everything was fine. Not because I knew what would happen. But because I felt a shift. I felt movement where there had been silence.

You didn't text again the whole morning, and I didn't rush to send another message either. It wasn't about rushing anymore. It was about letting something build back naturally. A few hours after noon, I got a new message from you. "Hey, your writing's actually good. I didn't expect it to be this clear." That line made me grin like a kid. Not because of the compliment—though I liked that too—but because you had read it. You had actually opened the file. You gave time to something I shared. That meant something to me.

I kept the reply short. "You read more than the intro and the end?"

You sent back, "Maybe. I won't admit anything officially."

That was the first time in a while our chat felt like before. Light. Easy. No pressure. No big emotion hiding under the words. Just us, slowly coming back to the flow we once had.

From there, the messages came in naturally. Not long chats, not deep ones at first. But enough to feel normal again. You would send a photo of your coffee. I'd reply with a messy photo of my study table. You'd say you were tired of assignments. I'd say I was surviving only on tea and dates. Sometimes you didn't reply fast. Sometimes I didn't either. But we weren't counting minutes anymore.

I didn't tell anyone that we had started talking again. It felt like a small plant I was protecting from too much sunlight. Something still growing. I didn't want to explain it. I just wanted to feel it without noise.

A few days passed like this. Ramadan kept moving forward. My focus slowly returned to my studies, but now my phone didn't feel like a weight. I didn't feel that ache when I looked at it. I knew you were there somewhere in the background, and that was enough for now.

One night, while replying to your message, I stopped halfway and just stared at your name. I tried to remember when the shift happened. When did you go from being the tall girl near the library to someone I thought about daily? When did your messages start to feel like the best part of my day? I didn't know the exact moment. It had crept up quietly. I used to think I just liked your presence, your face, your voice. But now I knew it wasn't just that.

It was the way you replied with care, even in short messages. It was how you didn't try too hard to impress. It was your timing, your calm way of talking, the little jokes that didn't feel forced. It was the way I felt when you replied—light, calm, safe.

I had liked you from the beginning, yes. But now I was beginning to value you. Not because you were beautiful or because you had laughed in that library. But because I could see you. Not fully yet, but enough to want more. Enough to feel something deeper than just attraction.

That night, I didn't message you again after you replied with a simple "Goodnight." I stared at the word for a while. Then I whispered, "Goodnight," back to the screen, like you could hear it. I placed the phone down and slept peacefully for the first time in a while.

The next few days passed smoothly. Our chats stayed simple, but they were steady. It felt like we were walking again, not running. Sometimes we'd talk about random things like how annoying group projects were or which show was overrated. Once you asked me what kind of tea I liked, and I asked you the same. You said, "Mint tea. It helps me feel human during exam season." I sent back a voice note of me pretending to cry over deadlines, and you replied with laughing emojis. It was silly, but I didn't care.

Every message felt like building blocks. Not big steps. Just tiny bricks, steady and patient. I didn't want to rush anything. I didn't want to ruin this again by overthinking or expecting too much. I just wanted to enjoy talking to you.

I also started learning to pause. When you didn't reply fast, I didn't panic. When your tone was a little dry, I didn't assume anything. Maybe you were busy. Maybe tired. I reminded myself that connection doesn't always look loud. Sometimes it's just quiet and steady.

One day, while waiting for my bus, I looked around and thought, "This is the same place where I used to avoid eye contact, where I used to walk the long way just to get a glimpse of her." And now, here I was, waiting for a message from you. Talking to you daily. Learning who you were beyond the smile and scarf.

It felt surreal, but not like a dream. More like something earned. Something carefully grown. It made me want to keep going, to keep showing up in small ways. I didn't know what we were building yet. But whatever it was, it mattered.

And I had finally stopped feeling like I was chasing a moment. Now I was living it. Slowly. Simply. Honestly.

Chapter 4: Sweet Beginnings

It didn't happen all at once. Our conversations didn't suddenly become long or deep. But there was a natural rhythm now. A message in the morning. Another during a break. One before sleeping. Slowly, texting you became part of my routine, like brushing my teeth or checking my bag before class. And it didn't feel forced. It felt easy, like something I was meant to do all along.

You'd send simple things, like "Good luck with your presentation" or "Did your group members finally show up today?" I would reply fast, sometimes even before finishing my sentence in real life. We joked about university deadlines, professors who gave surprise quizzes, and how the canteen kept serving the same oily biryani every Tuesday. You once texted, "If I see that yellow chicken again, I'm dropping out." I laughed out loud in the middle of class and had to cover it with a fake cough.

We talked about siblings one afternoon. You said you had two younger ones who never stopped stealing your charger. I told you my brother still hides the TV remote like it's a secret weapon. That day, we exchanged five voice notes back and forth, not about anything important—just the usual sibling madness. But something about the way you told those stories made me feel closer. Like I was being let into a part of your world.

I noticed you texted a lot in the evening. That became our time. I'd keep my phone nearby, and even if I was out with friends or busy with an assignment, I always checked if you'd sent something. Even a simple "how was your day?" from you made me sit up straight and think carefully before replying. I didn't want to sound too excited, but inside, I always was.

One evening, I told you about my old school. I don't know what made me bring it up. Maybe because you'd mentioned how you hated public speaking and that reminded me of a class I once messed up in front of everyone. I told you how I froze during a debate and stood silent for thirty full seconds before running off the stage. I thought you'd just say "lol" or send a laughing emoji, but you actually sent three voice notes back-to-back. You laughed the whole way through and said, "I would've cried. That's so brave, actually."

I had never told anyone that story without feeling embarrassed. But somehow, with you, it felt different. It felt okay.

The more we talked, the more I noticed the small things. The way you always added “alhamdulillah” when talking about something good. The way you used full stops even in short texts. The way your voice changed slightly when you were sleepy—softer, slower. You once told me, “I only talk this much when I feel comfortable.” I didn’t say it out loud, but I smiled and whispered, “I’m glad you do.”

One night, I sent you a photo of my dinner—just to complain about the cold paratha. You replied with a blurry photo of your tea and wrote, “This is my entire mood today.” I stared at that photo longer than I should’ve. Not because it was anything special, but because you chose to share it with me.

You weren’t just a girl I saw from far anymore. You were becoming a part of my every day, one text at a time.

There was one night that stayed with me more than the others. You were quiet the whole day. No messages. I didn’t want to be annoying, so I didn’t double-text. But by evening, I gave in and sent, “Long day?”

You replied after an hour, “Yeah, just a little drained. But I’m okay.”

That “but I’m okay” made me pause. It sounded like you were trying not to say too much. I didn’t want to push, so I just said, “I’m here if you feel like talking.”

You didn’t say anything after that. I placed my phone on the table and tried to focus on my assignment, but my mind was with you. I kept wondering if I’d said something wrong. Then, just before midnight, I got a voice note from you.

You spoke softly. You said you were just tired of the noise around you. People, expectations, everything. You didn’t explain too much, and I didn’t ask. I just listened. Twice.

I didn’t know what to say to fix it, so I just said, “It’s okay to pause. You don’t always have to explain. I’m glad you said something.”

You replied with a simple “Thank you,” and I knew you meant it.

After that, something shifted again. You texted a little more often. A little more freely. You told me you liked walking without a destination when your head was full. That you kept a tiny

notebook in your bag where you wrote random thoughts. I told you how I sometimes spoke to myself while walking home, just to clear my head. You laughed and said, “I do that too. We’re both weird.”

We were weird. But in the best way.

Most nights, I would lie in bed, phone in hand, screen brightness turned all the way down. I didn’t scroll aimlessly like before. I’d just reread our chats. Not because they were deep or dramatic, but because they felt real. I’d go back to that message where you told me about the time you got locked outside your house because you forgot the keys and had to sit on the porch for an hour. I laughed every time I read it. Or the one where I said my group project members were missing again and you replied, “Should I show up and pretend to be one of them?”

I don’t know when it happened, but your words became the last thing I saw before sleeping. Even if we hadn’t talked all day, I’d open our chat just to feel close. It wasn’t about checking for replies anymore. It was more about holding on to what we already shared.

Each conversation felt like a step forward. Not rushed. Just steady. Like a soft light that keeps growing quietly. I didn’t feel that pressure to be perfect with you. If I made a silly typo or sent a voice note that didn’t make sense, you’d just laugh it off. I could be myself, even on the days I felt like a mess. And that feeling was rare for me.

In between classes, I’d check my phone just to see if you’d sent anything. If your name popped up on the screen, even if it was just a “hi,” I’d smile before reading it. Sometimes I’d pretend not to have seen it yet, just to reply with the right tone, not too fast, not too slow. But most of the time, I couldn’t help myself. My fingers moved before my brain could catch up.

Even your short texts made my day. A simple “what are you doing?” or “I’m bored, entertain me” would pull me out of whatever dull thing I was doing. I’d start typing, then erase, then type again—trying to sound chill, but probably failing.

I started telling you things I never thought I’d share with anyone. Like how I always eat the edges of a sandwich first. Or that I sleep with one sock on and one sock off, and I don’t know why. You didn’t judge me. You just called me “a proper character” and told me about how you can’t sleep if your door isn’t slightly open.

It was strange how natural it all felt. Like we'd known each other much longer than a few weeks. Sometimes you'd send a voice note in the middle of the day, just to share something random—a new playlist, a weird dream, or a funny thing your sibling said. I'd pause whatever I was doing to listen, and I always replied with something to keep the conversation going.

One morning, you texted me during breakfast. "Canteen served watery eggs again. I miss my mum's paratha." I replied, "If I see one more boiled egg, I'll drop out and open a tea stall instead." You sent a sticker of a crying face and wrote, "I'd come to your stall daily if you made me chai."

Reading that made me sit up straighter. It wasn't serious, I knew that. But it still meant something. You'd come. You'd show up. Even in jokes, there was warmth.

I started paying more attention to little things. If I saw something interesting during the day—a funny sign, a strange bird, a lopsided cake in the café—I'd snap a picture, thinking, "She'd laugh at this." Then I'd send it with a dumb caption, and your reply would always make it better. One time you said, "Your brain is full of screenshots," and I said, "Only the best ones."

Sometimes, I'd open our chat just to listen to your old voice notes. I'd pretend I had something to look for, but really, I just wanted to hear your voice. You didn't know it, but your voice had become part of my day. Soft, a little fast when excited, always clear. There was one voice note where you were talking about a random classmate who kept mispronouncing "psychology," and you couldn't stop laughing. I saved that one. I never told you, but I did.

With each passing day, I felt something growing. Not big, not loud. Just steady. Like finally having someone who listened. Someone who replied even when there was nothing important to say. And that meant more than anything.

I once told you that I hated early mornings and you replied, "Same, but the sky looks nice at 6 a.m." The next day, I woke up early on purpose, looked at the sky, and smiled. It did look nice. But what really made it worth it was telling you that I saw it. And you replied, "See? Told you."

That was how it went with us. Small things became big. A tiny moment, a short message, a silly joke—they all carried more weight than I expected. You weren't just someone I was getting to know. You were becoming the best part of my day.

There was no confession. No big, dramatic moment. Just tiny steps forward. A little more trust. A little more laughter. And suddenly, life didn't feel as heavy. Not because everything was perfect, but because I wasn't carrying it alone anymore.

Chapter 5: Our Little Adventures

It started with short messages about timings. “Are you free after your class?” “Only for a bit, by the way.” And that bit slowly turned into a few minutes on campus benches or walking slowly from one block to another. It wasn’t planned like a date. It was just... time shared.

The first time we bumped into each other again, outside of texting, I remember standing near the science block stairs. I saw you walking from the other end, holding your water bottle and adjusting your bag strap. You were wearing a plain grey scarf that day, nothing fancy, just your usual simple look. But there was something calm in how you moved. Like you were always in your own space, never rushing unless needed.

You saw me too and smiled gently, like you weren’t surprised. That smile made it easy. I didn’t even have to think about what to say first. We stood near the steps and just talked about our lectures, how tiring the last assignment was, and how the canteen had run out of chicken patties again. You made a joke about how it’s always the best things that disappear fast, and I laughed louder than I should have.

From then, it became a quiet thing between us. No big meet-ups or plans. Sometimes, you’d text me, “Heading to the lawn. Feel like walking?” and I’d drop everything and go. Other times, we’d cross paths by chance, and it would turn into a ten-minute walk under the shady side of the main path near the admin block.

Those walks were never rushed. Sometimes, we spoke about the smallest things. You’d tell me how your brother annoyed you by finishing the cereal at home, or how you couldn’t sleep because the fan made a weird noise all night. I’d nod, listen, and add my useless complaints, like how the printer never worked when I needed it most. You’d say, “It hates you. Just accept it.” And I’d laugh, because maybe it was true.

There were also days when we didn’t talk much during our walks. Just footsteps and the sound of other students passing by. We didn’t need to fill every second. You were never in a rush to be loud, and I liked that. I liked how I didn’t have to be funny or smart all the time around you. You didn’t ask me to. You just let me be there, walking beside you.

Once, we sat on the bench near the corner of the main garden. It was one of those benches that's slightly crooked but still comfortable. You had a chocolate bar in your hand and offered me half. I refused at first, but you insisted. "Come on, you act like it's poison." I laughed and took it, mostly because you smiled at me like I had no choice.

We sat there and talked about movies. You told me how you once walked out halfway through a film because it annoyed you too much. I said I could never do that, I'd feel too guilty. You said, "Sometimes peace is more important than guilt." That sentence stayed with me for days.

There was one morning when I was early to campus for a change. I had a class at 9, but I arrived at 8:15. You texted, "I'm near the small café. Want to grab coffee?" I wasn't going to say no. I practically ran there, trying not to look like I was rushing.

The café was quiet that early. Only two other tables were taken. You were sitting near the window, facing the wall, your phone in one hand and a paper cup in the other. You looked up, saw me, and nodded. No big hello. Just a small smile that said, "You're here. Good."

I ordered the cheapest coffee they had and joined you. We didn't say much at first. Just sat and sipped quietly. The window beside us was slightly fogged from the cool air outside, and you drew a little smiley face on it. I looked at it and said, "That looks like me after a group presentation." You laughed and added messy hair to the face.

We talked for maybe twenty minutes. About nothing big. Just how fast the semester was moving, and how you once tried to bake cookies and ended up burning the tray. I told you how I once fell asleep during a Zoom lecture and didn't realize my mic was on. You laughed so hard I thought the server might throw us out.

Before we left, I looked at my cup and said, "This might be the best cup of coffee I've had on campus." You looked surprised. "It's just instant powder, calm down." I said, "Yeah, but the company makes it better." You didn't say anything, but your eyes crinkled a little. I knew you heard me.

That short meet became one of those memories that played in my head even days later. Not because it was romantic or dramatic. Just because it was real. You, me, a small table, two paper cups, and the quiet kind of comfort that's rare to find.

After that, we kept meeting whenever we could. Always in open places. Always simple. Sometimes it was near the old lecture hall steps, sometimes under the tree by the admin gate. We never stayed too long. We never drew attention. And that made it easier. It felt like our own little space inside a big, noisy campus.

There were moments when you'd stop mid-walk and point at a tree or a pigeon doing something weird. Or when I'd ask you suddenly, "If you could teleport, where would you go?" and you'd answer, "My grandmother's kitchen." No hesitation. And I'd nod, because that answer made perfect sense somehow.

One afternoon, we sat near the back lawn where no one usually went during lunch hours. I had brought a pack of chips in my bag and offered you some. You took three and said, "Only three. No more, don't tempt me." I shook the pack again in front of you, and you just grinned without reaching for more. Then we laughed about something silly—probably about how people walk faster when it rains lightly, as if trying to race the drizzle. It wasn't a joke really, but we still laughed.

You told me a story about how once your teacher kept calling you by another student's name for a whole week, and you never corrected her. I said, "Why didn't you say something?" You replied, "I wanted to see how long she'd go on. It became an experiment." That made me laugh for a full minute. You just smiled and said, "See, now you know how my brain works."

There was a day we bumped into each other near the photocopy shop. I was waiting for my printouts, and you showed up holding a few loose papers in your hand, looking a little annoyed. I asked, "Long queue?" You sighed and said, "Always. But I came too late, so it's my fault." We stood there for five minutes, not really talking about anything important. Still, when you walked away, I felt better. Like the day just got a little less boring.

I began noticing how I waited for these little meetings. Even if it was just passing you in a hallway, even if we didn't stop to talk, it gave my day a small lift. Sometimes, when I didn't see you, I caught myself feeling slightly off, like something small was missing.

You once said, "You always notice things I think people don't." It was random, said during a break between classes when we were walking past the sports ground. I had pointed out how your shoes looked new. You smiled at them and said, "They are. You're the first to say anything." That moment stayed with me. I liked that you noticed what I noticed.

I never tried to impress you. And I think you liked that. You never tried to impress me either. You didn't speak in a fancy way, didn't dress up differently just because we were meeting. I think we both just showed up as we were. And that made it easy. Comfortable. Steady.

You told me once that you used to be shy about speaking too much, afraid people would think you talk nonsense. I said, "Nonsense is my specialty." You laughed and said, "I know. That's why we get along." And maybe that's what made things feel good. We weren't trying too hard. We were just being ourselves.

One day, we sat by the wall near the music room, where few students passed during break hours. I told you about how, in middle school, I once tried to do a class presentation but forgot all my lines halfway through and ended up reading from the whiteboard behind me. You said, "Wait, you used the teacher's writing as your script?" I nodded. You laughed so hard you dropped your water bottle. That kind of laugh stayed in my head for hours afterward.

Even the short messages between lectures made a difference. Just a "Done with class?" or "Canteen is chaos today" made my phone feel like a friend. Not just a device.

I didn't realize how much I was getting used to you until I didn't see you for two days. You had been busy, and we hadn't texted much. I didn't say anything, but I kept checking my phone too often. When your message finally came, just a simple, "Hey, how's your day?" I felt like I could finally breathe.

Our bond wasn't loud. It wasn't like the stuff people post about or write poems for. But it had weight. It had rhythm. It was in the small things. In knowing I could say something random and you'd understand. In knowing that you'd message me just because you remembered I had a long class that day.

One cloudy afternoon, we walked near the main gate because I had to collect something. You walked with me without asking why. On the way back, we talked about what we'd do if the semester got cancelled suddenly. I said I'd sleep for a whole week. You said, "I'd probably read something boring just to feel useful." Then you stopped and added, "Okay, maybe not boring. But something real." I asked, "What counts as real?" You thought for a second and replied, "Something that reminds me of life. Not just stories, but feelings." I didn't say anything after that. I just let your words stay in the air.

The more we talked, the more I felt like I was learning about a whole new person. Not someone perfect. Not someone mysterious. Just someone layered. Real. And that made me want to be more real too.

You told me you didn't like surprises unless they were quiet ones. Like finding your favorite snack in the fridge without asking. Or seeing a message when you least expect it. I made a note of that in my head. I never sent anything dramatic. Just small, steady check-ins. "Don't forget your umbrella," or "Hope your class went okay." You always replied. Sometimes short, sometimes longer. But always in your way. And that was enough.

I also liked how you didn't ask too many questions at once. You gave space. You never pushed for answers. You let things come out slowly, like they were meant to. I think that's why I found myself wanting to share more with you. Because nothing ever felt like a test.

There was a calm to everything we did. A natural rhythm. We didn't talk every second of every day. But when we did, it was never forced. It was never empty.

I started sleeping with my phone on silent but next to my pillow. Just in case you messaged late. Even if I knew you wouldn't. Just the idea that I might wake up to something from you was enough to make the night softer.

By now, most of our meetings had a familiar pace. We knew how each other walked, how long we'd sit before needing to move, how long it took for a joke to land. Even your silences had meaning. When you were quiet, it wasn't because you were upset. It was because you were thinking. And I learned to wait.

There were many things I didn't know yet. I didn't know what your favorite movie was. I didn't know what your room looked like or if you liked summer better than winter. But I knew how your face looked when you were trying to hold in a laugh. I knew how you tapped your foot when impatient. And somehow, that felt like enough for now.

Our bond was still new, but it felt like it had roots. Not deep yet, but steady. Growing at its own speed, not rushed, not afraid.

Some days, I caught myself smiling for no reason. Then I'd realize it wasn't for no reason. It was you. A sentence you said, a moment we shared, a joke you didn't finish. All of it had slowly

become a quiet part of my day. And I knew—whatever this was—it wasn't just passing time. It was something being built, one small piece at a time.

Chapter 6: The Heart Talks

The day had been slow. Classes felt longer than usual. The weather was warm, not in a nice way, but in that sticky way that made you want to sit under a fan and not move. I reached home around late afternoon, dropped my bag, and sat down with a glass of water. I wasn't planning to call anyone. I just wanted to rest. But then my phone buzzed. Your name. "Free to talk?"

I stared at the screen for a few seconds. Then replied, "Yeah, give me five minutes."

I washed my face, fixed my hair a little, and plugged in my earphones. When the call connected, your voice came through soft and slow. "You sound tired," you said.

"Long day," I replied. "And the heat didn't help."

You laughed quietly. "Same here."

The call started light. You asked what I ate for lunch. I asked how your group presentation went. We talked about the noisy kid who always sits in the front row and how he thinks every lecture is a debate.

Then there was a pause. Not awkward. Just different. You stayed quiet for a bit. Then you asked, "Can I ask you something personal?"

My hand froze mid-air, reaching for the water glass. "Of course," I said. I felt my chest tighten a bit.

You didn't speak right away. I waited. You finally said, "That day when we talked about your past... you didn't say much. I mean, you were honest, I know. But... can you tell me more?"

I leaned back into my chair. I could've dodged it. Could've joked or changed the topic. But I didn't want to. Not with you. Not anymore.

So I took a breath and said, "Okay. I'll tell you everything."

I told you about the mistakes. I didn't dress them up. I didn't add excuses. I told you how things started, how I didn't think it would matter at the time. How I thought I knew myself, but I

didn't. How I confused attention with care, and how I ignored the voice in my head that kept warning me. I told you the truth. Nothing added, nothing left out.

You didn't interrupt. You didn't react much. You just listened.

I talked about how I regretted it. Not because someone told me to regret it, but because I grew up since then. Because I started seeing the weight of it. I told you how I prayed about it. How I asked Allah for a clean heart. How I stopped pretending I was fine and started being honest with myself.

I paused when I finished. My throat was dry. My hand was still holding the water glass, untouched.

You took a while to reply. I stared at the ceiling, waiting.

Then you said, "Thank you for being honest."

That one line sat with me.

You didn't say, "It's okay." You didn't say, "I forgive you." You just thanked me for telling the truth.

And that meant more than anything.

After that, we didn't rush into another topic. You said, "I know you're not that person anymore. But I had to ask because if this is going to grow, I need to know where it's coming from."

I nodded, even though you couldn't see me. "That's fair," I said.

You told me you've always valued honesty more than perfection. You said, "Loyalty doesn't mean never making mistakes. It means choosing the right path when you have the chance."

We both stayed quiet for a while.

Then you asked, "What does loyalty mean to you?"

I thought for a second. Then said, "Loyalty is not letting curiosity or attention distract you from what you've already chosen. It's about standing where you said you'd stand, even if the world tries to pull you somewhere else."

You hummed softly. “That’s strong,” you said.

We moved slowly into a conversation about forgiveness. You told me how you struggled once to forgive a close friend who hurt you. You said it wasn’t about the mistake. It was about how they handled it. “If they had just said sorry, really said it, I think I would’ve moved on faster,” you told me.

I asked, “Did you forgive them in the end?”

You said, “I think I did. But I never forgot. Not because I hold a grudge. Just because it taught me something.”

I replied, “Some things are meant to teach. Not punish.”

You liked that. I could hear it in the way you said, “Yeah.”

We kept talking. About trust. About how small things matter more than big gestures. About how people who truly care never make you guess their place in your life.

At some point, you asked, “Are you afraid I’ll leave because of your past?”

I stayed silent for a moment, then said, “I was. Before. Not anymore. Because I know I’ve done what I could. The rest is yours to decide.”

You replied, “That’s fair.”

It felt like we were walking through a dark hallway with tiny lights guiding us. We didn’t know exactly where it would end, but we weren’t afraid of the dark anymore.

I leaned back again and closed my eyes. Your voice had become something I didn’t just hear. It became something I trusted.

Near the end of the call, you said, “Thanks for not hiding.”

And I said, “Thanks for not judging.”

Then I added something I hadn’t planned to say, “I don’t want to impress you. I just want to be real.”

You went quiet. Not the kind of silence that feels like something's wrong. The kind that says you're thinking about what was just said. When you spoke, your voice was softer, slower. "That's what I've been scared of, honestly. People trying too hard. Saying the right things but not meaning them."

I sat up a bit, feeling the weight of your words settle into the space between us. "Yeah. That's what I used to do sometimes, to be liked. But not with you. I don't want to do that anymore."

You let out a little breath. "It's hard, you know? Letting someone in. I've seen things fall apart even when they looked perfect from outside."

I said, "Same. That's why this... whatever this is... I want it to grow without acting or pretending."

You said, "Me too."

It wasn't dramatic. No big declarations. Just two voices on a quiet night, trying to be understood.

The call lasted longer than I expected. We kept talking about random fears. You said you're scared of being misunderstood. Of opening up and then being told you're "too much" or "too quiet" or "too different."

I told you I've had that fear too. That someone might get bored once the "nice version" of me wears off. You laughed, and it felt like a small light came on. "Isn't it weird how we're all scared of being known too well, and also not known enough?"

I smiled, even though you couldn't see it. "Yeah. It's like we want to be seen but also want to hide."

You said, "But not from each other."

That moment didn't need any more words. It just stayed there, floating between us.

When the call ended, I stared at the ceiling in the dark. I didn't want to sleep. I didn't want to lose that feeling just yet. So I played the last part of the conversation over and over in my head. The way your voice sounded when you said my name. The way I felt when I said, "I trust you."

I checked the time. It was close to 2 a.m. I wasn't tired. I just lay there, thinking. My chest felt full, but in a calm way. Not heavy. Just... warm.

I whispered to myself, "So this is what safety feels like."

Not the kind you get from locking a door or holding a hand. The kind you get from being known and not pushed away. From being messy and still welcome. I'd never felt that before.

I reached for my phone again. I didn't want to message you. I just wanted to see your name in the chat. The last message sat there: "Talk tomorrow?"

I typed back slowly, "Yeah. Talk tomorrow."

Then I left the phone beside me and looked at the wall. I remembered everything we said. Every time you paused to find the right words. Every time I held my breath, waiting for your reply.

This didn't feel like a crush. It didn't feel like excitement or butterflies. It felt like sitting under a tree on a warm day. Nothing big, nothing loud, just... peace.

I thought about the way you shared your fears with me. How you told me about your doubts, about not wanting to waste time on something that doesn't feel honest. And how, after saying all that, you still stayed on the call.

That's when I knew it wasn't just about liking you anymore. It wasn't even about wanting something. It was about having someone.

Someone who didn't make me shrink. Someone who didn't ask for perfect answers. Someone who listened when I talked about regrets and didn't look for the "right" version of me.

The next morning, I woke up late. I checked my phone first thing. No message yet. But I didn't panic. I just smiled. Because I knew you would message. I didn't need proof. I just believed it.

Around noon, your name popped up. "Did you sleep well?"

I replied, "Nope. Kept thinking about that call."

You replied with a laughing emoji. "Same."

I sat on the edge of my bed and grinned like an idiot. This—this quiet check-in—meant more than long texts or heart emojis. It meant you were still there.

We didn't talk about love. We didn't label anything. But I knew something had changed. Something strong had started to grow.

I stood up and walked to the mirror. I looked at myself. "You didn't mess this up," I said quietly.

And that small sentence made me feel lighter. I walked out of my room and made tea. The morning sun touched the side of the table, and I sat down with my cup, still half-sleepy, but fully awake in a new way.

That day, we didn't call again. We just sent a few messages through the day. About small things. A meme. A joke about how slow the campus Wi-Fi was. A reminder to drink water.

But under every message, I could feel the care.

That night, I looked up at the ceiling again. Same spot, same pillow. But a different heart. A braver one. A softer one too.

You didn't say you loved me. I didn't say it either. But we didn't need to.

The feeling was already louder than words.

Chapter 7: Two Weeks of Silence

After that phone call, something in me felt quieter. Not empty—just more peaceful. You had listened, said thank you, and then asked for space. It wasn't harsh. It wasn't cold. It was said in the softest voice, like someone gently closing a door but not locking it.

I didn't argue. I didn't try to hold you back. I just said, "Take whatever time you need," and meant it. At least, I thought I did. The truth is, I didn't know what to do with all that time afterward.

The next morning, I reached for my phone without thinking. It was muscle memory by now. I tapped your name. The chat opened. The screen stared back at me, empty. My fingers typed, "Hey, hope you're okay," then stopped. I hovered over the send button, stared at it, then deleted the message and locked the phone. It became a routine.

I told myself I'd give you space, but I didn't know space could echo this loudly.

Days began to feel like they were dragging their feet. I kept checking my phone, even during lectures. I'd glance down between sentences, hoping for that one small notification. I turned off "Last Seen" just so I wouldn't torture myself. Still, I'd open our chat again and again.

I kept remembering your voice from that night—clear, steady, kind. And then the silence after.

On the third day, I walked past the admin building where we'd once stood for an hour just talking about nothing important. That bench, the one near the cracked tile we joked about, looked back at me like it remembered something too.

I sat there once, alone. No purpose. Just to breathe in the space where your laughter once lived. The sun was too harsh that day, or maybe it just felt that way because I wasn't used to facing it without your voice softening the heat.

Every time I saw your profile photo—just that same smile, slightly turned, light hitting your cheek in that way—I would whisper, "Ya Allah, guide her heart. And guide mine too."

I didn't ask Allah to bring you back. I didn't beg. I just asked for whatever was best. But deep down, I hoped the best included you.

Some nights, I couldn't sleep. I'd lie down and turn to my right side, as if I was preparing for dua, but no words would come out for minutes. Only when my eyes began to burn, and my chest felt heavy, I'd finally say, "Ya Allah, if this is love, make it halal. If this is a test, give me strength."

I cleaned my room more often, as if having a tidy desk could help me manage the chaos in my heart. I even deleted old pictures from my gallery—except the one of the Ferris wheel. That stayed. That night stayed.

I noticed small things too. My appetite dipped. Music didn't feel the same. Even the campus felt louder, messier. I found myself zoning out during conversations with friends. They didn't notice. Or maybe they did, and didn't know how to ask.

One afternoon, I saw a girl who looked a little like you from behind. Same walk. Same hair. My heart skipped before I realized it wasn't you. It was such a silly moment, but it made me stand still for a second longer than needed. And then I just smiled at myself—shaking my head like, "Get it together."

In my notebook, I scribbled little things I wanted to tell you. Like how I saw a cat trying to fight its reflection in a glass door. Or how I'd finally figured out that vending machine near the basement block only worked if you pressed the button halfway. Random, silly things. The kind of things we used to text each other in between classes.

I missed that.

I missed the calm your replies brought. Even when you said just one line like, "Eat something," or "That meme was tragic," I'd carry it in my chest like a warm cup.

I talked to myself more during those two weeks. Out loud. Especially during walks. I'd say things like, "She's probably fine," and then argue back, "But why hasn't she texted?"

Sometimes I caught my reflection while talking and rolled my eyes at myself. "You're losing it," I'd say with a half-laugh, half-sigh.

One evening, I sat at the prayer mat longer than usual. Not because I was asking for anything new. But because the silence of the room didn't scare me as much as the silence between us. After praying, I stayed seated and stared at the wall.

I said, "Ya Allah, give her peace, even if it's not with me. But if it is with me, make it easy. Make it clear."

I had guilt too. For not being perfect. For having a past that needed explaining. For being a person still figuring out what kind of man I was meant to be.

But even with guilt, there was hope. A quiet kind. The kind that doesn't shout. Just waits.

Somewhere deep inside, I felt that maybe you were doing the same—trying to understand your own heart, away from noise, away from me. I didn't blame you. In fact, I respected it more than anything. It takes strength to ask for space instead of pretending everything is fine.

It was during those days, those long and often uncomfortable pauses, that I truly understood how deep this connection had grown. I wasn't just missing your messages. I was missing the comfort that came with them—the stillness they brought to my always-racing thoughts. You had this way of balancing my chaos, without even knowing it. Even your simplest replies used to calm me down. Now, in the silence, I could feel how loud my own mind was again.

I kept finding little things that reminded me of you. A line in a book. A song you once said you liked. The smell of cardamom when someone reheated biryani in the hostel microwave. These small things hit unexpectedly. They pulled me back to our little chats, to your laugh in the middle of a serious story, to the way you'd say "that's deep" even when it wasn't that deep. I didn't just miss your presence. I missed how your presence changed the way I felt about my own life.

I remember sitting in the masjid one afternoon after class. It wasn't even Ramadan yet, but the masjid was quiet, and I needed to be somewhere quiet. I sat there, legs folded, and looked ahead without focusing on anything. Then, without planning to, I whispered, "If she's meant for me, bring her heart peace."

Not bring her back.

Not rush the moment.

Just peace—for her, wherever she was, however she was feeling.

I repeated that dua every day after. It became a habit, like checking your chat. But this was better. It felt cleaner. Less about what I wanted. More about letting go of control.

I also made a rule for myself: I wouldn't chase you with words. I wouldn't send a message just to check if you'd reply. I would give you what you asked for—space—and trust that if something was meant to grow, it would still grow in silence. Like seeds under the soil, hidden but not gone.

This wasn't a breakup. Not in my heart, at least. It felt like a pause. A needed one. Like we both had to step back to see the full picture. I think if we hadn't paused then, we might've dragged each other down without knowing it. We might've kept talking just to fill the silence, instead of facing what we both needed to face inside.

I tried to use the time well. I started journaling again, just for myself. Most of it was about you, of course. But not in a desperate way. It was more like talking to myself. Untangling feelings I'd never had to name before.

One entry read, "She's not mine to hold, but she's in my prayers now. That counts."

I started exercising again too. Not seriously. Just walks. Early morning ones. The air helped. Sometimes I'd pass that same tree near the library where we once sat on the grass and talked about how confusing adulthood was. I passed that spot almost every day. Never stopped. But I always looked.

Friends noticed I was quieter. Haseeb asked once, "You okay, bro?" I just nodded. Said I was tired. He didn't push. Just patted my back and handed me half his chocolate bar. That's the kind of friend he is—not big on words, big on snacks.

Even with friends around, I didn't feel like joking as much. It wasn't sadness exactly. It was just... waiting. A calm type of waiting. I didn't want to distract myself. I wanted to sit with everything I was feeling.

You'd once said that sometimes silence teaches more than words ever could. I didn't understand it fully when you said it. But I think I do now.

Because even during silence, I began to respect you more. For asking for what you needed. For not ghosting. For not pretending. For being someone who didn't say "I'm fine" when you clearly weren't. That kind of honesty is rare. It takes bravery.

And maybe that's when I started thinking differently about love. Not the kind in movies where people chase each other through airports. But the kind where someone says, "I need time," and the other person says, "Take it," and really means it.

Maybe love isn't just about being close all the time. Maybe it's about being steady, even from a distance.

I didn't stop caring. Not even for a day. But I also stopped panicking. The space began to feel less like punishment and more like a chance for both of us to breathe, to grow, to clear whatever clouds we were each carrying.

One night, I couldn't sleep again. So I made wudhu and sat down to pray. No big duas this time. Just one sentence: "Ya Allah, soften what's hard in both our hearts."

Then I slept.

And for the first time in days, I dreamed something calm. I don't remember the details. Just a feeling of lightness.

So I held onto that.

And waited. Not with anxiety. But with quiet hope.

Chapter 8: Faith and Prayers

Ramadan came quietly. No big welcome, no announcement. Just the soft presence of early mornings and quiet nights. The air felt different—not because of weather, but because I was ready to feel it this time. The fasts made my body slow, but my mind alert. I was tired in a different way, the kind that makes you notice things you usually ignore.

My routine shifted. Waking before Fajr, walking to the masjid with a hoodie on, slippers slipping on wet tiles, and yawning behind a hand. The mosque wasn't full, but it wasn't empty either. Men in white kurtas, some half-asleep, some whispering duas. I found my spot at the back, sat cross-legged, and closed my eyes for a moment before prayer began.

That first week of Ramadan, I made the same dua every morning after Fajr. No list, no speech. Just one line. "Give me another chance with her." Sometimes I added, "Only if it's good for both of us." But mostly, I just left it simple. I didn't know what else to say. What do you say when your heart wants something, but your brain is learning to let go?

The days were long, and the silence between us remained. But something had changed inside that silence. It didn't hurt as sharply as before. It was still heavy, but now it carried meaning. Like maybe this time apart was teaching both of us something we couldn't learn while texting every hour.

During one of those slow afternoons, when my phone was face down beside my books, I saw your name light up the screen. Just one message. No greeting. No small talk. Just an image of an ayah from the Qur'an with a soft green background. It read, "Verily, with hardship comes ease." That was it.

No caption, no emoji.

But that message sat with me all day. I stared at it longer than I should've. I reread it during breaks between studying and again before Maghrib. It felt like a whisper from you, like a gentle reminder that you hadn't forgotten me—even if we weren't speaking like before.

That night, I stood on my prayer mat longer than usual. After Maghrib, after the fast broke, I didn't rush off like I normally did. I stayed. Sat quietly. I told Allah things I'd been holding in my chest. I asked Him to forgive me for being careless in the past, for hurting hearts I didn't mean

to hurt, for not always choosing the best version of myself. And I asked, if He had kept you in my life for a reason, to help me deserve that blessing.

I began to see Ramadan not just as worship, but as cleanup. Like dusting off the shelves of my soul, one little part at a time.

The next few days, you sent a few more Quranic verses. Always without words. Just the verse. One talked about patience. Another about sincerity. And another about trusting Allah's timing. I didn't reply with words either. I just reacted with a heart. Not the loud kind of love, but a quiet thank-you.

In a way, it was the purest kind of conversation we'd had. No back-and-forth. Just silent understanding, passed through screens. And even without your replies, I kept you updated through my duas. I'd whisper, "She's in my heart. Please guide us both."

One night, just after Taraweeh, I sat in the courtyard behind the mosque. There were a few boys playing with dates, tossing them like pebbles into a paper cup. I sat away from them, phone in hand, screen dark. I didn't open any chats. I just opened the notepad and wrote: "You inspire me to be better. Even when you're not around."

I stared at it for a while. Then I copied and pasted it into our chat.

Sent.

You didn't reply. Not that day. Not the next. But I didn't delete it. I didn't regret it either. I think you saw it. And I think you felt it. That was enough.

That message wasn't to win you back. It was to say what my ego had been holding in. You had become someone I looked up to—not for being perfect, but for being real, for being spiritual in a way that made others want to reflect too.

Ramadan helped me see things without the noise. Without overthinking. I saw how much of my growth came from knowing you. How I'd started checking prayer times more often, not because I had to—but because I wanted to be better than who I was yesterday. And I knew part of that change came from the way you carried your faith.

I cleaned my room one afternoon, not because it was messy, but because I felt like changing something. Found old papers, a pen with dried ink, and the notebook where I'd scribbled ideas for a khutbah I never gave. I opened a random page, and the first line said: "Be a person who brings ease to others, not pressure."

I closed the book and smiled. Thought of you again.

Each night, before suhoor, I would sit by the kitchen window. Small plate of dates, one glass of water. I'd rest my arms on the table, eyes half-shut, and let the quiet settle. That's when my mind always came back to you. Not in a loud way. Just softly. Like a breeze.

I started journaling again too, this time with purpose. I wrote down the things I admired about you. Your honesty. Your calm. The way you didn't push when things were hard. The way you stayed kind, even when you were distant.

One entry read: "She doesn't reply often, but when she does, she gives me the feeling that she thought about it."

Another said: "I used to think love was about closeness. But now I think it's about respect—even when it's quiet."

I started looking forward to prayers, not just because of faith, but because they became the only moments I could speak freely without waiting for a reply.

At suhoor, while the sky still held onto its darkness, I would sit at the table with my glass of water and a date. The house was quiet, just the humming fridge and ticking clock in the background. My hands would rest around the warm cup of tea, but my heart would already be somewhere else. I would whisper your name in my dua, always gently. I never asked for a grand reunion. Just peace—for you, for me, for whatever was meant to unfold. Sometimes I would say, "Ya Allah, if she's the one, make her heart soft toward me." Sometimes it was just, "Take care of her when I can't."

At iftar, right before breaking my fast, I would pause. While others reached for their first sip, I took a breath. That moment before eating felt powerful. Like the door of the sky was slightly open. I would thank Allah for letting me feel calm, even in confusion. I would thank Him in case, somewhere unknown to me, He was already untangling whatever needed fixing between us. I couldn't see the result yet, but my heart was a little less restless. That, in itself, felt like progress.

Our bond, even in the quiet, still had something alive in it. It didn't need messages or replies to stay real. It was just there, hanging in the air between us, like something understood but unspoken. And that quiet connection had a softness to it. A kind of blessing I didn't want to disturb.

Even when I got busy with work or studies during the day, I'd suddenly hear something—someone saying your name by coincidence, or a lecturer mentioning something you once told me—and it would bring me back to you for a second. I never stopped thinking. You weren't absent from my mind. You were just quieter now. Like background dua.

Faith didn't erase the ache. It didn't snap its fingers and fix everything. But it gave me something to hold onto. It helped me not spiral. I didn't let my fear grow wild this time. Instead, I put it somewhere safer—on the prayer mat, during the hours when the world slowed down and the lights were low. I found meaning in the silence. Maybe you were doing the same.

I remember one night in the last ten days of Ramadan. It was late, and I was too tired to move after taraweeh, but something inside me told me to stay up a little longer. So I sat quietly, leaning against my pillow with the Quran open on my lap. My eyes were reading, but my heart was whispering your name again.

It was during one of those nights that I felt a kind of certainty I hadn't known before. Not a loud, clear voice. Not a flash of anything. Just a steady knowing. That whatever this was between us, it wasn't meaningless. It wasn't a waste. Even if it ended. Even if it didn't look like love in the way movies or stories show it. It was something that taught me more about myself. Something that brought me closer to Allah.

That night, I didn't cry. I didn't ask for anything specific. I just closed the Quran, placed my hand on it for a second, and smiled. Not because everything was fixed, but because I finally felt like I could let things be. If you came back, it would be a gift. If you didn't, it would still be okay. Because I would still pray for you. Still wish you peace.

Even when we didn't talk, I'd hear your voice sometimes. Not in a strange way—just in my head. The way you used to say my name when you were slightly annoyed. Or how your voice dropped a little when you were serious. I'd replay old voice notes quietly, just for a second, and then stop myself. Not to make myself sad—but because even in memory, your voice calmed me.

One night, I opened our chat again. It had been weeks now, and it was still mostly silent. A few heart reacts to Quranic posts. A few verses sent. No new messages. I hovered over the keyboard again, typed something like “Hope you’re doing okay,” then backspaced it slowly.

Instead, I closed the app and picked up my prayer beads. That became my reply. Not with words, but with a small act of worship. That became my habit in Ramadan. Every time I wanted to say something to you, I would say something to Allah instead.

It’s strange how faith gives space to feelings. It doesn’t push them away. It just gives them a place to rest without rushing. I stopped trying to force a result. I stopped needing to hear from you just to feel seen.

And somehow, that made me feel closer to you. Closer than before.

I imagined you in your own little world, fasting, praying, maybe also asking questions about us. I didn’t picture you sad or confused—I pictured you steady. Learning something new, just like I was. Because that’s what growth looks like. It’s not loud. It’s not perfect. It just shows up every day, quietly.

As Eid came closer, I didn’t expect anything. Not a message. Not a call. I was okay with silence. I had filled it with enough faith not to fear it anymore. But I did feel something had changed in me. I wasn’t the same person who needed constant replies to feel important. I had learned to give space, without letting go of care.

I had also learned to forgive myself a little more. For not being perfect. For having moments of doubt. For needing time, just like you.

That’s what this Ramadan gave me. Not closure. Not answers. But understanding. Of you. Of myself. Of how sometimes, love grows in quiet places.

And I hoped—still quietly—that when you were ready, when it was right, you’d find your way back. And if not, at least I knew I had made dua with my full heart.

That was enough.

Chapter 9: Sweet Surprises

It didn't happen all at once. Our chats started like soft footsteps—slow, careful, and light. You sent a message about an article, and I replied with something about the weather. It felt a little awkward at first, like walking after sitting too long. But I didn't mind. I was just glad you were there again, on the other side of the screen.

That week, I promised myself one thing—I would be more thoughtful. No rushed replies. No empty words. I would show up properly, fully, the way I should have before. Even in small ways.

One afternoon, you mentioned you had a rough day. I could tell you were trying to stay upbeat, but I picked it up in your voice note. You said, "I'm okay, just drained. I didn't even eat lunch properly." That sat in my head for hours. I couldn't fix your day, but I could add a little light to it.

The next morning, I walked to the campus shop before class. The sky was still grey, the wind a little sharp. I bought your favorite snack, that simple one you always reached for even when there were fancier things around. I put it in a paper bag, wrote your name on it in small letters, and dropped it off at the faculty helpdesk with a note: "For your energy. Hope the sun finds you today."

You messaged me two hours later. "Did you just drop this?" You sent a photo with the snack on your desk. I replied, "Maybe. Or maybe the snack just walked to you because it missed you."

You sent back a laughing emoji and then wrote, "Thanks. This actually made my day better." That one line felt more valuable than anything I'd read all week. I didn't reply right away—I just stared at it for a while, feeling quiet joy.

That same evening, you sent a short voice note. Just six seconds. "I miss your laugh," you said. That was it. No hello, no long speech. Just those five words. It felt like a thread pulled tight again. I played it back twice, maybe three times. There was something honest in your voice that I hadn't heard in weeks. I didn't record anything back. I just sent a heart emoji and wrote, "Still here. Still laughing. Just softer these days."

A few days later, I found something inside my notebook. I had left it on the bench during a group meeting, and you were sitting nearby with your own work. I didn't notice anything until I

flipped a page at home that night. There, tucked between the notes on page 47, was a small, folded paper.

I opened it slowly. It just said: “You’re doing better than you think.”

I stared at those words longer than I should have. I read them again and again. It wasn’t fancy handwriting. Just neat, short letters. But it landed right in the middle of a rough evening, and I didn’t know how badly I needed to hear it until I read it.

I wanted to say something back immediately, but I waited. I didn’t want to flood the quiet space we were carefully rebuilding. So I left a sticky note in your own textbook two days later. I wrote, “Thanks for making even silence feel kind.” I never asked if you saw it. I just hoped you did.

Later that week, something strange happened. I sat at my desk one night, laptop open, surrounded by books and notes. The window was slightly open, letting in the evening breeze. I picked up a pen—not to write a to-do list or an essay—but to write something for you.

It had been years since I wrote anything creative. But that night, I let it come out. It wasn’t long. Just a few lines. But they came from a place in me that had been quiet for too long.

I wrote:

“I used to chase loud things—
noise, names, moments.
But you made me sit with silence
and see that it can hold love too.”

I wasn’t sure if it was a poem or a thought or something in between. But I typed it out neatly and saved it. Then I sent it to you, plain and without explanation. I didn’t add hearts or extra words. Just those four lines.

You replied after a while with, “That’s beautiful.” And then: “You haven’t written like this before.”

I said, “Not until now.”

You wrote, “Please don’t stop.”

That made me pause. It was such a simple ask, but it stayed with me. I closed my laptop and leaned back, thinking about how something so small—a snack, a voice note, a handwritten line—could feel bigger than grand gestures. I had spent too long thinking love needed to be loud. But we were proving that soft could be stronger.

Our chats continued, gently. Still not daily. Still not too much. But they had more care in them. I noticed when your typing paused longer, and I waited instead of double texting. You noticed when I sounded tired, and you sent memes instead of asking too many questions. We found a rhythm.

One afternoon, while walking across campus, I caught sight of you near the library steps. You were laughing with a friend, hair tied back, tote bag over your shoulder. You didn't see me, but I saw you laugh—and it wasn't for me, but it made me smile anyway. That kind of ease on your face meant you were doing okay. That was all I wanted.

After that day, something shifted again—not loudly, not all at once, but gently. Like the way light creeps through a curtain in the morning. We had made it through that strange space of silence, and now we were learning how to be with each other in a new way. No pressure, just presence. And every little surprise between us felt like laying down another brick, one by one, for something we both wanted to last.

You started sending photos of random things again—a tree full of parrots on your street, your iced coffee looking suspiciously watery, or a screenshot of a funny typo I once made in a text. I responded with memes, voice notes, or a thumbs-up with extra exclamation marks. These weren't just silly exchanges. They were quiet ways of saying, "I'm here. I still care."

One evening, I brought you coffee—not because it was planned, but because I passed the shop we both liked and thought of you. I remembered how you always said the vanilla syrup there was too sweet, so I asked them to go light on it. You laughed when I handed it over. "You remembered that?" I said, "Of course. Your coffee complaints are memorable."

Later that day, you messaged, "That coffee saved my headache. Also, you really didn't have to. But I'm glad you did."

I replied, "I didn't *have* to. I *wanted* to."

You heart-reacted to that, and I took a screenshot of it. Silly, I know. But I didn't want to forget those small wins—the moments that reminded me we were still slowly choosing each other.

One weekend, we went to the go-karting place. You had a discount from your old job, and we thought, why not? It was loud, full of shouting kids and the smell of rubber and fries, but that day remains stamped in my memory. I was nervous—I didn't want to look like a complete beginner. You kept teasing me before the race, saying, "Watch me lap you twice."

I said, "Let me win at least once. I need this for my ego."

You laughed and said, "Okay, but don't cry when I beat you."

We raced, and yes, you won. But that wasn't the best part. Afterward, we took a photo together using that small polaroid-style camera you carried. You handed it to me and said, "Let's make this one frame-worthy." We posed like kids—goofy peace signs, slightly messy hair, and wide smiles. That photo is still in my wallet. It's a little faded now, but it hasn't left its spot. Whenever I open it, I'm taken back to that exact moment. The noise, the lightness, your laugh. That one memory is mine to keep.

We didn't plan big things. That's what made everything feel lighter. We didn't need candlelit dinners or dramatic declarations. We needed coffee runs, small notes, shared playlists, and quiet understanding. I think that's when I realized: this wasn't just comfort—it was connection.

There were days when all we did was sit under the tree near the admin gate. You'd scroll through your phone, I'd doodle in a notebook. Sometimes we talked. Sometimes we didn't. But the silence was never awkward. It was calm. It was ours.

You started sharing things with me again, slowly. How your classes were stressing you out. How your younger brother kept stealing your hoodie. How your mom made your favorite biryani and you saved some for lunch the next day. I listened to every word like it mattered—because it did. These weren't just updates. These were windows into your day, into your world.

One night, we were texting while I was walking home. You asked, "What do you think is one thing people underestimate?"

I thought for a second, then replied, "Consistency. Small things done with heart."

You responded with a voice note, softly saying, “I like that. Sounds like what we’re doing.”

That stuck with me.

The more we talked, the more we understood each other’s ways. You needed time sometimes, and I gave it without taking it personally. I needed reassurance sometimes, and you gave it in your own quiet ways. A random check-in. A song you thought I’d like. A comment on something I posted. It wasn’t loud love. But it was real.

I kept writing. Not poems every day. Just small lines. Some stayed in my notes app. Some I sent to you. One afternoon, I wrote:

“You don’t fix me. You make space for me to grow.”

You saw it and replied, “That’s what love is meant to do, I think.”

That reply made me stop for a second. It was a simple sentence, but it carried weight. It felt like we were finally understanding love on our own terms—not as a fairy tale, but as something grounded and kind.

We had come far from where we started. There were no big speeches. No dramatic scenes. Just two people learning to care better, bit by bit.

And that day I saw you laugh by the library? I didn’t come say hi. I just let you have that moment. I walked past with a smile, whispered Alhamdulillah in my heart, and carried that little joy with me.

I didn’t need to be the center of your day anymore. It was enough to be someone you smiled for. Someone you still let in, even in small ways.

And I knew—really knew—that we were building something that mattered. Something real. One sweet surprise at a time.

Chapter 10: Laughs and Jokes

We weren't the loudest pair on campus. We didn't walk arm in arm or talk over each other in big groups. But in our quiet corners—in chats, walks, and random voice notes—we were loud with laughter. Strange laughter. Silly laughter. The kind that starts from one small word and ends in both of us wheezing from absolutely nothing.

Your laugh wasn't just a laugh anymore. It was how I knew you were okay. It was my signal that the mood was light. That even if the world was messy, this little space between us was still safe.

I remember the day you said, "You text like you're writing a university email." I frowned at my phone and replied, "Please advise on how to fix this matter at your earliest convenience." You sent back five laughing emojis and said, "You're the only person I know who adds punctuation to a meme."

Later that evening, I told myself out loud, "Okay, maybe tone it down. You're not sending a job application." Then I sent you a voice note saying, "Next time, I'll try sending a meme without a caption. Raw and unfiltered." You replied, "Finally, welcome to real internet culture."

And it wasn't just texting habits. We found joy in each other's odd routines. You had a habit of sending half-finished thoughts. Like, "You know what's weird?" And then nothing. I'd stare at the screen waiting for the rest of it. Ten minutes later, you'd follow up with, "Never mind, I forgot."

It was infuriating. It was hilarious.

I used to tease you about how long you took to reply sometimes. You'd read my message, say "BRB," and come back four hours later. I once said, "You should teach a course in emotional suspense." You laughed and said, "People pay for anticipation. Be grateful."

We had this little joke about one of our professors who always said, "In conclusion," but never actually concluded anything. We started using it for everything. If a message was too long, we'd just end it with "In conclusion" and leave the rest blank. It became our short way of saying, "I've talked enough but I have no real end to this rant."

Our laughter wasn't for show. It was quiet, real, tucked inside small moments. During breaks between classes, while waiting in line for chai, or sitting on the far side of the campus steps, the ones students rarely used.

You once told me, "You know you're my favorite notification?" And I replied, "I hope I never get turned off." You laughed so loudly people turned to stare. And I smiled without shame.

There was one day after class, we found an old bench behind the main building. No one sat there because the paint was peeling and the seat slanted a little. But we made it ours. That day, you asked, "Do you remember our first meeting in the library?"

I groaned, covering my face. "Don't remind me. I almost walked into a shelf trying to look cool."

You smirked. "You didn't look cool. You looked like you dropped your notes on purpose."

I laughed. "Okay, maybe I did. But it worked, didn't it?"

You shook your head. "Barely."

That story never got old. We told it to ourselves in different versions every time. In your version, I was clumsy. In mine, you were the mysterious one who pretended not to notice. Somewhere in the middle was the truth: two people, both nervous, both unsure, somehow found a connection between books and awkward glances.

There were also days when we had nothing deep to say. We'd send each other random filters—ones that made our noses bigger or turned our faces into animals. You once sent me a video of you with a giant pizza slice on your head and said, "This is me thinking about dinner at 9am." I replied, "Mood. But you forgot the hot sauce."

Even on harder days, we found ways to laugh. Sometimes it was forced at first. A dry joke. A meme from last year. But laughter has a strange way of breaking tension. You once said, "Laughter is my way of not crying," and I understood. Not everything needed to be heavy.

There was one late evening, we were both tired. You had exams. I had back-to-back meetings. Still, we called each other. Not to say anything serious. Just to sit in silence. Then you said, "I bet if we were in a cartoon, you'd be the anxious one and I'd be the one causing chaos."

I raised my eyebrow. “Excuse me, I’m the stable one here. You’re the one who forgets to reply for two business days.”

You grinned. “Exactly. That’s why I’m the chaos.”

We laughed for a while. And then just sat. Not talking. But not hanging up either.

The comfort came from knowing I didn’t have to perform with you. I didn’t need to be interesting all the time. I could be tired. I could be boring. And you’d still laugh with me—or at me—and that was enough.

We even had this thing with tea. You liked yours with more sugar. I always said it ruined the taste. You said, “My tongue, my choice.” I once made you tea and added too little sugar on purpose. You sipped it and said, “This is why people break up.”

We both burst out laughing. That’s how it always went. A small jab here, a sarcastic line there, but it always landed in the softest part of our comfort zone. That kind of ease doesn’t come overnight. I had to learn your sense of humor slowly. You had to figure out mine. I realized you laughed hardest at things when they weren’t trying too hard to be funny. You noticed I loved when you mocked me in that mock-serious tone, pretending like you were giving a lecture. That tone always cracked me up.

Some days we didn’t even talk much. We’d just send memes. Back to back. No context. Just funny images or videos that made no sense to anyone else but us. There were entire conversations made out of nothing but reaction photos. You once sent me a sticker of a goat on a skateboard and wrote, “Mood.” I replied with a photo of a sleepy panda falling off a chair. We both got the message. It meant, “We’re tired, but we’re okay.”

It sounds silly now, but those meme conversations got me through some rough days. The world could be loud and annoying, but that little bubble of nonsense between us—it helped. It felt like love, even if it was in the form of GIFs and bad filters.

Stress didn’t stop us from laughing. Even when we were dealing with deadlines, family drama, or those strange days where nothing seemed right, we’d find something small to laugh at. Once, during midterms, you sent me a voice note that started with, “I can’t do this anymore,” followed by a deep sigh, and then, “But at least I look cute while failing.” I nearly dropped my phone

from laughing. I replied, “Beauty over brains is a valid survival strategy.” You said, “Excuse you—I’m choosing both.”

Our conversations were light when they needed to be, and real when they had to be. But more often than not, we chose light. We didn’t always need deep talks or serious check-ins. Sometimes, we just needed to know the other person was still there. Still laughing. Still sharing dumb memes. That was enough.

There were times we’d argue too. Over silly things, mostly. You’d say, “You always take ten years to explain one thing.” I’d reply, “I’m just giving full context, thank you.” Then we’d both fall quiet. A few hours later, one of us would send a peace-offering meme. Usually you. Something like a cat holding up a sign that said, “Truce?” And I’d send back a thumbs up.

Even our fights weren’t fights, really. They were pauses in a long conversation that always found its rhythm again. Because deep down, we knew we weren’t against each other. We were on the same side, just occasionally confused about where the other person was standing.

I started to enjoy the way we made fun of each other. It was never harsh. Just playful. Like when I teased you for always misplacing your charger. You’d say, “You’ll miss this chaos when I’m gone,” and I’d say, “I’m already preparing a list of all the places you’ll probably leave your socks in our future house.” You’d laugh and say, “Put it on the fridge.”

Sometimes we’d go days without talking much, not because anything was wrong, but because life got loud. But even then, one meme from you could make my day better. You once sent me a meme of a guy sitting in a chair, eyes wide, captioned: “When she says she wants to talk.” I replied, “That’s unfair representation. I’m a very good listener.” You said, “You’re good at pretending to be one. That counts.”

We had inside jokes that no one else understood. About classmates who always borrowed pens and never returned them. About that one security guard who always said “Salaam” with too much enthusiasm. About how every time we made plans, it rained. We started saying the weather had a personal vendetta against our outings. You once messaged, “Let’s plan for sunshine this weekend,” and I said, “Let me ask the clouds for permission.”

Even the campus became part of our joke world. That broken swing in the back lawn? That was “our therapy seat.” The tiny dusty corner in the library behind the old books? “Our private

conference room.” We made names for things, gave meaning to ordinary places, until everything around us felt like ours.

It wasn’t about having fun only when things were perfect. It was about carrying a little joy in our pockets even when the rest of the day was rough. You’d call it “emotional snacks”—those small bursts of happiness we gave each other to keep going.

One day, during a heavy week full of classes and family stress, you sent me a selfie with toothpaste on your chin. You said, “Look at this warrior.” I laughed so loudly I had to turn my mic off during class. That picture stayed in my gallery longer than most of my notes.

You always knew how to lighten the load, not by solving problems, but by making space around them. And I tried to do the same for you. When you once texted, “I’m having a weird day,” I replied with a playlist titled “Songs for Dramatic Window Staring.” You said, “This is the love language no one talks about.”

We didn’t need grand gestures. Not then. Just memes, laughter, and the quiet knowing that someone was there on the other side of the phone, smiling too.

That’s what stayed with me most—the feeling that even if we had nothing new to say, we’d still find a reason to laugh. And that kind of laughter wasn’t just noise. It was reassurance. It was friendship. It was us, in the simplest form.

Chapter 11: Tough Days Together

We never promised each other perfection, and maybe that's what helped us keep going when things got hard. There were days when the connection between us felt tired. Not because love had faded, but because life was heavy. Deadlines were stacking up. Family problems were pulling us in opposite directions. Some days we were just two people trying to keep our heads above water, and that made our usual ease feel far away.

I remember one week in particular. My schedule was full of long hours and back-to-back responsibilities. You were dealing with your own things, juggling classes and home stuff, and your energy was thin. We'd send short replies. Sometimes just one-word answers. No jokes. No memes. No voice notes. It felt like a pause, not a break—but it still stung.

There were moments when we didn't agree on things. Simple plans became disagreements. Small talks turned into silence. I'd say, "Are you okay?" and you'd reply, "I'm tired." I'd want to fix it, but I didn't know how. You needed space, not solutions. I didn't always understand that right away.

One afternoon, after a stressful morning, I sent a message that came out sharper than I intended. I don't even remember the exact words, but I remember your reply: no reply. You went quiet. That kind of quiet hits different when it comes from someone who knows your heart. You didn't argue. You just disappeared into stillness.

I stared at my phone. I tapped to check if you were online, even though I knew you weren't. I wrote a long message, deleted it. Wrote it again, deleted it again. My chest felt tight. I tried telling myself it wasn't a big deal. But it was. To me, it was.

That night, sleep didn't come easy. I replayed our last texts again and again. I kept thinking, "Why did I say that? Why couldn't I wait to speak better?" My thoughts were loud. My room was quiet. I kept wondering if you were also lying awake, just not talking to me. Or maybe you were trying to forget the way my words had landed.

I kept telling myself not to overthink. But I did. A lot.

In the morning, I sent you a message. A plain one. No justifications. No "but I was tired" or "you misunderstood me." Just a simple: "I'm sorry. That wasn't fair of me."

I didn't want to fix it by defending myself. I just wanted to admit I'd messed up. That part of love that's not fun—the part where you look in the mirror and say, “You were wrong. Now make it right.”

You didn't reply right away. I didn't expect you to. But I hoped you would feel it—my honesty, my regret, and how badly I wanted us to be okay again.

That evening, you replied. It was short. Just, “Thanks for saying that. I needed the space.”

I breathed a little lighter.

Our connection had been tested before, but this time felt different. Maybe because it reminded us that love isn't just built in happy moments. It's built when things go sideways and both people still show up the next day.

We didn't block each other. We didn't post dramatic statuses or delete photos. We just waited. Gave each other space. Let the silence cool the heat instead of letting the heat burn it all down.

There were other moments like this, too. Times when I misunderstood you. Times when you didn't say much, and I took it personally. But over time, we got better at it—pausing, not quitting.

One night, I remember you called just to say, “I don't want to fight with you. I'm just tired. That's all.” And I said, “I know. I'm tired too. But I'm here.” We didn't talk for long. But we didn't need to. Just hearing your voice, even for five minutes, helped.

I started to understand something I hadn't known before: loving someone doesn't mean always being on the same page. It means staying in the same book, even when the chapter gets tough to read.

Sometimes we talked through things. Other times, we didn't. We just waited for the air to feel lighter. And somehow, it always did.

The hard days didn't end us. They taught us. They showed me what it meant to love with patience, with softness, even when your head is noisy and your heart feels sore.

And through it all, you never made me feel replaceable. Even when you were upset, even when we didn't talk for hours, I never doubted your place in my life—and I hoped you never doubted mine.

There was one evening I still think about. I had sent a message—not angry, just thoughtless—and I knew the moment I pressed send that it wasn't right. You replied hours later with one sentence: "I forgive you." That was it. And somehow, that was everything.

No long explanation. No list of things I should've said instead. Just those three words. And in that moment, I finally understood what grace really meant. It wasn't about pretending things didn't hurt. It was about choosing peace even when pain was an option.

We didn't survive our rough days because we were perfect at handling them. We survived them because we chose patience over pride. Because one of us always came back with softness, and the other learned to meet it halfway.

I kept thinking about how we managed to do that, especially during the toughest time of all—when my aunt passed away. I was already exhausted emotionally, and everything started to feel like too much. Work. Grief. Expectations. I didn't know how to carry it all, and I didn't know how to talk about it either. That's when I pulled away a little, even if I didn't mean to.

You tried to stay close. You'd check in, ask if I was eating, remind me to pray. But I wasn't myself. I didn't reply much. Or I did, but with short, clipped words. We weren't fighting—but we weren't connecting either. And that quiet distance between us started to grow.

We began misunderstanding each other over little things. A late reply would feel like disinterest. A missed call would feel like avoidance. Looking back now, I know we were just tired—both of us, for different reasons.

But the fact that you didn't walk away matters to me more than you'll ever know. You let me grieve, even if I didn't show it in the usual ways. You stayed, even if my replies were slow and dry. And when I finally opened up about the loss, you just listened. No advice. No fixing. Just being there.

There was another time that still makes me smile now—though back then, it felt like a disaster. I had promised to bring you flowers before one of our dates. I don't know why I made it such a

big promise. I think I just wanted to make you smile, and I knew how much you loved small gestures. But of course, in the middle of everything else going on, I forgot.

You didn't say anything at first. You were polite. Normal. But I could tell something was off. Later that night, you sent me a message that said, "It's not the flowers. It's the fact that you said you would." I sat with that for a while. It hit me harder than I expected.

It wasn't about the thing itself. It was about following through. About meaning what I say, even when it's small. And that's what you always taught me. That it's the small things, done with care, that build trust. I replied simply: "You're right. I should've remembered. I'm sorry." And you replied, "Thank you for saying that." Another one of those quiet moments where we could've pulled away, but we didn't.

We made it through arguments not because we avoided them, but because we learned how to walk through them without tearing each other down. Sometimes you needed time to process. Sometimes I did. But we always came back. That became our rhythm. And that's what made our bond feel real—not shiny, not perfect, but steady.

There were other small things too. Like when we couldn't decide where to eat and got annoyed with each other, only to end up at the same little burger place we always went to. Or when I forgot to respond to a message because I got caught up in work, and you called just to say, "I know you're busy, but I miss hearing from you." That call made me pause. It reminded me that staying connected takes effort, even when love is there.

Sometimes you'd say, "We're not fighting, we're just figuring things out." And it would calm me instantly. You never exaggerated our problems. You didn't make drama where there wasn't any. You gave things space. You gave me space.

Even when we were in different moods—one of us laughing, the other quiet—we still sat beside each other in that emotional space. That's something I never want to take for granted.

I remember telling myself during one of those tough weeks, "Don't let this small storm make you forget the sunshine." Cheesy, maybe. But it helped me stay grounded. Helped me remember that you weren't against me—we were just tired.

You always said, “I want us to be a team, not a battlefield.” That line stayed in my head. It became something I’d repeat to myself when I felt tension rise. “Be a team.” It worked more than once.

Through these ups and downs, I also realized something else—your strength wasn’t loud, but it was powerful. You didn’t demand apologies. You didn’t push for answers before I was ready. You just created space for the truth to come out naturally. That taught me a lot.

We’ve had arguments that ended with a hug. Fights that ended with late-night texts saying, “Let’s not do this again.” And we tried. We really did.

I remember once asking myself, “What would happen if this ended?” And the answer that came was, “I’d still be grateful.” Because even if we had walked away from each other, I would’ve known I experienced something real. Something honest.

But we didn’t walk away. And that says more than anything else ever could.

Those hard days didn’t break us. They became the days we built something better. A deeper kind of trust. A softer kind of strength. And a love that knew how to sit quietly through the noise, waiting for peace to return.

And when it did, we welcomed it. Together.

Chapter 12: Growing Stronger

Things didn't change overnight. It wasn't a big moment that told me we were growing—it was the small ones, quietly stacked on each other. Days passed, and I noticed how our talks shifted. They weren't just about funny classmates or what someone posted online. Now they were longer, deeper, and more honest. You'd ask things like, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Not in a pressuring way, just curious. I'd pause, think, then answer slowly, like the words mattered more now.

"I think I want to teach," I told you one evening over the phone. "Maybe even do something community-based. Like, real work. Work that leaves something behind."

You hummed. "I can see that. You've always had that calm voice people trust."

It meant more than you knew. And you weren't just asking—your questions had weight. You'd ask, "Would your family be okay if I worked after marriage?" or "Do you think my parents will ever feel fully comfortable with you?" You weren't just talking for fun. You were thinking ahead, and you wanted us to be prepared—not just hopeful.

It was strange how those kinds of talks didn't scare me. In fact, they made me feel more rooted. Like everything we were building had a direction. You once said, "We can't just float forever," and I laughed because you said it with a biscuit in your mouth. But even through the crumbs, the truth landed. We needed a plan. And without really sitting down and writing one, we were slowly shaping one.

You started telling me more about your parents. About how your dad always wanted you to marry someone who had 'vision'—his word, not yours. About how your mom would probably worry, not because she disliked me, but because she wanted everything perfect for you. I listened. Carefully. Not just to the words, but to what was underneath them. You weren't just warning me. You were inviting me into your world.

I began saving money, quietly. I didn't tell you right away. Not because I was hiding it—but because I wanted to feel like I was doing something concrete. Every time I got paid, I'd put a little aside. Nothing huge, but consistent. Sometimes I'd open the savings app just to look at the growing number and whisper, "Bismillah." It felt good. It felt like preparation, not just dreaming.

We still had our playful moments. We still joked and sent silly selfies. But there was a shift now. It was subtle but steady. One night, you said, “I think I’d want a small wedding. Simple. Just close family and friends.”

And I nodded, even though you couldn’t see me. “That sounds perfect,” I replied.

Then you said, “Do you think you’d be okay living in a flat for the first year? Just until we figure things out?”

That question stayed with me for hours after the call. Not because I didn’t know the answer, but because it made everything feel even more real. You weren’t planning a fantasy. You were planning a life—with me in it.

I remember walking past a shop window a few days later. It had basic kitchen sets on sale. Plates, pans, mugs. I paused and imagined us using them. Nothing fancy—just us, maybe burning toast on a lazy morning or fighting over who left the cupboard open. It made me smile. It also made me nervous in a good way.

You asked me once, “Do you think love is enough?” I didn’t answer straight away. I think I said something like, “Love is the start. The rest is teamwork.” And you said, “Yeah. I like that.” I liked it too. It sounded like us.

We had moments when we’d talk about things we didn’t fully agree on. You wanted to live close to your parents. I wasn’t sure where I’d end up for work. But we didn’t treat those as red flags. We treated them like parts of the puzzle we hadn’t solved yet. And that, honestly, felt like growth.

I noticed how you’d check in on my work progress. Not in a nosy way, but genuinely. “How’s that project going?” you’d ask. “Did you finally send that email?” I’d roll my eyes and say, “Yes, boss,” and you’d laugh, “Good. I’m just helping you win your future husband points.”

You made me feel like becoming a better man was not just possible, but something I was already doing. I’d sit down at night and think, “What can I do now that helps later?” It wasn’t pressure. It was motivation.

Sometimes, I’d sit and write lists. Not big ones. Just small ideas—things I wanted for us. Like:

- A bookshelf in the living room.
- A corner for your prayer mat.
- A drawer just for snacks.
- A weekend routine that includes chai and silence.

You didn't know I had these lists. Maybe I'll show you someday. Or maybe they'll just turn into real things one day and you'll smile, not knowing I thought of them long before.

We spoke less about people outside of us. Less gossip. Fewer opinions about who said what. More focus on us. Our habits. Our hopes. You once said, "I want to be the kind of wife who makes her husband feel safe." And I said, "That's what you already are." You smiled and said, "Well, then we're on the right track."

Even during busy weeks, when we didn't talk as often, there was this quiet understanding. Like we didn't need to say everything, because we trusted the space between words too.

One day you sent a message that just said, "I made dua for you today." No reason. No context. Just that. And it made my whole day better.

I was learning new things about you too. Like how you're more organized than I thought. How you write reminders on sticky notes and stick them on your mirror. How you like your toast a little burnt. How you reread your favorite book every Ramadan.

You had little habits, quiet ones, that told me more about your personality than any deep talk could. You weren't loud about your love, but it was there—in reminders to eat, in random texts about sleep, and in those dua messages that came when I least expected them.

You told me once, "Whatever we have, we'll make it work." And it stuck with me. Not because it was dramatic or poetic. But because you said it like a decision, not a wish. You weren't hoping. You were ready to put in the work. That sentence felt like a promise.

From then on, I started to see things differently. I stopped worrying so much about how perfect we looked from the outside. I started thinking more about how we functioned when no one else was watching. We weren't just imagining a life together—we were preparing for one. Quietly. Bit by bit. Through every talk about bills, cities, careers, timelines. Through every, "What do you think about this?" that led to twenty minutes of real conversation.

We both had things going on. Life didn't pause just because we were figuring each other out. There were deadlines, family stuff, odd days when we didn't feel like talking much. But even during that, we were laying bricks. Slowly, sometimes awkwardly, but steadily.

I remember the day I met your mom in that small coffee shop near your house. It was nothing fancy. Just one of those quiet places with brown chairs, soft yellow lights, and a glass counter that smelled like warm croissants. I dressed in a way that felt respectful but not stiff. You sat next to me, quieter than usual, eyes bouncing between me and her. I could feel your nerves, and I tried to balance mine just enough not to show it.

Your mom was kind, but sharp. She asked questions like she already had the answers. "What do you do?" "Where are your parents from?" "Do you like tea?" That last one made me smile because you had already told her I preferred coffee. She wanted to see if I'd lie.

I didn't. I told her the truth. "I'm more of a coffee person, but I've started getting used to chai because of your daughter." She laughed, and that laugh told me she approved—at least for now. That coffee shop moment wasn't loud or full of speeches. But it felt like the quiet beginning of something real.

Later, when we left and walked a few steps away from the cafe, I looked at you and asked, "Was I okay?"

You didn't say anything right away. You just nodded, and then finally said, "You didn't fake anything. That's what I hoped for."

Meeting your family properly after that felt like a next-level thing. It wasn't just you and me anymore. It was me showing up in a room where your brothers watched me closely, your sister whispered something in your ear, and your dad asked me questions in a tone that made me sit straighter.

I was nervous, yeah. But it was the kind of nervous that makes you take things seriously. Because in that moment, I knew—this wasn't a phase anymore. This was the real thing. No more "Let's see how it goes." Now it was, "We're doing this."

You kept checking in with your eyes that day. Like asking without words, "Are you okay? Still good?" And I kept nodding, even when I wasn't sure of my answers to your dad's questions. But

deep down, I knew something: this family was now part of the journey. And that made me want to do better.

After those meetings, our conversations changed again. You asked, “If we ever move out, would you be okay living in a smaller space just to start with?” And I answered without thinking, “Yes. As long as it’s ours.” You smiled. It wasn’t a dreamy smile. It was an I-heard-you-clearly kind of smile.

You told me you wanted a kitchen window with sunlight. I said I’d take care of the bills as long as you didn’t forget the WiFi password. You said you wanted plants. I said I’d probably forget to water them. You rolled your eyes and said, “It’s okay. You’ll learn.”

And I wanted to. I wanted to learn how to live beside you—not just talk to you on calls or text from distance. I wanted to know what it felt like to argue over which brand of dish soap to buy, or how to fix a leaking tap. I wanted the regular life. The shared keys, the clashing schedules, the “what do you want for dinner?” fights.

Every small challenge we went through didn’t make us weaker—it gave us deeper roots. Like when I was short on time and forgot to reply for hours, and instead of picking a fight, you just said, “Hope you’re not too stressed.” That little message said so much. You weren’t looking for perfection. You were choosing peace. I wanted to do the same.

I started keeping a small note on my desk. It wasn’t anything big. Just a folded paper with two words: “Make space.” It reminded me to keep making room—for your thoughts, your ideas, your plans. It helped me remember that love wasn’t about taking up all the space. It was about sharing it, respectfully.

You once asked me, “Do you think you’re ready for everything that comes with this?” And I said, “Probably not. But I think I’m willing to try.” You laughed. Not because it was funny, but because it was honest.

I didn’t want to pretend I had it all figured out. I didn’t want to act like I had answers for everything. What I had was a decision. To keep choosing us. Even when it was awkward. Even when it was difficult.

Some nights, when I was tired and couldn’t sleep, I’d think about the future in small scenes. Not big wedding halls or dramatic love stories. Just the sound of your voice saying, “I bought that

brand of rice you like.” Or you humming while folding laundry. Or us sitting on the couch, both scrolling on our phones, sharing memes again.

Simple things. Real things.

That’s what we were building. Not just a relationship. A life.

And every time you reminded me of that—even with a short message, or a deep question, or even just showing up on time—I’d feel it again. The quiet kind of certainty. The kind that doesn’t shout, but stays.

We were growing. Not perfectly. But truly.

Chapter 13: Why I Choose You

There were days we were smiling without reason, and days when everything felt heavier than it should. But I still chose you. On all those days. The bright ones, the dull ones, the ones in between. Not because we were always on the same page, but because we were always reading the same book—even when we didn’t understand the chapter.

I remember those quiet moments, not the loud ones. The mornings we didn’t have much to say, but you still sent a simple salam. Or when I’d take too long to reply, and instead of being upset, you’d say, “I figured you were busy.” That level of understanding—it stayed with me. It still does.

You never needed me to pretend. Not once did you ask me to be more than what I was trying to be. You let me grow. You didn’t overwater me. You just gave me space and light. That’s why I felt safe.

It wasn’t just your kindness in the good moments. It was how you stayed kind even when we disagreed. Even when I said something clumsy, you had this way of correcting me that didn’t feel like a correction. It felt like guidance. Sometimes you’d pause before replying. Other times, you’d raise an eyebrow and say, “You sure about that?” And I’d know I wasn’t.

That was you, never making me feel small, even when I was wrong. That’s what built trust. That’s why I kept choosing you.

There were stressful times too, not dramatic ones, just the normal weight of life. Work pressure. Family obligations. Schedules that didn’t match. Plans that got canceled. Some days I’d be too quiet, and you’d check in with just a question: “Is it you or is it the day?” That little sentence always made me stop and think. You saw through me even when I tried to act like I was fine.

We didn’t always talk things out right away. Sometimes we needed space. But we never left. That’s what mattered. We didn’t ghost. We didn’t play games. We waited. Then we returned. Always.

One time after a minor disagreement—nothing big, just one of those tired-day things—you texted, “We’re not perfect, but we’re intentional.” And I read that sentence over and over. Because yes, that’s what we were. Intentional. We didn’t stumble into love. We worked for it.

It wasn't about being impressive. I didn't feel the need to post things online or talk about us to the world. Being with you made the noise fade. I found peace in your presence. I didn't have to explain myself. I didn't have to overthink every word. You understood me, even when I didn't make complete sense.

And you gave me space. That was huge. Most people want closeness all the time, but you knew I sometimes needed silence to think. And you didn't take it personally. You just let me come back. And I always did.

Even when you were upset, you never used harsh words. That mattered more than anything. You didn't push me away to prove a point. You stood your ground with kindness. You made me want to be better, not out of guilt, but out of admiration.

I don't know the exact moment I realized that this was different, but maybe it wasn't a moment. Perhaps it was the little things that built up, like how you listened, not just to my stories, but to the tone in my voice. How you remembered small details I'd forgotten myself, and how you reminded me to be kind to others and myself.

You always noticed when something was off. Even if I didn't say it, you picked up on it. "You seem off today," you'd say. Or, "You haven't made a joke in hours—is everything okay?" I'd laugh it off at first, but you didn't let me stay closed. You made space for real talk.

One day, I asked you, "Why do you stay calm even when I'm being difficult?" And you said, "Because love is not a mood. It's a decision." That line has stayed in my head since. It still comes back to me when I'm upset at small things. It reminds me that choosing each other doesn't mean we always feel good—it means we stay committed even when we don't.

We built a rhythm. Not one that others would understand. But it worked for us. Our rhythm included serious talks and ridiculous voice notes. It included "I miss you" followed by a meme. It included "I need space" followed by "Don't forget to eat."

Your love didn't push or pull. It stayed. That was new for me. You weren't loud with it. You didn't try to win me over with fancy words or constant attention. You were calm, respectful, and steady. I didn't need to guess where I stood with you. I just knew.

I remember once I got annoyed at something small—a plan changed, or maybe you replied late. I don't even remember what the issue was. But I do remember how you handled it. You didn't

jump to defend yourself. You didn't get dramatic. You just said, "I understand why that might've bothered you. Let's talk when you're ready." And that one line softened everything inside me. I admired the way you could reason without blaming. The way you always tried to understand both sides. I wasn't used to that kind of emotional balance. It made me want to grow up. To grow better.

It's strange how certain traits pull you in without you realizing it. Your patience did that to me. It made me pause. Made me think before I reacted. Made me want to reflect on how I speak, how I respond, how I show up. You didn't force that change—you inspired it by being yourself.

Even your forgiveness felt different. When I messed up, you didn't pretend it didn't hurt. You told me it did. But then you gave me a chance to fix it. You didn't bring it up again to win an argument later. You just let it go, like truly let it go. I used to say sorry out of habit, but with you, I meant it. Because your forgiveness wasn't a shortcut—it was a mirror. It showed me where I had gone wrong and gave me the courage to be better.

We talked about big things sometimes—our future, our values, our hopes. But what stayed with me the most were the talks about our "someday" home. Not the kind with expensive furniture or city views. But the one you imagined with light coming through the windows, books stacked by the prayer mats, a kitchen that always smelled like something warm. You once said, "I just want peace in my home. And someone to laugh with over tea." And I wrote that down, word for word. Because it wasn't a demand—it was a dream. And I wanted to be part of it.

You told me you didn't care about big weddings or big houses. You wanted a place where both of us could breathe. Where we didn't have to speak in soft voices just to be heard. Where we could disagree and still pray side by side. That image stuck with me more than any romantic fantasy ever did. It was real. Simple. Possible.

One evening, I remember sitting on my bed with your voicemail playing again and again. It wasn't even anything deep—you were telling me a story about how you dropped your lunch on the way to work and had to pretend you weren't upset. But you said it in that voice—the one that's half serious, half playful—and I laughed like an idiot. That's when it hit me. I could live a whole life with that voice. With that version of comfort.

Sometimes I'd stare at your texts for a bit too long, smiling at the way you'd type "lol" even when I knew you hadn't laughed. Or how you'd send long messages with full stops and then one

tiny one without, and I'd know you were distracted. I learned your habits without trying. That's what happens when someone matters to you—they become familiar in the smallest ways.

You once asked me, "Do you think we'll be the same once we get married?" And I said, "I hope not." You looked surprised, but I meant it in the best way. I didn't want us to stay the same. I wanted us to keep evolving, learning how to love better, how to forgive quicker, how to listen more. I wanted growth. With you, it didn't feel like pressure. It felt like progress.

We didn't have everything figured out. We still don't. But I'd take uncertainty with you over clarity with anyone else. You made the unknown feel less scary. You made life feel like something to build, not something to escape from.

I started noticing how much I was changing, not in significant, dramatic ways, but in small ones. I was less reactive. I listened more. I thought before speaking. I prayed more sincerely. I wrote more. I reflected more. And it wasn't because you asked me to. It was because I wanted to. Because being around you reminded me of the person I always hoped I could become.

We had days when we didn't speak much. Not because of fights. Just life. You'd have deadlines. I'd have work. But even then, there was a softness in the silence. A knowing. A kind of comfort that didn't need constant checking in. One day, you sent a message that just said, "I'm here." And that was enough. No explanation. No follow-up. Just three words that held so much.

I remember when you showed me your old notebooks—pages filled with doodles, random to-do lists, thoughts you didn't share with anyone else. You looked a little shy about it, like you were showing me a piece of your heart. And I treated it like one. Carefully. That's when I realized love isn't always about grand gestures. Sometimes it's about witnessing someone's quiet parts and not looking away.

You told me that peace was your priority. And I saw you choose it every time. In your actions, in your tone, in your choices. Even when we could've argued, you decided to pause under pressure. You'd say, "Let's not talk about this while we're both tired." And I'd agree, because I knew the conversation would still be waiting, but our respect had to stay.

You once described your dream home with such simplicity that it surprised me. "Just a space with chai on the stove, soft curtains swaying with the fan, and a clean floor I can pray on," you said. No mention of luxury. No obsession with trends. Just peace and togetherness. And in that

moment, I knew where our hearts met. I didn't have big promises, but I had an intention. I told you, "I don't know how to build everything yet, but I can promise you effort. I can promise you I won't make you carry it all alone."

And from that point on, our conversations began shifting toward real things. We didn't just talk about our day anymore. We talked about how we'd handle future stress. What kind of parents would we want to be? How we'd split responsibilities. What traditions would we keep? What boundaries would we draw with others? Every time you shared something like that, I listened—not just as a partner, but as someone who wanted to be ready for that life with you.

I started thinking differently, not just about love but about responsibility. I'd never thought about budgeting properly before. I didn't save consistently. But then I caught myself saying no to things I didn't need. I'd walk past cafés and think, "I'd rather save for something we'll need later." You didn't ask me to do that. You never pressured me. But knowing I had you to plan for, to build with—it changed my decisions in quiet ways.

We joked sometimes about decorating a kitchen together. You said, "I don't care about the style, just give me counter space and proper lighting." I laughed and said, "I just want enough room for both of us to move without stepping on each other's toes." We weren't painting a fantasy. We were imagining something real. Our version of love was slowly turning into a shared direction, one step at a time.

There were times I'd lie in bed, just staring at the ceiling, thinking about how much we had grown. Not just together, but individually. You had become more open, more trusting. I had become more grounded, more aware. What we had wasn't perfect, but it was honest. And in a world full of rush and noise, that kind of honesty felt rare.

Sometimes when we sat in silence—whether in person or over the phone—it wasn't awkward. It was calm. It was understanding without needing to speak. That's when I realized this wasn't just love. This was a real partnership. We weren't two people who just liked each other. We were two people building side by side, learning to respect the pauses as much as the conversations.

You once said, "I want a home where it's okay to say 'I need time' without fear." That line stayed with me. Because you didn't just say that—you lived it. You gave me space when I was overwhelmed. You didn't ask me to explain every emotion. You trusted me to come back with a clearer heart. And that trust—quiet, consistent, and strong—became my anchor.

We imagined simple joys. Laughter in the kitchen. Sharing groceries. Watering plants. Watching rain through the window. Nothing that would make a highlight reel. But everything that felt full. Full of meaning. Full of comfort. Full of purpose.

I once told you, “Some people chase excitement, I just want consistency.” And you replied, “Consistency is rare these days. I want that too.” That was when I truly knew—we weren’t just hoping for love. We were building it.

On hard days, we didn’t panic. We paused. When life got busy, we checked in gently. A “thinking of you” text. A shared video. A quick “you good?” on a long day. Those small things—they stacked up. They built a quiet language between us—a language made of tiny reassurances.

I remember when I got frustrated with myself over something silly, and you said, “You’re doing your best. And your best today is enough.” That one line gave me more peace than any motivational quote ever could. You never tried to fix me. You just stood beside me. And that made all the difference.

There was a day I asked myself, “When did this stop being a feeling and start being a decision?” I couldn’t answer that exactly. But I knew it had happened. Somewhere between late-night apologies and early-morning prayers. Between small notes and longer talks. Between shared plans and silent support.

Choosing you didn’t happen once. It happened again and again. Every day I woke up and decided: Yes, still you. Even on days we didn’t talk much. Even on days we misunderstood each other. Even when I was tired, or unsure, or distracted, it was still you.

It wasn’t because we never fought. We did. It wasn’t because we always agreed. We didn’t. It was because we stayed. Through doubts. Through shifts. Through tough weeks. Through quiet mornings.

You knew how to stay calm without being distant. How to guide without pushing. How to care without clinging. That balance—that emotional maturity—that’s what taught me the most. You didn’t just help me grow. You made me want to.

I look at our journey now, and I don't see a perfect story. I see effort. I see patience. I see respect. I see two people who never gave up on understanding each other. Even when we had reasons to walk away, we chose to walk through instead.

I see a future with you, not because I'm romantic, but because I'm sure. Sure of your character. Sure of your steadiness. Sure of your willingness to work through hard things. That kind of surety is rare. And I'm not letting it go.

So if anyone ever asks me, "Why her?" I won't give a long list. I'll say, "Because she chose peace. And she helped me choose it, too."

And in a world that's loud, rushed, and full of noise, choosing peace is everything—choosing someone who builds it with you? That's everything else.

Chapter 14: A Letter to Aisha

My dearest Aisha,

This letter has lived in my heart longer than on this paper. I've written it in my head a hundred times—at night when I couldn't sleep, during quiet walks across campus, and every time you looked at me and smiled without needing any words.

Thank you for loving me through the parts of myself I was still figuring out. The parts I tried to hide—the parts I used to feel unsure of. You didn't rush me to be complete. You met me where I was and stood there, gently, without pressure.

You gave me space to grow without walking away. You never made my silence feel like rejection. When I needed time, you didn't question it. You waited—not with frustration, but with trust. That kind of trust is rare. It made me feel safe in a world where I used to hide too much.

I've always found it hard to talk about feelings. Words have never been my strong suit. But with you, I didn't need perfect words. You saw through the pauses. You understood what I meant even when I stumbled through saying it. You never laughed when I struggled. You listened, nodded, and just stayed. That's something I never knew I needed—someone who didn't fill every silence with advice, but instead, sat beside me in it.

There were days I was confused, unsure, and distant. And still, you never punished me with coldness. You stayed kind. You stayed calm. You chose softness over pride, even when I didn't deserve it. That grace—that quiet patience—is what pulled me closer to you every time.

I remember once telling myself, "I hope I don't lose her while trying to figure myself out." But you never made me feel like I was running out of time. You never rushed me to heal. You never asked me to be someone else. You believed I could get there. And because of that, I did.

You made me feel seen in a way I didn't know I needed. You noticed things others didn't—how I get quiet when I'm overthinking. I rub the back of my neck when I'm anxious, how I get loud when I'm passionate, but calm when I'm hurt. You paid attention, not for control, but for care.

You held my flaws gently, not pretending they didn't exist, but reminding me they didn't make me unlovable. That changed me more than anything else.

We've had our heavy days. And still, you didn't use those days to test me. You didn't play games or keep score. When things were hard, you didn't disappear. You stayed. And when I asked, "Are we okay?" you always answered with calm honesty. I've never felt more respected in my life.

You never tried to fix me. You tried to understand me. And because of that, I became someone who wanted to be better, not to earn your love, but because your love reminded me I was worth the effort.

Now, as I write this, I think about all the little things. The way your face lights up when something makes sense to you. The way you talk with your hands when you're excited. The way your voice softens when you're worried. The way you send me reminders to drink water, even when I forget to respond.

And I think about the future—not in some grand, unrealistic way, but in the quiet things. Like how we'll navigate busy mornings. How we'll talk through disagreements. How we'll pray side by side. How we'll remind each other to breathe on the hard days.

Aisha, I want you to know that I don't take your presence for granted. I don't assume you'll always stay just because you love me. That's why I try, every day, to show up better. To communicate clearly. To listen more. To be softer. Because love alone isn't enough—it's how we protect it that matters.

You inspire that in me. Not because you ask for it, but because you live it. You lead with respect. You speak with kindness. You correct without crushing. You stay gentle even when things get tough. That kind of strength is what holds this bond together.

And I know—I won't always have the answers. There will be moments when I'll mess up, when I'll speak too quickly or not say enough. There might be times when I pull away because I need to think or when I let stress get in the way of softness. But I will always come back. Not just to you, but to the version of myself that we both believe in. I will always be willing to grow with you.

In the future, when we have our own space, our routine, and our tiny world carved out from the chaos around us, I will remember everything that led us there. Every long conversation that shaped us. Every shared dua. Every misunderstanding we worked through. Every kind word you gave me when I didn't deserve it. Every laugh that softened a long day.

I'll remember how we weren't perfect, but we were honest, how we didn't pretend to be fine when we weren't, how we gave each other permission to feel things fully, how we disagreed, but always with care, how we figured things out without shouting, how we learned to trust timing, to trust effort, and most importantly, to trust each other.

And when the days feel long in that future—when the sink is full of dishes or the bills are waiting on the fridge—I’ll try to remember what matters most. Not who’s right. Not who did more. But who stayed soft? Who reached out? Who chose calm even when they were tired? I’ll try to be that person. I’ll try to be your peace, the way you’ve been mine.

You once said, “We don’t have to be perfect for each other. Just sincere.” That sentence still sits in my head. Because sincerity—that quiet, honest effort—is what got us here, it’s what kept us close even in silence. It’s what made challenging moments easier. It’s what made our story feel real.

There’s a kind of love people talk about in books—loud, dramatic, full of grand gestures. But what do we have? It’s deeper than that. It’s in the everyday. In showing up, even when it’s inconvenient. In holding back harsh words when they want to spill. In choosing to stay, I find that walking away feels easier.

You showed me that love doesn’t have to be complicated to be strong. It doesn’t need constant noise to be felt. You showed me that love is not loud—it’s steady. Not showy—it’s consistent.

I’ve grown in ways I didn’t expect, not because you pushed me, but because you believed I could. You reminded me that growth isn’t about becoming someone else—it’s about becoming more of who you truly are, with honesty and kindness. You never tried to change me. You encouraged me to uncover the parts I’d buried out of fear, out of doubt, out of habit.

And now, when I look at myself, I see someone who listens more. Someone who speaks more softly. Someone who pauses before reacting. Someone who tries to give the kind of patience I’ve received from you.

I used to think love was all about the feeling. Now I know—it’s about what you do when the feeling gets tested. It’s in the quiet choices. It’s in the care you give without being asked. It’s in the way you keep showing up, even after a disagreement, even when your plate is full.

There were moments I thought, “Maybe I’m not enough.” Not smart enough. Not stable enough. Not put-together enough. But you never confirmed those fears. You looked at me like I was already enough, as long as I was honest, as long as I was trying. That kind of love—it doesn’t just heal. It rebuilds.

Sometimes, I still catch myself overthinking and wondering if I’ve done enough. Suppose I’ve said the right thing if I’ve supported you the way you need. But then I remember your words. The quiet reassurances. The simple way you said, “I’m here.” And I remind myself—love doesn’t need to be complicated. It just needs to be present. Real. Consistent.

And that's what I want to offer you, now and always. Not perfection. Not a flawless path. But presence. Patience.

Partnership. A soft place to land when the world gets rough. A safe space where we both get to be human.

You taught me that being loved doesn't mean never being wrong. It means being corrected with gentleness, being held accountable with care, and being forgiven without being made to feel small. That's the kind of love I never knew I needed until I met you.

You are calm without being quiet. Kind without losing your edge. Gentle without being passive. And in every version of myself that I hope to grow into, you're part of the picture. Not just as my partner, but as someone who continues to teach me what it means to love and be loved with respect, with balance, with honesty.

I pray our days ahead are full of quiet victories—the kind no one sees but we feel in our hearts. Like solving a disagreement with softness. Like making each other laugh after a rough day, like catching each other's eyes in a room full of noise and feeling anchored again. I hope our days hold more warm meals than cold silences, more shared duas than shared doubts, and more honesty than guessing games.

I want us to be a team that grows from the same soil but stretches in our ways. A team that doesn't need to win every argument, but always returns with understanding. I want to wake up beside you and still choose kindness—even on days we don't have much to say. I want to sit with you through the hard stuff, without trying to fix it too fast. I want us to stay curious about each other, even when life gets busy and predictable. I want us to laugh often, cry sometimes, but never lose our gentleness.

There will be moments when we're both tired, when work is heavy, when nothing feels enough. On those days, I don't want us to be perfect. I want us to be soft with each other. To say, "It's okay," and mean it. To say, "I'm here," and stay. To remember that even when we disagree, we're on the same side.

May this letter—these words I've written from every honest corner of myself—remain a small proof of everything we survived. Every silence we honored. Every fear we faced. Every step we took toward each other when it would've been easier to turn away. Let this be a reminder of how far we've come, not because we had no struggles, but because we stayed when it was hard.

And if one day, years from now, we're older—sitting in a cozy corner, sipping tea that's a little too strong or a little too sweet—I hope we find this letter again. I hope we read it and smile. Not because everything turned out exactly how we imagined, but because we lived it fully. Because we tried, really tried, because we showed up for love even when it asked us to be uncomfortable, honest, or patient.

I hope, in that moment, you'll still reach for my hand, and I'll still know how to listen when you need quiet. That we'll still laugh about the same old jokes. That we'll still find peace in shared silences, just like we did at the start.

Thank you, Aisha, for being my lesson, my mirror, my calm, and my favorite kind of home.

With all that I am and all that I'm still becoming,

Yours, always.