

LIFE & PROMISES

ANNIVERSARY EDITION

PULKIT GUPTA
ILĀ GARG



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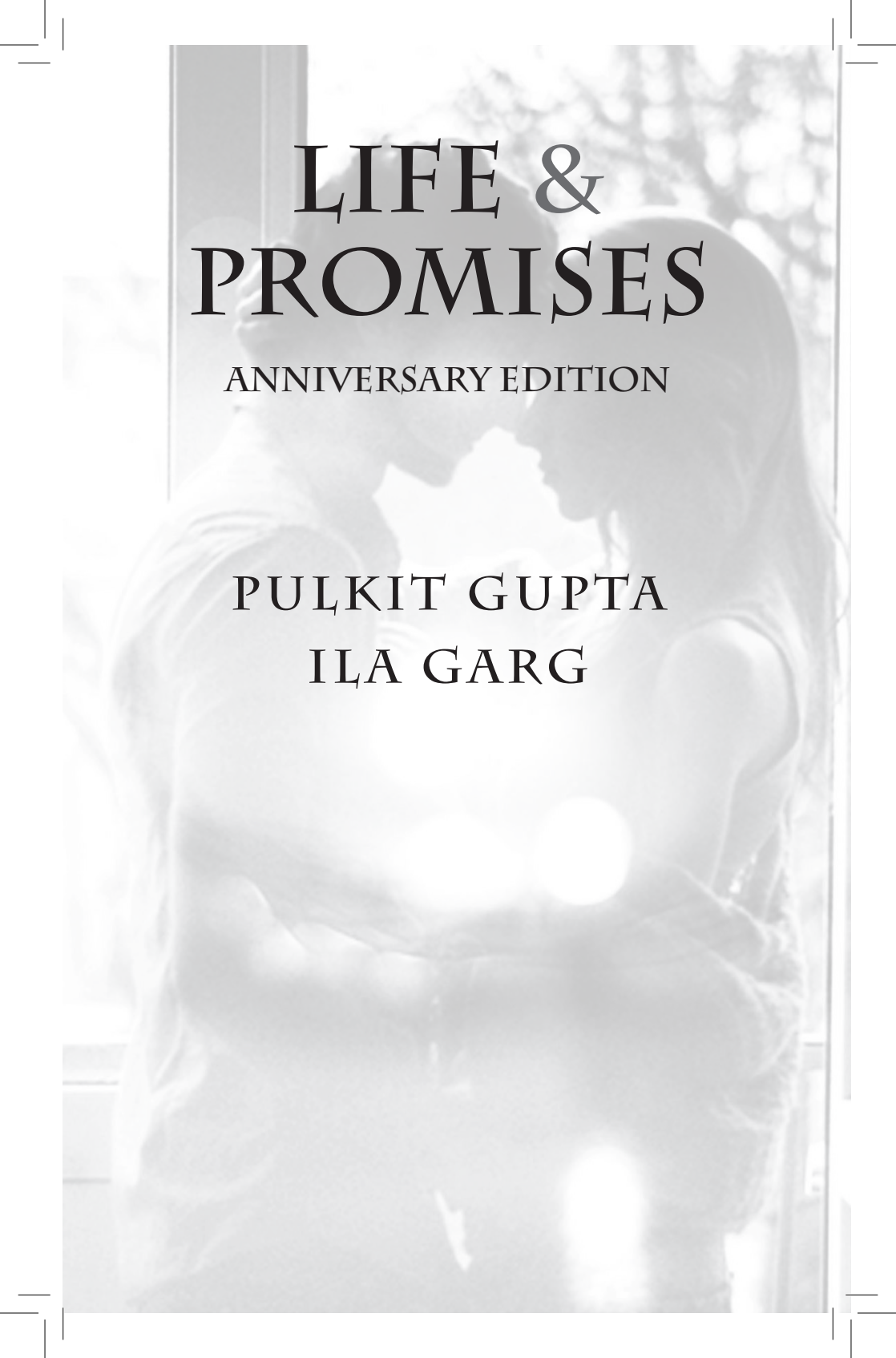
It is during
our darkest moments,
that we must focus to
see the light...

Stay Blessed!

With Love

LA
PULK/T



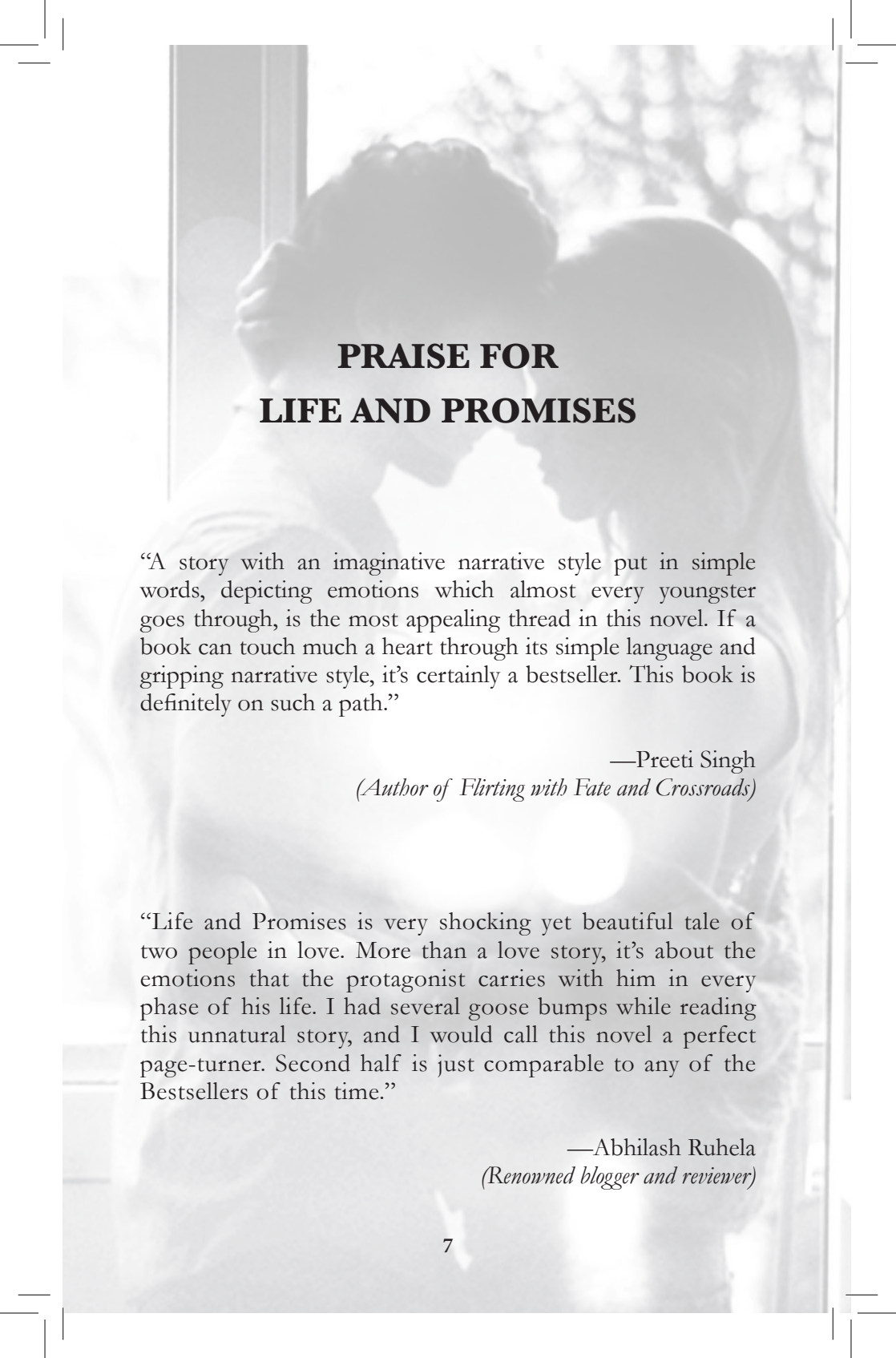


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PRAISE FOR LIFE AND PROMISES

“A story with an imaginative narrative style put in simple words, depicting emotions which almost every youngster goes through, is the most appealing thread in this novel. If a book can touch much a heart through its simple language and gripping narrative style, it’s certainly a bestseller. This book is definitely on such a path.”

—Preeti Singh
(*Author of Flirting with Fate and Crossroads*)

“Life and Promises is very shocking yet beautiful tale of two people in love. More than a love story, it’s about the emotions that the protagonist carries with him in every phase of his life. I had several goose bumps while reading this unnatural story, and I would call this novel a perfect page-turner. Second half is just comparable to any of the Bestsellers of this time.”

—Abhilash Ruhela
(*Renowned blogger and reviewer*)

“The story line is sensitive and beautifully conceptualised. This promises to be a novel that will touch the hearts of many whose journeys are across achievements, dreams and despair. I think this is a very commendable effort for a first book. I wish you both, great success.”

—Nandita Bose

(Author of Tread Softly and The Perfume of Promise)

“Different, Wonderful, Amazing... Loved the end”

—Dipen Ambalia

*(Author of In Their Shoes, To B.E. or not To B.E.,
and LOSER (Life of a Software Engineer))*

“Emotions, dreams and air castles, blames and insecurity, and finally the reality, all in all realms of the youngsters’ life are woven together. I think as a debut; this is well written, well etched and well presented. ‘Life and Promises’ is well conceptualized, fresh effort. I would certainly love to read this one in prints!”

—Arpita Ghosh Sarkar

(Author of A Walk Down The Lane)

“Emotional, gripping, inspirational, addictive, this book has all the elements of a wonderful story.”

—Harshita Srivastava

(Author of One In A Million and Bad Romance)

As a debut novel they have created an impact on readers with a beautiful and emotional tale of Rachit and Radhika. It will make you cry till the end. The journey of Rachit and problems faced by him is a complete page page-turner. Second half of the story will make you fall in love with the book. A must read for all those people who face difficulties in life and wanted to have a ray of happiness.

—Himani Gupta
(*Reviewer*)

Kudos to Pulkit and Ila for collectively putting a fantabulous show. Poetic touch gives the script a new dimension altogether plus an over-the-top script. Pocket size dynamite is the word. Highly recommended.

—Siddhartha Yadav
(*Contributing author at Uff Ye Emotions2,
Her Story, Moonlit Matinee and Uppercut*)

Foreword

Get inspired to love more and achieve more by this mesmerizing tale decanted by Pulkit Gupta and Ila Garg. A story of an IITian turned CA aspirant will come to you as a new concept. These days, in India, a brave new generation of readers, writers, critics, bloggers and publishers is emerging in manifolds; all of them are looking with extreme tenacity for their moment under the sun. In the midst of such a scenario, Pulkit and Ila bring this novel to you with a blend of romance and inspiration; it is something that gives it a different flavour.

When Pulkit approached me to write a foreword for this novel, I, immediately, agreed, although the contest of Uff Ye Emotions-2 was not even started, and I was busy in giving shape to my upcoming project. The only reason of giving my consent was my belief in his work and a very strong bond, which we share since the launch of Uff Ye Emotions-1. After reading this novel, I realised a tremendous amount of effort put in by both the authors, which ensures 'Life and Promises' to be a wonderful read for all of you. They come across as new voices, and somehow connect romance to inspiration, giving it a whole new horizon. The diction and emotions chosen are indeed heart wrenching.

I would like to wish best of luck to the authors and the publisher for this book. Wish this book turns out to be a bestseller very soon. Love you all.

Vinit K. Bansal

Author, I am Heartless, Wo Chali gayi

Editor, Uff Ye Emotions, Uff Ye Emotions - 2

Dedication

*This book is dedicated to our parents, our brothers,
The Almighty, our Soul and our friends.*

Love you all.

Above all, this book is dedicated to hard work and the go-getter attitude.

Acknowledgements

'Life and Promises' was a tough decision to take and it would never have been possible without the help of some very close people who came forward at the right time, to extend their help to us.

This novel is the outcome of our destinies that made us bump into each other on the memorable day of 9th February 2013 in the book fair; a common passion that brought us close and gave us something to talk about.

Thank you God for showering us with so much love and blessings and a bunch of close knit friends. Our sincere thanks to our parents for their unending support, our brothers; Abhishek Atul Gupta for his unending help, his million dollar ideas, and an awesome website designed for this book, and Ayush Garg for spreading the word about it.

We extend heartfelt thanks to Bhavin Pathak and Priyanshu Saxena, who ignited the idea in Pulkit's mind, of developing his story into a full-fledged novel. We started working on it together. As the story line progressed, we took help from our friend, Rachna Sheth, for adding a poetic flavour to it and also to assist us with one of the chapters.

We would like to thank Gargi Sarkhel Bagchi for editing our script. Also we would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Sharanya Bhattacharya & Suhail Mathur for proofreading the manuscript.

We would also like to thank Prof. Dippak Gupta for encouraging us. CA Nagendra Sah and CA Gaurav Jain were extremely co-operating and also helped us in our promotions. We are also

grateful to Nandita Bose and Rohit Gore for providing us with valuable inputs.

We genuinely thank another set of our awesome friends – Siddhartha Yadav, Diksha Babbar, Nikhil Mahajan, Gaurav Kushwaha, Manoj Chaurasia, Aditi Gupta, Harshita Srivastava, CA Abhilasha Bhagat, Himani Gupta, Divya Chaudhary, Komal Panwar and Rohit Godayal for constantly encouraging us in our journey.

We dedicate this book to you i.e. our readers for showing faith in our promise. We hope that we won't let you down. Keep reading and stay blessed.

—Pulkit Gupta and Ila Garg

Sneak-A-Peek into the characters

RACHIT AGGARWAL

Rachit, a young, ambitious guy from Western U.P. is suffering from the ghost of his past. He worked hard to fulfil his dreams of getting into IIT. He also falls in love with his batchmate - Radhika. But one night changed his life completely.

Read on to know more about his love life and the bond, which he shares with Khushi.



KHUSHI GUPTA

Khushi Gupta, a bubbly girl of 19 is a happy go lucky character. Chirpy little bird symbolizes her completely. She lives up to her name when she constantly brings a smile on Rachit's sad face with her small little comments.

Read on to know whether she succeeds or fails miserably in her efforts.

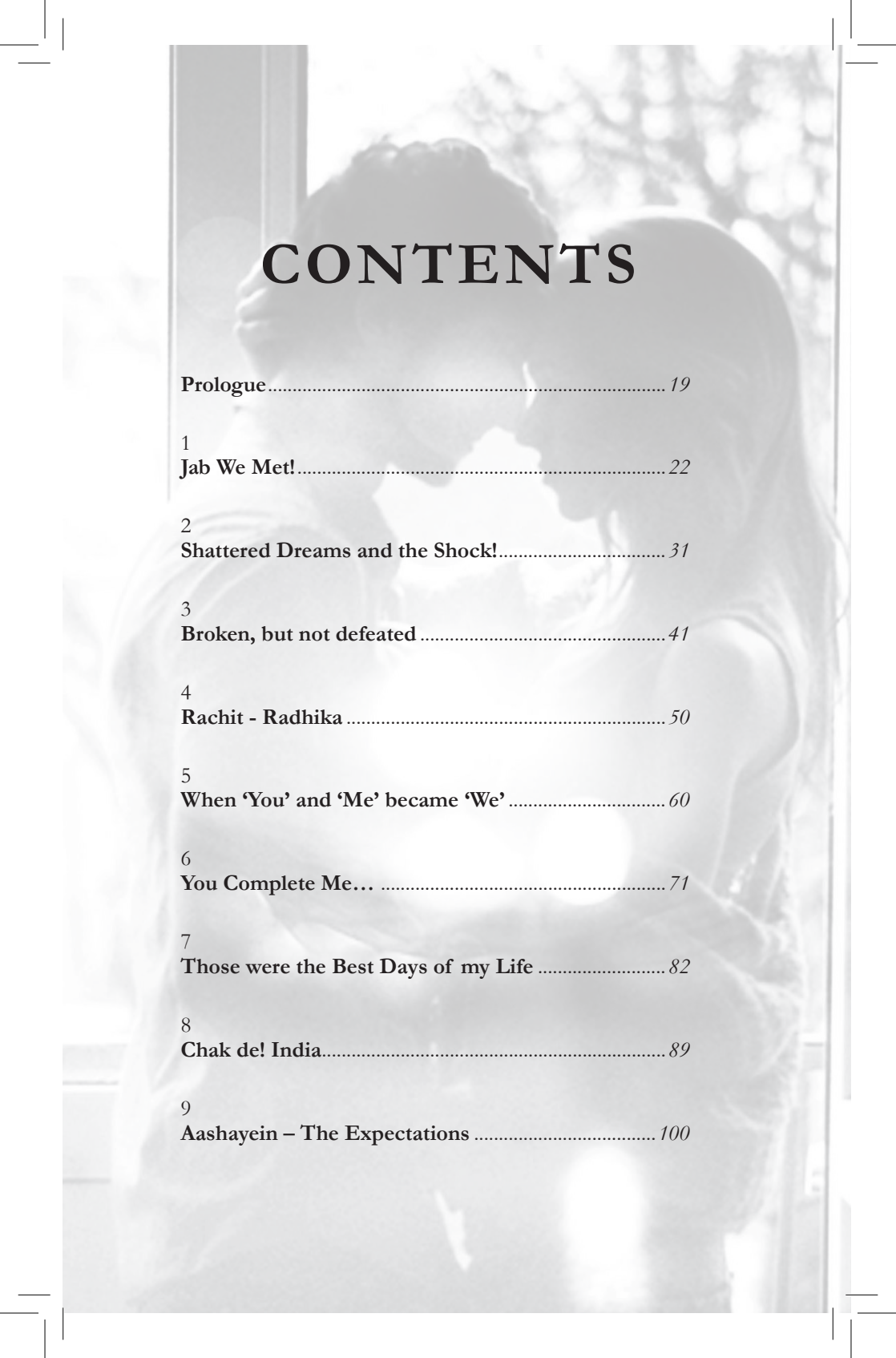


RADHIKA BANERJEE

Radhika Banerjee, a sweet Bengali girl, was one of the hottest girls in Rachit's batch at IIT. She was simply stunning; a girl anybody could have died for, the love at first sight for Rachit.

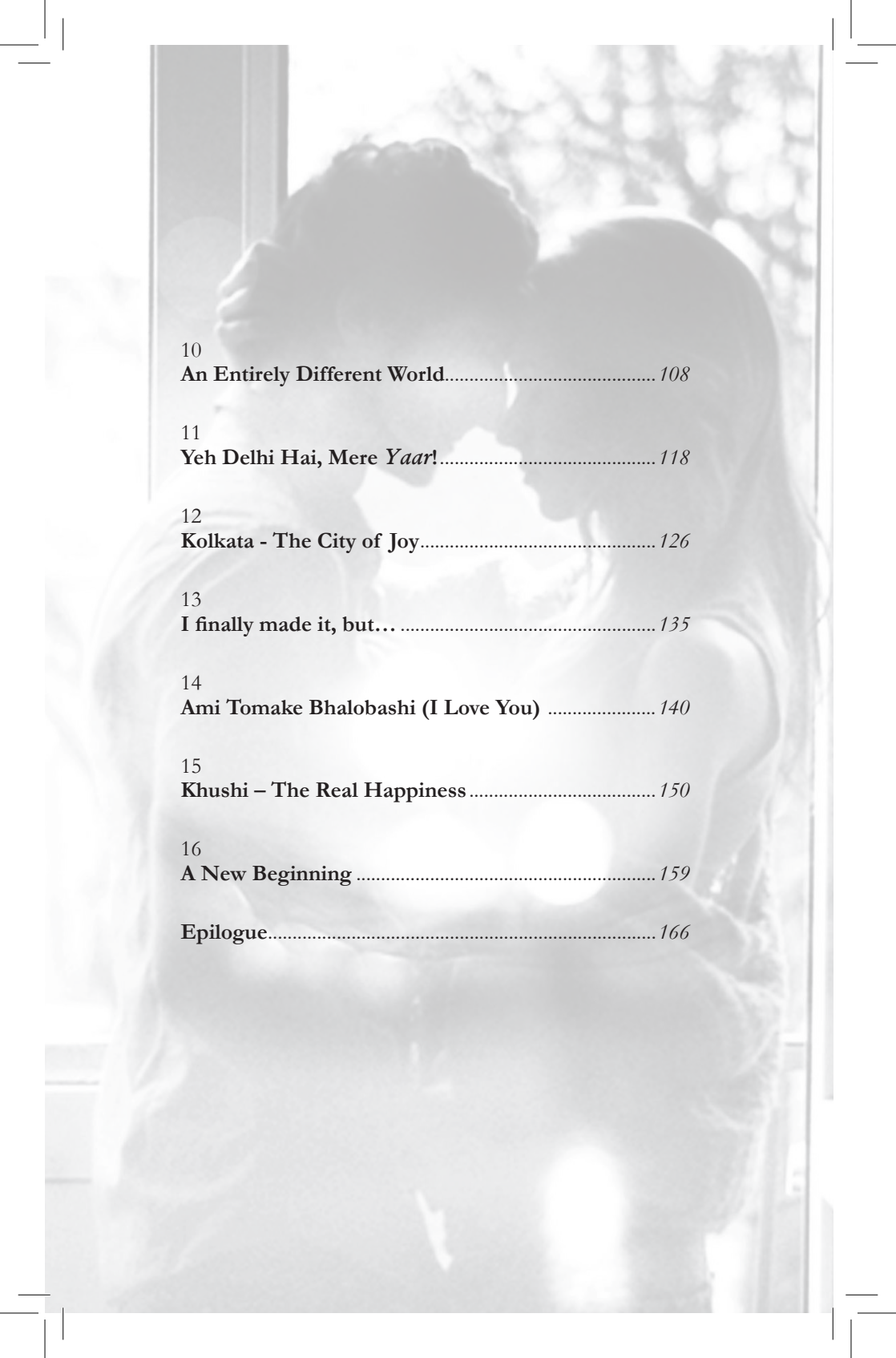
Read on to find out how long could she hold Rachit's interest and how far was their love successful.





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Prologue

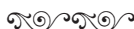
*This heart is a bloody criminal, Seeking love;
Even when the other part of the heart is at its Funeral!
Yes, you read it right, 'Funeral'!*



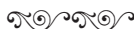
*Damn, someone has rightly said; 'Love is an innocent kid'.
You give it a hundred kisses but it will still be ever ready for
the 'Hundred & One Feed!'*



*The nastiest connection of the soul is to the heart,
It is prompt to add one more to its cart,
Even when it has experienced over it - 'A Painful Dart'*



*Love, so very addicted to 'love'
That it is difficult to get it out of your nerve!
Try to name it friendship but still it is firm to call it 'love'!*



*A human is hungry for love; you must have read!
You can still wait for bread,
But love is simply so desperate and mad!*



*I swear it will make you commit thousands of sins, Naming
itself as pure love; it will convert your life into ruins!*



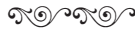
*Taking you to those tempting heights,
It will make you feel sexy, lonely and helpless during nights!*



*Please don't take love as wrong, It is simply innocent,
Unaware of what is next in the fog!*



*Whether it is right, wrong or immoral,
It will leave you in the end with an empty bottle!*



*Go step out; see how many more are in love - On their faces,
you will find a shameless, fearless dove!
A dove that is ready to fly, with its face so innocent,
Even if you try, you will fail to find that cruel quotient!*



*Those who say love is spiritual,
Are surely right and virtual!
But the acts of love are no more factual!*



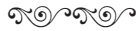
*It starts with the name of need,
Continues with its own greed
And ends, when someone better is ready to feed!*

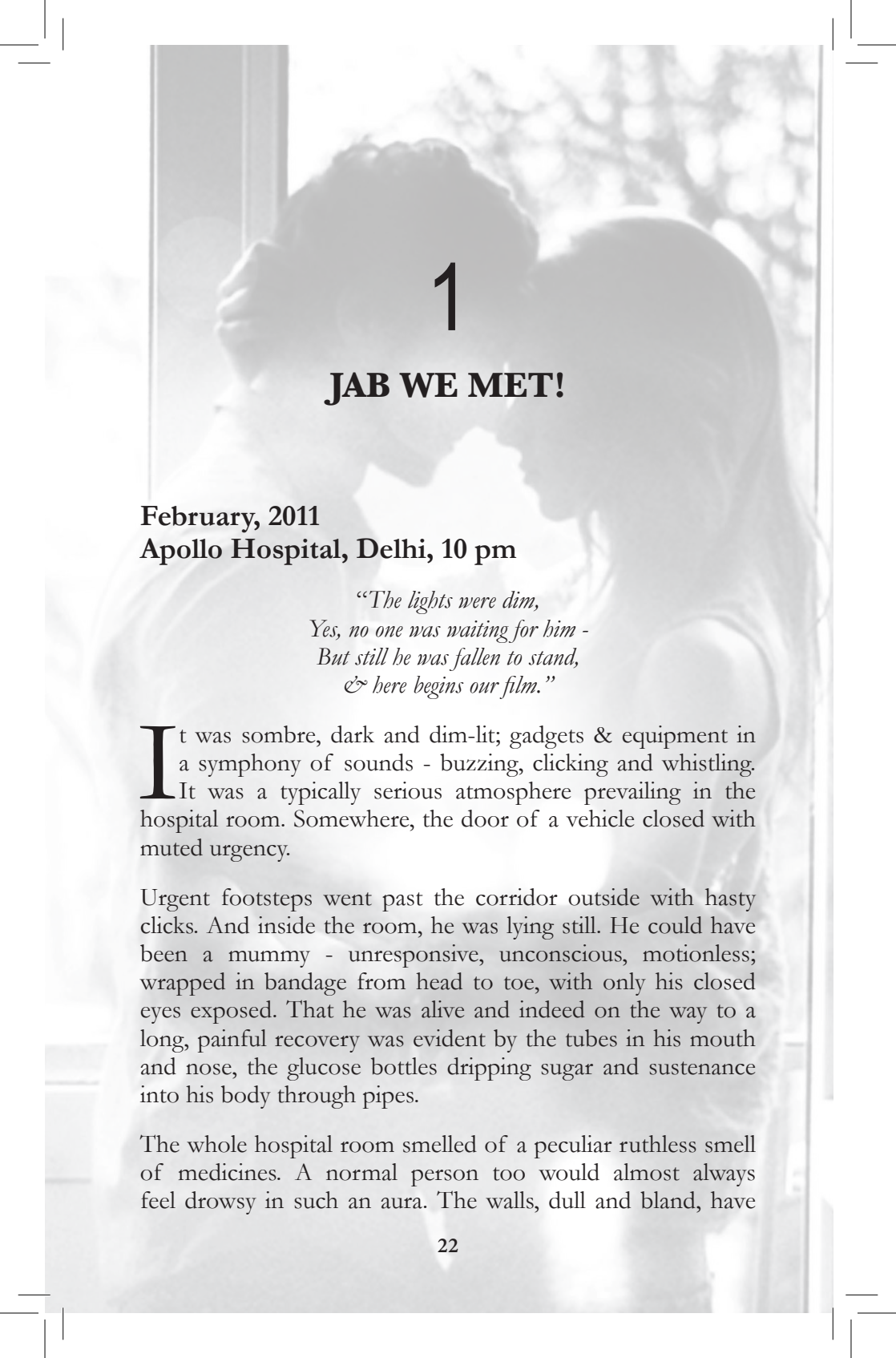


*Love, the bloody hearted criminal wanting more every night,
I swear; it makes you crave for the dark even in the light.
& if you get the light, it will urge the bright, to 'turn into
night!'*



*This heart is a bloody criminal,
Seeking love;
Even when the other part of the heart is at its funeral!*





1

JAB WE MET!

February, 2011

Apollo Hospital, Delhi, 10 pm

*“The lights were dim,
Yes, no one was waiting for him -
But still he was fallen to stand,
& here begins our film.”*

It was sombre, dark and dim-lit; gadgets & equipment in a symphony of sounds - buzzing, clicking and whistling. It was a typically serious atmosphere prevailing in the hospital room. Somewhere, the door of a vehicle closed with muted urgency.

Urgent footsteps went past the corridor outside with hasty clicks. And inside the room, he was lying still. He could have been a mummy - unresponsive, unconscious, motionless; wrapped in bandage from head to toe, with only his closed eyes exposed. That he was alive and indeed on the way to a long, painful recovery was evident by the tubes in his mouth and nose, the glucose bottles dripping sugar and sustenance into his body through pipes.

The whole hospital room smelled of a peculiar ruthless smell of medicines. A normal person too would almost always feel drowsy in such an aura. The walls, dull and bland, have

experienced only loud screams, cries and pain. No one wants to be in a hospital room at his or her own will, until and unless such gruesome events arise. Unluckily, Rachit was lying in one of these mundane rooms.

He was a very strong person and had survived after a very long struggle. He was on the hospital bed, still lying unconscious in his state of oblivion.

Doctors and nurses gave their best shot to save Rachit's life; a few hours back they were running all around, trying hard to save him. As soon as he was declared to be out of danger, the hospital staff shifted him from the Intensive Care Unit, where he was earlier, pertaining to his critical condition in which he was brought to the hospital, to one of the rooms.

Suddenly, Rachit heard a very familiar voice...

"Rachit..! *Beta!* How are you feeling now? Don't worry about anything now. You are safe. The bad and difficult time has passed." The voice belonged to his mom; that's what he used to call his mother.

A mother can understand the pain of her child just by looking at her son's face; he doesn't even need to tell her what had happened to him or what adverse circumstances he had been through. A mother - son relation is an unsaid bond; it's not dependent on vocal exchange of some words.

At once, Rachit wondered how that could be possible. How could his mother talk to him?

He had lost his mother when he was fifteen years old.

Maybe she was talking to him in his head as she was very close to him. A teardrop slipped from the corners of his eyes as he remembered his mom, because she was both his strength as well as weakness. His mother was always with him in his subconscious mind, howsoever far she might be in reality.

He opened his eyes, after having slept for so long - how long, he didn't know - and the moment he regained consciousness,

he felt as if the walls of the room were closing in on him. He disliked the place.

He despised the feeling of lying aimlessly on that hospital bed without any productive thing to do. Sitting without anything to do did not suit the person he was. It angered him to waste his time, even a second of it. Moreover, he could not remember why he was lying on the hospital bed, which only angered him all the more.

He believed that life goes by in the blink of an eye, so no moment should be wasted; instead it should be appreciated and aptly utilised. He was an ambitious person and therefore he wanted to achieve a lot in his lifetime. He had a lot of unfulfilled dreams. He had a lot to prove to people around him. Life had not been an easy sail for him.

Everything seemed blurry to him as he tried to open his eyes several times and then he realized that he should wear his spectacles, which were on the side table next to his bed.

Then, at that very moment, he tried to recall what he was doing in the hospital room. His back ached; his head hurt; various other body parts were in pain too, but that wasn't why he came to be lying in that hospital bed.

He could feel the graveness of his present situation. Trapped and immobile in the crisp hospital sheets, he was feeling like a folded letter in an envelope about to be mailed.

As he slowly opened and closed his eyes, the harsh light invaded him; ripping him back into a world 'full of pain'. He felt disgusted.

Rachit tried to move his hand to adjust the pillow, but he failed to do so due to multiple body fractures caused by the impact of his fall from the third floor of his hostel in Laxmi Nagar, East Delhi.

The fall could have had far worse effects. He could have died or fatally injured himself. His limbs might have been rendered lifeless. Therefore, his survival was a big thing in itself.

Rachit tried a few more times, but he failed every time due to the atrocious pain. This pain included both the external as well as his internal pain. The external pain was obviously due to his wounds and multiple body fractures, but the internal pain he was going through was due to his heart and whatever crap that resided within it.

“Excuse me, can I help you?”

The voice belonged to a smiling face of a cute petite girl who seemed to still be in her teens. Dressed in hospital robes, she looked a little weak but managed to remain beautiful somehow. Dimples were pressed under her high cheekbones, making her look cuter. Her tresses fell down on her face, as she moved with a sudden velocity towards Rachit to help him. She pushed them away with her hand and tucked them behind her ear. She looked intelligent, yet childlike and gullible. Charismatic and unreal features characterized her. She appeared surreal, out of the world! Her voice, silken and soothing, was pure music to the ears. Her deep-set chocolate brown eyes looked at him like a puppy dog.

And yet Rachit didn’t show much interest in indulging in an interaction.

“No, thanks!” Rachit replied rather rudely without even looking at her.

“Hello, I am Khushi. By the way, we are roomies. Can we be friends?” Bubbly and friendly by nature, Khushi tried further to strike a conversation.

“Girl, let me make one thing very clear to you. I am a loner; I hate interacting with unknown people, and I really do not make friends especially with kids like you. So it would be better if you stay away from me and even better, if you shift

into a single room. I am sure that your rich parents can easily afford that. Just stop pissing me off.” Rachit said curtly, taking a glimpse at Khushi. He hadn’t always been like this, but the tides of time had made him indifferent.

“Do you always talk like that or is this the first time? Also, what made you think that I belong to a rich family?” Khushi was just a little taken aback as she wasn’t used to such rudeness, but her confidence was still evident as she continued to talk to Rachit.

“Well, it appears to me from your smile and behaviour as if you are on a vacation and enjoying your trip to the hospital here. You definitely belong to a family which has one home at Defence Colony, another at Greater Kailash and a farm house at Chattarpur and run to Sir Gangaram Hospital or Apollo even if their daughter is suffering from normal fever or something as lame as that. So shut up and stop irritating me.” Rachit replied with disinterest and an utter stereotypical notion.

“Okay! As you wish, but I was only trying to help you. Rest assured, you may let me know if you need anything. Take rest now. Relax. Good night,” she replied with the same sweetness as before.



1 am

Rachit was not able to sleep due to the severe pain in his body. He just kept still, as tossing and turning was beyond his strength. The slightest of movements were causing him so much pain that he was cautiously avoiding them. This went on, for what seemed to be an eternity, but in reality, only a couple of hours had passed. Rachit wondered how this night would go by. He wanted to rest, but his body was not allowing him that.

Therefore, to divert his attention he tried to go through the book which Khushi had been reading a few hours prior. He got up from his bed with great effort and picked up the book lying on the table between the two beds.

Somehow, by pushing the table he got hold of the book and with some effort, he opened the first page.

He read out the title of the book, '*Introduction to Solid Mechanics by I. Sharma*'. Inside the book, on the very first page, he found something scribbled in someone's handwriting. He continued to glance at it, and read, '*Khushi Gupta, 1st year, Mechanical Engineering, IIT Delhi*', which was written in an exceptionally beautiful handwriting. It looked ornamental.

He then replaced the book in its original place and looked out of the hospital window. Now, he realized that he was very alone; with no visitors and no one who could tap on his back and make him sleep as his mother used to do.

Then he reminded himself, "No, not completely alone," looking over at the second bed where Khushi was lying wrapped in a striped blanket, fast asleep.

Rachit wondered how she could sleep so peacefully. And then he thought how lucky she must be to sleep in solace; with no pains. Maybe she had not gone through any struggles in her life. Life for her must have been a cakewalk!

Looking out of the window again, he took in the calming view of the city. His mood suddenly turned pensive. He could see a few houses dotted here and there. The city was never this silent. He was amazed to notice this peculiar thing.

"That's odd," Rachit thought. The moon was shining and the weather outside was pleasant. However, inside the hospital it was air-conditioned and temperature controlled. Rachit wished he could be outside enjoying the silence, the breeze, walking through the lonely lanes or be anywhere but there on the hospital bed.

Khushi stirred in her bed; drawing Rachit's attention, but only for a moment. Then she was quiet again and Rachit went back to his thoughts.

Suddenly he started coughing which was caused due to his own saliva. It rendered him extreme discomfort. He was sure it would kill him if it didn't stop somehow. His whole chest was in terrible agony. His body was drowned in pain too as the coughing was causing a lot of friction in his body.

He reached his bedpost, fumbled for the button, and pushed it to call the nurse, but no one came to help him. He was suffocating and was running out of breath. Then suddenly someone gave him a glass of water. He took it and drank it in one shot and then he looked upwards to thank the person. It was Khushi with traces of fear and anxiety on her face, looking exceptionally worried.

"You okay?" inquired Khushi in a shaky voice out of fear.

"Yes, I am. Thanks for helping me despite the fact that I misbehaved with you a couple of hours ago," Rachit replied, this time with a little sweetness unlike his previous tone and behaviour.

"That's ok. No one is bad at heart. I know that something is bothering you, which made you behave in such a manner. Tell me, how did you get yourself hurt and end up here in the hospital in such a critical state? What went wrong and where?"

Khushi was determined to know the facts, circumstances and reasons behind Rachit's present condition as she was extremely sensitive at heart and was concerned for Rachit.

"I slipped from the third floor of my hostel," Rachit replied in a tone that was not very convincing.

"You are telling a lie as you are fumbling with your words and also looking somewhere else while talking to me," Khushi smirked.

Rachit felt a bit hesitant to disclose the truth to Khushi, but it is almost impossible to hide something from a girl, especially if she is after you to divulge all the details. Then he replied in a

low voice, almost murmuring, as he saw no point in hiding the reason anymore.

"I tried to commit suicide," Rachit replied slowly while trying to avoid eye contact with Khushi.

"What?! Are you nuts? I mean... How could you do this? Disgusting!" Khushi was shocked beyond words.

"You have no right to judge me," Rachit said angrily.

"Why shouldn't I? We live in a democratic country and I have full right to comment on one of the most idiotic things I have heard in a long time. I want to know the full story. This is always the last option, and for me it is not an option at all. Tell me everything. Every detail that made you think of committing suicide," Khushi replied in an alarming tone.

"Why should I tell you?" Rachit looked straight into her eyes, a little disturbed by this unwanted intrusion.

"Oh hello..! You have to tell me because you have no other option. You have no one to talk to and you cannot sleep in such pain. Nor do you have any recreational activity here to keep yourself distracted."

"Plus you owe it to me as I just saved your life and I will continue disturbing you till you don't share your story with me."

"So Mr. Rachit, the choice is entirely yours. Divulge the details, narrate your story or else bear me!" Khushi chuckled.

"Ok, wait... I am telling you, but promise me that you will keep it to yourself." *Rachit was in no mood to argue with her and he didn't have the strength to enter into any further discussion with her either.*

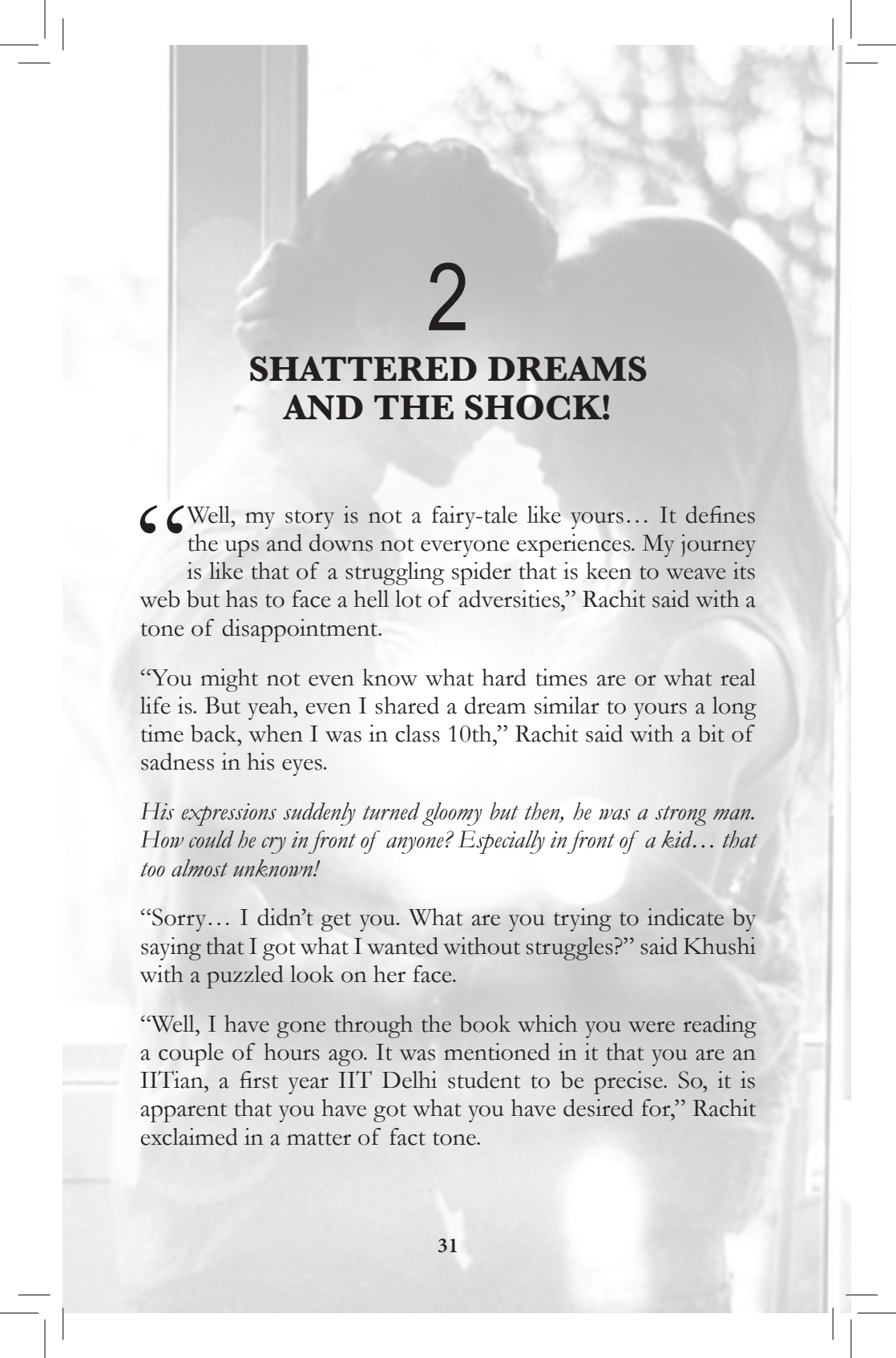
"God promise! Now come on, tell me everything without missing a single incident. I am curious to know. Tell me each and everything that led to a situation that you had to take such a drastic step," she replied, with a grin on her face.

As Rachit opened his mouth to begin with his tale, Khushi interrupted, “Hey, wait! Wait! Wait! First tell me, what do you do?” Khushi added.

“I am a CA final student,” Rachit replied in an irritated voice.

“Ok! Now c’mon, please initiate your story. I can’t wait.” Khushi was already enjoying it. Seeing Rachit’s helpless face made her laugh a little more.





2

SHATTERED DREAMS AND THE SHOCK!

“Well, my story is not a fairy-tale like yours... It defines the ups and downs not everyone experiences. My journey is like that of a struggling spider that is keen to weave its web but has to face a hell lot of adversities,” Rachit said with a tone of disappointment.

“You might not even know what hard times are or what real life is. But yeah, even I shared a dream similar to yours a long time back, when I was in class 10th,” Rachit said with a bit of sadness in his eyes.

His expressions suddenly turned gloomy but then, he was a strong man. How could he cry in front of anyone? Especially in front of a kid... that too almost unknown!

“Sorry... I didn’t get you. What are you trying to indicate by saying that I got what I wanted without struggles?” said Khushi with a puzzled look on her face.

“Well, I have gone through the book which you were reading a couple of hours ago. It was mentioned in it that you are an IITian, a first year IIT Delhi student to be precise. So, it is apparent that you have got what you have desired for,” Rachit exclaimed in a matter of fact tone.

“What!” She said shocked.... and then soon regained her composure and added, “Well... Never mind! It was only a book, not my personal diary,” she winked at him.

Seeing Rachit silent, Khushi tried to keep him engaged in the conversation to make him feel better. “You were talking about sharing my dream... tell me more about it. I want to hear your complete story, from beginning to end.”

Rachit stared at her, thinking for a moment whether to tell her anything or ignore any further conversation with her. And then, he decided to continue, as he was bored of the mundane hospital air. He made Khushi his grief-mate as he overcame his dilemma.

“Well, I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth. My father was a Production Manager in a sugar mill in Western UP. He never compromised on my education. I did my Higher Secondary from a reputed Catholic School which was affiliated with ICSE Board where we were taught to excel in every aspect of life under strict disciplinary rules.”

“Oh that ‘*Pratishta, Parampara and Anushashan*’ types where you are punished for not cutting nails, for dirty shoes, speaking in Hindi, not bringing the diary, not completing the homework on time and blah, blah, blah...” she smiled making a mockery of it.

Rachit smiled in his heart and spoke in a sarcastic tone. “Huh... But it was much better than your show-off school; which has got its branches all over the NCR, where your parents pay some twenty thousand bucks per month so that their ward can learn some crazy British Accent and it ends as a meeting place for teenagers,” he said in a taunting manner with a sarcastic sigh.

By this time, he too was quite enjoying the conversation. Laughing after so long made him feel a lot better.

“Mind you, I was a CBSE topper in Hindi and secured 99 marks in class 10th!” she replied angrily.

She liked the fact that she was making Rachit laugh at last and she was the reason for his ‘*khushi*’. In general, Khushi loved to spread joy and happiness wherever she went, quite reflecting her own name. *Finally, Rachit was willing to open up more and interact with Khushi, who made him feel at ease while on the other hand, Khushi liked the fact that Rachit was happy now and this made her happy too. Who knows, they might actually end up being friends!*

“Ok, let’s not start this city girl and small town boy thing here!” he said with an air of finality to end the argument.

“So where were we?” Rachit asked.

“That I was a CBSE topper in Hindi and maybe now you would like to boast about yourself that you were a topper of your highly disciplined school too,” she replied calmly, very pleased with her own self.

“Well, I was not. I was an average student who had always lived his life as an ‘above average’, but yeah, I was good in debates and was a winner of the state level English debate competition. That was a real achievement for me!” He said with an air of triumph. He loved to praise himself, especially when it came to his debating talent. He had a flair for speech, something that he really treasured.

“Okay, Mr. Speaker, I got it,” she chuckled and rolled her eyes sarcastically.

“I scored 85 percent in my 10th and like most of the 80+ percentage holders of my class, I dreamt of being an IITian.” Rachit continued his story as by then he was too engrossed in sharing his past life with her. He felt very comfortable with Khushi and momentarily forgot his pains.

He left behind his rudeness for a much-needed change. Rachit started to open up and uncover the covered pages of his life

story in front of this young girl, who reminded him of his good old, carefree and nonchalant childhood days.

“Yes, I know. Because you people are told that only those people who fail to cross the cut-off of reputed 10+2 schools of the region opt for commerce. Am I right or am I right?” Khushi interrupted with a little laugh loaded with sarcasm.

“Maybe in some cases it is true, but in my case, I always dreamt of passing out from IIT. It was my desire, my will and my dream. In short, it meant everything to me! Though I fell short of the required ninety plus percentage to get admission in DPS RK Puram, my father got me admitted in one of the reputed schools of South Delhi which had a tie-up with a premier coaching institute that provided coaching for IIT and AIEEE. Now my only aim was to remove the tag of mediocrity by cracking JEE and scoring decent marks in 10+2. I was ready to face the heat.”

Each and every time Rachit spoke about his broken IIT dreams or his desire to be an IITian, he sounded so different and his tone blended with many emotions ranging from proud to sad and the words were loaded with passion.

“Wow! That’s nice...” Khushi replied.

She heard him very carefully and like a good listener, she was keeping up with Rachit and replied to him every now and then with her gestures, responses, questions, etc. and showed him that she was genuinely interested in his story, his life, his dreams, his aspirations and his past.

“I gave my best shot and it yielded dividends in the form of 91% in Senior Secondary and selection in ‘IIT Madras’. I was overjoyed. I still remember the date, 10th July 2007; it was my convocation, a day which I can never forget in my life. That day I entered the world of my dreams. Or I should say my dreams actually turned into reality.”

“Oh, wow! That’s fabulous! It’s really nice to hear this. I didn’t

know that I am talking to a fellow IITian,” Khushi was glad and confused at the same time as Rachit had told her that he was a CA final student, but just because she was keen to hear the whole story in Rachit’s own voice, she gave up on the idea to debate on this very topic for that moment.

“I fell in love with my alma mater with just a glance at their prospectus,” continued Rachit. “IIT Madras, which is situated on Sardar Patel Road, is a residential institute, whose campus sprawls over an area of six hundred and twenty acres. The campus is close to the Raj Bhavan, the official seat of the governor of Tamil Nadu. This campus was formerly part of the adjoining Guindy National Park. I always had a thing for nature. This park is home to four hundred blackbucks, two thousand spotted deer, twenty four jackals, a wide variety of snakes, tortoises and over one hundred and thirty species of birds, fourteen species of mammals, over sixty species of butterflies and spiders and much more. The park attracts more than seven lakh visitors every year.”

He said all this with a glint in his eyes because by talking about it; he had just relived that cherished moment all over again. *He wished he could turn the time and go back to those happy, carefree days! But, the constraints of time wouldn't allow him that luxury.*

“All right, stop showing off your wildlife knowledge, Mr. Rachit.”

“Well to be honest, I can’t take full credit for the mentioned information. I have got it from Wikipedia. I love absorbing knowledge of the places I come across and I am very fond of travelling too.”

Rachit continued, “Things were going very well and I loved the place too. I always wanted to be there because of beaches and the beautiful neighbouring places like Mahabalipuram etc. Most students at IIT Madras reside in hostels and I was no exception. The campus has eighteen hostels. Dining facilities are provided in two centralized halls. Hey, there is an interesting

point about our hostels and buses. Buses that ply between the gate and other locations on campus at regular intervals are named after mountains and hostels are named after rivers. This has, in fact, led to the joke that IIT is the land of moving mountains and stationary rivers. I found some of the best roomies from various states like Orissa, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Everything was just near perfect. I could not have asked for more.”

“Four people in one room?” Khushi enquired, quite engrossed in Rachit’s story.

“Well, it was for the time being which was later changed to twin sharing basis. However, we continued it in the previous manner because of the bond that we had developed.”

“We used to hang out together every weekend and often visit Mahabalipuram for a ride or have *nariyal pani* (Coconut water) at East Coast Road or travel without a ticket in the local trains of Chennai. All this was part of our fun and we really enjoyed every second of our life.”

She had created an image of him in her mind, which was slowly changing and developing as Rachit kept on narrating more and more about his own self and his life in the past. Khushi was almost living Rachit’s life through his words.

Rachit continued...

“Everything was going well. I had a girlfriend (from the same branch), scored eighty percent in my sessional and also represented my branch in Maths’ Olympiad (inter-branch), everything was going well and fine and I was happy with my life.”

“Then suddenly one night everything took a turn when I passed blood in my urine, but I ignored it for almost a week. As I was not sure what had happened to me and it’s quite weird to talk about these things with your friends and even to your parents as you never know what their reactions would be, or maybe I was slightly scared.”

“What? Are you crazy? How can someone ignore such a crucial thing?” she literally shouted at him angrily, not even attempting to hide her emotions.

“I know it was a mistake and please don’t make me feel guilty about that now. To be honest, I would have continued to ignore that if things would not have taken a bad turn a week later.”

“Did anything very serious happen in that week?” Khushi was alarmed as she was hearing such things perhaps for the first time. She wondered how Rachit could have been so careless.

“Well... I came back from a friend’s room after attending his birthday bash and was planning to sleep. But suddenly, an unbearable pain occurred on the backside of my left kidney just above the hip region. Luckily, one of my hostel mates had proxyvon - a very strong painkiller. It killed my pain for that night, but it started again at around 4 am. Somehow, I got through the next couple of hours and then I had to be rushed to a city hospital to consult a nephrologist.”

Rachit took a pause here. His eyes reflected his pain. The pain was a combination of the past remembrance and present agony caused by multiple fractures which had yet not healed. He had been really lucky in this context as even after suffering to such an extent, he had managed to survive with his high spirits somehow. He was a winner - a survivor in that sense!

Irrespective of the tragedies of the past, irrespective of the pain he was going through; deep inside his heart, he had maintained his jolly nature though somewhere in the folds of his heart, deep hollowness and loneliness stayed hidden.

Khushi broke the silence, “Ok! What happened next?” Rachit continued, “Hmmm... Initially, I was reluctant to disclose this to my father, as my mother is no more. You know when it comes to his child; a father can leave anything or everything and so it was with my father as well. He would have come down leaving everything for my sake. I obviously didn’t want that.”

“Yeah, I know the same is with my father too,” Khushi smiled reflecting on Rachit’s emotions.

“I missed my mother; I could share everything with her. But then in her absence, I didn’t want to bother my father much.” Rachit added.

“So, finally I decided to choose my brother as my grief companion and told him about my health issues. He was pursuing PGDM from Pune at that time. And as expected, he immediately boarded the next flight to Chennai and shifted to my hostel for the time being. After my mom, he is really close to me and cannot see me in the slightest of pain.”

“Ok, then you went to the doctor with him?” Khushi inquired. “Yes, he met my doctors and a couple of tests which included Renal Angiography/Angioplasty - i.e. an X-Ray of arteries supplying blood to the kidneys - were done on me,” saying this Rachit took a deep sigh.

“What did the reports say? Was there anything serious? Come on tell me, what was the doctor’s verdict over it?” Khushi asked with extreme curiosity.

“They said something that shocked me to a great extent,” Rachit replied.

“It was confirmed that I was suffering from impaired renal function and blockage of both renal arteries. It was primarily due to elevated blood pressure which includes potential risks like severe bleeding, infection, kidney failure, stroke and heart attack.”

“How is it possible? I mean you were doing fine and all of a sudden things fell apart.” Khushi was shocked.

“Hmmm! The same reaction was mine when I heard about it first. I asked God, *‘this is not happening. Why me? How could this happen to me?’* This whole thing made my brother and me go in a frenzy. We were damn scared, so we decided to share it with my father,” Rachit added.

Rachit spoke further, “After it was diagnosed, my brother shifted me to Apollo, Chennai for a week. After a week, as circumstances demanded, I was shifted to Apollo, Delhi as it was approachable from my native place.”

“I remained there for two months under the strict supervision of highly experienced nephrologists, urologists and haematologists of India.”

“Those were the two most difficult months of my life when my daily routine included a blood test, pain killers, a morning walk on the terrace of the hospital and some blood clotting injections.”

“For a person like me, such monotony was a complete ‘no - no’ and only I can understand how I managed to survive with such a mundane and cumbersome routine replaced with the live and happening one which I had experienced at my college and hostel. I lost about fifteen kg of weight during that period, but I was glad that I was recovering at last, even if it was at a very slow pace.”

Rachit smiled as the images from the past came in front of his eyes. “1st Dec, 2007 was the happiest day for me because I was going back home from this boring hospital room to my own room and then very soon I would be back with a bang to the place I naturally belonged to - to my college, to my real and actual life. I was desperate and was dying to be there as I wanted to enjoy again, roaming with my friends, doing *masti* at my hostel, parties, hangouts and loads of fun which I had missed out on, these past two months.”

“I was going to be discharged from the hospital finally. Although I had missed my end-autumn semester examination, I was confident I would get a hold on my studies.”

“I called each of my friends and told them that their ‘Rac-Hit’ is coming back to Chennai. I was alive again, as if awakened from my deep slumber. Everybody was so happy for me.”

“But there was no sign of joy in my father’s eyes. I felt as if he didn’t want me to disappear from his sight; it was like he wanted to say something, but was not able to.”

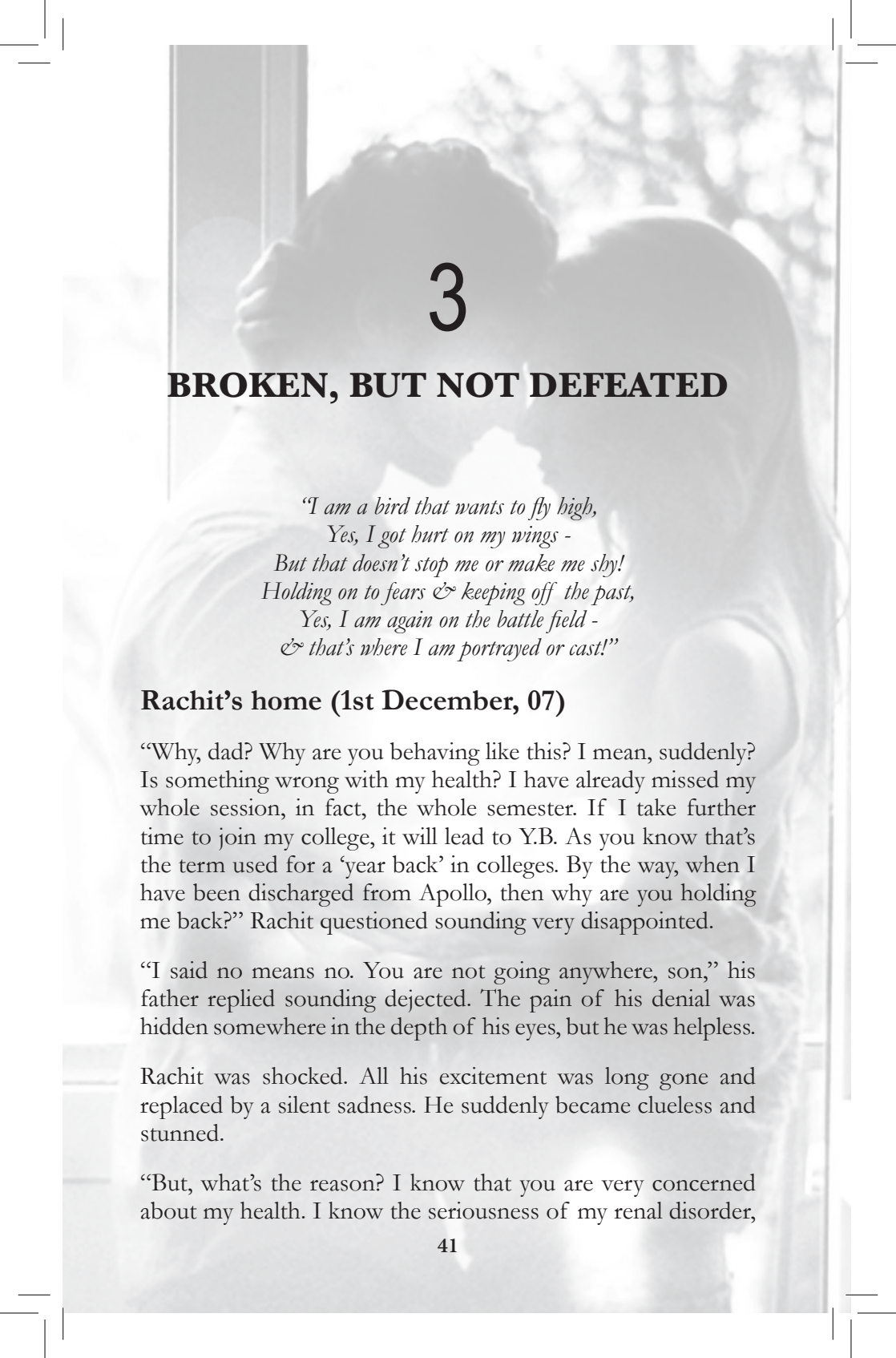
“Anyway I thanked my doctors and the hot dietician of Apollo and loaded my bag into my cab. I was impatient to begin my life again and join in all the fun and frolic that was awaiting me.”

We reached my hometown at 9 pm and immediately I opened the website of Indian railways to check the availability of berth in trains from Delhi to Chennai. I was not in the mood to miss even a single moment wasting on anything or I should better say that I was dancing with joy in my heart to be back in form.

Suddenly my father came to my room and tapping my shoulder he asked me not to book any tickets. I was very surprised by his gesture and action as well and I asked him the reason for that.

The reply he gave me was the biggest shock of my life and from then onwards that became my destiny.





3

BROKEN, BUT NOT DEFEATED

*"I am a bird that wants to fly high,
Yes, I got hurt on my wings -
But that doesn't stop me or make me shy!
Holding on to fears & keeping off the past,
Yes, I am again on the battle field -
& that's where I am portrayed or cast!"*

Rachit's home (1st December, 07)

"Why, dad? Why are you behaving like this? I mean, suddenly? Is something wrong with my health? I have already missed my whole session, in fact, the whole semester. If I take further time to join my college, it will lead to Y.B. As you know that's the term used for a 'year back' in colleges. By the way, when I have been discharged from Apollo, then why are you holding me back?" Rachit questioned sounding very disappointed.

"I said no means no. You are not going anywhere, son," his father replied sounding dejected. The pain of his denial was hidden somewhere in the depth of his eyes, but he was helpless.

Rachit was shocked. All his excitement was long gone and replaced by a silent sadness. He suddenly became clueless and stunned.

"But, what's the reason? I know that you are very concerned about my health. I know the seriousness of my renal disorder,

but isn't it over, dad? I mean as per my doctors, the clot has been dissolved and the blood supply has been restored too. Then what is the problem? Let me go, dad. Please try to understand my point of view," Rachit protested with a heavy heart.

"Son, how shall I make you realize? You are not understanding my...."

Rachit didn't even let his dad complete his sentence. He had become impatient by then as it was a question of his dream career now.

"Dad, I am already lagging behind so much. After doing so well in the sessional, I had to miss my semester exams. Now I have to catch up with all the lectures that I have missed, update my notes, complete the pending projects and submit my assignments. I have also missed my Physics and Chemistry lab sessions and Engineering Graphics is such a pain, I can't even tell you. Then, we have a Mechanical paper in our second semester, which people hardly clear in one attempt. I don't know how I will manage so much. And above all, you are not letting me go. I have so much on my mind right now," Rachit said while interrupting his father.

"Will you let me finish, Rachit? The IIT chapter is as good as over. You will not be an IITian anymore. Are you getting me? IIT is over," he almost shouted at Rachit.

"I wasn't willing to tell you like this, but you haven't left me with any other option. Yesterday, I had a long conversation with your nephrologist, Dr. Ahuja. Son, do you know the exact cause of the death of your mother?"

"Yeah, it was a heart attack. But I don't think it is in any way related to the current topic. Where did it come from in the midst of my career decision? Please don't mix topics, dad. I am already tensed," Rachit asked surprised, while answering his dad's vague question.

"Yes, but do you know what caused her that heart attack? It was due to an excessive clotting disorder or hyper-coagulable

which is the tendency of some people to develop blood clots in parts of the body, such as deep veins in the legs or the arteries of the heart which can potentially block the flow of blood leading to stroke, heart attack or kidney disorder.”

“Your haematologist, Dr. Aiyar, conducted some blood tests and it confirmed our suspicion that her tendency has been passed on to you through genes,” his father added, wiping his tears and hiding them from Rachit. His voice had a hint of fear in it.

“What?! Is *bhaiya* also suffering from the same disorder?” Rachit asked in a bit of a shock.

“Luckily, no, he isn’t suffering from this problem. The reason is that you share the same blood group as your mother’s while he shares my blood group.”

“Dr. Ahuja has said that you will stay on medicines for some years or maybe for a lifetime and your high BP is doing no good to your illness. But you need not worry, son. You have to take only two medicines once a day – one for keeping your BP in check and the other for controlling the blood clotting time. A weekly blood test will be conducted which is known as PT - INR or Prothrombin Time, which is used to determine the clotting tendency of blood in the measure of Warfarin dosage, liver damage and Vitamin K status. And for your information, even I’m taking BP and sugar tablets for the past fifteen years.”

He tried to convince Rachit by presenting himself as an example to make him comfortable in the best possible manner.

“Well, dad! Don’t you think that if it is about those two daily tablets, then I can manage it in Chennai too? What is the need to stay here and ruin my career for the sake of them?” Rachit kept his point in front of his father confidently.

He was not willing to give up on his IIT dream that easily. He knew he deserved to be an IITian and nothing less would suit him. It somehow went with his personality. The pride, the honour and above all, the title of

an IITian; he had worked too hard to get there and now when he finally had what he always desired, he couldn't just let it go.

"Yes, you can! But my son, there are always two sides of the coin and you can't ignore the other side. These medicines will make your body vulnerable to injuries and even a small cut can prove fatal and result in a huge amount of blood loss. In such a condition, you will need to be rushed to the nearest hospital where you will be injected with vitamin K..."

"But *dad*, IIT had been my dream since a long time and you know that. How can I leave it? How can I lose it, dad? Please, dad. Find any alternative. There must be some other option. Please say yes, dad! For God's sake, please do this favour for me. *After this, I shall never ask anything from you, I swear.*" He started crying bitterly while continuously hoping for a solution.

"*Rachit*, don't behave like this, my son." He embraced him. "And what do you think? That I haven't tried to find any other option? I have already discussed it with your doctor and in the present circumstances, he has advised me to keep you with me, at least for a year or so, till your condition becomes stable."

"Your PT will be done on alternate days for the first fifteen days, and then on a weekly basis for the next six months. A graph will be prepared based on that and Dr. Aiyar will adjust your dose according to the results. All this isn't possible if you stay in the hostel."

He added further disappointedly.

Rachit was losing his life's aim; his dream was becoming invisible in front of his eyes and he was helpless, blank and shocked. After all, such things were not tolerable. Hearing all this Rachit's innocent heart bled in protest!

"So you are asking me to abandon my dream? You want me to spend my entire life under strict observation like a cancer patient? Be like a captive bird in a cage?" Rachit concluded and with this he burst into tears.

His patience had gone. He was gloomy and felt lost. He was left with a face incessantly reflecting his shattered dreams and unfulfilled desires. His life was snatched away from him, his innocence died out due to this hard time and the pain of losing his dreams that he had been going through.

Khushi had tears in her eyes too as she heard all this. She could feel what Rachit had been through and she held his hand to give him support. She even offered Rachit some water to calm himself before he went ahead with his story.

Rachit then continued narrating what his dad said to him that day.

“It’s not like that, son. You are a bright student. You can appear for entrance tests again and can easily get admission in any reputed college in NCR which would be approachable from our home. We have DCE (Delhi College of Engineering, which takes AIEEE score), IIT, NIT’s, GGSIPU (IP University), JSS and Jaypee Noida etc. You can even clear JEE again and can get admission in IIT Delhi,” Rachit’s father said while hugging and trying to console him.

“Dad, if you don’t mind, can I think over it again? I want to spend some time alone!”

Rachit had already had enough and he wanted to dwell for a while on his condition and life thereafter. An appalling silence had taken over him and he could think of no more to say or argue with his dad. He had been swallowed by his own fate.

“Ok, beta! But, where are you going?”

“Even I don’t know! I guess the place where I can get some peace of mind for a couple of hours and no one can find me to cause any disturbance. Don’t worry, dad. I will be back soon... I just want to take a walk and have a talk with myself. I want a little solitude to digest this bitterness that I am feeling right now,” he said in a very low voice but with a tone of assurance.

“OK! Come back soon, son. It’s already 9:30 pm. I will be waiting for you.”

Rachit quietly left that place. He was all numb. He was walking in an abominable lull. Never even in his worst of worst dreams, had he thought about anything else apart from IIT when it came to career options. Now the thought of having to wait for a year or choose some other option almost killed him from within. His mind had frozen. His heart felt heavy too. His future had all of a sudden turned dark. In a jiffy, his life had turned upside down. He was quite dejected with his murky future.

He went upstairs to his terrace and looked at the sky. He usually loved watching the sky for long hours or sometimes overnights as he was a nature lover, and this thing acted as a stress-buster for him and the other reason was his mother who had become a star, in his view, to accompany him always.

But that day the darkness of the night was appearing to him as the darkness of his own life. He had never felt so helpless and lifeless before. It was like he was trapped in a long dark tunnel with no end to it. He wished against all wishes to find an end to this tunnel, so that he could see the light again.

The child in him wept! He could not think of anything else in that situation. Tears were his only recluse. Darkness and sadness washed over him, claiming him.

That particular day, even the sky was gloomy. The atmospheric aura seemed repugnant to him. He felt the whole world mocking him as every time he thought that he would have no more sorrows, no more losses; his life pulled him back to reality and showed him that his life was all about sufferings.

He was compelled to face the agony and overwhelming sadness of being alone... Where nights seemed to last forever and tears just keep streaming down the face...

When he had got into IIT, he was all the more confident that he had finally trapped all varieties of joys in his cage and it would never separate from him, but this incident led to his happiness leaving him. And he could do nothing to hold on to it before he

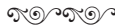
could even realise it was gone. A realisation dawned upon him – ‘*Happiness and dreams are elusive!*’ He was badly hurt and broken. The sense of loneliness and dejection overwhelmed him.

He was actually missing his mother, who was his best friend, that day. In her absence, he was back to his mother nature for comfort, support and some subtle hints or advice to go beyond that dilemma of life. He looked at one of the shining stars and tried to talk to it as if he was talking to his mother.

*Oh Mother, where are you?
I know you are hiding there,
Help me to seek you!*



*I am badly hurt,
Hurt over my dreams,
I am sure if you were there,
All would have healed!*



*Feeling like a lonely lad,
There is nothing here to make me glad.
Caress my head with your hands,
Your absence in this world is making me mad!
With heart-broken dreams &*

*Tearful eyes,
How will I learn to survive?
How will I stand?*



*My soul is searching you,
To hug you like mad,
I won't leave you then,
Till my arms go red!*



He cried in front of that star. He smiled when he was tired of crying. He shouted and finally in the end, there was a sign of trust and satisfaction on his face.

He knew he could either consider it as darkness of the night or as the brightness of the day. It all depended on his choices and

perception. A new phase of life was awaiting him. A new day and a new beginning. A new story was waiting to be written.

There is nothing wrong with the valleys of sorrow. They are just like the phases of relaxation to regain the strength to move on.

He went back to his room and dialled Radhika's number to share this newly taken decision with her. They kept talking the whole night and finally he slept while talking to her. It gave him some relief and also encouragement to follow his decision.



February, 2011 Apollo Hospital, Delhi

"Radhika? Who is she?" asked Khushi interrupting Rachit in between.

Khushi's curious question brought him back to the hospital room. He was so engrossed in his own story that he had almost forgotten he was in a hospital, narrating his story to someone.

"Well, she was my girlfriend," Rachit answered.

"Was? What do you mean by that? What happened now?" she asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" Rachit replied, *not wanting to discuss more as this discussion was doing no help to him. It was making him look forlorn and nothing else.*

He felt hollow as he realised how bereft he was without Radhika. Absence sometimes makes you realise the importance of people but then it was too late for anything to be done that could possibly bring them back together.

"I am asking the reason, dude. And is it because of this breakup that you tried to commit suicide?" Khushi continued her inquisitiveness.

"Well, I will tell you when the right time will come to reveal it. Now, if you want to hear the story then let me tell it to you in sequence. Don't disrupt the flow else, I will stop here."

“Ok, *baba*, sorry! Please continue with your story. I can’t wait to hear it till the end,” Khushi said.

“Great then, I will resume,” with this Rachit took Khushi back into the story.



Rachit’s Home - 2nd December, 2007, 10am

“Your pleasant smile is back on your lips, my son; I think you have settled your mind at last,” Rachit’s dad said with a smile on his face.

“Yes, dad! I have taken my decision and that’s why I am happy.” Rachit was extremely confident with his decision.

“I knew that you will understand my position. Son, I have decided that you will join the crash course of JEE conducted by Super3 Tutorials at Meerut. They have the best Mathematics teacher in whole UP. Maths has always been your favourite subject. You can learn a lot from him and nobody knows, maybe this time, you will crack JEE with an even better rank,” Rachit’s dad added his inputs and tried to encourage him.

“No, dad! I guess that will not be required anymore...” Rachit interrupted with a deep sigh.

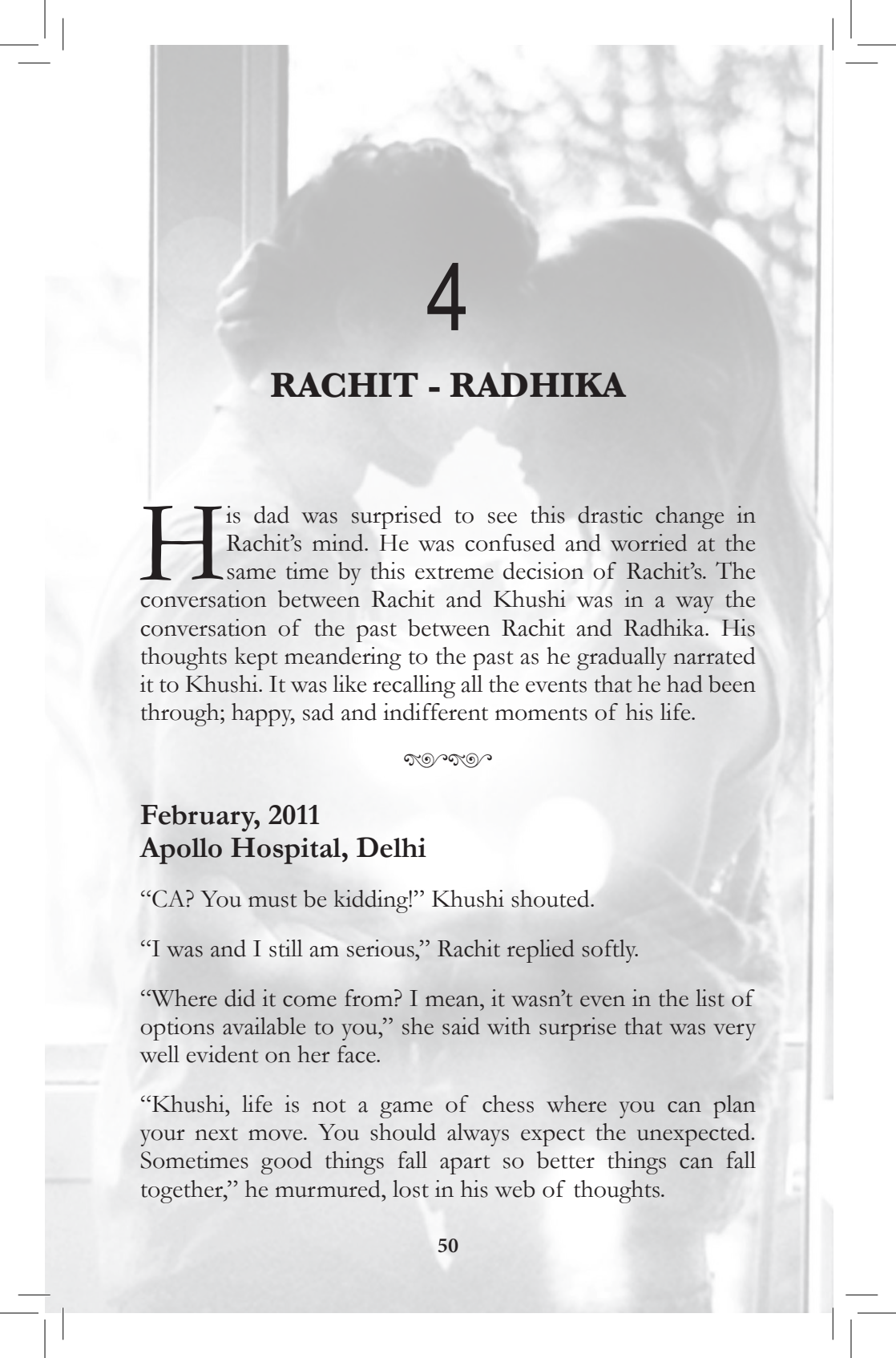
“Why, son? You have been out of touch for a while. It will help you recall your syllabus and strengthen your weak areas.”

“Dad... I will not be sitting for JEE-08 and AIEEE-08! In fact, I have decided to quit this line completely now,” he replied with a bit of calmness on his face.

“What? Are you mad? *Do you even know what you are saying? And if you won’t appear for JEE then what will you do?* He exclaimed in a state of shock. His brow creased with worry.

“I will do CA...”





4

RACHIT - RADHIKA

His dad was surprised to see this drastic change in Rachit's mind. He was confused and worried at the same time by this extreme decision of Rachit's. The conversation between Rachit and Khushi was in a way the conversation of the past between Rachit and Radhika. His thoughts kept meandering to the past as he gradually narrated it to Khushi. It was like recalling all the events that he had been through; happy, sad and indifferent moments of his life.



February, 2011
Apollo Hospital, Delhi

“CA? You must be kidding!” Khushi shouted.

“I was and I still am serious,” Rachit replied softly.

“Where did it come from? I mean, it wasn't even in the list of options available to you,” she said with surprise that was very well evident on her face.

“Khushi, life is not a game of chess where you can plan your next move. You should always expect the unexpected. Sometimes good things fall apart so better things can fall together,” he murmured, lost in his web of thoughts.

“I know destiny plans everything but at the same time, a man is the architect of his own fate. I am a little confused about the decision you took, but then yes, ‘luck’ and ‘love’ are the two magnificent forces, no reach over it,” giggled Khushi.

“Ok sorry, no more PJ’s. On a serious note, how did this thought of doing CA come to your mind all of a sudden?” Khushi questioned still very much surprised and waiting for Rachit to answer.

“Maybe you will find my reasoning a bit stupid but on the contrary, I was very calm and composed while taking this decision. I knew that this decision was going to change my life forever, yet I was not tensed.”

Rachit took a pause here and glanced at Khushi, who was listening to him with full attention.

He continued, “I was tired of living a mediocre life and being tagged as an ‘Above Average Student’ all the time. By clearing JEE-07, I broke this myth and for the first time, I got what I had always dreamt of. But this kidney ailment and clotting disorder shattered my dream of being an IITian. I needed to compromise by appearing in AIEEE-08 and settle for a college which was ranked lower in comparison to my present alumni, that too after wasting a year and going through the vicious circle of entrance tests and coaching institutes again. I almost felt like a bird whose wings had been cut...”

A silent tear slipped through one of his eyes which he immediately wiped off before Khushi could notice it.

“So you took this decision to satisfy your ego? Strange!” Khushi commented.

“Not ego! Satisfaction is the right word for it. Listen, there are three ‘I’s in our country which attracts people - IIT’s, IIM’s and IAS (Civil Services). I was leaving one, not eligible for other and not interested in doing the third one, with all due respect to all the IAS of our country.”

“Settling for an engineering college less than IIT was a compromise which I didn’t want to do. My paternal uncle is a CA and I have seen the respect he gets in our society. I slowly developed a firm belief that if CA is not more than IITian, then certainly not even less in comparison to that. Just pick up the newspaper and look at the matrimonial section of Sunday times, and you will observe only three professions dominating the prospective grooms section - B.Tech from IIT, PGDM from IIM and CA,” he said and winked at Khushi.

“Ha ha... Hey, by the way, this topic of marriage made me remember the ‘Not Yet Discussed’ topic of Radhika. Tell me something about her - Your first meeting, how you asked her out on the first date, how you proposed to her, did she say yes the first time, your first kiss, journey of your love and your break-up. I want to know each and everything that too, in detail,” she said excitedly in a teasing tone.

“Why are you always in such a hurry? I mean, I am here at least for a week. I will tell you everything, but slowly in parts and I have to listen to your story too, afterwards,” Rachit said while he tried to gain his composure.

“Maybe I won’t be there to listen to your story tomorrow,” Khushi said.

“Why? What do you want to say? Are you already bored?” Rachit questioned her.

“No, I mean I will get discharged tomorrow. And yeah, I don’t have an interesting story like yours. I was a born ‘geek’, who always dreamt of getting into IIT. I never had a boyfriend, mugged up all the equations, spent many sleepless nights while solving the questions from H.C. Verma, Hall & Knight and TMH series, and finally cracked JEE to get into IIT Delhi... that’s it!” she said with a smile on her face.

“Even I was born intelligent but education ruined me.” Rachit gave a mischievous smile.

His real nature, which he had tried hiding under a blanket for many years was finally coming at the surface with Khushi around.

“What was that?” Khushi smirked “At least be original”.

“Nothing but my first attempt at cracking PJ’s... I think it was bad!” Rachit tried to be casual as the story that he was telling her was too gloomy in itself. He wanted to keep the conversation light. He couldn’t afford to cry in front of her. It would hurt his male ego.

“Really? OK, so CA would have been a cake walk for you, Mr. IITian,” Khushi added with a spark in her eyes.

“I have noticed that it is the general tendency of people to underestimate another’s profession. They will feel the heat once they enrol for the same. No course is a cakewalk; it needs utmost dedication & devotion. Even I used to think that there is nothing tougher than cracking JEE, but CA proved me wrong.”

“What do you want to convey? Tell me in detail. I want to know more about your CA life and yeah, your love life too.” Khushi was acting impatient.

“Radhika was my first and last love. My CA life as well as my love life shares the same graph,” Rachit said.

Lost in those beautiful memories of love-life, Rachit whispered,

*“I was divided into two parts,
One was with her and the other with me”*

“Miss Radhika Banerjee, my sweet Bengali girlfriend was one of the hottest girls of my branch. My cousin was a third year student at IIT Madras, so I was very comfortable with my seniors. Our initial classes were scheduled to be held at the newly constructed hi-tech building which was adjacent to our IT Park, but about 2 km from our hostel mess (thanks to our vast campus, but a week later we were provided buses for the

conveyance). *We often used to joke that we have such a big campus which is spread out that even a college romance seems like a 'long distance relationship'.*

Khushi could finally notice a smile on Rachit's face which might have got lost due to his stressed CA life or failed romantic life or maybe the pain he had suffered till now and she was happy to see him comfortable and relaxed.

Rachit continued with naughtiness in his voice, "I skipped my introductory class as I was exploring the campus along with my cousin. During our lunch time instead of going to the hostel mess, I opted to have some snacks at our college canteen along with my cousin and other seniors. We were not expecting many fresher's to be there in the canteen that day as it was their first day in college and naturally, they were too scared of being ragged."

"Suddenly, I saw my *Shona* arguing with the owner of the canteen over the quality of cheese sandwich. I gave her a cursory glance at first from head to toe and then slowly that glance turned to staring. *Abbbb!* She looked amazing. I still remember that day, fresh in my memories, very clearly," Rachit paused as he recalled the day.

"Long, black, naturally shining hair, light brown large eyes (a pair of eyes to die for! Let me tell you that Bengali girls are blessed when it comes to eyes), pointy nose, model like eyebrows, *Demi Lovato* dimpled chin, rosy red lips, pretty addictive smile, good attitude (feisty not rude), oval face and thin waist. I know you will find it filmy but it was love at first sight for me. First love often comes unannounced, doesn't it?"

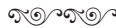
Radhika's love was indeed special to him. He loved her in his own unique way; their love was unsaid but not unfelt.

"Yeah, OK! Please continue now. I can't wait to hear further." Khushi replied.

“I suddenly felt the urge to know more about her. I asked my cousin to take her intro. She was a confident girl from the City of Joy. She was a day scholar who was living with her relatives in Chennai and her roll no. was immediately next to mine. I was bound to be attracted to her. She had that compulsive aura around her. You know, she was like a magnet to me and I could not resist her magnetism.”

“I can recall it for you in the form of a poem that I wrote that day in my diary. It was something like this -

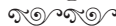
*“She said, she can’t colour me;
I said; I love simplicity!
She said, she can’t afford me;
I said, but I am for free!
She said I don’t have anything;
I said, you shall call me nothing!
She said, I don’t adore flowers;
I said, let the thorns shower!
She said, I am an evil;
I said - I adore devils!*



*She said, I shall destroy you;
I said that won’t help me betray you!
She said, I like you;
I said; it’s okay even if you do not do!
She said, I can’t be good enough;
I said - I am born tough!
She said, I am sounding crazy;
I said; my life is all hazy!*



*She said, I am here today and not tomorrow;
I said; I recognize today but sorry, what’s tomorrow?
She said I might hurt you!
I said, would be glad to get something from you!*



*She said, I have a heart made up of iron gadget,
I said won’t! Always wanted to tell you -
My heart is that of a ‘Magnet!’”*

“Yeah, *Rachit & Radhika*... you were made to be together. *Soul mate type*,” Khushi chuckled.

“Huh! I wish it was true,” Rachit sighed, engulfed by sadness yet again.

“Ok... okay... leave it for now and tell me how did you propose to her? Am sure you asked her out, right? So, Mr. Romeo, tell me how you did it? Were you nervous?” Khushi was excited.

“As I told you, her roll no. was next to mine. So, we shared our Physics and Chemistry lab sessions. I always had feelings for her but I was waiting for the right opportunity and finally it came in the form of the Maths Olympiad. I was selected from my branch along with three more groups and had *Ridz* (her nickname besides ‘*Shona*’) as my partner. I could not have asked for more. It was the moment I was wishing for,” Rachit smiled as he said this.

Then he continued, “Anyway, so the Maths Olympiad comprises of three levels - Written exam (as qualifier) followed by a Maths Dumb Charades game (the one like in ‘*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*’) as eliminator and Maths Quiz (just like ESPN School Quiz Olympiad) which decides the champion team.”

“Wow... that sounds interesting! I am damn sure that you won that Olympiad. Didn’t you?” Khushi asked.

“Yes and my love too... We were given three days to prepare for the Olympiad and we did that during our college time by skipping our lectures. It was fun! In those three days, I got to know her more closely; her likes and dislikes; her nature, the type of movies and music she liked and our common love for Mother Nature. She gave me her cell no. so that we could discuss more about the competition. But we used it more for chatting purpose and sweet dreams and morning messages,” Rachit said while giving a mischievous smile.

“Interesting! Tell me a bit more about the Olympiad, the first brick in the foundation of your love,” Khushi asked.

Maths Olympiad

Round 1

In total, there were twenty four teams. Rachit and Ridz had performed very well in the written test. In fact, they were in the Top-5. But the worst part of the competition was that the points don't carry forward to the next round, but only serve the purpose of eliminator.

Round 2

Now the contest was reduced to twelve teams only. Each team was given a three hour break before this round. Rachit and Radhika were busy preparing signals for dumb charades. It included some basic signals and some advanced gestures which were invented by them. Rules were simple. You have to help your partner to guess the name of a mathematician or a mathematical term with the help of gestures. The team which guesses it right within two minutes will qualify for the final round. In case of more than four winners, time will be the sole criteria. Six teams guessed the terms right, but Rachit's team took the minimum time. They were giving a tough time to their opponents. It was mainly due to the amazing chemistry between them. Everyone was praising their team effort.

Final Round

After a series of questions, the judges eliminated the two teams and now it was down to Rachit's team, who had to battle out with a very strong team from the Electrical department. It was very much like the 'Penalty Shoot' of a football or hockey match which is conducted in case of a tie to decide the winner. It was a livewire. They were asked five questions each, but both the teams answered all the questions correctly. Now the decision had to be taken by the tie-breaker.

It was all about performing in that single question and holding your nerves. Only one question was left and scores were tied.

Their hearts were beating very fast and suddenly the last question appeared in front of them.

$$1 = 1, 1 = \sqrt{1}$$

$$1 = \sqrt{(-1)(-1)}$$

$$1 = \sqrt{-1} \sqrt{-1}$$

$$1 = i \times i$$

$$1 = i^2$$

So, this proves $1 = -1$ (As $i^2 = -1$), so what's the catch?

Rachit immediately pressed the buzzer as this was their last chance to win the trophy. He closed his eyes for a while, thought about it a bit and said, "Sir, if any real number is squared, its square root is the absolute value of that real number so $\sqrt{(-1)^2} = |-1| = 1$, so the third step i.e. $\sqrt{(-1)(-1)} = \sqrt{-1} \sqrt{-1}$ was incorrect."

He was damn nervous while answering it. He must have read it somewhere in the R.D. Sharma/R.S. Aggarwal Mathematics for Class 11 in the chapter of Complex Number, but was not at all sure and said the first thing which came to his mind.

In the next second, he got a tight hug from Radhika... a long one indeed. He was taken aback by shock, but he loved it.



Apollo Hospital, Delhi (2011)

"That hug made me realize I had been incomplete without her till date and that moment onwards, I was feeling like a complete man. Her hug had that magical effect on me," expressed Rachit with a smile on his face!

"Wow! It must have been unbelievable?" Khushi asked curiously.

“Yes, it was. I came back to my hostel and got an SMS from Radhika congratulating me on our success.”

“Yes, we did it Rash (my nickname)... let’s celebrate tomorrow... How about going to the new Italian restaurant at Nungambakkam?”

“OK. But I have a condition. You have to spend a whole day with me and the treat will be from my side and there is a surprise for you too,” he replied.

“OK, but what’s the surprise?” Radhika asked.

“You will get to know tomorrow”, Rachit replied.

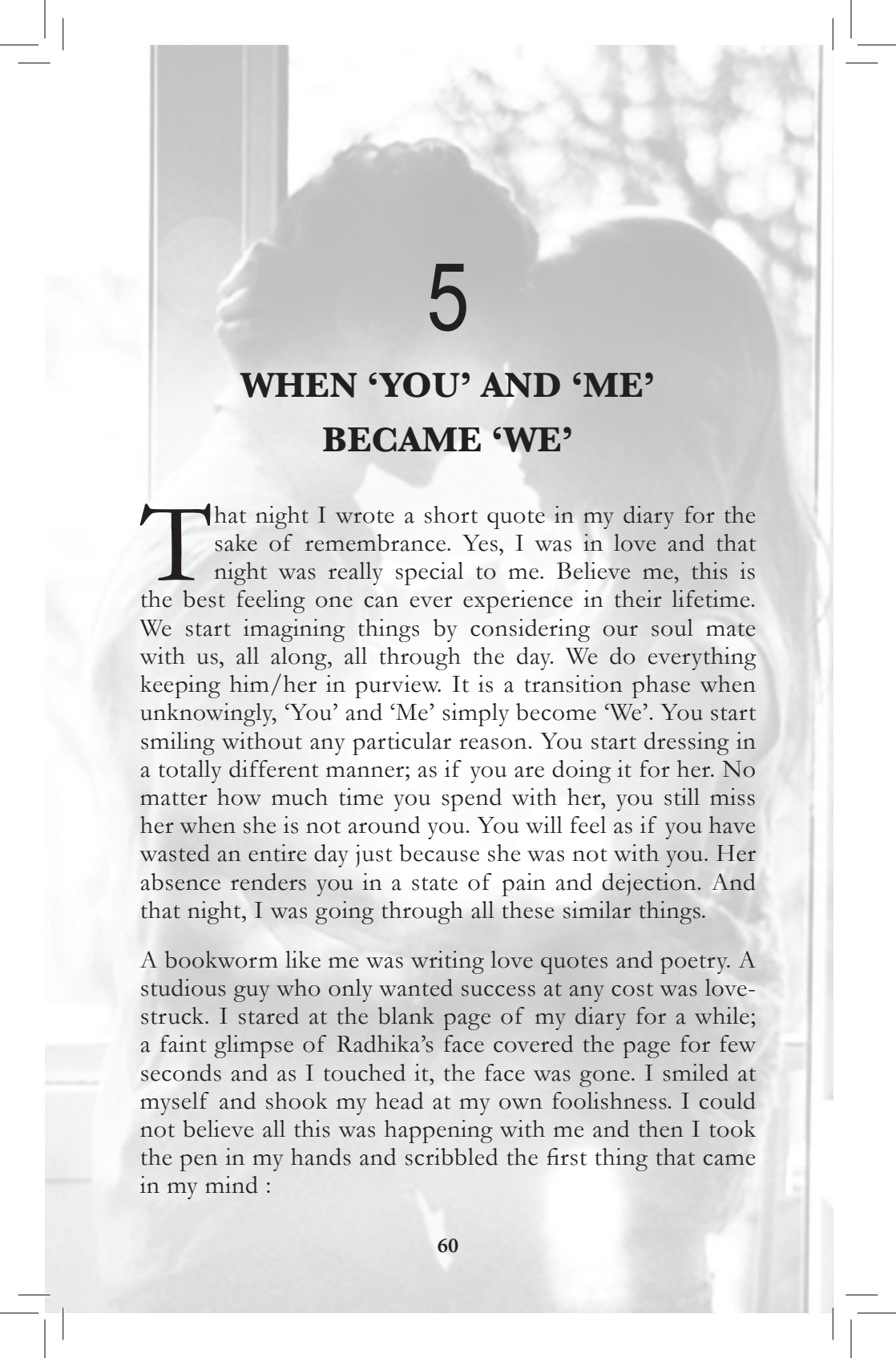
“OK... I’ll be waiting”, she texted.

“Me too...”

“What happened the next day? I can’t wait.” Khushi was being impatient.

“Yeah, yeah, am coming to it,” Rachit smiled while saying this.





5

WHEN 'YOU' AND 'ME' BECAME 'WE'

That night I wrote a short quote in my diary for the sake of remembrance. Yes, I was in love and that night was really special to me. Believe me, this is the best feeling one can ever experience in their lifetime. We start imagining things by considering our soul mate with us, all along, all through the day. We do everything keeping him/her in purview. It is a transition phase when unknowingly, 'You' and 'Me' simply become 'We'. You start smiling without any particular reason. You start dressing in a totally different manner; as if you are doing it for her. No matter how much time you spend with her, you still miss her when she is not around you. You will feel as if you have wasted an entire day just because she was not with you. Her absence renders you in a state of pain and dejection. And that night, I was going through all these similar things.

A bookworm like me was writing love quotes and poetry. A studious guy who only wanted success at any cost was love-struck. I stared at the blank page of my diary for a while; a faint glimpse of Radhika's face covered the page for few seconds and as I touched it, the face was gone. I smiled at myself and shook my head at my own foolishness. I could not believe all this was happening with me and then I took the pen in my hands and scribbled the first thing that came in my mind :

*The Moment I opened my heart and let you in,
I saw this great love starting to begin...
I could search my whole life through,
And never find another 'you'.*

Gradually as the night passed and more such lonely nights came and went by, I started scribbling crazy quotes on love just by thinking of that breath-taking hug, which changed my world forever :

*"I am sure I am in love,
With my blood, I feel her on my nerve!
Her looks that make me feel so complete,
If I don't hold her face, my heart starts to bleed!
Not only her soul, I wanna acquire her thoughts too,
She is my lover girl, only to whom I am so true!
I don't need to tell her how much I am keen,
If I am fed up of the ice, she gets me cream!
I find the seven wonders in her two loving eyes,
She makes me feel laughter in my loudest cries!
It feels like I am born to love her, and she is born to love me!
If anything comes in between then, it's only a love tree!
With just her hands in my hands, I get the power!
We just got to see each other & the love has to shower!"*



Spencer Plaza, Chennai (21st July, 2007), 12.10 pm

"What should I do to impress Radhika? I think I should make her laugh so that she will feel more comfortable with me. Oh, come on, she is my good friend. She is already comfortable with me. There is no point in pretending to be something that you are not. Girls hate pretentious people. I will try to be myself with her. Yes, girls like that. Yaar... I think I have gone crazy. This is not the first time we are meeting. Why am I thinking so much? If I keep on doing this, I will end up spoiling it. She is the same girl with whom I have spent about thirty odd hours

in the past three days (including our telephonic conversation and messages). And for God's sake, why the hell am I sweating in an AC mall! Oh wait! I should go and bring flowers for her at least. She will surely appreciate that." Rachit was in constant argument with himself. He was highly nervous about this particular meeting with Radhika.

We guys are always in a frenzy state when it comes to the first date. No matter how much time you have spent with your girl, you will always feel the nerves while proposing to her. We start dreaming about being dumped or all the possible reasons she won't dig us. There is a scene from '*Hum Tum*' (one of my favourite movies) which repeatedly keeps on playing in my head. 'Yes, I know that I love her but how can she love a guy like me?'

Yes, this was not the first time they were meeting, but this was officially their first outing. As per the last message exchanged between Rachit and Radhika, they were supposed to meet at Spencer Plaza at 12 pm where they would celebrate their success, which would be followed by a surprise which Rachit had already planned for her to make her feel more special. Rachit was trying to assure himself that he was confident but somewhere deep down in his heart; even he knew that it was going to be a big and tough day for him. He was continuously thinking about his clothes, the place where he should wait for her, what he should order for her, and all the numerous questions which would have been playing in the mind of any person who would have been in his place.

He hurriedly ran to the nearest florist and picked a bunch of red roses and returned to the meeting place. He looked at the main entrance of the mall and then checked his wallet and then glanced at his watch. This was the tenth time in the last five minutes that he was checking time. Girls have a habit of coming late, but they always want their man to be on time.

Then suddenly he heard someone calling out his name in the sweetest voice he had ever heard and he looked upwards to check it. And then, he kept looking at that person for a few

minutes without uttering a word. Yes, he was speechless; muted by the sight of the beautiful girl in front of his eyes. She had a soothing voice. He could hear his heart beating fast.

Angelic, gorgeous, delicate, precious, sweet, pure, lovely, enlightening, delightful and eccentric were all inadequate words to describe her beauty. She had never looked so beautiful before that day!! He didn't know whether it was the occasion or his feelings for her or her white *salwaar kameez*, which made the explanation of her looks beyond the depth of words that day. He fell in love with her all over again.

Her midnight black hair tumbled over her shoulders. With a cheerful, bubbly outlook, she had a figure to die for. Everything about her seemed just about perfect.

He kept looking at her beautiful eyes. Her eyelashes were velvety and she had slender eyebrows, well-shaped. His heart had never felt this way before. The reach of her arms, the stride of her steps, and the curl of her lips could make anyone fall for her. The fire in her eyes, the flash of her teeth, the swing of her waist and the joy in her feet made him fall in love with her all over again.

Her hair flowed in waves to adorn her glowing, porcelain-like skin. Her eyes, framed by long lashes, were a lovely shade of brown and seemed to brighten the world. A straight nose, full lips - she seemed the picture of perfection. Had she smiled, the world would sigh with contentment! Had she laughed, the world would laugh with her! And had she wept, the whole world would want to comfort her!

He had always seen her in western wear, but the *salwaar kameez* added a different kind of grace to her looks. Every movement of hers was driving him crazy. The curl of her hair, the click of her heels and the way she was looking at him made him freeze at his place.

"Where are you lost, my Lord?" Radhika passed a mischievous smile.

“Nowhere! By the way, you are looking stunning today. And yeah, before I forget, these flowers are for you,” Rachit replied while trying to hide his real feeling and taking a grip of the situation.

“Only today? I thought you always find me attractive and thanks a lot for these lovely flowers,” she winked and then finding Rachit’s face a little fallen, she added, “Hey, I am just kidding... So where are we going?”

“Well, it is totally your call. We will go as per your plan but will end it with my surprise. This will be a perfect balance for a perfect day ahead”, he said with a bit of hesitation.

“I love surprises. How about lasagne with chilled a ‘blue lagoon’ followed by a Hollywood flick?” Shona asked.

“That would be fabulous. Let’s watch Ratatouille. I have heard that it is a nice, animated comedy movie”, Rash answered.

“Ok, let’s go then...”

5 pm

“I really enjoyed today, Rash. Movie was fun and food was delicious. But I should leave now as it is already five,” Radhika said.

“But my surprise is still left.”

“Oh sorry, I totally forgot about that. So what is your surprise, Mr. Lover Boy?” Radhika said while giving a naughty smile.

“Ah... for that you have to come with me”.

“Come with you? Ok, but where?” She asked anxiously.

“*Arrey* you will the get the answers to all of your questions there. Just follow me, Ridz. Trust me, you will love it.”

“Well Ok, let’s see what you have got,” Radhika said while teasing him.

ECR Road

State Highway 49, also known as East Coast Road is a two lane highway in Tamil Nadu, built along the coast of the Bay of Bengal. After riding for about forty minutes (on his cousin's bike), they stopped at a secluded resort. He called someone and then asked Ridz to follow him.

“Rash, I am scared,” Radhika said with a bit of fear in her eyes.

“Don't you trust me? Five more minutes, just keep your eyes closed and hold my hands so that I can guide you to the surprise,” Rachit assured her.

“Can I open my eyes, Rash?”

“Yes, Ridz.”

“OMG.... This is out of the world, Rash,” Radhika said with her eyes wide open.

She was standing on the bay of the beautiful beach as the sun went down and watched the silent growth of another sea, which the stormy ocean of the wind could not disturb – the sea of the darkness. It was a time when the sun goes down in the horizon, drowning in an endless sea. The colours changed from red to orange with a mix of purple and indigo adding to the romance. This was the beginning of a new day in Rachit's life.

Rachit had always been close to nature. All the important decisions of his life have included one or other element of nature. He had always believed that not even a single luxury of this world could match the luxury of quality time spent with nature. God has a different way to communicate with man. He does it through nature. The chirping of birds, blowing of the wind, sound created due to flow of the river is nothing but his medium to communicate. But, it has music for those who listen. Rachit was one of those, and he had set the perfect atmosphere to propose to his ladylove.

“Rachit, thanks for bringing me here. All these malls, multiplexes etc. are nothing in comparison to the beauty of

nature. It brings us close to the real meaning of life. This was the best surprise one could ever get,” Radhika said with a sense of satisfaction on her face.

“The surprise is not yet over, Ridz. Just look behind you.”

She gave a sweet smile to Rachit and turned around. She saw an interesting décor of a beach hut with tables on the beach with a dim candle light and a guitar.

Rachit added his dialogue to capture her attention in the background. “You’re amazing, you’re beautiful, you’re kind, and you’re smart, you’re stunning, you’re breath-taking. In short, you’re just perfect and I think I’m in love with you.”

It did act as an icing on the cake. Girls love such praising words. They love to live a life of illusions. And Rachit wasn’t complaining as long as it was working. He just wanted to see Radhika happy.

“Today, I am your performer and you are my sole audience. This song is dedicated especially to you, Ridz.”

*Smile, an everlasting smile
A smile can bring you near to me
Don't ever let me find you gone
Cause that would bring a tear to me
This world has lost its glory
Let's start a brand new story
Now my love
You think that I don't even mean
A single word I say...
It's only words
And words are all I have...
To take your heart away!
Talk, in everlasting words
And dedicate them all, to me
And I will give you all my life
I'm here if you should call to me*

*You think that I don't even mean
A single word I say...*
(With the rhythm of guitar strings)



“I rehearsed this moment a million times since last night, but now I am falling short of words. I don’t know what to say! I have never been this nervous. Can I have my Maths Olympiad partner as my partner for all the competitions and challenges of life? I guarantee that we will have tough times together; I guarantee that, at some point, one or both of us will try to get out of that, but I also guarantee that if I never ask you to be mine, I’ll regret it for the rest of my life because deep in my heart; you are the only one for me! I really love you, *Shona*. And nothing can change this feeling dwelling inside me, my heart and my soul.”

A tear rolled down from her eyes. In the next moment, she hugged Rachit and he kissed away the tears from her eyes. She gave him a soft peck on his lips and then they cried together. She had said yes to him through her eyes. This is just possible in an unconditional love where a girl stands in front of a guy, asking him to love her. They had candle light dinner in that

beautiful ambience. And then they danced as the lyrics of the famous song played in the background to make the moment more cherished and add on to the romantic mood -

*Nothing's gonna change my love for you
You ought to know by now how much I love you
One thing you can be sure of
I'll never ask for more than your love...*

As the song ended, Radhika expressed her desire to leave as it was already very late. Rachit was still engrossed in the dance but had to agree.

He accompanied her to her relative's place. They both walked hand in hand, exchanging shy smiles. Rachit felt good with her; a sense of completeness gradually took place in his heart. As her destination neared, Rachit's smile began to fade a bit.

"Hey, my uncle's house has arrived. Thank you for today. It was indeed a wonderful evening," Radhika beamed at Rachit.

Rachit winked at her. Radhika gave him a questioning look.

"Haha... don't look at me like this. This evening was like a cake. Now, I have got an icing on the cake," Rachit pulled his collar in pride.

"OK, c'mon. What is it? Tell me?"

"Close your eyes," Rachit whispered in her ear.

Radhika closed her eyes and smiled sweetly. Her smile was intoxicating. Rachit wished the moment to freeze somehow. He placed a wrapped up gift in her hands and instructed her to open her eyes. Radhika opened her twinkling eyes.

She exclaimed, "Oh, my God! Rachit, this is indeed the icing on the already creamy cake. What's inside?"

"Why are all girls so impatient? C'mon Radhika, open it before you sleep tonight. And don't forget to buzz me, to tell me if

you like it or not. Now I have to go and thank you for coming today! You made my day beautiful.”

Rachit left silently.

Back in her room, Radhika opened the gift Rachit had given her with great excitement. It was a pendant. She loved it. There was a folded paper too along with that.

She sat on her bed beside the pillow to read the contents of the paper -

*“That one beautiful moment;
Is making my life aggressive;
That small wish to get you here;
Is making me more and more possessive!
There are no more wishes left, honey -
You have taken all, making me empty!
I close my eyes to see the dark;
Every time you appear like a magical spark!
How shall I get you here from my dreams?
Please find a way to reach me with the beams!
It’s like I am holding my heart day and night;
I swear if I leave it, it’s gonna take a flight!
A flight straightway to you,
Whether you accept or not,
It is foolish; it may continue loving you,
Whether you love back or not!”*

Radhika smiled reading this honest confession of Rachit’s heart.

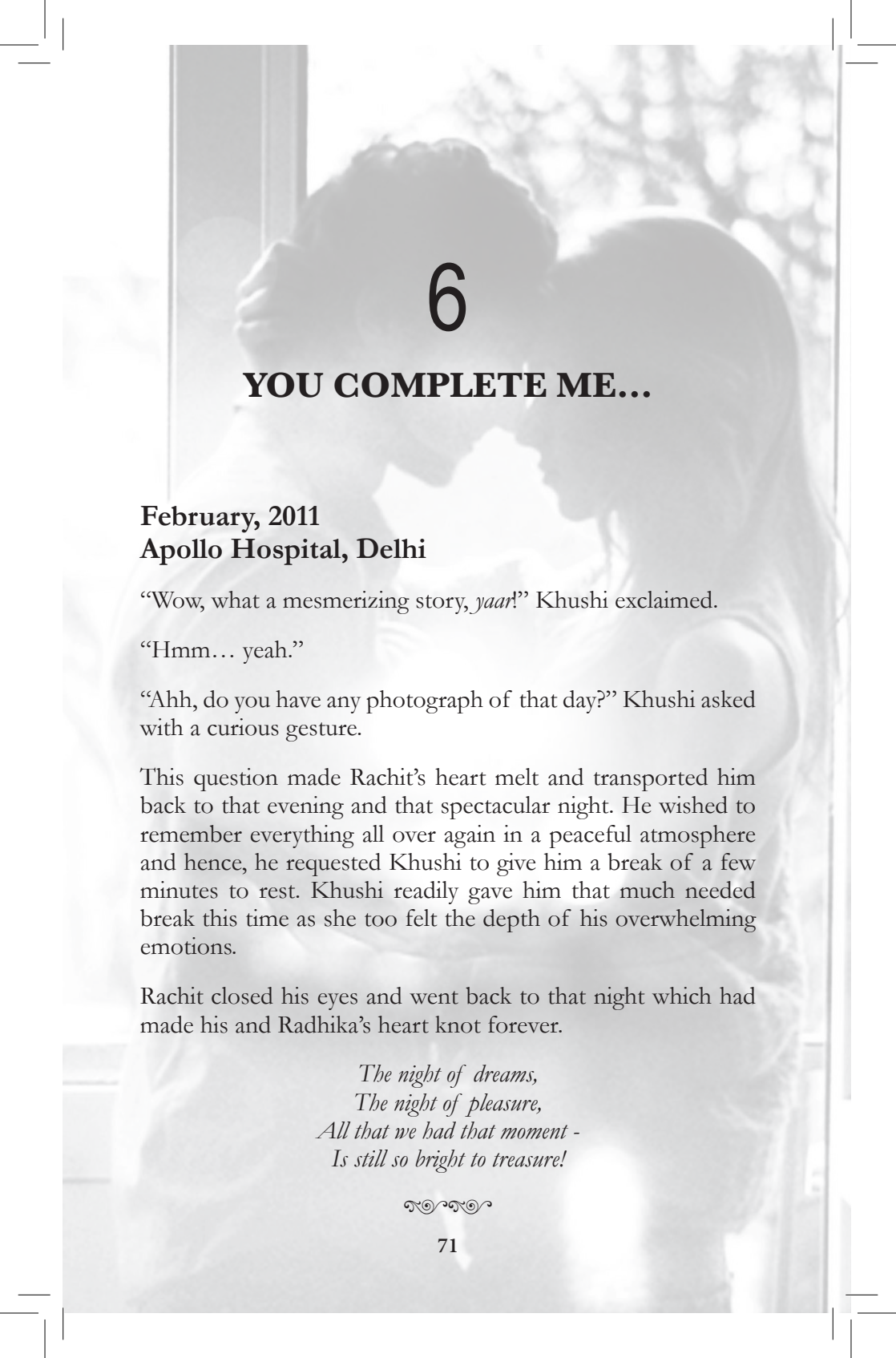
She immediately picked up her phone and started typing a message to Rachit.

“Hey, thank you for the day. It was mesmerising. The flowers, a surprise after the movie, lavish food. The stroll to my relative’s place, the whispering voice of yours, the gift... Yes, the pendant is gorgeous. Loved it! And last but not the least, the poem scribbled on the paper. Wow Rachit, I never knew a guy can be so expressive! Thank you. This was one of the best days of my life.”

Rachit was ecstatic on reading this message. Then in a jiffy he typed a reply to her.

"I loved the time spent with you. Your smile is out of the world. See ya then. Sleep well, Shona."



A romantic couple embracing in a window. The man is on the left, leaning towards the woman on the right. They are both looking down at each other. The background is a bright window with trees visible outside.

6

YOU COMPLETE ME...

February, 2011
Apollo Hospital, Delhi

“Wow, what a mesmerizing story, *yaar!*” Khushi exclaimed.

“Hmm... yeah.”

“Ahh, do you have any photograph of that day?” Khushi asked with a curious gesture.

This question made Rachit’s heart melt and transported him back to that evening and that spectacular night. He wished to remember everything all over again in a peaceful atmosphere and hence, he requested Khushi to give him a break of a few minutes to rest. Khushi readily gave him that much needed break this time as she too felt the depth of his overwhelming emotions.

Rachit closed his eyes and went back to that night which had made his and Radhika’s heart knot forever.

*The night of dreams,
The night of pleasure,
All that we had that moment -
Is still so bright to treasure!*



22nd July, 2007

Radhika's Home

Radhika was unable to sleep. She was completely lost in the memories of the day that had made her heart and soul come alive. Love is one of the most beautiful feelings to have and it becomes more endearing when it takes the form of a relationship. *And when the relationship is new, ifs and buts are few.* She picked up her phone and looked at the time, it was sharp 12.00 am. Without giving a second thought, she called Rachit with her unknown gesture of romance.

Midnight, Rachit's Hostel

Rachit's phone rang and he was surprised to see that his phone was flashing Radhika's name. His heartbeats increased immediately and with hands shivering, he picked up the call.

"Hello *Shona*, all well? What happened?" Rachit spoke all the things at once over the phone to Radhika without giving her time to say anything.

"I don't know, but I was getting an uncontrollable feeling to be with you. I really want some precious time with you, a time when it's just you and me," whispered Radhika in a soft, exquisite voice. When it comes to expressing love, girls are far ahead in comparison to guys. The best you can do then is to show her that she is the one for you. You are deeply, madly and crazily in love with her. For you, she is as precious as her own love for you.

"So, shall I come down to your house?" Rachit asked her playfully in a candid tone with his raised brow.

"Rachit.... Ummmmmm, actually, my heart is yelling with a yes," expressed Radhika with a sweet smile over her face.

"I am coming," said Rachit with a naughty grin.

Before Radhika could say anything more, Rachit disconnected the call.

Alone in her room, Radhika was feeling completely confused. She was left with no other choice as out of love; she had simply called Rachit and expressed her feelings sincerely. With lots of courage and guts, Radhika managed to move out of the door.

Well, intimacy is not only about being physical. It plays a major role in bringing you emotionally close to your partner. This also helps you understand him/her better. Trust plays a major role in intimacy. It is built up over a period of time with the strong foundation of love and relationship. Emotional intimacy is an important ingredient for a long, ever lasting relationship. Such things cannot be planned. They happen spontaneously.

In a hurry, she forgot her cell phone in her room and she was eagerly waiting for her love.

Rachit however, after managing to move out, dialled Radhika's number to let her know that he was very near her and might reach anytime.

Both of them had no conversation or contact after the last phone call and hence the curiosity between both the lovers was about to blast.

Just beside the main gate, covered with a beautiful white shawl, Radhika was lost in some silly thoughts and was waiting for Rachit with a smile on her face. That night even the moon was waiting to see the crawling romance between Radhika and Rachit.

From a distance, Rachit noticed someone outside, but he was unable to recognize Radhika as she had covered herself in a white shawl. He came nearer and recognized Radhika.

12.20 am

Rachit grabbed Radhika from her waist and whispered in her ears, "At your service mam!"

Radhika was unable to escape from the tight hug. She blushed and her face was turning red.

Rachit had borrowed his senior's car for this late night date. It was going to be a perfect date where two lovers were destined to mingle.

"Shall I open the car door for you?" asked Rachit in a polite way.

"I guess we should move away from here as soon as possible," replied Radhika.

There is a saying that when your girlfriend wants to spend more and more time with you, understand she is in love with you. Taking her for a long drive at night with stars all over your head is the best way to evoke some more feelings in her mind. Although this date was spontaneous, Rachit made sure that he had got one of the best cars with personalized music CDs of romantic numbers.

Rachit pushed the key in, ignited the engine and they left for a romantic drive.

"Now after missing me so much, are you gonna sit so far the whole way?" questioned Rachit in a mischievous tone.

Hearing this, Radhika slowly moved her hand to the gear, where Rachit's hand was placed. The softness and touch of love was clearly visible.

"I have never seen such a beautiful night in my life," whispered Radhika in a sweet, cheerful voice.

Rachit stopped the car on the side and asked Radhika to lean on his shoulder.

"I want to feel your breath. Please come a little closer," said Rachit.

"I am feeling thousands of butterflies in my stomach," murmured Radhika in an innocent way.

The moving vehicles on the highway were giving perfect

shadow lights to both of them and it was making them more expressive and charming.

Rachit held Radhika from her waist and leaned his face towards her to sense her breath. Radhika was trying to hide her face by moving her hands, but Rachit was going crazy.

Both of them were so near that they could hear each other's heartbeats. Before they could keep themselves in check, that romantic flow overflowed.

"I wanna eat your lips as they seem like my favourite strawberries," he whispered in her ears.

"I am feeling extremely shy and nervous, Rachit. Please hug me tightly," Radhika replied with tears in her eyes.

Holding her face, Rachit started sucking her pink lips and they continued smooching for a few more minutes. The silence inside the car was making their kissing sound more audible. Though with time people have found out many places to kiss, kissing during a drive-out inside a car is still the most romantic thing to do. You are basically following the foot-prints of your seniors and experienced people. It is as if you are doing what your friends, your ancestors and most people have been doing since ages.

Radhika was turning red with goose bumps all over her body whereas Rachit was feeling extremely high.

Suddenly the noise of a passing by vehicle made them realize, they were on a highway.

"That was beautiful," said Rachit in a sneaky way. Radhika blushed.

"So, shall we try one more time?" he asked with a romantic look.

Radhika held his face and wet her lips with his lips; she tried to kiss Rachit as he did and that made the romance more deep and crazy.

Unable to shift from the tight posture, Radhika whispered, “I am unable to move, I am stuck in your arms, Rachit.”

“That’s where you have to spend the rest of your life,” said Rachit.

Radhika shifted to Rachit’s seat swiftly. Rachit slowly bit her ears and cuddled her close to him. Radhika managed to forget her shyness and reciprocated her feelings by kissing Rachit passionately.

Radhika gazed into Rachit’s eyes for all the answers to the questions that were coming up in her mind. Questions like – “What will their future be?” “Was this love or mere infatuation?” “What if Rachit left her?” “Was this kissing the right thing to do?” “Was it too early?”

Radhika saw the love Rachit had for her in his eyes. Satisfied, she held his face in her hands and kissed him again. This time, the kiss was light, soft and the feelings were more prominent.

Their love was flawless. It was both: calm and wild; pure and tainted.

1.15 am National Highway

Suddenly, Radhika and Rachit heard the whistle of a cop and soon after that, both of them tried to check if someone was around their car, keeping an eye on them.

Rachit and Radhika held their breath as both of them were experiencing a midnight car romance for the first time. Luckily, the cops didn’t get out of their van as they were patrolling around for some other reasons.

Before wasting a minute, Radhika went back to her seat and Rachit wore the seat belt and started the car to head back.

Rachit loved music and hence, he played a romantic track diverting Radhika’s attention from the cop-incident. Radhika

closed her eyes and calmed down while Rachit kept looking at her as he drove the car towards Radhika's place.

The cold breeze was making Radhika's hair fly beautifully in the air and that reminded Rachit of a dramatic scene from one of his favourite movies where the actor tries to comfort the actress by moving the falling hair that falls on her face due to blowing wind.

Coming back to his senses as a dark yellow light flashed on his eyes from the front side of the road, Rachit immediately stamped on the brakes which made Radhika snap out of her relaxing state.

She asked with fear in her voice, "What went wrong, *Mishti*? Is everything OK? Why did you apply the brake so abruptly?"

"Oh yes, I was simply lost in you and suddenly I realized I was driving a car," Rachit replied innocently.

"I am sorry. I was resting for a while, trying to calm down," Radhika said while keeping her hand in his hand.

"It's completely all right, *Shona*. I enjoyed gazing at you and your beautiful blowing hair," replied Rachit caressing Radhika's hair.

"By the way, what's the time?" interrupted Radhika with her raised eyebrows.

"Ah! Wait a moment, I have forgotten my watch. Let me take out my cell phone and check," replied Rachit.

"Oh shit, I forgot my cell phone at home," said Radhika in a worried tone.

Rachit straight away replied, "Yes, I guessed the same while I was calling you after reaching your place." He further added, "It's 2.00 am!"

Radhika replied, "I guess we should move back now before someone at my home notices my absence."

"Yes, definitely I will drop you safe, but not so early," said Rachit holding her waist.

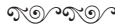
"You wanna romance again in the middle of the road?" she asked in a dramatic voice.

"Any doubt?" asked Rachit getting closer.

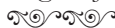
Holding her from the waist, Rachit started kissing her all over her face and shoulder.

Literally getting wet by his lips, Radhika held him hard and pulled him towards her.

*Getting wet with his lips,
She tried to tighten the grip -
And in no time,
Both their hands were getting flipped!
The romance was turning wild,
The ugly was turning beautiful -
In the name of love -
The taste tasted as fruitful!*

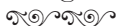


*Wetting his lower lip,
She flipped her upper lip -
In this wet game of love,
They loved to dip!
Now they are not far,
Now they are just near -
Forgetting everything else,
Losing the fear!*



*The feel was going intense,
The romance was making sense -
Yes they were in love,
& it made everything enhance!*

*Abh! The noise of kissing was going wild,
The touch and hold were no more mild -
She sat on his lap grabbing his thigh -
Their love was booming like a growing child!*



Some ten minutes later, both of them opened their eyes and love could be witnessed easily. Radhika calmed down and took a deep breath. Rachit went out of the car to see whether someone was around them.

He got back to the car and said, “Nothing to worry, all fine.”

“That’s all right, but we should leave now,” said Radhika.

Rachit’s face turned sad listening to this. She added, “We are meeting tomorrow morning anyhow after college hours.”

“Indeed, but right now I don’t want to leave you,” Rachit spoke up confidently.

“Even I am not willing to leave you for a second but we have no other choice,” explained Radhika.

Radhika tried to cheer up Rachit by giving a sweet hug and finally they started moving back home.

Rachit said, “Radhika, this was one of the most beautiful nights I have ever experienced, and I wish to capture a moment of it, if you allow me.”

“I will never deny you anything, you know that,” said Radhika in a sweet tone.

“That’s like my girl,” he said pulling her sweet, plump cheeks. Radhika’s house was almost there and they stopped the car on the side finally to bid adieu.

Before Radhika could cover her shawl and wear her sandals, Rachit tightly grabbed her and asked her to feel his heartbeat once more.

Once again, both of them got lost in the heavenly hug that meant everything to them.

They captured their moments in Rachit's cell phone by taking a sweet picture.

Radhika got tears in her eyes as she was finally with the man of her dreams. Later she expressed to him with love, "we have exchanged our breaths, I will live within you and you will live within me from now on."

Rachit screamed out, "I love you Radhika! Radhika I love you, my *Shona*... Love you a lot."

Radhika put her hand on his mouth and begged him to be silent. Rachit bit her palm gently.

3.40 am

Now it was getting tough for both of them to part.

Radhika sweetly kissed on his cheeks and said, "Bye Rachit, love you loads."

Rachit kissed her on the forehead and said, "Take care." He added, "Please message me after going back to your room and confirm that everything is alright."

"Sure, now I am finally getting out of the car. You leave once I get down." she said consoling Rachit.

"No way! I shall leave only when I get your message," Rachit immediately replied.

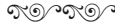
"You are really stubborn, Rachit," she said in anger.

Radhika finally got out of the car and moved towards the gate of her house. Rachit kept gazing at her...

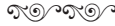
*Cherishing last few moments - he finally dropped out,
She just went out, and his heart began to shout...!
Screaming out loud with her name in neat,
His heart was now stopping her walking feet!*



*Anyhow she managed to walk few steps ahead...
& just at the moment the horn of the car rang mad!
Before she could guess, what was next
He came out of the car at his best!*



*Grabbing her in his arms, he gave life to her love!
Holding her tight from the arms, she was fixed in his curve...!
Ah! The hug was the best making both mad...
Looking at their cravings, even the moon would have shed!*



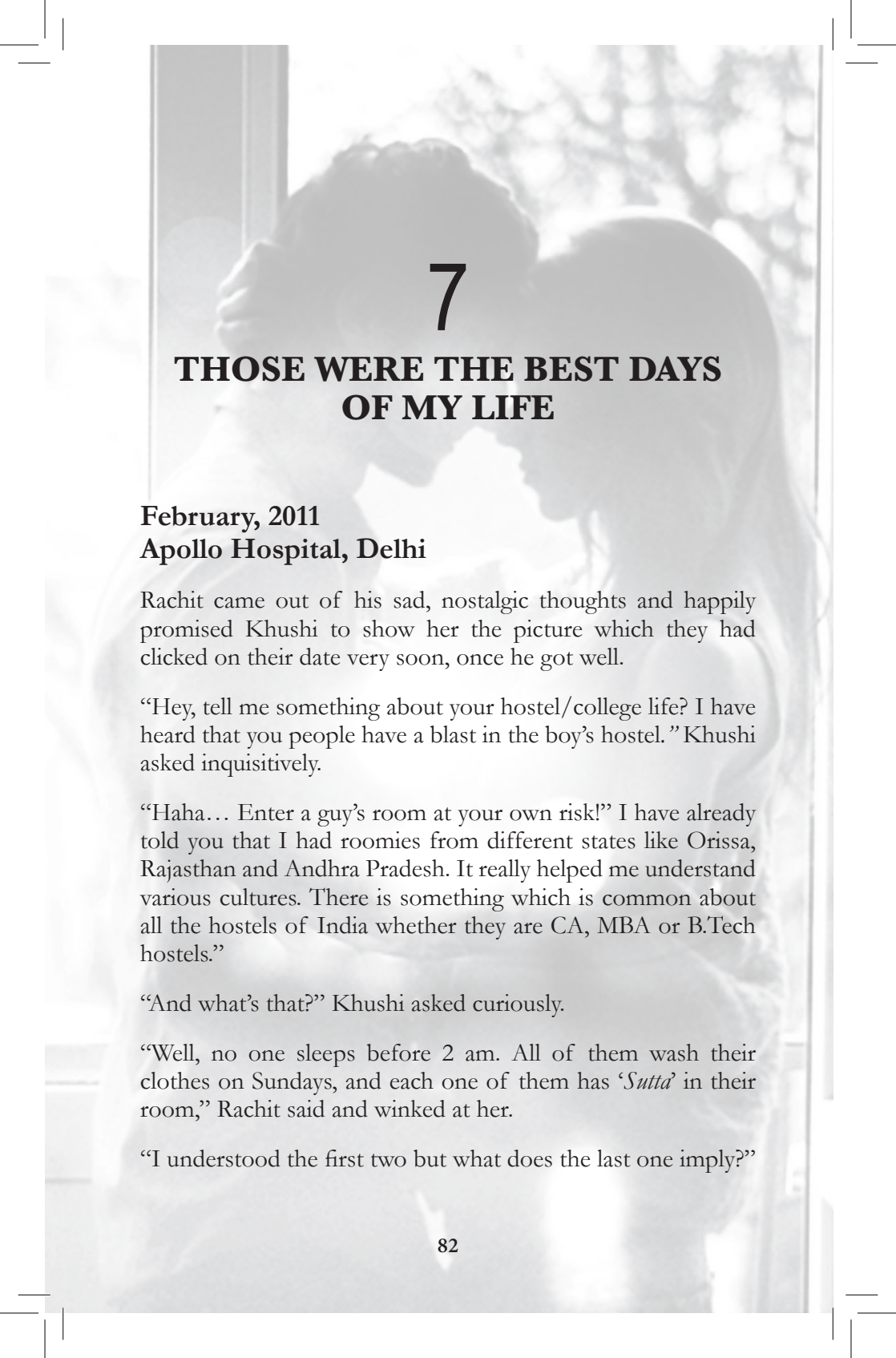
Few minutes later, Radhika's home: 4.00 am

Radhika got inside her house via her balcony, took her cell phone in hand and unlocked it to message Rachit that she had safely reached her place.

Rachit's hostel, 4.20 am

Rachit sent a message to Radhika informing that he too had reached safely. Gazing at their pic taken inside the car, Rachit finally fell asleep.





7

THOSE WERE THE BEST DAYS OF MY LIFE

February, 2011
Apollo Hospital, Delhi

Rachit came out of his sad, nostalgic thoughts and happily promised Khushi to show her the picture which they had clicked on their date very soon, once he got well.

“Hey, tell me something about your hostel/college life? I have heard that you people have a blast in the boy’s hostel.” Khushi asked inquisitively.

“Haha... Enter a guy’s room at your own risk!” I have already told you that I had roomies from different states like Orissa, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. It really helped me understand various cultures. There is something which is common about all the hostels of India whether they are CA, MBA or B.Tech hostels.”

“And what’s that?” Khushi asked curiously.

“Well, no one sleeps before 2 am. All of them wash their clothes on Sundays, and each one of them has ‘*Sutta*’ in their room,” Rachit said and winked at her.

“I understood the first two but what does the last one imply?”

“It’s a very popular song and the complete album of that singer was very famous during my college days i.e. 2007.”

“OK... But, how come I have never heard this song in my life? When was it released?” Khushi asked with a bit of ignorance.

“Such kinds of songs are never released. They are simply meant to be downloaded and then transferred from one mobile to the other through Bluetooth and Infrared,” Rachit told her with an air of pride. Being a ‘Leo,’ pride came naturally to him.

“Huh. Alright tell me the lyrics of this song. Maybe I will recognize it after that.”

“I will answer every question of yours, but please don’t ask me to tell the lyrics of ‘*Sutta*,” Rachit said with the obvious expressions of discomfort on his face.

“Hmm... Leave it. So tell me more about your group.”

“I was very popular among my friends and we had a very large group. Initially, I was not very comfortable with South Indians, but with time we used to hang out together.”

“I was very close to Sandeep (Sandy), Raj Marwari and Jay Ghosh.”

“Tell me about them.”

“Raj was my roommate and a no. 1 miser. Whenever we used to go out for dinner, he was the first person to order and when it was time to pay the bill, it was impossible to catch him.”

“Why?” Khushi asked surprised.

“He was the one who was always ready with excuses. Either he was on a loo break or he used the most famous dialogue, ‘*Sorry, I forgot to bring my wallet*’. Sometimes we used to wonder whether he even had a pocket or not! We used to bet that if anyone can take money out of Raj’s pocket, we will sponsor the monthly canteen bill of the winner.”

“Lol,” with this Khushi burst into laughter.

“Yeah, there is a saying that Marwaris are very good businessmen. In fact, they along with Gujaratis are born MBAs. There was a famous Marwari joke at that time with which we often used to pull Raj’s leg.”

A Marwari went to God, standing between hell and heaven.

God: Where should I put you and why?

After a glance he says, ‘Ye jo dono ke beech ki jagah hai na, ispe ek dukan karva ke de dyo (Just give me a shop in the space between these two places).

“Stop it, Rachit. Even I am a *baniya* (Gupta). So, stop cracking jokes on misers,” Khushi said in an irritated voice.

“So what? Even I am a *baniya* (Aggarwal). There is nothing better than cracking jokes on your own self. Leave it... Let’s move on to my second friend i.e. Jay. Jay was a cool guy as most Bengalis are. He never used to take tension. He had a very jolly nature, but a bad quality too. He was a chain smoker.”

“Ohh! I hate smokers,” Khushi said in a stern voice.

“So do I, but his positive aspects used to cover up his bad quality. Although his surname was ‘Ghosh’, we used to call him ‘*Ghost*’.”

“It’s bad to make fun of someone’s surname, Mr. Rachit,” Khushi said angrily.

“*Arrey*, it had nothing to do with his surname, but he was called so because of his habits. He was the last person to sleep in our hostel. In fact, it was very famous in the whole of IIT that ‘*Jay is a man who doesn’t sleep*’. You could always see him with a cigarette in one hand and mobile in another, talking to his Bengali girlfriend. This is one of the biggest demerits of LDR - Long Distance Relationship.”

“Don’t tell me! Theoretically speaking even you were in an LDR with Radhika after you left IIT. How did you manage to do that along with your Articleship and classes?” Khushi questioned.

“You could have used a better word for the same. I mean instead of leaving IIT; you can also say joined CA. It hurts... And yeah, be patient. I will tell you everything in detail but at the right time. Otherwise, it will disrupt the flow of the story,” Rachit said in an irritated tone.

“Sorry”

“It’s OK. So, I was telling you about Jay. I mean, surprise tests, quizzes, sessional were the things which don’t let us sleep, but in his case it was a beautiful *Bongo*.”

“In our later days, we became besties due to our common taste i.e. Bengali girls. He even helped me learn some cheesy Bengali lines to impress Radhika. But unfortunately, I lacked in the accent.”

“Haha! By the way, you haven’t told me anything about Sandeep!”

“Sandeep or Sandy for me was one of the most ambitious guys of our group. He was a typical Bihari i.e. highly passionate in anything he does. He was an inborn leader and he wanted to prepare for Civil Services. He had a strong personality. He had the ability to strongly put his point forward. Because of the same reason, we selected him as the CR (Class Representative) of our section. He was the life of our *Chai-Sutta* sessions. Apart from them, we also had Sid (Orissa), Teja (A.P.), Pratyush (M.P.) and Ram Kumar (Tamil Nadu) as an integral part of our group.”

“And what’s *Chai-Sutta* Session?”

“Well, after a long tiring day at college, our group used to sit together and have fun along with *chai*, *mathri* and cigarettes.”

“Oh! You mean gossip. We girls are quite good at it,” Khushi said and winked.

“I know, but we people never used to gossip. We used to talk instead and moreover, it was done only to update ourselves,” Rachit tried to explain his point.

“Update about what?”

“About the new chicks, movies, politics, teachers, short-cuts to score well in the sessional etc. It was a stress-buster for us.”

“Ahaan”

“Yeah, this is the second thing I missed a lot besides Radhika, after joining CA. **Those were the best days of my life...**” with this Rachit got lost into his past.

IIT Madras, 8th August, 2007

Chai-Sutta Session

“Where were you, man? You didn’t even attend the morning lecture of Subbu Sir?” Sandy asked Jay.

“Ghosh *babu* must be busy with his Bengali chick,” Sid said in a teasing tone while dipping his rusk in tea.

“How many times do I have to tell you, Sid, that her name is Swagnikaa and for you – ‘*Boudi*’ (*Bhabhi*)!” Jay said angrily while smoking out the perfect puff. “By the way, I had gone to war.”

“What?” The whole *Sutta* group shouted in shock.

“*Arrey...* I mean I was booking my train tickets to Kolkata”.

“Dude, our session will end in December and dates haven’t been finalized yet. Then why the hell have you booked them in August?” Pratyush asked surprised.

“Well, I don’t have any faith in IRCTC. I have booked three tickets with a difference of seven days each. When the dates

will be out, I will cancel the rest of the two,” He replied with pride.

“Awesome, man! What about you, Raj?” Rachit asked.

“I will book them two days before my departure in *tatkal*.”

“*Tatkal*... you must be crazy! Getting your tickets booked in *Tatkal-quota* is nothing less than clearing JEE,” Rachit replied and the whole group burst into laughter.

“By the way, where were you yesterday, Mr. Rachit?” asked Ram Kumar.

“You people don’t know?” Sid said mockingly. “Yesterday was the birthday of our lover boy and instead of spending time with us, he went out with Radhika.”

“What? You rascal... you are finished, man. You owe us a party,” Raj said angrily.

“Look who is talking! Raj, I doubt you have ever thrown a birthday bash!” Rachit replied in a teasing tone and the whole group laughed again.

“It doesn’t matter. We demand a party and you are taking our whole group of eighteen people for *Chak De! India* on 10th August, 2007,” Raj said “And yeah, no girls allowed... It will be a boy thing. We will have a booze session at Marina Beach.”

“Hey, I have got a better idea. Let’s go for *Sivaji*. It features our superstar, Rajinikanth Sir. We can check out the girls from Loyola after that or we can also go to *Sarvanna*,” Ram Kumar said with a spark in his eyes.

“Bad idea! I mean, Ram Kumar, do you want to set the world record for watching *Sivaji* for the maximum number of times? It got released on 15th June and you have already seen it more than fifteen times. And how come Rajini Sir is your superstar?

He was born in Bangalore and featured in Kannada stage plays, so he is our hero,” Teja protested.

“So what? His first movie was a Tamil movie - *Apoorva Raagangal* - starring Kamal Haasan and directed by K. Balachander. So he is a Tamilian and currently he resides in Chennai. He is our hero,” Ram Kumar replied.

“Ram, do you have the habit to counter all my statements just to prove me wrong?” Teja replied.

“Teja.”

“Ram.”

“Teja....”

“*Ye Teja Teja kya hai... ye Teja Teja,*” Jay said to lighten up the mood. “*Teja ye hai... mark idhar hai.*”

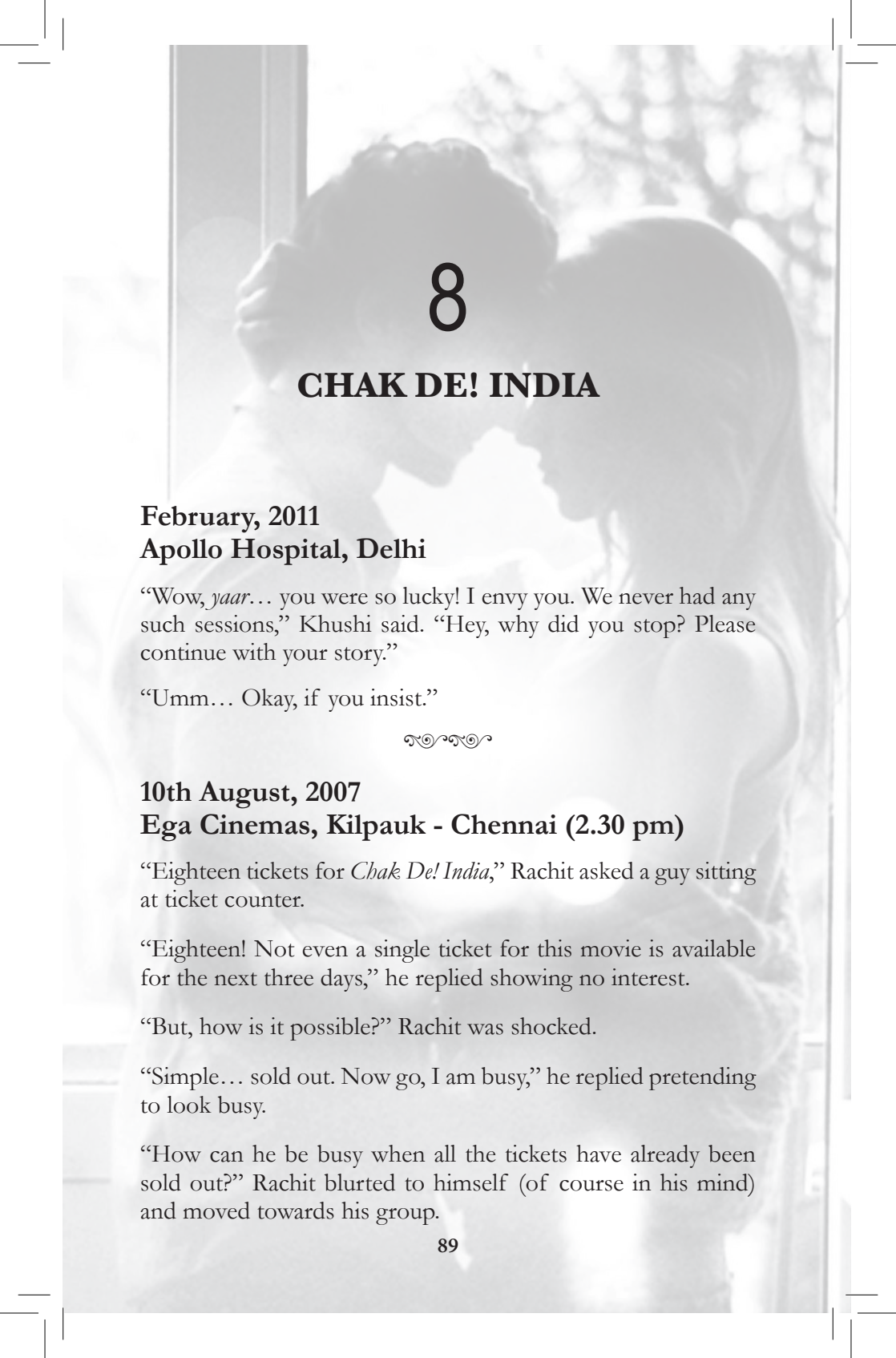
“Jay, just shut up. We know that you are a big fan of *Andaz Apna Apna*. But this is not the right time to crack jokes,” Teja said angrily.

“Why do you people take life so seriously? Just chill guys! For your kind information, Rajini Sir was born in a Maharashtrian family and his original name was Shivaji Rao Gaikwad, so technically speaking, he was a Maharashtrian. So, it would be better if you stop your Tamil - Andhra war here because his stature is much above states. He is the gem of our country and all of us are proud of him. And for now stop spoiling our *Sutta* session and we are settling for *Chak De*. Ok, Rachit?” Jay tried to restore peace.

“Done. *Chak De! India*. First day 2nd Show followed by a booze session. Are you guys ok with it?”

“Yes,” the whole group shouted in agreement.





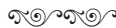
8

CHAK DE! INDIA

February, 2011
Apollo Hospital, Delhi

“Wow, *yaar*... you were so lucky! I envy you. We never had any such sessions,” Khushi said. “Hey, why did you stop? Please continue with your story.”

“Umm... Okay, if you insist.”



10th August, 2007
Ega Cinemas, Kilpauk - Chennai (2.30 pm)

“Eighteen tickets for *Chak De! India*,” Rachit asked a guy sitting at ticket counter.

“Eighteen! Not even a single ticket for this movie is available for the next three days,” he replied showing no interest.

“But, how is it possible?” Rachit was shocked.

“Simple... sold out. Now go, I am busy,” he replied pretending to look busy.

“How can he be busy when all the tickets have already been sold out?” Rachit blurted to himself (of course in his mind) and moved towards his group.

“Sorry, folks... sold out.”

“Shit, man... *apna toh saala bad luck hi kharab hai*,” Raj said disappointed.

“Don’t worry... We will watch it some other day,” Rachit tried to console the group.

With this, the whole group proceeded towards the exit of Ega, but suddenly someone’s hard and loud voice caught their attention.

“*Chak De... Chak De... Chak De... 100 for Stall and 150 for Balcony.*”

A fat lady was yelling this to the best of her potential. She had long, neatly oiled hair that actually had more coconut oil than in an entire bottle of Parachute. She was wearing a lot of jewellery the combined weight of which would be more than the WWE Championship Belt of Undertaker or Brock Lesnar. We always wondered how a woman in South India could safely travel in their locals wearing so much jewellery! Only *Bappi Da* could give them competition in terms of gold.

Another interesting fact was about selling movie tickets in black. It was also a practice in North India. You could easily find some guys selling tickets in black in *Daryaganj* area in Delhi around Delite Cinemas, but such an act by a woman came as a surprise to them. Everyone was shocked and didn’t know how to proceed. They unanimously agreed that Raj Marwari would negotiate with that lady for eighteen tickets for the 3 pm show. He was a champion when it came to bargaining and used to enjoy that job.

He moved towards her and said, “*Amma*, Chak De... how much?”

“Haven’t you heard me? 100 for Stall, 150 for Balcony,” she roared in fury.

“That is for one ticket, *na*... I mean, what about eighteen tickets?”

“1800 for Stall and 2700 for Balcony... simple Maths... idiot!”

Now everyone was enjoying their bargaining. It was quite an insult for an IITian, especially a Marwari. A guy who had spent two years of sleepless nights while solving questions from S.L. Loney, Hall & Knight and M.L. Khanna was just given a lecture about basic mathematics by a lady who was not even a 10th Pass.

“*Arrey*, tell me the discount which you will give in return for eighteen tickets?” Raj said in an irritated voice.

“You want a commission? So you can also sell tickets in black? You want them at a low price so that you can sell them at a higher price. You want to steal my business? I had a doubt when you asked for eighteen tickets. But now you have confirmed it. Wait; let me teach you a lesson. *Anna*, come here”. With this, that lady started shouting and calling out some names.

“*Arrey*, you are misunderstanding me,” Raj replied nervously, “I am a student”.

“So you are doing it for earning some pocket money,” she replied with great annoyance.

“Nope. I am here with my group of seventeen people. Rachit, Sid, Ram, Teja... what the hell are you guys doing there? Come here and help clear her misunderstanding before she asks her *Anna* to beat me up till I’m blue.”

Then Rachit along with his group took control of the situation and also got the discount of 300 bucks. Now they were the proud owners of eighteen tickets by paying 1500 bucks. They had occupied their seats ten minutes before the starting time and coincidentally Ram Kumar and Teja were sitting adjacent to each other. Rachit was quite surprised to see so many South Indians watching a Bollywood movie.

“*Yaar*, if your parents have named you Raj and you are asking for the ticket of an SRK movie, that doesn’t mean that girls will consider you to be Shahrukh and get impressed. Forget about girls, you even failed to impress the aunty out there,” Sid said to Raj to pull his leg.

“Just shut up and let me concentrate on the movie, Sid,” Raj replied and gave a scowl while he was still in shock about the previous incident.

And then began our film with the whistles and clapping all around. Every scene and dialogue of the movie was a masterpiece. But then a dialogue followed which made the whole group burst into laughter.

Name?

Netra Reddy

Are you Tamilian?

Nope, Telegu.

Ya ya, same to same... what’s the difference between the two of them?

Difference between a Tamil and Telugu is same as between a Punjabi and Bihari...

Everyone was laughing their heads off and Ram Kumar and Teja were looking towards each other expressionless. It was a tailor made dialogue for their situation. The film ended with the Indian Women’s field Hockey team defeating World Champions Australia in a nail biting Penalty Shootout game. This climax charged them up and they were ready to have a perfect finish to their day.

Marina Beach, Chennai (7.00 pm)

A friend of Ram Kumar’s, who was not with the group during the movie, had arranged for some Bacardi Breezers for all of

them. It did not even qualify as alcohol as it was a fruit wine-based alcopop with only 2% alcohol. The best thing about this place was the view. It was a natural urban beach along the Bay of Bengal, a part of the Indian Ocean. Everyone was enjoying pulling each other's leg.

"Jay, please throw that Breezer towards me. I will catch it," Sid asked for his drink from Jay.

"I think you people haven't learned anything from this movie. We have just watched *Chak De! India*, not *Lagaan*," Rachit roared.

"What do you mean by that and how it does it have anything to do with throwing a Breezer to Sid?" Jay questioned Rachit.

"*Arrey*, make short pass man. You are breaking the flow by throwing it to him. There are four more people sitting in this line. You should go like - Jay to Ram, Ram to Teja, Teja to Raj, Raj to Rachit i.e. me and Rachit to Sid. Isn't it sounding good and smooth just like the tides of this ocean? I am in love with this place."

"Ok, friends - breaking news. Rachit is the first ever person to get drunk by a bottle of Breezer... applause," Raj shouted making fun of him.

"Don't say anything to my brother. He is in love... true love," Jay said mockingly.

"Sorry, I forgot we have another Romeo here. And guess what both of them are in love with *bongs*! Bengali girls have big beautiful eyes, no wonder you are both charmed by their marvels. I think they have something in their eyes... *kaala jaadu* aka black magic."

"Yup... I have never seen prettier eyes than hers." Rachit was really drunk as he was not a regular drinker.

“*Yaar*, I can understand about Jay, but Rachit you? I thought you were the serious type, who was here to prove something to everyone... never thought a studious guy like you would fall in love,” Ram Kumar asked in a serious tone.

“Well, you never know when it comes to IIT. People are already frustrated after screwing two of the most important years of their school life in solving I.E. Irodov, H.C. Verma and P. Bahadur that they start behaving in a strange manner. There are two types of guys in IIT - *Tadbne Wala* i.e. those who watch girls and *Padbne Wala* i.e. those who are studious. ‘*Kisi bhi din Tadbne Wala Padbne Wala ban sakta hai ya Padbne Wala Tadbne Wala*’ and to translate it for my dear South Indian friends: Any day one of them can start behaving like the other.” Raj didn’t want to miss even a single chance to pull Rachit’s leg.

“Leave it, *yaar*. First T20 World Cup is starting from 11th September in South Africa and guess what? India is sending a fresh team with a young captain in the form of MS Dhoni! It will be a treat to watch,” Jay tried to change the topic.

“Time will tell. India is nothing without Sachin, Ganguly and Dravid. I am telling you, they will be knocked out in the first round itself.” Raj was a die-hard Sachin fan so to prove Jay wrong he contradicted him.

“We will see...”

“Indeed.”



T20 World Cup, 2007

India v/s Pakistan

14th September, 2007 - Group D

It proved to be the most dramatic match of the tournament. Pak had already qualified for Super 8 as India’s match with Scotland was washed out, and Pakistan had defeated Scotland

in its group match. India had to win this game to qualify for the Super 8. India batted first and scored 141/9 in its quota of 20 overs. Pakistan finished with 141/7 and the match ended in a tie. The winner was to be decided out of the bowl out. India won the bowl-out (3-0) and qualified for the Super 8.

In the same tournament, Yuvraj scored the fastest fifty in an official T20 international from just 12 deliveries and also hit 6 sixes in the over of Stuart Broad. India defeated Australia in the semi-final and was all set to meet arch rivals Pak in finals.

24th September, 2007

IIT Hostel - India v/s Pakistan – Final

The whole hostel was glued in the front of the TV screen for the most anticipated match of the tournament.

India won the toss and chose to bat and scored 157/5 in 20 overs. Pakistan was in the last over and needed 13 runs to win, with only 1 wicket remaining. Joginder Sharma bowled a wide first ball, followed by a dot ball. Misbah followed by taking six off a full-toss; Pakistan needed just 6 runs to win from the last four balls. Misbah attempted to hit the next ball with a paddle-scoop over fine leg, but he only managed to sky the ball, and it was caught at short fine-leg by Sreesanth, leaving Pakistan all out for 152 runs. With this, the whole hostel broke into celebration.

Everyone was dancing on the tune of *Chak de! India*. A song which was specifically made for a hockey based movie was inspiring cricketers and cricket fans.

All the IITians broke into unprecedented celebrations across the campus; setting off fireworks, jamming the main entrance, partying hard on the streets savouring glory as India won the cricket World Cup. Hundreds of them were wearing 'Team India' jerseys and were waving tricolours. It was a special moment for all of them as none of them had watched India's previous World Cup win in 1983. Even the strict faculty and

administration of IIT didn't interrupt it, and they also became part of their celebration.

"Rachit, let's go outside. Everyone is celebrating out there and you are sitting here expressionless," Raj said to Rachit.

"No, *yaar!* I am not feeling well. I need to take some rest," Rachit replied in a low voice.

He was passing blood in urine for the past one week, but he didn't tell about it to anyone. He was also having some pain in his abdominal area. So, he thought it would be better if he skipped the celebration.

"Ok, but on one condition. You have to join us for Jay's birthday bash at midnight."

"Done," Rachit gave his consent, but half-heartedly.

He went to Jay's room at sharp 12 am. Their group had already made proper arrangements. As in most of other boys' hostels, when the clock strikes 12, everyone gets together to wish the birthday boy. They had made their own cakes and Maggie was served as snacks. Sandy was an awesome cook and he made sure that the cake was well baked. They hardly got their share of the cake as most of it was thrown on Jay's face. After that, he was given birthday bumps by everyone. It was followed by champagne and multiple rounds of beer. After endless hours of dancing and partying each one of them left for their respective rooms at around 3.30 am. After seeing their present condition, anyone could have said that they were going to bunk their classes next day.

24th September, 2007

IIT Hostel - Rachit's Room – 4 am

"Teja, please wake up."

"What has happened, Rachit? Please let me sleep. We have just come from the party and I am dead tired," Teja replied in a sleepy voice.

“*Yaar*, I have passed blood in my urine and am having an unbearable pain on my backside of the left kidney just above the hip region,” Rachit said with a lot of discomfort.

“What?” Teja instantly woke up due to graveness of the situation. “When did it start and since when have you been urinating blood?”

“Well, I have been passing it for the past one week. I had severe pain around 11 pm, but I took proxyvon from Sid.” Rachit didn’t make any eye contact because he was at fault.

“Have you gone crazy? Proxyvon is a very strong tablet which should not be taken without any doctor’s advice. It can damage your liver too. And why the hell you are telling us about the blood thing today?” Teja almost shouted at him.

Hearing this, Raj woke up. Then they discussed the seriousness of his situation. His pain was increasing with every second. All they could do was, give him another tablet of proxyvon. As he was experiencing pain on the backside of his kidney, they mutually decided to take him to the best nephrologist of the City Hospital.

City Hospital – Next Morning

“Well, certain tests need to be conducted like KFT, LFT, X-Ray and Doppler-Ultrasound,” Dr. Murugan told Raj and Teja.

“Can you tell us what the exact problem is?” Teja asked as he was confused about Rachit’s condition.

“Well, we can only comment after seeing the reports. Till then he needs proper treatment. If you want, we can arrange a bed for him till we get to the root cause of the problem.”

“Ok, Doctor. Go ahead,” Raj replied.

“I think you need to tell someone in your family about your current condition. We need a responsible person here,” Teja discussed with Rachit.

“Are you mad? I don’t have my mother and my father is not keeping well. Maybe the problem is not so serious. If I tell him, he will come here leaving everything for my sake. I obviously don’t want that.” Rachit totally rejected his suggestion.

“Then also, we want someone here to help us. I mean, we don’t have money to bear the cost of the tests and everything. Even the doctor is saying that there is a need to get you admitted,” Teja tried to convince him.

“It’s not about the money, Rachit. I think we are not mature enough to handle it on our own,” Raj said interrupting Teja.

“Of course it is about money and I am sure Raj has suggested this to you. Isn’t it, Teja?” Rachit said angrily.

“Nope... it’s not like that, *yaar*,” Teja tried to make peace.

“I am calling my brother. Abhay *bhaiya* will be here within a couple of hours. I don’t want anyone’s help....”

“Rachit...”

“Topic is closed,” Rachit interrupted Raj before he could complete his sentence.

Few Hours Later

“Hi! I am Abhay, Rachit’s elder brother. You must be Teja. Where is Rachit?” Abhay said in a worried tone.

“They have shifted him to a ward. Some tests have been done. Please have a word with his doctor. He can explain it to you in a much better way.”

“Thanks a lot for taking care of him.”

Rachit’s Room

“Hey bro, wassup?”

“*Namaste, bhaiya.* How are you?”

“I am good. There are better ways to call me here if you were missing me. You don’t need to get hospitalized for the same,” Abhay tried to lighten the atmosphere.

“Lol... something serious?”

“*Naah!* But we are shifting you to Apollo, Chennai for better medication facilities.”

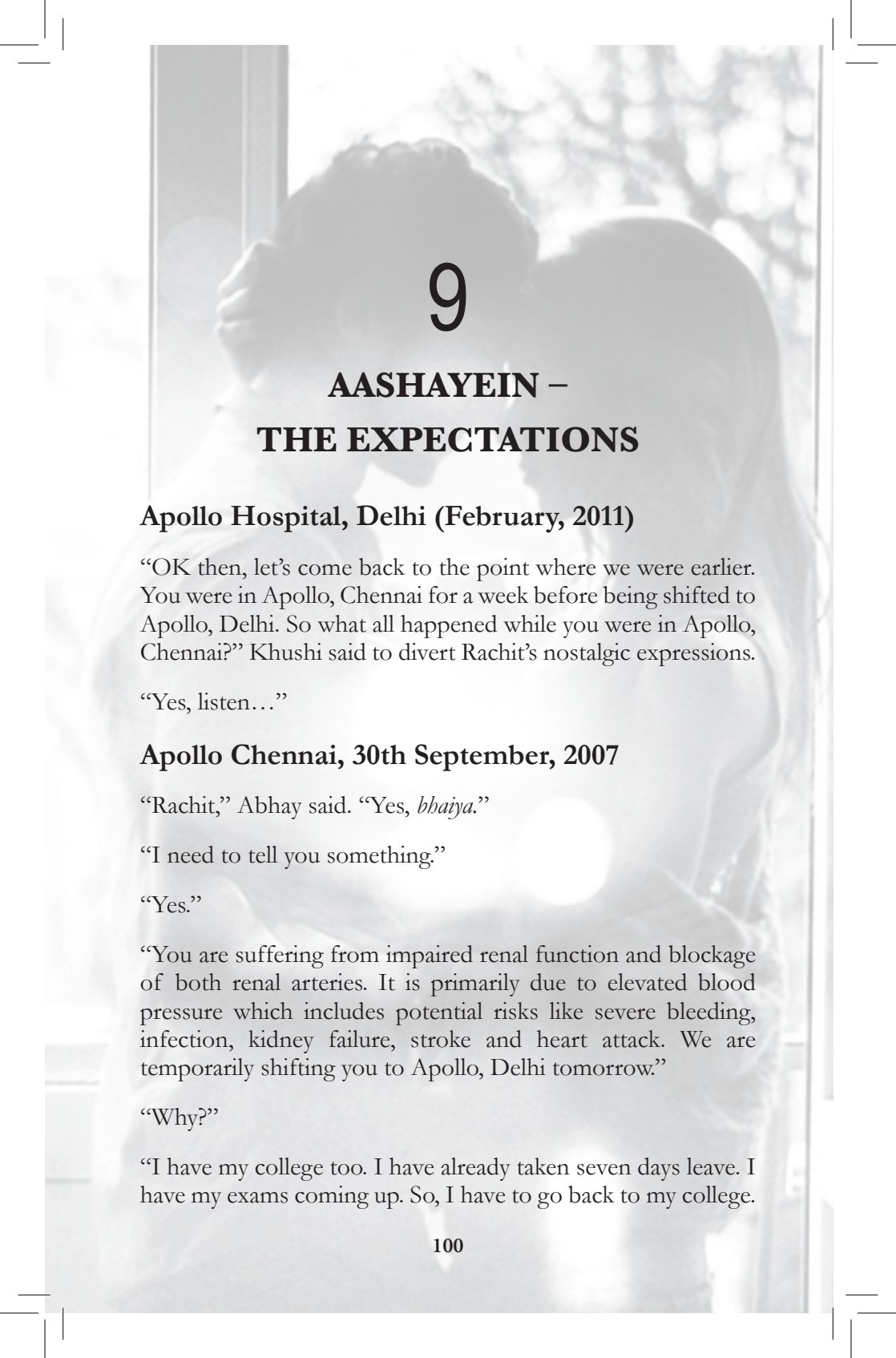
“OK. But before that, please pay the bill for all the tests conducted, medicines given to me and charge for one day of providing bed.”

“It has already been paid,” Abhay replied in a calm voice.

“Who paid for it?” Rachit was shocked.

“Raj Marwari.”





9

AASHAYEIN – THE EXPECTATIONS

Apollo Hospital, Delhi (February, 2011)

“OK then, let’s come back to the point where we were earlier. You were in Apollo, Chennai for a week before being shifted to Apollo, Delhi. So what all happened while you were in Apollo, Chennai?” Khushi said to divert Rachit’s nostalgic expressions.

“Yes, listen...”

Apollo Chennai, 30th September, 2007

“Rachit,” Abhay said. “Yes, *bhaiya*.”

“I need to tell you something.”

“Yes.”

“You are suffering from impaired renal function and blockage of both renal arteries. It is primarily due to elevated blood pressure which includes potential risks like severe bleeding, infection, kidney failure, stroke and heart attack. We are temporarily shifting you to Apollo, Delhi tomorrow.”

“Why?”

“I have my college too. I have already taken seven days leave. I have my exams coming up. So, I have to go back to my college.

Delhi is accessible from our place. Dad can take very good care of you from there. So call your friends here so that you can meet them before you leave.”

“OK, *bhaiya*,” Rachit replied in a low voice.

Apollo, Chennai, 1st October, 2007

1st October was one of the busiest days of Rachit’s life. Almost all his batch mates visited him. Some came with flowers and some with get well soon cards. But he was waiting for just one special person. Finally, he noticed Prachi, one of her roommates, entering the premises of the hospital but there was no sign of her.

“Where is Radhika?” Rachit asked Prachi.

“She is in her hostel,” she replied.

“Why didn’t she come here? She knows that I’ll be shifted to Apollo, Delhi today and there is a high possibility that we might not be able to see each other for the next few months,” he said angrily.

“Rachit, I think she is the best person to answer that. She just gave me a letter to give to you.”

“A letter...” Rachit said surprised. “Okay, give it to me.”

Rachit was perplexed at such behaviour from Radhika. *How could she just send a letter?* He had never expected this kind of ignorance from her. *She should have been there with him.*

Rachit began reading the letter with a heavy sigh.

Hi Rash,

I know that you are very angry with me right now because I have not come to meet you today. And I am extremely sorry for this.

You may call it my weakness, but I cannot see you in this condition. It would have been very difficult for me to control my emotions today. I always wanted to be your strength rather than your weakness. I know you will recover from your illness quickly and we will complete our graduation together.

I wanted to tell you something.

You have shown me what love is and what it feels like to be loved. Every time you kissed me, I got the same magical feeling as our first kiss. You have been my steady rock, my best friend and my life.

You have left an imprint on my heart that will stay with me. I spent the whole time living my life with you, both in the past and what I hope for in the future. I want you to know how much you mean to me. You are my world, and I love you with all my heart. I don't care whether you are in Chennai or Delhi, distance can't separate us...

You know why?

You are the beat of my heart, the soul in my body. You are in every breath I take because without you; I am nothing. I will wait for you, my love. Get well soon!

Love you forever

Shona

Apollo, Delhi (February, 2011)

“It must have been very difficult for you to live without her, right?” Khushi asked in a sombre tone.

“Yes, it was. You cannot even imagine it. But she and her love for me were my inspiration here. It was because of her belief in my abilities that I managed to clear my CA entrance without any coaching and that too, in my first attempt.”

“Wow! Tell me about your course... I mean, what's the structure and training you have to undergo while doing it. I have heard from people that it's quite tough and some people even say that

CA refers to ‘COME AGAIN’,” she said grinning at Rachit.

“Haha... Well, it’s not like that. I mean it is tough, but not that as bad as you have just said. We have a better pass percentage nowadays. Well, the structure has changed a bit now. During the time I started with CA; we had 3 levels – CPT which is just like an entrance exam where you are tested on 10+2 commerce knowledge with mercantile law being an additional subject; PCC which was later changed to IPCC and now called ‘Intermediate’ and CA Final. We had to undergo three and a half years of ‘Articleship’ i.e. training under a practicing CA immediately after clearing the CPT.”

“But you didn’t have any commerce background, then how did you manage to clear CPT in your first attempt, that too without any coaching? This sounds strange, *yaar*,” Khushi asked with a bit of a surprise.

“All thanks to Mathematics and the teacher who refused to take me in his CPT coaching batch.”

“Refused to take you in the CPT coaching batch? Details please?” Khushi was naturally astonished.

“After getting myself registered for CPT, I searched for an institute for CPT coaching in my hometown. I still remember, it was the first week of January when I approached a local accounts teacher for that purpose.”

Rajput Sir’s Home, Jan 2008

“*Beta*, your father had told me about you. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to help you much in such a short duration. I mean you have your first attempt this coming February (at that time CPT was conducted 4 times in a year), and we are already in the first week of January. If you target the August attempt then I might help you... But even then, I can’t assure you of your success. You can’t expect anyone to teach you everything that people study after devoting two precious years of their life in just a few months. But we can still work on it.”

“Sir, I have already lost about a year or so because of my B. Tech. followed by my sickness. I really can’t afford to lose any more time. All the respected faculties of PCC in Delhi take their batches twice a year. If I skip this attempt then I will lose another 6 months, because I’ll be joining their November batches instead of May.”

“I understand, but I am sorry, *beta*... In that case you have only one option left - that is to go for self-studies. You can consult me for your doubts.”

Rachit was about to leave when suddenly one of Rajput Sir’s students asked him to meet after his batch was over.

After an hour (Outside Rajput Sir’s Home)

“Hi, I am Deepak,” said the guy who asked Rachit to meet him after his tuition.

“Hello, I am Rachit.”

“So you are the one who has dropped IIT to join CA?” asked Deepak excitedly.

“Yes, I am that idiot you are talking about,” replied Rachit irritated.

“Don’t say that. Always respect the profession you are going to be part of. By the way, let me remind you, it was your decision to do CA and no one forced you to choose this field. So don’t crib now.”

“See, I am not well... feeling very tired and highly irritated right now... please don’t start your *Gyan Bharti* here. Tell me why you asked me to stay back? What’s wrong?” Rachit was fully irritated by then.

“*Yaar*, please don’t show me your IITian attitude. You are the one who needs help and I can provide that to you, only if you want.”

“You can help me? How can you do that?” Rachit was astonished.

“See, I am a B. Com first year student and Rajput sir teaches me Financial Accounting and Statistics. You know the attendance process in our degree colleges, so I have lot of spare time in my daily routine.”

“OK... Please continue...”

“See, as you know, we have four subjects in CPT -- Maths, Economics, Mercantile Law and Accountancy. You don’t need to study Maths as it will be a cakewalk for an IITian like you. Just read P.C. Tulsian sir’s book of Mercantile Law like a Chetan Bhagat novel. It is a very practical and easy subject and you don’t need any technical knowledge for that,” Deepak said confidently.

“How do you know this much about Mercantile Law?” asked Rachit curiously.

“Well, we have a paper in B. Com (first year) named Business Law, which covers all the portion of your Mercantile Law.”

“Oh... OK.”

“So just do whatever I say. I don’t need to teach you Mercantile Law. Tulsian’s book is very good and it will be sufficient for you. It will act as a Self-Tutor. Just go through it and I am there to solve your problems, in case you face any,” Deepak said in an assuring voice.

“Okay, but what else will you do then?” questioned Rachit.

“I will teach you the basics of Accounts and everything that is covered in the book of class 11th.”

“OK and what about the Accounts of class 12th and Economics?” Rachit gave him a puzzled look.

“Brother, you can’t win the Red Fort in 20 days!” Deepak taunted. “So, give proper time and I assure you that you will sail through.”

“See, your main aim is to clear the paper... This is not a 12th class exam where you can score 90% and ya, 70-75% can be scored in CPT, but you are short on time. You can easily score 75-80 out of 90 (50- QA + 40 Law) by doing self-studies. I will teach you Accounts that will cover 35-40 marks out of 60... rest you can attempt some general questions of Macroeconomics which will fetch you around 10-15 marks... if everything goes as per our plan you can touch the magical figure of 100... You are lucky that no one is expecting you to do well. You are standing at zero risk level with nothing to lose. So think positive and attack... Keep your hopes high and work towards it,” Deepak tried to boost his confidence.

For the next 20 days, Rachit prepared for his CPT under the guidance of Deepak. For the first time, he was nervous while writing the paper. Somehow he solved it and then finally, the Judgment Day arrived.

March, 08

The most anticipated CPT results were finally out. Rachit typed the previous 5 roll numbers and their results were as follows -

78, 36, 85, 91, 12

“Deepak, please type my roll number ... I am very nervous.”

Deepak typed his roll no. And suddenly the following result flashed...

Name:	Rachit Aggarwal
Marks Obtained:	121 Marks
Maximum Marks:	200 Marks
Result:	PASS

Rachit shouted with joy and hugged him tightly. He was overwhelmed.

“Rachit, this is just the beginning. You have a long way to go. This was just an entrance exam... CA is tough... Very tough ...”

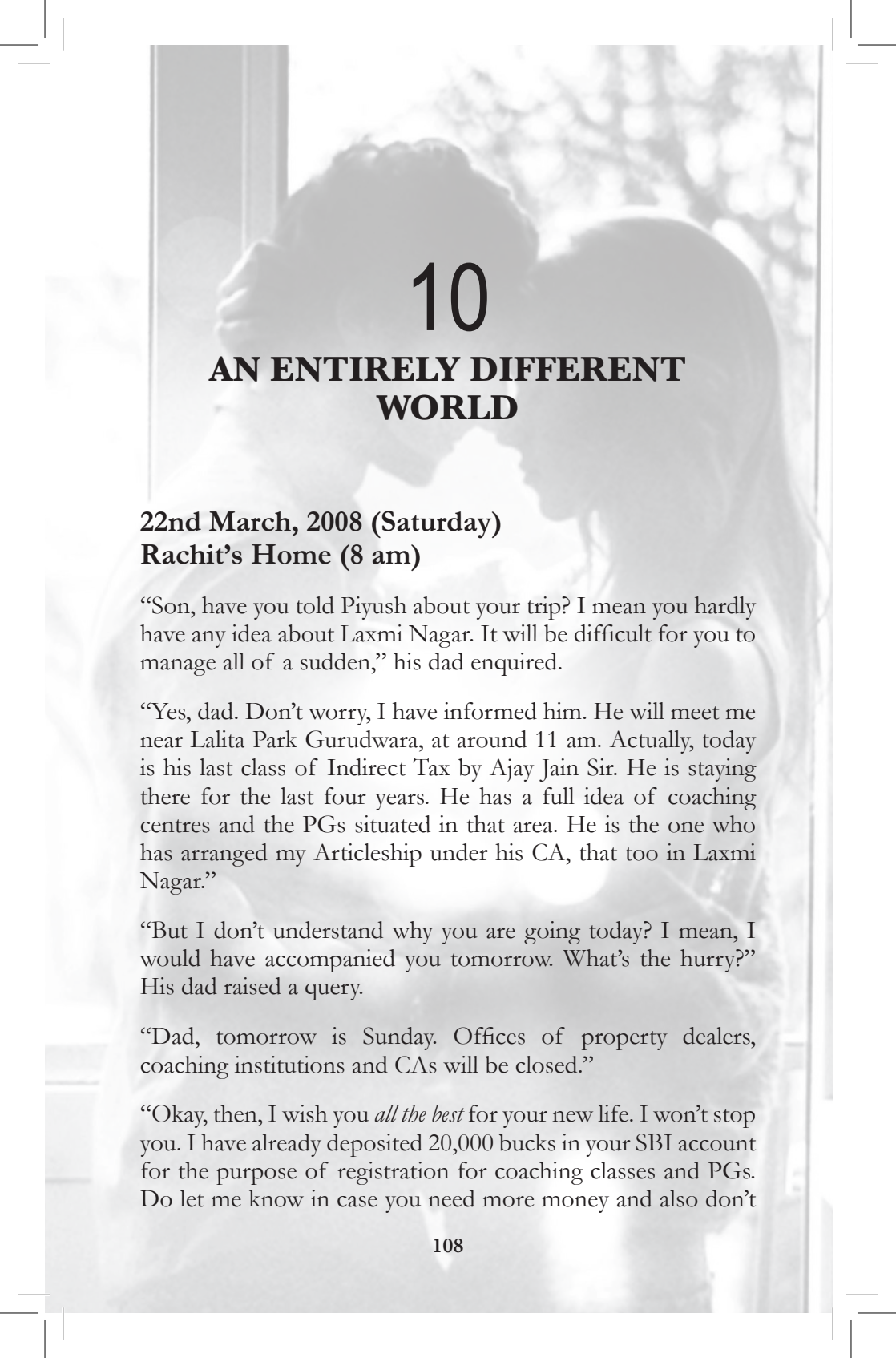
“I know, but let me savour this moment, please.”

Yes, this was just the beginning of a very tough road ahead. This success of his would raise the hopes of his dad, his brother, his relatives and everyone around him. This had set the benchmark for him. Now he had to live up to everyone’s expectations to prove that his success was not a fluke. Expectations... no, not only expectations but the burden of EXPECTATIONS...

AASHAYEIN... yes, that’s the word!

*Everywhere you look out
Like two birds who lose their home
They’re blocking all the streetcars
They’re holding up our phones.*





10

AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WORLD

22nd March, 2008 (Saturday)
Rachit's Home (8 am)

“Son, have you told Piyush about your trip? I mean you hardly have any idea about Laxmi Nagar. It will be difficult for you to manage all of a sudden,” his dad enquired.

“Yes, dad. Don’t worry, I have informed him. He will meet me near Lalita Park Gurudwara, at around 11 am. Actually, today is his last class of Indirect Tax by Ajay Jain Sir. He is staying there for the last four years. He has a full idea of coaching centres and the PGs situated in that area. He is the one who has arranged my Articleship under his CA, that too in Laxmi Nagar.”

“But I don’t understand why you are going today? I mean, I would have accompanied you tomorrow. What’s the hurry?” His dad raised a query.

“Dad, tomorrow is Sunday. Offices of property dealers, coaching institutions and CAs will be closed.”

“Okay, then, I wish you *all the best* for your new life. I won’t stop you. I have already deposited 20,000 bucks in your SBI account for the purpose of registration for coaching classes and PGs. Do let me know in case you need more money and also don’t

forget to purchase a new SIM today itself. We all have a lot of expectations from you. You have always been a bright student and I know you will maintain your performance in the future too. Your cab is waiting outside. Bye, son. Take care,” Rachit’s dad said with his eyes full of hopes and expectations. And with all these instructions, Rachit left his home for Delhi - A city where he would fulfil his dreams...

Apollo, Delhi, (6.30 am) – Feb, 2011

“How did it feel when you were leaving for Delhi?” asked Khushi.

“It was a great feeling. A completely different career; a new city was waiting for me. A sense of uncertainty, a hope to be a CA, to be successful was also prevailing within the realms of my heart, but there was also a sad feeling juxtaposed with these happy and hopeful feelings due to the separation from my love, Radhika. We had lived our dream in such a short span. We were supposed to be together in college for the next four years. But now all of a sudden, our sweet relationship was going to convert into a long distance relationship. So it was a kind of mixed feeling.”

“I can understand your pain. But, you just mentioned that distance can’t separate love. If emotions are true then it should not matter to you, whether you are near or far. And as days go by, the memories remain. And these memories then add on to the beauty of the relationship. Right?” she questioned.

Rachit took a pause as he went into nostalgia and then answered, “Yes, you are right, but we all are humans and misunderstandings can occur. Earlier we used to be together for 10-12 hours a day. But now we were solely dependent on our telephonic conversations to discuss everything.”

“We will get back to your relationship during CA but first give me an idea about your CA life. I mean how was the atmosphere? It would have been a completely new culture for you. You were

talking about coaching classes. Is it the same as we had in Bansal (Kota) or FIITJEE (Delhi) or JEE preparation?” Khushi was very curious as CA was a completely new thing for her.

“Nope... You can’t even compare them. CA coaching and JEE preparation are poles apart. In Kota, an entrance test is conducted for Bansal or Resonance, while in CA; it is on first come first serve basis. A very long waiting exists in the case of reputed names and they won’t entertain you even if you are a CBSE topper. You have to get yourself registered well in advance if you want the teacher of your choice. They teach us in the auditorium.”

“What?” Khushi was excited as well as shocked.

“Yes. Here they don’t take batches of 60-70 people like we used to have in Bansal. They only have two batches which comprise of 700-750 students. Such batches are taken twice a year i.e. in May and November end after the end of CA IPCC/ Final Exams. They don’t have classrooms but auditoriums. They charge huge amount of fees for such classes ranging between 15K-20K.”

“*Yaar*, 15,000 is OK for the whole course,” Khushi replied with ignorance.

“*Arrey*, it is not for the whole course but per subject. We had 6 subjects in PCC – Three subjects per group. One can appear either in one group or both. But before that, we had to serve a period of fifteen months as an Article Trainee under a practicing chartered accountant.”

“Wow,” Khushi was listening to this conversation with keen interest. “This is fascinating. Tell me something about your coaching classes and Articleship.”

“Managing the personal as well as the professional life was very tough for me. It was an entirely different world to me. I used to have my morning classes followed by my Articleship in those days. So, it was only possible to talk at night. Thanks to the

699 - STD pack (which later changed to 749) of TATA, that only works on TATA handsets (CDMA), we could talk for an unlimited period. We finally had to arrange two new sets and two new SIM cards that too by hiding it from our families,” Rachit flashed a mischievous smile at Khushi.

“Well, this is the beauty of a relationship. There is nothing better than maintaining it by hiding from your families,” Khushi said and winked. “Where were you staying?”

“Well, I got a room in a hostel in Laxmi Nagar.”

“Laxmi Nagar! Yeah, I have heard about it. It is in East Delhi. Isn’t it adjacent to Preet Vihar?”

“Yes, it is but you can’t even compare these two places. Preet Vihar is a posh colony whereas Laxmi Nagar and Shakarapur are student areas. Thousands of students have been accommodated in such a small area like a shepherd accommodates goats and sheep.”

“But, how can you have classes in such a small place then?” Khushi asked.

“We don’t have classes there. Most of the classes are held at ITO, Mandi House, Kashmiri Gate and Paharganj.”

“Then why do you people stay here?”

“Well, it is the cheapest area and student friendly. All these coaching institutes have their offices there. Every second building is the office of a coaching institute; every third building is a CA office and every 4th building is that of property dealers. There is a saying that if you don’t have anything to do, just open a *chhole-bhatore*, Photostat, Cyber Cafe or Mobile Recharge shop in Laxmi Nagar and you will swim in money.”

“Lol,” Khushi chuckled.

“And if you have any property there then you are one of the luckiest people in the whole of East Delhi. You don’t have to

do anything special. Just put a board of ‘*To-Let*’ outside your house and it will be occupied within couple of hours.”

“That’s unbelievable! By the way, you were going to tell me about your classes, Articleship and friends.” Khushi reminded him of the main topic.

“I was coming to it. I still remember my first day at Sonu Ma’am’s classes as Parveen Sharma sir was not teaching Accounts to PCC students in 2008. She used to take classes at Pitampura. This was the first time I had the experience of travelling in a metro. My father accompanied me as I was very nervous. We took an auto for Shastri Park, boarded a metro for Kashmiri Gate and changed it there for Rithala.”

“It must have been exciting, *na?*”

“Yes, it was and I was nervous too. In the case of Sonu Ma’am, it was a large hall. This was the first time I was interacting with commerce students except at the time of my CPT exam. Many of them were coming in pairs. Maybe they have studied together in same schools or took their CPT coaching at the same place. It took me two-three classes to adjust there and slowly and gradually I started interacting with fellow students. Soon, I became friends with Nikhil, Shalini and Diksha. Diku and Nikhil were Delhiites whereas Shalini was from Chandigarh. Nikhil and I were doing Articleship from the same firm whereas Shalini and Diku were in another.

Nikhil introduced me to them as he and Diksha were classmates. Shalini was shy by nature which was very different for a girl from Chandigarh.”

“Please continue...”

“Our classes went on continuously for four hours with a fifteen min break. Initially, we were very sincere and usually roamed only outside the hall in those minutes but as time passed we started getting casual. We used to leave class fifteen minutes before the break and come back fifteen minutes after the break

got over. This had proven to be a stress-buster for us to get over the frustration of Articleship.”

“Actually, we had a lot to talk about. I used to tell them stories of my PG. It was as famous as *Jat Bhavan*.”

“Why?”

“Well, most of the occupants there were Jat. I still remember my first day there. *Bhaiya* had told me that there was a guy named *Jang Bahadur* who was the caretaker and would help me out. As I entered the PG, the first thing I noticed was an old man shouting at occupants regarding their diet. I asked him, ‘*Uncle, where can I meet Jang Bahadur ji?*’ And he replied, ‘*I am the person you are searching for.*’

Then he entered my name in the register where he used to record the number of diets and dates of admission of all the occupants. He explained to me all the rules and regulations. No entry after 10 pm and no drinking were the main amongst them. I was expecting someone with a strong personality, but all I found was an old fellow whose hands were shaking while entering my name. Definitely *uski jawaani jang kha chuki thi*.”

“Lol... And how was the atmosphere there?”

“I expected it to be very strict but the scene around room no. 102 (my room) took me by surprise. People were playing music loudly, six people were drinking in a room adjacent to mine and four others were playing cards in the room opposite to mine. It was on twin-sharing basis and it finished as we entered inside. My partner was a frustrated MBA, probably in his thirties, who had not cleaned the room for months. He was wearing old, torn shorts.”

“How did you manage in such a place?” Khushi was shocked.

“Well, I agree that those people were untidy, aged and had some bad habits, but they were quite good at heart. They had

gone through a lot in their life. They had worked for peanuts which our institute called ‘stipend’, were the victims of office politics, worked on a workstation with a Pentium II Processor that we fondly referred to as ‘*dabba*’ and never had a girlfriend in their life. Many of them were waiting to finish their CA so that they could marry.”

“The biggest threat that parents give their wards is that they will only get them married once they complete their CA. I was very scared because of the same reason as I was sure that Radhika would finish her B. Tech in four years, but there was no time limit for my course. Many of them were doing it for the past seven-eight years. And the worst part is to see your engineer friends getting a job in the 7th semester, getting a promotion, increments, making foreign trips and finally getting married.”

“To make it worse, our neighbours and relatives keep reminding our parents about our attempts and increasing pass percentage. I mean every Tom, Dick and Harry, who never calls you on your birthday will definitely call you on the day when the results will be out. There is a saying that *‘No. of attempts doesn’t matter in CA’*. All that matters is adding the prefix ‘CA’ before your name. At school, we used to talk about missing merit by two marks but here we talk about missing aggregate.”

“Man... I have never imagined that you people are frustrated to this level. So there was nothing good about your place?” Khushi said and gave a sigh.

“There were some positives too. If I gave a single missed call it meant that I needed tea and a double missed call meant I needed Maggie. We used to call our caretaker ‘*Tau*’. It was compulsory to take 45 diets in a month, but *Tau* used to increase four-five extra diets in everyone’s account.”

“And ya, I forgot to tell you the most important rule. No one can question the account maintained by *Tau*. The restriction of 10 pm was not applicable to my roommate and all other people on my floor as they used to share a drink with people working

in the PG. We were also given an extra *parantha* for breakfast in return of the favour and occasional cricket matches.”

“Hmmm... And what about your Articleship?”

“Well, it was a mid-size CA firm, situated in Laxmi Nagar. Initially, my work was limited to vouching as I hardly had any experience. But I was lucky that my boss was not very strict in comparison to those of my friends.”

“What kind of strictness you are talking about?”

“Well, as I was new and was not given major responsibilities, I was allowed to leave office early so that I could attend my account classes. Usually Principals (CA’s) don’t allow their articles to attend evening classes or they lay the condition of one class at a time. Some of my friends even complained of mistreatment during Articleship. For e.g. in small firms, some CAs ask girls to prepare tea or boys to serve water to their clients. Some of them also cross the limit by asking them to go to grocery stores or the vegetable market.”

“What? You must be kidding!” Khushi almost shouted in shock.

“Nope... I am serious. You are lucky if you are given tea with biscuits any day. They want to go on audits, not for learning anything new, but for the royal treatment given to them by the client and the delicious food provided to them. An article doing audit at a client’s office and an article in his office are two different people. In the first case, he is the lion who is the king of the jungle and in the other case he is the lion you will find in circus. Being exploited by your seniors, thrashed by your boss and being ignored by average looking girl-assistants are some things that an article goes through.”

“They can study in the office only by hiding it from their seniors and bosses. This is after they have sacrificed their friend circle and the latest flicks. They are forced to work till 9 pm while office working hours are 9.30 am to 4.30 pm. During the

closing period i.e. 31st March/30th September, they need to work till 3 am. Most of their life is spent in taking advice from their seniors who have the experience of giving ‘n’ number of attempts. Maybe their CA had suffered all this in his life too and so, he is doing the same to his trainee. All of them take a vow that they won’t do this to their articles, though.”

“Luckily, I was not the victim of such CA’s. We had 1 more partner in our firm, but he used to visit only once in a while. We had 8 article assistants - 5 guys and 3 girls. Two B.Com graduates were also employed by our principal, but they were very senior and were in their thirties. Their salary was double of a freshly qualified CA. We had to report to them in case of any query. They used to allot us our work, and they directly reported to our boss. Though our boss was very frank, we hardly needed to ask them for anything. Also in case of classes, Nikhil and I used to inform Dinesh *bhaiya* (one of those graduates).”

“What about your studies and relationship? How did you manage them along with Articleship and classes?”

“Initially there was no huge load of studies and Articleship but gradually it got difficult for me to manage them. Radhika was the one who used to call me each morning to wake me up for office. I am a late riser and for the same reason I prefer evening classes. We used to chat after our coaching. Pitampura was very far from Laxmi Nagar, and it usually takes an hour or so to commute. I used to come at 10 pm, and we used to chat after that which went on till 4 in the morning.”

“*Yaar*, I always wonder why couples talk for long hours! I mean, what is there to discuss and how do you people get fresh topics every day?” Khushi asked.

“Just fall in love once and you will get to know. We had a lot to discuss like what is new in her college as once her college and her friends were also my friends. Everyone wants to stay updated,” Rachit said and winked.

“Ya, right... So Mr. Rachit, you are admitting that it is not only girls who gossip, but also guys,” Khushi finally had a chance to pull his leg.

“Not exactly... It depends on the person with whom you are talking. She needed to know about my CA friends, girls in my office and all. She had to make sure that no one is flirting with me seeing me alone.”

“*Abaan*, as if you are SRK and all the girls are dying to be with you,” Khushi said sarcastically.

“Huh... Not all but just one and it was my *Shona*. We were madly in love with each other. We made sure that the distance didn’t affect our love. Once in love you become more important to your partner and each word of yours has more value.”

“True. I firmly believe that LDRs are the sweetest kinds of relationships one can ever have. Her voice becomes the most important thing of your life. Because this is all you can have and can’t even complain,” Khushi added.

“Yes, I was in love with her melodious voice. It also increased the level of trust and understanding between us. I agree that insecurities are there and it often leads to small fights, but these fights make the relationship very cute.”

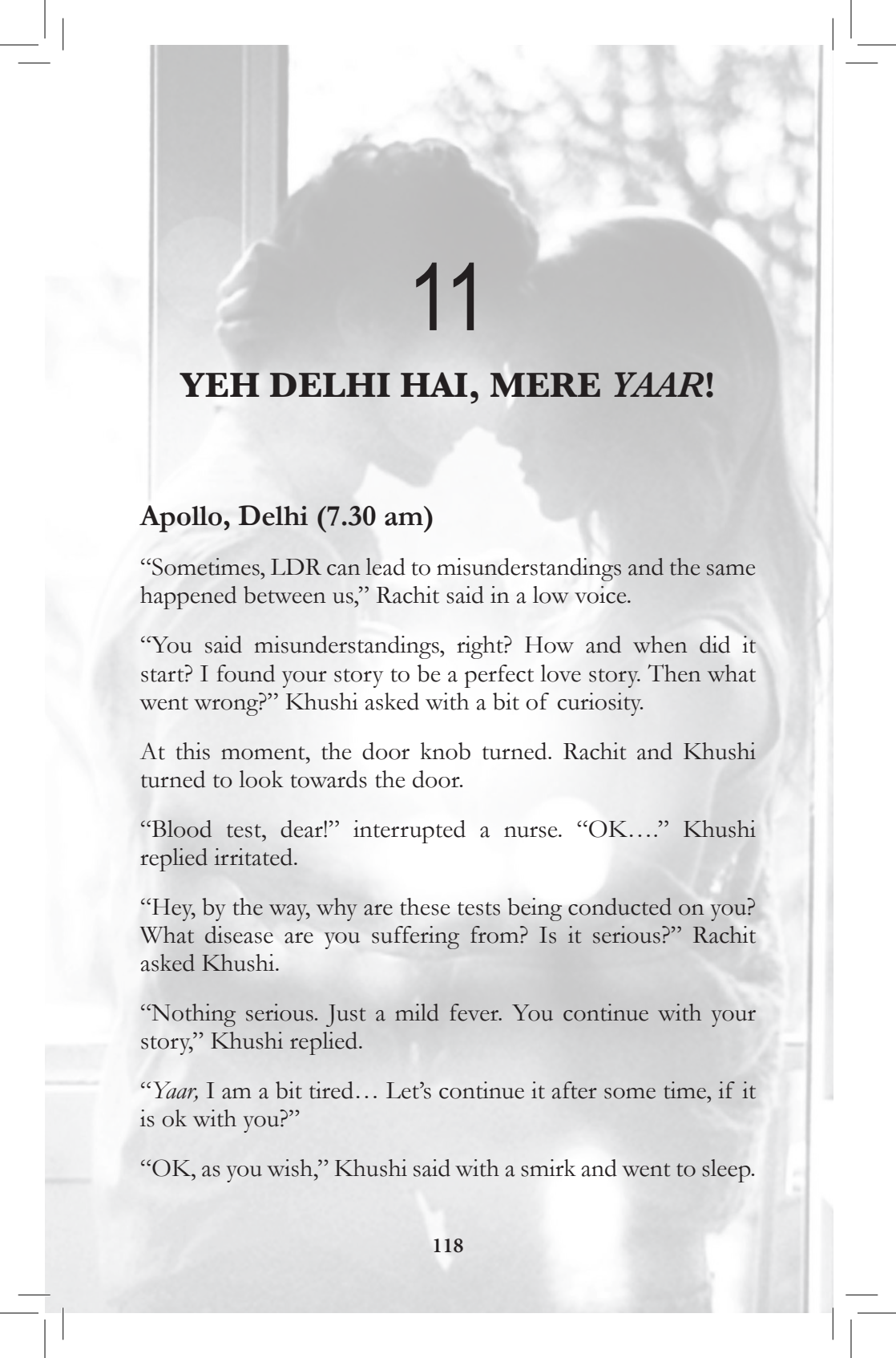
“Well, you only fight with a person you love,” Khushi smiled.

“Ya, but sometimes long distance relationships can also lead to misunderstandings,” saying this, Rachit started coughing very badly. Khushi gave him a glass of water.

“I think you need a break. Take some rest and we can continue after some time,” Khushi said in a concerned voice.

“OK, as you say,” Rachit replied.



A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace, about to kiss. The man is on the left, leaning towards the woman on the right. They are both looking at each other. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a building. The overall tone is romantic and intimate.

11

YEH DELHI HAI, MERE YAAR!

Apollo, Delhi (7.30 am)

“Sometimes, LDR can lead to misunderstandings and the same happened between us,” Rachit said in a low voice.

“You said misunderstandings, right? How and when did it start? I found your story to be a perfect love story. Then what went wrong?” Khushi asked with a bit of curiosity.

At this moment, the door knob turned. Rachit and Khushi turned to look towards the door.

“Blood test, dear!” interrupted a nurse. “OK...” Khushi replied irritated.

“Hey, by the way, why are these tests being conducted on you? What disease are you suffering from? Is it serious?” Rachit asked Khushi.

“Nothing serious. Just a mild fever. You continue with your story,” Khushi replied.

“*Yaar*, I am a bit tired... Let’s continue it after some time, if it is ok with you?”

“OK, as you wish,” Khushi said with a smirk and went to sleep.

“How and when did it start? Even I don’t know... I still can’t figure out what went wrong that day... I think it all started on the day when I had my last class with Sonu Gupta Ma’am,” Rachit said to himself.

And then he got lost in his random thoughts.

3rd October, 2008

**Opposite Pitampura Metro Station (10.30 am)
(Last day of the Accounts class with Sonu Gupta Ma’am)**

Rachit, Shalini (Shalz), Diksha (Diku) and Nikhil (Niks) were standing in a corner, disappointed, while most of their batch mates were busy fighting for good luck messages by Sonu Ma’am on their books and registers. They were literally shoving their books and registers in Sonu Ma’am’s face.

Nikhil glared at his other three mates who were wearing solemn faces. “All right, guys! C’mon, nobody has died! We are not in a mortuary. OK?” Niks spoke to them, almost shouting, breaking the silence.

“You and your PJs... You know Shalini is going back to her hometown, Chandigarh, tomorrow. Her coaching is now over and she has got a transfer in her Articleship. Maybe this is the last time we are seeing her as she will give her papers from there. Isn’t it sad enough for you?” Diksha said with tears in her eyes.

“I can understand that, but...” Niks said.

“No, you can never understand that. You and Rachit have your papers in November-09. But think about her, guys. On one hand she has to deal with the pressure of writing her papers after a month and on the other hand, she is going away from her best friends. It is true that we know each other just since four and a half months, but we share a very strong bond. Don’t you agree? We have become addicted to each other’s company. It will be difficult for us to separate now,” Diksha said in a sombre voice while interrupting Niks.

“OK, cheer up guys. Hey, Shalz do you want me to say some deep words of friendship, goodbye and all that stuff... If yes, then please don't expect such things from me. That's so not me. And by the way, you are not leaving us, girl. We will stay connected thanks to modern technology. Just complete your CA course with flying colours and we will start our own firm afterwards. Mind you, we will give a hard time to the 'Big Four' (name given to four largest International Professional Services networks in Accountancy),” Niks said and winked. “For now, we will only party hard to give you a grand farewell”.

“OK then, what place are we heading to? Is it Select City Walk or CP?” Rachit asked excited.

“Dude, today I will show you the real Delhi. These multiplexes and malls don't represent the real Delhi. Let's move beyond these clichéd things. We will spend the whole day together. No office, no phone calls etc. Switch off your mobiles otherwise you will give me the excuse that your boss is calling,” Niks said with excitement.

Nikhil and Diksha were schoolmates and were Delhiites. They knew this city much more than Rachit and Shalini, who had spent most of their time in coaching and Articleship.

“That's great... but switching off the handset is not a great idea, man,” Rachit tried to protest.

“Man, this is my plan and it will go according to my way. Don't worry; Mr. Obama is not going to call you. I don't want any kind of disturbance. It's just a matter of a few hours, dude. Trust me and follow me,” Niks said in a dominating as well as convincing tone.

Now the idea really sounded tempting, so who could have said no to it? With a sigh, all of them switched off their cells and got ready for a smashing outing.

So, once they made up their minds and the girls did their usual touch up (God knows why they care about their looks

so much!), their group left for the first destination in the long list that was made in Niks mind, i.e. India Gate. Saluting the *Amar Jawan Jyoti*, which is the symbol of sacrifice and courage, gave them a patriotic feeling like it does to all the visitors. Then they went boating and chased each other as they ran across the widespread ground near the majestic India Gate.

After having ice-cream from one of the vendors, they left for *Akshardham*, which is very famous for its unimaginable architectural work. They were awestruck to see the magnificent architecture; the work on every stone was done with so much patience and it was evident. It had such a peaceful aura.

This was followed by visit to Humayun's Tomb, which was built by the wife of second Mughal Emperor Humayun, in the loving memory of her husband (a fact not very widely known). Besides Humayun, his wife and some subsequent Mughal royalty are buried here. The tomb is a serious place yet it is beautiful. There were a lot of fruit trees (like pomegranate) all around and flowering ones like Gulmohar and Amaltas. Chirping birds added to the beauty. They sat on the grass for some time, and clicked a few pictures to add to their memories.

Then they moved to Raj Ghat. In black marble, surrounded by lawn and with an eternal flame burning, Raj Ghat remembers the man who is known as the 'Father of India' for his tireless and pacifist work to reclaim India's independence from Britain. This hangout was definitely going to be memorable for each of them, every moment of it was to be treasured. They visited such places that are usually ignored by people of their age group.

From Raj Ghat, they went further to Jama Masjid and decided to have lunch near Jantar Mantar after roaming around for a while.

Jantar Mantar incorporates multiple buildings in a unique form, each with a specialized function for astronomical measurement. These structures with their striking combinations of geometric

forms at large scale have captivated the attention of architects; artists and art historians world-wide yet remain largely unknown to the general public. It held their attention; especially Rachit's, as he was curious about nature.

From there, they headed towards *Purana Qila*. With its massive walls and impressive gateways, *Purana Qila* bowled them over. As they had less time and many more destinations to cover, Niks rushed them to the Lodhi Garden. In the middle of the gardens is the *Bara Gumbad* ('Big Dome'). It consists of a large rubble-construct dome; it is not a tomb but a gateway to an attached Three Domed *Masjid* (Mosque). The architecture is characterised by the octagonal chamber, with stone *chhajjas* on the roof and *guldastas* on the corners. Rachit was spellbound upon seeing such architecture in a day.

Niks then took them to the ISKCON Temple; *Daryaganj* and finally they reached the Red Fort by evening.

The red sandstone walls of the massive Red Fort rise 33-m above the clamour of Old Delhi as a reminder of the magnificent power and pomp of the Mughal emperors. The walls, built in 1638, were designed to keep out invaders. Now they mainly keep out the noise and confusion of the city. The main gate, Lahore Gate, is one of the emotional and symbolic focal points of the modern Indian nation and attracts a major crowd on each Independence Day.

The vaulted arcade of *Chatta Chowk*, a bazaar selling tourist trinkets, leads into the huge fort compound. Inside is a veritable treasure trove of buildings, including The Drum House, The Hall of Public Audiences, The White Marble Hall of Private Audiences, The Pearl Mosque, Royal Baths and Palace of Colour.

Also, a sound and light show held there in the evenings recreates events of India's history connected with the fort. So they decided to watch the show. It was alluring. They shouted, danced and had fun.

With their cell phones switched off, there was no one to disturb or add any kind of hindrance to their perfect hangout plan, all thanks to Niks. Not one of them was complaining either; they were rather enjoying this cut off from the entire world. It was a much needed break and relief!

Red Fort 7:30 pm

“Nikhil, you have really made this day memorable for me. Thank you so much,” said Shalini, with a feeling of gratitude in her eyes.

“Anything for you dear, but the action is not over yet,” Niks winked at her.

“*Yaar*, it’s already getting late now. I think we should go back because we are far away from our places,” Shalini said with a worried expression.

“*Arrey*, I’ll drop you and Diku home. Don’t worry, just enjoy this moment,” Niks said assuring her.

“And what about me, dude?” Rachit said angrily.

“Don’t worry, brother. Blue line buses have good service here. I will tell you the bus number. And if you insist, I can even guide you to the gate. Now don’t thank me for being so kind hearted,” Nikhil joked. All of them burst into laughter.

“OK, don’t waste my time. Let me finish it with my masterstroke i.e. the star attraction of the day, the icing on the cake,” Nikhil spoke in an animated voice.

“And what’s that, Niks?” asked Diksha intently.

“Delhi-6 or ‘*Dilli- 6*’, the soul of Delhi,” Niks replied.

“What is Delhi-6, Nikhil?” Shalini questioned.

“Let me answer this, Shalz... the “6” here represents the pin-code of the area. No part of the city is referred to like this.

There is no Delhi-1 or 16 in common lingo and that's because this part of the city has a life and culture of its own. It is indeed unique. It covers the entire traditional area of Chandni Chowk, Jama Masjid, Ram Lila Grounds, etc. You will get the best food of Delhi there; it is known for its tempting palates. And if I am not wrong, we are heading towards the legendary *Karim's Hotel*," replied Diksha on behalf of Nikhil as they walked through the lanes of Delhi-6.

"You are partially right, dear. Actually Rachit is a strict vegetarian so we will go to *Paranthe Wali Galli*."

Every home in India makes *parathas* - unleavened flat rounded oily breads. But the folks at *Paranthe Wali Galli* (meaning the street where you get *paranthe*s) in Chandni Chowk have their own trademark style. This place is also famous due to Akshay Kumar. It is said that Akki stayed in that Chandni Chowk Street for a few years before moving out to make a career in Bollywood. In many Bollywood Movies like '*Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*' and '*Black and White*', they have recreated the *Paranthe Wali Galli*.

Though more than Akki, people there talk about their delicious *paranthe*s. Rachit and Co. had a blast there. They had *Khurachan Parantha*, *Methi Parantha* and *Bhindi Parantha* along with that they also ordered *Lassi*. After that, they had *Kulfi* at *Haldiram* and then they visited *Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib* while meandering on *Nai Sarak*.

After that, Nikhil dropped Diksha and Shalini home and he also dropped Rachit to his hostel at around 10 pm. None of them wanted that day to end though. Everything about it was purely magical.

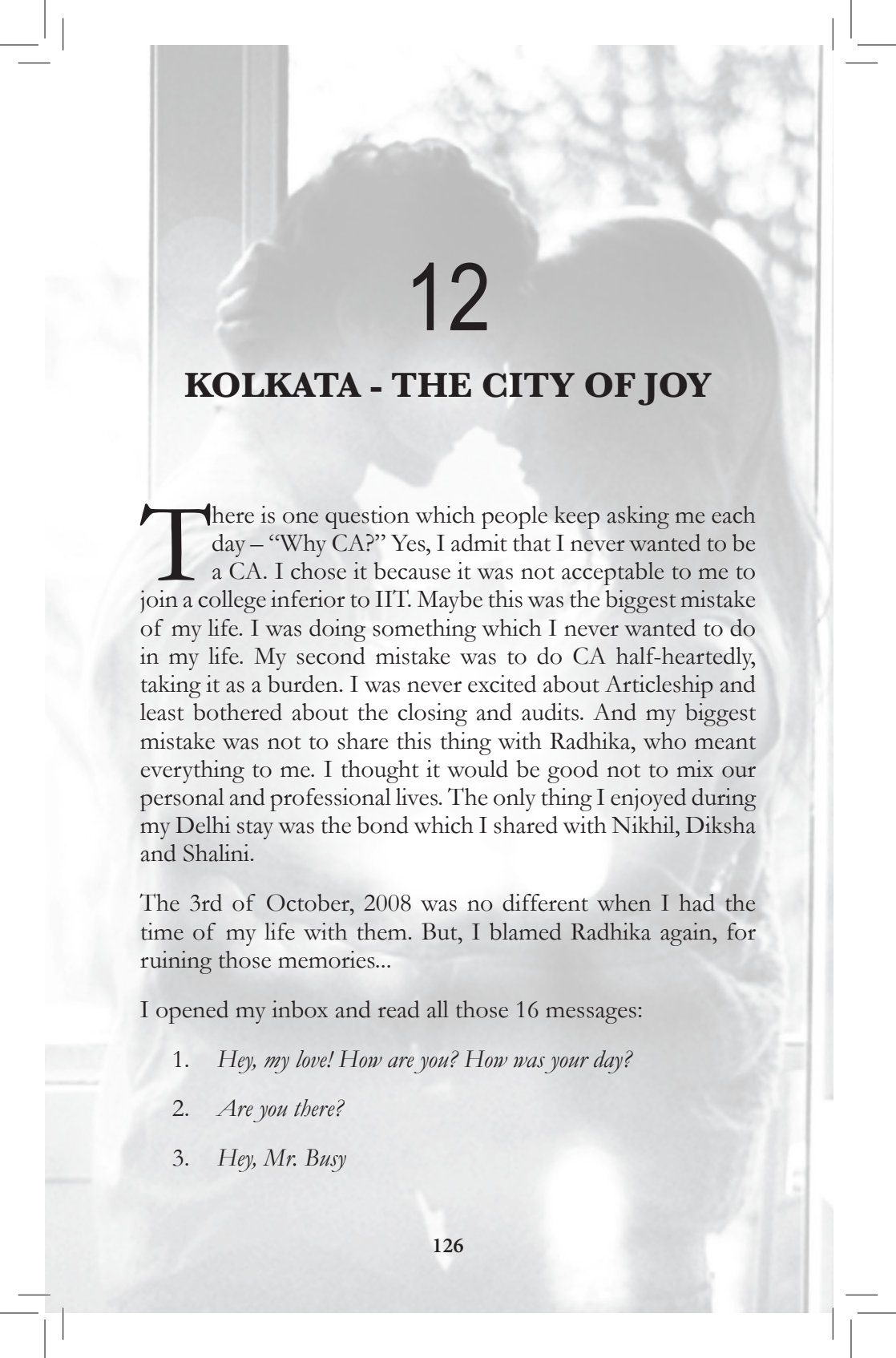
Apollo, Delhi (8:00 am)

Sitting on the hospital bed, Rachit remembered how he had wondered that day, if he would ever be able to live such a happy day again in his whole life.

He also recollected how after a tiring day and in a fully exhausted state, when he finally switched on his handset, he saw 16 unread messages flooded in his inbox, all of them from Radhika.

“16 Messages... that wasn't really my fault,” Rachit said to himself with a sigh.





12

KOLKATA - THE CITY OF JOY

There is one question which people keep asking me each day – “Why CA?” Yes, I admit that I never wanted to be a CA. I chose it because it was not acceptable to me to join a college inferior to IIT. Maybe this was the biggest mistake of my life. I was doing something which I never wanted to do in my life. My second mistake was to do CA half-heartedly, taking it as a burden. I was never excited about Articleship and least bothered about the closing and audits. And my biggest mistake was not to share this thing with Radhika, who meant everything to me. I thought it would be good not to mix our personal and professional lives. The only thing I enjoyed during my Delhi stay was the bond which I shared with Nikhil, Diksha and Shalini.

The 3rd of October, 2008 was no different when I had the time of my life with them. But, I blamed Radhika again, for ruining those memories...

I opened my inbox and read all those 16 messages:

1. *Hey, my love! How are you? How was your day?*
2. *Are you there?*
3. *Hey, Mr. Busy*

4. *Please Reply*
5. *Are you fine, Rash?*
6. *Why are you not replying?*
7. *Are you angry with me, Rash? I'm sorry my Rac-bit.*
8. *You there?*
9. *Please talk to me, where are you?*
10. *Please Rachit talk to me....*
11. *What's wrong with you, Mishti?*
12. *Please jaar, at least tell me where you are?*
13. *Don't scare me, Mishti...*
14. *Please Rachit... :'(*
15. *Goodnight ...:/*
16. *I am going to sleep... Please talk to me whenever you get my messages.*

I shouted at her for messaging me 16 times when I was with my friends.

I told her that I was tired of this relationship and this was the only day that I had got to spend with my friends, but she just couldn't see me happy. Maybe this outburst was the result of our previous fights or my own frustration at doing CA, but it caused permanent damage in our relationship. She cried that night and what did I do? I hung up the phone without even listening to her side of the story... This was the first time that I had done this kind of a thing, but certainly not the last time. Maybe slowly and gradually, it became my new way to avoid an argument or maybe it was just a sign of my weakness at handling the relationship...

To be honest, I was sick of my routine - Morning classes, Articleship and self-study. The biggest problem of a long distance relationship is to be in constant touch with your partner through telephone or messages. If there is a single day you miss this routine, you will be bombarded with the usual questions. Our late night talks were affecting my morning classes. I was not able to give proper input. I even started to miss my classes. *If you miss even two lectures of practical subjects, you are finished.* I already had a very weak base in accounts and I thought I could rectify my mistake in PCC, but I was wrong... I wasted my Accounts classes, and Costing was no different. The only thing I enjoyed was Taxation and maybe it was due to the terrific teaching skills of Ajay Jain Sir.

I know I was at fault, but I couldn't be wrong every time. You have to accept the fact that we guys don't like to discuss our problems. We want to solve it ourselves. And we avoid talking to people till we solve our problem. I was no different. It doesn't mean that I didn't love her or was trying to avoid her. It was like; I was in my shell and trying to find the solution for my problems. We guys are also very bad at expressing ourselves. We think that if we share our problems or cry, then it will give a very wrong impression to the other person.

I had my attempt in November, 2009 and I was scared to my wits. I also wanted to avoid sharing it with Radhika, but it was affecting our relationship. It began with limiting our conversation from once a day to once a week. It was just for those four months.

Was it very difficult to understand? I was doing CA for her sake. She was doing B. Tech, which was a certain line, but CA is very uncertain. We don't even know whether we will clear our exams in the first place. And even if we manage to crack it, we are not sure of getting a placement. But how could I possibly explain this to a student who will, in her seventh semester, be placed in one of the top IT companies of our country?

Apollo, Delhi, (8.30 am) – Feb, 2011

“So, let’s continue from where we left. You were talking about problems and misunderstandings. Do you think it is possible to solve all the problems telephonically? I mean, howsoever strong your bond is; it is necessary to meet and discuss. Even one such meeting is more than enough and one tight hug removes all the insecurities and confusions,” Khushi said.

“It was not like I was not trying to revive our relationship. I know I was getting frustrated as well as impatient day by day. It was also getting difficult for me to talk to her daily, but I was trying my level best to make things work and my trip to Kolkata in September, 2009, just before my exams, was one of them. I loved her and finally we were meeting after a span of almost two years. Coincidentally, she was there in her hometown and I was on study leave from my office though my Taxation was still going on,” Rachit tried to defend himself.

New Delhi Railway Station – Ajmeri Gate 1st September, 2009, 4.00 pm

“I hope you realize what kind of a blunder you are doing right now. I mean even a non-serious student will not skip his classes at such a crucial time to meet his girlfriend. And you know Taxation is such an important subject and you are doing decently well right now. Please postpone your trip till your exams are over. If she has waited for you till September, she can wait for another two months. Don’t play with your career, dude,” Nikhil tried his level best to make Rachit understand but unfortunately, it was of no use.

“I know bro, whatever you are saying is correct. But I have got tired of such fights. Since Oct 3rd, 2008 till date we are talking less and arguing more. If it continues like this, it will also destroy the good times we once shared. I need to save our relationship anyhow and at any cost. Where are my tickets?” Rachit said in a helpless tone.

“If you have made your decision then it’s pointless to discuss more. It was impossible to get confirmed tickets at such a short notice. These are the waiting tickets for sleeper class. Pay some money to the ‘TT’ and he will arrange a berth for you. All the best!” With this, he hugged him and handed over the tickets along with the dinner - *poori-aloo* made by his mother - in a tiffin. And then, Rachit left to finally meet his love.

Kolkata Howrah Junction

2nd September, 2009, 7.00 pm

Poorva Express, which takes 24.5 hours to cover 1450 km between New Delhi and Kolkata, was late by “*just*” two hours. Well, it was very good, considering the history of this train. Rachit was getting impatient with every extra minute this train was taking. In those two hours, Radhika had called him at least twenty times. She had been waiting for him at the station. Finally, that moment came, which they had been waiting for. Poorva Express arrived on the platform and Rachit’s eyes were looking for his *Shona*. Suddenly he heard someone calling him.

“*Mishiti*,” and there she was, waiting for him wearing a cute pink top and giving a cute smile.

The next thing Rachit did was really unexpected. He came forward and kissed her! That too in one of India’s most overcrowded railway stations! This came as a shock to her, and when she realized it, she pulled him away.

“*Mishiti*, stop it... people are staring at us.”

“Oops! Sorry... I couldn’t control my emotions. I missed you so much. I love you, *Shona*.”

“I love you too, Rachit. So, how was your journey? How did you get your ticket confirmed?”

“In instalments... I gave some money to the ‘TT’ and he provided me two seat numbers - one from Delhi to Varanasi

and another from Varanasi to Kolkata. And how did you manage to be here so late?” Rachit asked as he was surprised to see her so late.

“Well, I told mom that I am doing a girl’s night out or you can say, a *pyjama party* at Mona *di’s*,” Radhika chuckled.

“I can’t see any *pyjama* here,” Rachit teased her. After all, it was after ages that he was finally with her.

“Rachit...”

“What?”

“Nothing... I love you.”

“*Ahaan*... so what’s the plan? Are you taking me to your place?” Rachit said with a mischievous smile.

“Shut up! Let’s take a taxi and we will go to Hazra. There are some decent hotels there. Once you get a room, we will go to Kalighat Temple and from there you will drop me to Mona *di’s* and the same taxi will drop you to your hotel. I will catch you tomorrow morning outside your hotel. Then I will show you my city, our culture and our people,” Radhika said with sparkling eyes.

“Why temple? You know I am an *Arya Samaji*. Can’t we go somewhere else?” Rachit protested.

“Rachit”

“What?”

“Shut up and do as I say”.

With this, they took a taxi and moved towards Hazra in search of a decent hotel. After a bit of effort, they got one and then they proceeded to Kalighat. It is located on the banks of river Hooghly. It is a Hindu Temple dedicated to Goddess Kali.

People of Kolkata have a lot of faith in this temple as they treat Kali as their mother and pray here with utmost faith. After offering their prayers, Rachit dropped Radhika to Mona di's house and went back to his hotel.

Kolkata – 10 am – Next Day

As promised, Radhika began her mission of introducing her motherland to Rachit. Kolkata has a culture of its own. It is the only place where you can find hand-pulled rickshaws and trams. It is a literary hub of India and has produced people like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Aparna Sen, Kishore da, Manna Dey, Satyajit Ray etc. Kolkata is very famous for its desserts such as *roshogolla*, *shondesh*, *mishti doi* etc. It is also a sports hub due to the landmark Eden Gardens and Salt Lake Stadium. It becomes a completely new city during the month of *Durga Puja*. All the streets dazzle with lights. You can see the different type of podiums or '*pandals*' which are temporary structures made of bamboo and cloth for the purpose of the *puja* at whatever space available in the city. The best things about these *pandals* are the creativity behind them. That year a *Facebook Pandal* had also become famous. Mostly they are made by referring to mythology, history, science, or anything current happening in the country or even pure imagination.

Huge, elaborately crafted statues of Goddess Durga are installed in such podiums. There is a saying that Bengali women look their best during *Durga Puja*. You can see them in gorgeous bright coloured *sarees* and with a red coloured *bindi* on their foreheads.

They started their day with Victoria Memorial which was made famous by a historic classical movie '*Victoria No.203*', St. Paul's Cathedral and Howrah Bridge. After that they decided to catch the latest flick at the South City Mall. After watching the

movie, they had lunch at the Mall's Food Court when suddenly Rachit's mobile pinged.

"What has happened, *Mishti*?"

"Nothing... just an unimportant text," Rachit replied nervously.

"Show me your mobile, Rachit," and with this she snatched it from his hand.

'I am missing you, Rachit. Please come back: Love – Shruti'

"What the hell is going on, Rachit? You had told me that you don't talk to her anymore, but she is still in touch with you," Radhika shouted at him.

Shruti was Rachit's colleague at work and had feelings for him. Although he never reciprocated the feelings and had told everything to Radhika, they used to still fight a lot over this topic. Then one day Rachit promised Radhika that he would sever all his ties with her. Even that of friendship.

"*Yaar*, what can I do about this? How can I control her from texting me? I don't talk to her. You can check my call details or sent messages," Rachit said hastily.

"It's ok, Rachit. I trust you," Radhika said in an unconvincing tone. Her mood was off for the rest of the day. She finally came to see Rachit off as he had to depart the next day in the morning.

They didn't talk much over the next few months because of his CA exams and finally the 'Judgment Day' arrived.

7th Feb, 2010 (PCC result declared)

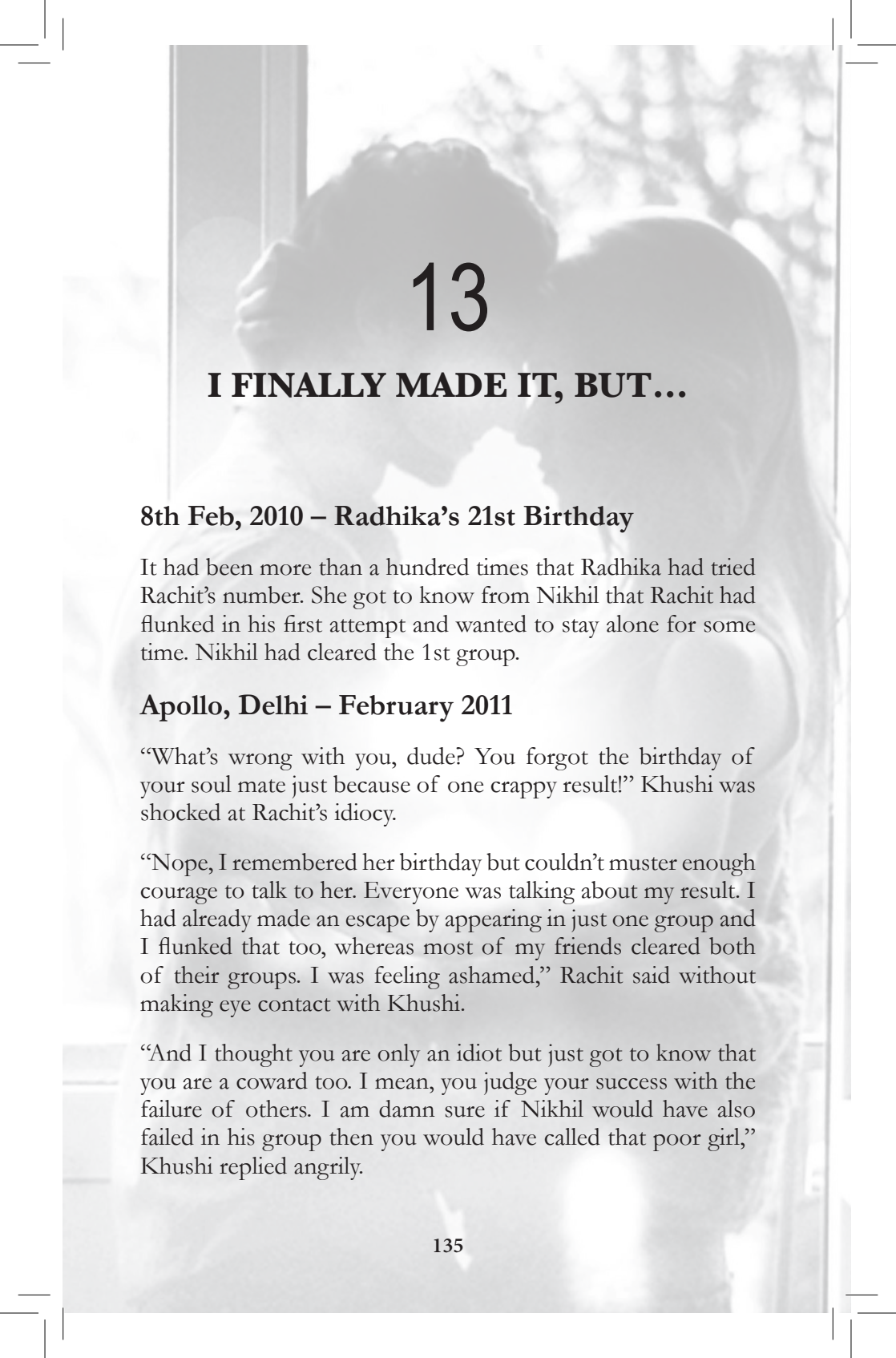
Rachit typed his Roll No. He had flunked in his first PCC attempt. Though he was not very hopeful for a positive result, he was disappointed. His scores were :

Cost Accounting & Financial Management	50
Taxation	31
Information Technology & Strategic Management	57
Total	138
Result	Fail

He whispered to himself,

*“Those who want to live,
Are sentenced with arrows
- Those who want to quit,
Are gifted with sorrows”*





13

I FINALLY MADE IT, BUT...

8th Feb, 2010 – Radhika’s 21st Birthday

It had been more than a hundred times that Radhika had tried Rachit’s number. She got to know from Nikhil that Rachit had flunked in his first attempt and wanted to stay alone for some time. Nikhil had cleared the 1st group.

Apollo, Delhi – February 2011

“What’s wrong with you, dude? You forgot the birthday of your soul mate just because of one crappy result!” Khushi was shocked at Rachit’s idiocy.

“Nope, I remembered her birthday but couldn’t muster enough courage to talk to her. Everyone was talking about my result. I had already made an escape by appearing in just one group and I flunked that too, whereas most of my friends cleared both of their groups. I was feeling ashamed,” Rachit said without making eye contact with Khushi.

“And I thought you are only an idiot but just got to know that you are a coward too. I mean, you judge your success with the failure of others. I am damn sure if Nikhil would have also failed in his group then you would have called that poor girl,” Khushi replied angrily.

“Please don’t insult me. I know I was wrong. I had been wrong in many things and I accept that. I was afraid I would utter something so atrocious in the flow of my emotions that it would end up permanently damaging our relationship.”

“Like what?” Khushi questioned.

“Well, if you had looked at my scorecard, you’d have seen that I had scored decent marks in Costing and IT & SM. I flunked because of Taxation because the time when I should have been attending my classes, I was in Kolkata.”

“Ohh... So now you want to justify your failure by blaming her? I was not expecting such words from you, Rachit. I am highly disappointed.”

“No, it’s not like....”

Khushi interrupted before he could even complete his sentence.

“I don’t even want to hear your explanation. Please continue your story,” Khushi said in a firm voice.

“OK. I am sorry for disappointing you.”

Rachit continued with a sigh, “This time I was more determined and really wanted to succeed in the May, ‘10 attempt. I took a full three month leave from my office for this attempt. This time I appeared for both the groups. You can’t expect a complete turnaround from a guy in three months, but you can expect a positive result. But Radhika started feeling very alone in April. She wanted to talk to me each day. I knew she was hiding something, but I was so engrossed in my preparations that I didn’t bother to ask her about her problem,” Rachit stopped to catch his breath and stop his tears.

“Please continue...”

“Slowly, I developed the habit of escapism. I used to talk to her each day in April while my mind was engrossed in my books

only. I know I was being selfish. I know I was confused and was a real bad guy, but even I was human. I can also make mistakes. I had never tasted failure in my life and the November, 2009 result had hurt my ego”.

“To change my mind, I planned a trip to Kashmir immediately after my May, ‘10 exams. I had told Radhika about it and she was happy for me. I, along with Nikhil and my other friends boarded a train to Jammu from Anand Vihar Railway Station, the same day I had my last exam of IT & SM. This trip was to last fifteen days, but I was not aware that prepaid numbers don’t work in Kashmir. My mobile services went off there. This trip increased the tension between me and Radhika, which I realized only later.”

“Well, it was quite natural. She was waiting for your exams to get over so that she could spend some quality time with you. But on the same day you left for Kashmir, leaving her all alone. You had your friends with you but what about her, Rachit?”

“Even she had her B. Tech group around with her to talk to her and share her problems,” Rachit tried to justify himself.

“Why do you always have to give justifications?? Leave it. Tell me about your result. You must have cleared this time as you had put your relationship at stake only because of these papers!” Khushi asked.

“Everyone was expecting a positive result, and so was I. I had really worked hard for this attempt. But even this time ICAI was playing with my emotions. Our result which was to be declared on 5th had been postponed till 7th August i.e. my birthday. I was expecting that maybe this time God had planned something very special for me. I was very excited because Radhika came to Delhi to be with me on my birthday.”

“That must have been awesome. Wasn’t it? So, you must have spent some quality time together after ages?” Khushi said in an excited tone.

“Initially we were doing that but again I was cheated by lady luck. My May, ‘10 results were out and my marks were as follows” -

GROUP I

Accounting	43
Auditing & Assurance	48
Business Laws, Ethics & Communication	58
Total	149
Result	FAIL

GROUP II

Cost Accounting & Financial Management	50
Taxation	56
Information Technology & Strategic Management	42
Total	148
Result	FAIL

Grand Total: 297

Maximum Marks: 600

Fail without a single exemption.

“I blamed Radhika and our telephonic conversations of April for it, although it was not her fault. I cut off all my connections with her till my next attempt. Actually I was ashamed of my performance and was unable to face her. I thought; I will talk to her once I restore my pride. She tried to contact me ‘n’ no. of times during that period. But I blocked her mobile number and email address. I took her for granted. I thought she wouldn’t leave me. I gave my best shot in Nov, ’10 and cleared both groups with AIR 21. The next thing I did was to book my tickets for Kolkata to go and meet her. I reached her

home on 8th Feb, 2011 i.e. on her birthday. I rang the doorbell and her mom opened the door.”

Feb 8, 2011 – Kolkata – Radhika’s Birthday

Rachit had already met Radhika’s mom during their Delhi visit in 2008. They had often talked on the phone. She knew about their relationship and had accepted her daughter’s choice.

“*Namaste* aunty, where is Radhika?” asked Rachit while touching her feet.

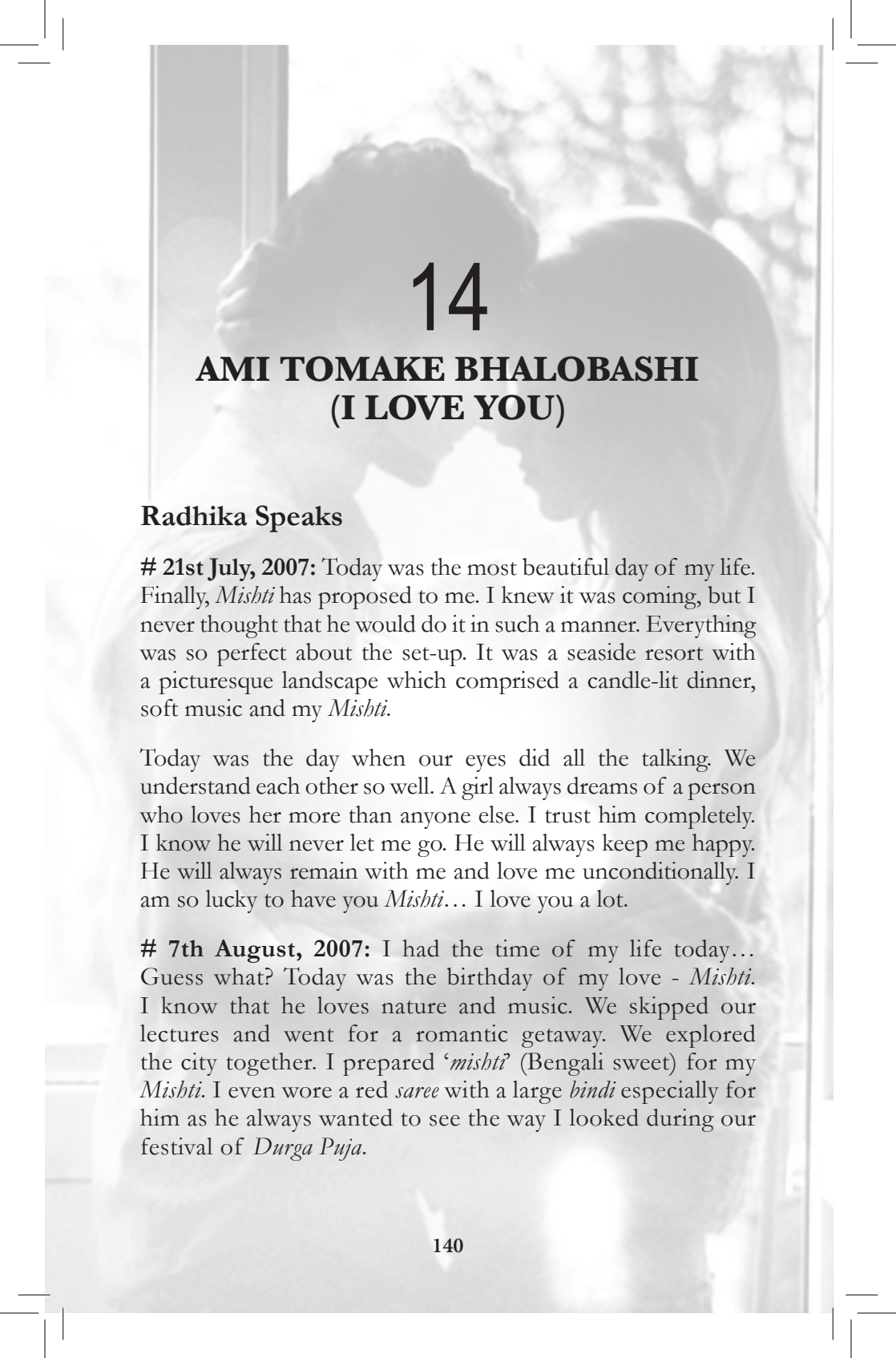
Radhika’s mom looked at him for few minutes in a state of shock and then slapped him. Then she burst into tears.

“Why did you do this to my daughter? This is what you call love?” Her mother shouted at him.

“She is in her room. Go and meet her,” while saying this she completely broke down.

He was still in shock, aghast and clueless as he could not comprehend this weird behaviour of Radhika’s mother. He advanced to Radhika’s room without uttering a single word. There was hardly any sound inside the house. He charged towards her room alongside the balcony. He opened the door and entered the empty room. The room seemed dull as if all happiness had been drained out of it. He couldn’t find Radhika there. Instead, he found a diary titled – “Mishti and Shona”. He got hold of it and started flipping through the pages...



A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace, about to kiss. The man is on the left, and the woman is on the right. They are both looking at each other. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a building. The overall tone is romantic and intimate.

14

AMI TOMAKE BHALOBASHI (I LOVE YOU)

Radhika Speaks

21st July, 2007: Today was the most beautiful day of my life. Finally, *Mishti* has proposed to me. I knew it was coming, but I never thought that he would do it in such a manner. Everything was so perfect about the set-up. It was a seaside resort with a picturesque landscape which comprised a candle-lit dinner, soft music and my *Mishti*.

Today was the day when our eyes did all the talking. We understand each other so well. A girl always dreams of a person who loves her more than anyone else. I trust him completely. I know he will never let me go. He will always keep me happy. He will always remain with me and love me unconditionally. I am so lucky to have you *Mishti*... I love you a lot.

7th August, 2007: I had the time of my life today... Guess what? Today was the birthday of my love - *Mishti*. I know that he loves nature and music. We skipped our lectures and went for a romantic getaway. We explored the city together. I prepared '*mishti*' (Bengali sweet) for my *Mishti*. I even wore a red *saree* with a large *bindi* especially for him as he always wanted to see the way I looked during our festival of *Durga Puja*.



I gifted him a CD of our favourite romantic numbers. I asked him to play the last track and to his surprise it was a special birthday number recorded in my voice. It ended with '*Ami Tomake Bhalobashi*'.

I remember the line that he said after listening to it - 'Your voice is the most magical thing I have ever heard. It casts a spell on me and cuddles my soul.'

I can never forget this as it made me blush. I am madly in love with him...

*I love you because of what you do for me:
 You encourage me when I'm down,
 You make me feel good about myself,
 You make me laugh,
 You show me your love in so many ways.
 Happy Birthday, my love and my friend!*

#1st October, 2007: It was a very tough day for me. 1st October was the day when *Mishiti* lost his mother and he still considers it as a very unlucky day. This year, it tested our relationship and *Mishiti's* courage. Today, he left for Apollo, Delhi and I didn't meet him for the one last time in Chennai. I will never be able to forgive myself for that. He needed me today, but I didn't turn up. Nobody can understand a girl's heart.

I know my *Mishiti*. On the outside, he shows everyone that he is very tough, but in reality he is scared of losing me. I was worried that he would break down on the thought of being separated from me. IIT was his dream and to graduate together from here was a dream which we shared after getting into this relationship. We had planned our future, our first job, our wedding date, our dream house... everything... Now, there is a high probability that we won't be studying together. But everything will become normal. I am with him and will always remain with him.

'I may not get to see you as often as I like. But it will not affect my love for you. I know that I want to hold you in my arms all through the night. I often feel frustrated when I fail to do so. But my heart knows you're the one that I love. I won't give up on us.'

22nd March, 2008: I am so happy that my *Mishiti* has fought against all odds and finally proven everybody wrong. I know CPT is just the first phase of a very long journey, but he will become a very good professional. CA is something he never wanted to do and though he has never shared it with me, I know he is only doing it half-heartedly. But I am with him. I will encourage him to love his current field.

Today is a very significant day for him. He is going to Delhi to start his Articleship along with his PCC coaching. Being a B. Tech student, I don't know much about it, but I will Google the terms and visit the ICAI site to learn as much about them as I can, so that I can also contribute in our discussions. I just don't want to be a passive listener. If we are in a relationship, it doesn't mean that we will only talk about romance and positive things. I want to share his problems too. I want to be an active part of his life.

3rd October, 2008: Why *Mishti*? Why? I am not crying because you shouted at me, but because you hung up the phone without even listening to my side of the story. I was worried about you. You had a fever yesterday and today your phone was switched-off since morning. I just wanted to know whether you are alright or not! I know you are very careless when it comes to your health. You won't go to a doctor. So, I asked my mom about the medicines which you can take now.

You said that I can't see you happy, while the only purpose of my life is to see and keep you happy. Why would I be jealous of your friends? I am happy that you have found an awesome group in Diksha, Shalini and Nikhil. They have filled the void which was created due to your separation from your B. Tech group. I am happy that at least someone is there in Delhi to take care of you when I am here in Chennai. *Mishti*, don't do this to me ever again. I really love you... :-)

8th Feb, 2010: Today is my 21st birthday and everyone is expecting me to be happy. But how can I enjoy when my *Mishti* is not happy? He flunked in his first PCC attempt whose results were out yesterday. I wanted to talk to him. But he switched off his cell yet again. I wanted to tell him that the person who loves you never judges you. I am with you, *Mishti*. I know you will clear your May, '10 attempt with flying colours. I was hopeful that when *Mishti* will call me to wish me, we will talk and sort it out. But he didn't.... I waited for him to greet me till midnight, but he didn't... I am not sad that he forgot my birthday, but

about the fact that I couldn't talk to the most important person of my life on such a special day.

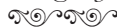
25th April, 2010: Things are not going well between me and *Mishti* off late. After his Nov, '09 results, he has started to take our relationship as a liability. 14th Feb was the last time when we shared anything good and since then we only talked. I am missing my *Mishti's* smile and our loving conversations. I am turning insomniac day by day. We hardly talk, but whenever we do, we fight. And to make it worse, *Mishti* has left me alone to sob. I don't want him to apologize. I just want him to love me like he used to. I keep thinking about him all night. I don't know where I am lacking. Maybe it is my fault after all. He can't be wrong. He is the one whom I loved and trusted. These things are not letting me sleep.

My health is deteriorating too. My grades are suffering endlessly. My GPA has dropped from 8.5 to 5. In the next semester (7th Sem.), we have our placements and I have to come back on track before June. I don't feel like talking to my B.Tech friends anymore. I am feeling very alone here. I wish I could go back to Kolkata. I am missing my family. I feel as if love and happiness have been drained out of my life.

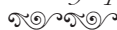
*It's been so long;
That your rain has touched my land!
I feel it's now been years,
Since I sensed your hand in my hand!*



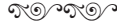
*My so-called alive body is dying inside,
Asking for your love that gives me pride!
Again, it's been really long;
When I last sang any happy song!*



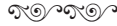
*I crave for your touch,
That arouses in me goose bumps - as such!
The smile that was worth a million dollars for you,
Still waits at my lips so true!*



*A feeling that you would be the same,
A hope that you will call me by my name;
Just everything is a dream now;
But still I need your love to help me grow, anyhow!*



*It's been so long;
That your rain has touched my land!
Again, it's been really long;
When I last sang any happy song!*



7th Aug, 2010: I was very excited today. I flew down from Chennai to Delhi to celebrate *Mishti's* birthday in a similar manner, like we did in 2007. I really wanted to make him feel special today. *Mishti* was really tensed. His May, '10 PCC result was supposed to be declared on 5th August but later it was postponed for today. We met at '*Dilli Haat*' at around 11 am. For the first time in the past one year, we were actually talking. He was holding my hand and was also making me smile. Then someone messaged him that the results were out. He opened the site on his mobile, and the next thing I saw was an ocean of tears flowing from his eyes. He was crying badly. In fact, he was howling. I was shocked. I hugged him and then checked his mobile. His marks were as follows:

GROUP I

Accounting	43
Auditing & Assurance	48
Business Laws, Ethics & Communication	58
Total	149
Result	FAIL

GROUP II

Cost Accounting & Financial Management	50
Taxation	56
Information Technology & Strategic Management	42
Total	148
Result	FAIL

Grand Total: 297

Maximum Marks: 600

Fail without a single exemption.

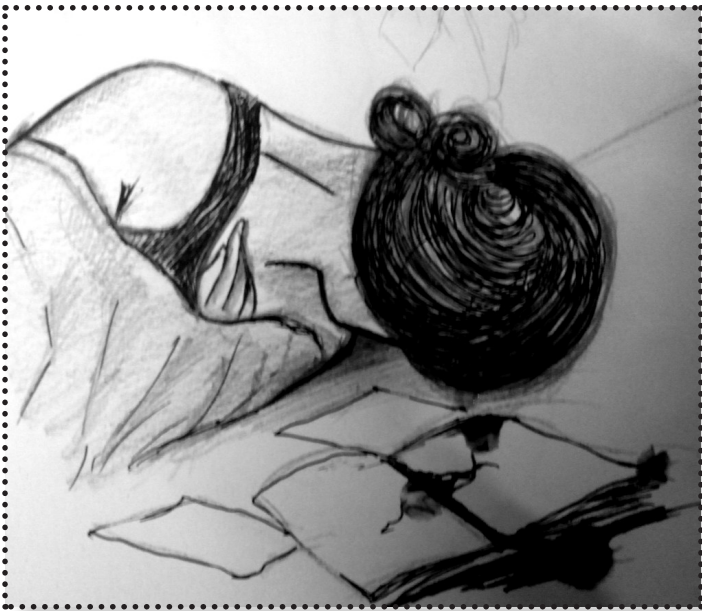
I tried to console him to the best of my capability, but he asked me to leave him alone. He accused me and our late night conversations for his unfortunate result. He went away leaving me all alone to cry. I tried to call him, but he didn't pick up my call either. He didn't even turn up to drop me at the station. Although, I was just going back from Delhi to Chennai, I felt like as though I was going away from my *Mishti's* life. It was a terrible feeling as if I wouldn't be able to see him in the future. I hope this was just fear and not reality. I won't be able to survive without him.

I can't live without you and can't seem to live with you. Can't decide whether to hold on or let go.

1st Jan, 2011 (New Year's Eve): I can't bear this pain anymore. When I say pain, I mean my physical as well as emotional pain. It's been five months since we last spoke. I tried to contact him, but he has blacklisted my number. Once I called him from someone else's cell, but he disconnected the call after hearing my voice. I know he is not cheating on me. He is also suffering like me. I contacted his Delhi friends, but no one has seen him for a while. He has also changed his hostel and maybe his number too. He wants to be left alone. I know

he will bounce back but only after proving his capabilities by clearing his exam. I can wait for him for a lifetime, but my body is not allowing me to do so. All those tranquillizers and sleeping pills are showing their effect now.

My liver has become very weak and I am showing zero-resistance to diseases and possible negative reactions to other drugs. I bleed from my nose. I skipped my semester exams and also placements. I am in Kolkata now with my parents. Today the whole world is celebrating New Year and someone has just wished me that this New Year brings me peace, joy, good health and everything I desire. I just desire that my *Mishti* clears his exam with good marks and comes back to me. I can't live without him. Without him in my arms; I feel emptiness in my soul. I don't want anyone but him.



1st Feb, 2011: I am finding it very difficult to grip the pen. I had vomited blood twice yesterday. *Mishti*, it's my birthday a week from now and I know that you will definitely come. I am trying my best to hold on till then. But those pills and drugs have caused permanent damage to me. I thought of curing

my pain with the help of those drugs. I am suffering because of my own fault. I don't want you to blame yourself. Maybe I didn't trust our love and took the aid of these drugs to forget you.

Maybe I love you beyond words and that is why I feel you are being unfair towards me but can't express it in words. Instead, I choose to express it through tears, which you always fail to see.

If you are reading this from my diary then it means that I have surrendered to this pain. Please don't worry as I have just gone out of this world and not from your heart.

'I am not going anywhere, my love. This is not a goodbye. It's just that I want to sleep. I am very tired. Tired of waiting for you... tired of this pain... may be tired of this life. But before going anywhere, I want to thank you for coming into my life, for loving me and receiving my love in return. Thank you for the memories, I will cherish forever. I love you.'

*Love a fire,
Where I burnt my desire
His love was all I ever admired,
Never knew how he got tired!
I agree his love was intense,
In his smell, I felt my sense.
Slowly time and luck failed,
Day and night I simply craved...
I wanted his love at tranquil,
I got nothing but addicted to sleeping pill.
I swear, drugs used to fail over his love,
Only his dreams were at my curve.
I was about to wish me goodbye,
Rolling up the tear of my last cry.
Finally he came to my rescue,*

*Leaving all the things due....
But drugs overruled me,
Keeping his love safe; finally I've got to flee!*

And here I stand and bid goodbye to you with a heavy heart but a steady mind. There is pain, but also a soothing numbness curbing that pain.

I will love you forever and ever... And maybe even after that if I can. **Ami Tomake Bhalobashi...**

Yours

Shona



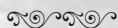
15

KHUSHI – THE REAL HAPPINESS

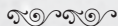
CA Hostel, 3 am, Delhi (February, 2011)

It had been over seventy two hours since Rachit had stepped out of his room. He was constantly crying and reading Radhika's diary again and again. Finally, he came out and moved towards the balcony of the third floor. He thought for a while, looked at the stars, smiled and then jumped from there with nostalgic and guilty thoughts.

*The end of my dreams if I lose your love,
I know I am so addicted to your things -
That a moment never passes making you my wings,
I am in love, so much in love with you,
That I can't keep mum -
& my waves of love are always touching your shore!*



*The end of my heart if I lose your love,
My heart beats thinking about you day and night -
Only with you can I survive to thrive,
I really can't live -
& if I have to -
Then I will cut my nerves with a sharpened knife!*



*The end of my smiles if I lose your love,
The slightest of fear makes my décor dull -
Can I ask you?
Do you have feelings or shall I consider it null?*



*I won't be able to speak, smile, live or respire,
Leaving you, my wings catch fire!
I really can't live day, night or noon -
The end of everything about me comes to me so soon!*



*Losing you I lost myself,
Simply gazing at the stars to fix myself
Yes, I am coming to reach you lady,
It's the end of my world -
After losing you and your love!*



Apollo, Delhi (February, 2011)

With this, Rachit had had too much and he burst into tears. Khushi hugged him and gave him a glass of water.

“You know what your problem is, Rachit?” Khushi said. “You have a habit to quit. You don’t want to face problems head on, but have developed a habit of escapism.”

“What makes you say this?” Rachit asked.

“Right from your IIT days to CA life, that is what you are doing, man... quit, quit and quit... On one hand you claim to be strong, but your heart knows that you run away from reality and responsibility. You made Radhika pay for this nature of yours and now your father is suffering too because of that. You didn’t think a bit about your father before trying to commit suicide. I mean, he is only living for you. Even he could have

given up after your mom's death, but he is still living... that too only for you and your brother. You have a responsibility towards your family. It's high time you realize it."

"Khushi, just shut up! You don't know anything, so please don't judge me. You can never understand what amount of pain I have gone through," said Rachit angrily.

"And you can never understand the amount of pain Radhika had gone through, without any fault of hers. Her only fault was that she loved you, and loved you unconditionally. In fact, you were her life. Nobody forced you to do CA. It was all your decision. Your first mistake was to choose CA after quitting B. Tech. because it was hurting your ego. A sensible person would have concentrated on improving his health at that time and would have prepared for the next year's JEE. But, you were not able to digest the fact that all your friends will become your seniors or maybe you won't be able to get into IIT, which was your dream. But, Rachit dreams change according to situations. Everything doesn't go as you have planned. Life gives you challenges and the best part of life is that, it provides equal opportunities to overcome them and emerge as a winner. Rachit, CA no doubt, is a brilliant line, but it was never your dream. You should have followed your dream of becoming an engineer."

"Even if you are getting it at the cost of one year and have to settle for a mediocre college?" Rachit questioned Khushi's logic.

"So what? People drop out for two-three years consecutively in preparation of Medical and even then, they settle for an average medical college."

"I don't want to discuss that. I have lost my Radhika and now, I don't have any purpose to live."

"This is your second problem. You never discuss your problems. You just take decisions and expect everyone around you to adjust their life accordingly. Firstly, without discussing

with your father you decided to quit engineering. Radhika suffered from insomnia because of you. You assumed that she won't understand your problems. On the other hand, instead of facing them, you started to ignore both of them."

"I had a tough life. I thought I could solve my problems on my own. I thought she would understand. It was just a matter of a few months. I was not going anywhere."

"Not going anywhere? Dude, you were never with her! I am not talking about the physical distance but the emotional part. It was always about you. You only talked to her when you needed her. You used her as a stress-buster. She just needed some attention. Love is not about being in a relationship, but living the relationship. At times, when you were with your friends or were enjoying, you hardly cared for her. She used to wait for you for long hours and finally died waiting for you. She was murdered... Your self-obsession killed her. You were very lucky to have her, but all you gave her was lifelong pain."

"That's why I tried to commit suicide because I was the cause of her suffering."

"And do you think that would have released you from your guilt? Idiot, she wanted to see you happy. She wanted you to be a successful CA. Even in her last breath, she was praying that you should do CA whole heartedly. She never doubted your skills. At the time of your negative result, she wanted to be with you... to hold your hand, be in your arms and say that, '*Rachit, I trust you and I know you will be a very successful man*'. And look at what you did to her. You accused her of being the reason of your failure and left her all alone to suffer. She came to Delhi all the way from Chennai to celebrate your birthday and you left her because of your negative result."

"But I came back... maybe a bit late," Rachit lowered his eyes, feeling guilty of his deeds.

"No, you came back as per your convenience i.e. when you had restored your pride or in other words satisfied your ego. Her

love was not dependent on your professional achievements, Rachit. Your soul mate is the one who remains with you throughout your journey of life. We all know that life is not that simple and in the course of this hard life, we might face numerous challenges, problems and setbacks. The difference between people who succeed in life and who don't is their ability to face challenges correctly and not the absence of challenges."

"I had never tasted failure in my life. I didn't know how to react. I thought if I would remove all my connections with this world for few months, everything would eventually become fine. I did get a rank in the next attempt," Rachit said in a defensive tone.

"Rachit, look into my eyes. Face the reality instead of turning blind to it. You would have anyway got a rank, Rachit. In your last attempt, you missed your aggregate by just three marks. That means you knew your subjects well and all you needed was just a little more effort. How much does it take to talk for twenty minutes to your beloved? It was not like you were studying twenty four hours. It's all in the mind and about love. Life is not designed for people to succeed in the first attempt itself. There are two kinds of people - one that expects easy successes and a smooth life that has relatively few bumps and the other, who understands that they need to try more than just once in order to get what they want. You belong to the first category that is extremely vulnerable to life's problems and challenges. Instead of finding solutions, you blame others for your loss. You can't avoid setbacks, but you can learn how to bounce back each time you face one."

"And what am I supposed to do now?"

"First of all, learn to control your emotions. Don't let your emotions overrule your decisions. Your mood swings are your major problem. I am damn sure you must be suffering from high blood pressure. Life is not a race where you have to prove all the time. You behave in a manner as if you have the

burden of the whole world. Just give yourself some time, talk to yourself and relax your mind. Do what you like. Something that you love to do and it will act like a stress-buster. What is your hobby?”

“Well, I love writing,” Rachit’s eyes were shining with hope.

“That’s great. Just pen down your thoughts! Only a calm mind can take a proper decision. Don’t let her memories haunt you; rather her love should be your motivation. Your hard time is over. You are in your finals and most of your Articleship is also done. Concentrate on your finals and give time to your family. Your father needs you a lot. Whatever you have done cannot be reversed. So, don’t give much stress to your brain.”

“But...”

“Shhh... Now relax. Take some rest now. We will talk tomorrow.”

“Thanks,” Rachit said, with eyes full of gratitude.

“Why?”

“Well, for listening to my story and making me feel better.”

“I’ll always be there for you, Rachit,” Khushi said assuring him.

“Sorry, I didn’t get you.” Rachit was surprised.

“Nothing. Just close your eyes and sleep, OK?”

“I am anyway tired. Good Night.”

“Sweet dreams”



Apollo Delhi, Next Day

Rachit opened his eyes and saw the smiling faces of Diksha and Shalini.

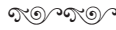
“Finally you have opened your eyes, man... we were so worried about you,” Diksha said.

“Then where were you yesterday when I was all alone here and was crying in pain? Thank God Khushi was there to help me out,” Rachit said.

“What?” Shalini shouted.

“Why? What happened?” Rachit asked in a puzzled manner.

“Rachit, you were in a coma for the past seventy two hours due to head injuries caused by the impact of the fall,” Diksha said.



Khushi Speaks...

I know many of you must be in a state of shock and raising questions about my identity. Don't worry; I am not Radhika's ghost who had come in Rachit's dream. Then who am I? Well, it's very simple ... I am '*Khushi*' i.e. your inner happiness. I am

always with you, but you are all so involved in your own life that you often ignore me. You may relate to me with your inner voice. Following your heart and listening to your inner voice is a method to attain me. Just like in the loud noise of heavy metal you often miss a smooth beat, similarly you are so engaged in one big problem that you often miss different forms of me. If you can't enjoy the joy of one moment again and again, then why do you think about one problem repeatedly?

You can find me everywhere – in professional success, shades of love, flavours of relationship, winning a competition and many more things. But practically they all are my elements; just like there are different elements of life. A combination of all of these together completes me. If someone is professionally very successful but has messed up his personal life, he can never be happy. There is no point of getting success when your loved ones are not with you. Rachit secured a rank in CA but at the cost of his love i.e. Radhika.

Things move far too fast in the hustle and bustle of today's world and you can often be left feeling as though you hardly have any time for your family, friends and leisure time with incessant work commitments, not to mention any time for yourself. But you can easily maintain it by creating a balance between your personal and professional life. You should overview and prioritize things and accordingly make lists. There are many students who are doing CA and are also committed. But not all of them have a messed up life.

They know both the things are equally important and they plan them accordingly. If you think CA is the only line where you have no time for yourself, then you are wrong. In Medical, one has to attend lectures and then they have practicals, internships, exams, self-study and simultaneously their love life to handle. Even after they become a doctor, their situation doesn't improve much.

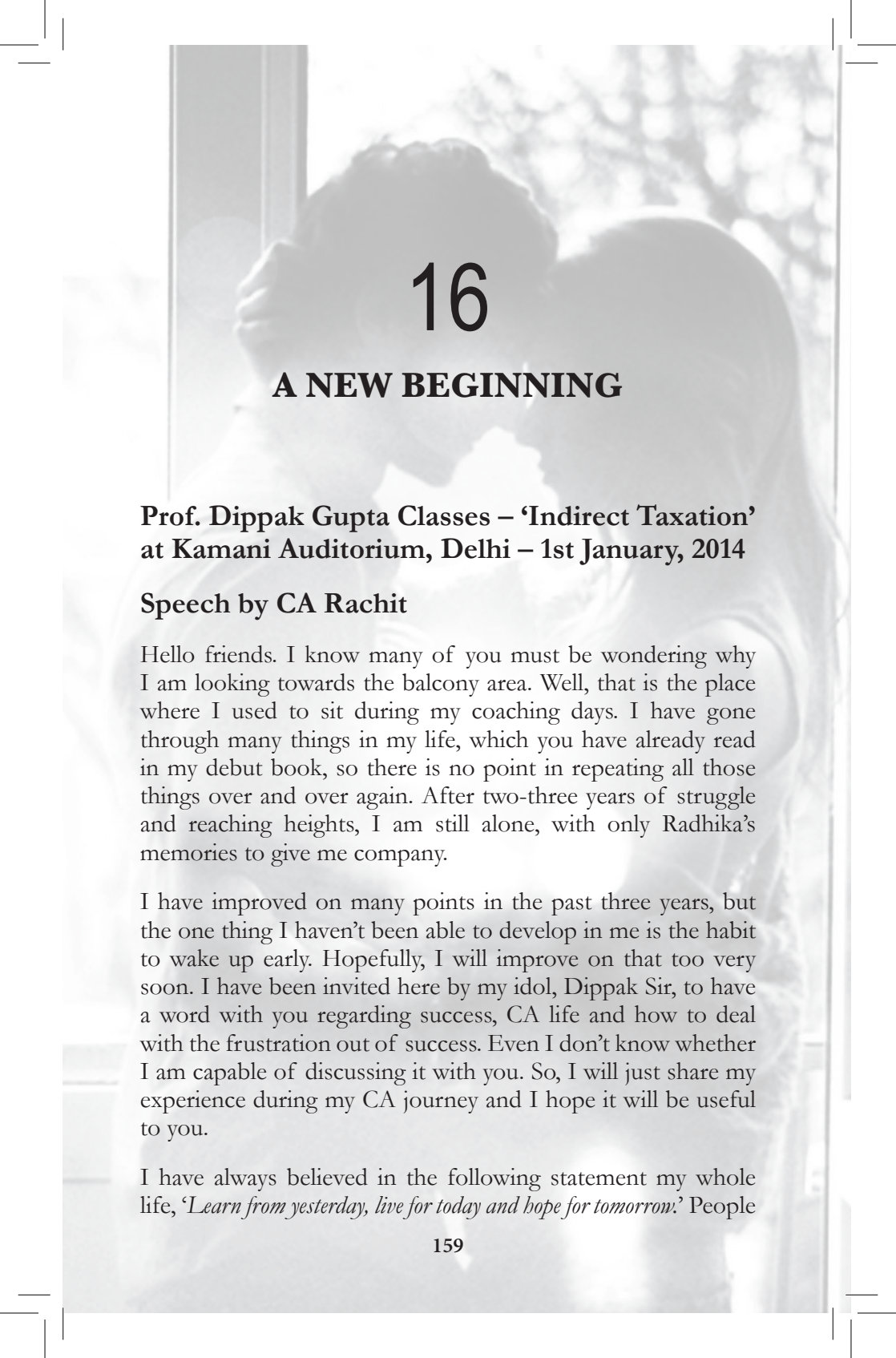
So the best thing is to enjoy every moment of life. Take it as it comes and above all, never quit because life is very precious.

“If a life brings challenges then it also brings several promises. It depend on us whether to see the glass as Half Full or Half Empty.”

I am quoting the lines from a very famous as well as a very old poem. These lines have been quoted in various blogs, websites and books, though the author of it is still unknown.

*When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.
Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You may succeed with another blow.
Often the goal is nearer than,
It seems to a faint and faltering man,
Often the struggler has given up,
When he might have captured the victor's cup,
And he learned too late when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.
Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far,
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.*





16

A NEW BEGINNING

**Prof. Dippak Gupta Classes – ‘Indirect Taxation’
at Kamani Auditorium, Delhi – 1st January, 2014**

Speech by CA Rachit

Hello friends. I know many of you must be wondering why I am looking towards the balcony area. Well, that is the place where I used to sit during my coaching days. I have gone through many things in my life, which you have already read in my debut book, so there is no point in repeating all those things over and over again. After two-three years of struggle and reaching heights, I am still alone, with only Radhika’s memories to give me company.

I have improved on many points in the past three years, but the one thing I haven’t been able to develop in me is the habit to wake up early. Hopefully, I will improve on that too very soon. I have been invited here by my idol, Dippak Sir, to have a word with you regarding success, CA life and how to deal with the frustration out of success. Even I don’t know whether I am capable of discussing it with you. So, I will just share my experience during my CA journey and I hope it will be useful to you.

I have always believed in the following statement my whole life, *‘Learn from yesterday, live for today and hope for tomorrow.’* People

believe that there is no point in digging your past, but I don't agree with them. I firmly believe that we should learn from our mistakes. You should introspect to make sure that you are not going to repeat them in the future and for that we need to admit our mistakes. You can only learn from a mistake after you admit you've made it instead of blaming others for the same. That you failed in some paper or attempt is a thing of the past but the most important thing is to learn from your failures. Every failure is an experience for you. It is adding to the list of what not to do in your life. It's really OK if you couldn't clear your PCC/Final; one exam can't judge your capabilities as a person. I can give you examples of many CA's who couldn't clear their first attempt, but they are now earning much more respect and money in comparison to the "first attempt pass outs". So it is very important to introspect yourself. If you feel that you are not capable of clearing your exam then look back into your past and think about your achievements like at a school quiz or winning a debate or a sports meet or securing 1st rank in college. If you can do it in the past then you can do it now too.

Second thing is managing your personal life along with your professional life. I have heard many people saying that if you are doing CA then just forget about love and relationships. It is a complete myth. It all depends on how you manage your time. You can enjoy success only when you have your loved ones to share it with. So never ignore your family and love your parents. We can divide this topic into two things - Love and friendship.

There is a saying in C.A. "Hundred words don't give pain when a teacher takes a class. But a friend's silence in an examination hall hurts a lot." Jokes apart, friends are very important in our life especially when we are pursuing a correspondence course like CA where we don't get much chance to enjoy college life like Engineering or Medical students. They are the people on whom we look upon when we are low (*ya toh attempt mein fail ya phir pyaar mein fail*). Guys, how can you forget the combined study sessions with your friends when almost 60% of the paper

comes from it? They are also the ones with whom you criticize the tough paper set or the low pass percentage of ICAI on the result day or the usual delay of the PCC result. So never let your best buddies go away.

It is very necessary to give time to your partner. If you are finding it difficult to do so then at least communicate with him/her. Most of the problems get solved by mere communication because all she needs is a bit of your time, smile and love. But some people overdo it. If your relationship is not working or he/she is no more with you then don't stop your life but keep going. I believe that if a relation fails then the mistake is from both sides. So, instead of accusing the other party, better realize your own mistake too. By improving ourselves, we will be in a better position and can get into a healthy new relationship. If you are feeling low about your break up then just think about the good time which you spent with him/her.

“Koi chabe kabin bhi chala jaaye par apni yadeein jaroor de jayega jo ki sirf tumhari hai aur koi bhi tumse vo nahi cheen sakta... sirf tumhari hai.”

Dream... Yes, it is very important to dream for your future. One bad incident should not stop you from dreaming. Dreams and imagination are the ingredients of a dish called 'future'. These are not the dreams which you see while sleeping, but these are your daydreams and believe me you will be paid very well for day dreaming. Everyone must have at least one dream and he should follow it till he achieves it. It gives you motivation to keep on living. Many people would have many dreams and the fulfilment of more than one dream in their lifetime. You must keep on dreaming. Once you dream a dream and that dream comes to pass, you move on to the next level and dream another dream.

Many students complain about lack of sources of inspiration. In short, they don't know whom to look upon for inspiration. Well, the best source of inspiration is you, yourself. You can also be inspired from current events and things around you.

You can get inspiration from nature, movies, sports or any historic moment. There are four main incidents in Cricket which inspired me a lot and still continue to do so.

*Anil Kumble with a broken jaw gets Brian Lara LBW - India v/s WI, 4th test, Antigua 2002. This shows your commitment towards your profession. Choose the career of your choice and then give your 100% to it.

*Sachin scoring a century after his father's death, 29th May, 1999 India v/s Kenya, Bristol – The Indian team was under pressure to win the match to stay in contention as they had lost their previous two games to South Africa and Zimbabwe. Sachin had not taken part in the match against Zimbabwe as he had to return to India because of the rather unfortunate death of his father. However, he made it a point to return to England for the World Cup. His hundred against Kenya is still talked about as one of the greatest knockouts of all time simply because of all the pressures (most of them non-cricketing) he was under. This shows that the biggest motivator in this world is you. If you want to do something, then do it for yourself.

*Graeme Smith batting with broken hand - AUS v/s SA, 3rd Test 5th Day, Sydney, 7th Jan, 2009 - S.A. was struggling to save the test match against Aussies and with 9 wickets down and there was no way that the South African captain Graeme Smith could come to bat in the last wicket, "Smith walked out at No. 11, looking to survive 8.2 overs with a broken hand, his own blood recently injected into his right elbow, and a desperate Australian attack." It was a special moment in World Cricket to watch Smith come out from that dressing room to bat in No. 11 with his broken hand and the entire Australian crowd giving Graeme a standing ovation was really inspiring. There is a saying that the leader should lead from the front by setting an example for others.

*Mohd. Kaif and Yuvraj's partnership at Lords, Natwest series final, IND v/s ENG, 14th July, 2002 - Chasing as mammoth a target of 325, India was struggling at 5-146 with all its big guns

back to the pavilion. Two youngsters, Kaif and Yuvraj were on the crease, but no one was expecting miracles from them. They played brilliantly, forged a fantastic partnership at the crucial stage and took India home. Y. Singh scored 69 and M. Kaif 87 not out, to bring one of the finest wins in the history of one-day cricket. This shows that when no one believes you, then it's good that you have no pressure to perform.

We can also learn a lot from nature. 'Why is it so cold? Why is it so hot? It's raining so heavily outside!' This is how a common man reacts to changing seasons or the cycle of nature. Actually it's not their mistake as they are too busy with their tight schedule to observe the beauty of nature. Even I was a part of them till 2009 i.e. before visiting Kashmir. Yes, after visiting this 'Heaven on Earth', I started to look at nature with a completely different perspective. To change with the change is adaptability. We have read in Strategic Management too, that the primary objective of the firm is survival. All animals, especially camels, are great examples of adaptability. Camels exist in deserts and can survive for many days without water. So we should learn to survive in extremities without losing our confidence. We should adapt to situations and conditions which are laid before us. Due to my busy schedule, I sometimes forget to water my plants and then after seeing them in a droopy state I quickly water them. But you know what, after watering, they again get back to their previous stage without complaining about anything to me. It means they forgive me and start loving me again. So please forgive everyone and win as many hearts as you can.

There is also a need to relax your body otherwise it may lead to frustration.

1. Has it ever happened to you that you are trying to concentrate very hard to understand a concept of Law or IT SM, but you couldn't do it?
2. You are studying for two hours but your effective study is zero.

Music can help you to overcome such problems. Music is not only what comes from a CD player. But natural sounds like chirping of birds, flowing water of a river, smooth blowing of the wind and movement of leaves also constitutes music. Whenever I feel low and find it difficult to concentrate, I spend time at a quiet place listening to the sound of nature and thereby gain energy to perform my work. Many people also believe that any music you respond to positively, will work for you.

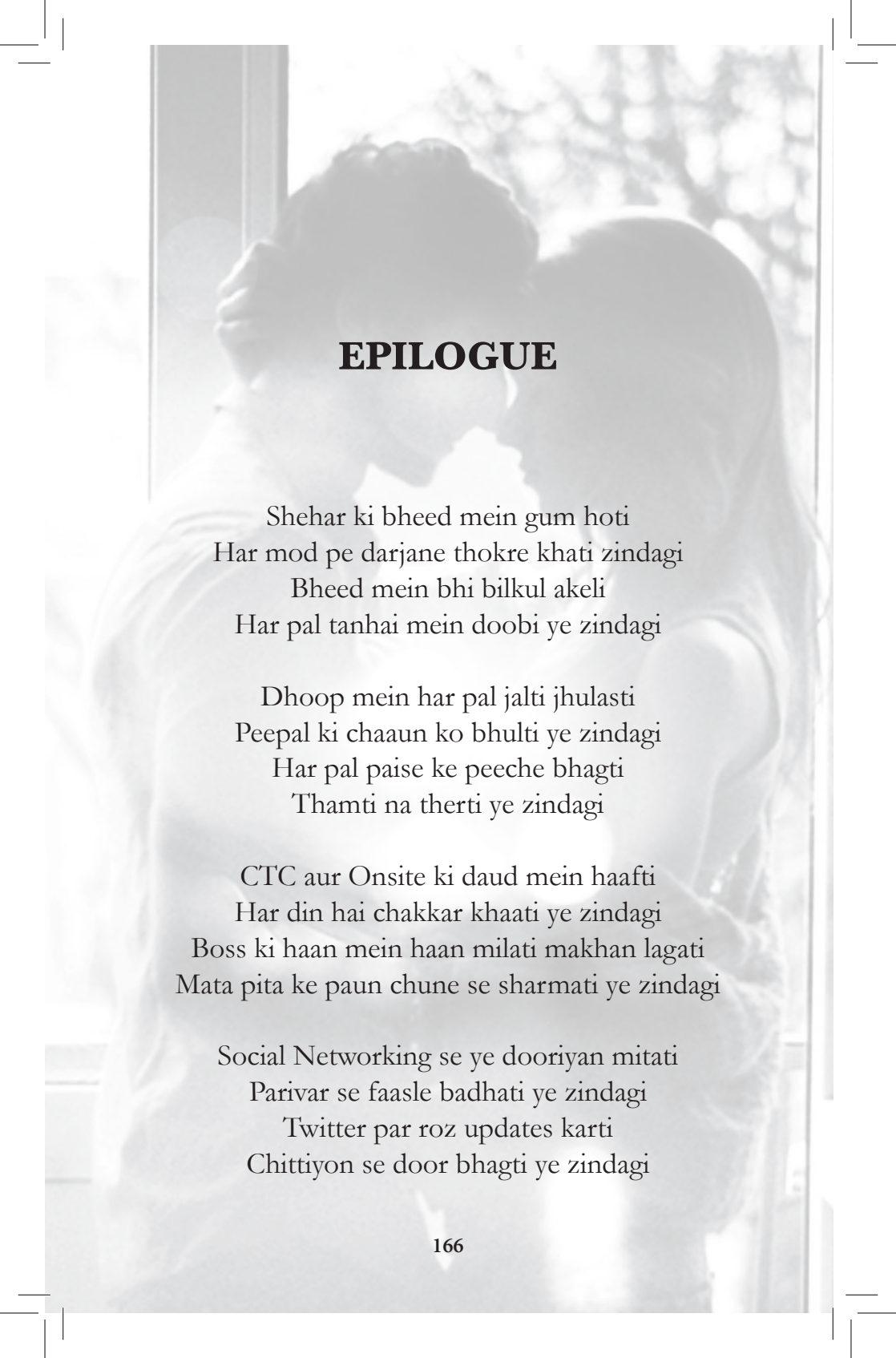
Now coming to the last and most important topic: How to deal with frustration out of failure? With every result, we encounter two terms - failure and frustration. The reason for failure differs from person to person. I can't guide you how to study and where you lack as you are the best judge of yourself. But yes, what I can share from my experience is how to prepare yourself again for the fight and cope up with the frustration caused by results. People say that, in CA, we get six months to prepare for the next attempt, but according to me, you only get three effective months. 2.5 months are wasted in waiting for results and rest fifteen days in discussing them with your friends. Such discussions are of no use. If you have some problem with the examiner, then you can apply for revaluation. But till then, you should make up your mind for the next attempt and start preparing for it. So, discuss your result with yourself (i.e. to analyse your mistakes) and not with others. Every success story is also a story of a great failure. The only difference is that they never gave up. So don't get discouraged if it takes a little longer than you expected. Talk to your best friend but not about the result but about something else. It helps to build up your energy levels. We do absorb energy from others and friends play a great role in CA.

Ask yourself, "What is working in this situation?" Your thoughts play a major role in your success. What you get has a lot to do with your thinking. Taking a break and remembering to keep your sense of humour can also help. This time of frustration will pass.

So I would like to conclude with the point that a positive mind is far more open to solutions and answers than a negative one that thinks it's just "hopeless" and thinks "what's the use?" A closed mind will not be able to see the possible solutions and will attract negativity."

With this, Rachit completed his speech and received a standing ovation from everyone present and praise from Dippak sir. **This was a new beginning in his life.**





EPILOGUE

Shehar ki bheed mein gum hoti
Har mod pe darjane thokre khati zindagi
Bheed mein bhi bilkul akeli
Har pal tanhai mein doobi ye zindagi

Dhoop mein har pal jalti jhulasti
Peepal ki chaaun ko bhulti ye zindagi
Har pal paise ke peeche bhagti
Thamti na therti ye zindagi

CTC aur Onsite ki daud mein haafti
Har din hai chakkar khaati ye zindagi
Boss ki haan mein haan milati makhan lagati
Mata pita ke paun chune se sharmati ye zindagi

Social Networking se ye dooriyan mitati
Parivar se faasle badhati ye zindagi
Twitter par roz updates karti
Chittiyon se door bhagti ye zindagi

Aasman ko jhukane ki khwahish rakhti
Bhagwan ke saamne jhukne se sharmati ye zindagi
America jaane ki tamanna dil mein sanjoti
Gaon jaane se katrati ye zindagi

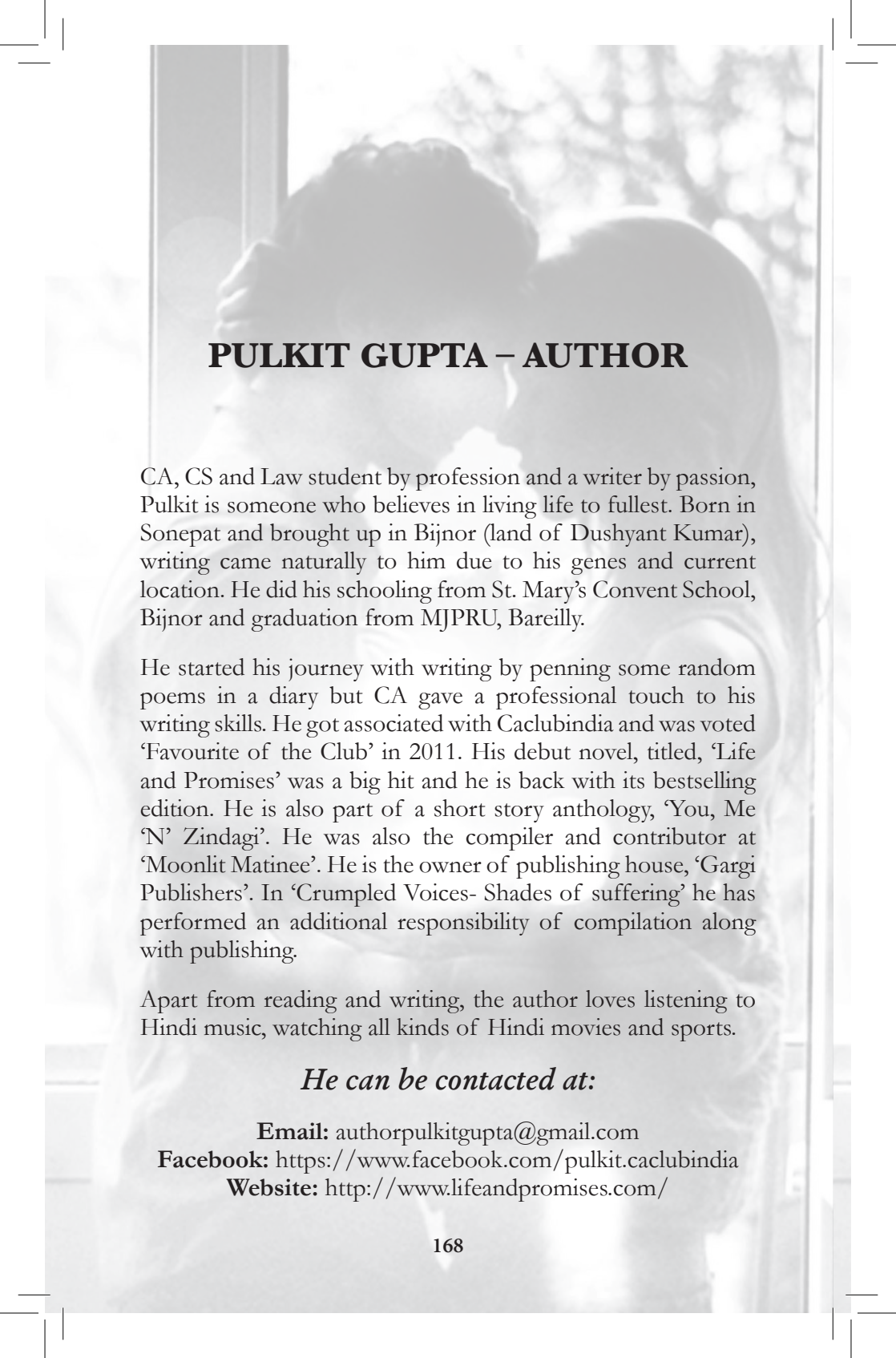
Darzanon channel se har pal duniyaan ka haal pata
lagati
Padosiyon ka haal bhulti ye zindagi
Internet par roz naye rishte banati
Dil ke rishton ko bhulti ye zindagi

Burger-Pizza kha kar Coffee peeti
Ghar ki roti ko tarasti ye zindagi
Badi-Badi malls ke chakkar kat ti
Nauchandi ke melo ko bhulti ye zindagi

Gaganchumbi imarton mein rat bhar jaagti
Chain ki neend ko tarasti ye zindagi
Heater aur AC ke changul mein rehti
Sardi ki dhoop aur garmi ki purvai ko bhulti ye
zindagi

Duniyan ko hamesha shaq ki nazar se dekhti
Haath milane se pehle jaat poochti ye zindagi
Ek gumshuda se khwaab ko talashti
Ajnabi si lagne lagi hai mujhe zindagi

—Abhishek 'Atul'



PULKIT GUPTA – AUTHOR

CA, CS and Law student by profession and a writer by passion, Pulkit is someone who believes in living life to fullest. Born in Sonapat and brought up in Bijnor (land of Dushyant Kumar), writing came naturally to him due to his genes and current location. He did his schooling from St. Mary's Convent School, Bijnor and graduation from MJPRU, Bareilly.

He started his journey with writing by penning some random poems in a diary but CA gave a professional touch to his writing skills. He got associated with Caclubindia and was voted 'Favourite of the Club' in 2011. His debut novel, titled, 'Life and Promises' was a big hit and he is back with its bestselling edition. He is also part of a short story anthology, 'You, Me 'N' Zindagi'. He was also the compiler and contributor at 'Moonlit Matinee'. He is the owner of publishing house, 'Gargi Publishers'. In 'Crumpled Voices- Shades of suffering' he has performed an additional responsibility of compilation along with publishing.

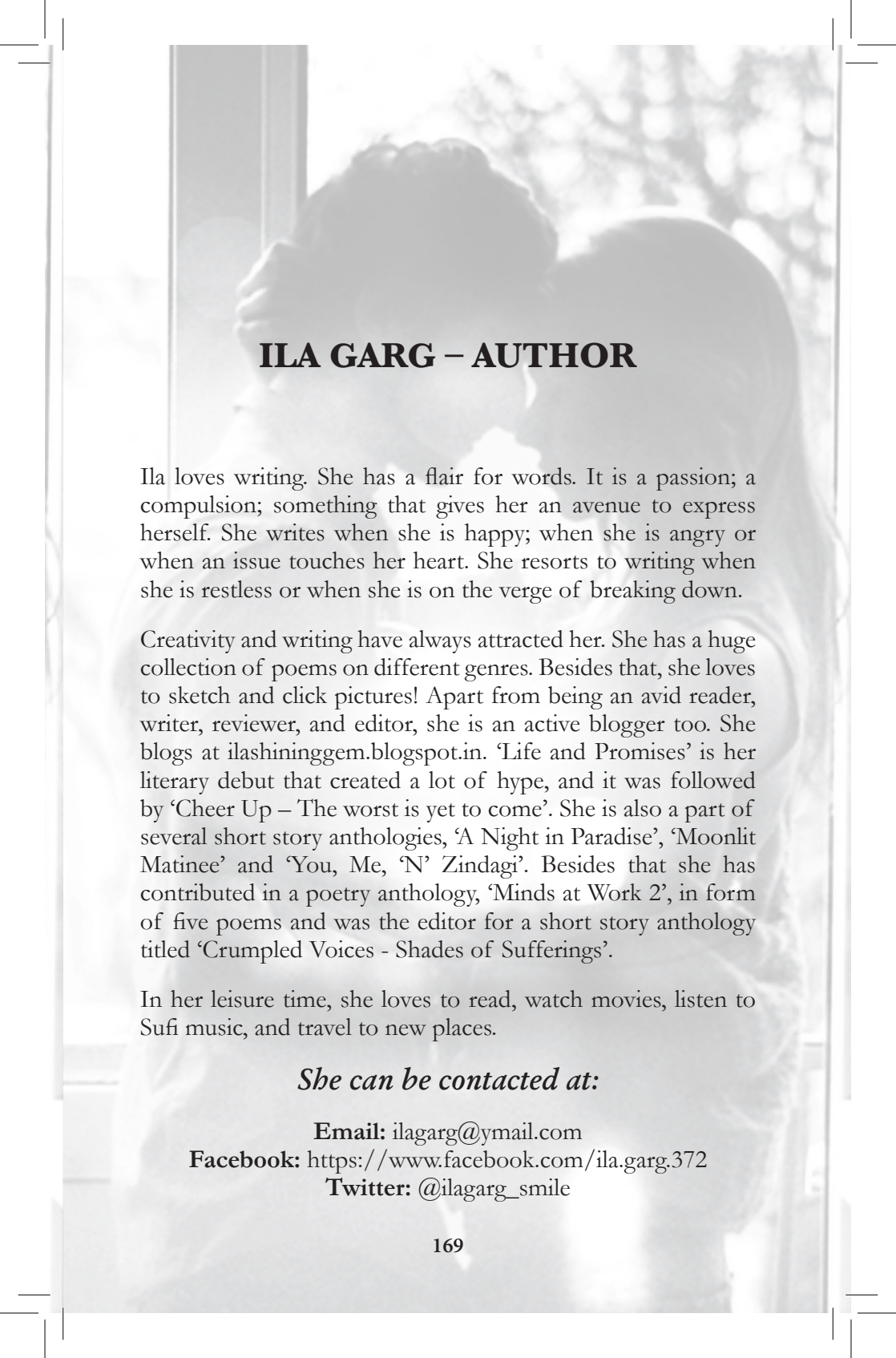
Apart from reading and writing, the author loves listening to Hindi music, watching all kinds of Hindi movies and sports.

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ILA GARG – AUTHOR

Ila loves writing. She has a flair for words. It is a passion; a compulsion; something that gives her an avenue to express herself. She writes when she is happy; when she is angry or when an issue touches her heart. She resorts to writing when she is restless or when she is on the verge of breaking down.

Creativity and writing have always attracted her. She has a huge collection of poems on different genres. Besides that, she loves to sketch and click pictures! Apart from being an avid reader, writer, reviewer, and editor, she is an active blogger too. She blogs at ilashininggem.blogspot.in. 'Life and Promises' is her literary debut that created a lot of hype, and it was followed by 'Cheer Up – The worst is yet to come'. She is also a part of several short story anthologies, 'A Night in Paradise', 'Moonlit Matinee' and 'You, Me, 'N' Zindagi'. Besides that she has contributed in a poetry anthology, 'Minds at Work 2', in form of five poems and was the editor for a short story anthology titled 'Crumpled Voices - Shades of Sufferings'.

In her leisure time, she loves to read, watch movies, listen to Sufi music, and travel to new places.

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POET'S CORNER

RACHNA SHETH

Rachna Sheth Gujarathi, born with a creative personality, is a diversified writer with her authentic skills in writing prose as well as poetry. She has contributed as a Sonnetist in 'Moonlit Matinee 1' and is back with her new writing avatar with 'Drenched Souls- Moonlit Matinee 2'. She usually writes fiction and is best known for her quixotic genre.

After the successful launch of her first book 'Love, the Ecstasy' she kept up to her fans' expectations with her second multi-author publication, 'Uff Ye Emotions.' 'Moonlit Matinee' is her only publication as a Sonnetist which enhanced her career in many ways. Recently, she also geared up to a new writing genre, mythological poetry with 'The Essence of Eternal Happiness', which was released in July 2014.

Apart from being an author, Rachna is an MBA graduate, serving her skills to the top notch IT & Media companies across India, as a Content & Social Media Head.

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*Love and good luck,
Writer/Poetess – Rachna Sheth
www.rachna.pro*

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***“Life is too short. Fulfil
all your promises”***

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**Your views matter a lot to us.
Do send us your feedback at
lifeandpromises@gmail.com or drop a
message to us on FB at**

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