

I AM NOT
DONE YET

I AM NOT DONE YET

SOHAN TAMANG



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To the blessings of Lord Krishna

Whenever I faced the critical phases of my life, you have always shown me the path. When life was filled with darkness, you brought the light of hope. Thank you so much, oh Lord, for being there always and helping me navigate my way during the storms.

Thank you for all the blessings, and all the strength you have given me. Whenever I felt lonely and life felt meaningless, I visited ISKCON. Every time I was in front of you, I saw a subtle smile on your face. The chanting inside the temple helped me to escape the noise in my head.

There were many moments when I wanted to give up and put an end to this life, but you appeared again and again in my dreams, or even in my social media feed—each time with the exact message I was searching for. Thank you for patiently listening to my prayers and blessing me with this life.

I promise I won't waste this life. I won't waste my time. I submit myself wholeheartedly to you, with no turning back. I shall keep my promise, as I have always done. Thank you so much, Lord, for being with me. Hare Krishna.

Preface

Dear Readers,

This book is a standalone memoir, and it is my very first. Writing has been my passion since my school days, and I have always dreamt of sharing something that thousands of people could read and connect with.

What you hold in your hands is my story—written with as much honesty as I could muster. Because this book is told from my perspective, it does not capture every side of the story. It is a glimpse into my emotions, my vulnerabilities, and the experiences that shaped me.

This is not a book targeted at any one person, religion, caste, or belief system. It is simply what I lived through—and it's not a scientific fact or a textbook. It is about human emotions, real feelings, and healing.

A line that deeply inspired me comes from Lord Jiraiya in the anime *Naruto*: “You can’t call yourself a real man unless you can laugh off the bad stuff that happened to you —or at least use it as writing material.” This thought fueled my desire to write this memoir.

I hope you will join me on this journey—with all its ups and downs—and find something in these pages that resonates with your own life and love.

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I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family—my mother, father, and sister—whose love and support were my anchor during my most vulnerable moments.

To my dear friends Sayam Rishi, Subhajit Singhababu, Rintu Mandal (Chhorda), and Niladri Kumar Mandal (Borda), thank you for your unwavering emotional support and for standing by me when I needed it the most.

I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Keerthi for her compassionate counseling that helped me navigate the darkest hours of my journey.

It has been a pleasure working with Profound Writers Publication; their professionalism and cooperation have made this memoir possible.

And finally, I want to thank myself—for the courage to face old wounds, for the strength to write this memoir even when the pain threatened to drag me back into darkness.

This book is a testament to healing, resilience, and the power of love, both given and received.

Prologue

On most nights, the city forgets to be quiet. But there are a few when it remembers. Those are the nights the rooftop becomes a room, and the sky, a ceiling that keeps every secret. This story begins on one of those nights—with a boy counting stars as if they were answers, and a man, just a few steps away, counting his promises and asking which ones he will actually keep.

If someone had stopped me then and asked for the short version, I would have pointed upward. Love is a constellation, I would have said softly. From far away, it looks like a shape with a name. Up close, it is only burning points that don't touch—distance disguised as design. The rest of this book is about how I learned to see the space between the lights and still call it beautiful.

You will meet me first as a boy who believes in forever, and then as a man who learns to believe in again. You will meet a girl whose name tasted like sweet chocolate when I first typed it, and like iron the night that word stopped answering back. You will meet a mother who warns me gently not to put her daughter on a pedestal, a father who arrives when anger might turn into a headline, and a few friends who stand in the doorway when darkness tries to walk in without knocking. You will also meet a God who says very little

and yet manages to be on time.

There is a café where two hours feel like proof that the future can be touched. There is a staircase where the same feet that ran up once, run down another day holding back tears. There is a festival where fireworks don't feel like celebration and a telescope that teaches what the sun does when nobody is watching. There is a white rose left like a surrender, and there are letters—the kind that explain, the kind that apologize, and the kind you never send because the truth is already louder than paper.

This is not a story that tries to win arguments. It tries to win mornings. It is a long walk across nine chapters: from *When We Said Forever* to *Miles Between Us*; from *Cracks in the Glass* to *The End I Didn't Want*; through *The Darkest Hours* to *Picking Up Pieces*; into *What Hurt Teaches You*; through *Becoming Someone New*; and finally the door that says *I Am Not Done Yet*. Along the road are small altars—ISKCON bells at noon, dumbbells at dusk, a vision board above a desk, a niece's unbothered laughter, an anime hero who refuses to quit, a poem that predicted the ending without warning the heart.

If this sounds like a love story, it is—just not the kind that ends with two names on one door. It is the kind that ends with one name learning how to live in one body without apology. The breakup did not close the book; it closed the prologue. The real narrative begins when the phone falls silent and the house does not. When nobody texts good night, and you learn

how to give that blessing to yourself.

Before the first chapter, it is fair to warn you: there are promises that will be kept and promises that will be kept only in the sentence where they were written. There are moments when you will want to shout “Don’t go back,” and others when you will want to hold a hand that exists only in memory. There is a Dean who raises his voice, and there is a son who lowers his fists. There are days when the gym feels like a temple and days when the temple feels like the only place the mind will sit. There is anger that looks like strength until it breaks something, and gentleness that looks like weakness until it saves you.

If there is a mystery here, it is simple: how does a life break without ending, and how is the repair more beautiful than the original? The clues are everywhere—on rooftops, in prayer beads, inside playlists quietly unfollowed, in the smell of a perfume that the heart avoids, in WhatsApp chats muted so the brain can rest, in a group called FitFam where strangers become brothers, in a café where the momo auntie proves that satisfaction is a salary no company can offer.

There are two voices in these pages. One belongs to the boy who wants to be chosen. The other belongs to the man who learns to choose. They do not always agree. On some nights, they argue beneath a sky that refuses to take sides. On other nights, they sit together and count how many times they almost gave up and didn’t.

If you are reading this to learn how to forget, this book may disappoint you. It does not teach forgetting. It teaches carrying—carefully, correctly, and then less each day, until the weight becomes a lesson and the lesson becomes a lantern. If you are here because you do not yet know what to do with your silence, come in. The first chapter begins with the kind of promise that breaks and the kind of person who doesn't.

For now, keep only this in your pocket: I am not done yet. The rest will make sense when you reach the rooftop and notice that the stars are in the same places they were last night, and yet somehow, tonight, you are the one who is different.

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CHAPTER 1

WHEN WE SAID FOREVER

This story is going to be a long one. Really long. So let me begin from the very beginning. Don't worry, I'm not going to talk about my birth and how I got my name, etc. Let me just give a brief introduction to myself. I am Sohan Tamang, and my grandfather came from Nepal to India, then settled in Malda, West Bengal. My father and his siblings were born and raised here, just like me and my sister. As the youngest son of the family, I was loved by all. When I said youngest, let me give you a perspective: my eldest cousin (from my mother's side) is almost the same age as my mother is. Now you do the calculation.

Anyways, I was not just loved by my family and relatives; I was also the apple of the eye for my teachers. Yeah, I was kind of a bright student and used to be the topper of my batch. But is that important to mention? Hell yeah. Without this info you won't get the context. So bear a little more. I know you can do it. I didn't

have dedicated tuitions till class 6. My mother was a university topper and my father was a school teacher, so you can say that we always had a good culture of learning in my home. Well, it had its own drawbacks too. But that isn't relevant to the story. So I'm skipping that part. Maybe I shall write another book to address that issue. (DM me if you guys want me to write that book.) You guys are welcome. (Yeah, I know you just thanked me for skipping those parts and saving your time.)

In class 7, I started to take dedicated classes in mathematics (mainly) and sciences from a colleague of my father. (To maintain privacy and avoid court cases I'm going to change the name.) For the story we'll call him Uncle M. I used to go there thrice a week for my tuitions with my father. I still don't know why my father used to carry me on a cycle; he was wealthy enough to afford a car. Maybe he wanted to save money for the future so that I could publish this book right now. Thank you, Baba.

The real story begins here. Why, you guys already started blushing, huh? That batch was a co-ed batch. For those who don't understand what co-ed is, lemme break it down: it means boys and girls study together. (Actually no one studies; they just pretend to study to avoid the rage of parents.) I used to sit in front of Uncle M (obviously my father told him to take care of me and check if I'm learning well or not). (#privileged) Many of you have already noticed that this book doesn't feel like a traditional book. Good observation.

This is written by a Gen Z author, remember that. In many cases you'll think that you are reading WhatsApp chats, so don't be surprised, I've actually used the real chats to write this. (Yeah, I'm lazy.) On the first day I was an obedient student who went there for studies. Well, until June 29, I just focused on studies and I used to talk only to Uncle M and male batchmates. For me, female batchmates didn't even exist back then. I actually felt it pretty annoying to listen to the chit-chat and gossip done by girls. So I diverted my attention to something else.

On June 29, 2016, I was asked by Uncle M to pass the water bottle and at the same time one of the girls also tried to do the same. And she held my hand. But as she noticed I had gripped the bottle, she pinched me hard and said, "I moved my hand first. I'll give it to Uncle M." Then she smiled with a strange attitude. This was the first time I saw that girl smile and the first time she talked to me. Many of you will think, "How does he remember the date so accurately?" Guys, don't forget that I'm Sohan; I have a sharp memory (I don't use that superpower to memorise my study materials though).

Then every time I went there, I used to observe what she was doing, the way she tried to crack lame jokes and other girls laughed (those were really bad jokes). She was like the leader of the girls in that batch. There was something in her personality that was so magnetic. Nope, she wasn't the prettiest, she wasn't the smartest, she wasn't the most talented girl in my batch.

But sometimes she portrayed glimpses of myself. Yeah, I was the unofficial leader in my friend circle too. (I think I was. Come on, no one ever denied me anything I asked them to do.)

One week before Teachers' Day 2016, my batchmates were discussing plans to celebrate and assigning who would bring what. That day I saw her try so hard to get my attention (I don't like these kinds of events. I love to work solo. Group activities are not my cup of tea). Then all of a sudden she got angry and started yelling like my mother. At that time, "mommy personality" as a phrase didn't exist. She was a baddie for sure. And I said, "If your birthday is in a leap year (~29th Feb) then you are only 3 years old. Don't yell like that; I'm much elder than you." (Yup, you guys noticed it right, I don't allow anyone to challenge my authority.) I always carried my sigma personality.

That day the topic diverted after my remark and I started to flirt. (Yeah, in front of everyone I tried to hit on her and I completely forgot that what we discussed could be heard from the lane outside Uncle M's house, where all the guardians wait to take their children home. Yeah, I used the word "children" deliberately. I was only in class 7 back then.) When we all came downstairs, I saw her mom first and then noticed my father who was standing at a distance.

Her mom asked her, "Who said you are 3 years old?" At this moment my throat started to feel dry. I was wondering if she heard the whole conversation or not! My father was always a chill guy, so he wouldn't

react after hearing those things. He knew that his son has high testosterone and is good at flirting. So it would not be unexpected for him to see his son acting like a man.

She replied, "Sohan said. And you know what he..." Her mom interrupted her and said, "Let's go home first and then we shall talk. I've made Puri and Dum Aloo." At this point I calculated the consequences and I realised I was safe. My father asked if I had quarrelled with her. I told him to take a chill pill. My father is a very calm person who doesn't talk much. So this answer was more than sufficient. He didn't ask anything further.

On Teachers' Day everyone tried to dress well, but Sohan being Sohan was super casual about it. I even brought books with the hope that Uncle M would check homework and teach something new. (I loved studying and he was a fabulous teacher.) But when I entered, I saw no one was there. I started revising the science topics which Uncle M was supposed to ask questions from. A girl batchmate came and handed me a broom to clean the floor. I handed it back to her and asked her to clean the room. (She is a 21st-century strong independent woman. If I was able to clean the room, so was she. #womenempowerment.)

I asked her about my crush. (Okay, let's give her a name cuz I can't refer to her using "she/her" only. Let's call her Ava.) That batchmate noticed Sohan was talking about a girl for the first time since he started taking classes here. "What's the deal? Are you in love

with her?" she asked.

"No, not at all. Why would I?" I replied.

"If not, then why did you ask only about her?"

"Clean that corner, there's still dust left," I replied to change the topic of conversation.

"She already has a boyfriend, stop daydreaming," she replied.

And I tried my best to pretend to be a sigma and said, "Huh, as if I care." But from inside I was feeling a strange pain, it was like someone was inserting needles into my chest.

Then other students started to come and everyone started decorating the room. I also took part (not because I was interested, but because I'm a perfectionist and tried to make the designs aesthetic). Ava arrived late with cake and noticed I was rearranging the ribbons, and she thought that I didn't notice her. So she came closer and pulled my shirt, then said, "Hey mister, are you done redoing the decors? It's about time we ask Uncle M to come over here and cut the cake."

"Nice. Then go and call him," I replied. My reply was concise and dry cuz I was sad. And I have a rule that I don't usually flirt with committed girls. I was regretting what I did a week ago and all the fake scenarios I had imagined in this short period of time. I was trying to avoid eye contact and pretend to be unable to comprehend her. She pulled my hand and said, "Let's go together." She opened the door and, surprisingly, on the other side of the door Uncle M was already there. I just realised that Ava was holding my

hand in front of uncle and that's problematic. I pulled my hand quickly. And wondered if we could ever hold hands again. There's a popular quote written by me: "Don't build your house on someone else's land."

As class 7 ended, Uncle M stopped tuition at his home. The batch of class 8 split into two groups. A group of girls who used to go to Ava's home, and in the other group there were me and Uncle M's sister. I used to miss Ava a lot but I couldn't do anything about it.

In class 9 (2018), some miracle happened. Only three students were taking tuition from Uncle M: me, his sister, and Ava. Uncle M wanted to unite us together and Ava's mom gave permission. When I heard that I was finally going to meet her again, I was both happy and sad. Happy cuz I'd be able to see her again, and sad cuz she already had someone in her life. "Wouldn't that be unfair to stalk a committed woman?" I asked myself. And the answer was yes. So I decided that I would go, study, and come back home. But as Madara Uchiha rightly said, "Nothing ever goes as planned in this accursed world."

I used to talk to Ava's mother more than her. Her mother used to love me like her own son (I hope she still loves me. I love you, aunty). One day she told her daughter, "Learn from Sohan. His parents are really lucky to have a son like him." Ava got triggered and, as I mentioned, she was a baddie. She replied, "If Sohan is so dear to you why don't you adopt him and I'll tie him rakhi. Problem solved, at least one of your children will be great."

Initially I laughed after hearing that, but after thinking deeply I understood it's a very bad idea. Yeah, I once had a dream about having her in my family but I didn't mean stepsister, I wanted her to be my wife. (Don't laugh, you must have gone through similar situations.)

One Saturday both of us were sitting in her room and I noticed her eyes. Sunrays were coming from the window and they made her light brown eyes look golden. She's very fair and her cheeks were glowing when the rays fell on her face. For that moment I suddenly remembered a dialogue from the movie 3 Idiots: "When you fall in love it feels like a movie. Everything happens in slow motion. You feel like breeze is blowing." She smiled mildly in a royal way and asked me, "What happened?" I tried to speak but I couldn't. I just wanted to capture that glance in my memory so that I could cherish it later. I wished I could wake up every morning and see this soothing smile. Then Uncle M entered the room and I had to again pretend to be sigma. Though I was looking at her quickly and secretly while solving mathematics problems. I remember that incident crystal clear even though so many years have passed.

Ava has a twin brother who is specially challenged and can't walk. Some doctor had suggested to aunty that she should do some yoga. Ava's mother knew that my father is a yoga teacher, so she asked me, "Beta, can you bring your father home so that he can suggest some stretching exercises?"

“Yes, why not. I’ll talk to Dad and when he’s free we’ll both come,” I replied.

Next day I, along with my father, went there and when he was busy teaching yoga, I was busy—yeah, you got it right—flirting. I came to know a surprising fact: one of my maths teachers (we’ll call him Mr. K) from my school was Ava’s relative. Mr. K was the uncle of Ava’s mother and he was the best mathematics teacher at our school, and he used to love me a lot. Mr. K used to call me “Dhanraj Tamang” (it’s the name of an old Bengali movie that was released in 1978). As I had scored 100 in class 8 maths paper which was set and checked by him, he was really impressed, so he had gifted me a book to practise more critical questions and sharpen my mind.

Most of my classmates used to call him “Dadu” (= grandpa). No, it wasn’t age shaming. He was a very compassionate and kind person and always treated us as grandkids. I became super strong in Geometry because of Mr. K. He was a genius. Due to poor eyesight he used to carry two goggles with him, both were super high power. So instead of reading questions from the book he used to ask me to read the question aloud (he had a hearing issue too). And I was always astonished to see how he solved every problem without writing a single word. He taught me how to solve geometry problems using diagrams. I love geometry so much that during my brief graphic design freelance career I tried to incorporate geometric shapes in my design works as a tribute to him.

Anyways, let's get back to the actual story. Months passed and her academic performance wasn't improving. So, her mom decided that Uncle M would come to their home just to teach her, so that his attention wasn't diverted to clearing my doubts or checking his sister's homework. I felt horrible when Uncle M told me, "From now on, come to my uncle's place. I'll teach you and sis there."

Even when I wasn't going to Ava's place, I used to keep asking about her to Uncle M like—"How's she doing?", "How much did she score in mock tests?", "How's her mother?" Now a lot of you might think, why didn't I ask Ava directly through social media or phone call. So, here is the explanation: I was always told that I have to ensure a good rank in the 10th boards exam (which I did) and for that reason I was obsessed with studies and studies and studies. I sacrificed my hobbies and just did what my parents told me to do (yeah, I am an obedient child).

The other reason is that I have a huge ego issue. Why didn't she message me? I was feeling like her mom had kicked me out of their apartment. And I just wanted to outperform her in everything so that I could prove that "I'm Sohan, I'm the best. I'm the lord." (I am really proud of my superiority complex.)

On the result day Uncle M was at our house. I asked him about Ava's result. He didn't know and I kept waiting for her phone call. I was hoping that she'd call me and congratulate. Alas, that never happened. Since that day I didn't text or call her. Neither did I

ask about her to someone else.

In 2022 I needed test question papers and I texted a few batchmates. (I don't text multiple people; I just send one text then forward it to others. It saves time. Yeah, I know I'm smart.) I forwarded that message to her also but never thought that she would reply for real. She sent the questions and we hardly talked for about 6–7 minutes. During this period I was not obsessed with her. I follow a basic rule—"Out of sight, out of mind."

During the span of these 2–3 years where I was detached from her, I did many crazy things, learnt new skills, started taking interest in geopolitics, read a ton of self-help books and autobiographies. COVID-19 lockdowns were not at all boring for me. I couldn't even realise how fast the time passed. So that small chat with her didn't matter to me. But ever since that chat she started to see my WhatsApp updates and I started to watch hers. We both used to react to each other's updates. That's it.

On June 26, 2023, I asked her if she still remembered that "rakhi" incident or not and she replied, "My mom still talks about you, she truly desired to have a son like you." As you guys have already understood that I am good at flirting, I wanted to text her, "So what if I'm not her son, I can be her SON-IN-LAW." But I didn't send the text after typing it. I left her on seen.

I like writing poems, so I shared with her a poem that I had written to motivate my best friend's ex-girlfriend. Hey, don't get me wrong here. She was my friend too.

And after their break-up I was acting as emotional support to both of them. Well, I didn't write any poem for my best friend though.

Anyways, Ava appreciated me after reading the poem. "I wonder how one person can be so much versatile," she said.

I replied, "That doesn't matter. My anger issues always overshadow the good qualities I have."

Surprisingly she said, "A girl who has enough cerebral capacity would never reject you." I realised the conversation was reaching peak romantic tension and I withdrew my attention; after 10 minutes I said, "Ok bye." You may wonder why I missed such an opportunity, so here is the explanation: don't be too accessible in the beginning, try to leave a lasting impression. The duration of conversation doesn't ensure that. Unfinished conversations are more likely to stay in mind. And that is the reason why I am writing this book now. Our last conversation was unfinished and one-sided.

Let's jump back to the story. On July 3, 2023, I had uploaded my first romantic poem "UNSPOKEN WORDS." No, it wasn't about her. I had written it in 2017 for someone else. Let me remind you that the batch was split and I was no more studying with Ava. I met a girl (she was my senior) and I was attracted to her. That's the story behind the poem. Those who read the poem—everyone loved it.

Ava texted, "It's beautifully written, even my mom loved it."

And I was numb with shock. “Why the hell did you show that to your mom? Now she’ll think I’m a romantic fool,” I said.

She told me not to worry about that and asked, “What do you do in your free time?” At that time, I had 16 hobbies. (Come on guys, I’m Sohan. It’s obvious.) This conversation we were having so casually was about to change our lives greatly and we had no clue whatsoever. That night we talked about goals, problems, childhood funny incidents.

She said her bad habit was sleeping late at night. I noticed the clock and it was 11:11 pm. I said, “I have to go to bed, bye.” (Seven hours of sleep is necessary to heal your body and for new muscle fibre synthesis.) Yeah, I understood that we were not having late night conversations, but since that day it became like a ritual. Every night after dinner we used to chat for about an hour.

In August, once we were talking about romance movies and what her favourite movies are. I asked, “I like a girl but I don’t know how to approach. Can you help?” She suggested, “Buy her chocolate or get her flowers or whatever she likes.” I replied, “She likes another guy.” Yeah, my joke worked and I used it to know if she was in any relationship or seeing someone else or not. And I understood that she was single at that time.

On 14 Aug, she sent personalised birthday wishes to my sister. In September, her dad, who is a police inspector, got some award and during the same period my father

got the “Siksha Ratna” award for teaching excellence and impact. We both congratulated each other’s parents and I got to know that she is a family-oriented girl. (I don’t like boss bitches.) With every chat I was drawn closer and closer; so was she. Once she mentioned, “I love talking to you; your words carry a different vibe that feels special.” I was blushing while reading that message and wondered why she didn’t remove the word “talking” and confess.

On Diwali 2023, I wrote a poem for her, “Awaiting Your Arrival.” She was texting and I was nervous about how she would react. “I never knew you are so romantic... it’s too good.” I thanked her and wondered if she was pretending that she didn’t understand it’s for her and I am confessing my love. (Just like I did in 2017. If this book sells well, I may write about that senior girl too.)

By the end of the year 2023 we both knew each other’s strengths, weaknesses, fears, workout routine, songs, favourite books and even food habits. (When she mentioned that she had read *The 48 Laws of Power* I immediately reassured myself that I am chasing the right woman.) I started to find so many commonalities that I again started to find myself within her. Just like what I experienced in class 7. But this time the pull was much more intense and going to sleep without talking to each other was unbearable. I know a lot of you can relate to this situation. You must have experienced a similar need for attention during the chasing period.

In the next chapter you will find mentions of a lot

of things we discussed and agreed upon—and how the words don't always match the actions. So I am giving free advice to my readers: Actions >>> Words.

On 14 Dec I wrote a quote and sent it to her, and I was unaware that it was for my future self. (Am I a prodigy or something?) I sent her:

“THOUGH THE CICATRIX OF LOVE MAY BE TRAVERSED, ITS VERDANT TENDRILS STUBBORNLY CLING TO MEMORY’S FERTILE LANDSCAPE. EVEN AS THE MOON’S BORROWED LUMINESCENCE BATHES THE WORLD IN AN ETHEREAL GLOW, ONE CANNOT HELP BUT DISCERN THE VEILED TRUTH BEHIND ITS BORROWED LIGHT.”

She was unable to understand, so I told her, “It means: Though the scars of love may fade, its green memories stubbornly cling to the fertile landscape of memory. Even as the moonlight bathes the world in a soft glow, one cannot help but see the truth behind its borrowed light.”

On 4 January 2024 she planned to surprise her mom with a bag. But she couldn't order it as COD wasn't available. So she borrowed some money from me, and when she asked me I felt like I'm a part of her mom's birthday surprise. It showed that she trusts me and considers me dependable. I was moved by her eagerness to make her mother feel special. She saved her pocket money for a long period of time so that she could afford to buy the bag, and when she wanted to order she was worried about payment. Ava's mom is a lovely lady.

To be honest, I miss aunty till this day. I don't know if she feels the same or not but I have always admired that lady. And till this date her number is saved in my phone as "Ma 2".

After this incident I was receiving a lot of red heart emojis and I am an over-analyser. So I was trying to interpret the intention behind those emojis. Were they just casual or did she try to hint that she also feels something? These questions started to occupy a vast chunk of my mental space. I discussed this issue with two friends of mine, and they started encouraging me to confess to her without thinking too much. But I was hesitant cuz I did confess through the poem. When she read my first romantic poem I told her that I convey emotions through writings. That's one of the reasons why I don't like to call people. Texting is much more comfortable.

After the birthday gift issue was resolved, she said, "If you ever need any support or assistance in your life I'll always be there for you." This was the first time someone told me something so deep like this. And I realised that tears were running down from my eyes. I thought I'd found my biggest cheerleader. I had no idea what was going to unfold in near months. "Having someone like you is a matter of luck. People who are close to you must have done a lot of good deeds in life," she added. I was unable to write a reply so I sent emojis and stickers instead. "When I was younger I didn't realise why my mom used to love you so much but now I can see why. Men like you are rare in this

generation,” she texted.

For the first time in my life I was overwhelmed by someone’s sweet talking. She pointed out that there is nothing problematic in me except the anger issue. And I assured her that she doesn’t have to worry about it as I was trying to evolve into an emotionally intelligent person.

She said, “I don’t know if saying this to you is right or wrong...” This text increased my heartbeat and I started sweating. I thought she’s about to confess her feelings. But she said, “If you ever get angry with me then shout as much as you want, use any cuss words, just don’t suppress your emotion. I won’t mind it. Even if you are angry with someone else you can tell me. I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

I was shocked and it took a few minutes to process what she was trying to convey. I replied, “I consider you as one of my closest persons I know and we do talk a lot about different things, but while talking to you I have to think a lot more before actually telling you. Cuz I don’t wanna hurt your feelings or trouble your peace.”

“Is it really that difficult for you to talk to me?” she asked.

I replied, “I can handle nonsense from a stranger. But when someone close says something mild it hurts much more than severe arguments with a stranger. I have always tried to keep others happy and yet many don’t talk to me right now. I don’t want the same thing to happen between us.”

Then she said, “I’ll never block you, I promise. You are a very, very nice person and having you by my side is a blessing. If I have to endure some of your anger issues that’s no big deal. I’m very understanding.” (I seriously can’t stop laughing while typing this. Right now I’m blocked from everywhere, even from her mother’s phone. Not only me, my other family members are also blocked.)

At that time I actually believed that she was saying the truth and she’d keep her promises. I was naive. She wanted me to showcase my childish side and I saw a ray of hope. Finally I didn’t have to be the tough guy 24×7. Finally I’d found my safe place. Finally someone wouldn’t judge me when I showed my vulnerabilities. And for the first time, I started calling her “Devi ji”. I am a worshipper of the divine feminine, so when I see a woman who is an embodiment of Shakti, I call her “Devi ji” to showcase my respect to her divine feminine.

She had a lot of questions to ask and said that “I would ask them when we meet. So I am saving them for future and not asking all of these at once.” Before she texted this, I thought I was the only one who was overhyped to meet and spend time.

She asked me two questions that night: “Whom do you show your childish side? What do you consider as red flags?”

I replied, “My sister has seen most of my childish side and I hate woke & hypocrite people, so that’s a red flag.” She couldn’t understand what I meant, so I again explained that people who talk about idealism

and themselves do the opposite are filthy. She agreed and said, “Yeah, such people are really red flag.” (Yeah, she herself said this thing. I guess she told that to her future self.) She said for her, toxic people who quarrel meaninglessly are red flags. First of all, no one quarrels meaninglessly; people got work to do and families to take care of. I replied that “Imperfections make us beautiful.”

She then pointed out that she considers careless men and silent men who always say “yes” to everything to be red flags according to her. She added, “As a man it’s okay to say ‘yes’ sometimes to your female partner, but not every time.” I just replied, “Stay aware of fake people.” (Why the hell didn’t I follow my own advice? Was I blind, huh?)

She asked me about my dream date/proposal. And I said, “I’m not like the rest of Gen Z. If I wanna be with someone, then the ultimate goal is to get married. And promising her for marriage at Vrindavan Prem Mandir is a wish I have had for a long time. It’s the best place to express feelings and take blessings before the beginning of a new life journey.”

“This is undoubtedly the best proposal idea I’ve heard in my life,” she replied with excitement. (As if she had already imagined herself getting proposed to there.)

All of a sudden she started to act like a dating guru and said, “Do you understand your emotions well? Just ask the girl whom you like if she likes you or not. Don’t just try to read her mind.” And I told her that

I had avoidant attachment. So I withdraw from others when I feel a relationship is getting too close. She tried to motivate me and asked me to be optimistic.

By this time I was so addicted to her that I would wait the whole day, re-read last day's chats and smile like a weirdo. Her messages became my favourite notification and making her laugh was the most beautiful moment of the day. But deep down I was scared too. I was wondering, "How long will this happen? She lives 250 km away from me. I can't even buy her dark chocolates when she is having period cramps. Even her period schedule has been automatically adjusted in my mind. What will happen when she realises I want more than just friendship, more than just chatting? Will she still choose to stay irrespective of her answer?" And self-doubts were biting me from inside. I started feeling like every passing day is like a clock ticking and I'm losing time to be with her. When I said, "I want to be by your side forever," I actually meant forever. "Should I allow my selfish desire of being loved by her to murder our years-long friendship and trust?"—this question started to annoy me. I was praying to the Lord to give me a clear answer whether it's worth it to gamble with everything or not.

She said that she'd return to her hometown during her birthday and I must come. I was super excited to meet her. And I had started preparing her birthday gifts since December. And then 4 January arrived finally. She didn't celebrate aunty's birthday cuz uncle had to go on posting somewhere else. But she showed her mom

the birthday greetings I had sent. Aunty was surprised how I was aware of her birthday. Ava said that she had told me and aunty teased her. Aunty was happy to see my picture after so many years and commented, “He is now a grown man but his face is still the same.” Aunty invited my whole family to visit them when they return during Ava’s birthday. “Tell me what food you love the most, Mom said she’ll make it for you. And I shall make kheer for you. My mom makes delicious cakes. If she makes my birthday cake you must try and I am sure you will love it.” For a moment I thought that I must be daydreaming. I was constantly trying to live in the present without getting excited about a possible future.

A movie became popular—the name was 12th Fail—where the protagonist was from a poor background but through hard work and support from his girlfriend, he finally cracks the UPSC exam and becomes an IPS officer. She loved the movie and suggested I watch. To be honest, it’s a really good movie, and while sharing my thoughts she tried to position herself as someone like the female lead of the film who is rooting for her partner.

As I have had a lot of pressure of academics from my early childhood, I was always a bit hesitant about going into a committed relationship which drains a lot of time and energy. Moreover, I hate nonsense drama, mood swings, and disagreements. I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but I don’t allow anyone to lead when I’m present. I am always the sole decision-maker. Advice is always welcome but orders are not. So I was wondering

if she becomes my partner like how she just narrated, she must suppress her masculine energy and express feminine energy more to adjust. The male lead in the movie is a very sweet guy, but I have Gorkha genes; my anger is devastating. Even I used to sometimes feel scared that one day my anger will backfire and become the cause of some serious issue. “Will she be able to handle me? Will she always be like the sweet girl she is now? Will she really be able to smartly navigate disagreements without shouting and creating drama?”—these were the questions continuously revolving in my head. But as there was no guarantee of us getting into a relationship, I started to avoid finding answers and instead focused on my own self.

One day she told me that she loves dark chocolate a lot and that was always my favourite thing. So I was happy to hear that. “I have a lot of cravings to eat dark chocolate especially during my periods. Moreover, it helps to reduce the cramps and I feel better,” she said. And after hearing that I gave her a nickname “Dark Choco”. And her number is still saved as this. Well, this is not the first time I gave a girl a new nickname; there are more like: Cappuccino, Cherry, Cookie, KitKat etc. (Yeah, I know I name most of them after foods. Hope none of them will file a case of objectification against me). While naming Ava “Dark Choco” I never imagined what kind of darkness she would bring into my life.

Every day I used to wake up with a smile and spent the whole day blushing while thinking about imaginary

scenarios, and at night talk to her until we both fell asleep. Life was good and the hope for a possible relationship distracted me from my life goals. But even after knowing that I was missing deadlines and wasting so many productive hours doing nothing, I kept telling myself a lie: “All this will be worth it when we finally get together.”

To my male readers, here is free advice: “Having a girlfriend is cool. But do you know what’s even cooler? Becoming a provider who can provide for himself and his loved ones. So, if you don’t possess generational wealth or already have built a strong income source, don’t put someone on a pedestal. Nothing should be more important than your goals, not even your own selfish desires.”

Enough motivation, now let’s get to the story. Once I asked her a beautiful question: “If your life was a rom-com movie, what would be the title track?” She wanted to hear my answer first and I said, “For me it would be: ‘Likhe Jo Khat Tujhe’.” This song perfectly explains my writing hobby and how I express my feelings.” She smartly skipped the question and said, “I’ve never thought about that. My love language is a lot different, a lot dramatic.” She was telling the truth; I was the stupid one who couldn’t interpret.

She asked me, “What’s your love language? For me it’s expressing love through eye contacts.” I was not at all expecting her to ask this. I suddenly felt butterflies in my stomach. I was blushing so much that my cheeks started to hurt. The past memory of seeing her light

brown expressive eyes on that Saturday afternoon was flashing in front of my eyes. I answered honestly, "Teasing and care are my love language. The more I care, the more I scold."

"I want to have someone who loves exactly how my papa loves my mom," she said.

"Hmm, for every girl her papa is the hero. She grows up seeing him. So she tries to find someone who has similar qualities. She feels secure around a person who protects like a father figure and loves like a generous mother," I replied.

She mentioned her father has anger issues too. When he gets angry she just stays silent and waits until he calms down. After hearing that, I was shocked for a while. Cuz as far as I knew, she was a stubborn girl who loved criticising others. But I thought in past years she must have changed, just like I've changed a lot, and I believed whatever she said. "I literally cherish this maturity," I added. "It is one of the reasons why talking to you feels soothing. Don't lose this quality."

She said, "The guy I admire and my mom praises is now praising me, wow, this feels good." Yeah, many of you must have already noticed how good a people pleaser I was. But trust me, I was believing every single word she had typed. I had no other medium to cross-check its authenticity.

Few days later she shared a portrait drawing of her and said that her batchmate had drawn her, and she felt really special after receiving it. She was completely unaware of the fact that I was busy drawing her portrait

as her birthday gift minutes before she had texted me. She asked me if I had checked her status update. I said not yet and headed to check it.

She had uploaded a few lines of a poem: “I choose to love you in silence, for in silence I find no rejection.” I replied, “I guess you are in love. Why don’t you express your feelings? I am sure that you must have more options—even if he rejects, that’s totally fine.” Instead of replying to my message, she sent me two more lines of this poem: “I choose to hold you in my dreams... for in my dreams, you have no end.” I read those lines and said that it’s a really beautiful point, but don’t send me this kind of poem because I don’t want to live with hopes.

At that moment, I was wondering if she had uploaded that poem for me or not—and was it just a poem or was she trying to express her feelings, just like I do through my writings? She tried to make the situation a little light and shared a funny meme to divert the conversation because she saw I was not responding as she expected. After I sent a few laughing emojis she commented, “Don’t laugh, you stupid, or I’ll fall in love.” I thought just like the meme, this is also a joke, so I said I’ll keep laughing—stop me if you can—then sent more laughing emojis and said, “Can you teach me one thing?”

“What do you want to learn from me?” she asked.

I said, “Women are extremely good at time management. I have seen a lot of them handling one boyfriend, two situationships, three exes, and a husband

along with her family all at once.”

She said, “Yeah, that’s true, even a lot of them are in my batch, so I closely monitor that. Yes, they certainly possess this kind of talent.”

That night I read the poem several times and I was lost in overthinking, trying to actually predict what her intention was in uploading it and then sharing the last two lines with me. I also wondered if she loves someone else and dedicated that poem to him, but I knew that if she was in love with someone else, then how was she able to spend so much time at night with me? Her boyfriend should have been mad at her because the attention was diverted.

Here I would like to share a hidden talent that I have; I even shared this with her. I have the ability to chat with five people at once. Yes, I am not joking. I have literally done this before, multiple times. I can simultaneously text five different individuals and, as my typing speed is superfast, the delay between message received and reply sent is very less. It’s really hard to predict that I am talking to others also while having a conversation with you. So I wondered if she was that skilled and giving time to both her boyfriend and me.

That’s how I wasted a few hours and then realised it’s 3:30 am already. So instead of sleeping I started to complete my travelogue which I was writing for my college magazine. I submitted that, but I don’t know why the magazine was never published, and nobody was able to actually read it.

For the next few days, I was busy writing a Bengali

poem and drawing for submissions to that college magazine, so I couldn't talk much. Approximately after 3–4 days we were chatting—just like we used to do after dinner—and she told me that “your trust in love will soon come back. After your last heartbreak, you have started to detach yourself from any kind of serious relationship, but I'm sure when you meet the right person, she will be able to take care of the cracks that the heart possesses and heal it with her love and care.” Those few lines were so soothing that I clearly remember each word as if it's etched into my heart.

I replied, “Thanks for saying those kind words; I appreciate your kindness, but we have to be real. I value exclusivity. I don't want a girl who is like an ‘open hotspot’ and accessible to anyone and everyone.” Just after I finished texting her, she shared a WhatsApp chat screenshot and said that she had pinned only two people: one was me, and the other was her female best friend, whose nickname was Golu. I was spellbound. I couldn't express how happy I was after hearing that from her; it was a really special kind of moment for me. I immediately thought that I am describing what my expectations are from my future partner and—surprisingly—she is just the one. She literally has most of the qualities that I was looking for, and she saved my name as “Sohan”.

She apologised to me for not being able to give me a cute nickname. She said, “You have given me such a cute nickname and I haven't even figured out what to call you. I tried a lot of names, but none of them

actually justify the kind of person you are to me.” My inner demon told me to text her, “Bae could be a nice nickname for me.” But I didn’t send that and told her, “I’m happy being called Batman or the Dark Knight. Only God knows when I’ll meet my Catwoman.” After a lot of brainstorming she came up with “Khajur” (= dates) as my nickname. Well, I don’t know why.

Then I got to know that she has migraine pain and immediately my response was like: why does every girl whom I like have migraine pain? Just why? And trust me guys, till now I have found four cases—when I am attracted towards a girl, she is a victim of migraine pain issues. I think maybe I am a sweet guy who doesn’t cause headaches, so God gave those girls migraine pain to compensate.

In January, my sister was suffering from dengue fever. And Dark Choco used to constantly ask about her health; even her mom used to check if my sister’s health had improved or not. This gesture was really special because she was actively taking part—or I would say wanted to be part—of my sister’s healing journey. When I saw the kind of reassuring texts she was sending to my sister to boost her confidence, divert her mind from the suffering, and spend time with her, it made me hopeful of the fact that this girl is genuinely fitted to be Mrs Tamang.

Few days later she sent a poem and told me that she wrote it a long time ago. Nope, she didn’t. It was the poem “Addiction of Yours” by Marcie Martinez. You guys can find it on Google or Pinterest. It’s a really

popular poem and I loved it, especially these lines:

“You are my personal
supply of dopamine.
I’m addicted to how you
make me feel.”

Don’t ask me how I remember the lines of the poem. I am Sohan. My memory is really sharp, and that has a lot of disadvantages too. When I read the poem it sounded familiar and I wondered if she got a reawakening like Jin-Woo got in Solo Leveling. She wasn’t really that good in literature back in school days. Yet I didn’t question the authenticity of the poem and asked her to explain how the poem was written. I wanted to hear my name, but she said, “Once I was obsessed with someone.” While she was trying to describe the reason behind sending this poem, my anticipation was increasing rapidly. I found that I was sweating and I was eagerly waiting to hear my name, but that didn’t happen.

But I wanted that “someone” guy—he just kept the conversation going and started asking about my sister. I said, “Seems like she is already your favourite.”

“No, no, you are my favourite,” she replied. And, as you guys can predict, I was again blushing like a lunatic.

Then she was asking me how my anger-management sessions are going, so I replied, “I am not taking any therapy from any psychiatrist or professional because I’ve got a really good companion to keep my mental health in check.”

She asked with curiosity, “Huh? Who’s that?”

“I call her Dark Choco,” I replied.

She said, “Hey, don’t make me blush, okay? It’s my responsibility to provide you the kind of emotional support you show towards me. By the way, don’t you forget that when I return back home, you must come and I’ll make coffee for both of us. If you don’t like coffee, then I can make hot chocolate too. We will sit together and talk our hearts out.”

“A glass of water is enough. I don’t like tea or coffee. Is your bestie not jealous that I’m snatching you from her, and she is not getting enough attention from you?” I said.

Then she described how she feels bad that after entering college life, they couldn’t spend much time together as their schedules do not match, and she misses her. She asked me if I can teach her how to do stock trading so that she can make at least ₹80–₹90,000 and buy an iPhone for her father. The older phone had slowed down and she wanted to give him a better one.

I don’t do any kind of trading, but I am very much inclined towards long-term investing and personal finance. So I love to talk about this topic, and I started describing from the very basics: how the market works, how to open demat accounts, how to invest, how much return she can expect, what kind of sectors are booming, and the differences between large-cap, mid-cap, and small-cap funds. She was unaware of the fact that I was already investing in a monthly SIP for us. I was creating a dating fund so that I could utilise

the profits to buy gifts and take her on dates and make some memories that we could cherish later. Yes, a lot of you might consider me to be crazy because she hasn't confessed, neither have I, and already I am investing money for the dating life to be somewhat luxurious. I think from this incident alone, you guys can get a rough idea that when I say I am a long-term planner, how long I actually mean—and how deeply I actually plan. Are those plans stupid or smart? That's a different kind of discussion.

Well, I was scared also while taking such decisions because in December 2023, my best friend went through a break-up. He had almost 5 or 6 years of relationship which ended very ruthlessly, and he is still suffering from it. We don't talk that much right now, but I hope he will recover soon. May God give him enough strength to endure the pain and show him the correct path to improve his life. So I never really wanted to go through a similar kind of situation. Maybe that's why I was always very choosy while selecting a partner. I was cautious about with whom I share my issues and with whom I shouldn't. As I knew her from my childhood days, the trust was very high and I was comfortable telling her about my every challenge, my goals, and my expectations without fear of judgement. She was not that much open. She used to answer only when I asked something; she didn't answer to every single question—she kept a lot of things multiple times—but I was okay with it because if we actually get into a potential relationship, then we will have a lot of time to know about each other. So rushing things isn't going to

be good for either of us. That was the reason I didn't force to know deeply about her childhood trauma, past relationships, expectations, fears, or anything that relates to a future with me.

On 22 January 2024, the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya was inaugurated and both of us were really happy about it and we lit diyas at our homes. She said that she has prayed for the recovery of my sister and also for me so that I can achieve all my goals—and there is another secret prayer, which she will tell me later someday. After hearing about the last wish, I was really excited to know what that prayer really was, and I wondered if it was about us.

One day, I sent her a picture of Batman and Catwoman and said that Batman can be vulnerable only in front of the Cat.

“That's a mature relationship. All men should share their worries with their partners without hesitation,” Ava said.

As we were talking every day, I was finding new similarities between me and her. I was actually trying to find the commonalities which can foster a deeper, more meaningful, and robust relationship. Once I told her that when I come to their home, I will tell her mom about all the similarities we share so that when she praises me, you can remind her that you are no less than Sohan—and I actually created a list about the similarities we had. That list consisted of 22 topics or behaviours that were similar between us.

She said that I should definitely read that list and

convince her mom that she is worthy of praise too. I said, “Your mother is going to be shocked after knowing how big of a red flag I am.” Yeah, it was a satire.

She said, “If you are a red flag, then every girl should choose a red flag like you every time.”

But I was not flattered by her reply. “People often realise value after losing certain things,” I said.

“Totally agree with you,” she said.

That night, after our conversation ended, I went to the rooftop and sat under the open sky, staring at the stars. This is my old habit. I love stargazing. That day, the romantic poet inside me tried to express through some words. I had my phone beside me and quickly opened my Notes app to write down whatever emotions I was going through. I’m sharing the poem. Hope you guys will like it.

“I’m on the rooftop, gazing up at the sky,
I’m surrounded by patchy clouds drifting lazily by.
My mind begins to wander, and
I find myself thinking of you—your lovely hair,
your adorable chubby cheeks.
The gentle breeze stirs,
and I feel as though you’re right here beside me.
In this moment, I’m not alone.
You’re with me, and my heart feels full.”

Okay, I never gave it a name, so I think this is a good opportunity to give it one. Let’s name it: “I Am Not Alone.”

My sister had bought the book combo by Colleen

Hoover: “It Starts with Us” and “It Ends with Us.” I shared some quotes from that book; one of them was: “Sometimes the one who loves you is the one who hurts you the most.” Well, I don’t know why I sent it, but she said it’s true, and right now, as I’m typing this after reading my old chat with Ava, I’m also trying to think—why did I send that particular quote to her?

She mentioned that I am an overall green flag, but a darker green. My anger issue and inability to show emotion and vulnerability are the only drawbacks, but that doesn’t make me a red flag. For context, you must know that till this time she had never seen me getting angry or showcasing any kind of aggression, because I was really a softy when it came to her. To the world, I was a very arrogant, masculine guy who was unable to accept any kind of nonsense. I had low patience, and it was really easy back then to trigger me—so I used to react very quickly and with aggression to whoever tried to make fun of me or challenge my authority. But why she kept mentioning my anger issue to be a critical problem from the very beginning was surprising to me. How can someone complain about something not yet experienced, or even know if it actually exists? Even if it exists, the intensity is unknown. So her assessment was mainly based on assumptions.

She said, “According to me, a person has both positive and negative. You cannot love someone just because you want to accept the positives and don’t look at the negatives. You have to love the person as a whole—both the positive and negative—and this is the

reason why I am not just a green flag. I am a green carpet.” Well, whether she was correct or not, you’ll find out very soon in the next chapter—so stay along and keep some patience.

On Republic Day, she talked to my sister, who was by then healthy. She had recovered from her fever, and during the conversation my sister mentioned, “My brother has 25 personalities—so which one do you like? I’m not sure, but once you see the other 24, I’m sure you will consider him a crazy guy and run immediately.” So Ava asked me to confirm if that’s true or not, and I said that she only mentioned 25—it’s actually “50 shades of Sohan.” Here I wanted to say that sometimes I’m an author, sometimes a poet, sometimes a painter, sometimes a graphic designer, sometimes I’m an obedient student, and sometimes I’m just a lazy guy who wants to sleep just one hour more before going out to work.

After hearing my response, she suddenly started to talk about her expectations from love life and said she wants to love only one person for the rest of her life—emotionally, spiritually, mentally, physically, and by every means possible. For her, her life partner is going to be husband, best friend, father figure, comfort zone. So, if her lover leaves her, it will wrench her soul. She won’t die, for sure, but she will become a living zombie. After hearing her description, for the first time I used the word: “Ardhangini” (= complementary female partner who together with her man forms a complete whole, fulfilling each other’s journey in life). I said, “You will

be a great Ardhangini.” This word holds a special place in my heart. I used to think that finally I have found someone worthy enough to be called Ardhangini. And if she really becomes part of my life, then I should stop searching for my better half in anyone else. Ever since, no matter how “better” options arrive in front of me, I would rather make my Ardhangini better than find someone else.

She wanted to know about me and I told her, “I’m not sure if I’ll get married before turning 30, and I want to be a father of a daughter because I think it’s an awesome experience. Seeing a baby girl grow is almost equivalent to seeing a flower bloom, and I really want to have a daughter.”

I used to upload a lot of songs in my Instagram stories and WhatsApp status updates before going to bed, and whenever I posted some romantic song—which I liked and, by the way, those were also liked by her and I didn’t know it—she one night texted me and asked, “Do you always listen to my favourite songs?” I told her, “Whenever I post some romantic song, people generally ask, ‘Who is your Cat, Batman?’ And I don’t have any concrete answer to provide.”

“Okay then, tell them I’m yours,” she texted.

After reading that, I was initially not believing it to be true. I suddenly felt like my heart skipped a beat. I was overwhelmed by a lot of strange emotions. I didn’t clearly know if I was happy or excited or just confused. After a few minutes I realised it’s no more casual friendly chatting. Things are getting really serious, and I must

introspect if I am doing the right thing by attaching her to me. After thinking about it for a while, I gave a small reply: “Approved.”

That night I couldn’t sleep and kept thinking about what had just happened a few minutes ago. Next day, she talked to my sister for about an hour and then texted me: “I am happy to see that you are trying to change. Finally, you are not staying in your room for the whole day. You are actually talking to your sister, opening up to your parents, and also sharing everything with me. This is a good step. I am happy to hear your progress.”

I replied, “As I don’t get compliments frequently, I am unable to give a proper reply without being weird.”

“A lot more compliments are on their way, so learn quickly how to respond to them,” she said.

I thanked Lord Krishna for reuniting us after so many years.

“When your sister said that you are actually changing and your parents are also happy to see you smile again, I was feeling so proud and suddenly noticed that I was crying. You are not just texting; you are actually implementing whatever flaws I talked about, and that made me super proud of you—that you keep your words. The Sohan I knew from my childhood was smart, kind, super polite, and helpful. Hope from now on, you will only improve. Please don’t get back to the situation that you were in during lockdown period,” she said.

I said, “Just like phones, I also get updates very

frequently and I only improve with time. The Sohan you know from your childhood was good. The Sohan you currently know is better, and the person I am becoming is the greatest of all time.”

“I don’t have a problem with misbehaviour because I have a lot of patience. I have a problem with being left. We share a deep sacred bond and I don’t want to lose it by any means,” she added.

My reply was: “I WON’T.”

This is easier to say, but very, very hard to actually deliver. Till today, I keep this promise. I never abandoned her.

After reading her text, I became emotional, then I said: “I was thinking about the past. Our paths. The journey. We sure have come a long way. There were obstacles. In future there will be even more. I’ll keep walking. And even if you be late to arrive, I’ll wait. The journey shouldn’t cease.”

She replied with a line from the poem “Addiction of Yours”:

“A simple reply is enough
for me
to smile and sink into my
chair.”

This confirmed that the poem she sent that night was dedicated to me. At this point, it was not at all essential for either of us to use those three words to express our feelings because we had crossed those bare minimum methods of confession. I was just waiting to

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see her in front of my eyes and talk directly to her while holding her hand and looking straight into those beautiful eyes, to say: “I surrender myself to you for the rest of my life from now, and you are my Ardhangini, my better half.”

I replied, “If this isn’t addiction of yours, then what is?!”

She responded with:

“And dopamine hits my veins once again.”

I was writing a poem for her, which was named “I’m You and You Are Me.” So my response to her line was from my own poem:

“Though roads may bend, and seasons may shift,
I am You, and You are Me, a timeless gift.”

I had taken almost four days to finish it and, surprisingly, I predicted the whole arc of my love story—the beginning, the romantic phase when both made promises of never leaving each other, the turbulent phase when both were scared of losing each other, and the last phase, when I kept waiting for one reassurance I never received.

On 30 January, she was free the whole day, so she texted me before going to bed: “Next day I have nothing to do, so I am ready to wait for your messages.” I was happy that I would get more than 24 hours straight, which is a rare thing as I used to sleep at around 12:30 am, but now I could talk to her the whole afternoon, the whole evening, even before I went for dinner, and just after I returned from dinner until I went to bed

again. So this was a big opportunity for me, and for the first time in these many months, we were about to spend a whole day together—well, not really together, but connected through the internet.

When she went to the gym, I was waiting eagerly for her to return. When she returned, I sent her a beautiful message:

“When you are far away from me,
Even minutes feel like hours,
And hours feel like eternity
Without you and your powers.
But when you are close to me,
Even hours feel like minutes,
And minutes feel like seconds
With your warmth and your presence.”

She apologised for being late to return. That day was her leg-exercise day at the gym, and after an intense workout she was really tired, but her mom didn't book any cab. Instead, they walked the whole way to their home, and she started yapping about why her mom doesn't listen to her. I used to really love when she talked to me like this little girl who is just annoyed by some casual stuff and wants somebody to listen to her non-stop chatter.

She mentioned that cooking delicious food for loved ones is her way to showcase her affection, so she would cook all the dishes that I like and feed me by her hand. I asked her, “What are my options if I ever try to sneak into your heart?” She laughed and then replied,

“Don’t try too hard. The lovely personality you are, you can enter any time, but you’re not allowed to exit.” I blushed and replied with shaky hands: “I’m okay with that. Even I won’t dare to leave.”

She told me that when she was a baby, her mom used to call her “Nonno”. That is indeed a cute name. So I named my smartphone “Nonno”, so that whenever I picked up my phone in my hand or tried to search it—because I sometimes really forget where I had put my phone—every time I touched it I would remember that this crazy girl is waiting for me more than 200 km away, and I am also waiting to sit beside her and just be with her.

Ava’s mom has Vitamin B12 deficiency and sometimes she faces difficulty working due to pain in her wrist. After I came to know that fact, I scolded aunty. I replied to Ava, “In a family, mother is the pillar of strength. So keeping her well is necessary for the family to function well.” I admire aunty a lot. Hope she is well and taking good care of herself.

“I’ll ask aunty whom she loves more: me or you. I know she’ll choose me,” I added.

She said, “Yeah, that’s true.”

I don’t know why this happens, but it’s now a fact that whenever I am close to any girl, I am even closer to their mother. So every time I was in some form of attachment, the mom has always loved me more than the daughter.

Now we are just a few steps away from the climax of this chapter. On 1 Feb, I began the chat with my

top-notch flirting skills: “You know what, I am obsessed with your eyes.”

“And I am obsessed with you,” she replied.

This set the tone for the rest of that night’s conversation. Next I received a poem from her:

“To the flower in heaven
where is it that you lurk in this abyss of Infinity.
I’ve looked for you from horizon to horizon.

Do you even know that you are the muse for my million poems?

Brighter than all the stars in the sky, you fill me with light boundless.

A symbol of grace and purity that you’re, I literally and figuratively always look up to you.”

And this was a moment. I was actually trying to say that let’s not pretend anymore about what we both are trying to convey, and let’s officially begin our new journey. But she suddenly sent me the poem “Addiction of Yours” once more and said: “You wanted to know to whom I dedicated the poem, right? Here is the answer.”

At this moment my heart started to race. My ears were waiting to hear my name. But the name I heard was a complete stranger to me—her ex. I started to overthink and my throat went dry. I didn’t have a water bottle by my side and I was not willing to get up and bring one. She narrated her past two relationships and, with every new detail, the strange pain in my chest kept increasing.

After she finished bitching about both of her exes,

she started crying and my heart was wrenching after hearing her broken voice. For the first time in all these months I was receiving voice messages from her. After almost four years I heard her voice—and that wasn't a sweet dialogue; all I heard was her frustration with her exes, and the hatred she possessed at one time felt artificial. "How can both only mistreat her from the beginning to the end? Did they never have any love for her in the first place? But that's unusual. How can both only possess darkness? If we ever separate, will she portray me the same way to the fourth guy?"—these questions puzzled my mind.

I am a very practical guy who thinks a lot before making decisions. I thought that I should, right now, take a back seat and assess her true intentions—why did she all of a sudden start talking about her past and acting like a victim? I seriously wanted to cry because the girl I was talking to for these months and the girl I was seeing right now didn't actually resemble that much.

But she said something so deep and emotional that caused me to shift my analytical brain and act purely with blind faith and emotions. She said, "You have always been there when I needed someone to hear me. You have always guided me when I needed someone to show me the correct path. You have changed yourself a lot so that you don't hurt me while communicating. I don't want to cover up anything from my past life and the cards I bear. I don't want to hurt you and, most importantly, I don't want to lose you. Even when

I think I may lose you, that thought alone causes me tears. It causes me pain. If something like this again happens to me, I won't be able to live anymore."

After hearing her words, it became crystal clear that this is nothing more than emotionally manipulating me to say yes to her, because in the last few lines she associated my absence with harm to herself—and she knew very well that I would never allow that to happen, and I would never try to cause anything that creates trauma or pain in her life. So the answer was decided when she finished her sentence. I replied, "I won't do the same. I won't leave you. I have always kept my promise, and I promise you that I'll be with you."

And after that I made my honest confession because I had predicted every possibility that could happen next: "I don't know whether you ever loved me or not, wanted me or not. If you think that Sohan isn't good enough or you deserve better, that's totally fine. Explore the world. I just want to see the smile and those charming eyes one last time and I'm totally fine. I'll meet you not because I want you to be mine. I want to collect some memories which I can cherish for the rest of my life. Just be happy."

As I knew that she assumes a lot of things in her head, I tried to give her an option to actually choose if she really wants to continue something meaningful with me only after she meets me physically. The last time she had seen me was four years ago; since then a lot has changed. Let her spend an hour or two with me without any help of technology, observe my behaviour,

my gestures, the tone I use to communicate, my body language—and then she is allowed to take any path she feels right.

She replied, “I am not sure what’s going to happen in the future, but after all, you have accepted me—that’s more than enough for me. One thing I can say for sure is that I won’t leave you ever.”

“Okay, stop crying and tell me one thing—why did you like me when we were in school? I wasn’t a topper. I wasn’t best at anything and you were exceptional, so what made you fall in love with me?” she asked.

So I started explaining how I saw a glimpse of myself within her. At the end, I said, “When my best friend had his break-up last year, I was there to provide emotional support, but if the same thing happens, I am damn sure that I won’t have his back. I won’t have anyone because, as you know, I am not able to share my pain with people. So don’t take any decision without thinking deeply. Take time if you want, but trust me, I don’t want to face similar consequences like him.”

“I’m a wife material, so don’t take too much stress. I know how to handle you. Everything will be fine. Just stay chill. I won’t do the same thing others have done to me. I assure you that this love will be eternal this time. You won’t worry about anything going wrong. I stay with you forever. Good night, my Khajur,” she texted.

“Good night, my Dark Choco,” I replied—being totally unaware of the fact that this is the beginning of the end. I slept with the satisfaction that finally we had told each other to stay forever.