



SHOULD I
HATE
— OR —
LOVE

Inspired by a True Love Story

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Notion Press

Old No. 38, New No. 6
McNichols Road, Chetpet
Chennai - 600 031

First Published by Leadstart Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2016

Republished by Notion Press 2018

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ISBN 978-1-64429-747-6

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Chapter 1



Walking outside India Gate, right near the fountain, a silent soul was wandering in the chilly winter night, wondering why he was there and what he was doing. Alone was what he knew he would be—he had made his peace with it, but this feeling was overwhelming. Only one day was left now, and he would finally lose what was never his. He wandered around for a few more minutes, trying to make himself disappear in the fog as his phone rang for the seventh time. It was time to return, but he didn't want to; this place was as comforting as he first remembered it to be.

“Sir..?” the driver gave a small smile as soon as he realised Aayan was back from his stroll.

“I took a bit longer than usual.” Aayan grinned at the driver as he continued, “What were you thinking?” Aayan shifted comfortably on the seat.

There were very few people who cared about Aayan; one such person was his driver. “I am still not able to understand why you come here again and again,” the driver spoke while putting the key in the ignition.

“Well, I like this place.” Aayan gave him a smile that hid a lot more than it said. The driver knew with just one look that this topic was not okay for Aayan.

“Every time we are here, you narrate a few lines,” the driver said as he slowed the car as the traffic light was



just about to turn red. “I would love to hear a few words.” The driver smiled as he looked into the rear-view mirror, straight at Aayan.

“It’s nice to know that at least somebody finds me interesting,” said Aayan, making the driver chuckle.

“Somebody? Sir! You are mistaken,” the driver almost exclaimed. “Everyone I know and all the people you work with are very fond of your poems.”

Aayan laughed, sinking deep into the seat of his car. “I am glad that you like them.” The only thing that could distract him was his poems. He took a deep sigh, closing his eyes and thinking deeply. The driver knew now that the masterpiece of the day was about to come.

Concentrating hard, Aayan was totally in another world now, thinking about a day which belonged to him. He chirped lowly:

Ye rimjhim barish aaj bhi aati hai
(This drizzling rain pours even today)
Ye chaandani aaj bhi sharmati hai
(This moonlight blushes even today)
Kabhi hauley se muskurati hai
(Sometimes it very slyly gives a smile)
To kabhi mujhe satati hai
(Or sometimes it teases me)
Par har dafa maaf kar deta hu isey
(But I forgive her every time)
Kabhi mere liye
(Sometimes for myself)
Kabhi tere liye
(Sometimes for you)

Everything was silent as only a low buzz of traffic noise enveloped his thoughts. When the poem was over, the

pain returned. It was weird to just think about how someone could so powerfully rule someone else's life. *For him it was her.*

As soon as the car reached the apartment, Aayan opened his eyes. "You dropped the invitation?" asked Aayan. "Yes, sir, and she accepted it gladly... admiring your little poem at the end of the invitation," said the driver with an ear-to-ear grin.

Everybody loved Samaira, and it was quite obvious that she was in love with Aayan. Often, the only thought that struck Samaira's mind was: *Who wouldn't love him!* He was not just a closed book but a bound book with each page glued with bits of gum and tape, which she was very eager to unfold. *If only*, she thought. *If only he would let me carry his baggage...*

Contrary to Aayan, Samaira had quite a brisk lifestyle with lots of friends and a loving family; all she ever wanted was Aayan's acceptance of her love, which was quite a tricky part. Even after working for the past three years with Aayan, and being quite close to him, she felt the distance between them, and that made her feel hollow.

"I knew she would." Aayan smiled, shaking his head, imagining Samaira screaming with joy, as she often asked him to write specifically for her. Though what he had written in the invitation was not meant specifically for her, he knew she would be happy.

"Don't come tomorrow," said Aayan, shifting his weight from one toe to the other. "I am taking the day off."

"Okay, sir." The driver nodded, sighing inwardly. Not a single day passed by when Aayan was not at work; even when he was running a fever of 104 degrees, he was there. Not even malaria could stop him a year ago.



He was, undoubtedly, a workaholic. The driver furrowed his eyebrows, making Aayan smile.

“A man needs his rest to cheer himself up.” Aayan raised his eyebrows with a smile. His perfectly aligned teeth flashed. The driver nodded with a smile, still not letting the worried furrowed eyebrows relax. Aayan sprinted towards his flat and knocked on the door. He knew it wouldn’t be the one he wanted, but that was something he needed to deal with.

“You are back, son,” Shyam Kaka exclaimed, letting Aayan into the house. Kaka was like family to him; since he had started to live alone he was all he got, apart from his driver and Samaira. Even the hardest bits didn’t worry him when he was under the spell of Samaira’s giggles. She was indeed his best friend and probably much more than that.

“I have cooked all the things you asked me to,” Shyam Kaka said with a smile. His face was now older than how Aayan first remembered it to be. But Kaka’s eyes held the same love they did since the very start.

“Thank you, Kaka,” Aayan said, taking his coat and shoes off, placing them in their right places. If being down-to-earth actually meant something, Aayan truly embodied it. “It’s the first time you ever asked me to cook so many things.” Kaka gave him a glass of lukewarm water as Aayan placed himself on the couch after turning on the heater. It was colder than usual; he didn’t blame the weather, instead, he could feel his soul turning cold inside him. “I have got company tonight, Kaka.” Aayan gave a fake smile.

“In four years, has anyone ever been here?” Kaka gaped at Aayan, astonished. “It’s Samaira, Kaka.” Aayan nodded, saying her name. “Oh! I like that girl.” Kaka

almost clapped with joy. “She is one kind and beautiful child of God.” Kaka still remembered the time when he was ill, and she had brought him flowers almost every day for a week. Though Aayan was enough to take care of Kaka, Samaira still brought Kaka flowers each morning. He couldn’t ever forget her smiling face making him soup and taking care of him when one fine day Aayan needed to be out on a case. The life of an IPS officer was not easy to deal with, and Aayan was best known for his dedication to his work.

Aayan moved to his room for freshening himself up before Samaira arrived. There was still an hour for that. He splashed some cold water on his face and closed the tap tightly.

“Aayan,” Samaira chirped from outside his room. Folding the sleeves of the shirt he was wearing, he went out. There she was, happy and excited, waiting for Aayan with a huge smile on her face. As soon as she laid her eyes on him, she was mesmerised. He looked so divine in his white shirt, and his black pants were hanging deliciously from his hips! At once she wanted to worship him—he was not just the smartest person she knew, but he was the hottest.

“You are early,” Aayan raised his eyebrows quizzically, rescuing her from the ongoing turbulence of wild thoughts in her head.

“Well! As I was the only one invited, I thought I was allowed to be early.” Samaira blushed with a cute shade of pink on her face. “So, it’s a date, I guess?” Samaira giggled.

“You might call it one!” Aayan nodded with a chuckle. “You brought something?” Aayan noticed the bottle of mock champagne she was holding. Samaira held the bottle out for him with a smile. “So, this is your den?”



Samaira looked around for a bit. She had been here hundreds of times but was never in Aayan's room before. It was like any normal room with a bed, a small love seat and a few cute furniture sets holding Aayan's degrees and diplomas. "Why are those frames empty?" she asked as she moved towards a wooden shelf painted a dark metallic shade of black.

Aayan laughed. "Would you like some mocktail first?" he asked, moving out of the room.

"Yeah sure," Samaira replied, completely distracted.

Walking out of his room, Samaira took a last glance at the empty frames. Aayan followed her into the dining room where Shyam Kaka was waiting for them. "Kaka, can you bring us two wine glasses please?" Aayan smiled, to which Kaka nodded walking towards the kitchen. Aayan held out a chair for Samaira.

"Thank you." Samaira smiled, shifting comfortably on the seat. Aayan poured two glasses of mock champagne, and he offered one to her gracefully before sitting down himself. Aayan offered her a plate of a gourmet meal as she was in a daze due to his intense and bright, big brown eyes. *Stop staring. You might creep him out,* Samaira thought before abruptly taking her eyes off him; Aayan laughed as he noticed this.

"What is so special about today?" Samaira tried to talk, taking a sip of her champagne. "As far as I can remember, it's not your birthday," she continued involving herself in the web of her thoughts.

"Someone, a few months ago, said that I was closed like a book, and was eager to know about me." Aayan smirked in between. "Well, I want to prove that somebody wrong." He pointed at Samaira. She giggled.

“Well, I have known you for years,” she chirped.

“Still, I don’t know you at all,” she completed her line before taking another sip of her champagne.

“I want to tell you everything about me.” Aayan smiled as he was lost in thoughts.

Samaira waited as she wanted this moment to just freeze. *Just two of us, and silence...* She smiled at her thoughts!

“... And after that, I would love to officially ask you out.” Aayan’s voice was serious now.

Ahh! I knew it was a dream. Samaira was quite casual about this while sipping her champagne, just when she actually sensed the seriousness of his words. “Out?” she spoke hastily.

“Yep!” Aayan smirked.

“Out as in on a safari with a few other friends like we did two years back?” Samaira was fully alert to what she was saying.

“Nope!” Aayan laughed out loud and smiled as he met Samaira’s big eyes, which were even bigger right now. Along the path, down the road, he had fallen for her a bit. He knew he needed closure before he moved on. “Out! As in dating out,” Aayan said, confidently meeting Samaira’s gaze, holding her there.

“Out, what... why... whaatt? Oh, shit! I need some air,” Samaira said, spilling her champagne on the table and some on herself. “Oh, shit! No! The stain!” Aayan stood up to rescue her, but his glass went down next, followed by the bottle which was right next to his glass. There was a clattering sound and mess all about. He had mock champagne all over his lap by the time he stood up.



“That will take a hell lot of time to clean.” Samaira pointed at his crisp white shirt flooded with sparkling yellow liquid and stains near the arm and on his almost-black dark green pants. They both cracked up with laughter before everything went calm and silent again.

“Well!” Aayan smiled. “Let’s do coffee instead?” Samaira nodded, holding back a giggle. He walked her to the couch.

“You must get out of those clothes, it’s cold,” Samaira said, staring at Aayan and holding back her urge to touch him.

“Yeah.” Aayan smiled and moved back to his room, asking Shyam Kaka for two coffees. Samaira jumped on to the couch trying to take in what Aayan had just said to her.

“Samaira.” Aayan stood in front of her in his comfy almost-black-dark-green pants and a light blue T-shirt. “I thought you hated colours,” Samaira pointed. Aayan laughed, holding out to her a steaming hot mug of coffee and sitting down beside her. “I might surprise you in many other ways, Samaira.”

“What you said earlier...” Samaira hesitated.

“That I wanted to ask you out on a date as my girlfriend?” Aayan nodded with every word.

“You were kidding, right?” Samaira asked.

“No! I really like you,” Aayan insisted. “But...”

“But?” Samaira asked.

“I want to tell you everything about me, and I want you to come with me tomorrow, somewhere, so that we can start our relationship afresh...” Aayan got entangled in a web of thoughts. “That is, if you still want to, after knowing me.”

“Why would you say that?” Samaira gulped her extra bit of hot coffee as she spoke and regretted that instantly.

“I am a bound book.” Aayan smiled, holding back his pain. “There is a reason.”

“With or without, I will always be yours and with you,” Samaira finally spoke up.

They both fell into a deep silence.

“Yeah, Mr IPS, you relax now, because once you are mine completely, you will miss it.” Samaira giggled with a blush.

“Happy to do so, ma’am.” Aayan smiled sincerely.

“Open the book, Aayan. It’s time you did.” Samaira smiled as they both faced each other, sipping coffee.

Chapter 2



*"Meri ruh jis mukaam ki talash me hai
(My soul is in search of that goal)
Vo mukaam kal haasil hoga
(I will achieve that goal tomorrow)
Itney barson tak jo tadpa hai dil
(So many years the heart has suffered)
Kal har sitam ka hisab hoga
(Tomorrow every suffering will get its due)
Ruswa kar aaunga kisi ko uski gali me
(Will disgrace someone in her lanes)
Samsheer se mohobbat ka sir kalam hoga
(Will behead love with a sword)
Intehan hui thi jo intzaar ki
(The trial which the long wait went through)
Kal uss intehaan ka bhi intkaam hoga
(Tomorrow that trial will also be ended)."*

Samaira was spellbound again; the only thing that could end her constant blabbering was his words.

Deep. Meaningful. Painful.

"I have a family. I don't visit them, and they consider me dead!" Aayan started. "Mr Sudhir and Mrs Manorama..."



<<FLASHBACK>>

It was an October morning. Aayan was sleeping soundlessly. “What is this? Just 72 in English?” screamed Aayan’s mother in a high pitch, making him toss and turn in his sleep. “You are such a worthless creature!” She slapped him hard, waking him up.

“What happened, Mom?” Aayan asked, shocked and scared. Manorama slapped him once again. “You tell me what the hell happened to you!” she said, shoving his mark sheet on his face. “Why didn’t you study, you moron?” she screamed as Aayan kept his eyes on his report card. “You are not stepping outside this house to play from now on; get this in your dumb head.” Manorama hit him again before leaving his room.

Little Aayan was scared and was crying silently. Little sobs were audible, but just to him. He shivered on hearing the noise that was coming from downstairs.

“You bitch,” Sudhir slapped Manorama. “What the hell is this? Can’t you clean a glass properly?” He smashed the glass on the floor. “You just rest all day. You don’t work at all. Look at those spider webs. Who is going to remove them? Am I supposed to do that too?” Sudhir shouted harder this time.

“Divorce me then?” Manorama sniffled.

“What did you just say?” Rage was flowing all over Sudhir’s face.

“I said divorce me then if I am so much of a problem. Why don’t you divorce me and let me leave?” Manorama yelled. “I am not your maid. If you want everything perfect and neat, appoint a maid for this house.”

“Some nerve you’ve got answering me back,” Sudhir said as he started to beat her black and blue. “Your

father has shoved us with loads of money that you are demanding a maid. Dare not utter another word or I will not think twice before slitting your throat and discarding your body somewhere to rot,” Sudhir screamed, slapping her even harder than before.

Aayan heard everything, shielding his ears from the abuse. Still crying, he ran into the bathroom and locked himself in. He splashed cold water on his face. Finally letting it flow over him, he was now crying hard. His eyes turned red, and his head was starting to ache. “What are you doing, God? For how long do I have to live with all this? I can’t take it anymore, God. Please, please make everything disappear, I beg you, please.”

Just then Manorama knocked on the door. “Aayan, make it quick. Your father is waiting. You need to see the doctor today, remember?” Manorama spoke through the closed door. She was used to her husband’s cruelty; she no longer cried after being beaten. “I will be there in five minutes, Mom,” Aayan replied, hastily letting the water run down his body.

“Hurry up, Aayan, we are getting late. You are becoming as lazy as your mother,” Sudhir scolded.

Ayaan consoled himself and quickly slipped into his clothes and headed downstairs. He had an intestinal infection and needed to be operated upon that day. He was scared as he entered the hospital with his father. There was no one there to try and make him feel better, and all his father did was scare him more. He always hated the smell of the hospital; the pungent smell of the cleanser and chlorine burned his nose and hit his head.

“Are you on an empty stomach, Aayan?” the doctor asked with a smile on his kind face. Aayan nodded. “Good,” the doctor said. “Don’t be afraid, my son.”



The doctor smiled, holding out a glass full of syrup. “You can have this juice for now.”

Aayan took it and drank the whole glass in one go, thinking that the syrup was juice. Not long after, he started to feel dizzy and eventually fell asleep.

A few hours later, when he regained his consciousness, he was taken back to his room, with liquid painkillers flowing into his veins. “What happened, Papa?” asked Aayan, as he felt pain in his belly.

“It’s nothing; you will be alright,” Sudhir grunted as he read some papers. “Look at all these bills; we have to check out right now. These people are conning us.” Aayan was drifting back to sleep. When he woke up again, he was on his way back home.

“Papa, it’s hurting!” Aayan cried out in pain as Sudhir drove recklessly.

“Ahh! Stop complaining. You are fine now. You can take rest once we are home. You are going to school tomorrow; you have missed your studies a lot this month,” Sudhir said and drove faster than required.

“Papa, it’s paining,” Aayan grunted.

“Stop whining like Mom, be a man. You will be fine in some time,” Sudhir replied. They were home by evening. Aayan had semi-liquid food and water for dinner before he went back to sleep.

The next morning, he went to school.

“Your last three chapters are incomplete,” Aayan’s science teacher screamed. “Sorry, sir... Actually, I was too ill over the last two weeks... so I had to absent myself from school many times... just give me two or three days, I’ll complete it, sir,” requested Aayan.

But the teacher was in no mood to listen to anything. “No, this time your grades are also not good. Go to the reception and call your dad. Ask him to come here and meet me.”

Aayan requested a lot, but there was no effect on the teacher. It was the first time that he had been asked to call someone from home. Before that, there was not a single complaint about him. But today, it seemed, something wrong was going to happen. His heart could feel it beforehand. But he was unable to pacify his teacher. Finally, with heavy steps and a downward pitiful face, he reached the reception and made a call to his father.

<<*AFTER SOME TIME*>>

“Hello, Mr Sudhir... I have called you to complain about your child. Actually, he hasn’t completed his written work on the due date...” complained the teacher to Aayan’s father.

“Why is it so, Aayan...?” asked Sudhir, turning towards Aayan.

“Sir, he told me he wasn’t able to complete it because of his illness!” said the confused teacher. On hearing this, suddenly Sudhir slapped Aayan in front of everyone.

“No, sir... Please don’t...” interfered the teacher, shocked by Sudhir’s reaction.

“Sir, he’s the biggest liar... he wasn’t ill at all... he was absolutely fine,” lied Sudhir blatantly. Aayan felt as if someone had just given him a 1000-volt shock; he just looked at his dad with thousands of questions floating in his mind. He had not thought even in his worst nightmare that his dad could do something like this. He was just not



able to differentiate if it was a dream or reality. That one slap from his father had made imprints not on his face but on his heart.

“But, sir, he was absent too for so many days in the past few weeks...” added the teacher.

Sudhir again slapped Aayan and blamed him. “Sir, I have myself dropped him daily at school; he must be bunking the classes. I don’t know the reason behind it.”

Aayan was still not able to comprehend why his dad was doing so when his father himself was the one who took him to the hospital for his operation. And now the same person was beating and blaming him. Every single moment was killing Aayan on the inside. His situation was not any different from a fish which had been forcefully pulled out of the water or a bud that had just started blossoming but had been plucked even before spreading a single petal. He could neither utter a single word nor run from there.

“Oh my God... he is such a big liar... I didn’t know that... you don’t worry, Mr Sudhir. Now I’ll see how he’s not going to study well...” said the teacher, agreeing with Sudhir.

Aayan was not able to react. He was shocked and surprised, just crying and searching for the reason behind all this. Touching the imprints of that slap with his fingers, with his innocent eyes brimming with tears, his heart and mind were asking only one question to God: “Why?” Why his father was doing this to his own son was a mystery to him. But what he was getting was not the answer but mere silence.

“Of course, sir, I give you full authority to punish him as much as you want. I won’t even say a single word.

And do take care to never ever believe him, as he's such a big liar, even if someday he says that his mom and dad are dead!" Sudhir said snidely.

This last line of his father gave him the shock of his life and shattered him completely. Could a son stoop to such lies? Perhaps no, but then why did his father accuse him today? What was it that Aayan didn't know about? Or rather, what mistake did he commit that day to make all this happen to him?

"Now, you just relax, sir. I know how to handle him," the teacher assured Sudhir.

*"Ye lamha jo mera ho na saka
(This moment which never belonged to me)
Dard jo aankhon me so na saka
(Pain which couldn't sleep in the eyes)
Jaaney kiss khata ki sazaa mili aaj
(Don't know for which fault of mine I am being
punished)
Dil tutkar bhi ro na saka
(Heart could not cry even after being broken)."*

<<FLASHBACK OVER>>

"Aayan, I'm sorry, but is Uncle mad or what? Why did he do that? Parents always protect their child in every adverse situation, even if they themselves have to lie somewhere. But it's just... I'm speechless..." interrupted Samaira while still feeling utterly shocked.

"No, yaar... it's nothing like that; there must have been a reason for that. All parents love their children, and they always do everything for their good..." said Aayan, still in defense of his father.



But only he knew the pain, which he still used to feel on remembering that day in his heart, yet, still, he was not aware of the reason behind that deed of his dad. His eyes were still full of questions. Even though he was an IPS officer now, who served his society diligently, the single question that always pierced him within was why his dad had behaved like that. Just a single question... Why...? Why...?

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