



# IN JUST 10 DAYS

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PERFECT COUPLE, IMPERFECT  
SITUATION

ROBIN AGARWAL

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First Edition



*Dedicated to those unforgettable special life changing moments of my life.*

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## PROLOGUE

**“...a wish, a lot more may be ...”**

i really cared for you,  
and i never said a lie,  
it was neither you nor me,  
but the time wasn't right,  
and now i know why i cried,  
to make 'em roll down my eyes,  
and let it go,  
as i know,  
you never gonna be mine,  
but still i pray, want you to be fine,  
just as happy as u were,  
when i never was there,

in ur life !

- Akshat



# 1

---

## THE LONGEST NIGHT EVER

A huge poster, of an intense and sweaty *Mahendra Singh Dhoni*, glaring right in your eyes entirely crossed over one of the black walls of the room.

In one of the corners, next to the tripod holding a Canon 7D, was resting a butt load of photography gear.

The two wooden chairs opposite to the MSD wall were somehow able to contain the Everest of dirty clothes, pizza boxes and a care-freely thrown wet towel.

It seemed like the only cupboard in the room had not been shut since the dawn of mankind.

From the edge of the top of the cupboard, a smiling spider carefully stitched the final thread of its web to the farthest end of the open door.

Through the attached balcony puffed in a pleasant breeze. The center of the airy room accommodated a comfortable iron double bed.

His drool sticking to his pillow, he was lying on one half.

The other half of the wrinkly bed sheet yelled, "*On a date with my sleep! DO NOT DISTURB.*"

Suddenly, his phone screamed. The name *Priyanka* flashed repeatedly.

Akshat's snores roared in the whole of his duplex apartment.

The phone bellowed again but he didn't move an inch.

Abruptly a crashing sound of the vase, echoed loudly in the hallway.

**Someone else was there too and was purposefully coming towards the room!**

A paranormally bizarre shadow with a giant skull, short legs and a miniature body approached slowly.

*Now don't be so serious you sucker. Just kidding, Relax, Will you!*

It was Junkie, an English bulldog!

*See, told you to calm down!*

Cranky, he quietly peeked into the shambolic room.

Akshat was roaring like an enraged, rampaging mad Spanish bull.

In love with his master, Junkie sneaked in calmly and looked at Akshat with fondness. Affection was literally drooling down his face.

Underneath his natural grump appearance, he looked like smiling at him.

Ultimately, his gaze fell on the flashing light of the barking phone.

Annoyed, he sniffed.

Making a whining noise, he walked towards Akshat with tired and dumpy legs.

All of a sudden, the ringing stopped!

Akshat's snores resembled a dried up screeching engine piston now.

Junkie relaxed as the normalcy established itself. Drooling away to relief he stepped out of the room, when unexpectedly, the phone teased him again.

Exasperated, Junkie banged his small pink paws in his flabby face.

In the urgent need to end this havoc, Junkie ran with full thrust and glided onto Akshat's bed.

He tilted his humongous drooling skull and went in to lick his master's face thoroughly.

Ignorant of who was making love to him, Akshat grinned.

Perhaps, he was fantasizing about Natasha, the spicy model he met earlier during the party.

Ecstatic, he rolled over passionately to grab Junkie.

Junkie jumped on to one side and innocently watched his master roll away.

Unconscious, a totally wasted Akshat fell on the floor with an *ouchy* thud.

"Son of a bitch.", he screamed loudly.

Junkie panicked. Baffled, he hopped on to the floor and started woofing loudly.

Jumping back and forth, Junkie wagged his tiny tail, only resulting in an unsettling booty shaking.

Akshat wondered if, perhaps, his pathetic excuse for a dog was dancing a new found style of samba.

The phone was getting ignored. It shrieked loudly once again.

In all the chaos, his tired mind finally realized that the phone was making extremely loud noises.

“Oh fuck! It must be Priyanka.”, he said lazily looking towards Junkie.

Junkie preferred to carry on with his Oscar-Winning performance.

Exhausted, Akshat received the call on loudspeaker and slipped into his bed again.

Following his master, Junkie hopped onto the bed as well.

“I have been calling for the past twenty minutes. You are totally bladdered, aren't you?”

“Sweetheart, it is 3 am in India. You know I am a deep sleeper.”

Comprehending, that her boyfriend was extremely heavy-eyed, she toned down a bit.

“Alright!” she said cheerfully, “How was the party? Had fun?”

Delusional, Akshat was on the other side, sleeping with his mouth wide open.

Softly, she asked, “Akshat?”

With blood red eyes, he woke up with a shock.

Junkie got frightened and hid behind a pillow.

“What? Who is it?” he said.

“We'll talk later”, she replied, “. You seem incapable of chatting right now.” sadly.

“No-No”, he replied, “I am up now.” with the longest yawn.

He continued, “The party was ok! Except, that pervert Ashish was asking about you. I am a hundred percent sure that he has the hots for you.”

*Oh man! That was not the time to go down that road! Unless his girlfriend was a guy, he should have instead, tried to amuse her. What a rookie mistake it was! Wasn't it?*

*Hey ref! Do your thing!*

STRIIIKE ONEEEE!!

She was annoyed.

Being so far away in a different country and, after having missed her boyfriend for almost two days, she was not at all in the frame of mind to be indicted of something futile.

She went silent. *Nothing-zero-zilch, Oh Boy!*

Akshat suddenly realized his crime. He woke up instantly and in the process, threw the sheets onto Junkie.

Blinded with the darkness in front of his eyes, Junkie freakishly ran around and fell down squealing.

Akshat gave him a murderous stare. Panicked, Junkie timidly crawled up onto the bed again.

Akshat knew that he has fucked it up. He was aware of the fact that her silence was worse than her wrath.

Softly, he asked, "Pri?"

She didn't utter a word. Quiet as she was that he wondered if the call was still connected.

Frustrated, he demanded, "C'mon Priyanka! Say something."

*OK! This man was going nuts and somebody should have told him that.*

*C'mon ref, you know what to do!*

STRIIIKE TWOOO!!

Priyanka was pissed at him.

*Irritated or not, a girl is never in a mood to take this kind of a tone.*

"Congrats Akshat" she said, ", you have somehow done it again. I am sick of you obsessing over me and Ashish, when I have clarified that he is just a family friend and nothing more."

"We haven't met in donkey's years and this is what you want to discuss when we get the time to talk to each other?"

A weary Junkie, with his mammoth face resting on the bed, was listening to this kind of a conversation for the fifteenth time in five months.

“Ok! Ok! Fine!” he snapped, “I was just kidding! I am **SORRY** sugar. How was your day sweetheart?”

Priyanka was right on the edge now.

“Ah! How typical”, she said, “. Don’t you dare use that word again! I hate it when you say that.”

Akshat got provoked as well.

A rebellious *Suryavanshi Rajput* with honor and pride, he rose up with passion and a purpose.

“What? Which word?” he roared, “Sugar or Sweetheart?” mockingly.

*Oh Dude! What the Fuck! C’mon, you shouldn’t have played with fire. Remember? Cupid taught us that during orientation. Ah! It’s too late now.* Obviously, the word she was referring to was “Sorry”.

*He is all yours ref. Slice him up.*

**STRIIIKE THREEE!!**

Priyanka was hopping mad now.

“Is this funny to you?” she asked, “How dare you take the mickey out of me? Do you think sorry is the answer to everything?” firing a flurry of really fucked up questions at him.

The *Rajput* in him hissed out like gas from a constipated stomach.

Defensively, he asked, “What the hell did I do?” acting innocently, even when he knew, that it was precisely his fault.

*Yes! There! I said it! It was his fault! Women are always right! And a hot one is definitely right. I also wanna live! Watcha gonna do? Sue me! Huh?*



All he managed to do was piss off an already worked up woman even more.

“Don’t you dare use that tone with me”, she said, “Jenny was right about you.”

Priyanka Ahuja and Jennifer Donagher had been friends since their high school days. Their friendship went way back.

Akshat had known Jenny, ever since he met Priyanka for the first time.

She had always been sour to Akshat’s eye and he hated the fact that she was and will always be Priyanka’s counselor.

She often reminded him of those obnoxious chick-flick female characters who did nothing but screw with the head of the female protagonist.

He tried to jump in several times, in the middle of Priyanka’s rambling, but his words were being whacked back at him in a merciless British accent.

He thought, “Maybe, if I was Superman I would have shut her up for real.”

*Ah! What a LOSER!*

Amidst all these naive fantasies of his, Priyanka kept blabbering.

“This is turning out to be exactly what she predicted.” she said, “Long-distance is hard. She warned me and your attitude, even makes it harder. It’s like, you don’t even care anymore.”

Her voice was trembling now.

“When we first met during the student exchange program, you were so concerned and thoughtful. And, just look at you now. You have just lost interest in talking to me.”

“You never call me, never text me and when I call you, instead of behaving like a boyfriend, you turn into an obsessive and jealous arse, which is only capable of talking about that Ashish.”

She cleared her throat, trying to keep her composure.

“You aren’t the same person anymore. That’s not the Akshat Rathod, I fell in love with. I can’t have this discussion over and over again with you.”

“It feels like I am talking to a wall. Even Junkie is smarter than you.”

She yelled almost crying.

Junkie yelped on taking a note of his name and licked his own balls.

A helpless Akshat stared at him with immeasurable displeasure.

“Yuck”, he thought, “That’s disgusting.”

It was Akshat’s time now. He had to do something smooth and cute and that too lightning fast.

Priyanka was quiet now. At last, she ran out of things to complain about.

But her jovial mood was already down the dumpster. She felt that it would have been better if, she hadn’t called him.

Akshat’s mind was wandering, thinking about his next move, with all his might.

A mini version of him echoed in his head.

“Sing her favorite song damn it, or perhaps, just be silent.” it yelled, “No-No, let’s not do that!”

“Your silence opened up the *Why don’t you have anything to say* topic last time and boy, did it go long.”

He was talking to himself! Obviously, he was losing it. He knew that one more wrong word would mean a lot of effort for days.

“What the hell should I do now? Saying sorry won’t help my case either. Oh man! I am such an idiot. Why the hell did I talk about Ashish?”

All these questions banged against the empty and drained walls of his macho head. He started thinking about anything and everything, to take the limelight off him.

Having not said anything, for the last two minutes, he accepted his rotten fate. He had already done just enough, to piss her off.

Anticipating a long night, sadly he looked at Junkie, who was busy digging down a hole, in the floor tiles of his smelly bedroom.

“That’s one weird dog I have”, he thought when suddenly, something struck Akshat.

Impishly, he said, “By the way, Junkie says hi!”

He looked at Junkie and gestured him to make that whining sound which, Priyanka adored when she was in India.

Although, she was still not vocal but, had somewhat calmed down.

If the truth be told, she was actually thinking about Junkie’s big eyes and his cute round shaped face.

She asked, “Oh really? Does he now?”

“Obviously!”, he quipped.

He continued, “He just sits by the door all night long, with his big-dark puppy eyes, often with the *Tricky Treat Ball* you got for him stuffed in his mouth, wondering, when his favorite sexy woman will come to India.”

Priyanka had a huge soft corner for Junkie and was sporting a tiny smile now. *The cute dog talk maneuver was working.*

Playfully, she said, "Junkie does this or do you do this?"

"Well! I won't lie. That *Tricky Treat Ball* is quite a brain puzzler."

Softly, she said, "Ha-ha, very funny." but still not letting him off the hook.

Akshat was quite sure, that his freedom to sleep wasn't very far away.

Forcefully, he picked a squirmy Junkie up in his lap.

"Babe, Junkie wants to talk to you", he said, ". Here you go Big Boy."

"Ruff-Ruff", Junkie barked into the phone.

Akshat kept on fighting like a warrior.

"You know sweetheart, I am thinking of making Junkie, a pair of red underpants, maybe give him a pair of shades. You know spice him up a bit! Give him an x-factor."

"Ha-ha, why so?", she asked.

"You remember The Kulkarnis opposite my flat. They have a got themselves a new bulldog bitch, *Sasha* and I have seen the way Junkie looks at her."

Junkie lifted his head and innocently looked towards Akshat.

Giggling, she asked, "Really?"

"Oh yeah, she is a real mellow", he said, "! But every time she appears in front of him, he just turns around and sticks his head in his ass."

"Awwww ... my poor baby!"

"Exactly, you poor baby needs some grooming, a confidence booster, precisely, some manhood!"

“Shut up”, she said, “Why do you talk like that about him?” smiling.

“I am telling you”, he continued, “. Imagine him in red shorts with a one-liner *Bitches Love Me* painted across his ass!”

Visualizing the whole picture of Junkie, in a pair of red under-pants, with a one-liner, Priyanka couldn't control and laughed out loud.

Akshat smiled as she smiled.

She said, “Yeah! I know what you are trying to do. You know that I love that dog. How is he?”

Casually, he said, “He is breathing!”

Babyishly, she said, “Akshat, tell me nooo!”

The baby like tone was an indication of the end, to his mood fixing drill. *The naked boy's wisdom was finally paying off!!*

Akshat was pleased that he had handled the situation quite well.

Smiling, he said, “He is fine sweetheart, misses you a lot.”

“I am sure he does”, she said “, Perhaps, more than you! Teach him how to use your phone as well.”

“That's the only thing left for him to learn. Innit? Kyunki tumse to kabhi call kiya nahi jaata.”

“Oh, that's so cute sweetie”, he said, “I so wanna kiss your lips when you talk in Hindi!”

Priyanka had forgotten about before and was her usual self now. She loved the playful conversation.

Playing with her curls, she said, “Oh really, Huh? Aren't you a smart arse?”

“If you think so!” he said, “Besides, I won't disagree with my alpha on that. That's how I got you. Didn't I?”

Giggling, Priyanka heard her Mom's voice calling her down-stairs for dinner and told Akshat about it with sugar-coated words like *Cuddly-Wuddly* spilled around here and there.

*Cuddly-Wuddly. Ewww, sends jitters down my spine!!*

This is quite usual with couples, who are in the initial stages of a relationship. The only difference being, that girls do it genuinely and guys do it purposefully.

Akshat realized that this was the only time he could safely claim, that he actually was interested in chatting, without having to stretch the conversation long enough.

Let's face it no matter how much a guy loves a woman; he would never want to compromise on his sleep.

"Well!! Aren't you a mood spoiler? **Mum**, that's the word I want to hear at 3 am when I am getting into the groove. Isn't it?"

"I am really sorry darling! I will give you a call when I get free. Okay?"

"Yeah, ok", he said, "! You do realize that I am sad. Don't you?"

"Yeah sweetie", she said regretfully, ", I know how much you miss me. But hey! Tomorrow isn't that far away. You do remember, Right?"

Fumbling, he said, "Of course I do, Babaganoosh." kicking Junkie, who was licking on his leg, aside.

Priyanka laughed whole-heartedly. She said, "Well, that's new and it is so cuuuute."

Extra emphasis given on the word *cute* assured that she liked her new nick name. Akshat winked at Junkie and registered this one in his memory for future references.

“Alright my royal prince, May I take your leave now? Your future mother-in-law is coming upstairs to get me. She hasn’t had dinner yet.”

Akshat quickly gave her a long wet kiss. Priyanka got embarrassed.

She said, ”God! You could be so cheesy sometimes!! Muuaahhh, Bbye, Goodnight!”

She gave him a long kiss too before hanging up.

Akshat let out a long sigh of relief. He turned around and looked at Junkie. His head resting perfectly still, Junkie just rolled his eyes towards his master.

“You saved my ass once more buddy”, he said, “. You are the best thing that could have ever happened to me, May be even better than Pri.”

Junkie whined loudly, this time in disagreement though.

“I mean it. What?” he asked his pal, “You don’t believe me? Tell me what should I do to prove that, right here right now?”

Frenziedly, he looked for his favorite toy in the room. His gaze got fixed onto the Tricky Treat ball, lying on the shelf.

“You wanna play? Not right now buddy. You know how tired I am. You heard the whole conversation. Didn’t you?”

“Let’s do one thing. Let’s take a good night sleep and do this tomorrow, as the first thing for the day, even before we have breakfast. How does that sound?”

Junkie was ecstatic and started licking Akshat’s face, wagging his tiny tail in agreement.

“Atta-Boy!”

Akshat patted him on his enormous head.

Within seconds Akshat was down and out again, and started snoring even louder. Listening to even shriller bombardments from his master's artillery, Junkie let out a feeble squeal.

Resentful, he left with the rowdiest woof he could do. Terrified, Akshat got up again with a pounding heart.

Frustrated, he screamed out loud, "Son of a Satanic Bitch", watching Junkie run away quickly, to save his tiny hiney.



# 2

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## I RE-LOVE YOU

JD yelled, “Can I have two beers please?” waving at the Marathi bartender.

The last night had left Akshat exhausted. Holding his head down, like a melon, he let out a painful sound.

JD was observing him shrewdly.

“You ok there man”, he asked, “. Looks like you are giving yourself a Vice Grip!” grinning foxily.

Akshat replied, “A what?” pressing his head even more.

“Vice Grip”, he said, “! Well, it’s a destructive move of The Great Khali.”

Akshat gave him a bizarre look.

JD continued.

“What he does is that, he squeezes the skull of the opponent so hard, that it stops the blood circulation”, he said, “. C’mon! How could you not know it? It is used very frequently as a finisher.”

Not charmed, Akshat gave him a seething look. For almost twenty seconds, he repeatedly switched his gaze between his watch and JD's face.

Apprehending the increasing probability of a serious beating, JD wiped his smile off and offered him the pint of chilled beer.

Akshat slugged on for five straight seconds. JD tried to change the subject.

"Bad Headache?"

"What sort of a question is that", Akshat snapped, "? What else do you think it is?"

He took a pause, exhaled heavily and put his head on the counter.

"I am up since 3 am", he continued, ", came office early as I had to run through countless number of presentations, prepare my notes on them and then, I had to attend three different meetings, in three different departments, for three straight hours!" banging his head at the every '*three*' he spoke.

"And to top it all", he said ", I have a photo shoot lined up in some time." freakishly.

"So what? Skip the goddamn shoot!"

"It's not that simple JD", he professed, "! Have you ever heard of something called commitment?"

He took a small pause and said, "...or an advance payment?" looking away hesitantly.

Working in the field of marketing was always his long-term vision but photography was his passion, his love, which he took quite professionally.

Call it fate, but it was '*the*' reason, Priyanka and Akshat bumped into each other for the first time.

He was photo-walking in the sprawling MICA campus, where Priyanka had come from the Southampton Solent University, pursuing her MA in Public Relations.

Whilst he was clicking candidly, a beautiful face with a splendid body popped into the frame and in his life as well.

The dynamic composition came out to be so amazingly gorgeous that Akshat was left with no choice but to approach her.

Thereafter, a lot of meetings happened. Some planned, some unplanned.

Strolling around the campus with the British lassie, he often tried to dig deep in to her core.

He knew that there was some connection between the two.

The occasional visibly innocent brushing of hands in the lecture theaters, the unknowingly fresh flirting, and her adorable giggling on the most pathetic of his jokes tormented with his tiny brain for months.

*But, a woman's heart is like a Rubik's Cube, Isn't it?*

You think you have figured it out. But, one wrong turn, and trouble is all you have.

The anxiety was killing him. The pain was equivalent to getting kicked in the nuts.

So, he decided to solve this mystery and eventually, during a scintillating and amazing night, to his delight, they got together.

That night of Nov 8, 2009, was by far, until now, the most delightful moment in time, for the both of them.

Curious, JD asked, "Why did you wake up at 3?" grabbing a hand full of peanuts from the bowl.

"It was Junkie." Akshat replied, "The motherfucker kept on barking for the whole night."

“Hey Hey Hey, don’t talk about your brother that way.”, JD chuckled.

“You wanna black eye motherfucker?”

JD went noiseless.

“Actually, it was Pri”, he corrected, “, she called me up.

That’s when she got the time, to talk properly to me and I was too tired, after the party.”

“What party?”

“Ashish’s party!”

“Ashish threw a party yesterday”, JD cried, “? When did he invite you? Why wasn’t I invited?”

“Can you please tone down your vocal chords”, he said, “? It feels like somebody is throwing coconuts at my head.” gesturing madly.

Jignesh Daruwalla abridged his name to JD, soon after he hit puberty.

Being the son of a Gujarati mother, he inherited a strange high pitch note which, he often allowed to slip out.

He was thirteen, when he perceived that, the reason he was the only single boy in his class was not just his tendency to ask a lot of questions, but also his name.

Henceforth, the geeky and unusual blend of Gujarati and Parsi parents became, the flamboyant but still irksome JD.

At least, he used to have some ladies around now, so what, if the duration wasn’t long enough.

“That was extremely mean and uncalled-for Dude! That hurt”

“I am sorry man!” he apologized, “Just a little bothered about tonight.” looking down.

JD quizzed, “Why what’s tonight?” instantly.

With a long sigh, Akshat raised his head.

He looked into JD's eyes and smiled sympathetically, for him and his questions.

He said, "We have an online video date scheduled at 8 pm." answering back, to the Gujarati-Parsi reincarnation of Derek O'Brien.

JD was amused.

Jeeringly, asked the quizmaster again. "What the fuck is that?"

"Since both of us knew, that this is going to be a long distance thing, we formulated some ideas, which I know, sound insane but are actually quite pleasing."

"We see each other, once a week through video chat. We drink together, talk about things going on with both of us, and if possible eat something together."

"AND", JD asked, "? What else?" drooling like an overly excited dog.

Akshat was disgusted.

"What the fuck JD, NO", he bellowed, "! We don't do that online."

The bartender at Elevates Lounge looked at them curiously.

"What's the matter with you" he whispered, "? That's my girlfriend, we are talking about here man!"

"Hey Hey Hey, Don't judge Me." JD defended, "You are the one who called your ideas pleasing. So, I thought of pleasing ideas. Honest mistake man."

He continued, "So, what's the problem?" finding hilarity in Akshat's love life.

"Nothing, I just don't feel like doing this tonight", he said glumly, "and since we have skipped quite a few times before as well, this one is exceptionally important to Priyanka."

“My god, is that bowl full of your nuts? I mean what’s the matter with you?”

“You fucking asshole, I just don’t want to disappoint her. That’s all.”

“Alright, you sound like you are married already”, JD exclaimed, “. Where is your manhood? Just be honest with her dude. I am sure she’ll understand that you are tired.”

“And if, she can’t understand even this much”, he continued, “, then perhaps, you have been parking your boat at the wrong dock till now, if you know what I mean.”

JD winked with a smirk.

Akshat fumed, “I swear to god JD...”

“Chill my man Chill, you are so easy sometimes. I love fucking with your head,” JD said, “! And don’t you have a photo shoot to take care of? I don’t want you this edgy tomorrow as well.”

Realizing, that he should leave now, Akshat picked up his backpack and chucked it into his car’s backseat.

A laughing JD hollered publicly.

“All the best for the lamest date ever man!!!”

Akshat gave him the finger from the right window, zooming away hastily, for the scheduled photo-shoot.

It was 7:55 pm, when he parked his swift back into the garage. His feet felt extremely heavy and he could barely walk properly.

Just when, he was about to open the door, his phone started screaming. To him, the sound of the phone resembled evil.

He knew who that was! Even Junkie, who was roaming around in circles knew, who that was.

He opened the lock sluggishly and dragged himself inside. Exhilarated, Junkie started jumping and snapping his teeth, mid-air.

Perhaps, he was anticipating his master to live up to his word, at least after a day of waiting. Hardly bothered, Akshat just wanted to lie in peace.

But, Junkie was not ready to give up so easily.

He started bouncing even higher. It was hard to believe for Akshat, that a bulldog could jump so high up.

For a moment, he thought that his dog was on a trampoline.

Displeased, he screamed, “Bad Junkie!” and threw his rucksack onto the couch.

Petrified, the poor creature whined and without making any extraordinary attempts anymore, started following his master up the stairs.

Junkie was all geared up for this. He knew the protocol. He looked more ready for this than Akshat.

Frustrated by his tiring day and the humdrum it was turning into, Akshat snapped at Junkie.

“Why don’t you do this by yourself only”, he yelled, “, sitting there with your best fur on.”

Junkie looked at him, flabbergasted.

With his tongue hanging out and panting, he was waiting for the proceedings to kickoff.

Extremely disinterested, Akshat finally, turned his laptop on.

Junkie got so excited and restless, that he jumped onto the machine and pressed every goddamn key with his pink paws.

Eventually, the laptop stopped responding. Expecting a reward, timidly, he looked towards his master.

The phone rang again. Akshat smacked his forehead and exhaled heavily.

Looking furiously at Junkie, he placed him aside and restarted his laptop.

Junkie roamed in circles, sniffed a spot and placed his small tushie at the exact same place.

Finally, Akshat logged into *Skype* and pressed the video call button.

The call got connected and she bellowed, “Hi Sweet-heart!” lovingly from the other side. Thrilled, Junkie started licking the screen vigorously.

“Awwww Junkie!” she said, “I love you too”, tilting her face to a new low this time.

*By the way! To all the girls reading, it is highly irritating sometimes!*

At last, Akshat got rid of Junkie by getting him his *Tricky Treat Ball*.

He grabbed on it with his paws and started pushing it around diligently, to get every smidgen of food, out of it.

Ready with her surprise, she smiled nervously but Akshat was still not focused.

Elsewhere with his frustration, Akshat spoke casually, rearranging the stuff on his bed.

“So! How was your day?”

Covering up her nervousness, she also replied, “It was Olright.” casually.

Realizing, that he is only messing up the mess even more, he gave up!

Finally, he looked towards the screen and saw his girlfriend after almost a month.



With his eyes not moving anywhere anymore, he surely seemed awestricken.

“Hi”, the only word he could spill out.

His brain just stopped functioning furthermore.

Blushingly, she said, “God Akshat! Say something. What do you think?”

Akshat smiled and said “Wow! Pri! That’s the sexiest any girl in the world could look.”

And yes, he was right; she looked plain-fully sensual.

Sporting just a plain white shirt, buttoned incompletely, she looked like a sexy diva. Her long curly black hair was still wet from the shower.

Water droplets were still running down her gorgeous face and her seemingly carved legs.

Mesmerized by the delicate & arousing view, Akshat went weak in the knees every second.

Even Junkie was distracted for a second from his *Tricky Treat Ball*.

Her fair skin looked so soft and flawless that Akshat forgot everything he had been worrying about the whole day.

He felt like kissing her, all of her!

He cursed himself inside, for even thinking about missing this.

Her deep blue eyes were asking questions, a lot of questions!

Having not heard anything for almost five minutes from the other side Priyanka wondered.

“Are you ok sweetie?”

“You can’t imagine how lucky, I feel right now”, he replied, “Priyanka! How is the weather in London right now? Aren’t you feeling cold?”

It was February, which is one of the coldest months in the UK.

“I am ok sweetie” she said, “. This is the reason why, I took this shirt of yours when I left India. Remember?” winking.

“I will change in some time, don’t worry love?”

Shyly, she continued, “So you like this look?”

He looked at her with pure love.

“I think I Re-Love You.”

She was touched by the sensitivity, with which Akshat conveyed his feelings for her.

She had not seen him this serious in a long time.

She started to feel, what he was feeling for her, at that particular moment.

Thinking about the time when he proposed his love to Priyanka, Akshat said nothing but started to smile.

Priyanka wondered what suddenly changed his mood.

She asked, “What happened sweetie?”

He was reminiscing about the fashion, in which he put forth his heart in front of her.

He asked her to close her eyes and they started to discuss the time, the location and the mood that made that day so extraordinary.

It was the beginning of November 2009. MICANVAS, the annual brand management festival of MICA, was in full flow.

The red brick buildings were decorated and the atmosphere was totally phenomenal.

The whole campus was energetic, after *Adrenaline*, the high voltage rock concert put on by Mr. Mohit Chauhan, the Indian pop-rock singer, got over.

Students were dancing to the foot tapping music of the DJ, who was playing a mix of Indian, Punjabi and International hits.

A wild passion of vivacity was spread, throughout the stunning campus. Needless to say, the four of them were having an exceptionally breathtaking time.

After jiving for almost an hour Akshat, Priyanka, JD and Jenny were just unwinding and chitchatting with their group of Indian and English students, when suddenly Akshat looked into Priyanka's gorgeous blue eyes with affection and passion.

In an orchid violet colored saree and a spaghetti blouse, she was the hottest girl in campus.

Suddenly, he grabbed her hand and said, "Just follow my lead."

Priyanka was dumbstruck.

She was totally heedless of what Akshat had planned in his mind.

He took her to the center of the stage, in front of a crowd of around 1500 students.

Priyanka was nervous, fearful and maybe a little mad as well.

Akshat picked up the microphone and wore it around his neck like a man on a mission.

He looked confident, determined and surely in love.

He looked towards the lighting technician-cum-dorky batch mate and winked at him smiling.

The four-eyed technician gave him a thumbs up.

Unexpectedly, the stage went absolutely dark, following which the students present there at that very moment screamed, at the top of their voices.

Quickly, two white stage lights focused on Akshat and Priyanka.

Her heart was thumping hard, very hard.

The enormous mob of students went completely shush.

Akshat looked at Priyanka and smiled. He started off emphatically.

“Hello fellow MICANS!”

The crowd was with him and responded, with a gigantic roar.

He introduced himself and Priyanka and then looked back at her with exhilaration.

He said, “Hey there Gorgeous!”

The crowd went crazy again. All the boys and girls in the house, screamed out loud in unanimity.

A bunch of boys standing up front, were howling like wild wolves.

Akshat ignored them and carried on.

Slowly, with the bright white light following him, he walked towards her.

They gazed into each other’s eyes deeply. With their eyes still interlocked, he went really close to her.

“The past six months spent with you, have been the most memorable, the most cherish-able and perhaps the most brilliantly blissful days of my life.”

“I never thought I had it in me, to do something like this before I met you.”

JD shrieked from the crowd, “He is telling the truth Priyanka!”

The gathering erupted into laughter. Akshat continued.

“See? People can testify if you want.”

Priyanka just kept on staring into his eyes.

“I am in love with you Priyanka! I love your curly hair, I love your fresh silky skin, I love that adorable giggle, I love that cute

nose of yours and that even cuter thing you do when you look at a stray puppy.”

Priyanka giggled for a sec.

Suddenly, Akshat got down on one knee.

*Priyanka was caught off-guard! She didn't move an inch! Her feet felt frozen to her!*

He looked at her in assurance.

Jenny was astounded to believe, what she was witnessing.

“What the fuck did you guys plan?”, she turned towards JD and asked.

Akshat looked into Priyanka’s deep ocean blue eyes, with intent and a smile.

He asserted, “Don’t worry.”

“This is not a marriage proposal, I am not a freak.”

“But if you say, that you love me the way I love you, then after some time, if things feel right, this jackass will come back on his knees like this, AGAIN.”

He paused for a second and then asked ‘the’ question with all his heart.

“So, do you wanna give this a shot?”

With her blue eyes wide open, she just kept on looking at him.

She was absorbing the turn of events, which took place in the last five minutes.

For around twenty seconds, Akshat was on his knees, waiting to hear the simplest three letter word in the English Language Dictionary.

Every fraction of a second, felt like an eternity to him.

The crowd was completely hushed and every single soul present there, was just waiting anxiously, for the pretty girl to utter something.

Amidst all the tension, the howling boys exchanged money and looked like gambling on Akshat's misery.

The longest fifteen seconds of his life passed by.

Slowly, his head fell in defeat.

He thought, "Maybe that word will never come out."

JD looked at Jenny and said, "Well! That's just embarrassing!"

Akshat got up and was about to get down when . . .

"You know your phone bill is going to be really huge!", she said smiling.

The crowd went berserk.

He was elated and just picked her up in his arms.

Tears rolling down her eyes, she laughed with her whole heart.

JD looked at Jenny, who also had moist eyes.

He just couldn't control himself and blurted out an awkward "Awwww."

Jenny gave him a breakneck look.

With her big beautiful eyes gazing deeply into his, she smiled.

She stepped really close to Akshat and pulled his microphone towards her.

Their eyes still interlocked, she moved her kissable and trembling lips really close to his and said, "I love you too!" while the whole campus, started cheering their names in harmony.

# 3

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## RAJNI IS NOT A SUPER-HUMAN

Ever since the day, they had their most romantic video date; Akshat started missing Priyanka a lot.

He used to check her pictures on Facebook repeatedly, looking at her face, her sweet pink pencil drawn perfect lips often accompanied with long sighs of despair.

Reading her mushy messages, over and over again and smile like a little girl became his favorite time-pass.

He was often seen chatting over the phone, for hours, like a sixteen year old teenager, during office hours.

*Yes, you guessed it right, our Rajasthani hunk was wasted.*

That's the problem with us men, we give in very easily. A little action and we can't think of anything else. Women could do wonders, even from behind a laptop screen.

I don't think if things were the other way round, Priyanka would have missed Akshat more, just because he wore a sexy skirt on their video date.

In fact, that move might have broken the relationship forever!

Perhaps, if he had a six pack and was sitting topless, then maybe, Priyanka would have.

*But, why these double standards?*

*Women are allowed to have a little fat, which by the way can never be pointed out, then why most of the girlfriends expect their boyfriends, to be a reincarnation of Ashton Kutcher?*

Anyways, he seemed to have fallen in love with his beautiful girlfriend, all over again.

He made it a routine to call her, three-four times a day, may be even more if they both had the time to converse.

To sum it up, Akshat Rathod had, as Priyanka would have said, become a perfect boyfriend, once again.

Akshat was from an affluent Delhi family.

His parents lived in Greater Kailash and his dad owned **The Dining Destination**, a famous Rajasthani theme restaurant in Connaught Place.

Allergic to anything Rajasthani, including his family business, Akshat hated the fact that his dad wanted him to assist him in his family business.

His desperation to leave home motivated him to find his niche.

And that is how MICA happened for him!

After completing his MBA in Brand Management from his dream college, he got placed at Venky's, as a marketing trainee in their Marketing Department.

He was ecstatic, the day he stepped foot into the Venky's Corporate office in Pune.

Other than him, there were two Kannada chicks Urvashi and Vaibhavi who joined in the day he did.



On their fourth day at Venky's, all the three new recruits were assigned teams and senior gurus to work with.

And Akshat's kismet made sure that his work life wouldn't be an ordinary one.

His mentor was Mr. Rajnikanth Shetty, a very senior brand manager with a lot of marketing expertise and experience.

Vaibhavi and Urvashi were heart-broken and shared a mutual feeling of resentment for Akshat the day this happened.

Rajni's earlier stints included big names likes P & G and HLL.

The management at Venky's used to say that he brought a new level of thinking and sophistication to the floor.

Akshat's first thought was, "What's a kannada doing in Maharashtra?" but then again, "What is a Marwari Delhite doing in Maharashtra.", he said to himself.

Somehow, there was an uncanny resemblance, between him and Rajnikanth, the superstar from the South Indian film Industry.

The typical moustache, sunglasses, the crooked smile and most importantly the wavy Kannada accent made Akshat wonder sometimes.

Mr. Shetty had a trademark phrase "*And that is the way to do it!*" as well.

That was his way of saying, "*I like you! Let's have a Masala Dosa together!*"

It was Friday and Akshat was as usual, chatting over the phone, when Rajni came out searching for him.

"Hey Akshath", he bellowed, "! Meeting is starting in *The News Room.*"

He noticed him kissing his phone madly and gave him a huge smile.

Like the Bermuda Triangle secret, the reason to the usage of “*th*”, by South Indians at the end of simple names like Akshat, Sharad, is still a mystery.

*The News Room* was where any new and significant discussion used to take place.

It was sometimes also called *The Surprise me Room*, *the Shock me Room* or most popularly *The Kill Me* room as well.

“Sorry sweetheart but I have to go now”, he said, “. I have a meeting to attend.”

“Ok sweetie! I have to start working as well. Give me a call when you get free. Love you cuddle-bear.”

“Cuddle-bear, hmm”, he thought.

Akshat referred to his repository and picked up the last successful and well-received name.

“I love you too Babaganoosh.”, he said and rushed towards *The News Room* like a Nigerian with a number on his back.

Akshat entered and apologized for the delay with a restrained smile.

The team majorly consisted of Marathis, with some Kannadas sprinkled here and there and a North Indian cherry, Akshat on top.

Smiling, Rajni said, “Ah! The lover boy is here.”

Everyone erupted into laughter.

*A North Indian is always amusing in the land of Marathas, Pune.*

Vaibhavi and Urvashi were the loudest. *Well, for obvious reasons!*

Akshat sheepishly grabbed a seat.

“Vokay guys, maaii name is Rajni, Rajnikanth Shetty.”, he said in a bitching James Bond manner.

“I have been in Venky’s for the past one year now and I handle the marketing activities relating to the brand Venky’s”, he continued.

“I am here to give you an overview of what we have been doing and are supposed to do.”

The three new recruits listened intently.

“Now, I know, you all are here because of your high qualifications but still I would start by the basics.”, he said modestly.

Vaibhavi and Urvashi looked at each other and smiled in his appreciation.

“Our job is to monitor the market trends and oversee advertising and marketing activities to ensure the right message is delivered to the end consumer.”

Vaibhavi and Urvashi started scribbling and seemed to be taking notes.

The rest of the gang seemed highly uninterested with the routine orientation.

“In order to make you competent enough to handle the work, I will be dividing the three of you in three different teams as of now.”

The three exchanged confused looks with each-other.

“Vaibhavi, you will be working with the consumer research team.”

The research team of four gave her a wicked welcome smile.

“Urvashi, you will work with the product packaging department.”

The product packaging team smiled in tandem. It was kinda weird.

“And Akshat, as of now you can work with me.”, Rajni winked and with his right index finger and thumb, fired a fake shot towards him.

*Oooh, Vaibhavi and Urvashi didn't like that!*

Suddenly, Akshat became the office bitch.

“We'll follow a rotation policy in the coming weeks.”, he finished.

Urvashi and Vaibhavi murmured ferociously.

Disappointed, Vaibhavi and Urvashi rushed out.

Akshat was leaving for lunch, when Rajni stopped him.

“Hey Akshath”, Rajni screamed, “, Waaiiit up.”

He looked back and saw a potbellied Rajni running hastily.

Gasping for breath, Rajni asked, “Are you busy tonight?”

Akshat found his question to be in tune of a Sandalwood movie song.

His thoughts got interrupted, as Rajni continued again.

“Actually we have a get together, every Friday night at my place. Just some close friends.”

Rajni winked at him and elbowed him.

He was shaken by a desperately friendly Rajni.

“First the comment”, he thought, “, and now this!”

He said, “Oh! Umm, I am so sorry Rajni. I am not so sure about tonight. My dog is really ...”

“Arey adjust maadi”, Rajni said, “, there will be scotch und beer”, persuading him like a pitiable salesman.

Akshat replied instantly.

“Can I bring a friend?”

Rajni laughed, like a Kannada version of Santa.

“Yes-Yes! Sure-Sure, why not?” Rajni said with a wink, “but oneli males allowed tonight.”

The elbow gesture came screaming back.

He said, "Cool!" with a scared smile.

"All set then! Don't be late, we start at eight. The beer and scotch will never wait."

Akshat replicated the fake shot at him as well.

He noticed that, Urvashi and Vaibhavi were looking at him by the side.

"Don't worry!" he said, "He is still yours."

They grumbled to each other.

"Mindri", said Vaibhavi to Urvashi and looked back at Akshat. Obviously, he established that they didn't like him much.

"What the fuck is Mindri", Akshat wondered.

Ignoring them, he took out his cellphone.

Running towards the cafeteria, he texted Priyanka about his plans for the evening, with his supposedly gay mentor.

Akshat and JD reached Flat A/14, Royal Park, Kothrud exactly at 8 pm.

"*Another brick in the wall*", could be heard faintly, outside the apartment as well.

Akshat pressed the buzzer three times. Rajni opened the door, banging his head with the beats of music.

He appeared out of the puff of smoke, like a super cool demon out of hell.

Yes, his shades were still there, on his head though.

"VohMyGawd", Rajni exclaimed, "Wats this Macha!" pointing towards the polybag in JD's hand.

"That's a Hukka!", JD smiled.

"Bomabaat", Rajni bellowed.

He gave Akshat a huge grin and handed them both a chilled pint of Bohemia each.

Rajnikanth escorted them into cloud of smoke, just as a male personification of death would escort, wandering spirits into hell.

Following Rajni into a house, turned into a bar, Akshat and JD bumped their fists together.

Banging their heads in unison, they entered into an apartment, which looked like a planet invaded by alcohol and cigarettes.

The living room boasted of everything, which can be classified as comfortable.

Four LA-Z-BOY recliners were placed in one part of the L-shaped living room.

Three of them, were occupied by men, who were wearing the uniform of the nearby supermarket.

A home theatre, with a huge LCD screen and 7.1 speakers system, was setup right in the center.

Witnessing a small classy bar in one corner, JD yelled in excitement.

The bar gave shelter to a variety of Scotch Whiskeys and other alcoholic drinks.

Ranging from Single Malt to Blended Scotch Whiskeys, Lager to Draught Beer, Wines to Champagnes, Rajni had everything.

The bar was not just some organized shelves of booze, but was actually the best home bar, they had ever seen.

There were pint glasses, shot glasses and martini glasses as well.

An installed bar sink and ice machine with water, definitely gave the idea, that a lot of thought had been put into setting up that bad boy.

JD vowed, "I am not leaving this place Bro."

“VoKay People!”

Rajni gathered everyone’s attention.

“This is maaii friend Akshath.”

Rajni’s belly wobbled, while announcing emphatically.

A group of around fifteen, thirty something men, looked at Akshat and JD, with straight faces.

Akshat waved at all of them, with a plastic grin.

JD whispered, “Hey dude, are we in Zombie land or what?”

Apart from one or two dorks, everyone went back straight to their Scotch whiskeys and Beers, without any response.

Suddenly, JD shrieked, “Come to Papa”, and handed his Bohemia to Akshat.

He ran towards the bar and picked up the bottle of Jack Daniels.

Akshat tried, but couldn’t find even a single resembling face in the crowd.

He asked, “Who are all these people Rajni?”

Rajni said, “Ah! Some of maaii close friends” now swaying to the tunes of, “*All you need is love*” by Beatles.

Akshat nodded in acknowledgement, but he didn’t feel the ambiance to be, as friendly and lively.

Meanwhile, JD got himself a tray, which held all his favorite drinks or perhaps, all the brands which he couldn’t afford, as of now.

The amount of alcohol he had on that tray, would have easily served four grown men.

Akshat ran towards JD.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?”

With a devilish smile, JD said, “I am going to pump up, this bitch of a party” pulling out a bag full of marijuana, from his jacket.

**It was 1:30 am.** With their arms around each other’s shoulders, they were swinging and dancing on Marathi songs, like a drunken tribal race.

Completely stoned, Akshat and JD stood in the center and hooted, cheered and laughed uncontrollably, for twenty minutes, at the rare scene.

The three supermarket guys, in their yellow t-shirts and blue jeans, were distributed uniformly, along the ring.

JD gave a peck on the cheek, to one of the supermarket guys, for following the protocol and passing on the Hukka to Akshat.

*Yes, sometimes, even guys can be overly friendly.*

Smoking away the marijuana mixed Hukka, and drinking Scotch whiskeys, they shrieked, at the top of their voices.

It’s weird, how much some music, alcohol and a tiny god sent plant, could bring people, who are so different from each other, in every possible way, so close.

Sporting a huge smile, Rajni suddenly, sprang out of the ring and like the conductor of an orchestra, started waving his hands with the music.

“Just Maja Maadi”, Rajni yelled.

Not at all in sync with the music this time, he started banging his head, madly.

All of a sudden, he lost balance and crashed on the marble flooring with a bang.

Everybody roared with laughter.

One of the yellow t-shirt guys shrieked, “Aayla, Somebody banged on the door.”



JD said, “Don’t you fuck with me. That was just Rajni falling down.” giving him another one, on his cheek.

Snorting and almost crying with laughter, Akshat left the ring and went to check the door.

Through the peep hole, he saw two police officers, standing on the other side.

He signaled madly towards JD, to kill the music. Hardly acknowledging he continued to make sweet love, to the super-market guy.

Akshat ran towards the home theatre system, skipping Rajni’s belly on the way.

“Everyone quiet down.”, Akshat whispered.

The officer banged on the door again, this time harder.

Akshat panicked.

“*Shit Shit Shit*”.

He ordered JD, to hide the Marijuana packet.

JD and Akshat looked at themselves in the mirror.

Their eyes were not as blood shot and glossy, as Rajni’s were.

They picked Rajni up and forcefully sprayed JD’s mouth freshener, into his mouth.

Akshat instructed Rajni, “Try not to look into his eyes” steering him, towards the door.

Everyone hid in the rooms. Akshat, JD and Rajni opened the door.

JD pushed Rajni a step further.

Smiling like a dumbass and shaking like a jelly, he was still high.

The officer looked intensely at Rajni, who was stinking.

He asked, “Tujhe naav kaay aahe?”

“No Marathi Saar.”, Rajni vigorously shook his head.

The officer didn't like that. Half of their crime was not being a Marathi.

Irritated, the officer asked, "What is your name?"

Smiling like a freak, Rajni replied, "Rajnikanth Shetty Saar."

"Aee! What are you smiling for? For causing public nuisance, Huh?"

Rajni said, "Sulpa-Sulpa Saar" like a nut and started snorting into laughter.

The officer got provoked.

"Arey kya sulpa-sulpa bol rha hai ye Gayetonde", he said to his fellow policeman.

Rajni snorted and fell on to the officer laughing.

Akshat and JD pulled him back instantly, but the damage was already done.

It wasn't going well at all.

Infuriated, by his laughing and ignorance, the officer looked back at a smiling Rajni, who was sweating heavily now.

"Kanakhali ashtavinayak kaadheen (*I'll bitch-slap you and leave you with an imprint on your cheek*)", he said pointing his nightstick at him.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Rajni spewed a long blast, right at the officer's face.

Akshat's jaw dropped down in shock.

He looked at the officer, in horror.

It's not every day that you see a police officer's face covered, in your friend's vomit.

JD stuffed his hand in his mouth to control his laughter.

The officer was stunned and enraged.

Flummoxed, he slapped Rajni three times.

He roared, “Tuzya aaicha..”, dragging Rajni, through the corridor.

He kicked him into the elevator and swore again in Marathi.

The neighbors kept peeking through their doors.

Akshat and JD didn't know how to react.

They hurriedly ran down the stairway.

Panting, they reached downstairs, where they saw the officer throw Rajni into a car and speed away.



# 4

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## RAJNI'S STORY

“Okay!” JD said, “Show Khallaas!” to the eyeballs peeking through their marginally opened doors.

JD gave them a hostile stare, similar to an old monkey!

The conservative Marathi neighbors fastened their doors, hurriedly.

He came inside to the empty living room.

“Aye Pakya, Dedfutia, sab bidu log bahar aajao (*Everybody come out*)”, he yelled laughing.

The Marathi wolf pack came out sporting confused looks.

Everyone asked, “What happened?”

JD’s favorite one exclaimed, “Shya! Vaat lag gayi kya? (*Shit! Trouble?*)”

JD chuckled, “Police took Rajni bhau along.”

They screamed in unison. “Aayla! Kaiku?”

“Arey Public Nuisance! Khali Peeli ka Tamasha kar diya. (*He made a scene without any reason*)”

Everybody nodded in affirmation.

One of the yellow men sobbed, “The police took him along! Bole to, ye katta gaya?”

“Hao! I mean fukat ki daru khatam. (*Yes! Free alcohol is over*)”, he replied smiling.

He continued, “Now, I am in charge here and I want all of you, outta here. C’mon hurry up, I have to lock the place.”, ushering the sheep herd out.

Disappointed, by the news, the bidu log started moving lethargically.

JD winked at his favorite supermarket guy and gave him an aerial kiss.

The nervous chap rushed towards the door.

“Kya bankas karta hai! (*What nonsense he does*)”, he murmured leaving.

Finally, JD grabbed the bag of marijuana and locked the apartment.

He called up Akshat and pressed the “G” button on the elevator.

“Dude, have you reached?” JD asked, “Sure you don’t need my help?” giving the apartment key, to the security guard, who gave him back a broad smile.

“No, I am still searching. Don’t worry, I will handle the situation. I have got enough cash. Just reach home. I’ll see you tomorrow. Bye.”

Akshat drove on the hauntingly, secluded road. He didn’t find, even a single person on the road, to ask for directions.

Continuing to drive with his gut feeling, he finally reached, at what looked like a road intersection.

A sign board, suggested taking a left, for all the destinations it highlighted.

Unaware of the route, Akshat felt lost. He looked at the board again and the twisted words appeared to be laughing at him. Maybe, the marijuana had still not faded away.

He yelled, "What the fuck Rajni?" banging on the wheel.

Eventually, he found a soul, cycling down the road. He pressed on the gas again, to catch the only help he could get, at that time.

He screamed, "Kothrud Police Station?" waving like a maniac.

The guy stopped and explained him the way.

After driving for around thirty minutes, Akshat reached his destination.

Recklessly, he parked his Delhi Swift a bit far and ran towards the police station.

His gaze fell on the same police car, which took his mentor away.

Taking a deep breath, he entered the premises.

The police station smelled, like a bag full of rotten tomatoes.

Ten steps away was sitting, Rajni's beloved vomit puppet.

The recent fiasco rolled in front of Akshat's eyes, constantly and speedily.

He looked around for Rajni and noticed a cell with three criminals. One of them was wearing exactly the same white shirt.

Nervously, he started walking towards the cell.

A hawaldaar shouted, "Kaay?" like an ugly crow from behind his back.

Akshat turned back and gave him a retarded look.

The irritated hawaldaar strategically trampled some tobacco in his palm.

In a Marathi accent, he asked again, "Kya chahiye?"

Akshat fumbled, “Umm, Mere ek dost ko yaha leke aaye the, thodi der pehle.”

The hawaldaar said, “Kon? Vo (*Who? Him*)” pointing towards the bench, to his extreme right.

In the corner was sitting Rajni, with his head hanging down.

Akshat let out a sigh of relief.

He went up to Rajni, without appreciating the hawaldaar.

The irritated hawaldaar grumbled and walked away.

“Hey Rajni, are you ok?”

He looked up into his eyes and nodded with a straight face.

“Give me two minutes.” Akshat said, “Let me talk to the officer.”

He tried to comfort Rajni.

Gathering up the courage, he went up to the officer’s desk.

Smiling, he said, “Namaste Sir, Apan Kashe Ahath (*Aap Kaise hain*)” trying to strike a chord with the officer.

The officer looked up and then went back straight to his papers.

Realizing, that his Marathi vocabulary comprised of only this much, he decided that English must be the way to go.

“Sir, I am really sorry on his behalf. He was just a little sick.”

The officer gave him a furious look.

“Sir, I am sure we can work this out.”

Without moving his gaze from his papers, the officer spoke in a frozen tone, “Pay the fine and leave.”

Akshat was somewhat relieved by his statement, but also a bit apprehensive, about the answer to his next question.

Anxiously, he asked, “How much will be the fine Sir?”

With a wicked smirk, the officer replied, “Five thousand only... Sir!”



Akshat was dumbstruck. That was exactly the amount he had, at that moment in his wallet.

Sadly, he said, "Sir, that's too much. I don't have that kind of money with me."

"That's how much you have to pay, for creating public nuisance."

Akshat looked back at Rajni, who looked awfully disheartened.

He pulled together the courage to negotiate and took a wild shot.

"Sir, as far as I know the fine for creating public nuisance, is one thousand."

The officer got agitated.

"Don't try and act smart with Me." he roared, "I can keep this man locked up, for a whole week. Would you like that? Pay the fine or else", gesturing towards the hawalदार, to grab Rajni.

He roared, "Aye Gheen Tak." to the hawalदार.

"Sir Sir Sir, It's ok. I'll pay the fine. Let me check with him, if he has any money."

Realizing, that negotiation of any kind was never an option after Rajni's deeds, Akshat went up to him.

Obviously, Rajni wasn't carrying his wallet.

Akshat came back and reached for his pocket.

The officer took his seat and pushed a file towards him.

He said, "Put the fine in the file and leave", avoiding any kind of eye contact, with Akshat.

Noticing, the emblem of the Pune City Police, he meekly slipped five thousand rupee notes, into the file. He felt violated.

The officer signaled Rajni to leave.

The hawalदार shouted in Marathi at the three convicts, making noises.

Disturbed, Rajni asked, "How much did he take?"

Akshat preferred to remain silent.

After being robbed, at a police station, by a police man, he was not at all in the mood to answer questions.

Rajni comprehended, that Akshat was upset with him and decided to keep silent, the whole way back.

**It was 4:30 am**, when they reached Royal Park.

Rajni was disappointed in himself.

They had not exchanged, even a glimpse of each other, throughout the whole drive back.

Akshat said, "I will see you on Monday" coldly, with no visible emotion.

Rajni was feeling extremely small and depressed by the night's turn of events.

He never anticipated himself, to be so out of the line, over anything or anyone.

Abruptly, he said, "Her name was Alankrita" letting out a long sigh.

Akshat gave him a puzzled look.

"What are you talking about?"

"I am sorry. Forget it." Rajni said, "I have troubled you enough, already" trying to suppress his emotions.

Understanding Rajni's state of mind, Akshat decided, that it would be better to spend some time with him.

He parked the car inside and they both went back to his apartment.

Rajni said, "Would you like some tea?"

Akshat's head was throbbing severely, after the whole episode.

He would have killed for a cup of tea.

While Rajni went into the kitchen, Akshat's gaze fell on a picture in a corner, near one of the LA-Z-BOY recliners.

The girl in the picture was wearing a cream colored sari, with a thick yellowish golden border.

Sporting a charming smile, bindi and a necklace, she looked pretty.

Rajni was in the picture too, with his arm around her shoulder.

In a pair of black aviator shades, a blue shirt and a white panchey, Rajni looked like an exact replica of Rajnikanth.

They looked happy together!

Placing the picture back at its place, Akshat smiled a little.

Rajni came back, with two cups of steaming hot cardamom tea.

He said, "That's Alankrita. My ex" and handed over a cup to Akshat.

Smiling, Akshat said, "Cute picture."

He continued, "You were about to say something in the car", expressing his curiosity, about the matter in question.

Rajni exhaled heavily.

"The people you met today are not my close friends. They come here every Friday night, for the free alcohol."

Miserably, he continued, "You must have noticed the supermarket guys. Other than them, there was the society's plumber, electrician, one of the security guards, who by the way come over here, in turns. A worker, from the coffee shop across the road and some of their close friends I guess."

Pretending to express his disbelief, Akshat gave him a shocked look although he had figured it out long back. Both of them took a sip of the hot tea.

Akshat's tummy grumbled. He fancied a bag of wafers, to munch with the story.

Both of them slipped into the LA-Z-BOY chairs. Taking a sip, Rajni started his long tale.

“Alankrita Kutty was my college love. We met during our orientation, for the first time and eventually, we fell in love. For four straight years, we were together. After graduation we both got jobs, but in different cities.”

“She was in Pune and I was in Bangalore. We decided that till the day one of us gets a job in the other one's city, we will try and make the long distance thing work. But, fate had something different in store for us.”

“Insecurity, ego, hatred and jealousy became the only emotions, we used to have. Somehow, love had dissolved away in all the bitterness. But, one day, perhaps after two years, I got a job at Venky's, Pune.

“I told Alankrita about this and she was elated too. Even though, it paid me less I took the job because I wanted to make this work.

“Ultimately, we both moved in together. We bought this house mutually, thinking that we would get married within a year.”

“Things came back to being normal again. Sooner or later, our parents got involved.

Perhaps, four months after we moved in together, our marriage got fixed.”

“But, one month before the scheduled date of our wedding, Alankrita got a job offer, from a leading marketing company in the U.S.”

“She couldn’t have turned it down. That experience would have been priceless for her career. I asked her about the application for the job.”

Even I supported her to take the job, when she explained that she did it casually when I was in Bangalore and never expected a positive response.”

“We decided to postpone the wedding, for some time even though, we both were aware of the repercussions. The day she left, we broke up with a mutual understanding, but none of us had the heart to say it out loud.”

“Time passed by and life again became crappy, like before. It became extremely tricky, for the both of us to make time, for each other. We barely used to talk to each other in a week.”

“Sometimes, it felt that, we were not in a relationship, at all. Even when we used to call each other, we didn’t have much to say. **The connection was lost.** It was hard to face the fact that, the time has changed.”

“The transition, from the feeling of having her for all my life, to the feeling of losing her, for eternity, was excruciating to deal with.”

Rajni had a lump in his throat. He took a long sip.

“We both knew that it was over. There was no point in fighting for it. One day, she dropped me an email which said, that she wanted to talk. I knew what that meant and prepared myself to talk for one last time.”

“Finally, the day came and she called me. It felt extremely agonizing, when we exchanged a formal *hi*. Suddenly, she broke down over the phone.”

“She kept on crying, on the other side. I knew, that she was in pain as well, but, I didn’t have the courage in me, to console her.”

“She told me that, I was important in her life but she didn’t want me, to be the reason for her to quit her dream job. I just kept on listening and didn’t say anything that would have comforted her.”

“I missed the intimacy and the bonding we shared. Through my closed eyes, I relived the moments, spent with her till that day.”

“Suddenly, something got over me and I disengaged the call. That, was the last time ever, I heard her voice.”

Rajni paused for some time.

Akshat noticed that, he had moist eyes.

On the contrary, he was just sitting there, like a speechless dumbass, sipping cardamom tea and fantasizing about some munchies.

Never expecting Rajni to share anything, other than presentations and documents, he felt helpless.

Rajni composed himself and continued.

“I couldn’t let her go from my heart and decided that, work will be my sole priority from now on.”

“But every day, after coming back home, there used to be a screeching silence which eventually, became extremely difficult to live with. Her memories were everywhere. So, I decided to renovate the place.”

Akshat looked around in acknowledgement and took a sip.

Rajni continued “Renovation helped, but not much. I needed to reroute my mind, to other things. I was never close to the people, in my building and did not want any sympathetic visits, from anyone. So, I started having these people over.”

“I didn’t want people in my office, to know, if something was wrong with me. I just needed some company and in due course, it became a usual thing to do on a Friday night.”

Akshat sat there oblivious of his next words. He speculated, if Rajni saw his past in his present.

Concerned, he asked, “Why did you invite me?”

“I don’t know.”

His head hung down again.

He said, “I am extremely sorry for the trouble I caused tonight.”

Akshat wasn’t sure of his next step.

He was never good at dealing with emotions.

He never ever anticipated that, there could be a moment of closeness, between him and his superior.

He thought, “Perhaps a hug wouldn’t be that inappropriate.”

Slugging the rest of the cardamom tea, in one go, he got up and gave him a hug.

“Rajni, I am glad, that you invited me”, he said, “And you don’t have to do this to yourself. From now on, Friday night will be just our thing man. Please, take care of yourself. I’ll see you on Monday.”

Akshat fired Rajni’s favorite fake shot and let himself out with a smile.

It was 6:30 am in the morning, when he unlocked his car. The security guard he saw during the party, saluted him on his way out.

Akshat was dying to get some sleep. His eye lids felt, as if heavy weights were dangling down from them.

He drove back home, as fast as he could. The twenty five minute drive drained out, the last bit of energy left in him.

Extremely exhausted and dozy he rushed, towards his bedroom upstairs. Junkie was waiting on the couch, for some companionship, since last morning.

He ran towards his master, with full force, assuming that it was a challenging race.

Knowing Junkie, Akshat ran even harder and shut the door, with a loud thud. Relaxing against the door, he was wheezing heavily.

He beamed with elation, as if he had won, The Pune Marathon. Junkie kept on barking, on the other side but he, was too tired to be bothered.

The morning sun had already started disturbing the ambience of his room. In a slapdash manner, he flung his shoes off and shut the drapes.

He hit his bed with a thump and cuddled along with his pillow. With a huge grin, he dozed off in seconds, with Junkie yapping on the other side.



# 5

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## WHEN THE BRITISH INTRUDED AGAIN

Akshat was leaving for lunch, when he saw Rajni coming towards him.

Still unseen, he spun around and rushed in the opposite direction when suddenly Rajni looked up and spotted a racing Akshat.

He yelled, “Aaiyooo Akshath! So, are we on for tonight?”

Akshat murmured, “Darn it” and turned around.

Rajni’s face carried the same pitiable expression, which he had three months back.

Listening to a whining Rajni every Friday night since then, had taken a toll on Akshat.

**Three whole months!** That’s a lot of whimpering, to be heard, in a Kannada accent for a North Indian.

Cursing himself, he muttered, “From now on, Friday will be just our thing. What a stupid thing to say.”

“Aaiyooo Akshath”, he asked, “! What are you thinking macha?” after catching up with him.

Akshat felt like fisting down a giant idli in his throat.

“Arrgh, No more Aaiyooo and macha for me”, he yelled to himself.

With his eyebrows, down in despair and a strange smile, on his lips, Akshat looked like a merged snapshot of a “*Guess Who?*” column.

Frantically waiting for an answer, Rajni held the same dismal face.

With nowhere to escape, he let out a tired *Yes* and nodded in affirmation.

Rajni skipped a step in excitement and walked past him, firing his trademark fake shot at him.

Horrified by the ordeal, he had to face in the night, Akshat called up JD, his only help.

“Yello”

“We have to do it again!”

Melodramatically, he said, “No! Never! Not at all. Over my dead body.”

Akshat pleaded.

“Dude c’mon, you do know, how much of a pain it is for me.”

Wildly, he said, “Hey! I have better things to do, then listening to a man whining about the same thing, over and over again. The guy is a nutcase!”

“He is like a playlist, with only one song and oh my god, is that song uninteresting like hell? She left me, she left me, Damn it!!”

“Obviously, she left you, you moron. Who would want to spend their money over phone calls, with a cry baby?”

“I know, but c’mon, this is the last time for sure. You could have the free booze. What do you say?”

“Ah! Fuck No and Fuck You. This is exactly, what you said before. That’s why I took away a bottle of Glenfiddich, the last time.”

JD scoffed on the revelation.

“What the hell? You stole from his place, you pathetic loser!!”

“Ah! Drop the act now and stop overreacting. Will you? The guy has like three of them. He wouldn’t even notice”

“So here is the deal, I am not going to that snooze fest. How about I come to your place and all three of us, play some poker, have some strippers over and drink, one of the finest single malt Scotch whiskies in the world.”

JD suggested, referring to Junkie, as one of the guys.

“Oh shut up, you are no Charlie Sheen, so stop talking like one. You are a Gujarati-Parsi, pain in the ass. That’s what you are!”

“I have got to go now. Priyanka is calling me. And, don’t you dare open that bottle alone.”

Akshat warned him before hanging up and picked up Priyanka’s call.

Sadly, he said, “Hi.”

“Hey Price Charming! What’s happening?”

“Nothing sweetheart, it’s the usual. Rajni just caught me again.”

“Why do you do this, if it is so much of a pain?”

“The guy is a mess. He needs someone right now. And honestly, it’s not that big a deal. Four days a month isn’t a lot of time.”

Akshat justified, even though, his petrified alter-ego calculated, that going at the current rate, he would have spent a total

of almost one-seventh of the year, listening to Rajni's depressing sorrow-dipped stories.

"Hmm, that's there. Okay, listen I have to go now", she said, ". My boss is coming at my desk. I'll call you later. Love ya." and hurriedly disconnected.

A green eyed chap landed at her desk. Pretending to be working, she was staring back into the screen.

It was Charles Evans, the hottest gossip of her office world. In his late twenties, he was the youngest person ever, to head the London office of Hill & Knowlton, a global Public Relations Company.

His lustrous hair donned an edgy choppy layered look. His chiseled chest and abs seemed to be calling out from under his crisp white slim shirt.

"Hi Priyanka! How are you doing", he asked, "? Enjoying the work here?" in a charmingly deep voice.

Priyanka was staggered. She didn't expect 'him' to know her name.

Nervously, she said, "Hey Charles!" to his abs.

She collected herself and looked up to a grinning Charles.

"I am doing well", she said, ". Definitely, am doing well." embarrassed.

"Well! That's good to know. We are a team now and your comfort is extremely important", he said, ". After all, Employee satisfaction comes first. Doesn't it?" smiling.

Unable to keep herself together, Priyanka smiled & giggled timidly. Charles leaned down and kept his left hand, on her chair. He looked into her eyes and looked into them captivati-  
ngly.

“How would you like to have dinner at Gordon Ramsay tonight?”

Priyanka was taken aback. She thought, “Is he asking me out?”

Charles noticed a smidgen of doubt on her face. Quickly and casually, Charles clarified with a drastic change, in his tone.

“Actually, it is my birthday today”, he said, “and I had planned, to take everyone out, for dinner tonight. Would you like to join us?”

Priyanka was perplexed.

Hesitantly, she replied, “Happy Birthday Charles and yeah....Of course I would.”

“Great! We’ll leave at 7:30 then.”

He left, smiling back at her. Baffled, she went back to her work.

**It was 7:10 pm** when, Charles came up to her desk again.

“You ready to go?”

She said, “Uh... Yup, am all done.”

“Ace! Let’s leave then.”

Nothing much to discuss with, the chief, the head, the apex of the office, she walked out quietly.

She asked, “What about the rest of the gang?”

“Oh! We’ll meet them there itself. Perhaps, they are planning a surprise. I saw them sneak out, around an hour before.”

“Oh! Um... Ok!”

Charles asked her to wait outside the building. Minutes later, a black sedan showed up. He was in the driving seat.

She adjusted her hair and tensely, sat in the apparently classy ride. Only, a seven minute drive, they reached the famous European diner.

An impeccably dressed, pretentious bald man greeted them.

“Good Evening Mr. Evans! Welcome!”

“We have been waiting for you. Your private diner is ready.”

Priyanka was new to all the royalty. She adjusted her hair again. Admiring the stunning and splendid, *Art Deco* architecture of the place, she was speechless.

Their host for the evening took them to *The Salon*. The dazzling cream colored room defined glamour and elegance.

The surrounding French glass-paneled doors supplemented its charm. With his chin up, he guided them towards the only table at the center.

Decorated with complementing flowers, wine glasses and impressive silverware, the round table seemed exceedingly inviting.

Around the table was, a relaxed seating arrangement, for ten guests. The whole ambience was comfortably private.

The pretentious fella pulled out a chair for Priyanka. He did the same for Charles as well.

“Would you like to order something Mam?”

“No”, she replied, “, we are expecting company, Thank you?”

“Some complementary bevvy?”, he asked again.

“No thank you Sir”, Charles interrupted.

“Very well then”, he replied, “, I’ll be waiting for the delight of serving you.” and left the room with a smile.

Charles let out a puff of air in relief.

He whispered, “What a twat! I thought he would never leave!”

Awkwardly, sitting right next to him, she gestured in affirmation with a smile.

“So, temme”, he continued, “You like the place?” trying to break the ice.

Timidly, she said, “It is beautiful.” with her fingers, playing with the spoons.

Charles fancied the lavender nail paint on her slender and delicate fingers.

He always wanted to touch them, embrace them. The fourth finger on her right hand carried a modest diamond ring.

He was waiting for her to settle down a little. Sharing a splendid diner, with her marvelously sexy superior, she was feeling highly conscious about herself.

Clearly, he liked her and wanted her to feel comfortable.

In the next few minutes, she checked her watch eight times, finished two glasses of water and went to the ladies room twice.

Those ten minutes of awkwardness, were quite incomprehensible for Charles as well.

Anticipating, a positive reply after coming back, she asked, “Any word from them?”

“Yeah! Andrew called. Just a matter of minutes.”

Priyanka took her seat. He was looking at her. Suddenly, to calm her down, he placed his hand on hers.

“Priyanka! Would you relax for a minute?”

Priyanka’s heart was beating hard. She looked at him with mixed expressions of jumpiness and fury.

“We are here for dinner”, he said, “, not for some rumpy pumpy. C’mon! You are making the bald guy look easier to chat right now.”

Priyanka chuckled.

“I am sorry! I am ruining your birthday dinner.”, she said smiling.

“No you aren’t.” he said, “By the way, you did think, I was asking you out in the afternoon. Didn’t you?”

Her smile wiped itself off.

“Ah! Bullocks!”, he said, “Just to clarify, I was not!” smiling, his hand still placed on hers.

Priyanka relaxed. Charles lifted his hand up and picked up the menu.

He said, “Or maybe I was!” jokingly.

Priyanka was stumped.

*“Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday Dear Charlie! Happy Birthday to you!”*

Andrew and the other seven bashed through the door with a loud roar. Charles looked back, and got up, with a huge smile on his face.

Their host for the evening guided the waiter, who drove, a king-size, three tier chocolate cake, towards the table.

The sudden rampage left a bewildered Priyanka startled.

With wide-open eyes and a big smile, Andrew gestured wildly towards Priyanka to get up and enter the *madly in love with their boss gang*.

“This is just amazing fellas”, he said, “. I love you all.” after all the merriness.

Smiling, Andrew stepped up and said, “Here you go boss.” unraveling an expensive golf club set.

Charles loved the game of golf and was thrilled by the present. In appreciation, he thanked everyone and hugged them all, but her.

Everybody occupied the vacant seats and finally, to Priyanka’s respite, *The Salon* was filled with people.



Meanwhile, things weren't so well at Flat A/14. Tragedy was written all over Akshat's face.

To him, Rajni seemed like a *Dementor*, who had taken over everything and sucked on all the happiness spread in the world.

He swallowed the large peg in one go. Rajni continued to impart his wisdom about relationships.

"Long Distance Relationship is a bitch." he said, "I mean, it has to be. No matter, how much you try to work with it; it'll come back and bite you in the ass."

"And if you are lucky enough" he yelled ", it might do that twice."

Oblivious of his rambling, Akshat checked his cellphone.

"She loved me, I know she did. But, do you think, that you could spend your life like this. Stuck in different worlds, how are we supposed to manage?"

He turned towards Akshat, who was texting on his cellphone.

He asked, "What are we?" standing with his hands spread out wide.

He said, "Um... People?" although he felt like a prisoner of Azkaban.

"Men, we are men! And men need SEX!"

Akshat's eyebrows got raised in astonishment.

"I don't think that was the point of discussion", he replied, ". I thought that you broke up because of all the insecurity and the unfulfilled expectations."

"Yeah, we did. The confusion and the doubt slithered in, no matter what we did. But, we desperately missed the intimacy as well. And let me tell you, that is when, you start questioning everything."

"What do you mean?"

“I mean your expectations rise and you become extremely fragile. A little bump seems like a huge setback. It’s like a chain reaction of emotions.”

“The web of uncertainty, of your partner’s affection, towards you, becomes so fucking complex in your head that, you feel like killing yourself.”

He continued, “You are in a Long FUCKING Distance Thing right?”

Akshat nodded.

“Lemme ask you this. When was the last time you had sex?”

“Whoa Whoa! I am not gonna answer that Rajni!”

“C’mon Akshath, we both are adults here.” he persuaded, “Don’t think of me as your senior. We are friends first.”

“Well”, he said, “! It’s been quite some time now.” avoiding any eye-contact with him.

“That’s obvious, but how long?”

Coyly, he said, “Eleven months.”

Rajni stood there in disbelief.

“Oh my god! And you are still together?”

“Yeah, Why not?”

“Well! How about NO FORNICATION and only AGGRAVATION?”

“It’s not like that Rajni”, he defended, “. We did it a lot of times when she was in India.”

Akshat paused.

“Ok...I don’t know why I said that”, he continued, “. But the point is that, a relationship doesn’t mean just sex, does it? I trust her!”

“Umm... Yeah... You are right... Sure... I understand” Rajni said, “. By the way, how long have you guys been... you know, together?” hesitantly.

“Well, in a relationship for almost a year now, I guess. But we got together a month before she left. So“

“So you are saying”, Rajni interrupted, “, one month you guys were actually together!”

“Yep, one month of college!”

“So, you are telling me, that you never doubted her loyalty towards you in the past eleven months!”

Timidly, he said, “No!”

“Really?”

“Why would I”, he replied, “? She loves me a lot! I know.”

“Man, are you a saint? What if she finds somebody better than you? She is in England for God’s sake!”

Irritated, Akshat responded, “I know what I am doing Rajni? You are too paranoid?”

“Well, that’s a lot of confidence for a guy who may be has had sex only for a week or two in eleven months!”

Suddenly, there was a scratchy silence in the room.

Akshat felt insulted. He checked his cellphone again for any messages from Priyanka.

The only sound that could be heard was, that of Akshat’s ass, rubbing against the LA-Z-BOY.

Grasping, that he got too personal and judgmental, Rajni said, “I am sorry Akshath. That was the alcohol!”

“Who am I to judge your relationship” he said, “, when mine is nothing but, a miserable tale of crap.” with pessimism crawling back in his voice again.

Before Rajni could spill out anymore agonizingly gloomy words, Akshat realized that, it was time to head out. Hurriedly, he got up.

“It’s ok Rajni”, he said, “. I didn’t mind it at all.” with a phony smile and a clinched fist.

“I guess, I should leave now. It’s pretty late.”

He grabbed on his car keys, lying on the table and showed himself out. Driving back home, he checked his cellphone again.

He thought, “Why hasn’t she replied?”

Put off, by the conversation with Rajni, he dolefully opened the door to his apartment. Suddenly, his phone rang.

“*New message received*” blinked the screen.

To his disenchantment, it was a racist joke from JD. He grumbled and deleted it instantly.

His eyes looked for, the next hurdle, his hyper-active dog. Climbing up the stairs, to his room, he noticed Junkie curled up on one of the steps.

Like a thief in his own house, he stepped lightly past the sleeping beast.

Akshat closed his door and hit his bed. He squeezed out his phone from his pocket and called up Priyanka. She disengaged the call.

Heaving out a long sigh, he kept his phone aside his pillow. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep.

Rajni’s words kept coming, back to him. He picked up his phone again and started reading Priyanka’s messages. “*I love you so much my Royal Prince*” said one, with a kiss.

He smiled and went through a lot of other, similar diabetic phrases.

By the time, he finished reading the last and the one-fiftieth message, he was missing her terribly. He thought of calling again but something stopped him. Suddenly, he thought to himself.

“What if Rajni is right? Is this even a real relationship?”

“What if, she doesn’t feel the way I do for her?”

“Nah! She loves me. I know it! Rajni is a dick.”

“But where is she? She said she would call back. Why hasn’t she called back? She should be home by now.”

He kept looking back at the glaring *MSD* poster. Eventually, he started feeling sleepy. The anticipation had left him exhausted.

Ruminating about her face, he curled up like a shrimp and closed his eyes, ultimately falling into deep sleep.



# 6

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## THE WEEKEND THAT SUCKED

“That’s it” she said, “.That’s me!” signaling to Charles.

He pulled over and stopped in front of a house in Brentford.

“Thanks a lot for coming all the way from Brook Street.”

Smiling charmingly, he said, “Hey! That’s the least I could do after you came to have dinner, at such short notice.”

“I hope you had a great time!”

“Oh yes! I sure did”, she said, “. I better leave now. It has gotten pretty late. My dad must be waiting.”

“Oh! Will there be a problem”, he asked, “? Should I come and say hello?” with concern.

“Um...” she said, “That won’t be necessary Charles.” immediately.

He just kept on looking at her with a smile. Nervously, she looked at him and unlocked the door.

Anxiously, she said, “I’ll see you on Monday.” stepping out.

He said, “Have a good night.” with an unnerving confidence in his voice.

Charles turned around his flashy ride and zipped away. She kept on looking, until the tail lights, dissolved into the night.

Still in a state of shock, she was unable, to come to terms, with the fact that her boss was hitting on her. Hurriedly, she reached, for her cellphone in her purse.

It said, *“Four messages received.”*

“Priyanka! Putter! Come inside. Why are you standing out?”

She looked back. It was her dad, Mr. Paramjeet Singh Ahuja. With a full head of neatly combed hair and light stubble, he looked a bit young to be a dad.

Extremely fair and tall, he still had the looks that could kill.

It wasn't hard to guess, where Priyanka got her gorgeous blue eyes from. In a white Kurta Pajama, he looked comfortable. Texting on her cellphone, she went towards the door.

Smiling, he caressed her head.

“Too much work”, he asked, “? Kaafi late ho gaye aaj?” in a heavy voice.

“Actually dad, I had to attend a dinner. It was my boss's birthday. Couldn't turn it down!”

“That's OK”, he said, “. Come inside?”

“You know what”, he whispered, “, your mom surprised the hell outta me tonight.” with his arm around her.

“Why”, she asked, “? What happened?” while walking with her dad.

“She got herself an Indian dress and made Mutter Paneer”, he exclaimed, “! Would you believe that?” with excitement.

She said, “Oh my god! No ways dad!!”

“I know!!”

Suddenly Alana, with a bowl full of Mutter Paneer, came scurrying from the kitchen.



“Hello Darling!”

“Hi Mum!”

Draped in a lovely Salwaar Kameez, she looked too Indian for a white woman.

“C’mon! Take a bite and tell me honestly”, she said, “. I don’t believe him, he always has the same comments.” stuffing a spoon full of the delicious Indian dish in her mouth.

“Mmm”, she said, “That’s actually very good Mum. Hats off to you.” kissing her on her cheeks.

“But I am full, had a lavish dinner tonight. Just want to relax and sleep.”

“It’s ok baby”, she said smiling, “. Have a good night.”

Alana kissed Priyanka on her head, before she rushed towards her room upstairs.

That’s right! Her mum was an English lady, but hers was a happy family. Paramjeet Ahuja came to his maternal uncle in London, when Priyanka was just seven years old.

Extremely fond of cooking, Paramjeet, known as *Parry* now, started a small restaurant “**Crazy for Chickken**”, in Brentford.

Famous for its *Chicken Tikka Masala*, “**Crazy for Chickken**”, gained numerous applauds from Indians and Britishers and eventually, became a major hit.

Alana met Parry, when she visited the famous Indian restaurant for inspection.

She found the food to be, so damn delightful and the cook to be so marvelously charismatic, that she fell in love with his cooking and eventually, with him as well.

Priyanka went up to her room and closed the door. She got undressed and slipped into a comfortable t-shirt and cotton shorts.

The moon light through the window, made her look drop-dead gorgeous. She was waiting impatiently for Akshat's reply.

This was the first time, in months, that her day ended without saying goodnight to him. Talking to him, before sleeping, had become a habit for her.

She felt a mild discomfort inside. She wanted to call but didn't. She kept on waiting for his message but Akshat was fast asleep.

Thinking about him, her eyes started to feel heavy. Reminiscing, she said softly, "Goodnight Aki!" and fell into deep sleep.

**It was 8 am**, when she woke up. Hurriedly, she reached for her cellphone. There weren't any missed calls or messages.

Quickly, she called up Akshat. It kept ringing, but no one picked up on the other side. She decided to leave a message.

It was a usual Sunday morning for her. She went down to the empty living room. No one was around. Her dad was already off to work and her mum was out for grocery shopping.

Suddenly, her phone rang. Crazy, she ran back up the stairs and flew towards her bed. It was Akshat.

She said, "Morning Sweetheart!" chirpily.

"Morning Sexy!"

"I am so so sorry for yesterday", she said, "! I know you must have missed me, but I just couldn't reply to your messages."

"It's ok sweetheart! You woke up just now? How was dinner?"

She replied, "Dinner was fine", thinking about the last night's turn of events.

Teasingly, she asked, "So, how was your date with Rajni?"

"Ah! Don't ask! He is practically getting worse day by day."

"Why? What happened?"

“The guy started talking to me about SEX”, Akshat exclaimed, “! He was a totally different person yesterday, a lot more finicky than he had ever been before. It was extremely uncomfortable.”

“What”, she asked, “? Did he ask you to do it with him?” mischievously.

“Now, what kind of a question is that?”

He concluded, “I think he just needs to understand that there are some boundaries!!”

“Oh My! My royal prince is getting worked up! That bad! Huh?”

“Just don’t ask! Tell me about your day?”

“Well, It was ok, till the time, we last chatted yesterday”, she said, “. But, something weird happened after that.”

Worried, he asked, “What?”

“Nothing that serious, I just think, that my boss, I mean, the head of our office, was kinda, hitting on me.”

He exclaimed, “What the hell!!”

Priyanka laughed out load.

“What’s so funny?”

Giggling, she replied, “Nothing, I thought, you must have known by now, that your girlfriend is HOT!”

“Yes, I do know that”, he replied, “, and that’s why I need to know, what he did? And, isn’t he old?”

“Oh no! He is quite young. I mean, may be still in his late twenties.”

“Hmm”, he asked, “! What’s his name?” casually.

“Charles, Charles Evans!!”

“So what did Mr. Evans do”, he asked, “? Did he pull off anything offensive?” trying to mock Charles, by doing an English accent.

“No sweetheart, nothing like that. But I could just feel, that vibe coming from him.”

Akshat was displeased and kinda put off, but tried not to let his insecurity flag out.

Serenely, he asked, “Ahaan? I understand. So, what exactly did he do?”

Priyanka knew him and that tone, inside out. She immediately, sensed a change in Akshat’s voice. Concerned and a bit apprehensive as well, she continued.

She said, “Umm...He took me to Gordon Ramsey for dinner.”

“What”, he exclaimed, “? He took only you?”

“No No! I mean, we just went together from office and the others, joined in later. There were around ten of us.”

“And then?”

“Nothing much happened! We just had a quiet dinner and then, he came back to drop me home.”

“That’s it?”

Priyanka could feel a sense of respite creeping back in him. Smiling, she said, “Yes, that’s it.”

“Oh! Phew”, he relaxed, “! You got me thinking that he made a move on you. I don’t think that he was actually flirting with you.” sinking in a chair.

“Well”, she said. “! He was!” gently slamming her hand on her pillow.

“No sweetheart! He wasn’t. That’s something, any well-mannered guy would do.”

**Girlfriends are complex creatures!** It was not like, she was proud about the fact, that the richest and the most eligible bach-

elor of the office, was flirting with her, OK! Maybe she was, just a tad!

But, it meant nothing more than, a rough night to her. Even then, she didn't want to let him take that away from her.

Impulsively, she let slip, "Well, there was something else he did!"

Anxiously, he asked, "What?"

Priyanka realized that she had uttered something, which she shouldn't have. Not telling about what happened, now, would turn things sour.

Cautiously, she said, "You know, there was a time, when he held my hand. And the way, he looked at me. It was not usual. I knew what he was doing and it made me highly uncomfortable." with a lot of emphasis on the last word.

Visualizing, what was being described, Akshat was burning inside like hell.

He cursed, "Oh! That Son of a bitch!" like a hero from a retro movie.

Priyanka tried to lighten up the mood and giggled again.

She said, "C'mon! It's funny, not even that big a deal!"

Akshat was annoyed.

"Not that big a deal! How could she say that", he thought, "? Was Rajni right? Am I the only one who thinks of this relationship seriously?"

Rajni's words were still hovering above and around his head. He hated the thought that, someone else was seducing his girlfriend, while he was being miserable and doubting his own relationship.

He asked, "So! Did you tell him about me?"

"What about you?"

“I mean that, you are in a relationship.”

“No! I didn’t.”

“Well! You should have.”

“Oh C’mon”, she said, “! Should I tell that to every guy who smiles at me?”

“No! But you should, to someone who held your hand and was flirting with you.”

“Akshat, The guy heads our office. He is my boss and it was his birthday”, she said, “. Do you think it would have been appropriate, to make him uncomfortable during his birthday dinner?” trying to explain.

She continued, “Besides, who knows, if I would have made a fool of myself, telling him about my relationship without any apparent reason.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, what if he wasn’t flirting with me and was just joking!”

“Well! I thought you said you were sure that he was.”

Irritated by the consistent inquiring, she blurted out, “Well! I wasn’t sure enough!”

Akshat didn’t have much to say. He just held the phone against his ear and preferred to remain silent. Junkie entered the room and looked towards Akshat in hopefulness.

It was his lunch time! Drooling over the floor, he sat opposite to him with his dark puppy eyes and wagged his tiny tail, really fast.

“I am sorry for shouting.”

Aloofly, he said, “It’s OK.”

He continued, “You know, I really missed you yesterday.”

“I know sweetheart, I missed you too.”

“Well, you could have replied to my messages at least once”, he said, “. I am just saying.” timidly.

“I was just so busy during the dinner”, she said, “. You know most of the people present were very high profile.”

“So, yours was the only new face there?”

“Not at all! There was one more guy, Andrew.”

Indifferently, he said, “Oh! Alright!” and then went back to being dumb again.

Priyanka’s mind was mixed up. She wasn’t sure, what was bothering Akshat so much. Never expecting him to react this way, she honestly told him whatever happened.

She wanted to make things better, but being new to fixing situations, she was heading nowhere.

She asked, “What is with you today?”

“With me? I am fine. You are the one who is getting irritated.”

“Excuse me”, she said loudly, “? And who is to blame for that?”

“I don’t know”, he said, “, how about the guy, with whom you were so busy yesterday, that you didn’t even text me once in four hours?” yelling.

“Don’t you yell at me”, she said, “and oh my freakin god! Will you stop that? It’s not like I went out with him.”

“You might as well, he burst out, “; it’s not like, we ever talked about being exclusive!”

“Akshat have you lost it”, she bellowed, “? Alright then, maybe I will!” and disconnected, throwing her phone on the couch in her room.

He yelled, “FINE!” getting up from his chair.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. Akshat didn't bother. It rang again, this time, constantly. Annoyed, by the clamor, he grumbled and went down with Junkie, scudding behind him.

He opened the door and found JD, munching on a bucket full of fried chicken.

Astounded, he asked. "What the hell are you doing here?" wondering about JD's premature awakening on a Sunday.

"Well! I was in the neighborhood", he replied, ", so thought we could hang out. What's up?" stuffing his face with a jumbo bite of the juicy snack.

"Umm", he mumbled, "Nothing much." trying to act normal.

Smitten by the mouthwatering whiff, Junkie's eyes got fixated right on target. Immediately, he gave up Akshat's leg and started jumping up and down in exhilaration, in front of JD.

*Who the hell thinks that dogs are loyal?*

Repulsively, JD said "Would you please get your other half, out of my face?"

Akshat yelled, "Junkie! No!"

Obedient as he was, a completely aroused Junkie waited patiently for some tasty treats to fall down.

Climbing up the stairs, Akshat told JD about the chat with Priyanka. On the other hand, Junkie was right behind JD, following him like a spy.

Pompously, JD said, "This is exactly the reason I am not in a relationship."

Akshat asked, "Oh! You sure this is the only reason?" mockingly.

"Obviously", he said, ", unlike you, I just can't stand the nagging, at all!"



Junkie panicked on witnessing JD fill up his mouth with yet another piece in one go.

He mumbled, “Umm... Chicken?” offering a piece to Akshat. Miserably, he said, “No Thanks.”

It had been five minutes, since JD came upstairs. Junkie was sitting exactly opposite to JD, who was hogging onto the food continually.

Famished and desperate, Junkie decided to pull out his big sympathy guns. Quietly, he rolled on his back and kicked his legs in the air, like a cockroach had flipped over.

JD didn't bother and finished the last piece. Suddenly, he let out a mammoth burp. So loud and emphatic, that the baby birds about to hatch, went back in for one more day.

He asked, “Did you hear that one go?” proudly.

“Ah! You are disgusting!”

“Anyway”, he said, “! Can you get me a beer?” licking his fingers.

“Are you kidding me”, Akshat replied, “? Get it yourself!” and went to the washroom.

JD kept the empty bucket on the floor and went downstairs. Junkie finally got a chance, to stick his face down the scrump-tious leftovers.

Akshat wanted to make things right with Priyanka. He didn't want to spoil her Sunday. He decided to, drop a message to Priyanka and get rid of the misunderstanding.

Out of the blue, Junkie started whining loudly, while he picked up his cellphone.

He said, “Now is not the time Junkie!!”

Junkie whined again. Suddenly, he started coughing and gasping for breath.

Akshat raised his eyes away from his cellphone and looked at his dying gift from Priyanka. Junkie made a weird retching sound and with a piercing squeal, churned out something disgusting.

He started scuttling frantically around the room. Akshat just couldn't finish the text and threw his cellphone on his bed.

Running after Junkie, he finally got a hold of him. He tried picking him up but Junkie was just too squirmy.

Akshat shrieked, "JD!" for some help.

Only just certain about what he had once seen on *The Discovery Channel*, he got on his knees and held Junkie tightly from behind.

He placed his arms around his belly, just under the ribcage and prepared himself to get this right in one go.

Whistling casually, JD came back with a beer, just when Akshat gave five nippy thrusts to Junkie.

"Oh my god, my eyes", JD yelled, "! What the fuck is going on here? How frustrated are you? Let him go or I will call Animal Security!" blocking them both with his right hand.

Maddened by JD's minuscule brain, Akshat yelled furiously.

"Please do call", he replied like crazy, ", because he is choking, you bloody MORON!"

JD was dumbstruck and looked towards the leftover chicken bones in the bucket.

Akshat yelled again, "Well! Do something!"

Unable to make up his mind, a bewildered JD just stood there and kept on watching the horrible sight.

Akshat tried the same movement once again, but it wasn't helping. Junkie was in too much pain. He was whimpering at the top of his voice.

Akshat decided to take him to a vet. JD picked up his car keys and rushed downstairs. Forcefully, Akshat picked a drooling Junkie up and carried him down like a baby.

Extremely anxious, JD yelled, "Hurry Up!"

Amidst all the chaos and panic, Akshat forgot his cellphone upstairs. He picked up the apartment keys and on the way out locked the door, just when his phone started ringing with the name *Priyanka*, flashing over and over again!



# 7

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## THE INVITATION

He asked, “Can you see that Mr. Akshath?” pointing at Junkie’s neck.

Both of them ogled carefully into the X-Ray.

Two splintered bones around 3 inches in length were lodged diagonally, deep in his throat.

“I tried removing the bones using Gastroscopy”, he explained, “, but it is not working as of now.” sitting back in his chair.

Worried, Akshat turned towards JD, who, while flipping through the pages of a dog reproduction book, saw something which he shouldn’t have seen.

Nervously he threw the book back.

JD uttered, “Umm ... Gastroscopy? What the hell is that?”

Akshat exclaimed, “Will you mind your language?”

The vet interrupted, “It is ok!” and adjusted his trifocals.

“Let me explain. What I meant was that, we located the bones visually using an optical fiber”, he clarified, “, but they couldn’t be withdrawn, might have damaged the food pipe.”

“So”, Akshat asked, “? What do you suggest?”

He replied, “Well, we have to push the bones down and then remove them surgically from the abdomen.” pointing aerially towards a totally unconscious Junkie.

Akshat looked at his panting dog with empathy.

JD whispered, “I think he is trying to take us for a ride. Let’s get a second opinion.”

Surprised by JD’s point of concern, Akshat looked at him with sheer fury.

“Or maybe NOT”, JD corrected himself.

So Doc”, Akshat asked, “! How much time will the surgery take?”

“Not much”, he said, “! Trust me; your dog is in good hands.” snobbishly.

Akshat and JD helplessly watched a huge male nurse, with the name tag Lankesh, wheel away his relatively tiny dog into the surgery room.

Worried, he thought, “Oh God, please save his tiny ass or else my ass will be on fire.”

Akshat gaped into the surgery room from behind the glass door. The vet wore a surgical mask and prepared Junkie for the surgery.

He gave him an intravenous anesthetic, followed by a gas anesthetic. Finally, he hooked Junkie onto a heart rate monitor and an oximeter.

Until the surgery got over, Akshat and JD decided to stay in the waiting room.

**Three hours later**, the doc came out.

Like expecting dads, both of them rushed hurriedly, towards him.

The vet looked at their anxious faces and smiled.

“He is resting right now”, he said, “. You can go in.” and went back to his office.

Akshat and JD rushed towards the surgery room. Under a green colored hospital sheet, he looked small.

Two broken and blood-soaked pieces of bones were lying in the nearby kidney tray.

Gently, Akshat picked up the sheet and peeked in.

He noticed a set of stitches on his belly.

Breathing swiftly, he was lying on the operating table.

Akshat felt extremely awful for the pitiable creature.

Akshat and JD scurried back to the vet office.

A seemingly depressed reincarnation of Ravana, Lankesh was leaning against the wall with his arms intertwined.

“When can we take him back doc?”

“Well, it’s majorly up to you”, he professed, “, but I would want him to stay here for at least 2-3 days.”

Clumsily, JD exhaled in denial.

“Don’t worry”, he continued, “, Lankesh will take care of him. You could take him back once he starts feeling better. Here is my card. Call me anytime.”

Akshat grabbed the business card. It said, “Gaurishankar Prathamesh Lokhande B.V.M.S”

JD read the card like a retard.

“Call me G.P.L”, he said, “, if you must.” seriously.

JD and Akshat looked at each other and smiled.

Considering his office and other commitments, Akshat found it rational to leave Junkie for a day or two in the hospital only.

He thanked the vet for his quick assistance and looked at the evil looking male nurse with a smile.

Lankesh spit out the traumatized toothpick and stared back coldly.

JD nudged Akshat to turn towards the exit.

He was thinking about Priyanka the whole way back. Her words, *"Take good care of him"*, came rushing back to him.

JD said, "I am extremely sorry man." pulling over at Akshat's place.

"Well, I should have been careful. After all it is my dog."

"Give me a call, in case you need me."

Akshat came upstairs to his room and rushed towards his cell-phone. There were eight missed calls from Priyanka followed by a brutal message.

*"U knw wat Akshat! m dne wid u. I hv had it wid ur attitude. Ur insecurity is killing me. First it was Ashish n now Charles. I tried to make u understand in the morning but u wrnt ready to listen. And wen I called u bak to explain the situation, ur huge ego was just nt letting u pik up my call. I dnt knw wat is wrng wid u! If u wanna make dis relationship work, u'll hv to do sumthing which u hvnt dne till now. **TRUST ME!**"*

Dead on his feet, Akshat dropped down on his bed and just kept on looking towards the ceiling. He decided to video call Priyanka. Her phone rang but she disengaged.

He dropped a message to Priyanka and requested the gods for a positive response. Five minutes later, his phone beeped.

*"hvnng lunch wid mum n dad. Gimme ten mins :-\*"*

Akshat was shocked and pleasantly surprised, all at once.

Stupefied, he thought, "Why the kiss? Have the gods listened to me?"



He wanted to send back a kiss as well, but unsure, he replied with a smiley. Confused, he cleaned himself up and switched his laptop on.

He logged into Skype and started thinking of a fool-proof story with no relation to Junkie at all.

He hadn't even finished his thoughts, when suddenly the room echoed. A bunch of small choked up Junkies, started dancing around his head, to the bouncy Skype tone.

He said, "Focus you moron, Focus!" smacking his head.

Mentally sealing the final draft of his lie, he clicked on the "Answer with Video" button.

A smiling Priyanka appeared onto the screen. Her hair was neatly tied up into a pony tail.

She was wearing a deep v-neck purple t-shirt and a pair of pink lace cotton micro shots, with ogling and smiling reindeers all over it.

Bamboozled by Priyanka's smile, he also smiled back.

"So you checked your mail?"

"Umm ... No, I haven't. What's in it?"

Abruptly, the blissful arc of her lips transformed into a nasty straight line.

She asked, "Why are you smiling then?"

Now, it was Akshat, whose grin had to run away.

Abruptly, he fumbled, "Umm ... JD choked!"

"What? What did you say?"

"JD choked on gum at my place."

"Oh my god", she said, "! What the fuck happened?"

"Well, he showed up at my place around 12:30 pm", he rambled, "and the idiot that he is, choked on some gum."

"Really, did you take him to a doctor?"

“I had to. He was panicking. I forgot my phone in all the rush.”

“Oh I am so sorry sweetheart. How is he? What did the doctor say?”

“He underwent Gastroscoy”, he quipped, “and then the doctor just pulled that gum right out.” wisely.

Priyanka felt bad about the aggressive message she sent unknowingly. Anticipating ‘the’ word, Akshat was all ears.

“I am sorry about that message sweetheart.”

Akshat smiled. Finally, his male-ego was satisfied.

“It’s ok! If I was you”, he said, “, I might have also reacted the same way.” prudently.

He continued, “I am sorry too about the whole Charles thing.”

Priyanka smiled and said, “I love you!”

“Let’s just forget about all this,” she continued, “, shall we?”

Excited, she chirped, “Now will you check your mail or what?”

This was turning out to be a piece of cake for Akshat. Basking under the brilliance of his maneuvering aptitude, he logged into his mail account.

She asked again.

“Did you check?”

“What am I looking for sweetheart?”

“Look for a mail from Ashish!”

Akshat scrolled through his mails. A mail titled “*The Invitation*” with an attachment was received yesterday.

Surprised, he said, “Found it!”

She yelled, “Ashish is getting married!”

Not that he cared but Akshat was a bit shocked to hear about Ashish's wedding news.

"What the hell happened to Ashish?"

"Forget about what happened to Ashish! Will you", she asked, "? Just open the card!" hugging a pillow.

She said, "Open the card, Open the card, Open the card!" rocking back and forth on her bed.

Akshat smiled and clicked on the attached image.

*Mr. and Mrs. Jagraj Baweja request the pleasure of your presence and blessings for the auspicious occasion of the wedding of their*

*son*

*Ashish*

*With*

*Natasha*

*Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Manveer Dhillon*

*On*

*Sunday Dec 19, 2010 6 pm*

*At*

*Regency Ballroom*

*Hyatt Regency Delhi*

*Bhikaji Carna Place, Ring Road,*

*New Delhi, India - 110607*

*Sharing the happiness*

*The Baweja Family and The Dhillon Family*

While jogging through the invite, Akshat's eyes got jammed at one point.

The name *Natasha Dhillon* rang some bells in his head.

Suddenly, he blurted out, "Oh my god! Is this *The Natasha Dhillon?*"

"What are you talking about? You know her?"

Akshat knew Natasha from a party, where in, Ashish introduced her as an aspiring model. What Akshat remembered of Natasha was a sultry beauty with big eyes, sharp features, a perfect rack and a nose ring.

In a bizarre world, he could have given this description to Priyanka as well. Maybe, she would have even applauded his eye for women.

But this was not the dreamland, committed men live in. **This was the real deal!**

Moreover, after the whole Charles fiasco, it would have been extremely hypocritical of him to reveal that Ashish's fiancée flirted countlessly with him during that party.

Trying to change the subject, Akshat continued.

"Umm... met her during one of Ashish's party", he said, ", but how come they are getting married?"

"That's the only thing that caught your attention?"

*Girlfriends love to play this game, don't they? Why do you guys just don't reveal what is on your mind?*

Akshat hurriedly scrolled through the invitation, once more.

He exclaimed, "Damn it! That's almost like a week? Why are they getting married so early?"

Priyanka was displeased.

"Akshat Rathod, you go and call up Ashish for the details of his wedding", she announced, "while I go and pack my bags."

She anticipated a wild reaction, but Akshat just froze in time.

"Huh", he fumbled, "? You are coming to India? When?"

She muttered, "18 Dec."

Akshat's mind started wandering, thinking about Junkie.

"I don't wanna talk about this, you hardly seem interested."

“Priyanka, are you crazy? I am glad that you are coming to India.”

Carefully, he said, “Sweetheart just let me know when I have to pick you up.”

“I’ll be going directly to Jaggi Uncle’s in New Delhi”, she said, “. Dad won’t let me come otherwise.”

Akshat relaxed on the news.

“But”, she continued, “...Maybe after the wedding I could come to Pune. I really wanna meet Junkie as well.”

Akshat panicked a little.

Ironically, he said, “Um... He is dying to meet you too.”

Priyanka just couldn’t stop smiling and kept on looking at him while Akshat was trying to read her mind.

Sweetly, she said, “I really love you Aki.”

Torn between love and apprehension, Akshat just kept on grinning.

Finally, he said, “I love you too darling, Can’t wait to finally touch you.”

Shyly, she said, “Me too.”

“Gotta go now. Have to go shop for the wedding.”

“You got your visa?”

“Yup, went to the commission in the morning only, got it in two hours.”

“Whoa... that’s something. Alright hotness! Do let me know about your flight.”

“Will do”, she said, “Love ya” smiling and disconnected.

Akshat pulled out G.P.L’s card from his wallet and dialed his number. The clinic was already closed. He decided to visit Junkie the next day.

**It was Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec.** On his way back from office, Akshat stopped at G.P.L's clinic.

"Hello doc"

"Ah... Hello Mr. Akshath!"

"Umm... Doc, can I visit Junkie?"

"Sure Sure", he said, "...Lankesh will take you to him." pointing towards the monster.

Akshat followed the inapt fellow to the ward.

Junkie was sleeping in an enclosed but comfortable pet crib. A black colored cone around his neck made him look even more adorable.

His paws seemed pinkish. Akshat smiled and extended his hand towards Junkie. Lankesh grunted. Akshat looked up.

"Don't-a Wake-a, very-a noisy-a"

"I know", he said, ", but he is a good boy." smiling proudly.

Lankesh snorted. Leaving, he said, "Naanu horagade kaayut-tini."

A minute later, Akshat came out and followed Lankesh back to the vet's office.

"All good", he asked, ", Mr. Akshath?" looking into a report.

"Umm... Yeah", Akshat replied, ", he looks to be doing fine. Thanks again." grabbing a seat.

G.P.L yelled at Lankesh to get two glasses of water.

Akshat was stunned!

It was like Mario shouting at the Hulk.

Meekly, he asked, "Doc, how early can the stitches come out?"

"As early as the incision heals. Why do you ask?"

"Ah... No reason, the earlier, the better."

Lankesh placed a glass of water in front of Akshat. Akshat wondered if he spit in it.

“Can I take him home today Doc?”

G.P.L adjusted his trifocals. Akshat noticed that he did so when he explained Gastroscopy as well.

“Mr. Akshath”, he said, “It’s your dog. You can take him home whenever you want.” acutely.

“But, right now he needs proper medical attention 24\*7. Can you do that?”

“Umm ... Well I could come early from office.”

He said, “Nooo Sir!” satirically.

G.P.L looked towards Lankesh, who was leaning against the wall, with his hands hidden behind his back.

He yelled, “Two Teas ... HURRY!!”

Akshath wondered if Lankesh would stab G.P.L in the chest any moment now.

Lankesh clenched his fists and murmured something nasty on his way out.

“Mr. Akshath”, G.P.L continued, “. A dog is like a crawling baby. He needs constant care.”

“In your absence, he might injure himself, might scratch the stitches. Moreover, he needs to be fed correctly.”

“The incision needs to be watched regularly. What if the incision gets infected?”

Akshat was wordless. G.P.L disturbed his glasses again and smiled.

“I am just trying to help Sir, sparing you from the emergency visits that you might have to make.”

“You please don’t worry Sir”, he said, “We’ll take care of him.” reassuringly.

Minutes later, Lankesh came back holding a tray like a toothpick. He served the cups and went back to his block against the wall.

Akshat, awkwardly, finished his cup-pa and got up.

“Umm”, he said, “...I’ll take your leave now Doc. Thanks for the tea, will visit soon.”

“Sure”, G.P.L replied, “, anytime.” smiling.

On his way out, Akshat received a message from Priyanka.

*5 mre dayz to go sweetie-pie. Tckts bookd. Air India AI-112, 17 Dec. Wil reach on 18 mrning around 11:30. Luv ya.*

*Gud news fr u, bought sme sexy sarees. U r gonna drool over me baby! :-\*:-\**

In seconds, his mind got filled with illustrations of a hot and sizzling looking Priyanka, draped in a saree.

Smiling, he texted back, *Dnt wrry, wil use protection ;-)* :-\*

*Shut up Aki :-\*. Try not to touch urself :P...hahaha...okay I wnt reply now. Dad’s cmin. C u. :-\*:-\**

Akshat got in his swift and zoomed away smiling, waiting anxiously for the **19<sup>th</sup> of Dec, 2010.**



# 8

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## THE BIG FAT INDIAN WEDDING

Priyanka was excited, too excited. Finally, she was in Delhi!

She had heard a lot about the city. *It was time to live it.*

Her strolly finally arrived on the immensely crowded conveyor belt.

A smiling young teenage sardar was watching her with admiration.

“Aapki taachi hai?”, he asked.

Her blue eyes shifted gaze into the petite sardar’s skull.

“Myself Gurdeep.”

Priyanka scanned him from top to bottom and smirked.

“Hello Mr. Gurdeep.”

“Arey rehene dijiye Mister-shister, everyone calls me Goldie!”

She giggled on his innocence.

“It looks heavy”, he said, “Tussi fikar na karo, let me help you with that” and dragged her strolly with full force.

Smiling, she said, “Thanks a lot Goldie, that’s so sweet.” and pulled on his cheeks.

Exhilarated, an ogling Goldie held his cheek and gawked while she left. The other boys went green with jealousy.

*Priyanka loved India for this. She loved the attention she used to get in this part of the world.*

Extremely overjoyed, she rushed towards the nearest pay phone and dialed the number to Jaggi Uncle's lavish residence in Vasant Vihar.

"Hellloooo!", a jolly Punjabi male voice boomed in the whole of the T3 terminal.

Priyanka heard loud Punjabi music in the background. She knew this track.

She could make out that Jaggi Uncle was humming and snapping his fingers to the beats of *Tunak Tunak Tun Ta Ra Ra*.

Politely, she replied, "Sat Sri Akal Jaggi Uncle! Main Priyanka."

*Yes, Our Punjabi kudi new this one and this one only!*

"Sat Sri Akal Priyanka puttar", he roared, "! Ki haal chaal? When did you reach?", into the phone.

"Just now", she said, ". Uncle, Dad told me that someone will be coming to pick me up?"

"Hanji puttar", he yelled again, ". I have sent a brand new Gaddi" pretentiously, perhaps for all the relatives to hear.

He continued, "Don't worry Puttar; the driver will be holding up your name."

"Alright then Uncle", she replied, ". See you guys soon!" and cut off hurriedly.

Quickly, she dialed Akshat's number.

Akshat was expecting Priyanka's call any second.

Speculating, it was her, he picked up the call.

"Hello?", he said.

She didn't say anything.

Cutely, she bit her lower lip and kept on smiling naughtily.

He asked, "Priyanka, is that you?"

With a notorious smile, she breathed out heavily into the receiver and moaned seductively.

Witnessing this, two teenage boys stumbled on to their luggage and gawked at her with their mouths wide open.

Stunned, he exclaimed, "My god Priyanka! What are you doing? Say something."

Priyanka burst out laughing.

Teasingly, she said, "What's up Aki? Are you scared? Can't handle a little domination, Can you?"

"Sweetheart", he said, ", I love it when you dictate terms!" impishly.

"Oh! Really my royal prince", she replied, "Hold your horses then. Just one day to go!"

"I just can't wait to kiss you sweetness."

"And what if I don't let you kiss me?"

"Oh C'mon Pri, it has been almost eleven months", he pleaded, "You are already so hard to get!"

"Hahaha", she said, "If you really want it, you'll have to come and get it yourself. Love you. Will call again." and disconnected.

Absolutely absorbed by love and the action-packed night that awaited her, a smiling Priyanka rolled her luggage out of the T3 terminal.

Like hungry wolves, the huge male population at the Arrivals Gate ogled at the gorgeous lass in front of them.

Priyanka expected this. She was unshaken.

Scrutinizing carefully, she spotted another bushy face in a bright red turban, holding her name upside down.

She laughed out loudly.

Amused, she went up to him and asked, “Mr. Jagraj Baweja?”

Standing in front of a gorgeous blue-eyed firangi desi girl, the saggy male-breasted *Sikh* turned *Rambo* instantly, stuffing hundred liters of oxygen in his lungs.

As broadcasted by Jaggi Uncle, a flashy black Honda City awaited her.

She got in, while he slowly loaded the luggage in the gleaming sedan.

“Straight to Vasant Vihar.”, she said and relaxed.

She freed her flowing long curly hair and smiling, envisaged the delicate moment that awaited her the next day.

**Date: 19<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2010**

**Time: 6:30 pm**

**Location: Entry Gate No: 1, Hyatt Regency, Delhi**

A majestically dressed wedding band which proclaimed itself to be “*Dilli ka Mashoor*” thumped down heartlessly on to a set of strapped around drums.

A huge group of profoundly ornamented *heavy-weight-females* jiggled their massive bums to the deafening tunes on a chilly Delhi evening.

Three suited up smashed males with turbans on their heads, made-up dance-steps, which could only be qualified as a way to chuck out their limbs and throw them apart.

*And oh my freakin god, what to say about the kids!*

A bunch of scary children squeaking at full volume were galloping their lungs out around the panic spread.

The rest of the more sane family watched and clapped madly, to seem involved in the merrymaking.

Amidst all the scintillating brightness and the compulsory Indian wedding chaos, was trapped a frightened *ghodi*, waiting helplessly for the spoiled rich jackass on her back to get down.

Priyanka gracefully stood miles away from the entire muddle. Bored to tears, she texted Akshat.

*“Hey, Its Priyanka. whr the fuck r u? I hv reached wid all. PLAIN WHITE NOISE. What a mess!”*

*“Sorry honey, flight got delayed. Reachin the hotel in 5 mins. Plz try n enjoy!”*

“Bhaiya”, he said, “, thoda jaldi kariye!” to the cab driver.

Dejected, Priyanka went back to empathizing with the female horse.

Suddenly, one of Ashish’s cousin sisters Monica clutched Priyanka’s arm and dragged her into the madness.

Maintaining her poise, she decided to adapt to the situation and duplicate whatever Monica was doing.

As a pleasing surprise to her English mind, she learned that her Indian body was picking up the groovy steps in no time.

Within minutes, Priyanka embraced the moment and started swaying and tapping to the rhythm of the pure Punjabi music.

Monica screamed, “Wow! Priyanka!” in her awe and started matching her from head to toe.

Responding to a seemingly international appreciation, that too from a gorgeous young woman, the wedding group members suddenly left the age of drunken men and ornamented wrestlers and shifted their concentration onto the two stunning lasses.

Watching this, Ashish's other cousin sisters and brothers jumped in with the two of them and started rocking the atmosphere even more.

Akshat reached the venue, just when the raw Punjabi energy was buzzing out of each and every soul present there.

He stopped the prepaid cab around fifty meters before and got mixed up into the crowd.

His eyes were wandering for a glimpse of Priyanka. He ignored and walked past the huge gathering around the *dhols*.

Nowhere to be found, He dropped a message to Priyanka, but there was no reply.

With the aggravation of wait and distance crawling up in his mind, abruptly, he turned around.

**And oh boy! There she was!**

Her long curving tresses were flirting naughtily with her slender waistline. The eyeliner around the contour of her ocean blue eyes defined a rare fusion of elegance with seduction.

Momentarily, a fresh new energized batch of testosterone ran through his entire body. Mesmerized, he smiled and kept on admiring the beautiful view.

A small twinkling diamond stud on her nose suggested her mood for the occasion. The soft pink lip-gloss on her tender lips made them even more engaging.

It was turning out to be exceptionally tough for him to sustain this distance from her. He wanted to hold her, kiss her and caress her.

Clad in a White and Off White Zari embroidery, stone studded Shimmer saree, Priyanka was undeniably the most attention-grabbing subject in the entire celebration.

Suddenly, she turned around and found Akshat in a black notched lapel suit and a white shirt.

Running out of breath, she shyly smiled and adjusted her locks behind her ears decorated with slim and dangling diamond earrings.

With smile on her lips and delight in her eyes, she timidly left the mid-road gala and walked towards him.

Two young boys from the bride's family, who filmed enough quality footage for their phones' memory cards to be packed up with, let out agonizing sounds in utter disappointment.

Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Manveer Dhillon, the bride's parents, were patiently waiting for the ass-kicking boogie to finish.

After riding a female horse for almost an hour, Ashish's ass was starting to twinge a little. He pleaded his dad to get this mayhem shifted inside.

In due course, the bride's parents bear-hugged the groom and his parents and welcomed the not-so-important members of the family with little head bows and small complimentary aromatic garlands.

With the rest of the groom's side, Akshat and Priyanka were also ushered into the Regency Ballroom.

The ballroom was a perfect setting for the two rich spoiled kids to get married. It had the perfect blend of sophistication and the much-desired Punjabi loudness.

The wedding stage featured an expensive looking golden carved royal throne sofa set.

Dazzling and massive drapes in yellow, red and orange were running down from the top to create a striking backdrop.

On the two small roman pillars on each side of the sofa set, were resting beautiful red stargazers with spreading out green plants to achieve that magnificent effect.

The strategic and decorative lights on the stage highlighted the stunning composition of the whole setting even more.

In a golden sherwani, loaded heavily with red, white and green colored stones, Ashish was helped towards the stage by the bride's brothers and other males of her family.

He sat on one side of the sofa set and looked uncomfortably at Priyanka in the crowd.

Priyanka looked back at him and laughed out loudly.

"I can't help it", she said, ", he is looking so funny!", cutely to Akshat.

Panic-Stricken, Ashish looked towards the brilliantly lit up crystal chandeliers and ornamental lighting all around.

A huge section of the splendid ballroom was occupied with round wedding tables dressed neatly in red and pink colored silk table clothing.

Akshat and Priyanka quietly grabbed two seats next to each other on their table.

The freshly cut roses and tulips centerpieces on the tables had fragranced and freshened up the atmosphere around it.

"Beautiful wedding", she asked, ", Innit?" playing with a small diamond pendant resting on her fair neck.

"Umm... Yea, it is.", he said and smiled.

"W-What happened?"

"You know, in Delhi, a girl looking as hot as you is called a *Totta!*"

"Shut up Akki!", she said smiling.

He said, "You are totally nervous!", enjoying the moment.



Instantly, she replied, “No I am not!”, in complete denial.

“See”, he said, “you can’t even look back at me!” with a confident smile.

Priyanka was nervous in the midst of anticipation. A mild smile on her beautiful lips made her even more adorable.

Suddenly, Akshat clutched her left hand tightly.

“What are you doing Aki? Everybody knows me here.”, she said anxiously.

“What happened”, he asked, “? Can’t handle a little domination? Can you?” with a shrewd smile.

Smiling nervously, Priyanka started looking down, when suddenly Monica came on to their table.

Priyanka hastily snatched her hand away.

“Priyanka! Jaggi Chachu is calling you!”, she said grinning.

Priyanka looked back at Akshat.

“I’ll be right back.”, she said with her assuring eyes.

Wondering, why was she needed, Priyanka got up.

“What’s the matter Monica”, she asked, “? Where is he?”

“Not sure”, she replied, “, But he was at the right side of the stage.”

“Alright... c’mon let’s go!”

“You go”, she replied, “! I’ll take care of your friend here!” smiling at Akshat.

Priyanka gave Monica a hateful look and left.

One-hundred percent in agreement with the definition of perfection her body was preaching, Akshat watched her leave.

“So handsome”, she said, “! What’s the deal with you?” cunningly.

Distracted, he asked, “Umm... Are you talking to me?”

Monica giggled. Akshat wondered when he told a joke.

Monica grabbed a chair next to him.

“Hi I am Monica, Ashish’s cousin.”, she said extending her hand forward.

Casually, he replied, “Hi, I am Akshat!” and shook her hand.

“So how do you know my brother?”

“Umm...we met in a party once and eventually became friends.”

“Hmmm...That’s strange”, she said, “! Two random guys became friends in a party. Who made the first move?” sarcastically.

With a forced smile, he replied, “Actually Priyanka introduced me to Ashish.”

“Oh ok!”

Staring flirtatiously into his eyes, she started sipping the glass of *blueberry-orange-vanilla* smoothie.

A little uncomfortable, Akshat got up.

“Lemme get a drink! I’ll be right back.”

“Aren’t you having a nice time?”, she asked pulling her chair nearer.

“Oh No! nothing like that.”, Akshat fumbled.

“Try this then!”, she said pulling him down and offering him her thick shake.

Desperately waiting for Priyanka to get back, Akshat took a small sip.

Out of nowhere, she spoke, “Priyanka didn’t tell me that she had a boyfriend in India!”

The smoothie almost came out of Akshat’s nose.

“Excuse me!”, he exclaimed.

“I thought you guys were together!”

“NO NO, Not at all! We are just friends!”, he replied with his least convincing lie ever.

“Oh! Alright”, she said, “I just wanted to know if I had any competition.” with a wink.

Akshat mind was scrambled up. He wanted to be with Priyanka. She was nowhere to be seen and apparently, out of the blue, some random chick was flirting with him.

“What’s going on?”, Priyanka asked from behind.

Strangely, Monica got up.

“It was nice meeting you Akshat”, she said, “! Hope to see you soon!” and left smiling foxily.

Perplexed, Priyanka asked, “What was she doing?”

“You might not believe it”, he replied, “, but I guess she was interested in me!”

“Why won’t I believe it”, she replied, “? I mean you are sexy, sophisticated and amazing in bed.” playfully.

Delighted, he asked, “You really meant the third one?”

“Well! To be honest”, she replied, “, It had been quite some time. I might need a little convincing!” with her face turning red.

Suddenly, a shy and smiling Priyanka looked around, leaned forward and quickly pressed her lips against his for a sec.

“I’ll be right back”, she said, “, and oh yes, Monica already knew about me and you.” laughing.

Akshat lovingly stared at Priyanka who hurried towards Monica. She pulled her away from the dance floor and murmured something into her ear.

“Umm”, Monica said, “...I don’t think I could do it!” wheezing.

“C’mon Monica, you have to! You promised me two days back!”

“Alright Alright! Give me five minutes. Lemme see what I can do. You stay right here. Okay?”

Monica went up to Natasha’s eldest brother, Nishant.

Five minutes later, she came back.

“Told him you were jet-lagged and about to faint”, she said, “....which you are gonna!” laughing loudly.

Embarrassed, Priyanka said, “Shut up!”

“Go nuts”, Monica replied, “! You owe me a big one!”

Smiling, she said, “I know I do, Thanks.” hugging her.

With every passing second, Akshat was getting impatient.

Priyanka went up to Akshat and gazed into his eyes, with a child-like thrill.

“Meet me fifteen minutes later”, she chirped, “, Fifth floor, Room No: 502. Love you.” and left.

# 9

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## LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX BAEBY!

*“Be cool, its ok, you are gonna be fine. Don't be nervous! So what if it has been eleven months.”*

The liftman noticed Akshat murmuring stuff to himself in the elevator.

“Fifth Floor Sir!”, he said as the elevator halted.

Akshat rushed out without any word.

“502, 502”, he repeated anxiously.

Finally a door, with 502 engraved on it appeared in front of him.

Akshat exhaled heavily, gathered his composure and knocked calmly on the door three times.

Nobody opened!

He knocked again! This time harder!

*“Knock, Knock, Knock”*

Nobody answered again!

“What da! She said 502 right?”, he said to himself.

Desperately, he took out his cellphone and dropped a message to Priyanka.

*"I m standing outside 502, whr r u swtheart :-\*?"*

Seconds later, the door unlocked itself.

She whispered, "Come inside."

Akshat barged inside the room and saw her smiling behind the door.

"Lock the door", she bossed, "Will you?" nervously.

Akshat hurriedly locked up the door and stared back at her.

She was wearing a white bathrobe and smelled like strawberries. Her curly hair was wet from the shower and lips seemed naturally pink.

She was staring back into his eyes with a naughty smile on her face.

Akshat stepped towards her while she waited timidly for him to make a move.

Slowly, he went up to her and fondled with her slender fingers with his.

She smiled and with trembling lips started looking down.

He suddenly clutched her left hand tightly into his and gently pressed her against the wall.

This was the moment they had waited for seven months now. The anticipation was killing the both of them.

Akshat ran his right hand through her wet tresses and kissed her neck.

Clutching her right hand now within his, he kissed her beautiful blue eyes..

Breathing heavily, she looked up into his eyes and smiled.

"Bas ho gaya?", she teased him.

Akshat intensely locked her lower lip between his lips before she could say anything further.

He slowly undid the knot of her bathrobe anticipating a *Kate Winslet*.

“Damn it”, disappointed, he thought.

She was wearing the same white shirt which she wore on their video chat some time back.

“You were thinking a Kate Winslet, weren't u?”, she asked laughing.

“I was so NOT sweetheart, this is so much better! I must say you have learned the art of foreplay.”

“Liar, I know you inside out, olright!”, she said and pushed him behind with an intensely dominant kiss.

Akshat picked up his gorgeous woman who was just wearing a plain white shirt, in his arms and softly tossed her on to the king size bed.

“Hmm, Saucy, you do know how to make it interesting!”, she said giggling.

“Shut up”, he replied smiling and lied down right next to her.

He looked at her beautiful face and said, “I really love you!”

“I love you too!”, she replied holding his hand tightly.

“So, You ready?”, he asked smiling.

“Can't be more ready than this my love”, she said as she unbuttoned her shirt, and went in to passionately kiss his lips.





# 10

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## THE PLAN

*Thud, Thud, Thud!*

Monica banged hard on the door.

“Priyanka Open Up”, she yelled.

“What the fuck now?”, Akshat said wheezing.

Out of breath, she said, “Ah Bullocks! I don’t care! Let her wait outside.”

“Have you gone mad?”

“Don’t you dare talk to me like that!”

“Sorry baby”, he said, “, but you have to go and check! What if your Jaggi Uncle is looking for you?” lying down next to her.

“You go, I don’t wanna go!”, she said cuddling.

“C’mon Pri”, he said, “, Please go and check what she wants.”  
kissing her.

Frustrated, she said, “Olright! I will.” and got up.

Akshat watched her cover herself up with that bathrobe.

“What are you looking at”, she asked smiling.

“You really want me to be descriptive, coz I will be”, he said grinning.

“Shut up”, she said, “, you are such an arse. Cover yourself up, will you?” shyly.

“Oooopen Uuuuup”, Monica yelled again banging ferociously on the door now.

“Coming”, Priyanka yelled.

“She has gone totally barmy, hasn’t she?”, she said looking at Akshat.

Akshat laughed out loud at her adorable English accent and got into his clothes.

Priyanka opened the door!

“What happened?”, she asked nervously.

“Love your new hairdo.”, Monica replied grinning uncontrollably.

Priyanka blushed.

“Stop that, will you now?”, she pleaded smiling.

“Alright, I’ll try.”, Monica replied peeking in.

“What exactly are you trying to do?”, Priyanka asked in disbelief.

“I wanna come in!”

“Why so?”

“I don’t know”, Monica said “, all this seems so exciting!” squeaking.

“Shhhh”, she said, “, Calm down, will you now? What is going down there?”

“Jaggi Chachu was asking about you. Pooch rahe the kudi ne rotti-shotti todi ya nahi.”

“Crap! What did you say?”

“I told him that I would get you a plate in your room.”

“And he bought it?”

“Of course he did!”

“Wow”, she murmured, “, that’s quite gullible for men who think they are the kings of shrewdness.”

“What did you just say?”

“Nothing! Thanks a lot Monica, you are a life saver.”

“Oh fuck, I forgot *phere* start hone wale hain. You have to come down now. A lot of people have left.”

“Oh Crap!”

“Don’t worry”, she said, “! I will get you fixed. Let me come in now.” and elbowed her way inside.

Akshat was startled.

“Hi there stud!”, Monica said laughing.

Akshat smiled tensely.

“Your pants are undone.”, Monica pointed and laughed out loud.

Anxious, he looked down. His pants were fine.

“She has totally lost it!”, Priyanka said pointing towards a bonkers Monica.

“You have to get out now.”, Priyanka said to Akshat.

“What? Why?”

“Mr. Handsome”, Monica interrupted, “, Coz I have to get her ready.” smiling and calmer now.

“So get her ready”, he said, “! Why do I need to go out for that?”

“He has a point.”, Monica said and winked at Priyanka.

“No Aki!”

“C’mon Priyanka! At least let him watch you wear the saree, Ok?”

Priyanka looked towards a pleading Akshat and smiled.

“Ok-Ok Fine. You two wait. I will back in a minute.”

Priyanka went into the bathroom leaving an uncomfortable Akshat with Monica.

Monica kept on smiling and looking at Akshat. Maybe she loved to make him uncomfortable.

“Perhaps, I should have stayed outside only.”, he said to Monica.

Monica laughed out loud again.

Priyanka came back in the under-essentials of a saree.

Akshat got down on the bed and admired her beauty.

“Okay”, Monica said, “, let’s hurry up now!”

Priyanka and Akshat stared into each other eyes affectionately.

Watching her get dressed in a stunning saree was one of the most beautiful sights Akshat could have ever imagined.

She looked pure, like an angel.

For him, it was like witnessing the birth of beauty with his own eyes.

Priyanka didn’t want to let go of his eyes for a second as well.

She mouthed, “I love you”, with her kissable lips.

Monica finally did her make-up and helped her with her jewelry.

Akshat just didn’t want this to finish. He yearned for every bit of this stunning sight to continue forever.

“How do I look?”, she asked.

Monica stepped aside!

Akshat got up and went really close to Priyanka.

He kissed her softly on her right cheek and left smiling without saying a word.

“Awwww”, Monica uttered, “, I wish I had a boyfriend like that.”

“I know.”, she replied smiling and watching him leave.

Five minutes later, Monica and Priyanka left the room.

“Does your dad know about you two?”, Monica asked Priyanka.

“Why are you asking me this?”

“You two really seem serious. Don’t you think about a future?”

“I don’t know, we have hardly spent time with each other, we never discussed all this.”

“And still such a strong connection! That’s quite incredible!”

Suddenly, Priyanka thought about the time when Akshat proposed Priyanka in college.

“Wait! I’ll be right back”, Monica said, “. Let me hand over the keys to Nishant.”

Akshat was standing close to the *mandap*, waiting for Priyanka to come down. Everyone with the Bride and groom had gathered around the holy fire.

The *pheras* were about to start!

Priyanka looked into Akshat’s eyes. She found love and nothing else.

Monica hurriedly came back and noticed them gazing into each other’s eyes.

Frustrated, she said, “It is like I am babysitting tonight.” to herself.

“Okay Fellas”, she whispered, “, let’s keep it simple for some time. Shall we?”, and sat in between the two.

The *panditji* started with the *mantras* and the heavily decorated couple started roaming around the holy fire slowly in circles.

Everyone stared at the overloaded couple and gossiped, but Priyanka and Akshat just could not get their eyes off each other.

Monica interrupted again.

“You know what”, she whispered, “, I am gonna get killed, if Jaggi Chachu found out about this.” sternly to Priyanka.

She continued, “Cut it out! Will you?”

Still locked with Akshat’s eyes, Priyanka suddenly asked Monica, “When are you leaving for Mumbai?”

“Now what has that got to do with anything?”

“Just tell me!”

“I have a flight at 8, so around 6, why?”

“Perfect, I’ll leave with you!”

“What?”

“This is what you are going to tell everyone, you have a trip planned with your office friends. I will tell here, that this is the only time I might get to spend time in India and I want to go with you.”

“What about your dad?”

“I’ll convince him.”

Confidently, Priyanka asked, “Done?”

Bewildered, Monica replied, “Alright.”

“Can you get me a pen and a paper? Please!”

“You know I am tired of looking out for you tonight!”

“I know, this is the last favor I am asking you to do.”

Frustrated, Monica got up and went up to Nishant again.

“You know”, she said, “, Nishant might be thinking I am interested in him.” after coming back.

“Don’t go up to him again and again then.”

“I don’t know, I might be interested in him. He is kinda cute.”

“You are totally crazy you know that.”

“Yes I know and here you go”, she replied, “, this is the best I could do your majesty.” handing over a pen to Priyanka.

Monica grabbed her seat between the two.

Akshat was wondering, what was happening between the two girls.

Priyanka looked around and snatched a beautifying leaf from one of the four *mandap*'s pillars.

“Can't you just text him?”, Monica wondered.

“Shut up”, she said, “, this is more romantic.” smiling.

Akshat tried to sneak a peek into what his lovely lady was up to.

“Sit up straight”, Monica commanded, “, and look at the lovely couple.” firmly.

Akshat grumbled!

“*I hate her so much rite nw*”, he texted Priyanka.

“You texted about me”, Monica said, “, didn't you?”, tormenting him and laughed.

Akshat didn't say anything.

“*It's ok sweetheart, jst wait for 10 mins :-\**”, she texted back.

Akshat kept on struggling with Monica for the next ten minutes.

At last, Priyanka was finished scribbling on the leaf, front and back!

She passed on the leaf and the pen to Monica.

“Oooh a love letter!”, Monica said.

“Just pass it on Monica!”, Priyanka begged.

Monica had to run through it once, at least.

She quickly jogged through everything the leaf contained and turned to Akshat.

“Lucky you!”, she elbowed him.

“Yeah”, he replied, “, I feel blessed right now.” mockingly.

“Very funny, here you go, Mr. No Fun!”

Finally Akshat got hold of the most significant leaf present in the whole *mandap*. He started reading it.

*I wanna live this moment to the fullest Aki.*

*This time is what matters the most.*

*The past, the future, nothing matters.*

*This is it!*

*I don't wanna let this time go anywhere.*

*Want it to be the most pleasant time of our lives.*

*And I wanna make this time as special as it can be with you.*

*I wanna stay with you for some time.*

*Want you to know everything about me.*

*Want me to know everything about you.*

*I am tired of being away from you.*

*Wanna know how it feels to be together with you.*

*Let's take some time off work and off life.*

*Let's go on a trip to places that matter!*

*Do you want to?*

*Just want to know if you are with me?*

.

.

*FLIP IT OVER, if you are!*

Puzzled, Akshat flipped the leaf over!

On the top of the leaf was written a question.

*How many days Aki?*

Akshat turned towards Priyanka, who was looking towards him and smiling.

He didn't know what to say to that question. He was confused, baffled, bewildered!



*I mean, how many days are sufficient with your girlfriend? How can a sane boyfriend ever answer that!*

Abruptly, he scribbled something on the leaf and passed it back to Monica.

Again, Monica had to go through the leaf at least once.

Finally, Priyanka got hold of the leaf and read the answer to her question.

She smiled, adjusted her curls behind her ear and texted Akshat.

*"10 is perfect sweetheart. I love you:-\*"*

*"Let's do it then. J. Love you too:-\*"*, he texted back.

"Are you guys done", Monica said, "? Focus on my brother's wedding now, hardly any ceremony left!"

Beaming with excitement, both of them said, "Fine" and watched the exhausted couple get final blessings from their parents.

**It was 4:30 am in the morning**, when everything seemed to get over.

Normalcy describes that laughing while someone is crying is called rude, but not in North Indian weddings.

The Dhillons cried their eyes out with each other, whereas The Bawejas just couldn't help but smile.

The situation was drastically contrasting but then again no one seemed to complain.

They knew the etiquette and that was how it was supposed to be done.

Within minutes, the Dhillons also started roaming around like carefree loafers.

Akshat and Priyanka were holding hands and walking among the crowd.

“That’s just stupid”, Priyanka said,” Nishant was awfully depressed a minute before!”

“Well”, he replied, “, this is how it works in India sweetheart!”

He continued, “Forget about all this, did you get your tickets cancelled?”

“Don’t worry I will take care of that.”

“Fine sugarlips, where do you wanna meet me then?”

“Sugarlips?”, she asked cutely.

“Haven’t I told you that yet? They are pretty sweet.”

“Ha-ha, I love you so much”, she replied, “Meet me at the airport, I will come there with Monica in an hour or so.”

“And what do you wanna do after that?”, he asked with a wink.

“Visit your home what else!”, she said casually.

“What??”

Priyanka laughed out loud at his over the top response.

“Don’t you worry my royal prince, just meet me at the airport. Will you?”

“Chheti kar Priyanka Puttar,” Jaggi Uncle boomed, “Gaddi vich baith.”

“C’mon Priyanka”, Monica yelled as well.

“Gotta go now sweetheart”, Priyanka said, “, Will miss you, Cya.”

Priyanka stuffed herself into one of the cars which constituted the fleet of The Bawejas.

“Visit my home. Has she lost it?”, Akshat thought.

Wondering what his crazy girlfriend had in mind, Akshat got himself a cab back to the airport.

Meanwhile, Priyanka and Monica reached The Baweja Residence at Vasant Vihar, and rushed to their room to pack up their stuff.

“I am all set to go.”, said Priyanka.

“Almost done”, Monica replied, “, just a minute.”

“Alright! I will go and break the news to Jaggi Uncle, you come soon.”

Still busy packing, Monica replied, “Okhaay, all the best”, waving towards the wall.

Priyanka picked up her strolly and dragged it out in the hall. Jaggi Uncle was resting on the sofa with his feet up on the center table.

Timidly, she went up to him.

“Jaggi Uncle!”

“Hanji Puttar”, he replied smiling.

“I am planning of leaving with Monica!”

“Arey Puttar, So soon”, he exclaimed, “Param told me that you had a flight day after tomorrow.”

“Sudden change of plans uncle, I wanna see India and Monica is going on a trip.”

“Yes Chachaji”, Monica interrupted, “, Office trip, but I can bring a friend.”

“Hmm”, he replied.

“Changa hai then”, he continued, “Did you tell your papa?”

“Of course I did.”, Priyanka replied nervously.

“Fuss class. Let me call him to confirm. Hamari bhi responsibility hai na Puttar!”

“Chachaji”, Monica said, “, call him in the afternoon. He must be sleeping right now. Time difference you see” pointing towards her watch.

Priyanka smiled looking at her.

“Samajhdaar hai Puttar bahut.”, he roared laughing.

“But Puttar, kuch khake jao. Oye Monty, Aloo Paranthe laga do plate.”

Within minutes, two plates of steaming hot *Aloo Paranthes* with horrendous amount of butter and curd by the side were presented on the dining table.

Priyanka was horrified after seeing the amount of butter while Monica attacked the plate with both her hands.

She took a bite or two, but did enjoy the hot cup of tea on the early morning.

“Uncle, Please get the rest of it packed”, Priyanka said, “. I will eat at the airport.” rubbing her tummy.

“Drama Queen.”, Monica scoffed.

Priyanka elbowed her.

“Oye Monty, do paranthe pack kar chheti.”

Monty wrapped up the Paranthes, the curd, the butter and what not into boxes and handed them over to the girls.

“Pairi Pauna Chachaji.”, Monica said smiling and bowed down.

Jaggi Uncle gave her a huge smile.

“That’s a nice touch”, Priyanka thought, “, I should do that too.” and replicated.

“Arey jiyonde roh puttar. Oye Satpal, Gaddi nikaal”, Jaggi Uncle was ecstatic.

At last, Satpal, the saggy male-breasted sardar, took the two ladies in the same gleaming black Honda city to the Delhi airport.

Akshat was waiting at a café, when they reached.

“Sorry for the delay”, Priyanka apologized, “Uncle arranged breakfast and everything sweetheart.”

“You hungry”, Monica asked, “? Aloo Paranthas!”

For a North Indian, getting a box full of buttery Aloo Paranthas on a cool Delhi morning is like finding diamonds.

For fifteen minutes, Akshat didn't say anything but feasted on the trademark Delhi treat.

“Don't inhale your food Aki.”, Monica mocked Priyanka.

“Shut up, I don't sound like that!”

After finishing up, Akshat brought forth a gargantuan belch from the depths.

“Disgusting Aki.”, Priyanka said.

“Hey”, Monica interrupted, “! That's a right way to appreciate a good Aloo Parantha Queen of England.”

“You bet.”, Akshat relaxed in his chair.

Priyanka gave him a fatal glare.

“Monica”, she said, “I guess your flight is on time, Isn't it?”

“Oh fuck, I should leave now.”

“Yeah, you should. Thanks for all the help. Will keep in touch.”, Priyanka said coldly and give her an even stonier hug.

Monica turned towards Akshat and hugged him tightly.

“It was nice meeting you Handsome.”, she said with a wink.

Akshat laughed out loud and said, “Hey, I feel the same.” with a wink.

Priyanka was scorched to flames!

“Don't you think”, Priyanka professed, “, you were being too friendly.” after Monica left.

“Was I”, he said, “, I never noticed.” smiling.

“Do you want to start this trip like this?”, she asked sternly.

“Yes”, he replied and kissed her passionately in front of a huge crowd.

“I love you sugarlips, let’s do this!”



# 11

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*Destination I : New Delhi*





# 12

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## DAY 1

“Are you serious?”, Akshat asked in disbelief.

“Yes, I am.”

“Why on earth would you want to go to my place?”

“Because I want to see where you grew up?”

“But Why?”

“Akshat!, I thought you were with me on this trip. We just have ten days, I don’t see having time for arguments.”

“This is insane man! You don’t know my family at all sweet-heart...”

“They don’t have to know about us, do they?”, Priyanka interrupted.

Akshat was dumbfounded.

“Akshat this is just about you and me, nothing else.”, she said looking into his eyes deeply.

“Fine, I will think of something. Do you want to go now?”

“Not right now, in the evening I guess”, she said, “. Let’s take a decent hotel room till then. We just need to get some sleep.” smiling.

Baffled, Akshat got themselves a cab.

She locked her fingers with his and cuddled up with him in the rear of the cab.

“Love you sweetheart”, she said and closed her eyes.

Akshat knew that the haryanvi cab driver was getting enough dosage of an early winter morning romance but he didn't give a rat's ass.

He just relaxed in her warmth and waited serenely to arrive at the nearest hotel.

On reaching the hotel, they just hit the bed and snuggled with each other into a deep sleep till the time they wanted to.

In the evening, Akshat's phone beeped.

It was JD's text.

“Whr r u fucker”, it said.

“In Del. Wil explain later.”, he texted back.

His phone beeped again but he ignored and kept the phone back.

“Wakeup sleepy head”, he said stroking her hair.

“What time is it?”, she asked like a baby.

“It is 5 pm sweetheart”, he replied, “. Time to go to my home and get us slaughtered, remember?” with a kiss on her forehead.

Priyanka chuckled and gave him a tender kiss.

“I'll be right back. Need to tell my mum that I am coming home with an official coworker for two days.”

“Mmm, hell yeah, I am your official coworker”, she said winking.

“Priyanka! Stop turning me on all the time.”, he said smiling.

“As if you don't like it?”

“Give me a minute sweetheart, I have to make calls.” He said with a kiss on her cheek.

Smiling, she replied, “Alright love.” and got under the sheets again.

Akshat went out to make a call to his home. He was a bit tensed. Hoping that his dad won’t pick up the phone, he dialed.

“Hello”, his mother said softly.

“Hi mom, Akshat here”, he said smiling.

“Beta, where are you? You didn’t call me the whole last week. Where have you been?”

“Where is dad?”

“Your dad is at the restaurant, keeping very busy nowadays, why?”

“I am coming to Delhi tonight mom.”

“Achanak! What happened? Job to sahi chal rhi hai na?”

“Just relax mom. Sab theek hai. Will be coming with an office senior. Have an official trip.”

“Achcha? Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“It was all so urgent mom. Stop asking so many questions?”, Akshat got irritated.

“Ek to phone nahi karta hai, upar se ab chillane bhi laga hai. (Not calling is one thing, but now he has started shouting as well)”, she taunted.

*Ah, the emotional blackmails! God! I tell you!*

“Sorry mom, one more thing. My colleague will be staying with us only for two days. She is new in India.”

“A girl! Why here? Your dad might not like it. Ask her to get office accommodation!”

“Arey mom, my boss instructed that she should feel at home on this trip. I might get an early promotion because of this.”

He thought, “What crap am I saying man!” in disbelief.

“Whatever, theek hai phir, she can stay in the guest bedroom downstairs.”

Disappointed, he replied, “Yeah, Whatever! We will see.”

“Okay mom, Will call before coming home. And yeah inform dad also”, he said and hung up.

Next in line was Rajni.

Akshat dialed his number.

“Hey Macha”, he greeted, “How are you?”, emphatically.

“I am fine Rajni. Have something important to tell you!”

“Everything fine?”

“I wish it was Rajni. I am in Delhi right now. My dad is not doing well.”

“Aaiyooo, what happened?”

“Heart Attack!”

“VohMygawd!”

“I will have to stay here for a week at least.”

“I totally understand Akshath! It is alright! Take all the time you will need.”

“Thanks for understanding Rajni”, he replied, “! I will drop you a mail from my personal Id.” and disconnected.

“You Big Liar!”, Priyanka laughed and hugged Akshat from behind.

“You didn’t leave me much of a choice, did you sweetheart?”, he said and hugged her.

“So, when do I get to see your bedroom?”, she replied smiling.

“We reach home by 10 pm”, he took a deep breath and kissed her head.

Her hair smelled like cinnamon. So vibrant and fresh, just like a small party in his nostrils.

Akshat got lost in those enchanting curls.

“What did your mom say about me coming over?”, she interrupted his thoughts.

“Umm, nothing specific, but she said that you could stay in the guest bedroom downstairs.”

“Nai”, she replied like a stubborn kid.

“Where is your bedroom?”, she asked cuddling.

“Upstairs!”

“So upstairs is where I will sleep.”

“You are totally crazy today, you know that!”, he smiled.

She looked into his eyes strictly.

“Mr. Akshat Rathod, I am not joking about this!”

“Hey, I got it sugarlips. C’mon Lemme see them.” and touched her lower lip.

“Stop making me conscious all the time.”, she said shyly.

He looked into her eyes and said, “As if you don’t like it!”, and kissed her.

**8:30 pm, in the hotel room.**

“Hurry up Priyanka! The cab has arrived!”

The shower stopped.

“Am done”, she shouted, “Just coming in a minute.” from inside.

“Let me in!”

“Yeah, in your dreams!”

“Fine then:, he replied, “ Oh yeah! There I am.”

“Shut up Aki”, she said, “What’s wrong with you.” smiling and opened the door.

“Oh damn! I hate it”, he uttered seeing her in a towel.

“What?”

“I envy that towel, hugging you so tightly.”

“Not getting late now. HUH?”, she asked smiling.

He said nothing but smiled.

Priyanka was embarrassed.

“Stop staring like that Aki and let me change.”, she smiled and pushed him out of the room.

Five minutes later, she unlocked.

Ecstatic, she chirped, “Let’s go!”

They both loaded their luggage into the cab and left for their plan for the day. Akshat was apprehensive about the rest of his night.

“Would mom and dad know about us?”

This question kept on bothering him for most of his way.

“Don’t worry Aki”, she said, “It will be fine.” holding his hand.

Forty minutes later, they arrived at his place in GK Part I.

Akshat asked the cab driver to stop in front of a bungalow.

The bungalow gave the look of a fortress with a massive gateway and growling tiger fences all around.



# 13

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## EPILOGUE





# 14

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## SLANG GLOSSARY

### **British**

Ace – Awesome

Arse – Okay, if you don't even know this, keep the book back and piss off!

Babaganoosh – Ah! Don't ask!

Bladdered - Another way of saying you are drunk.

Donkey's Years – Haven't seen each other in ages.

Alright – A mildly altered British pronunciation of Alright.

Budge up – Ask someone to move, if they are taking a lot of space.

Rumpy Pumpy – Sexual intercourse

Take the mickey – Make fun of someone.

Barmy – Crazy

### **Kannada**

Aaiyooo – Basically an exclamation.

Macha – A male friend

VohMygawd – A mildly altered Kannada pronunciation of Oh my God!

Bomabaat – Awesome

Saar - Sir

### **Punjabi**

Taachi – A brief-case or suitcase. Probably from “attache” case.

Totta – A hot girl

Gaddi – Car

Ghodi – Female Horse

Dhol – Drums

Puttar – A son or a daughter, basically, a lovable child

### **Marathi**

Arrey baprey – Oh ! Alas !

Aayla – Oh My God with that Marathi touch.

Bindaas – Without Fear.

Bhau – Brother.

Bidu Log – Gang.

Bankas – Nonsense

Daru – Alcohol.

Hao – Haan

Katta – A place where friends hang out.

Khallaas – Finished

Kaiku – A Big Marathi WHY?

Kaay – WHAT?

Kanakhali ashtavinayak – It means I’ll imprint ashtavinayak (8 Ganpatis) under your ear.

Pakkyaa – Marathi version of the name Prakash.

Dedfutia – The word is Marathi slang for someone short.

Fukat – FREE! FREE! FREE!

Gheon Tak – Take by the balls.

Vaat lagna – Chaos everywhere.

Tapori – Someone who does roadside mischief

Shya – As in SHIT!

Zhakaas – Awesome.

**All India**

Hawalदार – Constable

Phere – The seven steps taken by an Indian newlywed couple around the holy fire.

Mandap – Temporary structure for a Hindu wedding.

