

Prologue

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There are moments in life when you meet someone, and without warning, they become a part of your soul. As if, somewhere in the vastness of time, your paths were meant to intertwine. And when they do, it's not fireworks or grand confessions—it's quiet recognition, like the ocean meeting the shore, like the sky knowing the sun belongs to it. It's just... meant to be.

Ishh, I don't know when you became that person for me. Maybe it was in the way your name started feeling familiar even before I knew much about you. Maybe it was in the way our conversations never felt forced, just a flow of words that made sense even in silence. Maybe it was in the way you saw me—not just the version of me the world knows, but the girl behind all of it.

Love isn't supposed to be logical. It isn't supposed to be predictable. It happens in the smallest of moments, in stolen glances, in the way someone remembers the things you forgot you even said. It isn't about the grand gestures but the little things—the way you noticed my bracelet, the way you remembered the books I loved, the way you laughed when I argued with you about the silliest things.

But love, as beautiful as it is, is also terrifying. Because when you love someone, truly love them, you start fearing the possibility of losing them. And that's the thing about us, isn't it? We were never a perfect love story—we were a story of distance, of waiting, of navigating love across oceans and time zones.

I have always been scared of endings. Maybe that's why I struggled to put my feelings into words, why I hesitated before saying things I truly felt. Because love, once spoken out loud, feels more real. And real things can break.

But Ishh, if I have learned one thing from loving you, it's that not all stories need to have an ending. Some just... exist. Beyond time, beyond circumstances. Some loves are not meant to be lived in a single moment but felt across lifetimes. And ours? It is one of those. A love that doesn't demand permanence but lingers, like a melody that never really fades.

So, here it is—our story. Told through moments, through memories, through the reasons why you became the one person my heart chose. A story not just of love, but of trust, of waiting, of knowing that sometimes, love is about believing in the unseen.

And if I could go back to the very beginning, if I could relive it all, I wouldn't change a thing. Because loving you, in whatever way fate allowed, has been the most beautiful part of my life.

Chapter 1 - In the Stillness of the Ocean

Chapter 1

Tara's heart raced as she scribbled another line in her leather-bound journal— " The moment I saw him, a part of me walked out of my body and wrapped itself around him and there it still remains. "

It was a cold January evening, and the golden light of the setting sun filtered through her window, casting long shadows on the floor of her small, cozy room in Bhopal. The faint hum of one of her favourite song from " Veer-Zaara" played in the background, its beats a stark contrast to the ache of longing swelling in her chest.

119 days.

Zara and Veer waited for years, and she just had to wait for 119 days because that was how long it would take for Ishh to return from his voyage. Yes, "Ishh" — That's what she nick-named him. What was his reaction? — "Ishh...is a very sexy name; you know it's seductive but cute, perfect for me, haina?" — "As perfect as you are for me."

Every tick of the clock echoed in her mind, a reminder of the days that stretched endlessly before her. Yet, amidst the quiet moments of her solitude, she had realized something profound: She Loved Him. Deeply, irrevocably, in ways she hadn't dared to articulate until now.

As the pages of her journal filled with thoughts, memories, and reasons why she loved him, a seed of an idea had taken root in her mind. This wasn't just a journal anymore. It was going to be their story—a story she hoped would become the book he'd hold in his hands one day, reading

every word with the same devotion she poured into writing it.

A big-bang-proposal he deserves.

Tara was no stranger to love stories. She had devoured countless novels that painted vivid worlds of romance and heartbreak, from the dramatic love tales of Letizia Lorini to the thrilling mysteries of A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. Ironically, she had once gifted that very series to Ishh, teasing him about how it was her way of converting him into a book lover. Ishh had laughed then, a deep, rumbling sound that still echoed in her mind. He'd taken the books with a quiet smile, the kind that always made her stomach flutter. And now, he was reading them somewhere in the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, on the deck of a ship where the sun and sea met in endless horizons.

Their story hadn't begun like the ones in her novels. It wasn't love at first sight or a whirlwind romance. Ishh was the kind of man who moved through life with quiet determination, his 5'7.5— yeah! that .5 is very important to be included —frame and warm brown skin a mirror of strength and humility. His eyes; deep but beautiful. He was shy, rarely the one to initiate a conversation in a room full of strangers. But when he had spoken to her for the first time, his deep voice carried an honesty that had stayed with her.

"I like you, Tara," he had said simply, his light brownish eyes meeting hers without hesitation.

And Tara? She had been a whirlwind of energy and chaos, a Bollywood-loving chatterbox of a girl who was always the centre of attention. But at that moment, his words had rendered her speechless.

"I...I need some time, Ishh. You know my life is a mess right now. I don't want to start something this beautiful while I am a complete mess." she had replied, overwhelmed by the storm of emotions she wasn't ready to face.

Ishh hadn't pressed. He had nodded, a small, understanding smile on his lips. And just like that, he had stepped back, giving her the space she needed while still remaining a steady presence in her life. Now, months later, with Ishh thousands of miles away, Tara couldn't stop thinking about him. Every time she glanced at her phone, she hoped for a

message, a fleeting connection to remind her that he was still there. His texts were short and practical, much like him, but they carried a warmth that felt like home.

“Finished the first book,” one message had read. “You were right. Pip is fascinating.”

Tara had laughed when she read that, imagining him poring over the pages of the book during his rare moments of downtime. She had replied with a teasing, “Told you so! Wait till you get to the third one. It’s a rollercoaster!”

She missed the way his voice softened when he spoke to her, the way his eyes crinkled at the corners when he smiled, the quiet strength he exuded even in the simplest of gestures. She began to see him everywhere—in the books she read, the songs she listened to, the sunsets that painted the sky in hues of orange and pink. He had become a part of her world in ways she hadn’t anticipated, and the thought of him being so far away felt like an ache she couldn’t soothe.

One evening, as she sat by her window, the soft glow of the evening sunset illuminating her journal, Tara began to write. Each page was filled with reasons why she loved him, from his patience and determination to the way he had always respected her choices.

1. You never rushed me.
2. You made me feel heard.
3. You believed in me when I didn’t.

The list grew with each passing day, her words flowing like a river, carrying with them all the emotions she had kept bottled up for so long. This wasn’t just a way to pass the time. It was her way of connecting with him, of pouring her heart onto paper in the hopes that one day, he would understand the depth of her love.

As she closed her journal for the night, Tara looked out at the city lights twinkling in the distance. 119 days felt like an eternity, but for the first time, she felt a sense of purpose, a clarity that had been missing for so long.

“I’ll tell him,” she whispered to herself, her voice firm despite the lump in her throat.

“When he comes back, I’ll tell him everything.” with that thought, she drifted off to sleep, her dreams filled with visions of Ishh's return, the sound of his laughter, and the warmth of his presence.

Little did she know, the days ahead would hold more than just a confession of love. They would bring challenges and revelations that would test the very foundation of their bond, pushing them to confront the fragility and strength of love in ways neither of them could have foreseen.

Chapter 2 - The Threads of Destiny

Chapter 2

Tara sat cross-legged on her bed, the soft hum of the evening settling around her. Her room was bathed in the warm glow of her bedside lamp, the faint scent of lavender lingering in the air, and the gentle rustle of the wind outside whispered through the open window. A comfortable silence wrapped around her, and yet, despite the calm atmosphere, her mind raced.

Her journal lay open beside her, the leather-bound cover worn and familiar. She hadn’t written in it today—she hadn’t felt the need to. Instead, her attention was absorbed by the glowing screen of her phone. Her thumb traced the screen mindlessly, her thoughts scattered until one particular notification caught her eye.

A photograph. Her breath hitched in her chest as she stared at it. It was a picture of her from last year, a blurry image that captured a fleeting moment—one of those unplanned, imperfect moments that somehow meant everything. Ishh had taken the photo while she was in the middle of a conversation with her friends, in one of her usual protests to stop him from snapping any pictures. Her hand was outstretched, trying to grab the phone, a smile tugging at the corners of her lips. Behind the phone, Ishh wore that familiar smirk, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

A soft, knowing smile spread across Tara's face. Funny, how a single picture could carry so much weight. It held memories of laughter, of camaraderie, of conversations shared and unspoken bonds. The image wasn’t just a photo; it was a snapshot of time, of feelings, of everything that had led her to this moment. She hadn’t known it then, but that blurry photo had

become a part of their story—a story that felt like it had always been written, even if the ink was still fresh.

Tara's mind wandered back to the beginning of it all, to the moment when Ishh had first entered her life, not as a figure in the background but as someone real, someone she could talk to. Their story hadn't started like the fairytales she had once read, with serendipitous meetings or stolen glances across crowded rooms. No, their story began in the most unexpected of places—a dating app.

Bubble. The name itself was an ironic twist of fate, considering how their connection had burst open like a bubble, forming something bigger, something lasting. Tara had swiped right on a whim, not thinking much of it at the time. After all, she had swiped through countless profiles before, never expecting to actually connect with someone. But Ishh was different.

His profile picture was nothing like the flashy, over-the-top images that dominated the app. Instead, it was a candid shot of him in his navy uniform, a simple white shirt, buttoned down just enough to reveal a hint of his chest, yet it was tasteful, understated. There was something magnetic about it—a quiet strength, a calmness that stood out amidst the noise of the app.

When Tara saw the profile, something about it drew her in. Maybe it was the navy uniform, the half-open shirt, or perhaps the eyes—there was something familiar yet intriguing. Without thinking too much, she swiped right.

It was only her second swipe since installing the app. The first match had been a disappointment, and she had unmatched him within a few hours. But when Ishh's profile popped up as a match, she didn't overanalyze. She simply sent a casual Hi, and the conversation began.

They exchanged the usual pleasantries—interests, hobbies, and a bit about their lives. The conversation flowed effortlessly, comfortable yet exciting in an unexpected way. As they talked, they decided to add each other on social media.

The moment Tara saw Heeral in Ishh's friend list, her fingers paused over the screen. A strange déjà vu crept in. Without wasting a second, she texted Heeral— Her sister cum best friend cum crime partner cum favorite

enemy to fight with. In a line if Ishh is Tara's heart Heeral is the blood that flows in her veins.

"Hey, how do you know Ishh?"

The reply came almost instantly, but it wasn't what Tara expected.

"ARE YOU MAD OR WHAT??? Why are you asking about the same guy again and again?"

Tara blinked at the screen, confused. Same guy? What was Heeral talking about?

"Heeral, I have no idea what you're saying!"

A second later, a screenshot arrived in the chat. Tara's stomach flipped as she read her own messages from months ago.

"Here. You asked about him 3-4 months back, and I told you he's my senior."

Tara stared at the screen, stunned. She had absolutely no memory of this. How could she have forgotten? It was like the universe had nudged her twice toward the same person as if telling her she wasn't meant to overlook him.

A slow smile formed on her lips as realization sank in. That's destiny.

Excited and a little shaken, she messaged Ishh, telling him everything.

"Nooo, I don't believe this!"

Tara sends him that screenshot, and for a few minutes,, Ishh doesn't reply.

The connection was instantaneous. It was a thread that tied them together in ways neither of them had expected. Tara had heard of Ishh before, though not much. Heeral had mentioned him in passing, often describing him as a quiet, reserved guy who preferred his own company. Totally opposite from the kind of person Tara thought she'd be interested in. But somehow, the universe had other plans, and here they were, connecting across a screen, not as strangers, but as two people who already had a

shared history.

Their initial conversations were casual, polite even. But as the days went on, they began to unravel the layers of each other's lives. They talked about everything—the mundane and the meaningful. Their shared love for cartoons became one of the first things that made Tara smile. Ishh would talk about his favourite childhood shows, and Tara would eagerly share hers. He liked Oswald, the quirky blue octopus, while Tara had grown up watching Sofia the First, her heartwarming at the princess's bravery. They'd banter about the little details—who had the better taste in cartoons—and it felt like a window had opened to a world they both understood.

But it wasn't just the cartoons. They bonded over life's little ironies—the unexpected twists, the way the world never quite turned out the way you planned. Tara appreciated how Ishh listened. He didn't just nod along with her words; he absorbed them, thought about them, and then offered a response that felt both thoughtful and genuine. And Ishh, in turn, had come to admire Tara's unfiltered honesty, the way she spoke with such passion about her dreams, her fears, her life.

One evening, in one of their late-night conversations, Tara had found herself opening up about something that had been bothering her for a while.

"Rishu," she had said, her voice soft but tinged with frustration. "I feel like my life is this big, tangled mess of threads. I don't even know where to start untangling it."

There had been a moment of silence on the other end before Ishh's calm voice broke through.

"Tara, maybe it's not about untangling everything all at once. Maybe you just pick one thread, the one that feels right, and follow it. The rest will fall into place."

His words had settled around her like a balm to a wound she hadn't realized was open. Tara thought about it for days afterwards, and slowly, she found herself letting go of the pressure to fix everything at once. It wasn't about solving all her problems. It was about learning to trust and to take one step at a time. And in Ishh, she had found someone who not only

made her believe in herself but also made her believe in the possibility of change, of growth.

4. You are the solution to every problem.

Ishh had this quiet way of making things feel simpler. When Tara felt overwhelmed by life's complexities, his presence reminded her that it wasn't about solving everything at once, but finding the right solution in each moment. His calm voice had a way of soothing her chaos, just by being there.

5. You make me believe in me.

It wasn't just the words Ishh said that made her feel this way. It was the way he made her feel heard, understood, and capable of more than she had ever believed possible. When she talked to him, she felt like she could conquer anything because he made her believe that she was stronger than she realized.

6. You make me the happiest.

Tara didn't need grand gestures or big moments to feel happy. The simple things, like their late-night chats, their shared inside jokes, and the way he listened to her, made her feel a joy that ran deeper than anything she had ever known.

7. You are the cherry on my chocolate cake.

It wasn't just that Ishh made her life better. It was that he added something extra—a sweetness, a layer that she hadn't even known she needed. He completed her in a way that was subtle but undeniable, like the perfect topping on a dessert that was already wonderful.

The phone buzzed in her hand, breaking her from her thoughts. It was a message from Heeral.

"Tara-para, you sure then?"

Tara smiled at the nickname. Heeral had always been her sounding board, always there to offer advice, even when she wasn't sure what she needed.

"No," Tara typed back, "but I wrote about him again." She attached a picture of her journal entry and sent it off.

Heeral's response was almost immediate: "You two were meant to find

each other. It's like the universe refused to let you miss this connection. Just go with the flow, babe."

Tara read the message, her heart swelling with a mixture of gratitude and something else—a longing, maybe. She glanced at the picture again, a soft laugh escaping her lips. Maybe Heeral was right. Maybe, just maybe, they were meant to find each other.

As the night deepened, Tara lay in bed, the soft hum of the ceiling fan lulling her into a sense of calm. Her thoughts wandered to Ishh, to the way their relationship had unfolded. It hadn't been instant. There was no grand, dramatic moment of realization. It had been slow, steady, and yet, undeniably real.

Tara's fingers traced the edge of her journal as she thought about Ishh's words from a recent conversation, words that had stayed with her long after they'd been spoken.

"Tara," he had said, "I don't believe in perfect love stories. I believe in imperfect people growing together and becoming better for each other. That's what love is to me."

Her heart ached most beautifully at the memory. Their love wasn't perfect. It wasn't some fairy tale, some grand romance filled with sweep-you-off-your-feet moments. It was real. It was messy, it was raw, and it was exactly what she needed.

And as she closed her eyes, her thoughts drifted to the future, to the possibilities they might create together. Love wasn't a destination. It was a journey. And with Ishh by her side, it was a journey she was ready to take, one imperfect step at a time.

The warmth of the blanket enveloped her as she drifted off to sleep, her heart filled with quiet hope. Tomorrow, the story would continue.

Chapter 3 - Love Aroma

Chapter 3

The smell of freshly brewed chai filled the hall as Tara poured it into four mismatched cups. Her family—Papa, Chachu, Chachi, and her siblings—had gone to a family function, leaving her with the perfect opportunity to call her constants—Heeral, Kashi, and Disha.

Kashi was busy perfecting the bow on the frame she had received an order for, while Disha helped Tara out in the kitchen. Heeral, as usual, was sprawled on the sofa, tossing almonds in the air and catching them in her mouth.

"You know, Tara," Heeral started, her tone full of mischief, "you might as well write a book about Ishh at this point. You've already given us seven solid chapters—err, reasons—to obsess over him."

Tara raised an eyebrow, leaning against the kitchen counter. "And you're still here, waiting for the eighth reason. Hypocrite much?"

"Guilty," Heeral admitted, smirking.

Tara rolled her eyes but couldn't hide her smile. "Fine. If you must know, I do have another reason why I love him."

"Bring it on," Kashi said, tying the final knot on her bow. "But remember, we've got standards now. Don't give us some clichéd fairytale nonsense."

Tara chuckled. "Trust me, Kashi, you'll love this one."

8. He understands the weight of waiting.

Tara took a sip of her chai, letting the warmth settle her nerves. "Today was hectic. The global event we were volunteering for wrapped up, and I was running around the whole day. We had these beautiful orchids at the venue, but since the event was over, they were being thrown away."

Disha gasped. "They were throwing away orchids?"

Tara nodded. "I couldn't let that happen. The moment I saw them, the first thing that came to my mind was Ishh. Orchids. His favourite. So, I picked up a bouquet and brought it home."

She reached for her phone and showed them the picture she had sent Ishh.

"I sent this to him, and guess what? He had already texted me."

Tara scrolled up, reading out his messages.

"Now I know how you feel while waiting for days to talk to me."

"I really miss you, Tara."

"I know you well. You're the kind of person who will get things done all by yourself, no matter what it takes. So please don't stress out. Eat properly and stay hydrated."

"You know how much I miss you."

Tara smiled, recounting how she had texted back with just a single question:

"How much?"

"And then," Tara continued, eyes twinkling, "he sent me three images. I thought they were GIFs showing hands or something, trying to indicate the quantity of how much he missed me. But when I opened them..." She paused for effect, before exclaiming, "It was ship navigation data!"

Heeral sat up. "Wait. What?"

"He used his ship's tracking system, and the trace lines formed a heart shape!" Tara said, still unable to believe it. "I literally went 'Awww' and then 'Nooooo, he did not just do that!' because, honestly, that's something straight out of a novel!"

Kashi gaped. "You're kidding."

"Nope," Tara grinned. "I immediately asked him, 'OMG, what did you just do?!'"

"And?" Disha prompted.

"He said, 'Yeah, I just wasted a thousand dollars of the company's money. I think this is the most expensive heart a lover can give to his girlfriend... or

maybe future girlfriend?"

The room erupted into squeals and gasps.

"ARE YOU SERIOUS?!" Heeral nearly dropped her almonds.

Tara laughed. "I told him, 'You attracted the right one because if I were criminal-minded, you just committed a crime.' And we both laughed."

Heeral groaned. "Tara, do you even realize what level of romance this is? My expectations are ruined for life."

Tara just shrugged, but her smile lingered.

9. He supports me, now and always.

Tara leaned back, resting her head against the couch. "It's not just about grand gestures. It's the way he supports me even when he's not here. He believes in my dreams, in my ability to handle things, even when I doubt myself."

"When I told him about how exhausted I was from the event, he didn't just say 'Take rest.' He said, 'I know you. You'll get everything done no matter what it takes. But don't forget to take care of yourself in the process.' That's the kind of support that truly matters."

Kashi nodded. "That's rare. Someone who sees your ambition and still reminds you to breathe."

10. He makes me laugh when I'm at my lowest.

"Even after all this, do you know how he ended our conversation?" Tara grinned, pulling up the final text.

"You must be having chai right now. Extra sugar and water, less milk, no elaichi—Train wali chai! Did I get it right?"

The girls giggled.

"And?" Disha asked.

"I just replied, 'Always right.'"

Heeral sighed dramatically. "You two belong in a Bollywood movie."

Tara smiled, looking down at her phone, her heart swelling with warmth.

11. He turns ordinary moments into something extraordinary.

"It's funny," Tara murmured. "A bouquet of orchids. A few texts. A heart traced on an ocean's surface. None of these things were necessary. But he still did them. Because love, I've realized, isn't just in grand declarations. It's in the everyday moments that someone chooses to make special."

The room was quiet for a moment before Kashi spoke, "So... what's the final line of your chapter, Miss Romance?"

Tara grinned, picking up her phone again and whispering under her breath,

"With Ishh, even the sea writes love letters in the shape of hearts."

Chapter 4 - Imperfectly Perfect

Chapter 4

Love is not about finding the perfect person; it's about finding someone whose imperfections fit perfectly with yours.

For Tara and Ishh, love didn't arrive with grand declarations or poetic confessions. It unfolded in quiet spaces—hidden moments between long work hours, whispered conversations when the house was finally silent, and messages sent with the hope of a timely reply.

It was a love that grew in patience, in waiting, in understanding.

12. You accept me exactly as I am.

"Tell me something weird about you," Ishh had asked one evening.

Tara was lying on her bed, staring at the ceiling, the soft hum of a fan

filling the room. It was the only time of the day when no one barged into her space, demanding her attention.

"Weird?" she echoed, thinking. "I re-watch childhood cartoons when I'm sad. And I talk to my plants sometimes."

Ishh chuckled. "Okay, that's cute, not weird. But I like it. What else?"

She hesitated. There were things she had never admitted to anyone. Things she feared would make her seem strange.

"I sometimes write letters I never send," she confessed. "To people, to myself... to no one in particular."

There was silence on the other end.

"Why don't you send them?" Ishh finally asked.

"Because they're too honest. And honesty scares people."

Another pause. Then his voice softened. "I think honesty makes people feel seen. And if you ever want to send a letter, send it to me."

Tara smiled, pressing the phone closer to her ear.

Ishh never asked her to be different. Never made her feel like she had to edit herself for him. He accepted her quirks, her habits, her strange little ways of existing. And for someone who had spent her life trying to be 'enough,' this acceptance felt like a warm embrace.

13. You like my imperfections.

"Why do you like me?" Tara had asked once, half-joking but fully curious.

"Do you really want to know?" Ishh's voice held a teasing edge.

"Obviously!" she grinned, twirling a pen in her fingers as she lay on her bed, her laptop open but forgotten.

"Okay," he said, pretending to think. "I like how you talk too much when you're excited but become completely silent when you're upset. I like that

you overanalyze everything but also believe in silly superstitions."

Tara laughed. "Hey! That's not a reason to like someone."

"It is," he countered. "Because it's you. You fidget when you're nervous. You overthink texts before sending them. You carry the whole universe in your bag even if you don't need them and, of course, a sharpener blade just in case you murder someone in an emergency."

She blinked, surprised. "You noticed all that?"

"Of course, I did," Ishh said simply. "And I like all of it."

For the first time in her life, Tara felt that maybe—just maybe—her imperfections weren't something to fix.

14. You have the best laugh in the world. It cures.

"You know," Ishh said, "I think I should just become a stand-up comedian."

Tara snorted. "You? A comedian?"

"Yeah. I have great jokes."

"Like what?"

"Okay, okay. Why don't skeletons fight each other?"

Tara rolled her eyes. "I don't know. Why?"

"Because they don't have the guts!" Ishh burst into laughter before she even reacted.

Tara groaned, covering her face. "That was terrible!"

"Wait, wait, I have another one!" Ishh insisted, barely controlling his laughter. "What do you call fake spaghetti?"

She sighed, trying not to smile. "What?"

"An impasta!"

Tara couldn't help it—she laughed. And once she started, she couldn't stop. It wasn't even about the jokes; it was about how Ishh laughed at his own punchlines, how he was so confident in his bad humour that it somehow became funny.

"See?" Ishh said proudly. "Your day is already better."

"It's the best—like every day," she said beneath her laugh.

15. You respect my beliefs.

16. You are imperfectly perfect for me.

Love isn't about finding perfection—it's about finding someone whose imperfections feel like home.

One evening, Tara was running late for their usual call. She had been caught up with family, and by the time she found a quiet moment, she was exhausted.

"Hey," she whispered when she finally called.

Ishh's voice was warm. "Tough day?"

"You could say that," she sighed. "It's just... I wish things were easier sometimes."

"I know," he said softly. "But hey, we make it work."

Tara closed her eyes. "Yeah. We do."

There was a pause before Ishh added, "And you know what? If I had to choose between an easy life without you and this complicated, imperfect, exhausted life with you—I'd pick this. Every single time."

Tara smiled, feeling the weight of his words settle into her heart.

They were imperfect. Their love was filled with missed calls, delayed texts, and stolen moments. But in all those imperfections, they found something real.

Something worth holding on to.

Love, in the Little Things

This chapter isn't just about the reasons Tara loves Ishh. It's about how love doesn't need to be perfect to be beautiful. It just needs to be real.

For every woman who has ever waited, who has ever held onto love despite the distance, despite the uncertainties—this is for you. Because sometimes, love isn't about the grand gestures.

Sometimes, it's about the quiet moments, the stolen conversations, and the unspoken understanding that no matter what—some people are worth it.

Chapter 5 - A Dash of Cream & Love

Chapter 5

The sun had dipped into hues of warm orange when Tara set the tray down on the coffee table, four steaming cups of chai sending swirls of fragrance into the air. The mismatched cups—a running joke between the group—sat untouched for now, as Kashi carefully placed a box of cupcakes she had baked at the center.

Heeral, as expected, entered dramatically, cleaning her glasses with the edge of her dupatta—completely ignoring the fact that the fabric itself was coated in a layer of dust.

“Tara,” she sighed, settling onto the sofa. “We need to have an intervention.”

Tara raised an eyebrow. “About?”

Kashi, still focused on her perfectly piped frosting, chimed in, “Your obsession with Ishh.”

“Oh, for God's sake,” Tara groaned, sinking into her chair. “Can't a girl be in love without being interrogated?”

“No,” Disha answered, stealing a cupcake before Kashi could protest. “Not when you romanticize everything he does like you're starring in a Bollywood movie.”

Tara huffed but smiled, fingers playing with the rim of her cup. “Fine. But if you're all so invested, I might as well give you more reasons to swoon over him.”

Kashi looked up, intrigued. “Oh, this should be good.”

Tara leaned forward, her voice soft with amusement.

17. He's an old-school guy.

Heeral made a face. “Oh no. Don't tell me he writes love letters with a feather quill.”

Tara laughed. “No, idiot. But he prefers face-to-face conversations over endless texting. You know how everyone is all about double ticks and last seen? Ishh doesn't care about any of that. He believes in real conversations, not just screen-based emotions.”

Kashi nodded. “Honestly, that's rare these days.”

Disha smirked. “So, basically, he forces you to actually talk instead of ghosting him?”

Tara rolled her eyes. “Exactly.”

Heeral clutched her chest dramatically. “True love.”

Tara ignored her and continued.

18. The way he looks at the world.

“Wait, wait,” Kashi said, pointing a spoon at her. “This one better be poetic.”

Tara chuckled. “It kind of is. His mantra in life is ‘Plan ye hai ki koi plan nahi hai.’”

Heeral snorted. "So, basically, he's just going with the flow?"

"Yes, but not in a careless way. It's like he trusts the universe, you know? He doesn't stress over what's next, and somehow, that makes everything feel lighter. Being with him, I feel like I don't have to have everything figured out."

Disha nodded, surprisingly thoughtful. "That's actually pretty cool. In a world full of planners and overthinkers, having someone who just lives is refreshing."

Tara smiled. "Exactly."

Heeral groaned. "Fine, fine. He's deep. Move on before we start writing poetry."

Tara smirked.

19. He's a gentleman.

Disha gasped. "Wait. Are we talking 'holds-the-door-open' gentleman or 'protects-you-in-crowded-places' gentleman?"

Tara grinned. "Both. And more. You know how people joke about 'husband material'? Well, Ishh is that but without trying. It's in the little things. Like, he walks on the traffic side of the road. He lets me have the last bite even when he's hungry. And that one time—"

She trailed off, biting her lip.

Heeral leaned forward. "Oh, this is going to be good. Spill."

Tara sighed, warmth creeping onto her cheeks. "Remember before his birthday when he was about to leave for the ship?"

Kashi gasped. "The pastry incident?"

Tara nodded, laughing at the memory.

It was meant to be a quiet moment—a pre-birthday celebration before Ishh left. She had surprised him with a book, *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*,

because she wanted him to become a book lover too.

"I need to say something about you" Ishh looking deeply into Tara's eyes. And Tara focusing his eyes and was so occupied in thinking what could be this serious "ye-" and before she could say the word fully a finger filled with white cream was over her nose and cheeks and there he was laughing.

"You have cream on your nose," he had said, barely suppressing a grin.

Tara, being Tara, had narrowed her eyes. "So do you."

Before he could react, she had smeared a bit on his nose. He had retaliated instantly, swiping a finger full of cream across her face. One thing led to another, and soon, they were both covered in it, laughing like kids.

Disha sighed. "And then?"

Tara smirked. "We took a picture. Proof of our immaturity."

Heeral fake wiped a tear. "I hate to admit it, but that's actually adorable."

Kashi grinned. "So, he's chivalrous and playful. Damn. Husband material indeed."

Tara took a sip of her chai, the warmth of the memory lingering.

20. He balances work and personal life like a pro.

Heeral groaned. "Okay, now he's just showing off."

Tara laughed. "I mean, in today's world, it is a flex. People either get so consumed by work that they forget life exists or slack off completely. But Ishh? He somehow does both. He's dedicated to his career, but when he's with me, he's with me. No distractions, no half-hearted conversations."

Disha nodded. "That's honestly rare. Most people are either workaholics or completely clueless about responsibilities."

Tara smiled. "Exactly. And that's why, despite the distance, despite everything, I never feel like I'm missing out on him."

Silence settled over the room, the kind that felt warm, like an old blanket on a cold night.

Heeral finally sighed. “Okay, fine. Maybe Ishh is worth obsessing over.”

Kashi grinned. “We should keep a record of these reasons. At this rate, we’ll have a novel by the time you reach a hundred.”

Tara smirked. “Well, you never know.”

And as they sipped their chai, laughter filling the room, Tara knew—deep in her heart—that the list of reasons to love Ishh was only just beginning.

Chapter 6 - A Classic Kind of Love

Chapter 6

The house was eerily quiet. A rare phenomenon, really. With Papa, Chachu, Chachi, and her siblings away at a wedding, Tara had the entire place to herself. No sudden shouts, no footsteps running up and down the stairs, no doors creaking open and shut. Just her, the hum of the refrigerator, and the faint ticking of the clock on the wall.

She sat on the kitchen counter, legs swinging slightly as she waited for the water to boil. Maggi nights were her guilty pleasure—the easiest, laziest meal, and yet, there was something deeply comforting about it.

She tore open the packet, letting the familiar scent of masala fill the air. A small smile tugged at her lips as a memory surfaced.

“You put WHAT in your Maggi?” she had asked Ishh in absolute horror.

He had laughed, stirring his concoction of a dish like some mad scientist. “Cheese, egg, sometimes ketchup—depends on my mood.”

Tara had clutched her chest dramatically. “You are ruining a classic!”

Ishh had simply smirked. “Or maybe, I’m making it better.”

She scoffed at the thought, shaking her head. “No. Some things are meant to be left untouched.”

But that was Ishh—he loved experimenting, pushing boundaries, creating something new, while she found comfort in the original. Yet, somehow, they worked. Like two pieces of a puzzle that shouldn’t fit but did anyway.

As she absentmindedly stirred the noodles, another thought surfaced, warm and steady.

21. He as a person is humble.

Tara had met a lot of people who liked to show off—people who needed to be seen, needed their accomplishments heard. Ishh wasn’t like that. He carried his achievements with ease, never once feeling the need to announce them.

That was Ishh. Humble, effortless, never needing validation to know his worth.

Tara sighed, shaking herself out of the thought. She poured the Maggi into a bowl and made her way to the dining table, phone in hand, scrolling through old posts of Ishh on his socials — A very normal thing Tara did when she missed Ishh was stalking—more like investigating his socials.

What stopped her to scroll was this one comment of his brother on his post.

22. He loves his family.

Everyone loves their family, she knew that. But with Ishh, it wasn’t just about loving them—it was about valuing them, putting them first, making time despite the chaos of life.

And the way he had already embraced her family? That was something else entirely.

“I like them,” he had admitted one night over the phone. “Your sisters are trouble, though.”

Tara had laughed. “Oh, absolutely. They’re menaces.”

“But they remind me of you,” he had added, voice softer this time.

She had gone silent then, warmth spreading through her chest.

Because love wasn’t just about two people—it was about the world they came with. And Ishh had already started making space for hers.

She took a bite of her Maggi, the taste familiar, comforting. But her mind was elsewhere, drifting back to another conversation.

23. He’s mature.

Not in the way people throw the word around. Not in a “he knows how to pay bills” kind of way. But in the way he handled things, the way he responded instead of reacting.

Tara had a tendency to spiral—to overthink, to assume the worst. And Ishh? He was the balance.

“Okay, let’s think logically,” he would say whenever she panicked over something.

And she would groan, “Ugh, I don’t want to think logically.”

He would just laugh, steady as always. “But we have to.”

She had never realized how much she needed that balance until him.

Tara let out a small breath, pushing the bowl away slightly. The last thought made her smile.

24. He knows how to cook.

For someone like her—who found cooking to be more of a necessity than an art—it was an absolute win.

“I don’t understand how you enjoy it,” she had told him once, over call.

Ishh had smirked. “It’s not just about cooking. It’s about creating

something.”

Tara had wrinkled her nose. “It’s about eating something.”

He had laughed. “You’ll never understand.”

And maybe she wouldn’t. But that didn’t matter, because if she had learned one thing, it was this—some things were best left untouched. Just like her classic Maggi.

And just like their love.

Tara leaned back in her chair, staring at the empty bowl in front of her. The house was still quiet, but inside her mind, memories stirred like ripples in still water. Her life had never been simple—there had always been chaos, always been noise. She had learned to live with it, to mask the weight of everything she had faced with laughter, sarcasm, and an endless stream of conversations. But Ishh... he was different. He didn’t try to silence the storm within her. He didn’t tell her to move on, to be stronger, to forget. He just knew. He knew when to pull her into a conversation to distract her and when to let her sit in silence. He knew when to ask about her mother and when to let the topic rest, untouched but understood.

When she had lost her mother, Ishh wasn’t in her life. He hadn’t been there to hold her hand through the worst of it, to see the nights when she had cried herself to sleep. But today, he stood beside her—not filling the void, not fixing what could never be fixed, but simply being there. Steady. Present. A quiet anchor in the storm that had once felt never-ending.

And maybe, just maybe, that was love too.

Chapter 7 - The Kind of Magic That Stays

Chapter 7

The terrace was bathed in the soft glow of the evening sun, the sky a watercolour of fading oranges and deepening purples. Tara paced slowly, her phone pressed to her ear, her fingers tracing the cool metal of the railing as she waited for him to pick up.

The phone rang twice before she heard a sluggish, almost unwilling, "Hello?"

She sighed. "Ishh, you were sleeping, weren't you?"

Silence. Then a barely audible, "No."

Tara rolled her eyes. "Liar. I can literally hear the sleep in your voice."

Another pause. "Maybe a little."

She hated waking him up. She really did. He worked crazy hours and barely got enough rest, and this—this tiny window of time around 5:10 PM—was probably his only chance to sleep. But this was the only time they could talk.

"You should sleep," she said softly, even though she didn't want him to.

"And miss talking to you?" His voice was still laced with sleep, but there was that teasing lilt that always got to her.

She leaned against the railing, looking at the rows of rooftops in front of her. "You say that, but in exactly five minutes, the 3rd officer will call on your landline and ruin everything."

Ishh groaned dramatically. "Don't remind me of that villain. I swear, he has a radar for our conversations."

Tara smirked. "Maybe he just likes torturing you. Waking you up, interrupting your calls, making sure your life is miserable. Classic villain behaviour."

"More like he's been sent by the universe to test my patience," Ishh mumbled. "If I ever get a chance, I swear I'll—"

"Offer him chocolates and be nice because deep down you're the good guy?" Tara finished for him.

Ishh scoffed. "Absolutely not."

She laughed her voice light in the open air. This was their thing—talking about everything except what most couples probably did. They didn't fill their conversations with lovestruck words or dramatic declarations. Instead, they debated over random topics, discussed things that mattered, and found comfort in the smallest details of life.

25. You always know exactly what to say to make me smile.

"By the way," Tara started, kicking a small pebble near her foot, "do you remember Oswald?"

For the first time in the conversation, Ishh sounded completely awake. "Obviously. The best cartoon ever."

Tara grinned. "Best? That's debatable."

"Excuse me?" Ishh sounded offended. "That blue octopus had peak main-character energy."

Tara laughed. "Okay, okay, fair. But I was more of a Sofia the First kind of girl."

"Sofia?" Ishh repeated, his voice incredulous. "The princess with the purple dress?"

"Yes, and I loved her, so be careful what you say next."

Ishh chuckled. "Noted."

Tara smiled to herself. It was stupid, talking about old cartoons, but somehow, this moment felt so... them.

26. You find joy in the smallest things and make me see them too.

"You know," Ishh said after a pause, "I like that about you."

Tara blinked. "What?"

"The way you find joy in small things. Like how you still remember cartoon characters or how you get excited over little details that most people ignore."

She tilted her head, her heart warming at the thought. "You notice that?"

"Of course," he said simply as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

27. You have a way of making my worries seem insignificant.

Tara sighed, tilting her head back to look at the sky. "You know, sometimes I feel like I overthink everything. Like, I stress over things that probably don't even matter in the grand scheme of life."

"Everyone does," Ishh said. "But if it helps... I think most things are less complicated than we make them."

Tara scoffed. "Easy for you to say, Officer."

"Hey, I'm just saying, sometimes you need to take a step back. Look at things from a different angle."

Tara huffed. "And if I can't?"

"Then I'll remind you," Ishh said casually. "That's what I'm here for."

28. You are effortlessly charming without even trying.

Tara shook her head, smiling. "You know, you say things like that without even realizing how charming you sound."

Ishh chuckled. "Is that a bad thing?"

"It's annoying," she muttered. "Because I can't even argue with it."

"Good," he said smugly.

Tara rolled her eyes. "Ugh, shut up."

29. You never fail to surprise me with your thoughtfulness.

"I actually have something for you," Ishh said suddenly.

Tara frowned. "What do you mean? You're in the middle of the ocean."

"Doesn't mean I can't send something," he said, sounding too pleased with himself.

Tara: (suspiciously) "What did you do?"

Ishh: (smirking through the phone) "Wait and see."

Ping! Tara's phone buzzed with the distinct notification tone she had set for Ishh's messages.

She opened the chat. The first image was a drawing—an emoji of a ship with a tiny parcel on top.

Tara: (raising an eyebrow) "What is this? Your latest masterpiece?"

Ishh: (chuckling) "Swipe."

She did. The next image showed the parcel getting delivered. Another followed—a man with a notepad emoji saying, "Hello ma'am, here's a parcel for you from Mr. Ishh. Please sign here."

Tara: (blinking, heart racing) "Wait... what?"

Before she could react, the final image loaded—fresh white lilies.

Her favourite.

Silence.

Ishh: (softly) "I know you love daisies, but lilies... you adore them."

Tara stared at the screen, her lips curling into a smile she couldn't suppress.

Tara: (whispering) "You never fail to surprise me, do you?"

Ishh: (grinning) "I try."

30. You turn even the duller days into something special.

Before she could ask more, Ishh sighed. "I think the villain is about to strike."

Tara laughed. "How do you know?"

"Because I can hear the ring for more than one time that means it's an urgent call, he's coming for me"

"Run," she whispered dramatically.

"It's too late for me," Ish said. "Save yourself."

Tara burst into laughter, the sound carrying through the open air. Even after all this time, he had a way of making the duller days feel special.

31. You bring a certain magic to the way you exist.

As she ended the call, she stared at the sky for a moment, letting the silence settle around her. There was something about him—something effortless, something steady. He was like a constant in her life, making even the most ordinary conversations feel... magical.

32. You make even silence feel comforting.

33. You have an unmatched sense of humour that lightens my mood instantly.

34. You make ordinary places feel like destinations.

The list will continue to grow because Tara's reasons for loving him are indescribable. He's like the magic shown in Tara's favourite cartoon, Sofia the First; the only difference is, in Tara's case— It's real & it will stay.

Chapter 8 - Marked by Love, Bound by Fate

Chapter 8

Tara adjusted her phone against the wall, lying comfortably on her bed, her long hair spilling over one shoulder. The golden hue of the setting sun made her look even more radiant. Ishh, on the other side of the screen, was lying down too, but his expression was different today—distracted.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Tara narrowed her eyes, a teasing smile forming on her lips.

Ishh blinked as if he had been caught staring. "You have a mole on your collarbone?" His voice carried a mix of curiosity and something else—something deeper.

Tara instinctively touched the spot, feeling the warmth rise to her cheeks. "Uh... yeah?"

Ishh didn't give her much time to process. With one swift motion, he unbuttoned the top button of his shirt and pulled the fabric slightly aside, revealing his collarbone. "I have one too. Same place. Right side."

Tara's breath hitched. For a second, she wasn't even thinking about the mole—her brain had momentarily shut down at the sight of his bare skin. Ohhhhhmyyyygodddd. She screamed internally but kept her face as composed as she could.

It took her a moment to put the pieces together. And then it clicked. "Wait... this is insane!" She sat up, excitement replacing her initial flustered state. "You know, there's actually a theory about this."

Ishh smirked, resting his chin on his hand. "Of course you'd have a theory."

"Shut up and listen," she huffed. "Dr. Ian Stevenson, a reincarnation researcher, believed that birthmarks and moles could be linked to past lives. He studied cases where people had marks exactly where they had injuries or significant signs from previous lifetimes. And when two people have identical moles at the same place, it could mean they've been connected in another life."

Ishh raised an eyebrow, amused. "So you're saying we've known each other before?"

"Maybe."

He leaned closer to the camera, the smirk deepening. "Then in the next life, you'll probably have moles everywhere—since I love marking you like this."

Tara gasped, her face turning crimson. "ISHH!"

His laughter rang through the speaker, deep and teasing. Tara hid her face in her hands, completely flustered, while he sat there grinning like he had just won something.

And for the next hour, he couldn't focus on anything but her. The mole, the way she blushed, the way she smiled—why did everything about her look too beautiful today? He kept getting lost mid-sentence, forgetting what they were even talking about.

"You're staring again," Tara finally pointed out, tilting her head.

Ishh sighed dramatically. "Not my fault. You're distracting."

Tara rolled her eyes but couldn't stop smiling.

After a while, Ishh checked the time and groaned. "I have to go. Watch duty."

Tara pouted. "Fine. Go, save the ship."

He chuckled. "I'll call you tomorrow."

"Okay," she whispered, reluctant to hang up.

The screen went dark.

Tara exhaled, staring at the blank pages of her journal. The call still lingered in her mind—the mole, the teasing, the way Ishh looked at her like she was the most beautiful thing in the world.

She picked up her pen and started writing.

35. You always manage to keep your promises.

"You haven't promised anything yet, but still, it feels like you are giving me everything I've ever asked Bhagwanji for."

Some people promise the world but fail to give even a moment of their

time. And then there are people like Ishh, who never make grand declarations but somehow fulfill everything you never dared to ask for. Love isn't in the words—it's in the quiet gestures, in the way someone remembers your smallest wishes and makes them come true without you even realizing it.

36. You know how to make life feel like an adventure.

"Remember our conversation about how we both loved doing things we weren't supposed to as kids? Like ringing the neighbor's doorbell and running? That thrill, that mischief—it's still there. And I love that about you."

Love isn't just about comfort; it's about excitement, about finding someone who brings out the reckless joy in you. It's about breaking rules together, sharing mischievous grins, and knowing that with them, every moment can turn into an adventure.

37. You can turn a simple conversation into something unforgettable.

"Like today, when you noticed that mole. Who knew something so small could feel so significant? Like a secret connection only we know about."

Some moments seem ordinary until you look back and realize they weren't. They were pieces of fate weaving themselves into your story.

38. You have this ability to make people feel important.

Some people make you feel seen, not just in a superficial way, but in a way that makes you believe you matter. Ishh had that gift—the way he listened, the way he remembered details no one else did.

39. You give compliments that actually feel genuine.

"Because they come straight from your heart, and you don't just say things for the sake of it."

A real compliment is not about what you say but about how the other person feels when they hear it. Ishh's words never felt rehearsed—they felt true.

40. You handle difficult situations with such ease and wisdom.

Some people crumble under pressure; some rise above it. And then there's Ishh, who carries burdens without making them feel heavy, who faces storms without losing himself in them.

41. You are unapologetically yourself, and that's beautiful.

"This. THIS is what I love most about you. You never pretend to be someone else, never change for the sake of fitting in. And that's rare."

Love isn't about finding someone perfect. It's about finding someone real. And loving them not despite their flaws, but because of them.

42. You make being around you feel effortless.

"With you, I never feel the need to pretend. I can just be me. Simply."

Some connections drain you, and some feel like home. With Ishh, Tara never felt like she had to try too hard.

Tara was about to write the next reason when her phone buzzed. Adya calling...

She smiled, shaking her head. This girl and her instincts.

"Hello?"

"TARUUUUU!" Adya shrieked, making Tara pull the phone away from her ear. "I KNEW IT! I knew something was going on!"

Tara blinked. "What? What happened?"

Neha's voice cut in from the background. "She's been screaming for the past five minutes, and honestly, I want to know what's happening too."

"OH PLEASE," Adya huffed. "As if you don't already have a clue. Check his Instagram post, right now!"

Tara frowned, quickly switching to Instagram. She scrolled, clicked on Ishh's post, and there it was—a picture of him, standing with that

effortless confidence, captioned:

"Posing like Rai Sahab."

Tara felt a rush of warmth. She had said that exact thing when he first sent her this picture, teasing him about how he looked like an old-time aristocrat.

Adya was practically vibrating through the phone. "I AM A GENIUS! You said that to him, didn't you? Tell me I'm wrong!"

Tara bit her lip, trying not to smile. "Maybe..."

"I KNEW IT!" Adya clapped. "You see, Neha? I don't need evidence—I feel things."

Neha sighed. "Adya, this isn't Sherlock Holmes. It's obvious. Tara's the only one who calls him that. The real question is—"

Tara braced herself.

"—what are you planning to do when he's back?"

Tara froze. Oh. She hadn't really spoken about this out loud yet.

"See?" Neha continued. "100 days left, Tara. You can't just wing it. So what's the plan?"

Adya gasped. "YES! Give us details!"

Tara took a deep breath, glancing at the open pages of her journal. "I've already started making a list..."

Neha hummed. "Of things you want to do with him?"

Tara smiled softly. "Yes. And the most important thing on that list is giving him this journal."

There was silence. Then Adya whispered dramatically, "Oh my god. The 119 Reasons journal?"

"Yeah." Tara traced the words she had just written. "I want him to know every single reason why I love him. Not just in words but in a way he can hold, flip through, and remember—whenever he's far away."

Neha was quiet for a moment. Then, in a rare soft tone, she said, "That's... beautiful, Taru."

Adya sniffled. "Damn. I might actually cry. Who knew our Tara could be so romantic?"

Tara rolled her eyes. "Shut up."

Adya laughed. "I'm serious! Ugh, I swear, when you meet him, I want a live update. I want every little detail!"

Tara smiled, closing her eyes for a second. "You'll be the first to know."

The call ended with Adya still dramatically sniffling and Neha reminding her to be normal for once. Tara chuckled, placing her phone beside her journal. The room felt quiet again, but her mind wasn't.

She traced her fingers over the inked words, her thoughts drifting. 100 days. That number felt heavy and light at the same time.

She looked at the half-filled pages and whispered, as if speaking to someone beyond the walls of her room, "Love isn't just about the time we spend together. It's about waiting with the kind of certainty that doesn't waver. It's about trusting that no matter how many miles or days stand between you, nothing changes. Some stories aren't interrupted by distance—they're just paused, waiting for the next chapter to be written."

She smiled, shutting her journal gently. And when that chapter begins, I'll be ready.

Chapter 9 - The Scent of Brewed Details

Chapter 9

"If you are wondering who your people are, they are the ones who make

your heart feel seen, and your nervous system feels calm."
— Yung Pueblo

The café smelled of freshly brewed coffee and vanilla, the air humming with quiet conversations and the occasional clatter of cups against saucers. Tara sat across from Adya and Neha, stirring her cold coffee, her classic choice at every cafe. The warmth of familiarity wrapped around them like an old song.

Adya tapped her spoon against her cup. "So, Ishh?"

Tara glanced up, smirking. "What about him?"

Adya leaned forward, resting her chin on her palm. "Oh, you know. The guy you pretend not to talk about but somehow always ends up in our conversations?"

Tara rolled her eyes. "You two are impossible."

Neha shrugged. "We're just saying—it's different with him. He's not like those college guys who act like they have everything figured out but don't even know how to hold a real conversation."

Adya nodded. "There's something about him... steady. Like he knows where he's going but isn't in a rush to get there."

Tara exhaled, her fingers tracing the rim of her cup. She knew Adya was a — Ohh love gossips! Kind of girl but Neha, she was more of a— eww, no romance and all please kind of girl.

"Oh, Neha, look at you saying all this love and romance stuff," Tara teased, raising an eyebrow.

Neha scoffed. "I can at least talk about it. Even if I don't like all this, you and Ishh are—" she paused, rolling her eyes before softening, "—Love."

Adya gasped dramatically, clutching her chest as if she had just heard the most romantic thing in the world. "Tere dil mein meri saanson ko panah mil jaye, tere ishq mein meri jaan fanaa ho jaye!" she recited, her voice dripping with Bollywood drama.

Tara and Neha burst out laughing. “Oh god, Adya, seriously?”

Neha chuckled, shaking her head. “She’s lost in her own movie now.”

Adya flipped her hair dramatically. “What can I say? Your love story is giving all the Fanaa vibes you know!”

Tara blushed, and for the remaining hours, there was chatter about the irritating girl in the school who just got a new boyfriend and how Adya found— oh wait, INVESTIGATED who the boyfriend actually was.

Later that evening, she met Heeral, Kash, and Risha outside the movie theatre. They had been planning this for weeks—a much-needed break from assignments and deadlines.

The movie was one of those intense romantic dramas, where the hero was effortlessly charming yet deeply introspective, a mix of strength and vulnerability that lingered in your thoughts long after the credits rolled.

As they sat outside the MacDonalds munching on fries and burgers, Heeral smirked. “Okay, but did anyone else feel like the hero was a little... Ishh-ish?”

Kash burst out laughing. “You mean, mysterious and emotionally intelligent?”

Risha nudged Tara playfully. “Tara definitely saw the similarities.”

Tara shook her head, but a small smile played on her lips. “He was just... grounded. He knew when to be tough and when to be gentle.”

“You have a rare ability to balance being strong and being soft.”

Heeral dipped a fry into ketchup. “That’s what makes certain people unforgettable. They don’t just exist in your life, they fit into it.”

Tara looked down at her half-eaten burger, a strange warmth blooming in her chest.

The conversation naturally drifted into gossip—about their batchmates, their friend’s complicated relationships, and the latest updates on

everyone's love lives.

Kash rolled her eyes. "Riya's boyfriend is officially the most annoying person ever. I swear if I have to hear about how 'mature' he is one more time..."

Risha snorted. "You mean the same guy who threw a tantrum because she didn't reply to his text in ten minutes?"

Heeral sighed dramatically. "See, this is why we are better off. No drama, no unnecessary stress."

Tara grinned. "Says the one who keeps analyzing every guy's behaviour or like a psychologist."

Kash smirked. "To be fair, Heeral does have a point. Some guys are just walking red flags."

Their laughter melted into deeper conversations—about jobs, internships, and the terrifying reality of stepping into the real world.

Risha leaned back. "It's crazy how we've reached this phase in life. Like, internships, career planning, responsibilities... it's all happening so fast."

Tara nodded. "Yeah. One moment, we're talking about college drama, then next, we're discussing which companies we want to work for."

Heeral sighed. "I just hope we don't get so busy chasing the future that we forget to enjoy the present."

Kash raised her Pepsi like it was a toast. "To balance both. And to survive adulthood without losing our sanity."

They clinked their cups together, laughter bubbling around them.

By the time Tara reached home, the clock read 6:02 PM.

Without wasting a second, she rushed to the kitchen, grabbing the tea leaves and milk. The familiar routine of making tea for her family was second nature now—pour, stir, strain. A ritual she never skipped.

As soon as the cups were placed on the table, she slipped away, her heart racing slightly as she climbed the stairs to the terrace.

Her phone vibrated in her hand. Ishh.

She smiled, pressing accept.

“You’re late,” he said, voice thick with sleep.

“I was making tea,” she admitted, settling into her usual spot.

A pause. Then, “Did you save me a cup?”

Tara laughed. “If I could, I would.”

Ishh chuckled softly, the sound settling into her bones like comfort.

As they talked, she absently lifted her hand, adjusting the thin thread bracelet wrapped around her wrist.

“I like that bracelet,” Ishh murmured suddenly.

Tara glanced down. “Oh, this?” She lifted her wrist to show him on the video call. “Heeral gave it to me. It has an Aum charm, see?”

Ishh tilted his head slightly. “Is it a bracelet or a chain?”

Tara shrugged. “Technically a chain. I’m just wearing it on my hand because it looks classy.”

Ishh hummed thoughtfully. “Hmm... but I like the chain you usually wear.”

Tara blinked. “Which one?”

“That one with the small moti in between and the little ball on the chain.”

For a second, Tara just stared at the screen. He had noticed. Such a tiny detail, something she hadn’t even thought he’d ever pay attention to.

A slow smile spread across her lips. “You really noticed that?”

“I notice everything about you,” Ishh said simply, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Tara felt her heart stutter. Because love wasn’t just in the big moments—it was in the little things, the unnoticed things, the things you don’t even realize you cherish until someone else does.

Later that night, she opened her journal, letting the pen glide across the pages.

47. You make the mundane feel like something worth celebrating.

Love wasn’t always grand gestures or fireworks. Sometimes, it was a quiet phone call after a long day, a cup of tea brewed in the background of an evening. It was in the way the ordinary felt extraordinary when shared with the right person.

48. Your care envelops me like a warm, comforting blanket.

Some people walk into your life and feel like guests. Others settle in like home. Ishh was the kind of person who made you feel like you never had to try too hard to be loved.

49. You have a rare ability to balance being strong and being soft.

He wasn’t the loudest person in the room, but he didn’t need to be. His presence was strong without being overwhelming, gentle without being weak. It was in the way he listened, in the way he noticed the little things.

50. You bring a sense of excitement to everything you do.

Life with him wasn’t predictable—it was steady yet full of small surprises. Even silence with him felt like an adventure like something was always waiting just beyond the moment.

51. You always know when to push forward and when to pause.

Love isn’t just about moving forward. It’s about knowing when to stop, to take a breath, to be in the moment. He never rushed things. He understood timing like a second language.

52. You never make me feel like I have to prove anything to you.

With him, she never felt like she had to be more or less of anything. She could just be. And that was enough.

53. You have this quiet confidence that draws people toward you.

He never needed to announce his presence, but somehow, people always noticed him. It was in his stillness, his certainty.

54. You bring an effortless warmth wherever you go.

Even over a call, even in moments of silence, there was something about him that felt like sunlight on a winter morning.

55. You always find a way to inject fun into serious situations.

Even when things got heavy, he found a way to make them lighter. A sarcastic comment, a teasing remark—just enough to remind her that nothing was unbearable.

56. You carry yourself with a grace that's rare to find.

Not just in the way he walked, but in the way he was. In the way he held space for people, in the way he understood without demanding explanations.

Tara closed her journal, exhaling softly.

Love wasn't about grand moments. It was in the little things.

And sometimes, the little things were everything.

Chapter 10 - The Almost Break-Up

Chapter 10

Tara stretched out on her bed, eyes fixed on the laptop screen as Mismatched Season 3 played in the dim glow of her room. Everything was

fine today—she and Ishh were fine. Their conversations were normal, their connection steady. But as she watched Dimple and Rishi's final scene unfold, her fingers tensed against the blanket.

"Goodbye, future wife."

Her stomach twisted. It was just a show, just a line, but it hit her like a wave she wasn't ready for. The words echoed in her mind, pulling her into a memory she had pushed deep down. A memory from months ago, on a night that had changed everything.

The message had sat there, staring back at her, waiting for a response.

Ishh: I miss you. I don't know why, bhot zyada.

Tara had felt her heart hammer against her ribs.

Her first instinct? She didn't reply. She ran straight to her group chat.

Tara: He texted. He said he misses me. OH GOD, what do I do? What do I say? Should I just leave it? Should I send him this?

Heeral: I mean... if you already think this won't work, why entertain it?

Kash: Exactly. If you're scared of where this is going, why go further?

Risha had just sent a comforting emoji, the only one who seemed to understand that Tara wasn't looking for logic—she was looking for permission to feel.

But deep down, she already knew what she had to do.

So she typed—

Tara: Us against the internet thing, the long-distance thing, then your timezone my timezone thing... Ishh... I am sorry I am saying this to you like... right now. I think I can't do this. I might not be able to take this any further. It's not you, it's me!! I am scared. I am scared because I know eventually I'll end up things and end up getting hurt and hurting you too in this process. It's better to save things as it is now. No moving further, just let it be.

The three dots appeared on the screen.

And then—

Ishh: Yeah, you are correct. We should pull the plug now, it's a wise decision & I understand where you are coming from.

That was it. No fight, no dramatic pleadings—just two people making a logical choice to step away before they could get hurt.

It should have been simple.

But heartbreak never is.

57. You don't just dream—you work towards making things happen.

Months had passed. They had deleted each other from social media, buried themselves in their separate worlds.

And then, just when she had convinced herself that she had moved on, he had texted again.

Ishh: It's New Year & New Year marks new beginnings... people often tend to or want to forget the past, move on, and start afresh... well, I wouldn't want that... why would I want that!!! 2023 was great, it was amazing and exciting, OF COURSE, you were there in 2023... you made it special.

If New Year means forgetting you, I don't want New Year.

If it means forgetting the little moments we had together, I don't want New Year.

If New Year means not getting to see you ever again, I don't want New Year.

Her hands had started shaking the moment she saw his name pop up on her screen.

She had immediately sent a screenshot to the group chat.

Tara: SCREAMING. LOOK AT THIS. He texted. I was missing him and LOOK what he sent. Omg how do I react??

Heeral: Okay but—when was Ishh even in 2023??

Tara had blinked at her screen, then nearly thrown her phone across the room.

Tara: ARE YOU SERIOUS? I just poured my heart out and you're living in what year? Out of world. I swear I'll kill you, Heeral.

But in between the teasing and the chaos, there was something else. Something unspoken.

He hadn't moved on either.

58. You have an energy that makes even bad days feel lighter.

"You overthink everything," he had once laughed.

"And you don't think enough," she had shot back.

They balanced each other that way. He had this effortless way of making the heaviest days feel a little less suffocating, of making her laugh when she wanted to cry.

And that's what scared her the most.

Because once you get used to someone making things better, their absence makes everything worse.

59. You make people feel safe just by being around.

Safety isn't always about being in the same place. Sometimes, it's about knowing there's someone who gets you.

Ishh had always been that person.

"I'm here," he had once said during a late-night chat when she had been too exhausted to talk, but too restless to sleep. Because she was missing her Mum.

He hadn't filled the silence with empty words. He had just stayed.

That was the kind of presence that made a difference.

60. You turn nostalgia into something comforting, not sad.

She had always hated looking back at things, people, memories she lost.

But somehow, with him, even the memories that should've stung had felt like warm reminders of something real.

61. You can make anything feel special with your enthusiasm.

Like the way he got excited about the smallest things— ringing the bell of someone's door, a funny meme, a crime novel or documentary, or the way tara just smile.

His enthusiasm had made her feel important. Like their conversations mattered, even in the smallest ways.

62. You have a gift for seeing beauty in the unexpected.

"Who even likes Paneer in Maggie?" she had teased him once.

"Me. And now you too, admit it."

She didn't admitted but the he said that they can just make two different bowls of Maggie one with paneer another without. Sorted.

Exactly like that he just sorts it and not adjust.

63. You have a voice that sounds like home.

Distance changes a lot of things, but not that.

His voice had always been a constant—steady, familiar, a place she could return to even when she didn't know where she was going.

Like someone voice could become home, she never imagined this.

64. You take your time with things that matter.

Not everything is needed to be rushed. Not everything is needed to be

defined immediately.

That not all plans work, so why we have to work on plans. Why life should be planned. Life is meant to be lived.

He had taught her that.

65. You know how to celebrate people without making it about yourself.

Even when they weren't talking, even when he had every reason to be bitter, he had still wished her the best.

That's the kind of person he was.

66. You have a patience that feels like a superpower.

"You'll figure it out, Tara. You always do."

He had said it like it was inevitable. Like he believed in her, even when she didn't believe in herself.

67. You always manage to make tough conversations feel easy.

Except for this one.

Because some conversations never really end.

Some people never really leave.

Maybe that's why she had replied to his New Year's message that night.

Tara: You don't know, but forgetting you isn't that easy. Every morning when I listen to 'Take Me to the River,' it reminds me of you. Or in the evening, when I take an off and go to the terrace, it reminds me of our phone calls, lshh.

I don't know why this is so difficult, but it is. And I can't even fix this. I'm messed up.

I don't know what you want, but if you ask me, I don't want you to leave like this. Just stay. Maybe like a friend, something more than a friend—whatever—but just stay.

Because some connections don't just fade. Some stories don't just end.

"Soulmates will always end up together. No matter how much love got lost, no matter how much distance there was. You lose each other to find each other again."

Tara put her journal in the drawer of her study table switched off the lights and immediately fell asleep, in the dreams of her—

"Maybe-Future-Boyfriend"

Chapter 11 - A Love That Feels Like Home

Chapter 11

Tara curled up on the couch, flipping through channels absentmindedly. The remote lay heavy in her hands until she stumbled upon a familiar scene from *Main Hoon Na*. Her eyes brightened as she saw Lucky's grand entrance, the red bike roaring onto the screen. The sleek design, the way it cut through the wind—it reminded her of something. Or rather, someone.

Ishh.

She let out a small laugh, shaking her head. His bike had looked eerily similar to this one. And she remembered exactly how she had reacted when she first saw it. "What is this?" she had blurted out, unimpressed. "You could've brought something simpler. Something that doesn't look like it belongs in a Bollywood action sequence."

Ishh had raised an amused eyebrow. "You don't like it?"

"Not even a little. Next time, bring something normal."

To her utter shock, he had actually listened. The next time they met, he showed up with an Activa, grinning like a mischievous child proving a point. "This normal enough for you, madam?" he had teased.

Tara smiled at the memory, her gaze still fixed on the screen. The song *Chale Jaise Hawayein* began playing, filling the room with an airy,

carefree energy. The scene on TV showed carefree moments, friendships, laughter—something so simple yet so beautiful. And suddenly, her mind wandered again. Flowers. Bouquets. Daisies.

She remembered the time Ishh had surprised her with a bouquet before he left for his voyage. He hadn't even been sure what daisies actually looked like, but he had remembered that she loved them. That thought alone had been enough to make her heart swell.

As the song played on, she reached for her journal. She flipped to a fresh page, feeling the weight of the moment, the memories, the emotions. Her pen hovered for a moment before she started writing:

68. You notice things that most people overlook.

It's not just the grand gestures—it's the small details. The way you remember the way I like my coffee, the way you catch the things I don't say aloud. You make me feel seen in a world that often rushes past the unspoken.

69. You are a rare mix of ambition and contentment.

You chase your dreams fiercely, but you never forget to live in the present. You strive, but you are not restless. You teach me that success isn't just about reaching a destination; it's about enjoying the journey too.

70. You make even waiting for something feel worthwhile.

Distance should have made things difficult. But with you, the anticipation of the next conversation, the next meeting, the next moment—it all becomes part of something beautiful. The wait is not empty; it's filled with hope.

71. You know how to bring comfort without using words.

Silence with you is never awkward. It's peaceful, like a soft blanket on a cold day. Just being in your presence, even in the quiet, feels like home.

72. You don't sacrifice you adjust.

You adjust for me; you adjust when other people just tend to sacrifice. You

really make practical decisions and adjust things for both of us. Like meeting in the afternoon even when it is hot outside.

73. You have a way of making everyday life feel cinematic.

A mundane conversation feels like poetry. You add a kind of magic to reality that makes life feel like a story worth telling. You are actually some fictional character out of the books I read.

74. You bring out the best in people without trying.

It's effortless with you. You don't demand change, yet you inspire it. You make people want to be better, to be kinder, to be more present. Just by being yourself.

75. You carry kindness without expecting anything in return.

In a world where kindness is often transactional, yours is pure. You give, not because you expect something back, but because that's who you are. And that is rare.

76. You know how to make someone feel missed without saying it.

It's in the way you check in, the way you remember things I said weeks ago, the way your absence is felt even in a crowded room. You make missing you feel like a privilege rather than a pain.

77. You create moments that turn into lifelong memories.

I don't just remember the big things. I remember the way you laughed at something ridiculous. The way you looked at me when I wasn't paying attention. The way you made the most ordinary moments unforgettable.

78. You bring new perspectives that change the way I see the world.

You challenge my thoughts and broaden my horizons. You don't impose your beliefs, but you make me question, wonder, and grow. You make me see colours I never noticed before.

79. You make even a short time together feel significant.

We don't need hours. Sometimes, even a few minutes, a single conversation, a fleeting glance—it's enough. You make time feel richer, fuller, and more meaningful.

80. You are never afraid to stand up for what's right.

You don't just go along with the world. You stand firm when it matters. You fight for fairness, for truth, for the people you care about. And that courage—that conviction—is something I will always admire.

Tara put down her pen, running her fingers over the ink-stained pages. The song on the TV had long ended, but the warmth of the moment lingered. A soft smile played on her lips. Some people came into your life and left barely a trace. Others, like Ishh, left behind reasons. Infinite reasons, reasons that turned into memories, reasons that made love feel like the most natural thing in the world.

Chapter 12 - A Cup of Evening Comfort

Chapter 12

The soft whispers of the wind in February swirled around Tara as she sat cross-legged on the terrace. The tall tree shading her spot swayed, its branches brushing against the sky as its leaves scattered, gently falling over her hair. The evening was settling in, casting a golden hue over everything. As usual, Tara dialed Ishh's number, the one call she looked forward to every evening when the world around her was quiet.

"Ishh, do you think I should go to Gwalior for my studies?" Tara asked, her tone light, as if she was testing the waters.

There was a pause on the other end, a moment of thought before he responded. "I don't know... feels a bit uncertain, doesn't it? What if we can't meet?"

Tara fell silent. Her fingers absently played with a loose strand of hair, and she leaned back, watching the last traces of daylight slip away. A small frown crept onto her face.

“What if I left Bhopal for studies... how would we meet then?” she asked, her voice tentative, unsure of where her words were leading.

The silence between them deepened, stretching out longer than usual. Tara waited, but Ishh didn't answer immediately, as if he was processing what she had just said.

After a few seconds, she broke the quiet. “Well, I have a solution, though,” she said, her voice a mix of hope and amusement. “I'll match the time you come, with me coming to Bhopal, sorted.”

A chuckle escaped from his side, the familiar sound of his laugh making Tara smile. “That's a plan, isn't it? But, I don't know... Gwalior sounds nice too.”

Tara laughed softly, her chest warmed by the affection she could hear in his voice. “We'll make it work. Anyway, it's a plan,” she added.

Just as the conversation seemed to deepen into more of their usual banter, a sharp voice from downstairs snapped her back to reality.

“Tara! Make the tea now!” her chachi called from the kitchen.

Tara sighed dramatically, knowing it was time to pull herself out of her daydream. “I'll be there in a second, Chachi!” she called back, reluctantly ending the call with Ishh.

She stood up from the terrace, brushing the leaves from her hair, and walked inside. The scent of the evening was still with her, the wind lingering as if reluctant to leave. She reached the kitchen to find her chachi stirring the tea pot, looking at her with a teasing smile.

“You're getting good at daydreaming, Tara,” Chachi said with a wink. “But you still don't know how to make a good chai.”

Tara raised an eyebrow, smirking. “Well, I'm just going to find myself a guy who knows how to cook and make tea, and then I won't need to know how to do these things.” She said it with a mock-seriousness that made Chachi laugh.

Her chachi's laughter filled the small kitchen. “Smart girl. But you'll need

more than just that,” she teased, giving Tara a knowing look as she passed her the cup of tea.

Tara took the steaming cup from her chachi with a smile, shaking her head. “Yes, yes, Chachi. I’ll find a guy who can cook, make tea, and, ideally, make life easier.”

As she sipped her tea, Tara smiled to herself. The conversation with Ishh, the dream of studying away, the ease in their relationship—it all felt so beautiful and natural, and yet, she knew that uncertainty loomed in the background. But for now, she was content with these fleeting moments.

Tara walked upstairs to her room, the warm cup of tea still in her hand. She sat at her desk, the room dimly lit by the fading sunlight, and pulled out her notebook. Her fingers hovered over the page as she thought about the reasons she had written the night before. She picked up her pen and began writing, the words flowing from her heart as if she were sharing a secret with herself.

She started with reason 81.

81. You make uncertainty feel exciting instead of scary.

When life’s path is unclear, it’s easy to feel lost, but with him, uncertainty becomes an adventure. It’s no longer a source of fear, but a place where possibilities emerge. He makes the unknown seem like the beginning of something beautiful, something worth discovering, instead of something to run from.

Her pen moved quickly as she continued.

82. You always bring a fresh perspective to things.

He’s the one who helps me see things from a different angle. No matter the situation, his insight always makes me rethink what’s possible. It’s like he has a magic way of turning every problem into a solution just by the way he looks at it.

83. You have an aura of calm even in chaos.

In the middle of a storm, when everything seems out of control, he stands

like a rock. His calm energy doesn't just settle the situation—it brings peace. He's the steadying force when the world spins too fast.

Tara paused to take another sip of her tea before continuing.

84. You bring creativity to even the simplest things.

Every moment with him is a canvas waiting to be painted. Whether it's a random conversation or just a shared silence, he adds a layer of creativity that turns the mundane into something special. Life is a little brighter with him in it.

She smiled to herself as she moved on to the next one.

85. You know how to turn tension into laughter.

When the air is thick with tension, he has this uncanny ability to defuse it with humor. He knows exactly how to make me laugh, even in the most awkward moments. It's one of his superpowers, and honestly, it's a lifesaver.

86. You make everyday gestures feel like love notes.

He doesn't have to do grand things to make me feel loved. A simple text, a gesture, even the way he listens, feels like a secret love letter meant just for me. It's in the small things, the ones that mean the most.

87. You always find a way to make things work.

Life isn't always easy, but he's the one who never gives up. When things seem impossible, he's the one who finds a way through it. It's not magic—it's his determination. He believes in making things work, no matter what.

88. You have a way of creating comfort, no matter where we are.

It doesn't matter where we are—whether it's a crowded place or a quiet corner, he creates a space where I feel safe. It's in the way he speaks, the way he holds himself, that makes everything feel okay, even when it's not.

89. You never lose your sense of wonder.

I love how he always finds something to marvel at. No matter how old he gets, he still sees the world through a child's eyes—curious and full of wonder. It reminds me to look at life with the same sense of awe and excitement.

90. You balance passion and logic effortlessly.

He's the perfect blend of both worlds. Passionate about everything he does, but grounded in logic. He knows when to chase a dream and when to hold back. It's a delicate balance, and somehow, he makes it seem effortless.

Tara's hand hovered for a moment before she wrote the final reason.

91. You make even a simple handshake feel electric.

There's an energy in his touch, something I can't quite explain. Even a handshake, something so simple, sends a current through me. It's in the way he makes the smallest moments feel like they matter.

Tara set the pen down, her heart full as she looked over the list. It was a collection of moments, feelings, and memories that she cherished deeply. As she leaned back in her chair, a soft smile spread across her face. It wasn't just the grand gestures or the big plans that made Ishh special—it was everything. The way he made her feel, even from miles away, was something she had never expected to experience. And in that quiet moment, Tara knew that no matter where life took them, there would always be these reasons, these small moments that would keep her grounded.

She closed her notebook, feeling at peace. With every word written, she had found a little more of herself in him, and in them.

Chapter 13 - A Hundred Reasons And Counting

Chapter 13

Mintoo Cafe was buzzing with the warmth of chatter and the soft clinking of cups, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingling with the sweet scent

of caramelized waffles. Tara, Heeral, Risha, and Kash sat at their usual corner table, laughter rippling through the air as they flipped through their phones.

"Did you guys see? Mawra got married!" Risha beamed, showing them a picture of the actress from *Sanam Teri Kasam* in her ethereal bridal look.

"She looked so gorgeous!" Kash gushed. "That lehenga was a dream."

Tara sighed, looking at her phone. "I know, right? She looked so pretty. I was so happy for her, but also a little emotional. Like, my childhood favorites are all getting married."

"Oh, but more than that," Heeral smirked, "Did you see who else got married? Darshan Raval!"

Tara groaned dramatically. "I saw! And I don't know if I should be happy or heartbroken. I mean, look at him! He looked so perfect. But ugh, this is such a bittersweet moment for me."

"Don't worry," Heeral teased, "Your real Rawal Sahab—sorry, Rai Sahab—is coming in just 92 days. How excited are you?" She held an imaginary mic like a news reporter. "Breaking news on AajTak! Tara's countdown begins!"

Tara blushed, rolling her eyes. "Shut up! But honestly... I am excited. More than I can put into words."

Kash leaned forward, curiosity in her gaze. "How do you even have this much patience? Waiting for his replies, his calls, sometimes for days?"

Tara smiled, her fingers tracing the edges of her journal. "That's exactly why I write these reasons. They aren't just reasons. They are my words of wait for him. My way of holding onto moments, of making the time apart feel meaningful."

She flipped open her journal to the next blank page, drawing in a deep breath before continuing.

92. You take your time to understand before you react. Most people listen just to respond. But you, you listen to understand. I've seen the way you pause before speaking, the way you let words settle

before choosing your own. It makes me feel safe. Like my words aren't just floating in the air, but landing somewhere they'll be valued. In a world where people rush to react, your patience is rare. It's a kind of quiet wisdom that makes me want to be better, to think before I speak, to respond with kindness rather than impulse. Maybe that's what love should be—a place where understanding comes before reaction.

93. You make traditions feel exciting instead of repetitive.

I used to think good morning and good night texts were clichés, things couples did out of obligation. But with you, they've become a rhythm, a comforting beat in the melody of my day. When you text me good morning, it's not just a greeting—it's a promise that you thought of me the moment you woke up. And when you say good night, it's like a reassurance that no matter how far we are, I'll always be the last person on your mind before sleep claims you. Traditions aren't boring when they're built with love.

94. You know how to add depth to the simplest conversations.

A conversation with you never feels like just small talk. Even a simple 'How was your day?' turns into something meaningful. You ask, and you really want to know. You remember the little things I mentioned days ago and bring them up like they mattered. And they do, to you. Maybe that's why I never get tired of talking to you. Because every conversation, no matter how mundane, feels like unwrapping a new layer of us.

95. You turn waiting into something sweet, not frustrating.

Most people hate waiting. They get restless, impatient, annoyed. But waiting for you doesn't feel like that. It's not an empty space—it's filled with hope, with anticipation, with all the little things that remind me of you. I count the days, not with frustration, but with excitement. Because every passing second brings me closer to you. And when I finally hear your voice, it feels like a reward, like the universe's way of saying, See? He was worth the wait.

96. You carry a sense of quiet strength that's rare to find.

You don't need to be loud to be strong. Your strength isn't in raised voices or grand gestures—it's in the way you handle things with grace. It's in your calmness when things go wrong, in the way you steady me when I panic. Some people fight battles with swords; you fight them with silence, with resilience, with a steady hand that holds mine through the storms. And that kind of strength? It's the kind that lasts.

97. You always make time for what truly matters.

The world is noisy, busy, constantly demanding attention. But no matter how packed your day is, you always find a way to be there. Maybe not always in words, but in presence, in little gestures that remind me that I matter. It's never about having time, is it? It's about making time. And you, you always make time for me.

98. You turn any place into a home with just your presence.

Home isn't always four walls and a roof. Sometimes, home is a voice, a feeling, a person. And with you, it's like carrying a piece of home wherever I go. Even through a screen, even across miles, you feel like home. Safe. Familiar. A place where I can breathe, where I can just be.

99. You bring excitement to the unknown.

I've always been someone who likes certainty, who needs to know what's next. But with you, I've learned to love the unknown. Because with you, the future doesn't feel scary—it feels like an adventure. The kind of adventure where even if I don't know the destination, I know the journey will be worth it. And that's all that really matters, isn't it?

100. You have a way of making a moment feel timeless.

Some moments don't belong to time. They exist outside of it, floating somewhere infinite. That's what it feels like with you. Like every second is stretched, savored, made into something more. Whether it's a simple phone call, a shared silence, or just knowing you're somewhere thinking of me—those moments, they last. They stay. They become part of me. And maybe that's why I'm not afraid of distance or time or waiting. Because with you, love isn't measured in days or hours. It's measured in moments that never fade.

Tara closed her journal, running her fingers over the ink, sealing the words into memory. She looked up at her friends, who were watching her in quiet awe.

"Damn," Kash whispered. "I get it now. Why you wait. Why it's worth it."

Tara smiled. "Yeah. He's worth it. And so is every second of waiting for him."

Chapter 14 - The Non-Date Theory

Chapter 14

February felt like May in Bhopal. The sun was merciless, and the ceiling fan spun lazily, doing little to soothe the sticky warmth clinging to the air. Tara lay sprawled across her bed, her fingers flipping through the pages of **The Wedding Menu** by Letizia Lorini. A particular line made her pause, her breath hitching slightly.

> "Are we... friends, Ian?"

She reread it, her mind drifting back to a late-night conversation with Ishh.

She was scared that night—scared of how much she felt, scared of where it was leading. The weight of emotions pressed against her ribs like an unbearable ache.

"Ishh, I don't know if I can do this," she had admitted in a whisper, her phone screen dimly lighting up her face. "What if I ruin everything? What if I end up hurting us both? This relationship thing... it's too much."

He had chuckled softly, his voice steady like an anchor. "Then let's not call it a relationship."

She frowned. "What?"

"Let's be **non-dates**, just like you joked about that mismatched couple in **Mismatched**," he said, a teasing lilt in his tone. "Let's take that seriously. No pressure, no rules, just us. If we don't name it, maybe it'll be easier."

Tara had blinked at her screen, stunned. That was the thing about him—he always had a solution, even for things that weren't supposed to have one. Maybe that was what made him feel like home. He wasn't just someone she could lean on. He was the solution to every problem before it even fully formed.

Tara sighed, closing her novel and rolling onto her stomach. The heat wasn't just in the air—it was in her thoughts, in the way memories of him warmed her heart, refusing to be ignored. She reached for her journal, flipping to the next blank page, and started writing.

101. You make adventure feel like a daily experience.

Not all adventures come with passports and tickets. Some come in the form of late-night calls filled with laughter, debates over whether pineapple belongs on pizza, and spontaneous "What if we..." conversations. With you, life doesn't need grand gestures to feel thrilling. You turn ordinary days into stories worth remembering. You make the mundane feel magical.

102. You have a way of making even endings feel hopeful.

Some people fear goodbyes, but you make them feel like see-you-laters. Even when distance stretches between us, you find a way to remind me that it's temporary. Your words, your presence—even in absence—hold the promise of something more. That's rare. That's you.

103. You never let the weight of the world change your heart.

You've seen things I can't imagine—rough seas, endless nights, storms both outside and within. And yet, you remain you. Not hardened, not bitter. Just you. Kind. Steady. Unshaken. You carry the weight of the world, but it never makes you lose yourself. And I think that's the bravest thing anyone can do.

104. You make little things feel grand.

A text from you in the middle of a hectic day. A simple, "Have you eaten?" The way you notice when I'm feeling off, even when I haven't said a word. You don't need extravagant gestures to make someone feel special. You just do it, effortlessly.

105. You have a laugh that makes the whole room feel lighter.

You don't laugh loudly, but when you do, it feels like the world breathes easier. Like the weight of the day disappears for a moment. And that's a kind of magic I never want to lose.

106. You carry love in the way you do things, not just in words.

It's in the way you remember things I've long forgotten mentioning. The

way you listen—not just to reply, but to understand. The way you make space for me in your life without me having to ask for it. Love isn't always loud. Sometimes, it's just there, woven into the quiet things.

107. You know how to make an ordinary evening feel like a celebration.

It doesn't have to be a special occasion. A random call, a shared silence, even just sending me a song you think I'd like—it all feels like something worth cherishing. You turn nothing into everything.

108. You have a way of making people feel seen.

Not just me, but everyone around you. You notice things—small things. The way you wanted to know about heeral's story I was telling one day, the way someone's voice wavers when they're not okay. The way someone's eyes light up when they talk about something they love. And you remember. You make people feel like they matter. Because to you, they do.

109. You know how to hold space for emotions.

You never rush me when I'm upset. You never tell me to "get over it" or "move on." You let feelings sit, breathe. You hold space for them without letting them drown us. That kind of patience—it's rare. And it's something I hope to learn from you.

Tara closed her journal, running her fingers over the ink, sealing the words into memory. She stretched her arms, yawning, before reaching for her phone. Absentmindedly, she opened YouTube.

And there it was.

The first video in her suggestions— *Kyun Uthe Dil Chhod Aaye*, the title of a serial from four years ago. Her lips curled into a soft smile.

She had told Ishh about it once, just randomly in conversation. She never expected him to remember, but weeks later, he had asked out of nowhere, "What song were you saying? Which serial?" She had laughed, surprised. "Oh wow, that's so nice. I'll listen to it." And he had. He came back later, shaking his head. "Not my type. You were right."

She had laughed then, and now, watching the suggestion on her screen,

she laughed again.

The soft melody of the song filled her room, blending with the golden hues of the afternoon. As she listened, a warmth settled in her chest—the kind of warmth that only came from knowing you were truly heard, truly seen. Ishh remembered things that she herself sometimes forgot. And maybe that was love, in its simplest form.

> *"Kisi bhi safar ka sabse khoobsurat pal, uska manzil tak pahunchna nahi, balki raaste ki woh chhoti chhoti yaadein hoti hain jo hamesha saath rehti hain."*

(The most beautiful part of any journey isn't reaching the destination, but the small memories along the way that stay with you forever.)

And in that moment, Tara knew—this was one of those memories she'll be proudly telling her kids oh! maybe future kids with pride and laughter.

Chapter 15 - Swim Until You Find Your Shore

Chapter 15

Tara stood by the window, a soft dusting of sunlight spilling through the glass. The room was quiet except for the occasional flutter of pages as she wiped down her almirah and bookshelf. Her fingers lingered over a few old books, memories wrapped in paper and ink. As she brushed a cloth over the edge of a particular spine, her hand froze. It Ends With Us. She smiled softly, her heart tightening for a moment. This was the first book she and Ishh had ever discussed. Well, at least the first one they'd talked about. Ishh, being more of a practical, hands-on guy, wasn't much of a reader. But that day when they first spoke about this book, it had felt like a milestone. That simple conversation about a story of love and loss, of finding yourself amidst the chaos, had unknowingly paved the path for their own journey.

Her smile faded, as she shook the thought away. Focus, she reminded herself. She couldn't afford to get distracted. Not when her best friends were about to arrive.

Just as she was about to organize her scattered thoughts, her phone

buzzed. It was a call from Heeral.

"Hey, Tara!" Heeral's voice chirped through the phone. "We're on our way! Kash, Risha, and I will be there in an hour. Make sure you're ready!"

Tara glanced at her reflection in the mirror and chuckled. She had been so caught up in her thoughts that she had forgotten to prepare herself for the girls' visit. Her hair was tousled, and she hadn't even changed into something presentable yet. "Okay, okay. I'll get to work now!" she said, hanging up.

With newfound urgency, she started picking up the scattered books, dusting the shelves, and rearranging things in a rush. The thoughts of Ishh, though always lingering, were now pushed to the back of her mind. She had to get ready to greet her friends.

An hour later, the familiar sound of laughter echoed through the hallway as the girls arrived. Tara, now in comfortable clothes, opened the door to find Heeral, Kash, and Risha standing there, grinning from ear to ear.

They all piled into her room, settling around the bed with their usual banter.

"Okay, okay," Heeral said, her tone teasing but serious. "You already finished 109 Reasons? How fast, Tara!" She raised an eyebrow as if challenging her.

Kash, equally excited, leaned forward. "Now I'm dying to know the final 10 reasons! Please, spill it!"

Risha, grinning, nodded eagerly. "Yes, yes, come on, tell us! We've been waiting!"

Tara laughed, her heart warmed by their enthusiasm. She picked up her journal, flipping to the last page. Taking a deep breath, she began to speak, sharing the final and most important ten reasons she loved Ishh. With each reason, she reflected on the essence of their bond—how far they had come, and how much she had learned along the way.

110. He makes me feel safe, emotionally and mentally.

There's something about his presence that makes me feel secure in every sense of the word. It's not just about protection, but the way he makes me feel safe to express my truest thoughts, my wildest dreams, and my deepest fears. It's the type of security that allows me to be myself without judgment. "True safety is not in the absence of danger, but in the presence of someone who cares."

111. He has a quiet strength that reassures me.

In every situation, he remains calm and composed, even when things seem uncertain. That quiet strength he carries is one of the things that draw me to him the most. It's not about being loud or overpowering—it's about being steady and resilient, and that's something I admire. "Sometimes, the strongest people are those who love beyond all faults, cry behind closed doors, and fight battles that nobody knows about."

112. He challenges me to think differently.

There's never a dull moment with him because he challenges the way I view the world, helping me see things from different perspectives. His intellect, curiosity, and open-mindedness are things that push me to grow, to broaden my horizons. "The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud."

113. He is selfless with his time and care.

I've never had to beg for his attention or affection. He gives freely, without hesitation or the need for anything in return. His selflessness in moments when I need him most reminds me how rare and precious his heart is. "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

114. He values communication and honesty.

One of the things I admire most is how much he values honest communication. There are no games, no pretenses—just the truth. He isn't afraid of hard conversations, and he doesn't shy away from difficult moments. This openness builds trust, making me feel comfortable with him in every way. "Honesty is the highest form of intimacy."

115. He supports my independence.

While our relationship is important to him, he never tries to make me feel dependent on him. He supports my personal goals and dreams, and encourages me to carve out my own path. It's that rare balance of being deeply connected while also respecting each other's individual journeys. "A strong woman doesn't need a man to make her whole, but a man who supports her is invaluable."

116. He is thoughtful in ways I never expected.

Ishh doesn't just do things for me; he does things for me in ways that show how deeply he knows me. From remembering little details about my preferences to surprising me with acts of kindness that feel completely personal, he's thoughtful in a way that leaves me speechless. "Thoughtfulness is the key to a thoughtful heart."

117. He is resilient in love.

No matter the distance, the challenges, or the obstacles life throws his way, Ishh has shown a resilience in love that I've never seen before. His willingness to fight for us, even when things aren't perfect, is one of the most inspiring qualities he has. "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction."

118. He respects my space and individuality.

Even though we share our lives, Ishh has this rare quality of respecting my need for space and solitude. He understands that I need time to myself, to recharge, and to grow individually, and he gives me that without ever making me feel guilty. "You don't have to be everything to someone, but someone has to let you be everything to yourself."

119. He makes me feel like we're a team.

Ishh has this incredible way of making me feel like we're always in this together. Whether it's facing challenges, celebrating victories, or just navigating through daily life, he reminds me that we're a team. There's no "you" or "me" in our relationship, just "us"—working side by side toward the same goals. "A great relationship is about two things: first, appreciating the similarities, and second, respecting the differences."

As Tara finished sharing the last reason, the room was filled with a

comfortable silence. The girls looked at her, their faces soft with understanding. It wasn't just about the reasons—they could feel the depth of her love for Ishh, the way each word spoke volumes about the connection they shared.

Tara smiled, her eyes gleaming with a mixture of joy and contemplation. "And that's it," she said, closing the journal. "Those are the reasons."

Kash nodded, her expression thoughtful. "You two are something special."

Risha chimed in, "Definitely. It's not just love. It's a whole journey."

Tara leaned back, a wistful smile playing on her lips. She thought of Ishh, of the distance that separated them, and of the journey they were still on together. The future was uncertain, but one thing was clear—no matter how far apart they were, their hearts were connected.

As she gazed out the window, a thought occurred to her, and she said it aloud, almost to herself. "And as Atlas says to Lily—Keep swimming until you reach the shore. I think my shore will always keep swimming in the world's different corners, so I need to learn how to dive in to enjoy the Marine Life."

Her friends laughed, but Tara's heart swelled with hope. Love, she realized, wasn't about reaching the shore. It was about the journey, the diving, the exploring, and the constant movement toward something beautiful—even if the destination was always shifting.

Chapter 16 – A Letter to You

Chapter 16

Dear Ishh,

I don't know how to begin, where to start, or if words will ever be enough to hold the weight of everything I feel for you. But if love were a language, I'd write endlessly, carving pieces of my heart onto paper, hoping that somehow, in these words, you'd find the depth of what you mean to me.

I'll love you no matter how far you are. Whether the miles stretch endlessly between us, whether time zones shift like waves, whether the night falls for me while the sun rises for you—my love will remain unchanged. Distance has never been a measure of love, only of longing, and if longing is proof of love, then I have loved you in every moment of silence, in every missed call, in every unsaid word that my heart whispered when my lips could not.

I'll love you no matter what the future holds for us. Even if life unfolds in ways we never imagined, even if time tests us, even if the roads ahead twist and turn, my heart will always find its way back to you. Love is not about certainty, nor is it about promises etched in stone—it is about trust. And I trust you with the most fragile parts of me, the ones I never knew how to give away until you came along.

Because our love story isn't a love story. It's something beyond love. It is a story of trust, of waiting, of silent understanding. It is built not on grand gestures but on quiet moments—on stolen seconds between rushed conversations, on the way you notice the smallest details about me, on the way my name sounds different when you say it. Love can be spoken, but what do we have? It is felt, in the spaces between words, in the pauses, in the unspoken.

You once told me that waiting is the hardest part. That patience is a test, and love, a lesson in endurance. But I would wait for you forever if you are the end result. If love is a journey, then every step, every delay, every ache of missing you is a part of the story I want to tell. I don't mind the waiting, lshh, because waiting for you is still better than living a lifetime without you. If my love for you has to be measured, let it be measured in time, in days and nights I have spent thinking of you, in the quiet prayers I have whispered, asking the universe to bring you closer to me.

I often wonder what I did to deserve a love like this. A love that feels like the novels I read, the reels I scroll, the books I bury myself into, the movies I watch. You are the story I never knew I was waiting to write. And if love had a face, it would look like you. Like the way you listen when I ramble, like the way you remember the smallest things, like the way your voice turns softer when you say my name. If I am lucky, it is because I get to love you.

I once told you that my favourite movie is Vivah. You never knew why it

meant so much to me. It wasn't about the story; it was about the way love was shown—pure, patient, and unwavering. And then I met you, and I realized you are Veer to this Zaara, Prem to this Poonam & Rahul to this Anjali.

Sometimes, I sit and think about all the little moments that brought us here. The first time we spoke, the first time you made me laugh, the first time I realized that what I felt for you wasn't just fleeting. I think about the times you stayed up just to talk to me, the times you held onto conversations I thought were insignificant but meant everything to me. And I wonder—how did I get so lucky?

There are a hundred ways to say I love you, and yet, none of them seem enough. I love you in the way the sun kisses the ocean, in the way the wind plays with the leaves, in the way music lingers long after a song has ended. I love you in every way possible, in every language love has ever been spoken, in every poem that has ever been written.

But most of all, I love you in the simplest way—the way that doesn't need proof, doesn't need explanation, doesn't need grand declarations. I love you in the way my heart beats steadier when I think of you, in the way your presence makes the world feel a little less chaotic, in the way even the silence between us feels like a conversation I never want to end.

So, my love, no matter where life takes us, no matter how far or close we are, no matter how many years pass or how much changes—know this. I will love you. Again and again, in every lifetime, in every universe, in every version of myself that has the privilege of knowing you.

And if love is a choice, then I choose you. In this life, in the next, and in every story that is yet to be written.

Forever yours,
Daisy 🌻

Epilogue

Epilogue

"Some love stories end with a happily ever after. Ours? Ours never really ends—it just keeps unfolding, in stolen moments, in reckless adventures, in laughter that echoes through the streets where we once walked alone."

If you were to find us years from now, you wouldn't see a picture-perfect couple, all prim and proper, sipping coffee in a quiet café. No, that's not us. You'd probably see us sneaking into places we're not supposed to be, laughing breathlessly as we sprint away after ringing someone's doorbell at midnight. Or maybe you'd catch us in a bookstore, arguing over which novel to buy, only for him to secretly buy the one I wanted.

Or maybe—just maybe—you'd find us sitting by the sea, my head on his shoulder, watching the waves roll in, not saying much but knowing everything. Because that's how it has always been with us. Not just words, not just love, but a thousand untold stories in between.

There's something about love that no one really tells you. It isn't just about waiting, about the heartache of distance, or the poetry of longing. It's also about the crazy moments—the kind where you do things you wouldn't dare to do alone. It's about him convincing me to jump a fence just to get to the best chai stall on the other side. It's about me daring him to steal a flower from someone's garden just because I wanted one. It's about breaking a few rules, making new ones, and laughing so hard that the world around us blurs into nothingness.

Ishh and I? We weren't the kind of love story that unfolded in perfect harmony. We were chaos and comfort, adventure and home. We were the late-night calls that turned into 4 AM existential debates. We were the long-distance that never really felt distant. We were two people who found each other in a world where we weren't even looking.

And if you ask me where I see us in the future, I won't give you a serious answer. Because we could be anywhere—getting kicked out of a fancy restaurant for laughing too loud or sneaking onto a random rooftop just to watch the city lights. Maybe we'll be dancing in the rain, or maybe we'll be old and grey, still arguing over the lawas for men and women.

But one thing is for sure—whatever we're doing, we'll be doing it together.

Because our love story was never just about love. It was about trust. About waiting. About knowing that no matter where life takes us, we'll find our

way back. And now that we're here, standing at the end of the story, I realize—there never really was an end.

Just more reasons to love.

Just more chapters waiting to be written.

And maybe, just maybe—somewhere in another city, another timeline, another version of us—there's a boy and a girl, ringing doorbells, laughing as they run away, living in the kind of love that was never meant to be ordinary.