

LETTERS THAT NEVER CAME

A FICTION AND NON- FICTION

SHIVANI RAWAT



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Stories Matter

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Dedication

*To the ones who never gave up on me,
even when the words were left unspoken.
For the memories we shared, the silences we endured,
and the love that remains always, in every letter.
And to those still waiting for a message,
may you find peace in the spaces between the words.*

Dedication

*To my brother,
In your laughter, I found warmth. In your silence, I found
understanding.
You have been my protector, my secret keeper, and the
shoulder I never had to ask for.
Even in moments when the world felt distant and heavy, your
presence reminded me I was never alone.
This book carries pieces of my heart, and so many of them
belong to you.
For all the love you gave without words and for always being
my home in human form,
this is yours.*

“What if all your waiting was for someone who was never coming back?”

A page to answer!!

Letters That Never Came
A Novel

By Shivani Rawat

“And Still, I Waited”

That kind of loss carves a hollow space inside you one that no one else can fill, no matter how hard they try. When the person you loved and waited for is never coming back, it feels like time stops for you while the world keeps rushing forward. The dreams you built together fall silent, and you're left holding memories that were once promises.

But in that silence, over time, you'll begin to hear your own voice again. Grief doesn't vanish; it reshapes you. And though you might always carry that ache, you'll also carry the love. It doesn't die just because they're gone. You loved, deeply and truly and that is something powerful. Eventually, that love can become a source of strength instead of sorrow.

A Memory, Not a Miracle

**Not on the train I once imagined him on,
nor in the dreams where his boots echoed down the hallway.**

The silence came instead
louder than any goodbye,
crueler than any ending written by fate.

I waited through the folding of seasons,
wearing hope like a second skin,
believing love could bend the clock's stubborn hands,
reroute the map of destiny.

But life does not bargain with longing.
It does not pause for hearts left open.

Now, I carry him in the hush between raindrops,
in the wind that lifts my hair the way his fingers once did
tender, fleeting.

He returns in the scent of first rain on parched earth
a memory, not a miracle.
A presence made of absence.

And still, somehow,
I go on loving him forward
into the spaces he never came back to fill.

Chapter 1: The Door That Never Opened

Some nights, I still sit by the window, spine straight, heart unraveled,
half-hoping the sound of tires on gravel is the universe relenting,
bringing you home to me.

It's foolish, I know.

But when you've loved someone like a religion,
your heart forgets how to kneel for anyone else.

It simply waits stubborn, soft, and sacred.

You promised you'd be back.

Not in letters dipped in poetry or vows carved in stone.

You never folded love into metaphors or slipped verses into my
notebooks.

But your eyes God, your eyes they told stories even silence couldn't
bury.

That last morning,

when your arms clung to me like they were afraid to forget the shape
of love,

you said everything without speaking a word.

So I waited.

Like monsoons wait for mountains.

Like prayers wait for miracles.

At first, it was a holy kind of hope,
the kind that makes you sweep the floor twice

in case he walks in with dust on his boots.
The kind that makes you wear his favorite sweater
until the threads remember his scent better than you do.
I whispered your name into my pillow
like a secret only the night should know.
I counted days not as numbers
but as offerings. As stars a soldier might salute during lonely patrols.
Each one a fragile tether to a future I still believed in.

But days turned into months.
And hope
bright, burning, beautiful
curdled.
It rotted into silence,
a silence so vast it pressed against my chest like a second sky.

No letters.
No calls.
Not even the echo of your name in the wind.
Just a vast, merciless absence,
stretching across seasons,
turning my heartbeat into a slow, tired metronome.

People stopped asking.
Their curiosity faded like light at dusk.
They were tired of my brittle replies,
“No, nothing yet.”

“Still waiting.”

“Maybe soon.”

Their eyes flickered with pity, then shame,
as if to love someone who never returned was an embarrassment.

But I kept waiting.

Not out of belief,

not out of hope

but because waiting had become my final act of devotion.

My ritual.

My rebellion against forgetting.

I stood at the door too many times to count.

Hand trembling on the knob.

Eyes burning with a thousand imagined reunions.

I saw you in every silhouette.

Heard your voice in every wind-chime's cry.

I played out the moment you standing there, dust-covered and weary,
and me, collapsing into you like a wave remembering the shore.

But the door never opened.

And then not suddenly, but softly
something inside me surrendered.

Not with clarity. Not with peace.

But with the quiet mourning of a sun that no longer surprises the sky.

I stopped refreshing my phone.

Stopped straightening the cushions you always tossed aside.

Stopped believing that love could bend time,
or wake the dead.

But I never stopped loving you.

Because love like this doesn't fade.

It embeds itself beneath your ribs.

It lives in the silence between your thoughts.

It hums inside your breath,
not loud, but eternal.

Some days, it becomes a memory I cradle gently.

Other days, it becomes a storm
violent, weeping, unstoppable.

But it is mine.

And even if you never walk through that door again,
you live here,
not in the echo of my waiting,
but in the woman I became because of it.

The letters I wrote every bleeding word remain unanswered.
Still, I'm attaching each one.

Because the woman who waited...
learned how to live.

My main character is “her” **SUGANDHAA....**

Hi, everyone I’m SUGANDHA!!

Attaching my letter, show nothing but my affection towards him.

13th October, 2022 – Dehradun, Rainy Night

(My window fogged, my heart heavier than ever)

To My Love,

It’s been months. Maybe more. I’ve stopped keeping track, honestly. Time feels shapeless now, like fog that refuses to lift. It moves forward, yes, but without rhythm or reason. Some days blur into each other like watercolors left out in the rain, and I find myself wondering how many sunrises I’ve watched without knowing if you’re seeing the same sky.

You vanished.

Not in some romantic, tragic way that books talk about, not like the last star before morning or a boat disappearing into the mist. You simply... stopped showing up. One day, the messages became shorter. The calls less frequent. The laughter on the other end of the line dimmer. Then, nothing. A silence so sharp it could cut through bone.

I told myself it was the distance. The job. The chaos. The duty. I recited every excuse you might have given me if you could. I tried to be understanding, tried to believe that this was temporary. I whispered your name into every room I entered, as if saying it aloud might make you real again, even if only for a moment.

But the truth is, I still don't know if you're alive or gone. And that's a special kind of torment, isn't it? It's a grief without a body. A wound that doesn't know where to ache. Because how do you mourn someone who might still be walking, breathing, laughing under another sky? And worse, how do you hold onto hope without it eventually breaking you?

There are nights I wake up, drenched in sweat, convinced I heard your voice outside the window. My mind plays cruel tricks, pulling you from memory and setting you just outside my reach. Sometimes I still do little things for you, cook your favorite dal even though I can't bring myself to eat it, or leave the porch light on, just in case. I press your photograph against my chest like it's a heartbeat I'm trying to borrow.

Madness? Maybe.

Devotion? Definitely.

Somewhere in between, perhaps, but I've long stopped trying to define it.

I want you to know something, I'm still here.

Still loving you.

Still wearing the promise you left behind like a scar stitched with gold. It hurts, yes, but it's beautiful too, in that painful, sacred way love can be when it's left unfinished.

There are days I get angry. Not the kind of rage that screams and shatters things, but a quieter fury. The kind that simmers in silence. For not sending a word. Not even a "Don't wait." Not even a "I can't come back." Just emptiness brutal and unapologetic. But even in my anger, I find myself praying for you. Hoping you're safe. That wherever you are,

*you're still beneath the same sky, still breathing, still somehow held by
the universe.*

*And if, if you're no longer here, if this world lost you and no one bothered
to inform my soul, then I just hope you knew. That I loved you. That I still
do. That you were, are everything that ever made me believe in
something beyond this ordinary life.*

This letter may never find you.

It may sit in a drawer, age with me, gather dust and dreams.

But maybe, just maybe, love doesn't need addresses or stamps.

*Maybe it travels through the silence, echoes inside stars, lands gently
where it's meant to.*

So, if there's even a sliver of you still out there,

Come back, if you can.

And if you can't... remember me.

In the quiet. In the wind. In the scent of rain on parched earth.

The way I remember you always.

With all my love,

Sugandha

Part

1

The Quiet Among the Crowd

The first day of college was nothing like she had pictured it in the quiet hours of her room, or in the daydreams where she imagined herself stepping through grand gates with a confident smile and the kind of ease that comes from belonging. Instead, the corridors throbbed with noise, a chaotic symphony of laughter, chatter, clattering footsteps, and the sharp buzz of new friendships igniting.

It was a world alive with energy, but Sugandha moved through it like a shadow barely there, unseen and unheard.

Her bag felt suddenly too heavy, weighed down not just by books but by the weight of her own uncertainty. The smile she forced in passing felt like a mask stretched too thin, cracking at the edges. And her heartbeat? It drummed so loudly in her ears that she was certain everyone must hear it, as if her very presence was an intrusion she couldn't control.

She watched from the sidelines. Girls embraced like old friends reunited, their voices warm and familiar. Boys leaned casually against walls, already owning the space with effortless swagger. Groups clustered in corners of the canteen and stairwells, exchanging jokes and stories like they had been waiting for this moment their entire lives. But Sugandha... she had no one.

When someone spoke to her, she was polite, nodding along, a spectator in conversations she couldn't quite grasp. The truth was painfully clear, she was surrounded by hundreds of voices, yet never more invisible.

Evenings were the hardest. She'd walk back to the quiet corner of the hostel, where her bed waited silently like an old, lonely friend who didn't ask questions. She hesitated before unlocking her door, feeling the weight of the day pressing down on her chest. Night after night, she lay staring at the ceiling, as if willing it to cave in

and bury her, or at least make space for something new to grow. It wasn't exactly sadness. It was hollowness. An aching emptiness wrapped tightly in expectations she didn't know how to fulfill.

She kept telling herself it would get better, that this was just the beginning of a story that hadn't found its rhythm yet. But beneath the surface, something else stirred. Not hope. Not fear. Something unnamed, a silent current pulling her toward a future she couldn't yet imagine.

Part One (Continued): The Quiet Among the Crowd

Days slipped by like pages from a book she had no hand in writing. Sugandha showed up for lectures, her presence unnoticed, her name unheard. She nodded through roll calls, scribbled notes in neat, solitary handwriting, the kind that looked too perfect for the chaos inside her. Professors barely glanced her way, and she never bothered to ask why. The library became her refuge. She always chose the seat by the window, where the soft sunlight kissed her skin just enough to remind her, she was still alive, still here. No one sat beside her. No one asked if she was okay.

Sometimes she thought she preferred it that way, the silence was cruel, yes, but at least it was certain. It was a predictable kind of loneliness.

In the dining hall, she ate quickly, eyes fixed on her phone, scrolling through messages she never sent or replied to. The screen glowed cold in her hands, reflecting the emptiness she felt inside. She missed home, the familiar voices, the warmth of shared glances, the comfort of being understood without words. But she couldn't say that aloud. Not here. Not yet. What she missed was less a place, more a presence, a belonging that was more than geography.

At night, Sugandha stared at the glow-in-the-dark stars stuck to the dorm ceiling, pale green flecks of light pretending to brighten the

darkness but offering no warmth. Her roommate was friendly enough, vibrant in a way that seemed like it belonged to another world, one full of loud phone calls and weekend plans that never included Sugandha. She sometimes wondered if loneliness was like a scent animals could smell maybe hers was too strong, too heavy, and people drifted away without realizing why.

She wrote in her journal when the words came and even then, her own sentences felt distant, as if they belonged to someone else. She drifted through her days like a body with no anchor, waiting for something to hold on to.

And then, one quiet evening, just as the sky melted into a soft dusky blue and she lingered alone on the last bench in the college courtyard, letting her chai cool forgotten beside her, she heard it.

A voice. Low, warm, unexpected.

Not calling her name. Not yet.

But enough to make her spine straighten. Enough to make her breath catch. Enough to tell her the silence she had learned to live with was about to shatter. She sat very still, her fingers curling around the chipped ceramic of her chai cup. The courtyard was almost empty now, save for a few scattered students hastening to their evening classes or conversations fading into the growing hush of twilight. The faint rustle of leaves in the breeze, the distant honk of a city bus, the subtle creak of old benches settling, these ordinary

sounds blended into a quiet symphony that wrapped around her like a fragile, invisible thread.

Her heart quickened, not from surprise but from something like recognition, as if the voice had brushed past her skin like a familiar melody long forgotten. She didn't look up immediately. The moment hung suspended between hope and disbelief a delicate, trembling thing that might vanish if touched too soon.

The air itself seemed different, thicker yet charged, carrying a scent she couldn't name something like rain on dry earth or the faint trace of sandalwood that lingered long after someone left a room. It was as though the very atmosphere was leaning in, waiting with her.

For the first time in weeks, the dull ache inside her loosened its grip. The invisible walls she had wrapped around herself began to thin, thread by trembling thread. Her breath, once shallow and hesitant, deepened, steadying like the tide returning after a long absence.

She felt the weight of loneliness shift not disappear, but change shape. It was no longer just emptiness. It was a space that something or someone might fill.

Slowly, she lifted her eyes.

Across the courtyard, a figure stood half-shrouded by the last golden rays of the setting sun. The world seemed to blur around the

edges of that shape, as if her eyes strained to remember a dream just before waking.

Her breath caught again.

She wasn't sure if it was hope or fear, or some fragile mixture of both, but something inside her whispered that her waiting the long, silent vigil was not over yet. Something was about to begin.

And she was ready to listen.

Part

2

The Red Thread

The moment had slipped past like a whispered secret fragile, almost too delicate to grasp. Yet, long after Sugandha's eyes left the boy with the quiet smile, something hung heavy in the still air around her, like a gentle echo that refused to fade. His camera, an extension of his soul, swung low from his neck like a silent heartbeat. It wasn't just an instrument; it was a lens through which he peeled back the layers of the world, searching for the hidden poetry beneath the ordinary.

He didn't move like the rest. No swagger, no rehearsed bravado. He was a shadow moving softly against the bright chaos, not chasing

attention, but capturing the unnoticed the trembling hand tucked behind a back, the tentative glance between strangers, the unspoken stories etched on every face before words could reach them.

All night, he drifted through the Freshers' Day crowd like a ghost of stillness amid the rush his camera clicking, not loud or intrusive, but gentle, as if he was telling the world a secret only he knew. He caught faculty laughing over steaming samosas, the reckless joy of boys tossing paper planes from the balcony, a girl adjusting her kajal reflected in the shimmer of a silver spoon. Every frame was a quiet poem, a flicker of truth preserved between heartbeats.

But Sugandha? She found herself drawn to him like a moth to a distant, steady flame not out of curiosity, but something deeper. Recognition. A reflection. He mirrored her silent storm, calm on the surface, wild and restless beneath.

Days later, when the collage appeared on the college notice board "Freshers Through His Lens" Sugandha's breath caught. The photos pinned there were more than images; they were fragments of a soul's unfolding story.

There she was: mid-laugh, the red of her dress a small blaze against the soft shadows of the night. Another photo caught her leaning against a pillar, chin resting in her palm, eyes distant as if wandering a secret world, she herself barely remembered. There

was a shot of her pouring water into a paper cup, expression caught in a moment of quiet thoughtfulness none posed, none staged, all utterly raw and true.

She was everywhere and nowhere all at once seen, but still mysterious.

She felt it then, with a sudden rush, as if the air itself had thickened: she was truly seen. Not the version she showed the world, but the one beneath, the tender edges, the guarded heart, the flicker of hope behind tired eyes.

That evening, as dusk bled into the folds of night, she found herself beneath the ancient banyan tree behind the library, wrapped in the solitude she both sought and feared. The rustle of leaves, the soft hum of distant laughter, the scent of wet earth after a late shower all converged into a quiet symphony.

And then, he was there again. Nakul, camera hanging loose, bag slung carelessly, his steps unhurried but purposeful.

"You saw them," he said, voice low and certain, no need to explain.

Sugandha nodded, words stuck somewhere between surprise and disbelief.

"You don't smile like everyone else," he said, sitting beside her with a respectful distance that felt like an unspoken promise. "You smile like you're protecting something precious like a fragile secret."

The honesty in his words struck her harder than she expected. There was no pretense, no performance just a gentle truth laid bare.

“What’s your name?” she finally whispered, voice trembling with something like curiosity... and maybe hope.

He smiled, a slow, genuine curve that lit up his eyes. “Nakul.”

“I want to be a journalist,” he said softly, “because I see the world better when I’m behind the lens because some stories only show themselves to those who truly look.”

Sugandha nodded, the silence between them no longer heavy or awkward, but alive with possibility.

She didn’t know then how the boy with the camera would slowly become more than just an observer of her world. How he would become a mirror, reflecting not only the world’s view of her but the hidden colors and shadows she herself had long buried.

And maybe just maybe, that was enough to rewrite everything she thought she knew about being seen, about being known, about belonging.

Part

3

The Unspoken Frame

After that quiet evening beneath the ancient banyan, something in the air between Sugandha and Nakul began to hum a vibration so soft it was almost imperceptible, yet powerful enough to reshape the spaces they shared. They didn't burst into each other's worlds like a thunderstorm or a bright, reckless flame. No, theirs was a slow-burning dawn, a tender unfolding that rippled beneath the surface like the first tremors of spring beneath frozen ground.

He didn't arrive with grand gestures or dramatic declarations. Instead, Nakul became the faint, steady pulse at the edges of her days, a shadow that appeared in the courtyard after lectures, a

presence in the humming canteen line, footsteps echoing quietly just close enough to brush against her world without ever shoving it open.

His camera was never an accessory or a prop worn to impress. It was his second skin, a silent language that translated the unspoken poetry of life. He captured the fallen leaves curled in autumn's embrace, professors laughing with reckless abandon over stale samosas, a rusted bicycle wheel spinning stories in the wind. Yet, Sugandha noticed something profound in the way his lens lingered longer on her than anything else.

At first, she told herself it was accident. Chance. But then, one by one, she began to see herself reflected in his photographs, not the surface she showed the world, but the fragments beneath. Her smile caught mid-conversation, spontaneous and fragile; her fingers brushing the worn edges of a book's pages; her eyes trapped in distant reveries she hadn't even dared to name.

He never asked her to pose. No forced smiles, no rehearsed moments. The camera circled her gently, like it recognized a secret she had yet to understand herself.

Their conversations bloomed slowly, strange and beautiful, words that folded into silences, questions that hovered without needing answers:

"What's the thing you've never whispered aloud?"

“Do you believe silence can speak louder than words?”

“Which scares you more: fading into oblivion or being trapped in a story someone else writes about you?”

Sugandha didn't always reply. Sometimes, she shrugged, looked away, or let her silence fill the space between them. And Nakul never pushed. He simply waited, letting the quiet grow until it felt safe enough to breathe.

One evening, when the sky ripened into a bruised lavender and shadows stretched like whispered secrets across the lawn, Nakul approached her quietly, an envelope pressed into his palm.

“For you,” he said, voice soft as a promise, no flourish, no hesitation.

Inside, she found a printed photograph herself, sitting cross-legged beneath the gulmohar tree, golden sunlight tangled in her hairlike threads of fire. Her expression was a delicate balance half lost in the pages of a book, half-awake in something deeper, something almost sacred.

She held the photo, the edges trembling between her fingers as if it were something precious and fragile, something she never knew she wanted to hold.

“Why this one?” she whispered, breath barely catching the words.

Nakul's gaze met hers, steady and sure, a quiet fire burning beneath the calm.

“Because it’s you,” he said simply. “Not the version you show the world. But the one who watches who feels, when no one else is looking.”

No one had ever seen her like that. Not really.

And in that small, stolen moment between the fading sun and the racing beat of her heart, Sugandha understood something terrifying and beautiful all at once: Nakul was seeing the pieces of her she hadn’t yet learned to love.

Pieces she had tucked away in silence, behind walls of invisible armor and unspoken fears.

And maybe, just maybe, he was the first to hold them gently, without breaking them apart.

Part

4

The Picture and the Truth

Sugandha had started to believe in quiet things the fragile moments that don't scream for attention but somehow refuse to fade away. The kind of presence that lingers like a secret melody, the way Nakul would settle beside her without speaking, the folded photograph tucked in the corner of her notebook like a whispered promise, the way his eyes softened sometimes, as if holding a fragile treasure only she could see.

Their connection had grown like slow rain soaking thirsty earth subtle, patient, invisible until the roots trembled beneath the

surface. She thought they had found something sacred in that silence, a secret language in the spaces between words.

But truth has a way of breaking through the calmest waters, like a sudden storm tearing open the sky when you least expect it.

It was a warm afternoon, sunlight spilling gold over the hostel lawn. Sugandha sat with classmates, laughter bubbling around her like summer fireflies. The conversation drifted, as it always did, to the freshers' photographs pinned on the notice board those candid moments that had captured the entire campus's attention.

"Nakul's got serious talent," one girl said, tilting her iced coffee in a lazy arc. "But the funniest part? He wasn't even planning to shoot that day."

Sugandha's head lifted, caught by the words.

"Yeah," another added with a grin. "Aman from SC Bose roped him in. Told him to focus on one girl said he saw her at the induction, couldn't get her out of his head. Kept going on about her nose ring, like it was some magic spell or something."

The group laughed lightly, but Sugandha's world cracked open.

Aman.

Memories blurred the induction crowd, faces melting into one another, the flood of new beginnings. Had someone been watching

her then? Had her nose ring, the small silver hoop she barely noticed herself wearing, really caught someone's gaze and heart?

Suddenly, the photographs she thought were gifts from Nakul's eye felt different. Not spontaneous moments born from his own vision, but requests. Favors. Shadows borrowed from another's longing.

And yet...

She remembered Nakul's eyes afterward. Not distant, not mechanical something raw and unguarded pulsed there. Was it real? Or had she desperately wanted to believe it was?

Later that evening, the photography lab hummed with the soft glow of screens. Nakul sat editing, absorbed in the light and shadow dance on his monitor. She hesitated, then spoke, voice trembling but steady.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He paused, the weight of unspoken words settling between them like thick velvet. No answer came immediately, only a long sigh, heavy with regret and something fragile.

"Because it started as Aman's story," he said quietly, "but somewhere along the way... it became mine."

She sank down beside him, her heart unraveling in slow motion. Not angry. Not bitter. Just undone.

“Did you ever feel anything?” she whispered. “Or was it just the camera, the frame?”

He turned to her then no lens between them, no filter hiding the truth just eyes full of unspoken confessions.

“Sugandha,” he breathed, “every time I clicked the shutter, it stopped being about the picture. I never told you because Aman saw you first, and I owed him that. But with every photo, every stolen moment you captured me more than I captured you.”

The silence that followed wasn’t cold. It wasn’t heavy. It was everything words spoken and broken, promises unmade, hearts exposed.

Sugandha didn’t know what to feel. Confusion tangled with a strange warmth. Flattery mixed with quiet pain. Anger wrapped in the softest thread of hope.

But beneath it all, one undeniable truth beat steady and loud:

She had been loved quietly by two boys. One from a distance a crush that flickered like a flame caught in the wind. The other close through shared silences, stolen glances, and frames frozen in time.

And now, standing at the edge of this fragile crossroads, she knew with trembling certainty she had to choose between the story that noticed her first, and the story that truly saw her soul.

Part

5

The One Who Noticed First

The sun bled gold across the hostel walls, dipping low like it was trying to disappear quietly from the sky. Sugandha stood outside the SC Bose block, palms clammy, heart hammering in a rhythm she barely recognized. She hadn't planned this moment. She hadn't scripted it in her head a thousand times, as she sometimes did when overwhelmed by life's complexities. She wasn't sure what she wanted closure? Truth? An answer to the silent question echoing in her chest? But some restless part of her had summoned the courage to seek him out: the boy who noticed her first, before she ever dared to notice herself.

Aman sat on the worn steps, earphones dangling around his neck, scribbling feverishly into a battered notebook. His head lifted as she approached surprise flickering in his eyes, but not alarm. Slowly, he pulled out his earphones, as if bracing himself for something long overdue.

“Sugandha,” he said softly, rising to meet her gaze. “Hey...”

Silence stretched between them, thick and trembling.

“I heard,” she began, voice steady but fragile, “that you asked Nakul to take pictures of me. During freshers.”

Aman’s face didn’t twist with guilt or defensiveness, only quiet acceptance. He nodded.

“I saw you at the induction,” he said, voice low, like confessing a secret. “Third row. You wore that red shirt. Everyone else was clapping at something I can’t even remember, but you... you weren’t lost, not really. You were just there, apart. And then I noticed your nose ring. I don’t know why, but it stayed with me.”

That tiny detail, so specific and oddly intimate, made Sugandha feel like she had been laid bare exposed, vulnerable yet deeply seen.

“You could’ve just said something,” she whispered.

“I wanted to,” Aman admitted, his voice cracking ever so slightly. “But you looked like someone who wouldn’t fall for a stupid ‘hey,

you look cute.' You seemed like you deserved more than a half-baked line I hadn't figured out yet."

He smiled, sheepish and sincere. "So, I asked Nakul to do it for me. He's better with people. I thought... if I could see you a little longer through his lens, maybe I'd find the courage to say it myself."

Sugandha didn't respond immediately. She looked down at the cracked steps, then back at Aman, absorbing the raw honesty in his words.

"But Nakul started feeling something, didn't he?" she asked, her voice barely a breath.

Aman exhaled slowly. "Yeah. I noticed. At first, it was just updates 'got a great shot today' but then it became 'she looks like her mind's always running away' or 'she laughed today. That was rare.'" He smiled gently. "I knew I was losing the story. And he was beginning to find it."

That admission hung between them like an unspoken apology.

"You never told me," Sugandha said quietly.

"I didn't want you to feel like you owed me anything," Aman replied, gaze steady. "You never asked me to fall for you. I just did. And that was mine alone to carry."

Sugandha met his eyes really met them and in that moment she saw the boy who had noticed something small, beautiful, and

unforgettable in her. Not quite love, but something close. Tenderness. Respect. Gratitude.

"I'm glad you did," she said softly. "Even if it wasn't yours to keep."

Aman smiled, not with regret, but relief. "He's a good guy, Sugandha. If he ever tells you what he feels... listen."

And just like that, something tangled in her chest loosened, unraveling quietly into a fragile calm.

She didn't owe either of them a decision tonight. But now, she held both stories the one who noticed her first, and the one who truly saw her.

Part Five (Continued): The View from Afar

Days slipped by like pages turning too fast in an old book. The conversation with Aman folded itself quietly into the corners of Sugandha's mind neither forgotten nor demanding attention. She hadn't spoken to Aman or Nakul since that evening. Life moved on in lazy rhythms: lectures blurring into notes, the smell of hostel chai lingering in the air, the campus alive with its endless, half-remembered stories.

One breezy Saturday afternoon, she found herself lounging on the soft lawns outside the canteen, legs stretched out, the chatter of classmates rising and falling like waves around her. The talk drifted from exam stress to crushes to the eternal debate over the best chai

vendor, until someone suddenly gasped, half-laughing, half-gushing:

“Did you see that anonymous post about Aman on the confession page?!”

Sugandha’s stomach fluttered, a curious spark igniting.

“What post?” someone asked, already pulling out their phone.

“There’s this secret page, like a digital wall of whispers. And someone posted this whole paragraph about Aman. Called him ‘the 6’2 dreamboat with gym-carved arms and eyes that could write poetry.’”

The group burst into laughter.

“Not even kidding,” another added, scrolling furiously. “They said, and I quote, ‘His smile is illegal. His hoodie collection should be a national treasure.’ Who writes like that?”

“She’s clearly in love with him,” someone teased. “Or he’s in love with himself and wrote it anonymously.”

Sugandha laughed softly, masking the flutter in her chest. But her eyes lingered on the screen when the words caught a different note, beneath the exaggeration, beneath the playful teasing, there was admiration. There was something intimate buried between the lines.

“...and he listens like no one else matters in the world at that moment. It’s terrifying and beautiful.”

That part wasn’t funny. It felt unbearably real.

Caught in the strange pull of two worlds, Sugandha watched as the group debated the anonymous author’s identity, voices bubbling with guesses and gossip.

She leaned back on the grass, arms folded beneath her head, eyes tracing the slow drift of clouds overhead.

The truth was, she wasn’t jealous of the attention Aman received. She wasn’t even flattered by being the girl he’d once noticed from afar.

She kept thinking about how strange it was, how people were always being seen, and misunderstood, and admired, and sometimes loved, without ever knowing it.

And in the quiet unfolding of that afternoon, she asked herself, Who was watching her now? And what parts of her were they truly seeing?

Part

6

The Lie Everyone Loved

Sugandha hadn't noticed at first how eyes began to linger on her a little longer, how whispers hung in the air just a beat too long when she stepped onto the lawn or slipped into the library. It was subtle at first a glance stolen over a shoulder; a smirk barely concealed behind a carefully averted gaze. But rumors, like wildfire, never stay small or quiet. They spark, they catch, and before you know it, they consume everything in their path.

It began on a lazy Thursday afternoon, the sun soft and careless, when two girls sitting behind her murmured just loud enough for

her to catch snippets:

"That's her the one Aman's always with."

"I saw them at the gym last night. Together."

"No way. They were in the library too. Sitting way too close."

Sugandha barely turned her head, just enough to catch their words but not enough to betray that they had cut through the calm she wore like armor. Her heart sank in a way she hadn't expected. Because the truth was starkly, painfully different. She hadn't been alone with Aman in weeks. When they crossed paths, it was nothing more than a casual smile or a shared nod, nothing that would fuel the wildfire now spreading in whispers.

But truth is a fragile thing, easily shattered beneath the weight of the stories people choose to believe.

The rumor took on a life of its own a melody whispered through the campus corridors and painted across every corner Sugandha walked. They were campus sweethearts now: fingers intertwined beneath study desks, secret late-night gym sessions, stolen moments under the moonlight. Every time Sugandha appeared somewhere a smile, a glance, a passing conversation, it fanned the flames. Silence was no match for the roaring fire of gossip.

What stung wasn't the lie itself. It was that people wanted it to be true. They chose to believe it with such eagerness, such hunger for the story it told, rather than the reality it erased.

The truth cracked open unexpectedly one evening near the juice stall, when Sugandha overheard two students, their voices low but sharp:

“Did you know the anonymous confession post about Aman? The poetic one?”

“Yeah. Turns out it was Vaishnavi. Sociology. She’s obsessed.”
“She’s the one who started the rumor too, said she saw Aman and Sugandha holding hands. Total bluff.”

That name hit her like a stone thrown into a still pond, rippling through her calm and shattering it with bitter clarity.

Vaishnavi. Quiet. Studious. Always trailing a few steps behind Aman during class projects. Always eager to join his group, eager to be close. Sugandha had barely noticed her hadn’t needed to until now. Suddenly, the pieces fit together in a cruel, twisted puzzle.

Vaishnavi hadn’t meant to spark a romance. She’d meant to sow doubt, to cast a shadow. To make Sugandha the subject of sideways looks, the whisper behind backs, while Vaishnavi herself stayed in the safe silence of the background innocent, observant, waiting.

Sugandha didn’t confront her. There was no point. What could she say? Don’t want someone who doesn’t want you back? Instead, she let the truth settle in her chest heavy, cold, but unmoving, like a stone buried deep beneath soft earth.

That night, alone on the hostel terrace, the city's distant hum wrapped around her like a fragile cocoon. She realized she didn't mind being misunderstood by strangers, their whispers and assumptions were noise she could learn to live with. But she wondered, and worried: if Nakul had heard the rumors... if he believed the stories... what did that mean for them?

Meanwhile, Aman's fire was igniting in the opposite direction. Furious and determined, he was ready to confront whoever had dared to twist the truth, to tear apart the fragile threads connecting him and Sugandha.

Aarohi and Nakul joined the storm, their voices sharp and raw, weaving through the tense, emotionally charged exchange that began to peel back the tangled web of rumors, a conversation as much about truth as about loyalty, fear, and the fragile spaces between friendship and something more.

The lie everyone loved was no longer just a rumor. It was a battleground.

Part

7

Names Behind Whispers

The sun was bleeding out its last light, painting the college lawn in bruised purples and fiery oranges. The air hung heavy, sticky with the scent of damp earth and fading jasmine, but beneath it all lay something heavier, a quiet storm gathering between four figures huddled in the corner where shadows gathered first.

Aman's jaw clenched so tight it felt like breaking bone. His fists balled at his sides, knuckles white, but the rage inside was a wildfire he barely controlled. *How had this spiraled so fast?* He could still hear the echoes of those ridiculous questions:

"When are you two making it official?" "Are you going to tell her you love her?" Like his life was some scripted drama, staged for others' amusement.

And Sugandha... He glanced sideways at her, the way she hugged herself like she was trying to hold all her broken pieces together. She looked small, vulnerable, but there was fire in her eyes, the kind that didn't ask for pity. *She didn't deserve any of this.*

Sugandha's arms were folded, a shield against the world's sharp edges. She felt exposed, like a painting hung in the gallery for everyone's critique. Her heart hammered with a confusion that tasted bitter, how did something she hadn't even noticed morph into a campus-wide spectacle overnight? The stares, the whispers they weren't just glances anymore. They were judgments, stories being spun around her without her voice.

Did anyone really want to hear the truth? she wondered, biting back the sting of tears that didn't come. *Or were they all just hungry for a story, any story that made life more interesting?*

Aarohi's voice cut through the thick air like a blade, sharp and clear. She sat cross-legged on the grass, leaning forward like a warrior ready to fight a battle no one else dared face. Sugandha watched the way her eyes flickered fierce, unyielding. Aarohi didn't just see the surface; she smelled the smoke beneath the fire.

Nakul rolled up his sleeves, the faint scar on his wrist catching the last glints of sunlight. He was calm on the outside, but Sugandha sensed the tension in his jaw, the way his fingers flexed and released.

He's thinking through every angle, trying to find a way out of this tangled mess.

Aman's voice broke the silence, sharp and raw. "This is bullshit. Three people today asked me when I'm 'officially announcing' things with Sugandha. One even congratulated me like I'd won something. Like my life was a headline to be sold."

Sugandha swallowed hard, the words slicing through the quiet between them. She wanted to shout, to scream that none of it was real, that there was no announcement, no secret romance. But the truth felt small, fragile. And the lie? It was roaring, drowning out everything else.

"I didn't even know this circus had started until yesterday," she whispered, voice trembling but steady. "I thought people were just... staring. But staring became a story. And suddenly, I'm the lead in a play I never auditioned for."

Aarohi's eyes darkened. "It didn't just start. It exploded. One whisper in the gym, a shadow in the library, then boom the campus fairy tale everyone's choking on like it's gospel. Fingers point, tongues wag, and you.... *You*, become the legend."

Nakul exhaled slowly. "But who's spinning the thread? Who's weaving this web? Someone's feeding the fire, basking in the heat of the spotlight it throws."

Aman's hands balled into fists again. "I swear I'll find whoever's behind this and beat the truth out of them. No more whispers. No more shadows."

Sugandha's eyes locked onto his, steady and sharp. "That's not the answer. Fists don't fix broken stories. I want clarity. I want the truth laid bare."

There was a pause, heavy and full of unspoken things, until Aarohi finally said, "Well, clarity has a name. Vaishnavi."

Sugandha's heart sank. The name hit like a stone dropped into a silent pond, sending ripples of bitter recognition across her chest. *Vaishnavi*. The quiet one. The shadow lurking behind every glance Aman received. The girl she'd never really noticed, because why would she?

Nakul's brow furrowed. "Vaishnavi? Sociology Vaishnavi?"

Aarohi nodded, voice low and bitter. "The very same. She's the mastermind behind the anonymous confession post, the one gushing about Aman's '6'2 magic' and 'hoodie collection.' You know, the one that kicked off the rumors last week."

Aman stared, incredulous. "She actually did that? Wrote that nonsense?"

Sugandha sat up straighter, a dull ache in her chest. "She started the whispers? The stories?"

"Not directly," Aarohi said, voice like gravel. "No one ever says the whole truth. She throws out a spark, a vague hint, and the rest, the rest, the crowd builds into a wildfire. And here we are."

Nakul's eyes softened as he looked at Sugandha. "Are you... okay?"

Sugandha took a deep breath. "I'm... confused. Hurt, maybe. I barely spoke to her. And now I'm trapped inside a story I never asked to be part of."

Aman's jaw tightened again, disbelief bleeding into anger. "She did this because I never gave her the time of day? That's insane."

Aarohi's voice was steady, cutting through the storm. "She's not evil, Aman. Hurt makes people do messy, reckless things. It doesn't excuse her, but it explains why."

Nakul leaned back, his voice calm as a steady tide. "So, what now? Do we wait for it to burn out? Confront her head-on? Or do we write our own story, loud and clear?"

Sugandha's gaze dropped to the soft grass beneath her. She felt the weight of all the lies, all the unwanted attention, pressing down like an anchor. But beneath it, a fragile flame flickered, the hope for something real.

“I don’t want revenge,” she said slowly, voice low but steady. “But I want the lies to stop. I want people to stop believing in something that never existed.”

Aman’s expression softened as he looked at her, the anger ebbing away to leave something quieter, fiercer. “Then maybe we start by telling the truth. Together.”

Nakul smiled for the first time genuine, warm. “No cameras. No rumors. No filters. Just us. The story that’s real.”

The sun finally slipped below the horizon, and in the deepening twilight, amidst the whispers and shadows, a new beginning stirred raw, uncertain, but real.

Part



The Weight of What Wasn't Said

The amphitheatre stairs stood empty, a silent audience to the storm that had just passed. The air hung thick too heavy, too charged as if the unspoken words themselves pressed down on the world around them. The fading sunlight slipped between the trees, casting long shadows that stretched like fingers, mirroring the tension twisting inside the group.

Sugandha's arms crossed tightly over her chest, a fortress built from years of silent endurance. Her eyes, sharp and glistening with unshed emotion, locked on Aarohi. The question wasn't just in her words; it was in every heartbeat pounding beneath her ribs.

"Wait... Aarohi. You said Vaishnavi was the one who posted that anonymous confession. How do you *know*?" Her voice was low but fierce, the hurt bleeding through every syllable like an open wound.

Aaroahi shifted, just a flicker of discomfort breaking her usual calm. Her eyes darted away, the kind of look that said some truths were harder to carry than others. "Because... she told me."

Nakul blinked, surprise tightening his features. "You two... friends?"

Aaroahi's nod came slow, hesitant like admitting a secret in a room full of glass. "Same club. She trusted me. But I never thought it would spiral like this."

Sugandha's breath hitched, voice trembling with a raw ache. "So, all this time, I was sitting here thinking it was some stranger stirring things up. But it was *your* friend? The one you let people believe things about me that aren't true?"

Aman stepped forward, voice softening with an edge of regret. "Hey, Sugandha... she didn't know it would get this out of hand."

But Sugandha cut in sharply, emotion bubbling over like a dam breaking. "And you? Aman? You *knew* the rumours were lies. Yet you didn't stop them. Not once."

Aman swallowed hard, eyes dark with something like shame, or maybe something deeper longing, vulnerability. "Because... for the first time, people said your name next to mine, and I didn't hate how it sounded."

Sugandha froze, the words slicing through her like a cold wind. "What?"

He looked at her then, stripped bare of bravado. "I never asked you out. Never said it directly. Because I knew there were others. Guys who liked you, who weren't scared like me. Guys who would shout about you, post about you online, not just watch you walk by and hope."

AaroHi's voice dropped to a quiet, almost painful whisper. "He didn't ask Vaishnavi for attention, Sugandha. He was stuck. Trapped. And maybe... a little selfish."

Aman nodded; eyes fixed on the ground like he was carrying the weight of a thousand mistakes. "I didn't start the rumour. But I didn't stop it. Because, for once, that story the one people whispered about, it felt like the only version of *us* that existed in the open."

Nakul finally spoke, calm but relentless, like the tide wearing down a cliff. "But don't you see? The damage isn't just to you. It's to everything. Sugandha became a name whispered in hallways, not because of anything she chose, but because of something you *didn't*."

Sugandha's voice cracked, brittle with years of silent frustration. "You could've said something. Trusted me enough to tell the truth instead of hiding behind rumors and other people's stories."

Aman's eyes burned into hers, raw and unguarded. "I didn't want to lose you."

She looked at him then really looked and after a long, loaded pause, she said the hardest thing of all: "You never had me to lose. You had a chance. And you watched it turn into a rumor."

The silence that followed was deafening. Like the calm after a hurricane, it held the weight of everything unsaid, everything shattered, and the faint, trembling hope for something to heal.

The Question That Changed Everything

The world didn't move. Not the wind in the trees, not the distant echo of footsteps from another block. The only thing alive in that moment was Sugandha's heartbeat loud, chaotic, like a warning bell and a whispered prayer at once. Her lungs ached with every breath she didn't know she was holding. The ache wasn't in her chest alone. It was in her memory. In every time she had wondered what his silence meant.

She looked at him now no filters, no guesses, no crowd. Just Aman.

Sugandha:

barely a whisper, but enough to cut through everything that had gone unsaid

"Aman... do you love me?"

The question hung there, heavy and glittering, suspended between hope and devastation. Her voice shook not from fear, but from the

unbearable weight of clarity she had always denied herself. This wasn't about gossip. Or rumors. Or what anyone else believed. This was her line in the sand.

Across from her, Aman's world jolted to a halt.

His breath stilled. His fingers, which had been unconsciously curling into fists at his side, now loosened trembling. He hadn't prepared for this moment. He had prepared for *every* moment except this. In his mind, their first 'I love you' had music in the background, maybe stars overhead, maybe her laugh caught between his sentences. Not now. Not under this raw, unforgiving sky.

But maybe...

Maybe truth wasn't meant to be beautiful. Maybe it was only meant to be real.

Aman:

voice barely holding, almost childlike in its honesty

"Yes. I do."

Three words. No metaphors. No clever lines. Just truth unpolished, imperfect, desperate.

He swallowed hard, chest rising with the kind of vulnerability that leaves a scar.

Aman:

his eyes locked on hers now, the world be damned
"I do. From the very first day."

"I didn't say it because... I was scared. Scared of ruining what we had. Scared that if I reached for more, I'd lose even the little of you I was allowed to have. I watched you talk to others, laugh with them, shine in ways I didn't know how to deserve."

His voice cracked not loudly, but enough to make the sky above them feel too big.

Aman:

his confession spilling now, fragile and furious all at once
"Then the lie came. And for once... the world thought you were mine. And I... let it be. I let it breathe because I didn't know how else to hold onto you without breaking us."

Sugandha's lips parted slightly, but no words came out. Her heart clenched not out of joy, not quite out of pain either but from the sheer *magnitude* of what he had just laid bare.

Sugandha:

blinking back the swell, her voice quieter now, almost too gentle for the weight of it

"You let them believe a lie... because it gave you a version of me you couldn't ask for?"

Aman:

nodding, shame blooming across his face like bruises he wore willingly

"Yes. I know it's wrong. I do. But you've always felt... unreachable. And I, I've never felt enough. Not tall enough. Not brave enough. Not *good* enough to deserve someone like you."

The silence that followed wasn't hollow. It was thick, with all the things they'd never admitted. With the shared ache of almos, of what-ifs wrapped in their shared history. Of the time he looked at her like she was the answer but never asked the question. Of the times she wished he would.

Sugandha didn't rush to speak. Her silence wasn't emptiness, it was calculation, consideration, ache. She looked at him, *really* looked this boy with big dreams and bigger fears, all of them now bared and bleeding.

And then it hit her.

He hadn't done this to win.

He had done this because he had always been terrified to lose.

And maybe, just maybe, he already had.

Part

10

A Season of Us

It began with a *yes*.

A soft one. Fragile. Like the hush before a storm.

Sugandha didn't scream it from the rooftops she *whispered* it. On a pale sky evening, the sun slipping behind lecture blocks like it didn't want to intrude, she said it with eyes wide open and heart cautiously fluttering.

They were alone on the rooftop, and yet it felt like the whole universe leaned in to listen.

Yes.

Just that.

And Aman oh, Aman smiled like the world had finally made sense. Like he had spent every lifetime searching and this was the

moment it all came together. He didn't grab her hand or say something witty. He just looked at her entirely, gratefully, reverently.

He had won.

And she had chosen.

Because loving Aman for Sugandha was never reckless.

It was *deliberate*.

She wasn't the type to fall in love like a wildfire. She was rain slow, quiet, necessary. But with Aman, she was *monsoon*.

He made even silence feel like symphonies.

The way he listened fully. The way he joked like her laughter was the reward. The way he said her name, like it was something sacred.

She fell. Slowly, but all at once.

And it scared her.

Because Aman wasn't just liked, he was *wanted*.

He carried a kind of careless gravity. That boyish charm that made juniors blush and seniors notice. His name floated through corridors, stuck to stories and laughter. Girls would linger when he walked by. Some would brush past him like accidents, all innocent glances and perfume trails.

Sugandha *saw it all*.

She never said much. But her grip on his hand tightened in crowded hallways.

Her eyes followed the girls who giggled too long, smiled too wide. Jealousy, for her, wasn't loud. It was sharp. Sudden. Like the jolt before a storm.

Not because she didn't trust him, but because she did. Too much.

Still, they had their season.

Cold coffees shared under neem trees.
Midnight calls that turned into 3 a.m. promises.
Fingers brushing during roll call.
Arguments over emojis.
Laughter in campus canteens.
Rain-wet walks without umbrellas.

They became a story everyone watched.
Some with wide eyes and warm hearts.
Others with narrowed gazes and whispers that stung.
But no season lasts forever.

By month six, the shift was almost imperceptible.
Almost.

First, it was the delays.
Then, the missed calls.
Then, the way he'd scroll while she spoke, eyes glazing over the
shine in hers.

He stopped noticing her favourite earrings, the ones shaped like
moons.
He forgot her chai order.
His voice lost its softness.

She felt it. In her bones, in her silences.
Love didn't vanish, it *vacated*. Slowly. Like sunlight slipping
through curtains too tight to let it back in.

One evening, beneath the orange hue of a dying sun and hostel
block shadows stretching longer than her patience, he looked at
her.

His words were soft. Too soft for how loud they'd echo later.

"I don't feel the same anymore."

No fireworks. No tears. Just *impact*.
It hit her ribcage like glass. Clean break.

But she didn't flinch. Didn't scream.

She nodded, with the grace of someone who had already rehearsed this goodbye a hundred times in her head.

And still, nothing prepares you for the moment the story ends, not with a fight, but with a sentence.

When he walked away, it wasn't just him.

It was *everything*.

The memories, the first yes, the rooftop winds, the laughter folded in coffee cups.

All of it *gone*.

And in their place, a silence.

A silence so thick, it echoed against the hollows of her heart.

That night, Sugandha didn't cry.

She opened her journal and wrote with shaking fingers, ink smudging on the edges:

"Sometimes, love doesn't fade.

It just forgets to show up.

Or maybe, one person stops holding on,

While the other stays knuckle white, heart bruised."

It was the end of their season.

And Sugandha?

She was still standing in the rain

Alone.

Part

11

What He Couldn't Say

Aman had never *chased* love.

He didn't need to.

It came to him, like monsoon to thirsty earth. Uninvited.

Unapologetic.

Girls noticed him before he even spoke.

He was the boy with the easy grin, the quick wit, the eyes that looked like they knew secrets.

People called it charm. He called it noise.

But **Sugandha**,

She had watched him like a poem. Slowly. Curiously.

Not with admiration, but with *intention*.

And that rattled something inside him.

She didn't throw herself at him.
She *read* him. Page by page.
And that... that made him want to be someone worth reading.

When she said yes,
it wasn't victory.
It was *relief*.
Like he had been holding his breath for years and finally
remembered how to exhale.

And at first, he tried. *Really tried*.
The calls, the texts, the handholding under desks, the long walks,
the way he'd say something stupid just to make her laugh until her
nose crinkled.
He meant all of it.
Every single gesture. Every playful nudge. Every late-night "Are
you okay?"

But love, for Aman, wasn't a river.
It was *a tide*.
Coming in strong, beautiful, but retreating just as fast.
He loved the idea of love more than the work it took to stay in it.

Sugandha...
She loved with *depth*.
She noticed *everything*.
The skipped meals.
The change in his tone.
The way his fingers lingered on his phone longer, smile softer,
replies shorter.

At first, it felt like being *seen*.
Then, like being *searched*.
And slowly... like being *suffocated*.

But she wasn't wrong.
She was just *all in*.
And he... wasn't sure he had ever even unpacked.

There wasn't a thunderclap moment when it changed.

No dramatic scene.

Just a slow, silent shift.

Aman began to feel tired around her.

Her "good morning" texts began to feel like *reminders to perform*.

Her touch, once grounding, began to feel like a mirror reflecting his emptiness.

He hated himself for it.

She didn't deserve that kind of erosion.

He told himself it was a phase.

That if he held on long enough, the spark would come back.

That this was just stress. College. Pressure.

But the truth?

He had already left.

Only his body had stayed.

And the longer he faked it,
the more the lie grew teeth.

Not against her.

Against *himself*.

When he finally said it

"I don't feel the same anymore."

it wasn't a confession.

It was a *funeral*.

Of the version of him that *could have loved her right*.

Of the version of her that *still believed in him*.

She didn't cry.

And that shattered him the most.

She just nodded, once.

Like a queen laying down her crown.

And turned.

No goodbye.

No drama.

Just *absence* that echoed louder than any scream.

That night, Aman lay in his bed,

phone in hand,

her chat window open, blue ticks mocking him.

He didn't text.

He couldn't.

What could he even say?

Sorry I broke something sacred because I was too afraid to hold it properly?

Sorry I mistook your love for a weight instead of a shelter?

The screen dimmed.

But the guilt didn't.

And in the quiet,

with the fan whirring and his chest heavy with silence,

he whispered into the dark:

"Why do I always ruin

the things

that love me the most?"

There was no answer.

Only the echo of what he *couldn't say*

when it still mattered.

Part

12

The World Paused, Then Moved

After Aman, the world didn't just change.

It *fractured*.

Not loudly. Not with a scream.

But the way glass cracks under quiet pressure, a thousand invisible lines no one sees until the light hits just right.

Sugandha didn't get a closure.

She got a lockdown.

The world outside slowed to a crawl, as if it, too, was grieving something it couldn't name.

The virus started as whispers a news headline, a city far away, numbers ticking like a countdown.

Then, like breath sucked from the earth, it *arrived*.

And everything college, laughter, bus rides, hostel gossip vanished like chalk on a blackboard washed by rain.

Hostels emptied in hours.

Students packed their lives into suitcases that still smelled like Maggi and perfume and secrets. There were no proper goodbyes. No “take care”s. No last group photos. Only silent exits and the heavy rustle of bags dragged too fast down narrow corridors.

Sugandha didn’t cry when she left.
But something inside her went *very still*.

Back in Delhi, her childhood room greeted her like a museum of who she used to be.

Same posters. Same bedsheets.

But the girl who returned?

She was *not the same*.

She wasn’t daydreaming anymore.

She was *rebuilding*.

Quietly.

Classes turned into awkward grids of frozen faces on Zoom.

Teachers spoke like echoes.

Exams came through portals that crashed mid-answer.

Friends replied with “sorry, missed this” hours later.

Birthdays were screens and bad Wi-Fi and virtual cakes that didn’t taste like anything.

Love stories paused.

Some ended in unread texts.

Others dissolved without ever beginning.

And through it all, Sugandha *held on*.

Not loudly.
Not heroically.
But stubbornly.

She woke up each morning like it was a ritual.
Terrace walks at sunrise, yoga with YouTube videos that buffered halfway.
She built schedules like sandcastles, knowing they might collapse but needing something to build anyway.

And Aman?
She stopped checking his updates.
Not because she was over it.
But because heartbreak eventually becomes too tired to ache out loud.

She didn't delete him.
She just... stopped going there.
Some scars you stop touching not because they're healed
but because you *finally accept they'll stay*.

Then came **placement season**.
Like an afterthought.
The world was still on fire, and yet companies wanted to know
your "strengths and weaknesses."
She smiled politely in interviews.
Even when the Wi-Fi lagged and she had to repeat herself.

She practiced in the mirror.
Mock interviews with a version of herself she was still trying to
trust again.
She read job profiles like love letters to a future she hadn't dared
to hope for.

And then... one morning.
Tea in hand.
Mother beside her, humming an old song.
Her inbox blinked.

**"Congratulations. You have been selected for the role of
Content Analyst."**

Sugandha didn't scream.
Didn't dance.
No fireworks.

Just silence.

And then, a *smile*.

Small.

Real.

The kind that grows not from surprise, but from survival.

That night, she opened her journal again.

Same pen. Same pages.

But her handwriting had changed more certain, less flowery.

She wrote:

"Maybe some goodbyes
aren't endings.
Maybe they're just doors
leading you back
to the person
you were always meant to be."

The world took a lot from her.

Her first love. Her last semester. Her sense of certainty.

But it also gave her something rarer

Time to return to herself.

Time to become someone who didn't just survive heartbreak.

But rewrote her own story after it.

Chapter 1 “Centred on Aman’s post-pandemic journey:”

Chapter 1: The Weight of Regret

The world had started breathing again.

loud, restless, gasping for air like a man just pulled from the deep.

Cafés buzzed.

Trains ran on time.

Colleges reopened with banners that said "Welcome Back!"

People dressed up for no reason, hugged too long, laughed too loudly, as if to make up for every second they had spent locked in silence.^a

But Aman...

Aman didn't feel reborn.

He felt frozen.

Like the world had moved on without him,
and he'd been left behind in the pause.

Not the pandemic's pause.

A much older one.

The day Sugandha walked away.

That's where his time stopped.

Everyone else had aged a few years.

Aman had aged in regret.

To the world, he still looked the same
The boy with the sharp smile.
The one with the confident stride.
The “could’ve been anything” guy.
But inside?
He was a ruin dressed in skin.

After college, while his peers chased jobs, lined up interviews,
posted **#NewBeginnings**
Aman chose something else:
AFCAT. CDS. The uniform.
The dream of being something bigger than himself.
Of mattering. Of redeeming.

But maybe just maybe
he was trying to silence the voice that whispered every night:
"You broke something you were supposed to protect."

He studied like a man on fire.
Notes pinned on every wall.
Alarms set for 4:30 AM.
Mock tests timed like countdowns.

His desk became a war zone, pens stabbed into books, cups of
unfinished coffee like fallen soldiers.

And yet, every time the results came in,
the verdict was the same:

“Not qualified.”
Two words that weighed heavier than failure.

Aman never cried.
But the ache built quietly,
Like water under a floorboard.
Warping everything.

He stopped telling people.
What was the point?
They'd say, "Next time, bro,"
but their eyes had already moved on.

He hadn't.

Not from the exams.
Not from Sugandha.

Her memory was a ghost that didn't haunt.
It lingered.
In the scent of marigolds at temples.
In the cold side of his pillow.
In the silence between two songs on a late-night playlist.

He never texted her.
Never checked her profiles.
But her absence was louder than any presence.

He began going to the gym.
Not to feel better,
To feel something.
Every rep, every drop of sweat, every ache in his spine was
punishment.

He built his body like a fortress.
Biceps that stretched his sleeves.
A jawline cut sharp with anger.
People stared. Some whispered.
"He's glowing up."

But glow doesn't always come from light.
Sometimes it comes from burning.

One night, after yet another "Not Qualified"
Aman stood in front of the mirror.

His reflection was the best it had ever looked,
Broad chest, arms like armor, eyes rimmed in tired hunger.

But beneath all that strength was the same boy
who once watched Sugandha walk away,
and did nothing.

He touched the mirror, leaned in close,
and whispered to his own image:

"You had someone who loved you... and you let her go."

The mirror didn't shatter.
It didn't scream back.

It just stood still.
Reflecting a man
made of muscle, memory,
and a silence so loud
it could split galaxies.

Chapter 2: The City That Didn't Know Her

Bangalore was noisy in a different way.

And for the most part, that was the point.

It didn't know the girl who once danced in hostel corridors barefoot, or the one who used to underline quotes in novels and believe in signs from the universe. This city, with its skyline of ambition and traffic like a constant apology, didn't ask questions. It didn't care who she used to be. It just... moved. Fast. Unbothered. Loud in the kind of way that made loneliness seem normal.

Here, Sugandha was a name on an ID badge. A voice on client calls. Another girl in a pastel kurta waiting at a signal. The anonymity fit her like armor. It kept the world out. Kept the memories in.

Her job as a Content Analyst was dull but dependable, the kind of work that gave her peace not through excitement but repetition. Open laptop. Check emails. Draft lines she wouldn't read twice. Submit. Repeat. Her colleagues liked her, she supposed. They smiled when they passed her desk. But no one asked about her weekends. No one knew her favorite song. No one saw her.

Home was a rented matchbox with beige walls and stories they hadn't earned. The bathroom door creaked like it had secrets. The ceiling fan sounded like a tired heart. She shared the flat with a girl named Tanvi who mostly existed behind a closed door, headphones always on, eyes always scrolling. It was fine. Comfortable, even. No forced conversations. No expectations. Just two women orbiting around each other in shared silence.

Sugandha's favorite part of the day was the evening when the city softened, and the sky turned to a bruised orange. She'd step onto the tiny balcony, cradling a chipped mug of adrak chai, and let the noise of Bangalore become white noise. In those moments, she almost believed she was okay.

She told herself she was fine. Repeated it like a prayer.

I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine.

But inside, her life had shrunk to lists and leftovers. Her phone gallery was filled with work screenshots, half-read articles, aesthetic quotes she never posted. The girl who once wrote letters and took silly selfies in college bathrooms? Gone. Packed away. Archived.

She had deleted Aman from her contacts long ago not out of anger, but exhaustion. The kind of tired that doesn't scream. It just walks away quietly, closes the door, and doesn't look back.

And then, it happened.

A Thursday evening. Ordinary. Unremarkable.

She had just ended a client call, neck sore from hours of screen time, eyes dry from artificial light. She reached for her phone, the most casual gesture, routine

and there it was.

A text.

From an unknown number.

Just two words.

“Hey! Remember?”

Her entire body went still. Not tense. *Still*. Like time had momentarily paused to let her catch her breath.

She didn't need to check who it was.

Some things, your heart recognizes before your mind can name them.

Aman.

Years of silence years of pretending he was a closed chapter and now, two words that arrived like an earthquake wearing perfume. So casual it felt like an insult. So unexpected it hurt like betrayal all over again.

She didn't reply. Didn't even open the message. Just stared at it like it was a ghost knocking politely at her door.

That night, sleep betrayed her. Not because of the message itself no, she was stronger than that, but because of what it resurrected.

The memory of who she was when she loved him. And worse, the illusion of who she thought he was.

She had buried that girl. She had built a life without him, a quiet one, sure but hers. And now, with two words, he had brushed the dust off a version of her she wasn't ready to see again.

She lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, the city humming outside like a lullaby for the numb.

And in that moment, she realized:

Sometimes, it isn't the person who hurts you.

It's the fact that they still have the power to reach into your peace...

and shake it.

Chapter 3: Send

It wasn't some grand plan.

There was no overthinking, no pacing the room, no drafts in Notes app saved under cryptic names. It just... happened.

Aman had been spiralling in that strange loop of unmotivated evenings, the kind where time drips like a leaking tap and even your own presence starts to irritate you. His room was stale with stillness, gym closed for maintenance, CDS prep books sprawled open like broken promises. YouTube blared in the background with titles like *"Rewire Your Brain After Failure"* and *"Discipline: The Cold Truth"* and he was listening to none of it.

He scrolled without purpose. Not doomscrolling. Not nostalgia-scrolling. Just floating through the digital noise like a ghost pressing buttons. That's when it happened.

Her name didn't appear. But her memory did crash into his gut like an unexpected monsoon on a clear day.

Sugandha.

He didn't even realize he had opened WhatsApp until the search bar blinked at him. Hesitant. Familiar. He typed her name slowly, like a word that still hurt the mouth to say. Her chat wasn't on top anymore. It had slipped far down, under the weight of years and meaningless conversations with people who never mattered like she did.

And there it was. The last message in the thread.

"Take care, Aman."

No reply from him. Not even a thumbs-up. Just a cold silence he had convinced himself was strength at the time.

His chest tightened. Not dramatically. Not like in movies. But in that quiet, suffocating way that makes breathing suddenly feel like work.

His thumb hovered over the text bar. For a full minute, he did nothing. Then he typed.

"Hey! Remember?"

It was stupid. Lazy. Two words that couldn't possibly carry the weight of all that had been left unsaid. And yet, maybe that was why he chose them. Because anything else would have been too much and too little all at once.

He stared at the words. A blink away from deleting them. A second away from retreat. But his thumb betrayed him.

Send.

The moment it flew, he panicked. As if he'd just released something sacred into a storm.

The screen read "*delivered*" and the word glowed back at him like a taunt. No reply. No blue ticks. No typing bubble. Just an ocean of silence in digital form.

He chucked his phone onto the bed like it had burned him, then sat with his hands knotted in his lap, heart pretending to be still.

He didn't care.

Except he did.

God, he did.

He tried to act normal, did the things people do to distract themselves: refilled his water bottle, folded a towel that didn't need folding, stared at the fan until its spinning became a kind of hypnosis. But his mind betrayed him at every turn running off to her face, her voice, that laugh she used to do when he got too serious.

What would she think? Would she smile at the message? Scoff? Roll her eyes and show it to a friend? Or worse... would she not feel *anything* at all?

Minutes turned to an hour. The phone stayed silent. The world didn't change. But something in him had cracked not loudly, not visibly. Just a hairline fracture beneath the surface.

Lying back on his bed, eyes unfocused, he stared at the ceiling like it had answers. The fan above him spun slow. Like time refusing to move.

And in that breathless hush, almost afraid of the answer, he whispered to the room:

"Did I wait too long?"

Chapter 4: The Mask of Normal

She waited exactly three days.

Not because she was playing some cruel waiting game. Not out of pride. And certainly not because she was indifferent.

She waited because the message had shattered something not violently, but with a quiet, aching persistence, like water slowly seeping through cracks in an old wall. She needed time. Time to feel the chaos rise like smoke, time to let the noise swirl and settle inside her, and then only then to decide what kind of woman she wanted to be when she finally answered.

That third evening, the city outside her window buzzed as usual indifferent and alive but inside her rented flat, Sugandha sat still, her laptop humming low, a half-empty cup of tea cooling beside her. The client edits were finally done, her checklist ticked off with robotic precision. But her mind wasn't on deadlines. It was on those two words still sitting like ghosts in her WhatsApp chat:

“Hey! Remember?”

Remember?

How could she forget?

The memory wasn't a reel it was a flood. His voice at 2 AM, sleepy and soft. The way he laughed like it was the most honest thing in the world. The night he held her hand like it was a promise.

And then just silence.

The slow, brutal way he vanished from the narrative of her life, without a full stop, without even a proper comma.

But tonight, she decided, she wouldn't bleed on the page. Not for him.

Her fingers hovered over the keyboard the air around them electric, trembling with everything she refused to say. Then, deliberately, like someone painting a smile over a scar, she typed:

"Hey!! Who?"

She hit *send*.

A breath.

Then she added another perfectly curated, aching controlled:

"Sorry for replying late. Was busy in office meetings and work."

Send.

Two lines. Smooth. Distant. Unbothered. The digital equivalent of a nonchalant shrug. The kind of message you might send to a colleague, or a forgotten classmate from some ancient group chat.

Not the boy who once made your chest ache with the sound of his name.

But her hands were trembling.

Not shaking from heartbreak that was old, that was layered in dust but from the unbearable pressure of pretending she no longer cared. Of holding in a dam that had already begun to crack. She told herself it didn't matter. That she had moved on. That she didn't need an apology or closure.

Still...

She stared at the screen, willing it to stay still, but her eyes kept darting to the top right corner watching. Waiting. Praying not for a reply exactly, but for a pulse. A flicker. Three dots. Anything. A sign that her calmness had stirred something in him. That maybe, just maybe, he regretted the boy he used to be.

She minimized the chat, buried herself in her inbox, reopened the spreadsheet she had closed minutes ago but it was no use. Some part of her the soft, ruinous part she thought had long hardened stayed alert.

Listening.

Hoping.

Waiting.

For the boy who once spun her world to say something.

Or maybe, to say nothing at all.

Chapter 5: Things Left Unsaid

The message came three days later.

Aman was slouched at his desk, pretending to study, eyes glazed over a mock test question he'd read so many times it had stopped meaning anything. The afternoon light had gone golden through the curtains, the air thick with the kind of silence that made you hear your own thoughts too loud. Then, his phone buzzed. He didn't reach for it. Not immediately. He just stared at it, heart thudding like a distant drum. He was afraid afraid it was a promotional text, a useless forward, another reminder of how irrelevant he'd become in the world he once thought he'd conquer.

But it wasn't nothing.

It was her.

Two words:

“Hey!! Who?”

The breath left his lungs like someone had knocked the wind out of him. He blinked, stared again. It was playful, casual **a stranger's tone** wrapped in **a familiar voice**. She didn't have his number

saved. Or worse, she was pretending she didn't. And he couldn't even be mad. He had earned that erasure. He was the one who had ghosted her without dignity, who had carried his silence like a weapon and cut ties without a wound that could be stitched. And now, here she was still graceful in her detachment.

The second line stung even more.

“Sorry for replying late. Was busy in office meetings and work.”

Meetings. Work. Structure. A whole life that didn't need his name whispered inside it. She was living. She had *moved on*. While he? He was still trapped in the same four walls, the same dusty room that smelled like failed attempts and forgotten ambition. His desk was cluttered with guides, mock papers, rejection letters but none of it compared to the clutter inside his chest, where regret curled up like smoke and refused to leave.

His fingers hovered over the keyboard.

What could he possibly say now that would be enough? “Sorry”? No. Too late for apologies. “I missed you”? Too loaded. “I still think about you every damn day”? Too dangerous.

But he needed to say something. Not for closure. Not even for hope. But because the silence was choking him, and speaking now even into a void, felt like the only way to breathe again.

He began to type. Slowly. Carefully. As if each word had to earn the right to be read.

"I know this is random. And you probably didn't expect to hear from me after all this time. I wouldn't have reached out if it didn't matter. But lately, I've been thinking about things I never had the courage to say before. About us. About how I left everything unfinished."

He paused. Backspaced. Rewrote the last line three times before deleting it entirely. He stared at the blinking cursor like it was judging him. Then, with a breath he didn't realize he was holding, he wrote:

"I've been preparing for AFCAT and CDS. Failed more times than I can count. Built a body that looks strong, but still carry the same regret in my chest every single day. You've probably moved on and you should. You always deserved more. But I guess this message is me being selfish... just wanting to know if you're okay. And maybe... hoping you still remember."

It wasn't poetry.

It wasn't clever or charming.

But it was real.

He read it twice. Then again. Then once more, as if trying to find a flaw big enough to justify deleting the whole thing. But there wasn't one. Because it was the first time in years, he was being honest not just with her, but with himself.

He hit *send*.

Then tossed the phone onto the bed like it was burning and leaned back in his chair, shoulders sinking beneath the weight of everything he hadn't said until now. The room remained silent. Outside, the sun dipped low, casting the world in the kind of golden hush that felt like an ending. Or maybe a beginning.

The ceiling fan spun lazily overhead, mocking his stillness, his inertia, his years spent waiting for something to change without ever making a move.

And somewhere miles away he imagined her reading it.

Cool. Calm. Unreadable.

Maybe she'd smile. Maybe she'd sigh. Maybe she'd delete it without blinking.

He didn't expect forgiveness.

He didn't expect anything, really.

But he had spoken.

And for the first time in a long, long while, he didn't feel like a ghost in his own story.

Chapter 6: Not the Same Girl

She didn't open the message the moment it arrived.

She couldn't.

It had come in the middle of a mindless midnight scroll, the kind you do just to quiet the thoughts. And there it was. *Aman*. Bold. Bright. Brazen on her lock screen, like the past had suddenly found a way to glow in the dark. Her thumb froze mid-swipe. Her breath caught for just a second too long. Then, without hesitation, she turned the screen off and set the phone face down on her pillow. She lay still, her heart galloping in a body that had trained itself to stay still, to not react, to not hope.

She wasn't ready. Not yet.

But when the city dipped into its softer hours, when traffic became a memory and her roommate's even breathing filled the silence, she finally picked it up. No drama. No soundtrack. Just her, alone, in the half-light of a room that had witnessed all her private breakdowns. She opened the chat. And read. Slowly. Line by line. Like decoding a forgotten language familiar in rhythm, foreign in meaning now. And as the words unfurled across her screen regret, failure,

memory, longing she didn't crumble. She didn't cry. She didn't even sigh.

Instead, a quiet stillness wrapped itself around her. Because *he remembered*. Because *he had been carrying it too*.

But the ache that once had shattered her the sharp, wild grief that used to make her curl into herself at 2 a.m. now stirred only gently, like a whisper echoing down a long hallway she hadn't walked in years.

She remembered how it felt to wait for a message that never came. How her throat would tighten every time someone asked if she was okay and she'd smile, always, because what else could she do? How she had cried silently in the washroom at work, pulled herself together in front of mirrors that never lied, and made power points while her heart quietly collapsed behind her chest. She had rebuilt herself brick by bloody brick, learning to choose herself in a world where he had once chosen to disappear.

Now, he had come back late, soft, carrying all the words she used to beg the universe to hear. And it was cruel, in a way. Beautiful, too. But mostly... untimely.

She typed:

"Aman."

Just his name. Strange how easy it came to her fingers. How natural it still felt on her lips.

She paused. Then continued.

“I didn’t expect to hear from you. Honestly, I didn’t know what to feel when I read your message. I guess part of me was curious. Part of me still hurts. And part of me... has made peace with what happened.”

No. That wasn’t quite right. She erased the last line. And wrote what she really meant:

“You walked away without a word. And that silence, for the longest time, was louder than anything else. I kept wondering what I did wrong, why I wasn’t enough. But then, somewhere between exhausting work deadlines and lonely midnight overthinking, I stopped asking. I stopped waiting for you to answer questions I learned to answer for myself.”

Her hands weren’t shaking. Her heart wasn’t breaking. It was remembering softly, respectfully.

She kept typing.

“I’m glad you’re working on yourself. I really am. It takes courage to admit when we’ve messed up. And maybe this message is your way of healing. But for me... it’s a chapter I’ve already closed. Not because I stopped caring. But because caring cost me too much. And in the end, I had to choose myself.”

There was no bitterness in her words. No dramatic punctuation. Just a quiet truth that had taken years to arrive.

And when she added the last part, it felt like lifting the final stone off her chest:

“So yes, I remember. I always will. But I’m not the same girl you left. And I hope you’re not the same boy who walked away.”

She signed off, plain and clean, without flourish.

—Sugandha

And as her thumb hovered for a beat before pressing *send*, she felt something shift inside her not an explosion, not a breakdown, but a release.

A gentle, dignified letting go.

Like setting down a bag she hadn’t realized she’d carried across miles of healing.

Chapter 7: The Pause Between Heartbeats

Sugandha wasn't thinking about Aman anymore not really. That chapter, she believed, had folded itself neatly into the pages of her past. His message had come like a gust of wind through a half-open window: sudden, stirring, but fleeting. She'd replied calm, composed, no cracks in her voice or punctuation. And that was it. Life resumed its unrelenting pace. Bangalore didn't care for emotional detours. The city rushed you forward 7 a.m. alarms, the violent whoosh of the metro, missed breakfast, Slack notifications blinking like angry eyes. She no longer checked her phone with that lingering breath of expectation. She no longer waited for ghosts.

But fate never waits for permission.

It was a drowsy, honey-lit Sunday afternoon in early March. The kind that smelled of burnt filter coffee, sun-warmed pavement, and restlessness. Sugandha had been coaxed no, cornered into attending a book launch by a colleague who insisted on literary weekends. Some bestselling war memoir by a retired Air Force officer, all medals and metaphors. The venue was a cultural centre snuggled between two boutique cafés in Indiranagar, where

overpriced croissants met underfunded art. Inside, the AC was too loud, the chairs stiff enough to reshape spines, and the walls lined with sepia-toned photographs of a country forever halfway through remembering.

She stood near the back, half-listening to the speaker drone about valor and vulnerability, half-scrolling through work emails that refused to respect her Sunday. Her phone blinked red **12% battery**. She was already planning her escape, plotting caffeine and calm just one café away.

And then, it happened.

Her thumb paused mid-scroll. Her eyes casual, careless, bored suddenly sharpened, froze. Like a camera snapping to focus.

Him.

Aman.

The same unmistakable walk. That grounded, slow confidence like someone who had learned to carry failure with grace. But something had changed. He looked... honed. Sharper edges, broader shoulders, a stillness in his eyes that hadn't been there before as if he'd spent years in battle with himself and walked out the other side quieter, heavier, whole. His white shirt was crisp, sleeves rolled just beneath the elbow, revealing tan forearms and a wristwatch she once gifted him or maybe she imagined that part. Time blurred in memories.

The room tilted, just slightly. Her chest caved inward like the air had thickened without warning. She wasn't ready. Not here. Not like this. Her heart traitorous, untamed began thudding, loud and arrhythmic, like it recognized the past before her brain did.

And then, their eyes met.

Just a second. Maybe less. But it stretched wide enough to fall into. He paused mid-step. The world paused with him. It was like the air between them had solidified into glass sharp, see-through, unbreakable. There was recognition in his gaze, and something else too the unspoken question of whether the years had made them strangers or simply paused them mid-story.

Sugandha looked away first.

Maybe it was instinct. Maybe it was survival. She turned sharply toward the nearest bookshelf, eyes pretending to scan the spines of war memoirs she would never read, hands trembling slightly beneath the weight of feigned normalcy. Her pulse throbbed in her neck, a drumbeat of disbelief and buried emotion. And just as she was trying to disappear into a stack of dusty pages, she heard it.

His voice.

Low. Familiar. Unchanged in tone, but aged in weight.

"Didn't expect to see you here."

She turned, slowly, deliberately.

And there he was “*Aman*” not a ghost, not a memory, but flesh and breath and vulnerability dressed in white. He stood with his hands buried awkwardly in his pockets, his eyes meeting hers like they weren’t sure if they had the right to. Everything about him looked strong, but his gaze still held that flicker of uncertainty, that sliver of hope that maybe, just maybe this encounter was meant to be more than accidental.

Sugandha forced a smile. Not forced like fake. Forced like a dam opening carefully, cautiously, afraid of the flood.

“**Life’s full of surprises,**” she said. Her voice was steady. Her guard wasn’t down, just momentarily lowered.

He nodded. That familiar half-smile lopsided, sincere the one that used to slip across his lips during quiet college evenings when the world felt like theirs alone. And suddenly, it wasn’t the same city, the same afternoon, or even the same book launch. It was a moment outside of time. A pocket of stillness in a world that never stopped spinning.

And just like that standing between unread books and unspoken memories they weren’t ex-lovers, or strangers, or heartbreaks with different postcodes.

They were just **Aman and Sugandha**.

Older. Changed. Real.

Two people standing in the same room for the first time in years,
still echoing with the ghosts of what they once were and the distant
possibility of what they still might be.

Chapter 8: All the Words He Couldn't Say

He hadn't planned to see her.

That day, Aman had only come to the book launch because a senior insisted. Something about discipline, exposure, character. He'd nodded, pretended to care. In truth, he was tired. The kind of tired that seeps into the bones not from lack of sleep, but from carrying too many silences. He hadn't been sleeping much anyway, the kind of nights where even dreams were loud, and her name still rang in places he thought had healed.

The hall was humming with air-conditioning and polite applause. He entered late, found a corner near the exit. He didn't even glance around why would he? She wasn't part of his world anymore. She was a letter he'd torn up but never had the courage to throw away.

And then... like a whispered curse the universe had been saving for the perfect moment, he saw her.

Sugandha.

His breath caught so sharply he thought for a second it might be visible. She stood across the room, near a table of stacked books, lit by a soft shaft of sun that filtered through the glass. She hadn't seen him yet. Her hair was longer. Her frame smaller than he remembered, but her presence, *God, her presence*, it still cracked something open in him.

He froze.

The world narrowed into a single, staggering heartbeat.

She hadn't changed.

And yet, she had.

There was something heavier about her now a quiet armor in her posture, like someone who had learned to protect softness by making it invisible. She looked... calm. Not the loud kind, not performative. It was the terrifying, unshakeable calm of a woman who had survived something no one ever apologized for. She looked like a chapter that had rewritten itself.

And him?

He felt like a sentence left dangling mid-page.

Their eyes collided not met, not brushed, *collided*. And in that split second, his mouth went dry. His palms turned cold. It was like seeing a mirror that showed you everything you were before you broke. She held his gaze for barely a second. Then looked away quick, effortless, practiced. It shattered him.

She was over him.

And maybe that was fair.

But *he* wasn't over her. Not even close. Not even in the distant, blurry way one forgets the sharp edges of an old wound. She was still lodged inside him, like the last breath before drowning not painful, just impossible to ignore.

He approached her like a man walking into a fire he'd already burned in once.

"Didn't expect to see you here."

He hated how unsure he sounded. How small his voice felt in the space between them. But she turned slowly, like she was turning toward a memory, not a person.

That smile.

God, that *smile*.

It wasn't the smile she used to wear around him soft, silly, sacred. This one was... measured. A polite boundary drawn in dimples. A smile that said: *I've cried enough over you. I'm not crying again.*

"Life's full of surprises," she said. Calm. Balanced. Deadly.

Aman nodded, his throat tight with all the things he couldn't say.

Like how he'd read her reply at 3 a.m. and stared at the ceiling for hours afterward.

Like how he'd saved her message in a notes app and reread it every morning like prayer.

Like how he still remembered the exact way she laughed when the chai burned her tongue.

He wanted to say it all. Right there. Right then. That she still lived in his most stubborn memories. That every version of himself he had become since leaving her was still shaped by her absence. That he had tried "*God, he had tried*" to make sense of the wreckage he left behind.

But he said nothing.

Because now, standing this close, breathing the same air he understood.

She wasn't asking for apologies. She wasn't waiting for reasons.

She had already walked through the fire. And she had come out gold.

And he... he was still learning how to stop burning.

So, he stayed still. Smiled that half-smile she once loved. Let the silence wrap around them like an unfinished song.

And for the first time in years, Aman accepted something he'd spent a long time running from:

Some people don't come back to you.

They come back to show you how far they've gone.

A deeply emotional, narrative shift where life throws something unexpected and irreversible at Sugandha. Aman fades into the background but never truly leaves. Here's how it unfolds:

Life rarely warns you before it changes everything.

Life rarely offers a warning before it sweeps in and changes everything, without mercy, without pause.

Sugandha had always been the strong one. The quiet force holding herself together; head bowed, heart carefully shielded beneath layers of resilience. She moved through Bangalore like a ghost who had made peace with every scar, every silent fracture beneath her skin. She was the woman who smiled through the chaos, who carried the weight of the city on her shoulders but never let it show. But strength, as she learned, had its limits.

It began in whispers subtle, easy to ignore at first. A bone-deep exhaustion that sleep couldn't heal. A dull, persistent headache that pulsed like a slow drumbeat beneath her temples. Nights where rest refused to come, and darkness became a cage she couldn't escape. Strange bruises ghostly marks that bloomed on her skin without explanation, as if her body was silently crying out in pain.

She told herself it was just the city. The relentless pressure of deadlines. The hours spent staring at glowing screens. The constant hum of life pulling her in every direction. She ignored the signs, brushed them off like passing shadows. Until the day her body refused to obey. Until she could no longer pretend, she was invincible.

When she finally sat in the sterile, cold room of a doctor's office, the diagnosis came softly a quiet sentence that felt like a guillotine dropping. Rare. Serious. Terrifying.

For days, she carried the secret alone, a silent weight that pressed so heavily on her chest it was hard to breathe. She didn't tell her parents. Not Vaishnavi, not her roommate. No one. She locked the fear away, burying it beneath layers of controlled calm.

Her world began to unravel, thread by thread.

Work, which had once been her lifeline, slipped through her fingers. Meetings were replaced by medical appointments. Deadlines gave way to medication schedules. The sharp clarity she'd prized so much faded, replaced by a fog that dulled her thoughts and blurred her vision. The girl who sprinted through life was now exhausted by the simplest tasks, stairs became mountains she couldn't climb. The tea on her balcony, once her small daily sanctuary, lost its flavor and warmth. Her phone grew silent, except for the cold, relentless buzz of hospital reminders.

And Aman?

He never sent a message.

Yet, he was watching, in the quiet spaces where her life flickered like a fragile flame. He saw the sunsets she posted, the ones she framed from her hospital window, where the sky bled soft pink and gold, and he imagined her staring out, lost somewhere far away. He

noticed when her presence faded from social media, when the brightness in her photos the sparkle in her eyes, thinned and dimmed with every passing day.

He sat with his phone in his hands, fingers trembling. Hundreds of unsent messages crafted in the silence of his mind.

Are you okay?

I'm here if you need me.

Do you want to talk?

But each time, fear stopped him. Fear that reaching out would shatter whatever fragile peace she might have carved out. That his words would reopen wounds she had fought so hard to close.

So, he waited.

Not out of coldness. Not from indifference. But from a quiet, desperate hope a hope that maybe, one day, she would reach out.

Hey... I need you.

If those words ever came, he would run to her. Without hesitation. Without questions.

Until then, he lived in the silence, a silence heavy with regret and unspoken love.

He imagined her every night, fighting battles he could never see. Alone. Brave. Broken.

And between them, the silence grew thick and heavy, a gulf wider than either could cross.

He wished he could break through it. He wished he could carry her pain for her.

But all he had was waiting.

Waiting for a moment that might never come.

The Letters That Never Came

She had stopped posting online.

Stopped explaining herself to the scrolling world, to the casual observers who never really saw. She'd stopped sending emojis that tried to capture feelings too big for a little screen, stopped crafting messages that felt hollow even as they were typed.

But she hadn't stopped feeling.

So Sugandha wrote.

Late at night, when the city's noise softened to a distant hum and the only light was the gentle yellow glow from her worn-out desk lamp, she poured her heart onto pages. Not into WhatsApp chats or fleeting Instagram stories—no, these were letters.

Handwritten, raw, unfiltered. Ink bleeding the weight of things left unsaid, emotions tangled like threads in a knot she couldn't yet undo.

She folded each page carefully, sealed each envelope with a tenderness that belied the storms inside her. Then, she walked down to the small post office at the corner, the one run by the kind old postmaster who always gave her a warm smile, unaware of the burdens she entrusted to his hands.

One letter was for Aman, words meant to bridge years of silence, to speak the things her voice could no longer say.

One for Vaishnavi, a gratitude letter for the friendship that never wavered, even when Sugandha felt most lost.

One for Nakul, a confession of regrets, hopes, and apologies tangled together like vines.

And one for her cousin Aarav, far away in Boston, a lifeline stretched across continents and time zones.

None of these letters ever reached their destinations.

The postmaster tucked them away, the city's chaos swallowed them whole, or maybe they simply drifted in the vast quiet between sender and receiver.

But what she wrote, what she let herself feel and confess on those pages mattered.

Because sometimes, the act of writing is not about the sending. It's about surviving.

It's about holding your own trembling hand in the dark and telling your story, even if no one else hears it.

Letter to Aman

Letter 1:

The One That Should Have Been Sent

Dear Aman,

There are so many things I wish I had said when you were still here, when we still had time. Words that got lost in the silence you left behind.

I wish I had asked why. Why you left without a trace, why you didn't fight, why you didn't trust me enough to say the truth. But maybe I already knew sometimes, the hardest part is not knowing, but pretending you don't.

I want you to know that I never stopped caring. Even when the pain became too much, even when I built walls around my heart, a small part of me kept hoping for answers, for a sign, for you.

But it's not your fault that you couldn't stay. It's not your fault that we broke in places we didn't know could crack.

I hope you're finding the strength to fight your own battles, like I'm trying to fight mine.

I'm learning that love doesn't always mean holding on. Sometimes, love means letting go with grace, even if it breaks you a little more inside.

Maybe one day, when the silence between us isn't so loud, we'll find the words we never said.

Until then, I'm here.

—Sugandha

Letter 2:

The Last Goodbye

Dear Aman,

This is probably the last letter you'll never read. The final piece of me I'm sending out into the universe without expectation.

I'm tired. Tired of the waiting. Tired of the what-ifs. Tired of the love that was never enough to keep us whole.

I don't hate you. I don't blame you. But I don't think I can carry this any longer, the weight of memories, the ghost of your absence.

I want to thank you, for the laughter, for the moments when you made me feel alive, for the brief warmth in a world that sometimes felt cold.

But I'm done holding on to someone who left without a goodbye.

Maybe we were never meant to write a story together. Maybe some loves are just chapters, beautiful but fleeting.

I'm choosing to close this one now. Not out of anger, but out of love for myself.

Goodbye, Aman.

Take care of yourself.

—Sugandha

Letter 3:

(never delivered)

Dear Aman,

I don't even know where to begin, so I'll start here, right in the middle of the chaos that is me.

I am sick.

Not the usual cold-and-cough kind of sick, but the kind that settles deep inside your bones, quietly gnawing away at the edges of your being. I've known for some time now. Maybe I never told you because I thought you wouldn't care. Or maybe because I was afraid, afraid to need you again, afraid to let you in when I'd already lost so much.

But tonight, tonight something inside me insisted I write. So here I am, trying to make sense of this ache with words.

There are days when I forget I'm unwell, days when I can pretend, breathe a little easier, move through life without the weight pressing down so hard.

And then there are nights like this. When breathing itself feels like a battle and sleep slips through my fingers like smoke.

In those endless moments, I think of you. Not the version of you who walked away without a word, leaving silence in your wake. But the boy who once held my wrist gently on that terrace, when I was pretending not to cry. The boy who whispered, "You'll be the strongest memory I'll ever have."

You were wrong, Aman.

I won't be your strongest memory.

But you? You will always be mine.

*If by some chance you ever find this letter, if it reaches you in some way, please
don't come looking for me.*

Just remember me kindly.

—Sugandha

Letter to Vaishnavi

(never delivered)

Vaish,

It's strange how some friendships feel like they could survive anything distance, silence, even time itself. But here I am, writing to you like you're a thousand miles away, because maybe you are. Or maybe I just feel that far from everything familiar.

I don't want you to worry, but I also don't want to lie. Some days, the pain feels like a storm I can't outrun. And I don't know if I have the strength to keep pretending, I'm okay.

Do you remember how we used to promise each other that no matter what, we'd always be honest? So, here's the truth: I'm scared. Not just of what's happening to me, but of what comes after.

But then I think of you, your laugh, your fierce stubbornness, the way you never let me forget I was worth more than my fears. And somehow, that gives me a little light on the darkest days.

Please don't forget me, Vaish. Please keep fighting, keep being the wild, fearless you I always loved.

And maybe one day, we'll sit on your bed again, making ridiculous plans and laughing until our sides hurt.

Until then, I'm holding on to that hope.

Love always,

-Sugi

Letter to Nakul

(never delivered)

Nakul,

I don't know if you remember the last time we actually talked, probably awkward, maybe rushed. That's the thing about life, isn't it? It moves so fast, and somehow the people who matter most end up drifting to the edges.

But you always had a way of pulling me back in, even when I tried to disappear. Like when you'd crack one of your ridiculous jokes just to see if I'd smile. And somehow, even when my world felt like it was falling apart, you made the edges a little softer.

I want you to know that your kindness wasn't unnoticed. It was a lifeline when everything else felt like sinking sand.

I wish I could tell you all this in person, to thank you properly for being the light in so many dark days. But for now, this letter will have to do.

Keep being unapologetically you. Keep dancing like no one's watching, even when it feels like the music's stopped.

You don't know how much that matters.

—Sugandha

Letter to Aarav (cousin in Boston)

(never delivered)

Bhai,

You're so far away, across oceans and time zones, yet somehow the one person I still feel completely safe with. Maybe it's because you've seen me at my worst, pajamas and all, or maybe because you never once made me feel small for feeling too much.

I wish I could tell you all this in person. That I'm scared. That I don't know how many months, maybe weeks, I have left. That the world keeps spinning on like nothing's wrong, while I'm quietly falling apart.

But you're living your dream. You're thriving. And the last thing I wanted was to become the sad story you carry with you across the miles.

If you ever do get this letter, please know I thought of you in my last good days. I smiled remembering our childhood games, your endless lectures about life, and all the moments I wanted to hold onto.

I wanted to visit you. To hug you goodbye.

Maybe, in another life.

Take care of Mom and Dad if you ever come back. Take care of yourself too.

—Sugandha

Letter to Aarav #2

(never delivered)

Bhai,

Sometimes I lie awake at night, thinking about all the things I never said out loud. How you were always the calm in my chaos, the quiet voice telling me it's okay to not be okay. You don't know how much that saved me.

I'm sorry I never told you how much your support meant. How your texts, your little jokes even when you were busy, were the only light some days. I wanted to be stronger for you. For everyone. But sometimes, even the strongest hearts break quietly.

I want you to promise me one thing: don't carry my pain. Live fiercely, wildly, like you always dreamed. Make mistakes, fall in love, chase your happiness like it's the only thing that matters.

Because, Bhai, you deserve a life full of everything I couldn't have.

Hold onto the good memories of me. The silly laughs, the childhood dares, the endless talks about the future. Those are the parts of me that will never fade.

Always yours,

—Sugandha

Letter to Aarav #3

(never delivered)

Bhai,

If you're reading this, it means I'm gone. And maybe that's the hardest thing for me to accept, that I have to say goodbye without you here.

I wanted so badly to be the cousin who showed up. The one who stayed strong for you, who cheered you on from this side of the world. But life had other plans.

Please don't be sad for me. I lived with all the love I could carry for family, for friends, for you. I hope you feel that love, even now.

Promise me you'll keep going. Promise me you'll live a life that makes the stars jealous. And when you look up at the night sky, know I'm watching, smiling, and so incredibly proud of you.

This isn't the end, Bhai. Just a new beginning, for both of us.

With all my heart,

—Sugandha

Incomplete Letter to Aarav

(never delivered)

Bhai,

I started this letter so many times today, but the words keep slipping away. My hands are weaker than they used to be, and the days feel shorter, like time is folding in on itself.

There's so much I want to say, so many things left unsaid, but the energy won't stay. Maybe it's the illness, or maybe it's fear. Fear of what comes next, and fear of leaving you without answers.

I want you to know that even when I'm quiet, even when I'm gone, I am still here in every breath you take, every memory you hold. Please don't be angry at the silence.

Don't think I stopped loving you.

I wish I could see you one last time. Hold your hand. Tell you it's okay to be scared. To miss me. To carry me in your heart, but also to let me go when the time is right.

If this letter ever reaches you—

None of these letters ever reached the people they were written for. The postmaster, old and half-blind, had fallen ill himself and forgotten the stack beneath a pile of unfiled forms in a rusty drawer. By the time anyone found them, months had passed. Too late for calls. Too late for goodbyes.

Only ink remained.

And the silence that followed.

The Drawer of Unsent Goodbyes

The post office on the corner of Richmond Street had stood still for weeks, its shutters drawn halfway like a yawn never completed. Mr. Tiwari, the old postmaster who ran it like a second home, had passed away quietly in his sleep no fanfare, no noise. Just silence. The kind that lingers a little too long.

The city didn't stop. It never did. Bangalore kept moving, honking, rushing, as if mourning were an inconvenience.

Weeks later, a young postal clerk was assigned to clear the building. He moved through drawer's sticky with dust, bundled rubber bands, and faded receipts. In the back cabinet, behind a rusted lock, he found a small wooden drawer. Inside were four envelopes. Carefully sealed. Slightly yellowed. Untouched.

No stamps.

No return address.

Just names, written in the kind of handwriting that looks like it tried not to tremble:

Aman Singh

Vaishnavi Deswal

Nakul Arora

Aarav Rawat – Boston, MA, USA

The clerk stared at them for a long time. Something about the way they sat there, like they had waited for this moment. Like they knew.

He thought about discarding them. They were undeliverable by technicality. But something instinct, or maybe just human decency stopped him.

He posted each one.

*A month had passed since **Sugandha Joshi's** obituary appeared in a dusty corner of a local arts-and-culture newsletter. A two-line farewell. No photograph. Just a date. Barely noticed. Barely read.*

But now, it would be impossible to forget her.

Her last words were finally on their way.

The letters that never came were, at last, going home.

Aman

He was at the gym when the letter arrived wedged between bills and takeaway menus, almost too ordinary to notice. The envelope was pale, weathered. The handwriting was unmistakable.

Sugandha.

He froze. The world around him clanging weights, pulsing music, voices faded to nothing. His thumb brushed the ink like it might vanish if he touched too hard. A part of him wanted to leave it sealed, to protect the mystery. But another part, the one that had waited in silence for months, knew better.

That night, he opened it on his balcony.

The city glowed beneath him a constellation of apartment lights, traffic murmurs, the occasional bark of a stray. But Aman heard none of it. The moment he unfolded the paper, time slowed.

Her words didn't shout. They whispered. Quiet and cruel in their softness.

"I am sick... not cold-and-cough sick, but the kind that sits in your bones..."

He read every line twice. Then again. Then again.

By the time he reached the end, his hands were trembling.

"You'll always be mine."

The final sentence hit like something physical a blow to the chest, a gasp that wouldn't come.

Aman sat back in the plastic chair, letter resting on his knees. His eyes refused to blink. The wind rose around him, tugging gently at the corners of the paper, as if trying to lift her words into the night.

He didn't speak for a long time.

When he finally did, it was barely a whisper. Her name. Fragile, reverent.

"Sugandha."

He hadn't said it aloud in years.

And when he did, it broke something in him wide open.

He wept not like a man, but like the boy who once held her hand on empty terraces and promised things he didn't understand.

He wept because she was gone.

And because now, at last, she had come home to him in ink, in silence, in the words she never meant him to read too late.

Vaishnavi

She was in a café, laughing too loudly, the way she always did when she wanted to seem fine. Her friends were mid-conversation, their words swirling like foam on coffee cups, when her phone buzzed.

A message from her landlord:

"You've received a letter. Handwritten. Looks old."

She didn't think much of it. A bill, maybe. Something left behind. She picked it up on the way home, barely glancing at the envelope, until her eyes caught the handwriting.

Sugandha.

Her breath hitched. Her keys clattered to the floor. For a second, the hallway around her disappeared, and only the envelope remained.

At first, she thought it must be some sick joke. A marketing stunt. An old college memory resurfacing at the wrong time.

But as she sat on the edge of her bed and read it, her fingers went cold.

"Dye your hair red."

"Laugh extra for me."

"I love you, idiot."

Vaish didn't cry at first. She stared at the ceiling like it might give her answers. Then she walked back to the café, asked for the bathroom key, locked the stall, and slid to the tiled floor.

The sobs came quiet at first. Then louder. Shaking, aching, unstoppable.

Thirty minutes passed before she could breathe again.

That night, she stood in front of her bathroom mirror with a box of red dye she'd bought years ago on a dare from Sugandha. It had stayed buried under other things. Half a memory. Half a joke.

Now it felt sacred.

As the fiery strands soaked through, Vaishnavi whispered the words aloud:

"I'm not giving up. But just in case..."

And with each whisper, she kept a promise.

She would laugh louder. Forgive faster. Fall harder.

She would carry her girl in every streak of red.

Because some friendships never die, they just change colors

Nakul

The letter was waiting for him on his old study desk untouched, nestled between a forgotten photo frame and a dusty cricket trophy. He had returned home for the weekend from Delhi, expecting nothing more than his mother's cooking and some old comfort.

He opened the envelope casually, almost distracted. But by the second line, something shifted.

His breath caught.

By the third, his hands were trembling.

He read it again. Then a third time. And again, until the weight of it caught up to him like a slap delayed by disbelief.

"You were always the kind soul in the group."

"You made life lighter for people like me."

He didn't even remember sitting down, but suddenly he was on the floor legs folded, eyes wet, holding the paper like it was sacred scripture.

He whispered broken thank-yous to the room.

To her.

To the girl who had vanished without goodbye.

To the one who remembered his laughter when he had forgotten it himself.

That night, he stayed up watching old group photos the blurry selfies, the stupid filters, the one where Sugandha wore sunglasses indoors and stuck her tongue out at him.

He didn't dance at parties for a long time after that.

Not because he forgot how.

But because it no longer felt like escape.

When he finally did at a friend's wedding months later he danced without alcohol, without pretence.

He danced for her.

And, maybe, a little with her.

Aarav

In Boston, winter was just beginning to soften. The ice on the sidewalks cracked in the afternoon sun, and snowmelt dripped steadily from rooftops. Aarav was sorting through a small pile of delayed family mail festival cards, bank statements, wedding invitations from distant relatives, when he saw it. Her handwriting.

He dropped the envelope. Just for a second. As if touching it too long would burn.

He didn't need to open it to understand.

He already knew.

And yet, he did.

He read it at the kitchen counter, standing in socks, unable to sit, unable to breathe properly. Every sentence felt like a snowflake melting into fire fragile, fleeting, impossible to hold on to. The kind of letter that didn't just say goodbye... it rewrote time.

*"I didn't want to be the sad story you carry across oceans."
"I wanted to hug you goodbye."*

He didn't sleep that night.

By morning, his flight was booked.

Not for a funeral. He had missed that.

But for something else.

He went to the temple she had once loved as a child. He walked barefoot through the quiet paths of her favorite park. He brought flowers to the railing

where she used to sit and watch the world end in orange light. He took her parents out to lunch. He hugged her mother for a long time, longer than words could stretch, and whispered:

“She remembered all of us.”

And that was the thing.

Through a forgotten drawer in a dusty post office, through the final act of a dying postmaster, Sugandha found her way back.

Late. Quiet. But unshakable.

She was gone.

But in those delicate letters, in crumpled paper and bleeding ink

She came home.

To all of them.

Author's Note

This story began as a quiet ache in my chest, one that refused to go away until it was written.

Letters That Never Came is not just about illness or goodbyes. It's about the silences that live between people, the things we mean to say but don't. It's about the spaces love leaves behind, and how sometimes, we only understand someone's weight in our lives after they're gone.

Sugandha's story is fiction, but her emotions are real. They come from the countless goodbyes we never got to say, the friendships that faded without closure, the messages we typed but never sent. If you've ever lost someone without a final word, or waited for a message that never came, I hope these pages offer you a soft place to land.

To those still holding on, to those healing in silence, and to those brave enough to write what they feel, I see you.

Thank you for reading, feeling, and remembering.

With love,

Shivani Rawat

***"Some letters find their way, even if they're never delivered.
Some goodbyes are whispered, but never truly heard."***

Reader's Note:

This book is more than a story.

It's a quiet room. A space for reflection, for memory, for the ache of things unsaid. It's for the letters you never wrote, and the ones you wrote but never sent. For the people who passed through your life like seasons soft, sudden, unforgettable.

As you close these pages, take a breath. Let whatever this story stirred in you stay a little longer. Sometimes, the most important words are the ones we never got to say.

And sometimes, they still find a way.

Book Club / Reflection Questions:

- **Have you ever written a letter you never sent?**
What would you say now if you had the chance?
- **Do you believe closure needs a response from the other side?**
Or can we find peace in the act of expressing, even if it goes unheard?
- **Which letter in Sugandha's story touched you the most, and why?**
Did it remind you of someone in your own life?
- **How do regret and hope live side by side in this book?**
Can they coexist without canceling each other out?
- **What does this story say about the passage of time and how love endures through it?**
How have you seen that truth in your own life?

Author's Note

If you're reading this, thank you. Truly.

The Letters That Never Came was born not from a single story, but from many my own, my friends', strangers I'll never meet, and the silences we all carry. I've always believed that somewhere between what's said and what's left unsaid lies the truth of who we are. This book is my attempt to give space to that in-between.

Writing this was not easy. There were days I cried. Days I couldn't write a word. But there was also healing gentle, slow, and surprising. If these pages brought you even a fragment of that, I'm grateful.

To anyone who has ever lost someone without a goodbye, to those who live with words trapped in their chest, to those still waiting for a letter that never came, this book was for you.

Thank you for sitting with Sugandha. For remembering her. And for maybe, just maybe, remembering someone of your own.

With love,

Shivani Rawat

Final Letter from Sugandha (Posthumous)

Dear Aman,

If you're reading this, then maybe somewhere in time, I finally reached you.

I used to wonder what it would feel like if you came back. Would I recognize your voice? Would the silence between us still feel like home? I stopped counting the days when I realized you were in all of them, quietly folded between moments I never shared.

I don't blame you.

Not for leaving.

Not for the silence.

Not even for the wait that became my lifetime.

I loved you... even in your absence.

Especially then.

Don't carry guilt.

Carry the memory of the girl who waited.

Who wrote.

Who loved you enough to let you go quietly, completely.

With whatever life I had, I left you pieces of mine.

I hope one of them made you smile.

Yours,

Sugandha

"Write Your Own Letter"

Summary:

Some letters are never meant to be delivered.

Some goodbyes never truly happen.

Sugandha's life was a quiet tapestry woven from unspoken words and untold stories. After a painful breakup with Aman, she drifted into the quiet corners of her own heart, choosing to write rather than speak, to remember rather than reach out. When illness began to steal her strength, she turned to letters. To Aman. To Vaishnavi. To Nakul. To her cousin Aarav in faraway Boston. Words she could no longer say aloud found a home on paper.

But none of the letters were ever sent.

Years later, long after her absence became a silent ache in the hearts of those who once knew her, the letters are discovered tucked away in a forgotten drawer. And with them, the truth of her love, her regrets, and the memories she thought would vanish with her.

Letters That Never Came is a quiet, powerful story about love, loss, and the fragile threads that bind us even across silence. It's about the words we never say, the goodbyes we miss, and the haunting, beautiful weight of remembering.

About the Author



Shivani Rawat is a writer and storyteller whose work delves into the depths of human emotions, the complexity of relationships, and the delicate spaces between love, loss, and healing. With a profound connection to the quieter moments of life, Shivani's writing is both introspective and raw, often weaving themes of distance, memory, and unspoken truths.

Her debut novel, *Letters That Never Came*, reflects her belief in the power of words spoken and unspoken, and how they shape our connections to others, even when time and distance pull us apart. Shivani's own experiences with love, longing, and the quiet ache of goodbye have deeply influenced her work, creating a story that resonates with anyone who has ever left something unsaid.

When she's not writing, Shivani enjoys exploring the world through books, coffee, and heartfelt conversations with loved ones. She currently resides in Dehradun, where she continues to write about the beauty found in life's fleeting moments.

A defining moment in Shivani's life came with the sudden loss of her cousin brother, Ankit. They lived under the same roof, breathed the same air, and shared the everyday rhythms of life laughter, conversations, and secrets. Ankit often borrowed her phone to check Facebook, talked about the girl he liked, and shared his dreams for the future. But in the week before he passed, they hadn't exchanged a single word. Life quietly moved around them until

one evening, a call from her aunt shattered everything. Ankit had been admitted to the hospital and by morning, he was gone.

Shivani still remembers the numbness of that early morning bus ride back to Dehradun, the disbelief wrapping around her heart. There are days when tears come easily, especially during Rakshabandhan, when the sacred bond of siblings feels both precious and painfully absent. If Ankit is somewhere watching, she hopes he knows how deeply he is missed, how often he is remembered, and how profoundly he is loved.

In Loving Memory

A part of this story will always belong to Ankit my cousin brother, my childhood companion.

We grew up under the same roof, sharing not just rooms and routines, but laughter, silence, and dreams. He used to borrow my phone just to scroll through Facebook, talk shyly about his crush, and sketch out the kind of future he hoped for. So full of life. So certain there was time.

That week, we didn't speak. Life was rushing past quietly, as it does. Until one night, a phone call changed everything.

I still remember the numb silence of the bus ride home. The disbelief lodged in my chest. And even now, tears come easily especially on Rakshabandhan, when the thread I tie is only a memory now.

You left without a goodbye, bhai.

But you live in every quiet moment.

And I still wait, in the corners of old laughter, to hear your voice echo through our halls.


For Ankit,

In every silence, I hear you.

In every goodbye, I remember the one we never had.

Stay Connected

Thank you for reading *Letters That Never Came*. If this story touched something in you, I'd love to hear from you and stay connected.

 **Instagram:** [@imshivaaaniiiiii](https://www.instagram.com/imshivaaaniiiiii)

 **Twitter:** [@ShivaniRawat](https://twitter.com/ShivaniRawat)

Also by Shivani Rawat:

Give a read to my next emotional journey,

"Unloving the Unanswered" a story about the courage it takes to let go, and the strength to keep walking.

*Some letters are never meant to be delivered.
Some goodbyes never truly happen.*

Sugandha life is a quiet tapestry of unspoken words and untold stories.

After a painful breakup with Aman, she retreats into the shadows of her own heart, chooses to write rather than speak. When illness slowly steals her strength, she begins writing letters to the people she loved the most—Aman, Vaishnavi, Nakul, and her cousin Aarav, pouring out her soul in words she can no longer say.

But the letters never make it to their destinations.

Years later, as Sugandha's absence leaves a void in the lives of those who once knew her, the letters are finally discovered. And with them, the truth of her love, regret, and the memories she thought she would leave behind.

Letters That Never Came is a poignant story of love, silence, and the fragile thread that binds us together even when we are apart. It's about the things we leave unsaid, the goodbyes we never get, and the quiet beauty of remembering what was.

