

## And We Remained

“Everything about the book is unique. It’s title, cover, storyline, the narrative, the ending. Each and every part of it. At times it will leave you in splits and at times with a sense of nostalgia. The book is fast paced and interesting.” - **Anusha D’Souza**, Blogger

“What a lovely title to a book *And We Remained* is. There is a sense of contented incompleteness to it, like ellipses leading to an invisible forever-after. You will receive this book like you do the regular cup of coffee from college canteens – with love, heartbreak, prison, politics, drinking and strip clubs all in the same bean, written in a language that is simple, young, conversational, often slangy, definitely lacking lyricism but certainly not correctness. *And We Remained* remains a light and entertaining read ending on a sweet note and affirming the bonds of college friendship, exactly what its author intended it to be.” - **Sakshi Nanda**, Award winning blogger

“Style of narration is the icing on the cake. You feel as if you are one of the characters of the story that is unfolding in front of you. The transitions from flash-back to present are so well timed and elegantly managed, that you hardly feel any discomfort adjusting to the settings. With the language easy to comprehend, you can easily finish it in one sitting.” - **Vikas Navaratna**, IISc

“Read your book today from cover to cover. Must say, I enjoyed reading it a lot! I was laughing out loud in places. All in all a nice refreshing read - light and frothy yet deep and insightful in places.” - **Rubina Firdaus**, IBM

“*And We Remained* is happy, sad, funny, naughty, crooked, witty, romantic...!!!! Its a perfect blend of all flavours of college life!! And the best part of it is the way its written. Its simple and easy, crystal clear. No difficult words or weird jargons!! Its simply simple!!” - **Anuja Joshi**, IISc

"The first book I have ever read cover to cover in my life. Believe me I had not even read a comic book before. Out of curiosity I wanted to read the first few pages, and I ended up finishing the whole book." -**Nikhath Fathima**, Housewife

"The narrative is new and innovative, which is commendable, considering it is his first book. If you would like to feel nostalgic and go back to those 'good old days', this one is recommended!" - **Radhika Nair**, IISc

"Finished reading in one go... Loved your style of narration." -**Kumudini Ravindra**, Management Consultant.

"I had thought, novels are not for me. And then, for the very FIRST time, I read your book start to finish in one sitting." - **Ashwin Sheshadri**, CSC

"I like how u generate curiosity and keep the readers guessing. Trust me, if I don't like the first page, I try really hard to like the second page, but if a book can't capture my interest, then forget it!!!! But, I really liked it. Its awesome!!!" -**Dr. Madhavi V**, Dentist

"This is something refreshing after long! A good read and total fun, that anyone from hostel and college years can relate to practically. Difficult to put down once you start-off ! No morals or lessons ... narrative and contemporary style of writing." - **Tina Dasgupta**, Oracle

"A must read - this novel took me back to my college days and I could relate to so many incidents...money worth spent." - **Santosh Acharya**, Oracle

"I had stopped reading non-academic books after joining Srishti. But I read yours at one go. Its really engrossing; definitely not boring." - **Paulami Roy Choudhuri**, Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology.

An  
**AND**  
Absorbing  
**WE**  
Story  
**REMAINED**  
Told Differently

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Based on actual events, a guaranteed entertaining read.

Asad Ali Junaid

## **And We Remained**

An absorbing story told differently...

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## Synopsis

*And We Remained* started a story which needed to be told. The story though, wasn't a short one. How it had to be narrated had to be different as well.

*And We Remained* then turned into a 52,000 word novel, with an absorbing story and a unique narration style. In the 1990's, India is going through tremendous socio-economic changes. Set in this era, it is a coming of age story of five engineering friends—Sahir, Sandeep, Gopal, Anand and David—and the women in their lives, especially the beautiful Wardha. Their intertwined story is told by these friends through first person accounts of events in their engineering college contrasted in alternate chapters with their lives a few years later when they keep in touch, narrate events in their lives and share their experiences in India and abroad through emails.

*And We Remained* takes you on an entertaining journey through college, love, heartbreak, prison, politics, drunken binges, strip clubs, US and Europe as they hang on to sanity and their identities in a fast changing society and a nation in flux.

*“It is a risk to love. What if it doesn’t work out?  
Ah, but what if it does.”*  
– Peter McWilliams

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PART  
ONE

# CHAPTER 1

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Sahir Hassan

**December 1998, Bangalore**

I had flunked four.

My body went cold in one of the dimly lit, dusty offices of the Electrical Engineering department as I saw my sixth semester results in rolls of low quality printer paper. Every ounce of warm blood was draining out in a rush through my toes. I did not know how to react—I had never faced such a situation in the entirety of my student life.

The smile that Wardha had on her face as she took my note which ended everything flashed in my mind. She took the note from me without batting an eyelid, without the least bit of hesitation about me or my intent. Wardha's reaction as she took my note and all the subsequent hurt, made the decision of ending everything top the list of those 'what-were-you-thinking' moments in my life. Regret engulfed me. An irrepressible urge to slam my fist into the nearest wall started from within. I

could only imagine alternatives where there could have been no hurt, no bitterness.

“Hi Sahir. What happened, actually?” Sandeep Gadwal, a good soul and my best friend in undergrad, asked me.

“I lost four,” I said, as a hollow tone replaced my voice. I wasn’t sure which sentiment should have expressed itself to state my dismal status.

“Oh, fuck...” Sandeep said.

Between us, the need for profanity did not arise often.

I had always been an above-average student, had never seen a ‘fail’ against my name on any subject before engineering. I had earned my admission—on merit—in the prestigious Engineering College of Vidyakeerthi University (ECVU). I did not expect this from myself.

“You?” I asked him.

“I barely managed to clear all the eight subjects, got gold medals in three of them,” he said. A ‘gold medal’ meant one had cleared the subject with the lowest marks possible. “Why are you purposely letting such things happen to you?” he asked.

I shrugged. Sandeep was not expecting a specific answer either.

Sandeep and I had the same amount of interest in academics during engineering—which wasn’t much—and shared the last bench in class. We went to class so that our names would not be on the attendance-shortage lists before the final exams—we couldn’t afford to pay our way out of them. We managed to clear our subjects every semester without needing any subsequent ones for doing so.

The sixth semester turned out to be a huge exception—for me.

It was common knowledge that the sixth semester demanded the most in terms of academic workload for electrical engineering. I was also an office bearer of the college student’s union, trying to discharge my responsibilities as earnestly as I could.

And then there was Wardha.

I understood then, that the consequences of my action had gone well beyond repair. While still in love, and knowing somewhere at the back of my mind that she felt the same about me—for a little time, at least—I saw her every day in ECVU with this someone else. My heart ached. Every day after that was agony.

Stories about love did not end like this... Or did they?

Sandeep had a fair idea about the turmoil I was going through. He had more than a few clues about the havoc that threatened to tear me apart. There was nobody who could help—neither him nor my parents. Nobody doubted my caliber or my abilities to do well in Engineering. There were different demons I was fighting and there wasn’t any doubt that I was the one being pummelled into submission.

I began to hang out with Sandeep from the second semester at ECVU. We shared a career ambition to head the photography division of Playboy. Neither of us could afford a camera or had got a chance to click even a set of fully clothed people until then.

Like most that landed at ECVU, the two of us had little cash to spare. I never wanted to ask my Dad for money and Sandeep only had his Mom to ask money from. We watched movies sitting in the cheapest seats, usually closest to the screen

and ordered the lowest costing items at *darshinis*—Bangalore’s popular eateries.

Sandeep and I caught the same bus to and back from ECVU. Sandeep always managed to jostle his way into the ever-crowded BTS buses—our pathetic excuse for public transport—and get us seats. Footboarding was our only alternative to commute home if we failed to get seats. Overflowing buses, with people hanging on to them for dear lives, had become a common sight across the growing and bursting-at-its-seams city of Bangalore.

During this time, Sandeep and I started to prefer the Sidney Sheldons, Jeffrey Archers, Irving Wallaces, (and the Playboys and the Letters to Penthouse) over the Hardy Boys and the Nancy Drews. We began listening to the Guns And Roses and the Metallicas and shared the same taste in movies—those which played in theaters and those which were legally not allowed to play in them.

And both of us spent sleepless nights smitten by Wardha.

Though Sandeep and I got along with everyone—from the front benchers of our class who stayed buried in books attempting to do justice to engineering, to the girls’ shy cricket team who lived, ate and breathed cricket—we made our closest friends from our batch in the Mechanical Engineering department, Gopal and Anand.

Gopal was a simpleton, easily trusting and confiding. He gorged on oodles of ghee through the delicacies his Amma often made for him. He fancied he had a talent for singing but, fortunately for all of us, managed to keep it a secret through engineering. He was a God fearing, family guy and usually hung out with a horde of cousins outside ECVU.

Anand was the intellectual kind who devoured books and had a sharp wit. Both his parents were doctors. In fact, most in Anand’s family were either doctors or surgeons. Anand tried his best to not feel like a fish out of water in mechanical engineering or around girls. Women Anand’s ‘type’ were a rarity at ECVU. Private engineering colleges had plenty of his preferred variety where they decked themselves with tighter and smaller clothes—which revealed more than they hid.

David from electronics—the singer and Thalaiva incarnate—was a late addition to our group. He became the most popular guy at ECVU for having the X factor to handle girls with an audacity that left all of us in awe of him.

The three of them, wanted to hang out and even attend classes with us in Electrical Engineering—for a variety of non-academic reasons. Sushmita Ma’am—of our Electrical Engineering department—topped their list of such motives. Whenever she taught in their department—which wasn’t often—the classes were full. Their department did not even have the concept of attendance shortage each semester. Their students were free to walk in and out of classes as they pleased.

Gopal though, had a stronger motivation for his interest in Electrical Engineering. He—like Sandeep and me—had more than a mere soft corner for Wardha.

The three of us had perhaps ended up as a statistic in her life. But for some unfathomable reason, she was meant to remain more than that in mine.

## CHAPTER 2

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**A few years later...**

**From: Anand Nair** 18 July, 2001

Guys,

Hi.

Hello.

How are you? (Are you, or are you not?)

How is everything there? (Where is fucking everything?)

How do you do? Do you do? If not please do!!

Namaste.

The end.

PS: Start EMAILING loafers.

##

**From: David Williams** 24 July, 2001 Machans.  
Nude pics of Donna Thongy attached. Enzooyy!!!

##

**From: Gopal V** 25 July, 2001

Donna is 2 sexy.

I am happy that this email thing has picked up. Also happy that I can keep in touch with u all like this.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 27 July, 2001

Don't forget to use 'Careful' in the subject line when you send out these kinds of emails... I actually check my emails at office and this could get me into trouble.

Sexy nude pics though...

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 30 July, 2001

I landed in Dayton last week where my University is located.

I still remember Sandeep and me at internet parlors around the time we finished engineering, trying to figure out what this whole buzz around the Internet and Email was—it has come a long way since then.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 01 August, 2001

Times have surely changed. Now we are basically addicted to mails. If we don't check our mails for at least a dozen times in a day, we actually feel that there is something missing.

##



**From: Anand Nair** 05 August, 2001

Dear *Loafers*.

I flew into Boca Raton, Florida last week. It is the state of sand and sun. It's fucking beautiful out here. A desi student volunteer received me at the airport. They have found an apartment for me to live in as well.

Yesterday, I had been to this orientation which was arranged for international students like us. I tried talking to this hot girl from somewhere in north Europe. While I was trying to not focus on her boobs but what she was saying in her thick Scandinavian accent, she asks me whether I went to school in India ON AN ELEPHANT.

How could someone be THAT ignorant? I did not know what to tell her. To such types, one would need to spend the whole night explaining why sex has only three letters while fuck has four letters though they both mean the same thing.

##

**From: David Williams** 06 August, 2001

*Machi!!!* Was she blonde? I have heard lots about blonde bombshells and their dumbness. She seems like an easy catch. You can teach her the similarities of both sex and fuck and that too practically. Don't miss the chance.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 07 August, 2001

I found myself an apartment and three roomies—two from Bangalore and one from Hyderabad. We are taking turns to cook. My Mom had written down a few recipes before I left to US which I refer to.

We have never been able to get the home food taste.

Perhaps if we get hold of a couple of female roomies, we could get that Indian flavor in our food.

##

**From: David Williams** 08 August, 2001

*Dai*, thousands of miles away from India and your parents, I know what you want from female roomies.

I saw the English movie XXX yesterday. I went with high expectations. Forget x rated scenes, there was not even one nude scene. *Loafers*—why did they name the film XXX?? Was it to show nudity on the head of a bald guy?

##

**From: Gopal V** 09 August, 2001

Serves u right David. Who told u 2 go 2 the theaters for watching movies like those? Did u not know that all such movies r censored in theaters in India?

##

**From: Anand Nair** 10 August, 2001

By the way guys, the head of the university here is called the President.

Unlike the ECVU Principal, the President around here does not mind us sitting anywhere or doing anything in the University campus.

In fact, nobody has any fuckin issues with students doing anything anywhere around the campus. One can talk to any girl, ogle at them, smooch them or even make out with them in full public view without anyone having a fuckin problem like in ECVU.

## CHAPTER 3

### Anand Nair

#### September 1996, Bangalore (Third Semester)

At ECVU, like us, Sahir and Sandeep from the trical department loved spending time at the college quadrangle, OGLING girls.

The two of them behaved like they just broke out of a regressive PRISON of some sort that their parents and society had put them in. Showing all signs of desperation, they wanted to enjoy the kind of freedom a professional environment granted them, though they had no clue what being professional at anything meant. Sahir seemed the saner one but the two jerk-offs had set their noses to seek out trouble. They would jump at anything without worrying of what it would lead them into. There was never a dull moment with the two *loafers* around, which was the primary reason Gopal and I hung out with them in the first place.

On the first day of the third semester, the four of us took our usual positions at the steps in front of the library, a spot popularly known as the *katte* in ECVU. The classes had begun, but we weren't the kind of bibliophiles who would get all serious about coursework yet.

A new batch of first years had started at ECVU. ECVU was flooded with pitiful looking fresh and eager faces. At the *katte* we were letting our eyes get accustomed to the new set of babes on our campus.

"Back to your favorite pastime?" Rachana said giggling, while passing by with her boyfriend, Hegde in tow. "Don't you guys have anything better to do in life?" she said ridiculing us. Rachana, was from Sahir and Sandeep's class, and was credited for introducing the concept of 'Adam teasing' at ECVU.

We were now used to Rachana and her taunts and did not show any remorse or embarrassment.

"Nope we don't. Surely not today" Sandeep said. "Any really pretty girls at the ladies hostel this year?" he asked.

"Yes, we have a few. You should see them at ECVU soon," Rachana declared as she went to the library to hide behind the books and whisper sweet nothings to Hegde. I felt sorry for Hegde, not just because he had chosen to hook up with Rachana of all the people.

"*Loafers*, behind you. Seven o'clock! The BABE in blue jeans, white sleeveless top, and red lipstick. Now, SHE is something," I said to refocus the gang on our priorities.

"Hmm... she is a babe." Gopal said.

"She looks slutty with all that makeup on. How did she even think of wearing that kind of dress at ECVU?" Sahir asked.

“At our age, Sahir, we should be entertained by ONLY these types. We would be in too much friggin trouble if we started looking for things like love and commitment. Look what poor Hegde has got himself into,” I said.

“Why? He seemed happy.” It was Sahir again.

“Trust me on this one. Just stay away. At our ages, we wouldn’t even know what hit us and we would find ourselves in the deepest of shits.”

“I still don’t get it,” Sahir said.

“Hmm!!! You show all the signs of learning this the hard way. But forget it for now. Let us all focus on the babe. Look at her FIGURE and ASSETS! Those are a perfect 36, without a doubt.”

“Surely can’t consider her for a girlfriend.” Sandeep said. “I don’t think she will even let any of us get anywhere near her.”

“You are fucking right. I don’t think any of you would even have the GUTS to go near her. Anyway, look at the girl walking into ECVU, straight ahead at twelve o’clock? Is she GIRLFRIEND material for any of you?” I asked.

The three of them watched with great intent without uttering a word. I endured a few moments of silence. “Guys! What do you friggin think?”

“She’s okay,” Gopal said. Sahir and Sandeep nodded without offering any verbal confirmations, their eyes fixed on the girl. She was wearing a white Nehru-neck embroidered *kurta*, a patiala *salwar*, and a matching *dupatta*. Her waist length hair was left unbraided.

“Come on guys. Is she that fucking GREAT looking?” I asked, amused at their reaction.

“Hold on for a bit,” Sandeep tried to murmur something to break my monotone as they continued looking, letting discretion go to hell.

Their trance was broken by a middle aged man blocking our view. He was wearing a red tie and polished black shoes, sported a thick moustache, and oiled silver hair. He looked at us until he had our complete attention and said, “All of you, please get up from the quadrangle.”

It was more like a demand.

We had heard that ECVU would have a new principal. This moron had to be him. We seemed to be first set of students he set eyes on, that too on the opening day of our third semester.

While the three of them were ready to walk off the *katte*, I stayed put and glared at him. I was in a torn jean, worn out shoes, an un-tucked shirt, and had a three-day stubble. I stood up and, with my entire 5-foot-4 frame, sized up the dunce, my expression one of utmost contempt and asked “Why?”

“You should not sit here,” the man declared.

“Why?” I asked again. “We’re students of this esteemed institution.”

“Students or no students, you should not sit here. If you want to eat, go to the canteen. Otherwise, please go to the library.”

“Who are you to ask us to not sit here?” I asked without flinching.

He had a long look at me, stared each of the other guys down and then said “I am the Principal of your esteemed institution,” confirming our suspicions.

I thought for a bit and decided to take this fight up some

other day. I shrugged and got up. The Principal left us in peace and went on to harass someone else sitting peacefully at the *katte*.

I announced “We are headed for class”.

“On the first day?” Sandeep asked. “Why can’t we spend more time around here?”

“It is Sushmita Ma’am’s class in another ten minutes. Going early to catch the BEST seat,” I winked. “We should be back in an hour. You guys wanna come?” I asked.

Sandeep looked at Sahir. Sahir said “You guys carry on. I think she is scheduled to take an EE course for us this sem.”

“Ok. Where will you *loafers* be?”

“We will either be in the library or the canteen. See you soon then,” Sahir said while we made our way to catch a glimpse of Sushmita Ma’am emoting her way through complex electrical fundamentals and equations, at close quarters.

## CHAPTER 4

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**From: Rachana V**

**11 August, 2001**

Hi Sahir,

How is life? Congratulations on starting your MS.

My job is going good. Gets me a paycheck at the end of the month from what we learnt in Engineering. Have made new friends. No more boyfriends for me though.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**

**11 August, 2001**

Hi Rach,

Life is hectic here. I don’t think I’ve ever been this busy ever in my life.

Good you are happy with your job. You must be the one and only ‘Adam teaser’ at your office. God save the guys there.

##

**From: Rachana V** 12 August, 2001

Ha ha. Those instincts do not go away that soon. God can't save them. They are at my mercy now.

How are Sandeep and the rest of the gang? Staying out of trouble, I hope.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 12 August, 2001

David, Gopal, Anand and Sandeep are all doing well. Email has let us keep in touch—I hear quite a bit from them infact.

##

**From: Rachana V** 12 August, 2001

There must be plenty of attractive, single, available women around you in the US. I know it is difficult, but hope you get over Wardha soon.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 13 August, 2001

Have you been able to get over Hegde yet?

##

**From: Rachana V** 14 August, 2001

That is not fair.

I don't think I will ever forget him.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 15 August, 2001

:-) And you are expecting me to get over someone?

##

**From: Rachana V** 15 August, 2001

It is not the same Sahir.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 16 August, 2001

I don't think so Rach. Leave it for now...

##

**From: Rachana V** 16 August, 2001

Okay. But, don't conclude that this is the last time you will hear me asking about her.

## CHAPTER 5

### Sahir Hassan

After getting shooed off the quadrangle, Sandeep and I walked over to the ‘non-silent zone’ at the ground floor of the ECVU library. Anand and Gopal wanted to start their academic year with a full hour *darshan*—an uninterrupted observation of Sushmita Mam.

The ground floor of the ECVU library only had rows of tables and chairs—with books being the notable absentee. A cyber center was planned—and until ECVU received funds, it stayed empty.

This section of the library along with the ‘college canteen’—a shack that served vermin-infested food and watery tea—were the only places we could go after the new principal banned students from loitering anywhere else on the campus. Neither Sandeep nor I would have been seen anywhere close to the library otherwise. Our library did not have the kind of books which interested us at this time of the semester.

We sat next to the entrance—at a table for six.

Sandeep soon buried his head in Irving Wallace’s *Second Lady*. I noticed that the library was filling up. The Principal must have continued shooing the students off the quadrangle.

The girl who had left us speechless earlier, walked in. She had the north Indian fairness and a nice set of teeth on her. She had big eyes, a pointed nose and didn’t have any makeup on.

She was with a girl wearing spectacles and both seemed lost. The rows of tables and chairs with books nowhere around did not seem to match their concept of a library. While I was absorbing all her splendor, she turned and our eyes met. Before I could recover from being caught in the act of watching her, she smiled and headed our way. I nudged Sandeep and Irving Wallace was relegated.

“Hello,” she said, walking up to us. “Is this the library? Where are all the books?”

She spoke with enough assurance and a tinge of an accent—the kind that appeared when you have conversed in “north-Indian” most of your life. We did not see arrogance in her—the sort that attractive girls tend to carry once they start getting needless attention.

“You must surely be a fresher,” Sandeep said, smiling, while making sure she did not see what he was reading.

“Yes,” she admitted. “I have joined Electrical Engineering and my name is Wardha.”

“Sorry, what is your name again? I missed it completely” Sandeep said. Perhaps he was distracted for a moment that a pretty girl like her, was speaking to us politely and not as if she was doing us a favor by doing so.

“It is Wardha,” she said—a little slower and louder this

time. I had never heard of anyone with that name in my eighteen years of existence.

“Hi, Wardha.” Sandeep said, slowing down while he said her name, hoping to get it right while saying it the first time. “This is Sahir and I’m Sandeep. We are actually in the third semester of Electrical Engineering.”

The ‘actually’ in Sandeep’s introduction to Wardha was perhaps his fiftieth “ly” ending word of the day. He was addicted to them and had to include at least one such word every time he uttered something.

“Oh... You are ‘that’ Sandeep and Sahir! Rachana, your classmate from the hostel, told me about you. I’m from BULSH as well.”

We grinned. She had heard about us. BULSH was the Bangalore University Ladies Student’s Hostel. Rachana was also from BULSH and was my best friend before Sandeep. Rachana found herself a boyfriend and then three started to become a crowd.

“Oh, you’re actually from BULSH. A warm welcome,” Sandeep said with enthusiasm, echoing my sentiments.

Wardha introduced us to Kalpana. “She is my roommate.”

Kalpana smiled. We said hello.

Kalpana was the typical spectacled best friend of the leading lady types. She was in a light blue *salwar kameez*. She had a pleasant air around her, and did not seem to mind Wardha getting all the attention.

“What did Rachana tell you about us?” I asked.

“Umm... She told us ‘*Stay away from those two and their gang*’.”

“Is it so? I will get her for this” I said, though I did not have any hope to get even with the ‘Adam teaser’ of ECVU.

Wardha giggled.

“Do you want to sit with us?” Sandeep asked. “The books incidentally are upstairs on the other side of the library,” he added, answering the query that had brought Wardha to us in the first place.

Wardha and Kalpana looked at each other. They shrugged— *these guys don’t look like trouble...*

None of us had a clue about the trouble we would soon be in.

“Be warned. Your Department Head, Shylaja Ma’am is the warden at BULSH as well,” Wardha said before they sat down at our table.

“Is it?” Sandeep said. “Shylaja Ma’am isn’t somebody that we should be actually scared of. She is way too nice.”

I felt for the hostelites—they were living away from home, away from their Mothers who gave warmth and the warm food at whatever time they got up or went back home. They were at an advantage though—they were away from the watchful eyes of their parents and did not have to answer them every day. We were showing that extra interest towards the occupants of the ladies hostel as we believed that they had that spare degree of freedom which their counterparts living with parents did not.

“No classes?” I asked.

“It’s the first day. We thought we will look around,” she smiled. We nodded and smiled back.

“Why were you looking for books on the first day?” I asked.

“Ah that. The board said ‘Library’ outside. We expected to see some books and were surprised that they weren’t any,” she said. “By the way, do you always ask so many questions?” she asked in return. This had started well.

“Not always,” I said. “But since you are from BULSH, I thought I might as well,” I teased.

She knew I had started to mess with her.

“You obviously have a very different name Wardha.” Sandeep noted trying to get a different line of conversation going.

“Yes. My Dad named me after a place in Maharashtra,” she replied without hesitation.

“Are you from Maharashtra?” I was trying to trace her north-Indian accent.

“I am from Lucknow,” she said. I was surprised. Why would someone from Lucknow want to come to ECVU?

“How did you get admission here?” I asked. Not that I did not want her here, but ECVU was a government institution and admission was restricted to the people of Karnataka.

“There is this special merit quota that I came through,” Wardha explained.

“Oh, okay. Actually, I didn’t even know there is such an option,” Sandeep said, looking at me without probing further. I was glad there was such a possibility.

“Let us get to know you a little better, Wardha. Shall we play a little game?” I asked.

Sandeep gave me a knowing smile—we had tried playing this game with a few other girls in college, but it did not work as we wanted it to. We had introduced some variations to make it more

fun—for us. Wardha presented us with an excellent opportunity of perfecting it.

“Sure, why not?” Wardha said.

“Okay. The rules are very simple,” I said. “I toss a coin and ask you a question. If it’s heads, you have to answer truthfully. If it is tails, then you have to lie. Clear?”

“*Theek hai...* Simple enough... but...” Wardha hesitated. “It sounds like fun, though. *Chalo*, let’s play.” She smiled.

Sandeep handed me a 50-paise coin. I tossed. The “50 paise” side of the coin showed up. “It’s tails,” I said, holding the coin in my palm for everyone to see. “You need to tell us a lie,” I reminded her, before asking her the first question. Wardha nodded.

“What’s your name?”

Wardha saw no vice. “Princess Diana,” she answered in an instant.

I tossed, caught the coin between my palms and presented the three lions— “It is heads, you need to tell the truth.”

Wardha nodded.

“Do you like Bangalore?”

“I miss home. *Ghar ki bohut yaad aati hain*. But I have started to like Bangalore,” Wardha answered. I understood what she might be going through, though I had never lived away from home ever in my life.

Gopal and Anand walked in to the library. They sat down with us. “Class cancelled,” Gopal declared.

I did the introductions and briefed them about our game.

Anand was looking at me and shaking his head. He tried



to stay away from 'girl trouble' and hoped we did the same.

I noticed that Gopal wasn't able to take his eyes off Wardha from the time he walked in.

I continued with the game. I tossed. "Heads" I announced. "Wardha has to tell the truth," I said looking at Gopal and Anand. They nodded.

"What's your favorite book?" I asked Wardha.

"Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*," she answered.

"I tried reading that one," I said. "I found it a little slow. Sandeep tried, too, and could not finish."

Sandeep nodded. Gopal was not interested in those kinds of books. Anand would have finished reading them in high school, but was silent. Anand was quiet and reserved—more like tongue tied—whenever he was around girls at ECVU. I was not sure if he was shy around women or considered women at ECVU not worth his time for the kind of intents he had.

"It reminds me of my days as a kid in Lucknow," Wardha said. "Maybe you guys did not find a connect."

We shrugged, accepting this as a possibility. But there was a stronger reason – Harper Lee did not include references to beautiful women or what could be done in their company in her book to keep us interested.

Anand maintained his silence, perhaps recalling Albert Einstein's words: *Only two things are infinite—the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former.* Intellectuals like Anand sometimes chose to be entertained while they sit around watching lesser mortals make fools of themselves.

I tossed again. 'Tails' showed up. Wardha had to lie.

"How do you commute to college?" I asked.

"I drive a Royal Enfield." She giggled. The rest of us smiled.

I tossed. "It's tails again. Okay... Where did you meet Kalpana?"

She thought for a bit. "We met at a bar," she said without blinking. All of us laughed at her lie—neither Wardha nor Kalpana looked like the kind of girls who frequented bars. This evoked a smile from Anand.

I thought this game was fun. I hoped Wardha thought so, too. I smiled at her. She smiled back and glanced at Kalpana, it wasn't such a bad idea to sit with these guys, after all.

I tossed. Heads. "When is your birthday, Wardha?"

A smile and a few moments later, she replied, "May 14<sup>th</sup>...."

We waited for her to complete her answer.

"...every year," she said.

We grinned. She had won that round.

I tossed. "Its heads—you need to be truthful again. What does your Dad do?" I asked.

She started to grin. "He is a Major General with the Indian Army" she said, pride showing.

We let out some oohs and aahs. Kalpana had a wide grin on her face. That explained the 'special merit quota' which Wardha had got in through—you don't refuse Major Generals or their daughters anything. I started having visions of a big mustached, uniformed man aiming a double barrel gun at us and shouting, *'I'm warning you fellows to stay away from my daughter!'*

I glanced at Sandeep. He was shaking his head to indicate

that it would not be a good idea to go ahead with the intended line of questions. I nodded at him, assuring him that it should be ok. The Major General was not standing right in front of us with his gun, was he? It was his pretty daughter having some harmless fun. I continued with the game.

I tossed. "It's tails." I showed everyone the 50-paise side. I then stood up, went to Wardha's side, knelt down, and asked her with a straight face, "Will you marry me, Wardha?" She needed to lie on this question.

Wardha's smile vanished. She was in deep thought. Her pointed nose twitched, her cheeks reddened, her eyes closed for a longer duration than usual. Kalpana's jaw had dropped a few inches. Sandeep was grinning—he had known this was coming.

A no to this question would count as a lie, indicating she was willing to marry me. But it took guts to say yes to such a question, even if it meant a lie.

"Yes, I will," Wardha said, her smile coming back. Gopal looked at me with his eyebrows raised and mouth open. He had not seen us play this game before.

"Thank you, Wardha," I said and returned to my seat. The twinkle was in my eye. Wardha smiled and lowered her eyes. Gopal kicked me under the table, while Anand had an all knowing, half a smile on his face—nothing surprised him.

Sandeep's grin widened while he covered his mouth to hide it. He knew that '*Marry me?*' was not the key question—it was the precursor to the trick question.

I tossed again and held the coin between my palms. I started with the question without showing the coin: "Now that you've agreed to marry me, Wardha, imagine for a moment that

we are married. It's our first night together, the *subhaag raat*. What would you ask me on our special occasion?"

Her cheeks started to redden again as she thought about an answer. She looked at my closed hand. She took a few moments before she realized that I had not shown her the coin—she did not know if she had to tell the truth or lie for an answer. "*Paise dikbao*. Show me the money first," Wardha demanded.

"Oh, is that what you'll ask me on our first night—'*Paise dikbao?* Show me the money?' That's so bad... Not a nice thing to say at all," I said, clicking my tongue and showing mock remorse. I then grinned at her.

She looked at me for a moment while realizing what she had been tricked into saying. "Yoooouuuuu! Just wait..." Wardha said, rising from her seat, grabbing her bag and threatening to hurl it at me. She then froze, did not throw the bag and sat back at her seat with her head down, grinning. Everyone then burst out laughing, including Anand.

We heard commotion as we laughed—which wasn't the usual kind that excited students make. We heard someone shouting orders giving the impression that he owned the place.

It was the Principal, unmistakable in his tie, polished shoes, thick moustache, and oiled, silver hair.

Gopal was the first to spot him—he said 'shit' and I knew.

We sat frozen in our seats. We should have run...

# CHAPTER 6

**From: Gopal V** 02 September, 2001

How r u all ? i am fine in t\*/his a!@lwa)ys ho^t climate, <IMG src="http://us.i1.yimg.com/us.yimg.com/i/mesg/tsmileys/1.gif"> &nbsp;well classes r tooo.. regular & find no t%&ime during the m#orning's & afternoon i will sl%eep for an h!our then go 2 lab's then play&nbsp; cr!ick~et for an hour then the night comes&nbsp; some thi\$ng will be ther 2 take the time till 12:00 am&nbsp; & this w!ill be the &daily s(hedule..</P> <P>classes r going on well & lectures r good too.. but&nbsp;the food is very horrible & all full of fu#!ckin (allu's)&nbsp; even for cha\$inna m\*asala the@y put allu's yar i just can't eat those idlie's. well frie/nds of our clas(s r ok no body from b'lore & all andraite's all dengaie ra( fuck u in tel^ugu ) these word's r com#mon here.</P>

##

**From: David Williams** 03 September, 2001

*Adaa Paarvi!!* What is all that you send supposed to

mean? I know that you are trying to tell us something, but what the fuck is it? I am unable to understand anything.

##

**From: Gopal V** 04 September, 2001

I think the last mail I sent had some problem with the encryption. I was trying 2 tell about the college & classes here. Anyhow, forget it. It is not half as interesting. U guys in the US r enjoying.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 13 September, 2001

Did you guys get to see the video two planes slamming into the Twin Towers in New York? It was unbelievable—scenes straight out of movies. And that too on my first day of Graduate school.

My roommate's Father works in Kuwait. He had called a couple of days back to speak to his son. At about 2:00 AM on the night of 9/11, the FBI knocked at our door—they had tracked the call and wanted to investigate the “middle-east” angle.

We were all asleep when the FBI came—we did not know if we had to say good morning or good night to them when we opened the door. The FBI verified our backgrounds and everything seemed to have checked out. They left us alone.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 14 September, 2001

Really scary!!! You guys take care...

##

From: Anand Nair

19 September, 2001

I was walking towards my class with a couple of *desi* friends through one of the corridors here at my university. There were three well-built but dumb-looking Afro-Americans sitting around doing nothing. As I passed by them, one of them gestured towards us for his friends to see and called us 'TERRORISTS.' I guess due to our skin color, we all are the same to them. What morons!!!!

##

From: Gopal V

20 September, 2001

Ha.... Terrorists. I am sure nobody has forgotten the day when we were treated like Rapists.

## CHAPTER 7

---

### Gopal Varadarajan

I spotted the Principal first at the library on that ill-fated day. I just said 'shit' when I saw him. The laughter and excitement of that now 'stupid' game Sahir was playing with Wardha, melted away.

The new Principal was headed our way. He was with a couple of police constables. This did not look good. Four of us second-year guys were with first-year girls. Though we were asking some silly questions, it might have given the impression that we were ragging them. Since girls were involved, somebody from one of the anti-ragging squads had complained. These squads had been put in place to deal with the ragging menace at institutions like ours.

"What is going on here?" the Principal demanded, scowling at us. His eyebrows met at the center of his forehead. He curled his lips menacingly.

"Nothing, sir. We were 'just' talking with them," Anand replied. The 'just' in Anand's reply was admission

enough of our guilt to him.

Wardha and Kalpana were nodding in our favor. Neither the Principal nor the cops even glanced at them. They had made up their minds.

The Principal must have remembered the confrontation with Anand at the quadrangle. He got sterner.

“Shut up! Don’t talk nonsense. I know you all were ragging these two girls,” he fumed. Wardha and Kalpana started to shake their heads and began to protest with a feeble “No, Sir.” The Principal did not give them a chance.

“You... All four of you, come with me.”

We tried to say something in our defence. The Principal appeared in no mood to listen. How could you reason with someone who thought students should not be seen on the college campus? We got up and followed him to his office. The cops were behind us. Wardha and Kalpana looked on as we went. They sat glued to their seats.

Inside the Principal’s office, the constables started tying our hands with rope. We protested. We told them that this was a mistake. We weren’t doing anything. Why did they want to tie our hands? We were students, for God’s sake. We were not criminals who would run away and wreak havoc in society. The constables let out a set of expletives in chaste Kannada. They used their *lathi* sticks at our protests. One swipe of the stick struck Sandeep hard on his head. He writhed in pain.

After the *lathi* hit Sandeep, we stopped our protests. We just focused on each other’s well being and followed orders after that.

With our hands tied, the four of us were taken out in full

public view. We were herded into a police van like cattle. No, it was more like pigs. It was humiliating. Our heads were bowed. It was not with guilt or shame at what we had done. It was in embarrassment of what we were being put through as students of an esteemed institution.

We were taken to the police station. The sub-inspector was on the phone. We could almost hear the Principal on the other side of the phone ranting against us. The sub-inspector was looking at each one of us while noting down the details of our “offence.” An FIR was prepared.

We were then taken to the lock-up and asked to strip. They let us keep our underwear on. The sub-inspector came in. He gave us an earful of expletives and a few blows with a lathi.

What had we done?

Our mug shots were taken with us holding on to a slate with our names, dates of birth, heights and weights. The press made its way and we were huddled up for a group photograph. The photographer wanted a better angle and moved us around to get the best view of all of us. Our protests were met with more *lathis* and expletives.

Why was God putting us through this?

Once we were photographed, we were herded back into the police van and moved to the Central Jail which was just about a hundred meters away from ECVU.

Our anger turned into desperation. Our families must have heard by now. What was going on? We could not hold back our tears any longer.

I could only imagine what my parents would have gone through after hearing that I was in prison for ‘ragging’ girls. They

had made immense sacrifices to bring me up, to enable me to get this far, instilling in me a proper set of morals, and supporting me through my education. Would they ever trust me again? Would I be able to live with the shame and humiliation that I had been put through and had brought on my parents?

Preoccupied with such thoughts, we spent the night in a crowded cell with all breeds of criminals: thieves, rapists, and murderers. There was no space to sit.

Our future hung in the balance. We spoke about how we had landed ourselves into such a mess.

It then made sense to all of us. Examples were needed and we were made into these examples.

We could see the newspaper headlines: '*Students in jail: Caught ragging girls*' along with a picture that glorified the Principal. The dice had been cast. There was no looking back. It was set up. We were the guinea pigs and the glory was his.

We also spoke about doing something to salvage our way from the situation. We saw no way out. We were not sure if we would be allowed back at ECVU. In our middle class society, without a good education, we could as well give up any hope of a decent career.

In the prison, we still had no place to sleep. Anand worked out a deal with a criminal. The criminal looked like he had come straight from a gangster movie. He found some space beside his makeshift bed and went to sleep. That took some guts.

The next morning and we were asked to 'work'. We were made to sweep the corridors of the prison. We were put under the supervision of a man who was attempting to 'reform' himself while serving his time for murdering three people. We followed

his orders to the letter. Another murder would not have made any difference to his prison sentence.

After we finished sweeping, the four of us were asked to stand under a flag post at the center of the prison. The Indian Tricolor fluttered above us. We were in full view of everyone. The cops, murderers, rapists, thieves watched us with the expectant air of a circus act about to begin. We were ordered to undress. We stood stripped of our clothes and dignity in the shadow of our country's tricolor.

The irony of freedom did not escape me.

What had we done to deserve this?

We were asked to do sit-ups while holding on to our ears. A couple of constables thrashed us on our behinds with lathis. The sit ups and beating continued until the constables started to perspire and breathe heavily. Our vision was blurred with pain and fatigue. The means our parents used to discipline us seemed like candy in front of the abuse we were being put through.

We were then asked to return to our cell. We could not walk straight.

In the cell, an under trial prisoner asked us, "Did you rape someone?"

We looked at each other and shook our heads. The under trial then said "I have seen only rapists getting such 'treatment'."

We were being punished like rapists for sitting in the library of a government institution in Bangalore and asking some silly questions.

Why us, God? Why?

I could not think anymore.

Food refused to go down our throats that afternoon. At that moment, we would have given anything for having the vermin filled food at the ECVU canteen.

## CHAPTER 8

---

**From: Gopal V**

**01 October, 2001**

It has been about three months since u 2 went 2 the US. I am starting 2 miss all of u. Things have been busy but, I did not realize where the void was for a while. It then became clear.

At u-room & the canteen in ECVU, even outside of it, we used 2 hang out & get most things done together. I have not found such friends here. Everybody is busy with their own things.

I miss u all.

##

**From: Anand Nair**

**01 October, 2001**

Yeah... I do have some great memories of all of us in the u-room. And the vermin filled food at the canteen.

And the memories when we all went to the fuckin jail together.

##

**From: David Williams** 02 October, 2001

Dai Gopal!! Is it your age to start missing guys like us? Shame on you. Find yourself a girlfriend soon at your college.

Don't forget to update your status to us after you find one.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 09 October, 2001

Gopal, we know that something is surely cooking between you and the babes at your college. Reveal the details da....

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 10 October, 2001

How do you set things up with the girls Gopal?? That classic smile and a wink – that you showed us one day? :-)

##

**From: Gopal V** 10 October, 2001

Guys. I will tell u if anything happens. When have I hidden anything?

##

**From: David Williams** 12 October, 2001

*Machans!!!* Listen to this.

Friday night I had a date with two gorgeous women at 'Ghungroo'. Ghungroo is the discotheque of Maurya Sheraton in Delhi. Yes, the same hotel Bill Clinton stayed during his visit to India!

I was with my sister. Vasundhara Das, the singer/actress, was with us as well. She is my sister's friend. The sales manager

of Magnasound, a real killer *Punjabi* babe, was also with us. And she was coming on to me so much that it scared my sister.

Both had come to our house first. Around 11 pm, after dinner at our place, we went to their hotel where they changed their clothes (yes I was there. I even helped them choose their outfits but everything was very proper or as proper as it can get with me). We then went to the Taj Palace hotel (how is that for one night) had some refreshments and proceeded to Maurya Sheraton. We were at the disc until almost 3:00 AM.

They left the next morning. The Magnasound Manager might come again next month.

Well I guess some guys are luckier than the rest.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 13 October, 2001

*Loafer* David. Make use of the Magnasound manager for advancing your talent (the SINGING talent, not other ones). Hope to see an album from you soon.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 14 October, 2001

Here at Wright State, I registered for an undergraduate level course in philosophy in addition to registering for master's level courses in EE. The *desis* here think I'm a nut case hell bent on wasting my parents' hard-earned money for studying philosophy.

There's this hot American babe who I sit next too. She could be European – I can never know unless they open their mouths and speak. I sit next to her in this huge classroom with about two thousand students for the philosophy course. Before the class starts, I come in and sit at the corner of the 6<sup>th</sup> row. She



arrives before or after me and takes the seat next to mine.

##

**From: David Williams** 15 October, 2001

*Dai* Sahir. Make some progress. Make sure she sits in your lap soon and not on the seat next to you by the time the classes finish. Don't disappoint me this time.

*Macchis!!!* Today, a new receptionist was appointed at the place where I teach music. She resembles our famous Malayalam porn star Shakeela in her prime. She has got great assets.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 16 October, 2001

Shakeela!!! What a WOMAN.

Words cannot describe the wonder of those proud, gravity defying, perfect melon shaped, double whammies of Shakeela!!! The mere sight of which would make every man and his captain stand up and salute.

##

**From: Gopal V** 17 October, 2001

David. Why do u want 2 remind us of Shakeela.

Ummmmmmmm. What assets!!! You have spoilt my mood.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 19 October, 2001

The realization that education is not fucking cheap in the US has set in. I do two jobs on the campus. I am paid by the hour. What I make now is just enough for paying living expenses. I

need at least a few friggin thousand dollars to pay fees.

By the way, there are so many desis here in the school of engineering that it is nicknamed the 'TAJ MAHAL.'

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 19 October, 2001

Yes Anand—it is tough arranging for the kind of money needed to pay fees.

There is this Professor here who saw my interest in philosophy and gave me an opportunity as a Research Assistant in his lab. I am also able to earn some money from this hourly paid assistantship under him.

I still find it hard to pay about \$3000.00 every three months as course fees in addition to living expenses, rent and other bills. There's no way I can get enough money for course fees with the part time jobs.

And I want to continue studying Philosophy as well...!!!

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 20 October, 2001

Talking about money... My Mom only recently told me about how much of a struggle she had to put in to arrange for the bail money to get me out of jail then...

## CHAPTER 9

### Anand Nair

At about 4:00 in the evening, our fathers and Sandeep's Uncle came down after arranging for the bail. They GLARED at us as for putting them through this inconvenience. They friggin just did not seem to believe in our innocence.

Our families had somehow managed to arrange for the bail money. We had to squat on the floor of the prison office, taking in the fuckin sniggers and stares of the constables and other criminals while the formalities were completed. We no longer fuckin cared how we looked or what others thought about us. We had resigned ourselves to the situation and waited for the nightmare to end.

Our Mothers broke down when they saw us coming out of prison. They held each of us tight for a long time. Even if they believed that we did something wrong, it never showed.

There were no words spoken, our Mothers were

GLAD to have us back. But I couldn't believe what we had been put through for sitting in the friggin library and asking some dumb questions. How senseless could our society have become to be unable to discriminate a criminal act from normal human behavior?

FUCK!

The newspapers glorified the Principal. They endorsed him as a savior, guarding the sacred tradition of education from filth like us who would go to any extent for 'kicks.' To add spice to the 'ragging' episode, the newspapers cooked up versions of what took place which were very different from what had transpired. They even moved the scene of the 'crime' out of the college library to an adjoining PARK. They then let their and the reader's imagination run riot.

It took a few days for the pain and the swellings to subside. Our parents and relatives began to believe in our innocence once we told them what had transpired. They nursed our battered souls and bodies. The HUMILIATION we went through would never go away but they encouraged us to get back to Engineering and ECVU. Staying back at home longer than that was like an admission of our guilt in the society we lived in.

We decided to face the world with our heads held high. We had done nothing wrong. There was no fucking CHOICE either. We HAD to pursue and complete our education.

At college, everyone had heard what happened. Though we were treated as outcasts in a few groups, it was the right version doing the rounds among those who mattered. We got backing from a set of lecturers, which included Sushmita Ma'am. The electrical department head, Shylaja Ma'am, was on our side as well. A set of classmates knew us as the kind of guys who would not do anything to warrant such HUMILIATION and punishment.

If the Principal could do this to us, we started to believe that he could do the same or worse to other innocent students. Our blood BOILED. Rage engulfed us. Bruised and battered, we contemplated our course of action. We realized that every dog had its day and that today wasn't ours. We decided to wait. There were other things at stake, including our careers and the reputations of our parents. We OWED them that.

Representatives from last year's Student Union showed up. They had graduated and weren't able to support us during our ordeal. They were apologetic at what we had to go through, regretted that they weren't around and assured us of their support in the future.

We had first met them the previous year when we were freshers. We were called to support a protest they had initiated. I recalled squatting in the quadrangle at ECVU, shouting slogans against the vice chancellor (among others) of the university. I did not remember the motive behind the protest, but I was amazed to see the power that students could garner by involving numbers. I was certain the protest made the right kind of noises and hit where it had to.

It got me thinking...

## CHAPTER 10

---

**From: Sahir Hassan**

**21 October, 2001**

You guys won't believe this after the kind of censorship in place in India.

Four of us roomies decided to go to a strip club. The one we planned to go was called 'Diamonds' and had earned the reputation of being the best in the entire district, if not the entire state.

When we entered the strip club, we saw gorgeous—I repeat gorgeous—naked (yes, totally fully completely nude, naked, unclothed) women all around us behaving as casually as women did while shopping. Some of these women even looked at us and smiled—we lowered our gaze in return, unsure on how to respond.

We stood for a few minutes inside the strip club—absorbing and coming to terms with what was around us, with what we were seeing. We did not have

a clue what we needed to do next. We ordered for drinks and as we were drinking the cheapest beers, a couple of these gorgeous naked women came by and put their arms around us (yes, they were touching us). They then asked us—'Do any of you want a lap dance?'

A lap dance meant that one of these women took you to this enclosed 'private' space within the strip club and danced a 'special' dance with you literally on your lap. Only one of my roommates had the guts (and the money and the desperation too perhaps) to take a lap dance.

He smelt like one of them when he came back.

##

**From: David Williams** 22 October, 2001

*Dai* Sahir. Within a couple of months, you have already seen and touched naked American women!!! Excellent progress. Proud of you. Why have you not sent us pics? Don't worry, we will not blackmail you with them after you get married.

By the way, I don't believe that you did not take a lap dance. I wouldn't have missed such an opportunity.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 23 October, 2001

We cannot take pics in strip clubs—they would get us arrested.

Also, honestly, I did not have the guts or the money to spare at this point of my life.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 23 October, 2001

*Loafers*!!! Happy Dussera to you all. I shall go out and celebrate

by eating beef and drinking alcohol!!!

We all worship cows in different forms. Some worship the live ones and me, the dead ones on a plate with lots of *masala*.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 19 November, 2001

It started to get cold over the last few days and it snowed here yesterday. It was the first time I or any of my roommates were seeing snow in our lives—it was so beautiful and serene.

Find some pics attached.

##

**From: David Williams** 20 November, 2001

*Machans*!!! Careful. Pics of Kamasutra poses attached.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 20 November, 2001

Mr Porn King: David Williams. Don't forget to send such photos continuously....

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 26 November, 2001

I came down to Detroit last weekend for the winter break—which is the whole of December—after finishing my first quarter at the university. There is snow everywhere. It's like living in a freezer.

These American babes look hot fully covered as well.

My cousin here helped me find a job at a local mall. I work with a group of Bangladeshis who sell leather jackets. I

need the money.

There is a cute desi girl who works at the shop next to mine selling toys. I spoke to her a couple of times. She is an ABCD—American Born Confused Desi.

She told me what they call students like us—PIGS which stands for Poor Indian Graduate Students.

I stopped speaking to her after that. Come to think of it, she is not all that cute.

##

**From: Anand Nair**

**29 November, 2001**

There are lots of *desis* from my university too who have found jobs in a nearby mall. I went to that mall a couple of days back as I had been hearing so much about it from these guys. The mall was fuckin HUGE. I had not seen malls that size in India.

They guys took me to a shop called Abrecrombie & Fitch. The sales girls were real hot and wore the minimum of clothing. The posters in the shop all showed nearly nude boys and girls.

The biggest shocker: there were a set of crumpled and torn jeans. The price on them was close to a hundred dollars or more. Now who the fuck would want to buy torn jeans after spending a fortune?

The sales girls were hot, but that did not mean someone should go spending that much for jeans!! RIDICULOUS!!!

Later, a kid in the mall who must be about ten years old looked at me and smiled. I smiled back and said a simple, “Hey... How are you?” to which he replied, “Hey... Why are you speaking a different language?” It was perhaps because of my

accent. Our accents are a different language altogether to them. What the fuck!!!

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

**30 November, 2001**

Being treated like aliens in a different country is somewhat okay. But, in our own country we were treated like outcasts after the incident when we went back to ECVU....

# CHAPTER 11

## Sahir Hassan

A couple of weeks passed by and things appeared to return to normalcy. We stopped imagining eyes following us and whispers behind our backs wherever we went. Our limp stopped showing. Our bruises turned from red, to purple and then merged with the color of our skin. Keeping our head high during the few weeks at ECVU post prison was the most difficult—we did not have to do it always with the passage of time.

Most students stopped treating us as outcasts and started to share our table and their laughter with us. Wardha and Kalpana were among those who did not mind hanging around us during this time. Wardha was apologetic at what had happened, laughed at our weak attempts at humor and cursed the Principal with the same intensity as we did.

Life started to crawl back to normalcy.

The fresher's party for the new batch of students was delayed after the incident. It was eventually

scheduled on a Friday four weeks after the semester started. The party was the kind hosted by students from money starved institutions—ours—and children of tight pursed parents—us. An auditorium was converted into a party setting with the help of disco lights, flashy decorations, and a music system capable of spitting out decibel ranges high enough to be heard over conversation and laughter. Gopal and Anand chose to give the party a miss. Demi Moore's *Striptease*—which had hit the theaters that day—was their more than convincing excuse. "It's DEMI guys. How can you focus elsewhere?" Anand was convinced.

Wardha showed up at the party looking refreshing in a lavender colored *salwar kameez*. Our department head—Shylaja Ma'am—came down as well. She was looking serene in an embroidered handloom cotton *saree*. Shylaja Ma'am had chosen to not get married and lived alone. Such occasions with students were a welcome break for her from routine and she never let such a chance go by. She said "Good to see you both here." We were glad that she thought so.

David Williams from the electronics branch of our batch hosted the show. He sang *Informer* by Snow on the stage, kicking off the Freshie King and Queen competition. A Tamil accent was seeping through while he sang. But—one had to admit—he had talent. I had no doubt ECVU would be seeing more of him.

Wardha made it to the semifinals of the Freshie Queen competition, but it was a girl in jeans who went on to get the title. It was a sign of the changing times—preferences at ECVU were shifting away from the *salwar kameez* wearing types.

The dance floor was set up with disco lights and foot-tapping music—Indi-pop and *bhangra*. After some rounds of disco and *balle balle*, a set of guys from the Tamil land lead by David,

took the liberty to go berserk on the dance floor doing gyrations and thrusts. This freestyle dance form was gaining popularity in the south as the *dappan koothu*. It was fun to watch this new dance form after an overdose of *Punjabi* and pop music. Sandeep and I joined them and had a great time dancing to a Rajini chartbuster.

The music changed after the organizers had enough of *dappan koothu*. They slowed the tempo down. When the couples stepped in for the slow dance, the rest of us had to get off the dance floor.

I had seen slow dances on TV—you had to hold the girl close and lead her into these orchestrated steps while sticking to the rhythm of the music being played. Even if a guy was willing to make a fool of himself doing the *dappan koothu*, he wouldn't make a fool of the girl with him by attempting the slow dance if he had not mastered its moves.

I wanted to continue dancing. I didn't want to be left out of the dance floor because I didn't know the slow dance. Getting a partner who wanted to dance with me seemed impossible.

I spotted Wardha with Kalpana. I walked up to them without the guts to ask Wardha to dance with me.

"Hi, Sahir, you're not dancing?" Wardha asked, above the music.

"I don't know any of the slow dances. I don't have a dancing partner either," I confessed. "What about you? Do you know the slow dance?" I asked.

"No," Wardha said.

We watched for a while. "Isn't this sad that we are just standing around?" I asked.

"Yes, it is," she agreed.

"How can we make sure we don't feel left out next time? Any ideas?"

She looked at me in the eye, raised her eyebrows, smiled and said "What do you have in mind?"

I summoned all the guts I had. "Would you like to dance with me at next year's party? We'll try to learn at least one slow dance by then and whoever learns will teach the other. Deal?"

I did not want to sound too desperate...

"Okay, *theek hai*. It's a deal," she said, without looking irritated or giving me the impression I was pushing.

I hoped she didn't see this idea as an attempt to 'hook up'. If she did and had agreed nevertheless, I had struck a good deal that day. My future at ECVU appeared brighter.

"How are you going back to BULSH?" I asked her. Should I have reminded her of leaving? She could have stayed a little longer.

"Oh, yes, we should be going," she said, glancing at her watch and then at Kalpana. "It's getting late. We'll take a bus."

Sandeep joined us. I let him know that they were about to leave. "Let us drop you to the bus stop," Sandeep offered.

We walked them to the bus stop in silence. It felt different, walking with a girl without talking about anything—like taking an evening walk on the beach after a tiring day.

"Okay, bye then," Wardha said when we reached the bus stop and she spotted a bus which would take Kalpana and her to BULSH.

"Bye!" We waved and looked on as they boarded the bus, which covered us in a cloud of smoke as it went on its way.

It dawned on me that I had started to like the name Wardha and the person associated with it as well. Sandeep gave me the impression that he did, too.

My step and the rest of the day felt lighter.

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CHAPTER 12

**From: Sahir Hassan** 18 January, 2002

I am back at the university after the winter break. I have worked out an arrangement. I need not pay for undergrad level courses in Philosophy—I can just sit through them and get course credit.

One thing which is obvious here is that the engineering classes are packed with *desis* and there are hardly any *desis* who study philosophy. I am the only *desi* most of the time in the philosophy classes.

Also, the Department Head of Philosophy heard my story, saw my interest, noted that I would be a great fit for and encouraged me to apply to their Masters Program.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 17 March, 2002

David *laudeeeeeeeeeee loafer*,



HAPPY BIRTHDAY dear.

People generally sing the birthday song for birthdays. But in your honor and as a tribute to good old times, especially for the inability of any of us to get any of the ladies at ECVU, let me sing this to indicate the broadened set of horizons for you and for all of us.

*Aaasaman mein ... Tada-ton*

*Laakhon tare hai.. Tada-ton*

Have a great year my friend.

PS: How is the Magnasound manager doing? Are you still in touch with her?

##

**From: Gopal. V** 17 March, 2002

Happy birthday David. Did the Magnasound manager help u achieve ur goal regarding ur virginity on ur birthday?

##

**From: David Williams** 18 March, 2002

*Machans!!* Thank you for your wishes.

That Magnasound female went missing from my radar after our last meeting. She could have given me an excellent birthday gift though ;-).

##

**From: Gopal. V** 18 March, 2002

Better luck next time David. Don't delay whenever u come across such chances. We are already running late.

I had the opportunity 2 hold the hand of 3 females

while reading their palms. Among them, there is a very hot seductive female. While I did the palmistry thing with her, she was adjusting her bra.

##

**From: David Williams** 18 March, 2002

*Sabaash.*

That is more like it.

Please do not forget to let us know of any progress in that front.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 23 March, 2002

Yesterday, I went to this disco with a roommate. At the entrance, they said it was some 'Mardi Gras' night and gave us a set of beads to wear—had no clue why, but wore them.

It was crowded like hell. While I was mustering the guts to start dancing the *dappan koothu* with my roomie—like we used to in India—a girl with a whole lot of beads on her asked me, "One of your beads for a show of my boobs?"

I thought I did not hear right. The music was not that loud—perhaps it was the American accent. "What?" I asked her.

"Beads for a show of my boobs," she repeated.

What the hell?

She was asking for a bead necklace for willing to show me her boobs!!! Her assets!!!! Her twin peaks!!!

I was stunned. We have seen women in our country wearing layer upon layer to cover themselves—especially that part—and she wanted to show it in exchange of some cheap

beads which I was about to throw away anyhow.

I gave her one of the bead necklaces and she lifted her t-shirt to give me a sighting of her breasts. I did not know where to look after a lifetime of effort to not look 'there' while talking to a woman. I could have given her all the beads I had, just to get her away from me and avoid further embarrassment to myself.

While I was still recovering, I saw another one headed my way with a whole lot of beads around her neck. I hesitated. She perhaps wanted something else—but it was the same bloody routine, I dealt with her as fast as I could.

Then came another—this time she was with an assistant by her side that did all the talking.

Sexual harassment took on a whole new meaning. What the hell is going on in this country?

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 25 March, 2002

Interesting 'boobs show' concept Sahir. I am sure in spite of all your embarrassment, you would surely have had plenty of fun.....

I had been to ECVU yesterday. Some girls in the first year who we did not give a second glance when we left college have shaped up and were actually looking good.... The curves which were not present on them earlier are now showing and how!!

##

**From: Anand Nair** 25 March, 2002

Since when ECVU girls have started looking good and shaping

up??

Point to ponder. Is it just the DESPERATION??

##

**From: David Williams** 26 March, 2002

*Machans!!!*

What to do? Our life has become like this only.

Anyway, I am in Germany for a concert. The Germans girls have great figures. With the summer coming, you can see them taking sun-baths semi-nude. One can find couples kissing and making out in public.

In the beginning it was a little embarrassing, now I do not even give a second glance at them.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 29 March, 2002

My company is sending me for two months to Saudi Arabia for a project. After you told about Germany figures, any enthusiasm I had to land in Saudi is totally lost....

Even though it is burning hot in Saudi, all women there wear burkhas from head to toe. I would obviously prefer to come to Germany....

##

**From: David Williams** 30 March, 2002

*Machans!!!* Careful. Uncensored pics of recent wardrobe malfunction in a ramp show attached.

# CHAPTER 13

## Anand Nair

Though the SHAM of the friggin ragging incident was not forgotten, we got tremendous support from students and teachers, notably from Shylaja Ma'am, who got to know the Principal well enough to understand the truth behind the version reported.

The student Class Representative (CR) elections were coming up. Elections were held across the department for all the four years on the same day. I went through a few sleepless nights and a lot of deliberations during the day with Gopal, Sahir and Sandeep on the elections and how we could make a difference to ourselves and to ECVU. I was friggin determined.

Even at this level, there was a lot of canvassing, bargaining, mud-slinging and the intense drama that somehow squeezes into such occasions.

The incumbent CR, Somnath, requested me to withdraw my name from the fray. He wanted another chance to discharge his responsibilities right. I realized

that the stakes were much higher. As an elected representative, I could be part of the students' union. Then we could find a voice against the Principal. That fucking battle was on. I decided not to stand down.

Sahir decided to contest the elections from his class as well.

On election day, it was Somnath vs. Anand for the post of Class Representative. Our department head and class teacher came to oversee the proceedings and ensure a fair election.

Gopal nominated me and, as the challenger, I got to speak first. This was the first time I was soliciting anyone for friggin votes. My only familiarity with such a scenario was through the politics of our country and political leaders giving speeches. They were not the kind of examples I should have been looking at for elections, at any fucking level whatsoever. I went over the things I could say in an election speech and even listed a few items of concern.

During my speech, I accused Somnath of high-handedness and not discharging his responsibilities right. I assured the class they could trust me to do so. I ended with a promise that I would serve my class to the best of my abilities if the post were entrusted to me.

I realized that my allegations against Somnath were unnecessary as the truth was out there for everyone to see. The finger pointing only served to tarnish my image and swing a few votes in Somnath's favor.

Somnath in his turn alleged that I had no clue or experience taking up the kind of responsibilities a Class Representative had to. He also emphasized my not-so-great academic record and declared that the seriousness of an engineering student wasn't in me. Somnath was right, in a way, and perhaps swung a few more

to his side then.

Once all the votes were cast, counting began and the lead changed every few votes. It was getting too fucking close for comfort. Some votes were declared invalid as some people did not spell our names right, someone wrote both our names on the voting paper, and some left the voting paper blank. To make the drama even more fucking absurd, a moron wrote the name of a student who was not even contesting.

I had a wafer thin two vote lead when all valid votes were counted. Everyone started to congratulate me. I had won. I was the elected representative of my class.

Sahir secured the win in his.

We had started well in our quest for getting the voice we longed for.

---

## CHAPTER 14

**From: Sahir Hassan** 20 April, 2002

It is summer here—there is a lot of skin showing and beer flowing.

I took up an off-campus job at a local grocery shop close to downtown—which mostly sells liquor. To commute to and from work, I bought a car—cleaned up whatever cash I had with me from India.

I work three jobs now. I am attending classes on top of it. Hectic—the word is an understatement. I am still unable to earn enough for fees.

My cousin gave me his credit card with about \$5000 on it for paying fees. I guess that problem is solved for now.

##

**From: Gopal V** 21 April, 2002

Hang in there buddy. Everyone faces tough times. With God's grace, things should be fine soon.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 23 April, 2002

I got an assistantship here in the department of Computer Science as a System Admin. That helps in taking care of my friggin fees. I just have to pay for insurance and some other miscellaneous items. I earn a monthly stipend as well. What a RELIEF!!

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 23 April, 2002

Congratulations Anand. Yes—getting an assistantship which takes care of your fees is a major respite. It is difficult to pay fees in thousands of dollars and live as well with hourly jobs.

Buying a car has its advantages. There is this girl—Sally—in my department who wants to go to this “slow dance” club (to dance!!!), but does not have a dancing partner. I wanted someone to teach me this dance.

We go out dancing often now—which is when I have a holiday at the store. Sally’s roommate Carla comes along as well. Sally has been a good teacher.

##

**From: David Williams** 25 April, 2002

*Dai!!* Just the three of you: Sally, Carla and you go dancing?

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 26 April, 2002

Yes—just the three of us. I know where this is going.

##

**From: Sadeep Gadwal** 26 April, 2002

David, you have a one track mind...

##

**From: David Williams** 26 April, 2002

*Adaa Paavi!!!!* Just the three of you!!!!

Where all did you get to touch Sally and Carla while you danced with them? Tell us *machan*.

Please keep at least one condom in your pocket. You never know when it can come of use.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 29 April, 2002

My roomies ‘discovered’ a strip club in Detroit where one is allowed to touch these naked strippers—anywhere—during lap dances. Other places I know of—and have got the opportunity to visit—do not allow you to touch the strippers.

I am leaving to work at the grocery shop now—I work there almost every day of the week.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 30 April, 2002

I have got myself a driving license and a second hand car, a Toyota Corolla. I was able to buy the car only because I got the assistantship.

Also, I am considering applying for a PhD program. I have not yet made up my mind. But then when have I PLANNED and done something?

# CHAPTER 15

Sandeep Gadwal

In the midst of classes, Sahir's class representative duties, and other distractions, Sahir and I usually ran into Wardha often. We belonged to the same department and our classrooms were actually on the same floor and right next to each other. We couldn't avoid each other even if we purposely wanted to....

Wardha consistently scored the kind of high marks neither Sahir nor I ever came close to.... She had scored pretty high on her looks, at least on our scale, and was turning out to be a 'proper' student in terms of academia as well. We gave Wardha our engineering books and notes we had referred to. We were not sure if they were of use to her, but she gave us the impression that she actually found them useful....

Though Gopal and Anand belonged to the Mech department, Wardha had no reservations speaking to them whenever they came to our block, which was often. "Isn't it more exciting to see *bindis* and *dupattas*

than friggin moustaches and shirts around all day," was Anand's justification for coming over. Gopal's primary motivation for his visits outside of the Mech department was usually the prospect of seeing Wardha....

The infatuation with Wardha grew each day for the three of us, Sahir, Gopal, and me.

With the kind of intents guys our age usually have for women, none of us saw Wardha as a 'sex object'. She definitely did not seem the type. There were the slutty types, in ECVU as well, but we never found ourselves in their league or company.... The pauper state we found ourselves in was one major reason obviously, but not a complete show-stopper. Guts to involve ourselves in any such distraction, was actually the clincher....

Wardha wasn't the glam queen type either who looked good on somebody's arm for certain periods of time before actually moving on to another. She did not look the studious type.... We knew she could let her hair down, shake a leg and laugh when such a situation invariably arose. She wasn't a girl you wanted to be 'just friends' with. There was something about her that made the three of us to start thinking of her in a notably different way....

# CHAPTER 16

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **18 September, 2002**

I was out for a team lunch near the outer ring road yesterday..... I actually saw a familiar looking face sitting a little distance away. It did not take too long for me to figure out that it was definitely Wardha.....

She did not smile when she saw me. I obviously did not smile at her either.

She looked almost the same though. She has cut her hair short and has put on a little bit of weight from the last time we saw her.....

On my way out, I passed by her and saw her closely. She was wearing an ID card, but could not figure out which company she actually worked for. She did not have a mangalsutra on her. I guess she is still unmarried.....

##

**From: David Williams**    **19 September, 2002**

“...she is still unmarried...” *Adaa Paavi*. What can I say?

Sahir and Gopal: don't even think about it!!!

##

**From: Anand Nair**    **20 September, 2002**

After all you guys went through over her, Sandeep wants to still see if she is MARRIED or not.

Aaa  
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa (that's me screaming my head off and running out of my lab).

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**    **22 September, 2002**

The information about Wardha's marriage was actually for general knowledge, no ulterior motives.....

##

**From: Gopal V**    **24 September, 2002**

Anand, you don't have 2 worry about him. He has learnt 2 set his sights set on others now. Remember Milagro days??

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**    **28 September, 2002**

I guess, in the grand cosmic scheme of things—Wardha happened for a reason. It might not make sense now—but it will someday.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 30 September, 2002

Sahir, you have spoken like a TRUE fucking philosopher.

Anyway, yesterday I saw this 70's cheesy erotic vampire movie called *Vampyros Lesbos*. It was about Count Dracula's daughter who was a vampire and yes you guessed it, a lesbian too!!

It was HILARIOUS.

A note about the leading lady: this woman is just that whole(!)some complete woman. It is as if SENSUALITY and LUST are oozing out of every pore of her, all the time. She is like this walking production line of pheromones.

In one of the other movies I saw, the female lead teases the hero by saying, "You can put it anywhere you want." With this woman you get that FEELING.

Man-oh-man, what more can I fucking say?

##

**From: David Williams** 1 October, 2002

*Machan*, I am sure you must have clogged the drainage to keep your feelings under control after seeing the movie. ;-)

##

**From: Gopal V** 18 October, 2002

Pics of Miss India attached. Look how standards have fallen. Can u believe that she was elected Miss India?

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 19 October, 2002

Dude, Miss India actually looks good. I am not sure why you felt otherwise.....

##

**From: Anand Nair** 20 October, 2002

Every woman doesn't need to have watermelons for boobs and a sack of potatoes for an ass. Beauty comes in many SHAPES and SIZES ;)

##

**From: David Williams** 22 October, 2002

*Adaa paavi* Gopal. She is a babe. I guess her shape and sizes are not good enough for you.

Beggars cannot be choosers. Any shape and size is good enough for me ;-)

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 24 October, 2002

We have a new roommate—he is here for a short trip on a business visa from India. He and his colleagues wanted to see the US. They did not have the all important driver's license and did not want to spend on flight tickets either.

I was their cheapest option.

I agreed to drive them to New York, Washington DC, and Niagara after they were willing to pay for all the expenses. Four of us set off in a hired minivan.

One of the best parts of the trip was when we saw lot of girls in *salwar kameez* in Jackson Heights, New York—even *desi* girls at my university don't wear a salwar kameez except on occasions such as the ethnic day. We felt so much at home.

When we returned to Dayton after four days of non-stop travel, there was still some time before we returned the rental car. These guys showed the willingness and the enthusiasm for a short visit to the Diamonds Strip Club. Every



one of them took lap dances—I did not have to nudge them at all. I'm sure they will recall their visit to the strip club with more fondness than anything else they saw in the US.

##

From: David Williams

28 October, 2003

*Machans!!!* I experienced Newton's fourth law of motion today after eating some bad food at a *dhaba*: Loose motion cannot be done in slow motion.

## CHAPTER 17

---

### Anand Nair

The student union elections were held the following week in the college auditorium. They had a bigger element of friggin DRAMA in them. The stakes were higher. The office bearers were not only competing for student union positions, they were knocking on the doors of local political parties as well. Nobody other than the elected class representatives, Professors, and the Principal were allowed inside the auditorium during elections.

The Principal recognized Sahir and me from the ragging episode. A sarcastic smile showed up on his lips.

Shylaja Ma'am was there in all her serenity as well. She smiled at us. "Good going," she said.

Anyone who had won the Class Representative (CR) election could contest for the office bearer posts. CRs also got to vote for and choose the office bearers of the college student union. A set of fourth year students were being challenged by a set from the third year. Sahir and I were supporting the fourth-year students as we

felt they were better organized and had the earnestness to deliver.

The elections were on a different plane now. With the wager that high, violence was a distinct possibility. The buildup to these elections and the atmosphere on the day of the election were electric. I had done my bit in uniting the second years and convincing them that the fourth years were a better set than the third.

Like most times, the fourth year representatives won the elections and posts of office bearers at ECVU that year. The ensuing celebration by the fourth years inside the auditorium was somewhat unanticipated. I had seen colorful balloons being suspended in the air after the Republic day parade on TV, but never expected something of that sort to happen at the ECVU auditorium. About fifty cylindrical gas balloons of the same light pink color and size were brought into the auditorium and set free. It did take me sometime to realize that the balloons were condoms. I remember one larger sized condom with our not so beloved Principal's name written on it threatening to leave the auditorium into full public view.

Rachana walked in with Hegde. They saw the floating 'balloons' and enquired what these odd shaped and single colored balloons were. When we confessed, they were not ready to believe that these were condoms. They had chosen denial over embarrassment. They admitted at not having seen a condom ever in their lives. They 'knew' everything, but like us, only in theory.

## CHAPTER 18

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**From: Sahir Hassan**                      **20 February, 2003**

Guys, I got an internship at a company here. The internship pays me a healthy hourly rate along with taking care of half my fees at college.

Dr. Heft at the Department of Philosophy here helped me get it when things got tight financially. Things had come to the point where I was thinking of giving up on pursuing philosophy.

##

**From: David Williams**                      **21 February, 2003**

Sahir, congrats da.

*Machans!!!* Beware of call-girls. They are present in plenty in the underpass between the bus and railway stations at Majestic in Bangalore. They have agents who broker their deal for you as well. Beware!!!

##

**From: Anand Nair** 21 February, 2003

David, what happened after she blindfolded you ;-)? I am anxious to know. Till you tell me I will be constructing various stories in my head.

Do leave your fucking SHYNESS behind and tell....

##

**From: David Williams** 23 February, 2003

*Dai!!!* What are you talking about? You know that I'm a shameless person, but no further comments on this one.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 15 March, 2003

After our experience with cops in Bangalore, I had my first brush with the law in the US last week. It was late on Saturday night and I was heading to the company where I did my internship. A cop had followed me and turned his flashing lights on.

The cop then asked me to come out of the car. After the 9/11 episode, I had heard that everyone in law enforcement here had become very touchy.

The cop asked me a whole lot of questions – he did not seem very convinced with my answers. Only when I said I was a Graduate student at Wright State and showed him my university ID, he let me go.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 16 March, 2003

Sahir *loafer!!!* What were you doing on a fucking Saturday night at the company office? I am now getting serious doubts.

I don't know a SINGLE STUDENT with an assistantship or an internship who works on Saturdays, no matter how desperate the situation is.

Were you by yourself or with your dancing partner Sally?

##

**From: David Williams** 16 March, 2003

*Adaa paavi*, Sahir.

Did Sally's roommate also come along? What was her name? Carla?

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 17 March, 2003

You *loafers*—I have to be very careful telling you guys anything henceforth.

By the way, I was all alone when the cop started questioning me. Perhaps he would have left me alone if there was an American girl with me.

##

**From: Gopal V** 18 March, 2003

I hope you have learnt your lesson. Work towards finding an American girl to be with you day and night. Don't delay.

Saw the movie *Jism* today. Bipasha Basu is hot.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 19 March, 2003

I thought after finishing engineering, that it was surely the end of examinations.....

Though many of you have gone for further studies and have been taking up exams, for the rest of us who decided to take up jobs, life has actually been a bigger exam to face.....

## CHAPTER 19

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### Sahir Hassan

Wardha visited her home in Lucknow during her first semester break. Our fourth—and Wardha’s second—semester had started and there was still no sign of Wardha. I asked Kalpana “So, is Wardha still in Lucknow?”

“She is coming tomorrow afternoon by the Karnataka Express” Kalpana said.

The monopoly of government-owned airlines for domestic travel had ended with the Government adopting the open-sky policy in 1990. These fares for domestic travel by air were still high and were beyond most middle class finances. The preferred mode of travel—even for long distances and the daughters of Major Generals—was by rail.

“At what time?” I asked her.

“I don’t know the exact time” she said.

I found out that Wardha’s train would arrive at

1:40 in the afternoon. The railway station was on our way home, not too far from college. Sandeep and I wanted to receive Wardha at the station. But Sandeep had a lab assignment due. I did not.

I asked Sandeep if he wanted to bunk the lab and come along to the station. He said he couldn't. Bunking labs and catching up on experiments was not the same as bunking theory classes. After classes, I ate my packed lunch and was at the station by the scheduled arrival time.

While I waited, I started to think about the name Wardha. 'Wardha' was not the kind of name you would associate with attractive people—like the Aishwaryas or Soundaryas or Julias. You would have no association to make with such a name when you heard it the first time. You would have to make an effort to remember it. And once you got used to the name—it would never be forgotten. The name would bounce within the walls of your skull due to its uniqueness, roll on your tongue as you attempted to pronounce it right, play in your mind by forcing you to think of its oddness while the character of the person associated with the name, got built around it.

It then dawned on me who Wardha's Father was. I realized that there were certain 'risks' if Major 'Uncle' accompanied her to Bangalore and spotted me waiting to receive Wardha at the station.

I sat with a degree of nervousness at the station with these thoughts. That the train was half hour late did not help. I did not know Wardha's compartment number. I began looking for her—searching in each one.

When I had almost given up hope of finding her in the sea of people and luggage, I spotted her. She waved—and was fortunately by herself. There was no Major or anyone in army uniform in sight. Though looking journey-worn with her blue

*salwar* suit crumpled, she was still as pretty as the first time I saw her. I smiled.

"Hey. Welcome back," I said.

"Hey. What are you doing here?" Wardha showed genuine surprise. She was haggling with a coolie, who was asking for an exorbitant sum to carry her luggage to the auto-rickshaw stand.

"I came to meet the Major. Where is he?" I asked with a serious face, while pretending to search for him. I then smiled at her.

"He could not come, but was keen to meet you. I told him about the proposal," she said and giggled.

I froze. Images of a mustached, gun-wielding, uniformed man crossed my mind again. I couldn't think of anything witty to say.

I looked at her luggage. Someone must have helped her get it out of the train. While she could not carry it all by herself to the rickshaw stand, we could lug it together.

"We can manage this. Shall we say no to the coolie?" I said.

Still grinning, she nodded. I sent off the coolie.

"Kalpana must have told you," she said trying to figure out my presence at the railway station. I nodded.

"Any more trouble from the Principal while I was in Lucknow?" she asked as we began to walk out of the railway platform, carrying the baggage between us.

"Not too much. It was obvious he did not like our presence in the student's union. I think he chosen not to do anything about it."

"Sandeep, Gopal, Anand—how are they? All good?"

“They are all fine. Sandeep wanted to come along as well, but he had a lab.”

I had begun to breathe heavily. We were climbing stairs and her bags felt heavier than they looked. What did she have inside—rocks? Wardha managed fine. I had taken the heavier pieces—unaware they were that heavy.

“Oh, yes. The Karan-Arjun of ECVU! I was in fact surprised to see you alone here. I haven’t seen you both apart.”

We had reached the end of the stairs. The rest was easier—no more stairs before the rickshaw stand from that point on.

I smiled, while I caught my breath. “Yes, we do hang out quite a bit.”

“Those too heavy for you?” she asked, noticing my discomfort.

I smiled. “It’s just that I don’t come to the station very often to receive girls from Lucknow and lug their bags. When you come back from Lucknow next, I should be fine,” I said, still puffing.

“You want to come down to the station to receive me again? After today?” she teased.

“Yeah... Why not? You had said ‘yes’ to something once....”

She understood that I was referring to the ‘will-you-marry-me’ incident. She did not have her hands free, used her elbow to punch me on my arm and did the blushing bit again. I was grinning from ear-to-ear.

Amidst other small talk about the pleasantness of the journey, who her co-travelers were and whether they had behaved, we reached the auto-rickshaw stand.

She then helped me load her luggage in!

“Are you going back to ECVU now?” she asked as she climbed into the rickshaw.

“Nope. I’m going home. Bye then,” I said after she was settled in.

“Bye,” she said, smiling, a little unsure. Did she expect me to accompany her to BULSH? Perhaps not. Her friends at the hostel would help her unload.

I reached home—I managed to get a seat without Sandeep’s help on the BTS bus this time.

After I reached home preoccupied with thoughts about Wardha, the phone rang. It was Wardha. It was the first time she had called.

“Thank you so much for helping me out today”. Wardha said amid giggles in the background. She must have mentioned at BULSH who had received her at the station and that she was now on the phone with him.

“You’re welcome,” I said. I was glad I could help her out. “Umm... what did your Dad say?” I was unable to hold on to my curiosity about her Dad’s reaction to my ‘proposal’.

I did not hear anything except giggles in the background for a little while. I could sense her smiling at my plight. Had she told her father that someone had the guts to play such a prank on his daughter, knowing very well what he was?

“I can’t tell you now,” she said. I could see the sly smile on her face. Was she playing with me? Don’t dish it out if you can’t take it—she seemed to say.

My Mother was having her afternoon siesta in the next room. She woke up, saw me on the phone and let her eyes do

most of the talking—‘Why are you on the phone now? Who are you talking to?’

My Mom, like other mothers of teenage sons around, wanted her son’s life to revolve around college and academics. Eyebrows were raised and a lot of questions were asked when any girl called me at home, especially after the ragging incident.

“Okay. Bye then. See you tomorrow,” I said, as I ended the conversation. My Mom did not insist on knowing who I had spoken to, thereby avoiding a whole series of explanations and reluctant answers. She went back to sleep and I walked out to the balcony, relieved.

## CHAPTER 20

---

**From: Anand Nair**

**29 March, 2003**

*Loafers!!!!*

Guess what happened??? NO, not that. I’m still a VIRGIN. But something almost as good (at least to us).

This afternoon, I got a mail from the “Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences” saying they have accepted me for their Ph.D. program. I might in all probability take it.

It’s a five year program. Though the university (Florida Atlantic University) is not very highly regarded in this field, this center is easily in the top 2 or 3 if not at the top.

Like you guys, I am also SURPRISED that I got through. Part of the reason is that I have been working here as research assistant and have been involved in some of their good projects. So they sort

of like me. That is why, in spite of seeing my whole bundle of undergrad marks cards, an extra one for each subject we flunked in, they agreed.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 30 March, 2003

I chatted with Anand yesterday—he was thrilled at getting into the Ph.D. program at the Florida Atlantic University. He was telling me about his work and what he would be doing for the next five years. Five years!! Phew. I cannot imagine. That has always been one of my problems. I cannot think and plan so far ahead. No way. If someone asks me what I'll be doing after finishing my Masters, I'd say I have no idea. Seriously, I don't have a clue. I haven't thought about it seriously like Anand has—I have nothing like five year plans or lifelong commitments in place.

Anyway, Anand is going the medic way. For his Ph.D. he has to take classes in anatomy and might end up knowing as much if not more than a brain surgeon—who would believe that he has a BE degree in mechanical engineering? Coming from a family full of Doctors, I'm sure his parents will be very happy

What I am doing is less scary. My program— as I see it is 80% philosophy and 20% statistics—no blood or gore, no steam turbines, lots of eccentrics, maybe some programming. But overall quite ok.

One more thing I noticed while chatting with Anand—for a change we did not discuss Jishi's thighs, or talk about our virginities. Not even ECVU. We chatted about books among other things and Anand recommended a list, have to dig some time out to read them.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 30 March, 2003

Masturbation is better than nothing.

Nothing is better than Sex.

So, is Masturbation BETTER than Sex?

##

**From: David Williams** 01 April, 2003

Masturbation better than sex? Doing April fool to us? *Poda dai.*

##

**From: Anand Nair** 02 April, 2003

Our college life started some 10 years ago. That is the ENTIRE life span of an ass and it ended half a decade back. Another year and we'll be called "uncles" wherever we go.

Besides, the stuff has been going down the fucking TOILET for the past 10–12 years now, don't you think it's time to put it to good use??



# CHAPTER 21

Sandeep Gadwal

We belatedly discovered that the Architecture branch of engineering was skewed in the ratio of boys to girls, it was 1:5..... It was the 'one boy' for five different girls. As we saw it, the supply demand equation hugely tilted in the favor of guys. The Architecture course length was a year longer than other engineering disciplines as well. We earnestly wished that we had taken Architecture instead when this information seeped into our awareness. Why would any sane teenage boy want to knowingly deny himself that ratio of boys to girls? That too for an additional year....?

What made it notably worse was that the Architecture branch of ECVU was not even on our campus..... It was actually about twelve kilometers away on the Gnanabharathi campus in the outskirts of the city. Students from Architecture visited our campus twice a year to pay their exam fees. Whenever they came, the guys in our campus took up vantage points in

the quadrangle to discretely ogle at the 'well architected' young women who came down in plenty. We always watched in groups. If anyone was seen 'seeing' by himself, he would be instantly branded a lecher. Not that it mattered all that much, but why foolishly close out on options even before they became available.....

We let out our sighs when the archi students left the campus or when the principal chased us away. The three of us then got back to our daily pursuits, which now included Wardha, while Anand had his mind firmly on the student's union and its activities.....

## CHAPTER 22

**From: Anand Nair** 22 May, 2003

Our abject and pitiful FAILURE to get laid makes me nauseous. What is it that we, this bunch of love failures, have to do to get some guilt-free, responsibility-free sex?

Oh hell, I am even fucking ready to live with the guilt.

That is not too much to ask, is it?

##

**From: David Williams** 23 May, 2003

What to do? Our life has become like this only :-(.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 26 May, 2003

Happy birthday Sahir.... Wish this would surely be your last birthday as a virgin ;-)

##

**From: David Williams** 26 May, 2003

I don't think so, Sandeep. This Sahir paavi must have lost his virginity status long back. Remember Sally?

I think I saw a photo in one of the porn sites which resembled Sahir *bhaiya* ;-).

Happy birthday Sahir. I will have a bottle of Black Dog *sarukku* to celebrate your birthday and loss of virginity.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 26 May, 2003

Thanks a lot for all your wishes. Had fun on my birthday.

No comments on my virginity status—I will leave it to your imagination ;-)

I went to dinner at an Indian restaurant with my advisor on my birthday along with a researcher in my lab. My advisor gifted me a book titled *Global Eccentrics* with a note on it: 'From one eccentric to another.'

I was on top of the world that day that he counted me as one of his kind.

##

**From: Gopal V** 27 May, 2003

Belated wishes, Sahir. With God's grace, hope all ur dreams come true.

Hope u won't become a Philosopher talking abstract shit, with a big beard & no hair on the head. All the best.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 27 May, 2003

What did you actually mean by 'Hope you won't become a philosopher...' He is already one :-).

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 28 May, 2003

You people speak as if being a Philosopher is an embarrassment. You guys have no idea, do you?

Only if you come here and see for yourself, you will know what it is to be a philosopher.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 29 May, 2003

Fellow sufferers,

I have been watching with interest the various exchanges about the Sahir PHILOSOPHY experiment. Should I be calling it a fucking experiment? I am not sure.

But then isn't every decision we make in our lifetime an experiment, with life itself being the biggest experiment of all?

The first time I came to know about Sahir's wish was a few months after our graduation from ECVU. Those were troublesome times for me. Most of that conflict and turmoil had their roots in the perceptions of 'gainful' employment. Let me explain what I mean by this 'gainful' and how these perceptions came about.

The South Indian upper castes were jolted out of their safe and easy existence after Indian independence. This meant they had to fall back on the other sure-shot formulas for economic sustenance, namely, knowledge-based professions.

Amongst all the knowledge-based professions, engineering and medicine became the new 'priesthood.' Practitioners of these were considered elite, and became the new kind of Brahmins.

But in the new scenario of independent India, this new priesthood was something that anyone with resources could aspire to and achieve. As a result, it was soon embraced by the general Indian middle class and, to some extent, lost its primarily casteist and communal sheen.

So where is the common thread in all these ramblings?

Well, it is this new priesthood and the wisdom of it that Sahir has dared to challenge. Not directly, but it is implicit in his decision to pursue philosophy.

Ever wonder why ECVU and the work we did in union is so special to us?

I think it's because it was the last place we did what we did without the fear of failure or without fear of the uncertain.

I don't see any reason why, just a few years after college, we should all come down with a terrible case of cold feet, something we have managed to remain immune to.

So fellow sufferers, let us shake off all this negativity and hear a big round of applause for good ol' Sahir. Hip hip...

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 30 May, 2003

I read a book which traced the origins of philosophy and the current intellectual thinking in US in general. A similar process of intellectual awareness cannot happen at this time in India because of how the dynamics work. Such dynamics of change

and progress work only in countries like the US, which is why it is where it is today in terms of technology and innovation.

And no, I am not putting India down. I would like to give up everything and come back to India, but for one reason—what I am studying here, and the kind of work that is done here is not done anywhere else.

Most of them in India would not have understood and still don't understand why I am studying philosophy, especially after I have finished BE in Electrical Engineering.

## CHAPTER 23

---

### Sahir Hassan

I called Wardha at BULSH that weekend from one of the hundreds of enclosed phone booths that had sprung up across the city. Driven by the revised national telecom policy, the Indian telecom sector was witnessing a complete transformation. Private investment was being pumped for ensuring availability of telephone connectivity through efficient service networks.

I did not call from home—spending at home was tight and my Dad was complaining about the phone bills. These weren't even because of me. He also conveniently 'forgot' to let me and my Mom know who had called, lest we call them back from the phone at home and burn a hole in his pocket. My Dad worked in one of those 'sick' and soon to be closed down Public Sector Units (PSUs) in Bangalore. Privatization had kicked in and these PSUs were dying a slow death due to cheaper and better products offered by the competition.

I could not speak to anybody much at home

anyway—especially to girls!—with my Mom around.

It was difficult to get through the BULSH line—the phone remained engaged. I had heard from Gopal and Sandeep about how difficult it was to get through. ‘It is said’ that, ladies have a palette for conversations and that it is built into their genetic makeup. This was the ladies’ hostel of Bangalore University—unless everyone in the hostel was on a *moun vrath*—an oath of silence—you could not expect to get through at the first try.

I managed to get through after about hundred tries.

Yes, I did exaggerate on the number, but it felt that way. Each moment I spent trying to speak to Wardha seemed like an eternity. Einstein, in his theory of relativity, noted that there was no absolute time—that each observer had his own measure of time and it could be very different from another. A few moments for someone might seem an eternity to somebody else.

“Hi, Wardha,” I said.

“Hi, Sahir. You managed to get through,” she giggled.

I noticed that she sounded a little different on the phone. A little more open, perhaps not as conscious as she was amidst everyone at ECVU.

“You know how it is,” I said.

“Yeah, I know.”

She must have heard from people complaining about the ever-busy BULSH phone line.

“You were in a hurry the other day,” she said.

“Yeah, my Mom was around. I can’t speak much when she’s at home,” I confessed.

“She isn’t at home now?”

“She is. Which is why, I am calling from a phone booth outside,” I admitted.

“Okay... Hey, guess what?”

“What?”

“About the slow dance... Kalpana and I enquired, there’s this place where they teach slow dance near BULSH.”

I did not know what to say. It was unbelievable. I pinched myself. A girl like Wardha was doing something for ‘us’. After a few moments of silence, I gushed “You are serious about it?”

“Yes. I am serious.” she said “Why? Should I not be?”

“I thought you said yes to put me off the other evening at the fresher’s party...”

“That evening, yes perhaps I did. Not now” she said.

What did she mean by ‘not now’? Did she mean ‘not now’ as in ‘not after you received me at the station and lugged my luggage’? Or ‘not now’ as in ‘not after you are willing to try a hundred times to reach me at the hostel number’? Girls, do get you thinking, more than Professors, their assignments or engineering books.

“When do you start?” I asked

“A batch is going on. The teacher asked us to come back in about a month for the next batch.”

“Guess that works. There is still time for the next fresher’s party.”

“Yeah... A few more months,” she said.

“Wardha... Umm... Who is the dance teacher?”

Perhaps, at the back of my mind, I was a little jealous

about who would get to hold Wardha in their arms and dance with her before I did. Perhaps ‘learning the slow dance’ was a bad idea in the first place. Oscar Wilde made the startling but right observation about men: Men always want to be a woman’s first love. Women have a more subtle instinct: What they like is to be a man’s last romance.

“There is this retired convent school teacher who lives with his wife. They teach slow dancing, among other classes,” she said.

“Oh, that’s cool.”

I meant it. That it was not a not a smart looking twenty something, gainfully employed youth, but a retired school teacher who taught the slow dance instead, gave me some kind of comfort. There was some solace about the whole ‘convent school teacher’ thing as well—they were more chivalrous and gave the impression that they knew to behave around women.

Wardha asked, “You seemed hesitant about something. Were you ..... jealous?” and started to giggle again.

She had sensed my envy even though I had tried to make the question as casual as I could.

I did not know what to say. I fumbled for words for the second time during a single phone call with Wardha. I then concluded that the best way out was to change the topic.

“By the way, you never told me what your Dad said.”

“Oh, that... Want to take a guess? What do you think he said?”

I could sense triumph in her voice.

“I don’t know—was your Dad over the moon that you said yes? And did he want to get you married to me right away?”

“High hopes! Take another guess,” she said, amid chuckles.

“I don’t know your father well enough. I don’t even know how things are between you and him...”

“Umm... Okay, fair enough. Sahir, did you think I’d have the guts to tell my Father about your proposal?” Wardha giggled.

I laughed. “For a moment, I thought you did,” I admitted.

Wardha laughed at my confession. She had a deep, throaty laugh. I could not take it off my mind. It rang in my ears as I went to bed that night the thoughts of Wardha filling my head, unable to let go of the smile pasted on my lips.

# CHAPTER 24

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**From: Sahir Hassan** 1 June, 2003

I came back home after a long day at the university—dead tired and ready to hit the bed. My roomie had got hold of a complete version of *Mysore Mallige* and was playing it on TV when I came in—my sleep went straight out of the window.

# #

**From: Gopal V** 2 June, 2003

*Mysore Mallige* babe is 2 sexy.

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 2 June, 2003

What the fuck is this *Mysore Mallige* BUSINESS? I am fuckin lost.

# #

**From: Gopal V**

3 June, 2003

Let me tell u...

*Mysore Mallige* is a sex video scandal which happened in Hassan at the Malnad College of Engineering. Hassan is about three hours away from Bangalore. My cousin did his engineering there during the time the scandal happened.

The story of *Mysore Mallige*, as told 2 me by this very cousin (how is that for first-hand information), goes something like this. Others please pitch in with missing information or if I am wrong.

*Mysore Mallige* literally means *the flower of Mysore*. Both the hero and the heroine (is she beautiful or what!!) of *Mysore Mallige*, were in the Architecture dept at Malnad. Girl's parents are coffee plantation owners from Coorg, I do not have any idea about the guy's parents. According 2 my cousin, she used 2 stay with him a lot more than she used 2 stay in the Ladies hostel of her college.

One day, these two love birds decided 2 do a premature honeymoon in Mysore. Our hero had a 'handy cam' handy. He decided 2 'capture the event' which took place over three days (he is heard using the word "capture" a lot of times throughout the video). Everything goes fine & our love birds are back 2 Hassan 2 continue with their romance (and studies). Our hero decides 2 CD-write the whole thing and gives the camcorder 2 a close friend of his.

Everything goes out of control when his friend decides 2 keep a copy of the tape for himself while showing it off to his friends. You can't blame his friends if they wanted a copy of it too.

A major scam ensues and makes the front page of a lot of newspapers. The CD has broken all frontiers and records and ranks as the best X-rated Indian stuff seen in a while.

Last that was heard of the couple was that their parents were still 'thinking' of getting them married.

A point 2 note, this girl is gorgeous. In spite of whatever he did 2 her on that video, I still find her lovely. I had earlier come across only the parts where they just 'do it.' I saw the complete video with their conversation in it only recently. The initial parts of the video has her wearing specs and with her books around her. What a *chootiya* that guy must have been 2 get her into such a mess. Anyway, shit like this happens.

We should have taken up Architecture in engineering. What a mistake we did!!!

Still thinking and feeling bad about the *Mysore Mallige* female as I type this mail.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** **5 June, 2003**

Your mail is actually more than elaborate on the *Mysore Mallige* incident.....

There were a couple of screenings in my house. The movie was screened once exclusively for the gang (Anand missed out on it), and again for David on a special request from him.....

David is obviously floored by this girl. Unfortunately, someone borrowed my personal copy of the CD and never returned it..... David is the more disappointed about the lost CD than anyone else who saw it at my home.....

# #

**From: David Williams** **6 June, 2003**

*Machans!!!*

The heroine in *Mysore Mallige* gave me a few sleepless nights.

If only I was in the same college, I would have been in the queue to marry her even after seeing that *mayire*... that dog sleep with her.

Her beauty is as pristine as ever. Man-oh-man, she was a woman to kill and die for.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** **10 June, 2003**

David—it is a very big statement coming from you—about you even willing to marry someone.

Careful. Pics of *Mysore Mallige* mms scandal attached.

# #

**From: Anand Nair** **12 June, 2003**

Looks like the *Mysore Mallige* female lights the FIRE in the LOINS of all our guys irrespective of whether they are single, attached or married.

Anyway, I went to a student fest arranged here at the university. And needless to say had a good time—in fact had a GREAT time.

It was almost as good as back home. Well, ALMOST.

It was called 'A Festival of Nations.' It was supposed to be a platform for international students to showcase their respective cultures and talent.



The Indian contingent was a disappointment. They went up and performed various (so called) Indian dances to Hindi FILM music!!! Can you imagine that!!! FILM MUSIC. Remember that this was being showcased as Indian culture.

Now about the real fun part.

Every time one of those songs used to come up (and there were many) some of us (mainly southies) used to do dance in the crowd just like we used to do in college!!! Non stop with all the shouting and all.

Actually some of us got so excited that we went home, got one Tamil song, basically meant for street dances and went ON STAGE and did it!!!!!!

We came all the way to America and did proper *dappan koothu* dance that too on the dias. And even the crowd enjoyed it. For one evening it was like home. And to make things worse, by the end of the evening I was giving the organizers tips on how to make it better next time.

I guess that is how the case is with us. I had to force myself not to get involved.

# #

**From: Gopal V**

**12 June, 2003**

Yes Anand—even I feel the same. It is difficult 2 stay away from fests like these after what we did during Milagro.

## CHAPTER 25

### Anand Nair

One of the foremost responsibilities of the ECVU student union's office bearers was to organize the annual three-day student fest, Milagro. I was learning the nuances of organizing Milagro and HARASSED the arses off the organizers with my questions. I did not have to be told anything more than ONCE.

The University allotted some funds to the student's union for extracurricular activities every year, which weren't enough to conduct the fest. The office bearers had to rope in sponsors to get the necessary funds, which required as much effort as organizing the actual fest itself. It was a lot of work to WRING some money out from the sponsors of the fest.

Brochures were made with an overview of ECVU, the Milagro fest, the kind of crowd and numbers expected for the event, and the benefits the sponsors could garner for supporting the event. The office bearers and student volunteers went out in teams to search for

sponsors. The fruit of their efforts then decided the lavishness of the fest, the prize money for events, the quality of the bands that would play on the 'Rock Show' night, whether celebrities could be brought in and entertained, and a horde of other things.

Milagro had gone from a student festival to a ECVU tradition. It had become synonymous with ECVU and its success became a matter of PRIDE for every student. Hosting the fest well decided the triumph of the office bearers. Any other issue the student union dealt with came in a distant second.

ECVU was a sight to behold during Milagro. It wasn't because of the decorations that adorned the walls of ECVU, but because of students who were allowed to loiter in the college quadrangle during the fest. It is something else seeing a group of happy youthful faces unconcerned about classes or exams in the quadrangle.

It was soon evident that singing *Informer* and hosting events were not the only talents David from electronics possessed. In that packed quadrangle on the first day of Milagro, David called out in a distinct Tamil accent:

"Hey Kalpana, please come here. I want to open my ZIP and show you something."

When a lull descended in the quadrangle on his words, he slid his backpack off his shoulders, unzipped it, pulled out a set of RD Burman music CDs and showed them to Kalpana. Though Kalpana was expecting the CDs, she stood frozen at how David went about it. There was laughter all around and the quadrangle returned to life again.

From that moment, David became an integral part of our gang.

David's mannerisms and, I hate to admit, his looks as well, matched those of the 'Boss' and 'Superstar' RAJINIKANTH, minus the moustache. He looked younger than his age, and, like other Tamilians we knew, broke into his native tongue at the slightest excuse. He considered himself a 'ladies' man' and was able to strike a chord with them without effort. He enthralled them with his wicked sense of humor and voice, which dished out melodies at the drop of a hat. He rode a Royal Enfield Bullet to college while the rest of us were at the mercy of the BTS bus service for our daily commute.

David hosted a horde of music events. He was a natural at them. He worked the crowd, got them involved, and kept them entertained like a pro.

Wardha was a walking encyclopedia of songs and made it to the semis of the Antakshari event, teaming up with Kalpana. Wardha also did well to reach the quarterfinals of the table tennis competition during Milagro, fighting back from four match-points down against her opponent to triumph. She confessed that BULSH had a table tennis table and she got plenty of opportunities to practice.

Our moron Principal was making his presence felt. The Milagro schedule became his weapon of control. He would insist that the organizers wrap up everything according to schedule. The organizers and event hosts were pissed at this. Nobody could prevent such events from spilling over and exceeding the allotted time. Everyone knew this and nobody complained, except Mr 'you-know-who'. The organizers had to conduct the events in a strict, no-nonsense manner as a workaround.

Our ever so notorious fourth years were not to be

outdone. They took the happiness out of the Principal's life by painting his car, a white Premier Padmini, with every color of paint they could get their hands on. The act of vandalism could not be traced back, thereby avoiding further controversy or action against them.

Rachana had a whale of a time taunting Sandeep about Wardha during Milagro.

Sandeep and Sahir put together a soccer team. Sahir had played at the inter-school level and that experience seemed to have helped. They made it to the semis. Sandeep and I were partners in the carom event. I was way out of touch with my carom skills from school and pre-university days to be able to make any impact.

The ladies basketball matches were a major attraction, especially for guys. The girls took these basketball matches with a lot of seriousness and that competitive spirit oozed out from them. For us, it was a chance to see some serious GIRL-ON-GIRL action, with sweaty bodies and balls flying around everywhere.

Jishi's thighs deserve more than an honorable mention.

Our necks ached for a week from head-banging during the final showcase event during the concluding night of Milagro: the Rock Show featuring the band Millenium. As the horde of students started to warm up to the rock and heavy metal that Millenium played, the cops intervened and ensured that there was no further joy for us that night.

Nobody had any friggin doubts that there was only one person who would want to call cops at ECVU.

## CHAPTER 26

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From: Sandeep Gadwal

04 July, 2003

Today I met Jishi..... You guys must surely remember her from the basketball matches!!!

Jishi had actually come to my office for some training. I spoke to her for around 20 minutes. She said she has been here from past 3 days but I saw her only today during lunch in the cafeteria.

Guys believe it or not, Jishi is a babe now. She is not that plumpish girl anymore, but has totally slimmed down and looks great. She was wearing a tight black t-shirt. I think you guys can surely imagine the rest.

##

**From: Gopal V**

**05 July, 2003**

Yes, who can forget Jishi from the basketball matches at ECVU.  
*Devaa!!!* We had 2 keep track of so many balls at once.

She would be looking sexy with that extra weight gone.

##

**From: David Williams**

**05 July, 2003**

*Ayyooo!!!* Why did she lose the extra mass? Now there is less of her to hold. *Machans*, what a “handy” figure she was then in college!!!!

##

**From: Anand Nair**

**06 July, 2003**

Jishi must have gotten into one of those athletic flexible kinds. You know the type that can twist and contort their bodies like those Yoga masters.

She would be great to try out all those limb twisting poses of KAMA SUTRA. Now that would be something.

## CHAPTER 27

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### Gopal Varadarajan

I ‘asked’ Wardha on the second day of Milagro. She said no.

Why am I such a loser? Why me, God?

‘Asking’ worked like this: A guy summoned up all his guts. He either handed the girl a note or told her in person (or on the phone) that he felt ‘differently’ for her. He would then wait for a response from the girl: whether she thought ‘they’ could work or ‘it’ was a bad idea. The most common excuse from girls was that they never felt for the guy ‘that’ way. The ‘we could work’ scenario rarely happened at ECVU.

We got drunk that weekend after Milagro at a *dhaba* on the outskirts of the city. These *dhabas* were gaining popularity for offering a combination of chilled alcohol, inexpensive food, and a laidback setting. Anand got some extra money and agreed to buy the drinks. He drove the five of us to the *dhaba* in his Father’s Maruti 800.

I drank more than anybody else. I wanted to drown my sorrow of being turned down by Wardha. Choosing alcohol to pacify a broken heart is an established practice across nations and cultures. It always seemed strange to others in my group, that it was so. What did they know about how it felt? They had never got themselves into my situation.

“What did you tell her, Gopal?” Sahir asked.

“I told her, ‘I love you, Wardha.’”

“You told her that, to her face? Wow! You’ve got THE BALLS, man!” Anand said. “Not many I know have your guts”.

Anand’s discomfort around girls was common knowledge. “What did she tell you then?” he asked.

“She was silent for a while. She then said, ‘Sorry Gopal. I am in no position to get into such things. You are a good friend; can we please remain that way?’” I took another swig of my whisky.

“Gopal, at least you asked her like a fuckin man. Take a bow guys. How many of you have his GUTS?” Anand asked.

“Balls to the guts. No point having them if this is what you’re left with,” I said, holding the half-filled whisky glass high for everyone to see. I spotted Sandeep nodding and Sahir listening intently.

“Guts matter. Do you guys know what our senior Malla did?” Anand asked.

We shook our heads, “No, we don’t”.

“Like Gopal, he asked one of his batchmates from trical. She started to lecture him about this is not the age and that she never saw him that way and what would his parents think and he should focus on his studies and all such CRAP.”

“I really hate it when girls do that,” Sandeep said. “Who do they think they actually are to advise us on what we need to do? Our mothers? What happened then?”

“Malla told her, ‘I’m asking you. If you want to be a part of my life, you are more than welcome. Otherwise, SHUT UP AND GET LOST’.”

There was silence. Nobody spoke for a few seconds. David then said “*Adaa paavi!* Malla did that? I always knew he was not to be messed with, but telling this to someone, that too, to someone you’re in love with, that is something else.”

“What did the girl do? Did she slap Malla?” I asked.

“Not a chance. The girl didn’t know what to say and walked away with her head down.”

“Oh...” I said.

“But, as Anand said, you are the MAN,” David concluded slapping me on my back.

I shook my head.

I became their hero that day for ‘asking’ Wardha in person. They thought that since I did not send Wardha a note or call her up to confess my feelings, I was something else. I did not want to be a hero like how they had made me into one. I did not ‘ask’ Wardha for this.

But I wondered why Wardha said no. I had the right set of intentions when I asked, did I not? Did Wardha think otherwise? Did I give an impression about myself that I did not deserve her love?

Had I misinterpreted Wardha and thought she would say yes? Did I think she was willing? She was friendly and nice. But,

she was from a different part of the country and perhaps that's how they behaved there. Did I assume something which she had not intended to convey?

We all then turned to engineering for an answer. We started to see this 'asking' thing as more of a stochastic process. A stochastic system is one that does not always produce the same output for a given input. Unlike a deterministic system, a stochastic would have elements of random behavior. The evolutionary theory of random selection of characteristics that are passed on from one generation to another, is a good example of a stochastic system at work. In a similar way, no one could ever tell for sure whether this 'asking thing' would work out as the person asking would have intended it to. It seemed like a stochastic system which worked purely on chance. The 'asking system' involved several elements which were driven by random ingredients way beyond the human control. Foremost among them was the behavior of a woman's heart and its subsequent interpretation and understanding by the woman herself.

We discussed the 'just friends' state of affairs that Wardha had suggested. Anand started, "It is a fuckin difficult concept to work guys. How can you be 'just friends' with a girl?"

"Anand, you can actually be friends with a girl. That is possible" Sandeep said. "But it is difficult when you are blindly in love with her."

"Right *da*. How can you be 'just friends' with someone when the other is longing for your exclusive company? When the other begins to think that three is a crowd? When the other can't get his mind off you?" David pitched in with some expert opinion.

"It is not possible. Someone is in denial and someone is disregarding a strong tenet of human emotion. It is a messed-up

situation to be in," Sahir concluded after some deep thought.

The end of Milagro signaled the end of extra-curricular pursuits for that semester. Fourth semester exams loomed ahead. We then started to gather notes to cross the academic hurdle without too much heartache.

With all the distractions, I only hoped that God hadn't given up on me.

# CHAPTER 28

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**From: David Williams**                      **20 September, 2003**

Do you guys remember that senior Malla from ECVU. He got married yesterday. I pity his wife. *Paavam!!*

Good news for the babes, one JERK is gone. Good news for us too, another competitor is out.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**                      **23 September, 2003**

It's official now—I am a Graduate Student at the Department of Philosophy after finishing my MS in EE. The Philosophy department takes care of my fees and pays me a healthy stipend as well. In return, I have to teach Philosophy to undergrad students. My roommates who started with me have finished their MS and are leaving one by one.

While at ECVU, I had taught Electrical engineering. Now at Wright State, I am teaching

Philosophy. I don't think there are too many people in this world who have taught both Electrical engineering and Philosophy—in whatever capacity.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **24 September, 2003**

That's really awesome Sahir.... I don't think I will ever come across anyone who have taught such extremely different subjects like Electrical engineering and Philosophy....

##

**From: Gopal V**                                      **30 September, 2003**

Yesterday afternoon, I was travelling from Chennai 2 Bangalore. It was on a private bus. A very hot aunty sat next to me. She was not hot because Chennai weather is hot.

*Anjeneya!!! Control!!!!*

# #

**From: Anand Nair**                                      **01 October, 2003**

Gopal, the next time you are in a similar situation, do something, ANYTHING (touching!! touching!! or something like that).

Of course there will be a few repercussions, but it is worth a try. It is better than remaining a VIRGIN, isn't it??

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan**                                      **02 October, 2003**

Do you want to go to jail, Gopal? Be very careful while implementing Anand's advice. I don't think we can ever have such guts.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 18 October, 2003

Hey *Loafers*,

I was at this bar with my American friends. A girl, the SLUTTY types from our group got drunk, held my hand and asked me, "Hey Anand. Suppose we fall in love and get married to each other, would you burn me?"

I thought I did not hear right and said, "What?"

"Would you set me on fire and kill me if you get married to me?" she asked again.

She must have had heard of the sati practice from India and that was her way of showing off her limited general knowledge.

Forget marriage, I think it is a criminal waste of time if I have to think from above my WAIST for such types. I wanted to hump the bloody brains out of the bitch. Just plain hump hump hump and hump. Wham bam thank you BITCH.

I told her that Indian guys take special pleasure in burning women. That it gives us a prolonged orgasm and we cannot resist torching her types. That put her in her place.

What a bitch!! How I HATE these bimbos.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 20 October, 2003

Guys like Anand have the talent to become story writers to movies starring none other than our dear Malayalam porn star Shakeela....!!! Hump hump hump....

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 24 October, 2003

My colleagues at the department, mostly white Americans, came home last weekend. They looked at where I slept and asked, "Hey Anand, you sleep here on the floor?"

It's normal for desis like us in the US to sleep on the floor. I said yes without giving much thought to it. What they said next perked up my ears.

"So what if you get a girl home? Would you want her to sleep on the floor?" I shrugged. I getting a GIRL home (with such an intention) was not likely to happen, there were other places I could go ;-).

They did not stop at that. They spread the word in the department that Anand needed a bed, and he needed it ASAP. It seemed like they had more confidence than me that I would get a girl home sooner than I thought that could happen.

Anyway, now I do have a bed ;-)

# #

**From: David Williams** 28 October, 2003

*Dai* Anand, I have no doubts that you will be having lots of interactions and actions with the opposite sex soon.



## CHAPTER 29

### Sahir Hassan

It was the start of our fifth semester. Though we had finished only two years of engineering and had stepped into our third year at ECVU, I felt like we were veterans already.

The fresh and eager first years who had filled up the college quadrangle reminded me that it was only a year since we went through the horror of our prison—it felt much longer than that. It was also a year since we had first met Wardha. Her thought brought back the smile on my face.

It was election time again and class topper, Varun, contested against me for the CR post. I had discharged my duties as earnestly as I could—Wardha apart—and I didn't think anyone had anything to complain about.

Shylaja Ma'am came down to oversee our elections.

In my speech, I thanked everyone for their support—I included a special thanks to Sandeep for his help during my tenure. Between Sandeep and me, we had managed everything that was thrown at us.

During his speech, Varun didn't have too many things to criticize about my style of functioning or the work I had put in. He proposed a new set of initiatives that would help the students prepare for the upcoming campus placement season.

Though it was a close contest—I won the election with enough breathing space. Anand won again from his class.

The real election drama started after that.

The fourth years fought for the posts in the Student Union office bearer elections. As third year students, we were supposed to play a bigger role than the first or the second years in supporting the office bearers.

As usual, the Principal oversaw the student union elections. As it happened every year, no students other than the class representatives were allowed. This time, the Principal's reaction was different on seeing us—he looked a little unsettled and fidgeted as he sat. Perhaps he started to get wary of our growing influence in the student's union.

Anand had done enough to be nominated for the post of the General Secretary in the third year. The student nominated for Cultural Secretary had not showed up. I was recommended for that position. The Principal, after noticing that we were in line for office bearer posts, began to insist that only final year students could hold them. Circumstances though, did not favor what he proposed. Shylaja Ma'am supported our candidacy as well. The set of fourth years I was supporting won. Anand was elected the

General Secretary and I, the Cultural Secretary. The ‘important’ posts of President, Vice President and Treasurer went to the final year students.

Both, Anand and I were office bearers of the student’s union in our third year itself. These were posts that final year students usually held. It was also an indicator that we were getting the credentials to play a bigger role in the students’ union the following year.

Shylaja Ma’am congratulated us. “You guys are doing really well,” she said.

The job of a Cultural Secretary came with its set of responsibilities during Milagro. I did not know if I was up for them. Being a Cultural Secretary seemed a huge responsibility and I didn’t have Sandeep’s buy-in on it yet, which was a bigger dilemma for me. I did not want to appear like a power-and-title-hungry politician and had no clue how I could break the news to him. I knew that I could not do justice to the responsibility on my own. If Sandeep went with me on this, we could handle anything that came our way.

I recalled the last New Year’s party we had organized for the entire department with a day’s effort. We initially didn’t know if we could pull it off. I asked Sandeep if he was up for it, he had said yes. We decided to take it on. Everything then fell into place— we pooled in the money, booked the hall, made the required purchases, arranged for the music system and set the stage for the party—all this within half a day. The celebration was a smash hit.

Post elections, as I sat holding my head down, contemplating the situation I had gotten myself into, Sandeep walked up to me and said, “Congratulations Mr. Cultural Secretary”. He seemed happy. There was no sarcasm in his voice.

I propped my head up and said “Thank you.” I was relieved that he seemed fine with it. I asked nevertheless, “Are you fine with it?”

“Why, of course, I’m actually fine with it. I’m happy that you’re the Cultural Secretary. Why shouldn’t I be?”

“I didn’t want to take up the position. They did not even contest the post. I don’t want this limelight. I don’t want to be a title holder.”

“It doesn’t matter, Sahir. We can manage this easily. Let’s do this. It should be perfectly fine....,” he assured me.

As we lumbered off by ourselves that evening to catch the BTS bus home, I thought about the whole situation. Sandeep’s enthusiasm and belief that we could do justice to this, was rubbing off on me and I soon started to feel better.

This time, I jostled my way through the crowd to grab seats for Sandeep and me. My expression screamed, *Bring them on!* I was having an adrenaline rush. We could achieve anything together, get off the most difficult situations, the deepest of shits.

We had each other, didn’t we?

# CHAPTER 30

---

**From: Sahir Hassan**                      **03 December, 2003**

Guys, there is this festival called Halloween which is celebrated with great enthusiasm here. This was how I was dressed that day (pics attached).

I was supposed to be a ‘vampira’—a female vampire, minus protruding teeth, plus beard. The girl in the red dress was the one who dressed me up—she is Spanish, gorgeous, and had a killer accent. I had a good time in her company. Her boyfriend is a grad student in our department and was around—so don’t let your dirty minds go to work full time.

I was ‘wasted’ that day—drank booze after a loooong time. The whole drunken slide started when the Spanish girl offered me a shot of tequila. I couldn’t refuse—and after that I was unstoppable. Had fun though, getting high after a loooong looong time.

Gopal—do you remember the last time? Was that in Anand’s house?

# #

**From: Gopal V**    **05 December, 2003**

Yes Sahir. It was in Anand’s house. I remember we had also watched Salma Hayek in the movie *Desperado* then.

# #

**From: Anand Nair**    **05 December, 2003**

Aaah, the accent these latino babes have. I feel as if they are talking with a ‘lollipop’ in their mouths all the time!! It is so SUGGESTIVE of the other pleasures it has to offer.

As for me, I came back on Thursday after attending a conference in New Orleans. It was a huge conference that lasted eight days.

New Orleans is the home of the Mardi Gras festival. It is the biggest drunken revelry in the whole of the United States. Very much like the Brazilian carnival.

Or in other words it is THE city to party in the US.

So I did just that—eight days of great science and seven nights of unbelievable debauchery. I drank so much so that I felt that if somebody squeezed me hard, alcohol would ooze out.

Lots of women in New Orleans would flash their BOOBS for beads. There were also these experts who were adept at coaxing women to show their boobs on stage, not even for beads or money.

That place has more strip clubs and lap dancing places than coffee shops. I had a couple of white guys with me. We checked out every single one of the strip clubs over a whole week!! It was fun all the way. We even saw a LIVE SEX SHOW.

Anyways, now I am back to reality and tons of work.

That’s all for now guys. Have fun.

# #

**From: David Williams**                      **07 December, 2003**

Anand, *Naaye!!!* You dog. I know what you are talking about. On AXN, Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00 pm, there is a show called 'Wild On'. They once showed an episode on New Orleans and what goes on there.

Man-o-man!!! Every babe just pushes her t-shirt up and collects a garland of beads. Sometimes they push their pants down too. Pity, the censor board smudges the relevant areas.

People seem to be just wild there. That New Orleans party is the hottest.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **05 January, 2004**

I successfully cleared my PMP® Certification exam today.....

# #

**From: Anand Nair**                              **06 January, 2004**

Great news. I first read it as PIMP certification and was confused. ;- ) ;- )

# CHAPTER 31

## Sandeep Gadwal

There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that Sahir liked Wardha in 'that' way..... He managed to hide it well, but I simply could not. My eyes lit up when someone mentioned her name. Rachana got to know about my 'crush' and, inevitably, never let an opportunity pass by to torment me about her.....

Rachana soon got to know that the three of us, Sahir, Gopal and me, had soft corners for Wardha..... To taunt us, she decided to dedicate a song on us. The popular song from the Hindi movie Amar Akbar Anthony went: *Parde Hain Parde*.....

Rachana sang a modified version of the song, for us:

*"Wardha hain, Wardha hain;*

*Wardha hain, Wardha hain;*

*Wardha ke peeche, Teen janasheen hain.*

*In Janasheen ko be parde na kardon tho tho tho*

*Rachana mera naam nahi hain...*

*Wardha hain Wardha..”*

(There is Wardha, there is Wardha;  
Behind Wardha, there are three suitors.  
If I do not reveal these suitors to all;  
Then don't call me Rachana anymore.  
There is Wardha...Wardha...)

Valentine's Day was around the corner..... It had become quite a big deal with people our age due to the hype the media now invariably generated around it. Neither Sahir nor I had the money or the guts to do anything elaborate or with a degree of seriousness.....

Valentine's Day and how it began to be observed in India with cards, flowers and accompanying merriment was actually unheard of even a few years back. A section of the population considered itself the 'protectors' of Indian culture and tradition and scorned this 'aping of the West.' They even resorted to violence, attempting to strongly discourage such practices.....

Sahir and me considered ourselves as 'early adapters' and were eager to experience the new social phenomenon. We enthusiastically wanted to get a feel for the new ideologies brought in and bombarded into our awareness mainly by cable TV and newspapers..... Both were the kind who said yes first and thought later. Our enthusiasm bordered on the outrageous. We were game for pretty much anything.....

We subsequently decided to give Wardha a card on Valentine's Day. We did not want to give individual ones but decided on a single card, both professing our 'love' for her. We

did not want to appear serious when we gave Wardha the card and distress her with it..... By giving a single card, we also wanted to ensure that Wardha would find it funny (bordering on the ridiculous) and take it lightly as well.

We found a witty and apt card for the occasion. We put in some over the top Hindi and English love songs in it..... We also put in a lot of thought to make it as light hearted as we could, while waiting all afternoon for her classes to end. We checked a couple of times as well, she was in the Electrical Machines lab.....

The Machines lab was a huge damp hall filled with prehistoric machines that shook the earth and made grinding noises of varied frequencies every time they started, ran, changed speeds, or stopped. We spotted her absorbed in one of the numerous experiments that Electrical Engineering rigors inevitably demanded.....

When she came out, we timed our approach right and 'ran into' her near the Electrical Engineering department office on the first floor. She was checking the notice board and was alone. It was the ideal situation to avoid any possible embarrassment to us or, importantly, to her.....

"Hi Wardha," I said.

"Hi Sandeep, hi Sahir. How are you?" she said, smiling. She looked her attractive self even towards the end of the day.

"How has your Valentine's day been?" I asked her.....

"It's been pretty awesome so far. The induction motor that I have been doing experiments with has been good company" she giggled.

"Tch, tch, tch... I actually pity the induction motor. It could not get the Freshie Queen for company today," I said,

clicking my tongue.

“Yeah, right!” she said, pretending to be angry. “Whom have you been spending your Valentine’s Day with?”

“We had some gorgeous women waiting for us on MG Road, but we preferred to stay back at ECVU instead..... We were in the library the whole afternoon, keeping the chairs and tables company,” I said.

“Oh... Why?” Her expression changed to curiosity.

“We have something for you,” Sahir said, with a special stress on ‘we.’

Wardha started to get that suspicion that we were surely up to something. “What is it?” she asked with that ‘I am thinking’ look on her face.

We had given her engineering books and manuals before this. What we were about to give her this time, was clearly nothing close to academic.....

“It’s just a card..... Happy Valentine’s Day,” I said and gave her the card.

We were sure that she did not have a clue that we could come up with something as ridiculous as a single card from both of us. Her face had a mixed expression. She was grinning while appearing lost at the same moment, not knowing what she had to do with a valentine’s card in her hand, especially one which was given by two guys.....

“Bye then,” I said. Wardha smiled, the lost look still on her face.

When we started to climb down the stairs, we ran into Kalpana making her way up to where Wardha was. We did not

want Kalpana to go up to Wardha right then. We wanted Wardha to have enough time to decide what she wanted to do with the card, if she wanted to show the card to any of her friends, or even throw it away. We started a conversation with Kalpana on the stairs, in an attempt to prevent her from going upstairs then.....

“Hi, Kalpana..... What are you doing here this late?” I started (it was early evening).

“Hi. I had Electrical Circuits lab. Am really tired. I want to go back to the hostel now.”

“Yeah... We understand. We too have been through it. How do you find the electrical labs? Do you actually like them?” I probed on.

“They are very difficult. I am scared all the time of getting electrocuted. I leave it to my batch mates to complete the experiment most of the time,” she confessed.....

“The risk of getting electrocuted is always there. Good you are careful,” I said. Sahir smiled at me. The delay tactics were working well.....

“Yes... We need to be. Our parents are not here either. It will be difficult if something happens,” Kalpana went on.

“How’s the exam preparation coming along?”

Exams were still a couple of months away. Nobody in engineering prepared for exams that early.....

“Electrical Engineering is tough. I did not know it would be this difficult when I joined. I am trying to prepare, but none of the other girls have started,” Kalpana said.

“How are your parents doing?” I was relentless.

“They are fine...”

We spoke to Kalpana about classes and labs and lecturers and exams, about anything under the sun to prevent her from going upstairs to the department immediately. We let her go after what we thought was sufficient time for Wardha to read the card and take a decision to do whatever she deemed right with it.....

We then headed for M G Road, a favorite haunt. We shared a plate of fried rice at a Chinese place. We also managed enough between us for tickets to the front row of Salma Hayek's *Fools Rush In* playing in Rex. Though the movie wasn't great, Salma Hayek observed at close quarters made quite an impression.....

We spent a lot of time in the M G Road-Brigade road area, often envying the couples we saw. We usually made fun of ourselves for not being able to 'find' somebody. We always felt a little low then.....

Today, we did not feel all that bad. We now had someone in mind, at least....

We did not know what Wardha actually thought about us or the card after that day. Though we felt glad giving the card to her, we did not know if she was happy or distressed. Like most guys, we lacked the ability to read girls, understand them, and clearly anticipate what they felt or how they would react to what we said or did.....

Rachana came to our rescue. She admitted she hadn't got the chance to see the card. Wardha wasn't letting anyone see it. She let us know that most girls in BULSH had got to know what we did. She also let us know that Wardha had kept the card and was quite okay about it. Rachana did not elaborate further and we did not get an opportunity to ask Wardha about the card, with the BULSH phone forever busy.....

Wardha did not treat us any differently after we gave her the card, and neither did we behave as if something special had taken place...

Maybe something had changed. Two guys cannot give a single card professing their 'love' for someone and expect to get away with it, but we did not see any obvious signs of anything amiss.....

It was life as usual at ECVU after that.....

David was up to his tricks. He brought a few weeks old Pomeranian to college, knowing well that girls can't resist anything that cute. Kalpana was his target again. He asked in a Rajnikanth pose with the straightest of faces, "Hi, Kalpana. Want a puppy?" while not handing her the Pomeranian in her hand.

Kalpana didn't get it at first, but soon realized that 'puppy' was also slang for a kiss. She walked away in disgust amid laughter all around. David's voice was heard the loudest.....

## CHAPTER 32

---

**From: Gopal V** 14 February, 2004

Happy Valentine's day 2 everyone.

##

**From: David Williams** 14 February, 2004

Did you guys realize that Children's day comes NINE months to the date after Valentine's day??

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 15 February, 2004

Valentine's Day has come and gone—I did not see anybody with any enthusiasm here to celebrate Valentine's Day. There was no desi even worth considering for Valentine's Day.

The desi girls here at the university are either engaged or on the verge of getting married to someone. No options for people like us.

##

**From: David Williams**

16 February, 2004

*Dai!!!* You are still considering desi girls. Why aren't you widening your options to pardesi babes? Shame on you.

What happened to the babe used to sit next to you in class? Any progress?

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

17 February, 2004

The Sangh Parivar and RSS actually had the most fun here in India on Valentine's day..... They got 'couples' thrown out of restaurants, beat up a few guys who were seen with girls, got some 'couples-seen-together' married as well on Valentine's day under the excuse of Hindutva.....



# CHAPTER 33

## Sahir Hassan

Sandeep and I were at Deepak Nursing home, the hospital next to BULSH, with flowers and a get-well-soon card. We found Wardha in one of the hospital rooms, asleep and—like we had heard—with her leg in a cast.

I felt responsible and cringed.

We stood for a few moments looking at Wardha asleep at peace before Kalpana woke her up—in spite of our protests.

“Hi, Wardha. I guess there’ll be no more dancing for a while,” I said as Wardha woke up.

The fresher’s party for that year was scheduled for the following week.

Wardha smiled back weakly. She accepted our flowers and the card.

“Thank you for coming,” Wardha said in a just-woken-up voice. “I haven’t been able to learn the slow

dance. There weren’t enough students to make an entire batch. I guess I won’t make it to the next batch either.” She said looking down at her leg.

# # #

Bheemeshwari is a popular trekking destination close to Bangalore. I had hiked there a couple of times earlier with a trekking club, and had a lot of fun. When the juniors were looking for a day-long outing, I recommended the trekking club and Bheemeshwari. They liked the idea. Most of them had never trekked before, and showed a lot of enthusiasm. I helped organize the outing and co-ordinate between the juniors and the trekking club. I was invited to join the trek as a member of the club’s team and I agreed.

It was a stream-bed trek through dense forest. The eight kilometer path was strewn with rocks and boulders and led to a small waterfall. It was very scenic. The clean air felt good in our lungs and it was a refreshing break from classes and the concrete jungle for everyone.

We saw a lot of elephant dung on the way. These are a prized find for regular trekkers. Some of the droppings seemed fresh. There was a buzz of excitement in the group that we might run into some elephants in the wild.

We soon saw them—three adults. A calf was spotted as well trying to hide between the legs of its mother. We did not try to get close and they left us alone. It was the first such sighting of elephants in the wild for a lot of people on the trip. They cherished the moment.

The trekking club had organized food and set up rock climbing and rappelling activities next to the waterfall—the juniors

were having a great time.

It happened on our way back to the bus. Wardha jumped from a boulder and missed her footing. She heard a snap, felt a stabbing pain in her knee, and could not stand after that. The club was equipped to provide only basic first aid. We were in the middle of nowhere, with no chance of finding doctors or a hospital anywhere in the vicinity. Wardha had to be carried back to the bus and could get further medical help and consultation only when we reached Bangalore.

I sat next to Wardha and Kalpana on the way back to Bangalore.

Wardha did not appear to be in any kind of discomfort. Her leg had been cushioned using a set of sheets. We chatted and played Antakshari through the entire two-hour journey back. Wardha was the better singer among the three of us and knew almost every song there was to know—she toyed with my limited knowledge of Hindi songs.

I also began to understand Kalpana better and saw why Wardha hung out with her. Kalpana was naïve and trusted everybody. There was no vice within her—she was not the jealous and scheming type who hung on to grudges. Wardha adored Kalpana for her simplicity and for her ability to trust people, something that does not come easily to many.

Wardha seemed fine when we reached Bangalore. Though unable to walk without support, she took a rickshaw with Kalpana to BULSH—insisting she would be fine and nobody else needed to accompany them.

I called BULSH early next morning. I got through after a few attempts (the girls at the hostel must have slept late the

previous night) and Kalpana came on the phone.

“Hi, Kalpana. How is Wardha?” I asked.

“Hi, Sahir. Wardha’s pain increased during the night. It reached an unbearable point. We had to take her to Deepak Nursing home around midnight. She felt better when she was given painkillers. The doctor put a cast on her leg. She is still in the hospital,” Kalpana said.

As Kalpana narrated what Wardha was going through, I started to feel responsible for what had happened to her. Why did I have the bright idea of taking the juniors on such a trek? They would have been happier picnicking at a tried and trusted location—but for my suggestion.

It was at that moment—seeing her in unkempt hair and a crumpled dress with a cast on her leg, helpless and hurt in the hospital—she went from being attractive to beautiful. For me, this had gone beyond the crushes people kept falling in and out of.

We kept getting updates from Kalpana on Wardha’s progress. It took about three weeks for Wardha to recover enough and return to ECVU.

I grimaced in pain when I saw Wardha at ECVU limping to her classes—why did I have to propose the trekking trip.

“Hi. Good to see you back,” I said.

Wardha smiled.

“You have cut your hair short?” I noted.

“You noticed” she grinned. “Don’t you like it?” she asked.

“Err... This is also fine. But you had such nice long hair” I said.

“It had become unmanageable. But, it will grow back,” she

said as she went on her way.

Love is a very “heavy” word. It is misunderstood, misinterpreted, misstated and misused. *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* had begun to coax an entire generation to fall in love. *Dilwale Dulhania...* also associated triumph with love, unlike some of its predecessors which included *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* and *Ek Dujhe Ke Liye*. But, I had no way to gauge and understand that I was indeed in love. There were no yardsticks in place for such things. I was not thirteen or even sixteen and began to conclude that what I was feeling for Wardha was perhaps love.

A living and breathing mortal would fall in love at least once during his lifetime. There would be no escape. Once you start feeling like that about someone, the expectations start to change. You see yourself and them in a different light—not good or bad, but a different light. You don’t know whom to listen to, or how to decide with certainty what could be the proper path ahead. The company I kept, though very well-intentioned people, had zero expertise on the subject.

I was in a state of misery. I had got serious about this girl. I was behaving in a peculiar way—the humor, the wit, the laughter went straight out the window. I wasn’t myself anymore. I went through the whole of the fifth semester questioning myself, living in self-doubt about my intentions towards Wardha, without being able to tell what I felt for her and asking myself over and over again if letting her know how I felt would even be right.

## CHAPTER 34

From: Anand Nair

10 March, 2004

I came across this extract from a medical journal of the 19th century. Read the following paragraph CAREFULLY. I swear that I did not make this up.

In cases of masturbation we must, I believe, break the habit by inducing such a condition of the parts as will cause too much local suffering to allow of the practice to be continued. For this purpose, if the prepuce is long, we may circumcise the male patient with present and probably with future advantages; the operation, too, should not be performed under chloroform, so that the pain experienced may be associated with the habit we wish to eradicate.

*On An Injurious Habit Occasionally met with in Infancy and Early Childhood*, Athol A. W. Johnson. *The Lancet*, vol. 1 (7 April 1860): pp. 344–345.

OUCH!!!

Don't you think we live in happy times after reading that?

##

**From: Gopal V**

**12 March, 2004**

Unbelievable that someone could even think of such a thing.  
What sadists those fuckers might have been.

Thank God. We are not living with such idiots around.

## CHAPTER 35

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### Anand Nair

The Principal smirked whenever he saw us. Every time I saw him, it reminded me that he was fucking getting away with what he did to us. It was more than a year since our ill-fated day in PRISON. We were getting impatient.

The college, with people like him leading it, was badly run and poorly administered.

We were invited to meetings at Bangalore University as representatives of the students' union. As elected members of the student body, we were given opportunities to express our concerns about the college at these gatherings.

At the beginning of our sixth semester, the Principal was addressing one such meeting at the Bangalore University's administrative block, right across from ECVU. The Vice Chancellor of the university, the registrar, heads of department, professors, and lecturers were present. The Principal announced **AMBITIOUS** plans for the college: he wanted to set up a new cyber

center, build a new Information Technology department, and a sports auditorium, among other idealistic proposals.

We knew what he friggin cared about and what he was after.

It was our turn to speak. I went up to the dais and spoke THE TRUTH. “It is a wonderful idea to build a cyber center at college. But we students are paying bribes to use equipment in the college laboratories—equipment which is there for the use of us students, who are paying hard-earned money as fees. This equipment should be maintained so that students can use it to study. Is this too much to ask for?”

There was a slight murmur in the crowd. I had their ATTENTION.

I continued, “Students on campus do not have a place to eat in. We have often fallen sick eating food at the temporary canteen. We have spotted lizards and cockroaches in the canteen food. Can we please ensure that students get a place where hygienic food is served on campus before we build another department?”

The murmurs became louder. I noticed the principal was frowning the way he did when he took us to prison. I had more to say.

“Weeds grow unchecked on campus. Toilets are not cleaned for days, they stink and are unusable. Classrooms are not swept for weeks. Roofs leak during the rains and chunks of plaster from the ceiling fall on us during classes. With all respect, sir, can you please address these issues before going ahead with any other plans?”

There was an uproar. Everyone in the hall started speaking at once. The Lecturers and Professors knew the college was not

run right and that the buck stopped at the Principal. Perhaps none of them had the guts to speak or they chose not to get involved. Before I could speak any further, I was pulled back to my seat by Sahir and Shylaja Ma’am for fear of causing any more “trouble”.

Sahir and I went back to ECVU and updated Sandeep, Gopal and David on what had transpired at the meeting. We all felt that the TIME had come and that this was our best chance.

We called a meeting of the student’s union in the canteen of the adjoining Gents’ hostel. We avoided meeting at ECVU as we did not want the Principal to get any clue that we were up to something. We discussed our options and our course of action till late in the evening.

Early next morning, the members of the student union; Sandeep, Gopal and a few other classmates, gathered at the Gents’ hostel again. After we finalized on the plan, we went to ECVU, split up in groups and asked the students at ECVU to come out of their classes, labs, the library, canteen and assembled them at the quadrangle to stage a protest against the Principal. The students did not have to be coaxed all that much into the demonstration, they were more than willing when they learned about the reason behind the protest. The quadrangle was soon packed with slogan-shouting students.

David worked his magic. ECVU would never have experienced such synchronized decibel levels.

The Principal had no option but to call the cops. A couple of constables came down. They were the same ones who had taken us to prison. They saw the four of us among the ones leading the protest. Two constables could not harbor the remotest hope of controlling the multitude of angry students that were now a part of our voice against the Principal.

A unit of the Rapid Action Force (RAF), which was put together to deal with domestic unrest and riot, soon arrived. We continued with the slogan shouting.

With a little nudge from us, the press made its way to ECVU. The reporters started scribbling in their notepads. They spoke to us and started to chat with students to get a realistic perspective of the protest.

When things were on the verge of turning ugly, with the RAF announcing a *lathi* charge if we did not disperse right away, Shylaja Ma'am intervened. She brought the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar with her.

The VC heard us out, and initiated an impromptu inspection of the college. The VC and the Registrar saw firsthand the state of deterioration of ECVU. More discrepancies were dug out. There was misappropriation of lakhs of rupees allotted by the Registrar for maintenance and development of the college.

The VC and the registrar thanked us for bringing this to their notice and assured us that things would be dealt with. After his assurances, we ended our protest.

The principal was discharged of his duties the very next day. A new one took his place and set about his duties with earnest. The press got wind of the reasons behind the Principal's departure and had different things to say about him this time around. In a follow up story, they printed the right version of events of the ragging episode along with a full apology for their earlier versions.

We felt vindicated.

## CHAPTER 36

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**From: Rachana V** **15 March, 2004**

Hi Sahir,

Congratulations on starting with the second MS.

I have some news. I am getting married next month. My would-be works at IBM and travels quite a bit. I would have to leave my job to join him.

I don't think you can come down, but the wedding card is attached.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** **16 March, 2004**

Hi Rach,

Congratulations. That's great news. Yes, I can't make it to your wedding, but my best wishes to both of you.

Life is still hectic.

David, Gopal, and Sandeep are all doing good. We write often.

##

**From: Rachana V** **17 March, 2004**

Did you get 'lucky' yet?

Have you been able to find at least one for yourself among the all the attractive, single, available women around?

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** **17 March, 2004**

Getting 'lucky' or finding someone for myself? Ha ha ha...

You think it is so simple?

##

**From: Rachana V** **18 March, 2004**

Ok. Let's forget you getting lucky for now.

Have you got over Wardha yet? I am hoping you have.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** **19 March, 2004**

There is a story about a golfer. It goes like this:

In 1995 the golfer Michael Campbell was one putt away from winning the British Open. He got himself into a great position for the putt. He could have done it 99 times out of 100. That day, it turned out to be the one time when he did not make that putt, allowing his rivals to catch up with him. Eventually, he finished third.

A few years later, a reporter asked Michael whether he

still thought about the missed putt. Michael replied, "Sometimes a whole hour goes by without me thinking about it."

##

**From: Rachana V** **20 March, 2004**

You will figure out a way, Sahir. You will...

## CHAPTER 37

### Sahir Hassan

The Principal's exit left us with a sense of relief. We felt that justice had been done—and our role in effecting it made it that much more satisfying. We could have broken down and, in a fit of rage, done something that would have jeopardized our lives. That we waited—a characteristic rare at our age—and went about things the way we did was a good feeling to go to bed with.

The 'matters of the heart' were a different beast altogether. In the sixth semester when Milagro was about to begin, it became clear to me that I was indeed in love with Wardha. After thinking it over for a few days, I decided to put an end to my love-induced misery. On a gloomy Monday morning—as Wardha made her way to classes with Kalpana—I handed her a note with the intention of letting her know how I felt about her, while ending something which perhaps never began.

Wardha,

I am in love with you...

It took me a while to realize and confirm that this was not one of the crushes that people keep falling in and out of. I can now say it without a doubt or a second thought about it in my mind.

This is not a question. I am not expecting an answer—not today, not ever.

I am unable see you in any other way—as “just friends” or anything else. Forcing myself to do so is futile.

Knowing you, I don't think you would appreciate this side of me around you. Expecting you to care about what I and others like me feel, would not be fair on you. I don't think you would or should either.

I guess this is where it ends between us.

- Sahir

*'I told you that I loved you; And there ain't no more to say'* – Tracy Chapman, *Give me one reason*.

Wardha—looking beautiful with her hair washed and unbraided—smiled as she took the note from me, without a moment's hesitation about me or my intent. I could smell shampoo in her hair as she stopped while taking the note from me. Her dupatta brushed the hand which had held the note a moment ago.

With that note, I hoped I could become myself again and get on with life for at least the rest of Engineering as I had intended to.

But, there was more to it—such things can never be so



simple.

It had been ingrained in me that ‘falling in love’ did not lie anywhere in the path of getting educated. The paltry amount my Dad gave me every month for sustaining myself through college did not give me any hope of harboring such interests either—I had enough for the commute to college and back, college books, the front row movie, (and the occasional shared Valentine card). My age would have counted against me if I had even the slightest hope of taking this kind of avocation further or with a degree of seriousness.

It was very interesting to see guilt at work and how it got to you. Why else would a non-conformist like me—in my own way—want to think about getting educated all of a sudden?

I kind of knew—after Gopal—that Wardha was not willing to make any kind of romantic commitment with anyone. I knew that she was not the type. I did not know if I was in an emotional or a financial state to commit to anyone—I did not know if I was the type either.

I also thought she was way beyond my league—it was “Wardha” and I was a moustache-wielding mosquito. Factoring even the remotest of possibilities, my self esteem couldn’t fathom how someone like Wardha could even think about someone like me.

Maybe I didn’t have the guts to be seen with Wardha or with any girl as a couple on campus or anywhere outside. Perhaps I was a coward who had given up hope on love even before making a sincere attempt at it—I was so afraid of rejection and I connived to make it look like I was the one ending it.

Other reasons and intents apart—I was in love and she

had to know. Somehow. Everything else seemed irrelevant.

When I gave that note to Wardha, a corner of my heart hoped that things would work out, that love would somehow prevail.

We stopped speaking after I gave her the note. A non-verbal type of communication took over. This was how I read it:

Day 1:

Wardha: *Ha ha ha, that was funny...* look.

Me: *No, I am serious...* look.

Day 4:

Wardha: Still the *That was funny...* look.

Me: Still the *I am serious...* look.

Day 7:

Wardha: *You’ve got to be kidding me...* look.

Me: Still the *I am serious...* look.

Day 9:

Wardha: Still the *You’ve got to be kidding me...* look.

Me: Still the *I am serious...* look.

Day 10:

Wardha: *Why are you doing this...??* look.

Me: *Please understand. I see no other way...* look.

Day 14:

Wardha: Still the *Why are you doing this...?* look.

Day 17:

Wardha: Still the *Why are you doing this...?* look.

Me: *So, what do you want me to do...?* look.

Day 29:

Wardha: *I am pained...* look.

Day 39:

Wardha: *I am pained...* look.

Day 49:

Wardha: *I am extremely upset...* look.

---

## CHAPTER 38

**From: Gopal V**

**24 April, 2004**

Yesterday, there was a cultural fest in our college. I had a difficult time staying out of it. Basic instinct, u know.

I had been resisting real hard. Resisting right from the day student elections were held 2 choose office bearers of the students association. I did not even cast my vote. I did not reply 2 calls given out 2 volunteers. I resisted and resisted. It was tough doing that after what we did at ECVU.

The actual fest here was a 4 hr program. I had a lab assignment 2 complete. I could not resist any more. I went in and saw a dance performance, which was not 2 bad. After that, when somebody started 2 bray on stage (they called that singing), I walked out. I went 2 my lab and skipped the rest of the program.

I later met people who had been 2 the fest and everyone was saying "You missed it!!!"

I wanted 2 tell them, “Balls to this. I have been involved in fests which went on for five days and u people r jumping for some four-hour crap. Balls!!!.”

Wish u guys were here. We would have shown them a thing or two. Missed u all then. I almost had tears in my eyes.

Anyhow guys, exams are coming up. With God’s grace, I have prepared well and I am hoping 2 do well in them.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 25 April, 2004

Gopal, our ‘Basic Instinct’ of getting involved in fests and such activities actually reminded me of the movie *Basic Instinct* starring Sharon Stone.....

I got hold of an uncut version of it and saw it yesterday. In theaters they had shown only the censored version.

I am a big fan of Sharon Stone now..... What a babe!!!

##

**From: David Williams** 25 April, 2004

Sandeep *Naaye!!!* Why did you not call me? Even I wanted to see the uncut version of Basic Instinct.

Give me the CD. I am coming to pick it up tomorrow.

*Mayire!!!* I will never forgive you for this.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 28 April, 2004

Happy birthday Sandeep.

Having said that I must say it must be terrible to know that you have become another year older and are still a VIRGIN!! All the porn that you see on your computer or all the

cats that you have killed won’t make up for the REAL THING. Will it?

Well, as our David says “Our life has become like this, what to do?”

Anyways, have a fucking blast.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 28 April, 2004

Anand—you have reminded him about the virginity status too. That was the first thing I did when I called him to wish.

Here if I tell an American—and even the Palestinians I work with—that I am 24 yrs old and haven’t ‘indulged,’ they look at me as if I am from a different planet.

By the way, talking about sex—the pack of condoms you guys gifted me is rotting away in my suitcase.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 29 April, 2004

Thank you for your wishes guys.....

I was sitting at my desk at office and I heard some noise behind me. I turned around and actually saw some 20-30 people (including all the senior management guys) walking towards me..... While I was totally in a state of shock thinking what happened, my Manager came forward and handed me a birthday card. Around 30 people started singing the birthday song from all directions. I didn’t know what to say. I simply stared at them and thanked them at the end....

##

**From: David Williams**

**28 April, 2004**

Careful!!!

Especially for our birthday boy Sandeep, totally nude pics of Cheryl Rose attached. Enzoy!!!

## CHAPTER 39

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### Sandeep Gadwal

There's Something about Mary starring Cameron Diaz had been released in theaters in Bangalore..... It was actually a laugh riot with more than three men falling for the same girl. The three of us: Sahir, Gopal and I, saw it sitting in the front row of Rex on Brigade Road. We could not stop shaking our head at the situation all the suitors in the movie or us in real life had inevitably got ourselves into.....

It was time for a three day Milagro again. The notable absentee this time from the event was the old Principal. The new one was not the meddling types and let the students do their own thing.....

As part of the publicity initiatives, we went out to paste posters of the event at major student institutions..... The top women's colleges around the city were, obviously, our first priority. We chose the quietest time of the day to do so, which was close to midnight.

As we were pasting Milagro posters on the walls

adjoining Mount Carmel College, which was the city's numero uno to churn out girls of the 'beauty-contests-winning' variety, a police van with its lights flashing stopped about 200 feet away. It stood there silently as we applied glue and pasted the posters, our heartbeats pulsing in our throats. The horrid experience of our earlier jail visit flashed before our eyes.....

Just as we began to think we were surely in deep shit all over again, the police van went on its way.....

Sahir and I lead the class soccer team to the finals of the intramurals in ECVU, an improvement from the semi-final slot of the previous year. We were actually surprised that we got to the semis the previous year. We weren't when we made the finals this time. We had the strategies in place and played to our strengths..... The team had gelled well. Each member in the team had the talent and knew their role. There was adequate bench strength as well for support. The fringe set of players, including some front benchers, cherished the opportunity to contribute and did well. We lost the final to individual brilliance: the main striker on the opposite team was unstoppable. We did the best we could to hold him back (from scoring among other things), but when he quickly rammed in three against us, we were looking up a steep hill. We did not have the 'equipment', enough skill, or the energy to climb it.....

Wardha, partnering Kalpana, moved past the semis for the Antakshari event. She lost in the finals.....

Something had obviously happened between Sahir and Wardha. They were not speaking to each other. Wardha even returned all the books we had given her.

I asked Sahir, "What actually happened....?"

Sahir simply shook his head. I did not push him any further. He would tell me later.....

Rachana started to tease me about a new girl, Pallavi, a vivacious first-year student from Civil Engineering. That Pallavi's Mom was an Aquarian (as was Pallavi) and her Dad was incidentally a Leo (like me) and how it had worked between the two of them started the whole 'thing' off. Sahir was playing cupid, even keeping the rest of the gang away from our moments together. These moments included several long palm reading sessions on Pallavi by me, further discussions on sun signs and their feasibilities, ex-crushes and Milagro, which was an event by itself.....

I can't put my finger on what it was, but Pallavi and I went cold soon after Milagro, much to Sahir's disappointment. All his efforts had obviously gone down the drain. We also got to know that after Milagro, Pallavi got herself a boyfriend from Civil, shutting the door on 'any' possibility with me.

It was Sahir's turn to ask me, "What happened?" And this time, I invariably shook my head.....

# CHAPTER 40

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From: Sandeep Gadwal                      20 May, 2004

I obviously know how the replies are going to be for this mail, but I will still write to you all about three incidents from ECVU.....

Incident 1:

A few of us were sitting in our favorite Union Room one evening. A girl walked into the room wearing sleeveless. Our David looked at her and shouted, 'LOOK AT THOSE BICEPS MAAN'. She felt conscious, took a jacket from her bag and put it on.

Incident 2:

I was sitting in the library reading the same girl's palm (actually holding her hand for a long time) ..... Our dear David and Gopal sat there just to irritate me. Our good old friend Sahir came there and drove those idiots out.....

Incident 3:

It was sports time in our Milagro I was taking care of the ladies events. I think nothing needs to be told about what happens when ladies events take place. Thanks to Gopal, he came to my rescue.....

I think by now you must have guessed who that girl was. For those who have not, the girl was **Pallavi**.

I just found out something about her yesterday. Pallavi got married. Big deal, every girl has to get married. But it was nice while 'it' lasted.....

##

From: Sahir Hassan    21 May, 2004

What to say, what not to say. 'To be is to do, to do is to be. Doobeedoobeedoo'.

I remember how Sandeep was in the first year of Engineering – he hardly used to talk to girls. He used to catch a seat for me in the bus when we used to head back home – that is how we became friends.

Then the 'incidents' happened which lead to the unbecoming of Sandeep to whatever he is today – for his good or for his bad, we'll let him (or perhaps his sister to) decide.

All the mentioned events are as fresh in my mind as if they had happened yesterday. When I hear the song "*pyar to hona hi thaa*" (love had to happen), I still wonder why an Aquarian and a Leo (the thing which started the whole thing) did not click – in spite of all the efforts put in by people other than Sandeep. Lots of other songs remind me of a lot of other things too, but let us leave it at that for now.

The incidents have regularly been featured in discussions and will continue to be broached at the slightest trigger. They are a part of 'us', they are what have made us what we are today. Without them ECVU would be as pathetic as my current life in Dayton (in terms of things happening). That I miss ECVU will be an understatement.

##

**From: Anand Nair** **22 May, 2004**

Be very careful Sandeep loafer. It's Milagro time again in ECVU. This time make it COUNT. Look at your age, and your tummy too.

There is a difference between making things happen and things happening on their own. Your age and fucking size of your tummy cannot afford the latter option. You will otherwise have to start trusting your mom to initiate things happening.

Look at the past, look at all the girls you have missed. Haven't you learnt ANYTHING?

They say Men marry because they are tired, women because they are curious (the fact that both end up being disappointed is a different case altogether). Neither Sahir nor Gopal are unfortunately (or fortunately) around to help you. You have to do whatever you have to do, all by yourself.

They also say 'When nothing works, PRAY. There is immeasurable power in it.' I will pray for you, and you please pray for yourself and, for a change, everybody pray for our good old Sandeep to find one for himself. After that we can pray for each other.

And again, they say 'Miracles are natural. When they do not happen, then something is wrong.' Sandeep finding

someone who is at least a little permanent (not one who changes every Milagro) after 25 yrs of his life on this earth will be nothing short of a miracle...

Anyhow wishing you and everybody well (as always).

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

**07 June, 2004**

I am actually in Finland for a project from the last month.....

I have to admit, I miss India, the land and my dear bike, Indian food and definitely the gorgeous Indian women. I can now easily understand the emotions you guys in US are facing. There is no place like ours, there can never be.....

# CHAPTER 41

## Sahir Hassan

The sixth semester exams—the toughest in terms of subjects and workload in all the eight semesters of engineering—came and went in a haze, so did the sixth semester vacations. We soon took our positions on the last bench of our class for the seventh semester—it was our final year at ECVU.

I was hurting—and hurting bad.

It hurt me so much more because I had brought misery on me by myself. Nobody had asked me to stop talking to Wardha. I had to be an idiot to wait and gauge and introspect and then decide to end something that was perhaps going in the right direction—probably going nowhere, but still headed in the right direction. We were friends, there was trust, she seemed to like me and believed in me for whatever I was worth.

And I had to go ahead and end all that.

Meanwhile, Rachana broke up with Hegde. Hegde started to show a ‘keen interest’ in one of the juniors from computer science. Rachana got the message and ended it between them. She was hurt and did not seem to be herself after the break up.

It was election time again. I decided not to contest the elections this time. Since the primary purpose was served—the Principal was not around anymore—I did not want to be an office bearer at the student’s union or even the class representative. Though I knew there was no way I could detach myself from the union and its activities, I did not want to take up any responsibilities on an official note. I had contested and won for two years in succession and I did not have a reason enough to fight for elections this time. There was nothing I needed to prove to myself or to anybody.

Day 54:

Wardha: *I’ve got a surprise coming up ...* look.

On the day of the elections, I saw Wardha on the dais of her class, fighting elections for Class Representative. The elections in my class were about to start. I would not be able to know if Wardha would be elected from her class before elections in my class got over.

Still day 54:

Me: *What! You want to contest elections?* look

There was commotion in my head. Several voices screamed different things at the same time in it. I had no idea what I needed to do.

It came as a bit of a shock to me that Wardha wanted to become a CR. In the two years that I had known her, she had not shown the slightest inclination to be involved in any kind



of activities of the student's union or volunteer for the kind of responsibilities that a CR needs to discharge. She had always been an above-average student—eager to put in hard work and had even earned grades that put her in the bracket of the “studious” types in her class. I did not think she had the slightest idea what she was getting into. I failed to understand why Wardha even wanted to be a part of the student union, especially after my note. The student union was still ‘our’ realm—which included the three of us who had a crush on her.

I had never been in a bigger dilemma. Sandeep was not with me, he had bunked classes to attend a wedding in his family. Sandeep had grown from being a friend to someone I looked up to, my strength in times of difficulty, and my answer when I was riddled with self-doubt. He had come to know me like nobody else. I missed him while the predicament unfolded.

It would have been wonderful—Wardha and me in the student's union as elected representatives, doing the groundwork, looking for sponsors, organizing and hosting events, and being there for each other.

Like Samuel Jackson said in the movie *Unbreakable*, this part was not like a comic book, this was real—it did not fit into little boxes called ‘ideal’ that are drawn for it. This reality went beyond simple metaphysical deductions, where a logical conclusion follows from a set of hypothesis. It was way complicated than that.

I still wanted to be there for Wardha—by becoming the senior CR, by being a part of the student union. But I did not know what was in her mind. Did she want me in, or did she want me out?

Perhaps it was a guy thing—we just don't seem to get it.

There was something about ‘being guys’ that I had read a

little while back:

*Ask for what you want. Let us be clear on this one: Subtle hints do not work! Strong hints do not work! Obvious hints do not work! Just say it! - Unknown*

Wardha won the election from her class. Her class mates thought that she was a worthy candidate. I was proud of her.

I withdrew from contesting elections in mine.

Still Day 54:

Wardha: *Yaaaay! I won!* look.

Me: *What just happened here?* look.

The voices were screaming—you *have let Wardha down, you coward, you self-centered gutless worm.* The uncertainty of it all was killing me. What had Wardha wanted? What did she want? What did I need to do?

Day 55:

Wardha: *What? Aren't you going to say something?* look.

Me: *What do I do now?* look.

She knew how I felt about her. I knew that she knew how I felt—there was no doubt about that. It was clear to me that she did not want any kind of romantic commitments with anybody.

Wardha standing for and winning the elections from her class started to muddle things up for me. Her actions started that niggly of doubt. Her thoughts about me and ‘us’ started to become very hazy. I wanted clarity about us but I wasn't getting it.

We did not have anyone willing to play cupid for us—to let me or her know what went on in our minds. Rachana could have been that bridge, but she was attempting to get back to

normalcy. After her heartbreak, she was aloof and appeared to be in a different world.

Day 57:

Wardha: *What now? I'm getting very irritated ...* look.

Me: *I'm clueless—what do YOU want?* look.

Wardha resigned from her responsibilities as a Class Representative a couple of weeks after winning the post. Lecturers did not recall anyone having done that. She then 'went' with Sanjay—a student in Electronics. We had never heard of or noticed Sanjay in ECVU until then. We did not remember anything of note he had done to get noticed, until Wardha started to 'see' him.

Why did Wardha resign? What had made her that upset? Why did she go with Sanjay?

It began to dawn on me that Wardha might have felt as I did for her only after she resigned from her post and started to see Sanjay. She was perhaps saying that she was willing to commit, and that I had missed the bus.

Perhaps Wardha waited for me to reach out, to talk to her, to 'ask' her as people are asked. Maybe she thought I knew what she had in mind or that, by standing for and winning elections, she was telling me something which I failed to listen to.

Maybe the oversight was mine. I had not left her with too many avenues to reach out to me. We did not have e-mail then, or cell phones either. In my note, I did not leave her an address she could write to. Perhaps she had called when I wasn't at home, which was almost all the time and my Father—like he always did—chose to not to tell me that she had called.

Maybe the reason Wardha stood for elections and quit

from her post had nothing to do with me and there were other convincing reasons as well—I thought long and hard about them over sleepless nights and hazy days and weeks. But none of these made any sense. Knowing Wardha, none seemed strong enough to drive her to take up and give up on such a responsibility at such short notice. What must she have gone through to resign and lose face in front of her friends, classmates, the lecturers, and the department head?

The voices in my head did not go away. *You are responsible for what Wardha is going through. Are you happy now, you weakling?*

The doubt that still lingered in my mind about Wardha's feelings for me was cleared when I ran into Kalpana outside the department office one day. Wardha was not around. Kalpana's reluctance in speaking to me showed after what had happened. I still asked her "Hi, how are things? All good?"

Kalpana blurted out, "You were the one who did not want things that way, right?"

Kalpana's words shook me out of the denial about Wardha. Did Wardha feel as I did for her? Of course, she did. But of course, she did too...

I felt stupid.

I wrote numerous notes to clear up the misunderstanding, to let her know why I had behaved the way I did, but couldn't bring myself to give them to her. I decided to call her instead.

I managed to reach Wardha at BULSH on the second try. Getting through on the second try to the Bangalore's University's Ladies' hostel was no less than a miracle. Perhaps it was the enormity of what was happening in our lives that willed the connection to go through. Maybe there was something long

pending to be said which served as the catalyst. But, there I was. The connection was made and I waited on the phone while she came down from her room to take the call.

I wanted to tell her something in the lines of ‘Hey Wardha. I am sorry for all the misunderstanding, for all the bitterness and the hurt. Please don’t do this to yourself and to me. I love you.’

When she came on the phone and said “Hello, who is this?” I was able to blurt out my name and only the ‘I love you’ part of the intended message.

She kept the phone down without uttering a word.

I felt like a complete moron.

If there was any room for more drama, the sixth semester results chose that moment to arrive. Students in their right minds were not able to clear all eight subjects of sixth semester. I was in love, and didn’t realize I was so distracted that I ended up losing four.

I had bottomed the class. My misery took on a whole new dimension.

Wardha’s fourth semester result did not indicate any distraction—like she always did, she secured grades that put her in the top bracket of her class.

I understood then that the consequences of my action had gone well beyond repair. While still in love, and knowing somewhere at the back of my mind that she felt the same about me—for a little time, at least—I saw her every day in ECVU, with this someone else. Every day after that was agony. My heart—or something around it—ached.

That Wardha was convinced about us, was the truth I

wanted to believe—I was willing to live in denial for the rest of my life on everything else.

Rachana was bringing herself back to normalcy. She asked me “What has caused this mess, Sahir?”

I updated her on my version of the events. She heard me out.

Rachana said “She has chosen to move on. You need to move on as well.”

It made sense. Rachana had decided to get over Hegde, didn’t she?

I promised Rachana that I would stay out of Wardha’s way from then on, to not trouble her with my presence or with anything I did. This decision set off the silence in my head—the screaming voices began to calm down. The commotion began to die down. There was a lull in my head like one feels right after the splash of a wave breaking out on a beach. Perhaps this was a temporary respite that would come back to haunt me at some point of time in my life, but I felt closest to peace with myself and everything that was going on around me then.

Gopal was bitter when Wardha went with Sanjay. As I saw it, there was a difference between Gopal’s intent for Wardha and mine. Gopal had asked Wardha—whereas I had confessed my love for her without expecting anything. It was as if my love was on a higher plateau than Gopal’s by trying to be selfless and not expecting anything in return.

But who was I kidding? A human being cannot simply be anybody’s “object of affection”. In this case, these consequences turned out to be unpleasant—hurtful and bitter. It did not seem to matter if ‘the intentions’ were in the right place or otherwise.

Sandeep was in love with her, too, I knew that for sure. Though he might not admit it—ever—it was clear for everyone to see that what happened had affected him as well.

Neither Gopal nor Sandeep knew about the note and were not able to make sense of everything that followed it. Nothing was discussed but Gopal and Sandeep never spoke to Wardha after she started seeing Sanjay.

The realization that I was responsible for Wardha falling out of favor with Sandeep and Gopal dawned on me. There was no way I could escape from the guilt after I realized what I had done. I was the only one to be blamed for the whole mess. Everything seemed irrelevant. It felt too late for repair or reconciliation. It seemed like there was nothing I could do, except live with the sourness I created—perhaps for the rest of my life.

And it ended, just like that.

Stories about love did not end like this... or did they? We get to hear about those that have death, or when a celebrity thinks it's love and the Paparazzi present it to us in a platter.

The three of us had perhaps ended up as a statistic in her life. But for some unfathomable reason, she was meant to remain more than that in mine.

---

## CHAPTER 42

**From: Gopal V** **20 July, 2004**

I got my M.Tech. final year results. By God's grace, I got 72.8%.

I went for an interview at Global Tech Solutions after shaving off my mustache for the first time in my life.

I was interviewed by this hot female for a position I had applied for. She was wearing a see-through saree.

Hope I get through.

##

**From: Anand Nair** **21 July, 2004**

She will surely take you in for FILLING the opening ;-)

As for the loss of the facial hair, as long as you have stock in the store below (which you should have plenty), don't worry about the showroom too much.

##

**From: David Williams** 22 July, 2004

Good luck *machan* for the job. Find the lady who interviewed you as soon you get through.

Please do not forget to introduce me to her when you get the job.

# #

**From: Gopal V** 27 July, 2004

Guys, with God's grace I got the job. I started last week.

I have been searching for the female who interviewed me in the company. She is not 2 be found. She must be working out of a different office.

No other babes though in this company. Only mothers of babies here. No setup chances.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 15 August, 2004

Happy Independence day to all.....

Dudes in the US: when are you planning to visit India? It has actually been two years since you guys left. We are forgetting your faces.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 16 August, 2004

Sandeep dude—I shall plan to make it to your wedding whenever that will happen ;-)

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 17 August, 2004

My marriage obviously does not look like it will happen anytime

soon though.

While in college, such was our reputation that nobody expected Sahir and me, to have an 'arranged marriage.' I don't think I have any other option now but to depend on my Mom and my Sis to find a suitable bride for me.....

# #

**From: Gopal V** 17 August, 2004

I am also in the same boat as Sandeep is. I will have 2 depend on my parents 2 find me someone.

I have given some subtle hints, but they are not looking out for me as of now.

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 17 August, 2004

Gopal, this is what you can do to give out a stronger hint to your parents:

Tonight, sleep on the same bed as your father. Pretend that you are asleep and when he is least expecting it, lift your leg and put it across him. For better effect, MOAN a bit as well.

You shall soon see your parents taking ACTION.

# #

**From: David Williams** 19 August, 2004

Super suggestion from Anand. Even I couldn't think of anything better to recommend you.

But, tell me this. Why do you *machans* want to get married while you can have all the fun even otherwise?

# CHAPTER 43

## Anand Nair

“Gopal, Sandeep, Sahir, what the FUCK is up with you guys?” I said as we all sat at the *katte*. The three of them were brooding over Wardha.

“Machans, it’s not the end of the world.,” David added.

“She’s JUST a girl, for fuck’s sake,” I said. David and I were unable to take the moroseness of these three ‘love disappointments’ any longer.

“There are so many others around. You three need to just open your eyes” David said, following up.

“We guys have been through deeper SHIT and come out triumphant, haven’t we?” I said.

“There are quite a few good looking babes this semester. Quick, look at the babe at ten o’clock in the tight fitting jeans: narrow waist, broad thighs—what a figure!” David said. The three of them didn’t even glance at her. David and I noticed their disinterest. The two of

us loved those types and gave her an eyeful.

“Hey, look! Wardha at nine o’clock,” I said. The three of them looked immediately this time. There was no Wardha anywhere around. We burst out laughing. The three of them smiled.

Sandeep then asked “When will we find a girlfriend?”

“I don’t know. There is a thing called *kismet*,” Sahir said getting all philosophical. “Let me see your hand.”

Sahir looked at Sandeep’s hand and said “The line is there. There is someone.”

“But when?” Sandeep asked.

“It is just a matter of time” Sahir said.

“Why the fuck are you two looking at each other’s HANDS? It’s such a fucking waste of time. Where was your palmistry when we were about to be dumped in jail?” I asked. If Sahir knew palmistry, then he clearly failed to see the line of trouble brewing, which was common across all our hands, a part of our *kismet*.

“We are trying to figure out when we will have a girlfriend,” Sandeep said.

“Umm... Interesting. So why is that important, especially when there is so much ‘GREENERY’ around?” I asked.

“Isn’t it actually important?” Sandeep asked.

“Ok. Maybe it’s important for you two. But do enlighten me, when do you think you guys will get a girlfriend?”

“I can’t tell. Actually, Sahir is the one who knows palmistry.”

“Sahir, you LOAFER, you never told us that you knew palmistry,” I said, looking at him.

“I don’t know palmistry all that much,” Sahir said. “I just know about the lines of marriage and relationships, which are below our little finger.”

Gopal then thrust his hand at Sahir’s face and said “That is more than enough. Please read mine.”

I sighed.

“You have the lines,” Sahir said, looking at Gopal’s hand. “Like Sandeep, it is just a matter of time for you as well”.

“Is that all you can tell?” Gopal face fell.

“Yes,” Sahir said.

“Here. I know MORE palmistry than Sahir. Let me see your hand,” I said.

I pretended to study Gopal’s hand for a while. I then said “Gopal, you PERVERT. It seems like you shag way too often.”

“What? Does my hand say that?” Gopal looked guilty, as if I had let out one of his most embarrassing secrets.

“Yes, it does,” I said.

“I don’t believe you? How does it say that?” Gopal asked.

“There are hardly any lines in your hand,” I replied.

“What do you mean? So, what if I have lesser number of lines on my hand?” Gopal asked.

“I guess they have been rubbed off over time.”

“What are you saying?”

“Gopal. It seems like they have rubbed off while you have been shagging, which I presume, you are doing quite a bit,” I said.

“What?” Gopal said, not getting it at first. The rest of

them understood what I meant and broke into peals of laughter. Gopal then realized that I was pulling his leg and joined in. We all laughed till we had tears in our eyes.

“Like energy, love can neither be created nor destroyed. It can just be transferred from one girlfriend to another” were David’s words of wisdom to the three of them. I agreed.

Those three idiots seemed convinced as well.

But with Sahir, you can never tell.

# CHAPTER 44

---

**From: Sahir Hassan** 24 January, 2004

There is this temple close to the university. Since I'm the only one with a car, I take my new set of roommates there often. It's a serene place and I like it. The temple gives free dinner on Tuesdays—a boon for students like us. We get to eat desi food without spending any money and none of us have to cook at home that day.

There is a girl from Pune—Ritu who started her MS in EE this quarter. She comes along as well. She is taking up the same classes as my roommates and does not mind hanging out with us.

I think I like Ritu (in that way). It all started with the coin-toss game—you guys would remember it from ECVU library.

##

**From: Gopal V**

25 January, 2004

Yes, of course. We remember the coin toss game. How could we forget it?

Good Sahir. With God's grace, something will work out.

##

**From: Anand Nair**

28 January, 2004

*Carpe Diem*, seize the day. Don't wait. I don't think I need to remind you what happened last time.

##

**From: David Williams**

30 January, 2004

*Dai* Sahir, before you proceed with Ritu, find out if any of the girls in your department are interested in you, Sally or Carla or anyone else. *Carpe Diem*.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

02 February, 2004

Am really happy for you..... Please update us on the progress.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**

06 February, 2004

As expected, Ritu has a boyfriend back home. Her parents know and have consented too. One has a hard time finding single *desi* girls around.

I heard from my roomies that the long distance thing between Ritu and her boyfriend is not working out well.

##



**From: David Williams** 21 February, 2004

Sahir *loafer*, you never let us know what Sally or Carla or anyone else said to you. Did you ask them? I would have asked if I was in your position.

# #

**From: Gopal V** 22 February, 2004

David. He is serious about Ritu and u are asking him 2 go on a different path. Leave him alone.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 06 March, 2004

Ritu broke up with her boyfriend—she did not tell me anything, but I got to know from one of my roomies. These long distance relationships are too stressful. I feel sad for what she had to go through—her parents had even consented to their marriage.

# #

**From: David Williams** 07 March, 2004

Sahir *machan*, go for it. This is your chance.

Tell her about your options, Sally/ Carla. Tell her how much demand there is for you. She will agree ;-).

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 08 March, 2004

David, you are surely out of your mind.....

Sahir, go really slow on this one. Give her enough time to recover. Girls get very sentimental about such things and usually take time to cope.....

# #

**From: Gopal V** 12 March, 2004

Sahir, I agree with Sandeep. Take your time on this one. If God is willing, it should all work out fine.

Any other villain in the story now?

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 13 March, 2004

There could be nobody who can fit into the villain's role other than David. All David has to do is to call Sahir up and speak to him about love and its CONSEQUENCES.

# #

**From: David Williams** 14 March, 2004

I have spoken to a lot of people on love; they just don't seem to listen. They keep falling in love in spite of several warnings. *Loafers*.

# #

**From: Gopal V** 16 March, 2004

Love should not be a group decision. Except the 2 involved, others should not interfere in the situation.

As far as I am concerned, I am okay now with whatever happened. Not all love stories have a happy ending, and my life has not finished. Love still exists in my life; just the face of the girl has 2 be added. With God's grace, that will be done soon as well.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 18 March, 2004

Superbly said Gopal..... Sahir, any more updates from your side on this?

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 16 April, 2004

Ritu is beginning to understand that I like her. You can't hide these kind of things. She is still recovering from her breakup. I spot her sometimes zoned out—have to snap her out of it.

She told me that she is an only child—the breakup was pretty hard on her parents. In India with all the relatives around, it is difficult to deal with such things.

# #

**From: David Williams** 18 April, 2004

*Machans*, this is turning into a movie story starring our dear Sahir from Bangalore and Ritu from Pune. Shall we call it "Love in America?" The hero, heroine, and villain have already been identified. Who wants to be the comedian? I can play that role too.

# #

**From: Gopal V** 20 April, 2004

David, u will fit both the Villain and the Comedian roles.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 22 April, 2004

ECVU was more of a movie story than this one—much more drama. We should write a book or make a movie about it someday.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 02 May, 2004

Yes, obviously ECVU and us would be a awesome story to write about.....

I went on a trek to the Nilgiris..... If you have seen the

movie *Lord of the Rings*, you just need to remove the snow from every scene of the movie to clearly imagine how this place was. It was beautiful.

Treked around 50 km in 5 days.

Find some pics attached.

# #

**From: David Williams** 10 May, 2004

*Machan*... Don't you have any pics of babes in Nilgiris?

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 11 May, 2004

I actually went for a trek..... Took photographs of the Nilgiris hills. I was the only 'babe', I mean 'hunk' around. I have already sent you my pics.....

For pics of babes, Google for photos of Katrina Kaif and Riya Sen.....

# #

**From: Gopal V** 12 May, 2004

Sandeep, nice pics. Both of Nilgiris Hills and the babes.

I will be traveling to Singapore this Sunday night on a project. The plan is for six months.

# #

**From: David Williams** 12 May, 2004

*Dai* Gopal loafer!!! Come back home alone.

For your 'pleasant' journey and stay in Singapore, find some hot nude pics attached.

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 12 May, 2004

David, that warning to Gopal sounded very OMINOUS. Do you fucking know something that we don't?

# #

**From: David Williams** 13 May, 2004

I will leave it to Gopal to reveal it when the appropriate time comes.

## CHAPTER 45

---

### Sandeep Gadwal

After Wardha started seeing Sanjay, Sahir seemed to be really broken.... He had turned extra sensitive and he would simply choke up at any sentimental song or movie scene. Especially after he flunked in four subjects, it was clear that he had completely lost focus on studies. It seemed that sleep was the only thing that appealed to him. He just wanted to rest his head down and sleep while doing project work, on the bus, during classes or just about anywhere. I am sure, he was perhaps getting as much or even more than his quota of sleep, but he yearned for even more....

He suddenly acquired a new taste in songs of the yesteryears, especially toward the heartbroken variety. Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* was right up there in his list....

*Tang aa chuke hain kashmakash-e-zindagi se hum;*

*Tbhukra na de jahan ko kahin bedili se hum;*

*Hum ghum-zada hain, laye kahan se kbushi ke geet;*

*Denge wohi jo payenge is zindagi se hum...*

*Lo aaj humne tod diya rishta-e-umeed;*

*Lo ab kabhi gila na karenge kisise hum.*

– Vijay, in *Pyaasa* (the film, 1957)

(I have now become weary of this dilemma called life;  
I might just reject existence without a regret, without a  
second thought;

I am filled with sorrow, how can I bring out songs of joy  
from within me?

I can spread what I have received from life;  
I have given up on hope; henceforth I shall never complain.)

Sahir's Mom called me up to seriously enquire about his craving for sleep and the lethargic songs. She could not understand why her son had suddenly taken a liking to songs from her era and begun to spend so much time at home lazing around.... She told me that she hid those tapes, threatened to throw them away, and even bought and played English albums to channel his taste, but she admitted that it was of no use. She failed at keeping Sahir off dozing away and morose melodies for a long while....

Sahir's parents inevitably thought that the difficult commute to college was responsible for his dismal sixth semester results and his subsequent moroseness.... They immediately swung into action by buying him a second-hand bike. Maybe it was their way of showing concern, but by misinterpreting his problem, they ensured that neither Sahir nor

I had to travel by the BTS bus anymore....

Our college was counted among the premiere engineering institutes in Bangalore. Its on-campus placement wing actually boasted of sending students to companies by the truckloads to meet the rising demand for IT skills in Bangalore.....

With my Mother's retirement looming, we could not afford both of us sitting at home without work..... I was really desperate to find a job for myself through the campus placement.

Rachana was among the first ones to get placed. Among the ones also placed were our class topper Varun, Rachana's ex-boyfriend Hegde and even Somnath who contested against Sahir during class elections..... All of them had attractive offers before they actually graduated. They were the new celebrities on campus.....

We asked Rachana, "What did they ask you during the interview?"

"Under the table, I rubbed my leg against the one interviewing me. Guess I got in for that," she said, giggling.....

That was more like the Rachana we knew. It was nice to see her being herself after her break up with Hegde. After a good laugh, she went into the actual details about the kind of questions that were asked in the interview and her responses to them.....

Rachana became Sahir's shoulder to cry on. She patiently helped him tide through this difficult phase by showing faith in him. Rachana showing belief in Sahir made quite a difference to him..... We were still around for Sahir, but

we, like most men we knew, weren't actually able to provide the kind of compassion and support which women could in these kinds of situations.....

With Rachana's support, Sahir somehow willed himself to smile in front of Wardha. He kept a happy face. Perhaps he did so because he did not want to appear broken or distraught in front of her. He even managed to clear all the backlogs of the sixth semester while managing to sidestep flunking any more subjects in the seventh....

## CHAPTER 46

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**From: Sahir Hassan**

**19 June, 2004**

Ritu and I had a long chat in my car yesterday. She explained that even if she thinks that 'we' can work out—which she isn't convinced about yet—she does not want to hurt her parents. She said that she will say yes to whoever her parents choose for her.

Ritu also told me that her parents had sent her some profiles and are keen on a guy who works in Columbus—which is an hour away from our university. They might also get Ritu engaged to him in a couple of months.

I tried talking to her. I told her that I will meet her parents and convince them—but she was adamant on this.

I think there is no more hope left with Ritu.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 20 June, 2004

Why...?? Why....?? Why.....??

Why does this invariably happen to us?

# #

**From: David Williams** 21 June, 2004

Sahir *machan*, sorry it ended like this but don't worry about it.

As I had said in ECVU, *'Like energy, love can neither be created nor destroyed. It can just be transferred from one girlfriend to another girlfriend.'* You always have Sally/ Carla and others in your department.

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 24 June, 2004

So the problem with our group and girls seems to be that we give up easy, after the FIRST try to be precise. There is a word for it: laziness.

The difference between success and failure is to keep trying one after the other. And you succeed with one or the other. I will personally vouch for that ;-)

# #

**From: David Williams** 24 June, 2004

*Machans!!!* I am always committed to all pretty looking babes.

# #

**From: Gopal V** 25 June, 2004

I am not a subject matter expert in this, but in my humble opinion, they were not destined enough 2 come into our lives :-).

What ever happened 2 us was for our own good. It's God's will.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 18 July, 2004

Hi Anand,

Everyone missed out the couple of sentences that mattered in the mail you sent last month 'And you succeed with one or the other. I will personally vouch for that ;-)

The idiots that we are—we did not ask you!!!

When and how did you succeed, Anand? Please share your story with us. Is she an Indian? Has she met your parents already? Wedding bells anytime soon?

Please let us know...

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 19 July, 2004

Ok Sahir. Here it goes.

I am getting very serious with my current girlfriend. She is doing her PhD with me. Who would have thought this KIND of shit would happen?

She is American, and white. Her name is Jenny Bennett and studies music perception in humans :-). It is possible that she might have been in one of the photos I sent around before.

I have told my parents about it. She has not yet met them. I think they are still in SHOCK, though they seem to be coming out of it. At least now, my Mom is pestering my sister to tell me to get married to her soon!

As for wedding bells, EVENTUALLY yes. Not sure

when, but not right now. That is the current news ;-)

I have attached a few more photos for the curious.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** **21 July, 2004**

Within the year, you already had girlfriends and now you have actually got serious about one..... We always knew this would happen, but it was fairly quick.

Congratulations dude.

Wish you good luck.....

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** **22 July, 2004**

Sandeep said he knew that the 'getting a girlfriend' part would happen—I knew that too. But with a 'non-Indian'—I have to admit, that came as a little surprise.

No matter how modern in our outlook we Indians are, this would take some time to digest—I can imagine what your Mother would be going through. The strip clubs, discos, dating—all that is still digestible to some extent. To take that further step is something still out of the blue.

Hearty congratulations though.

# #

**From: David Williams** **24 July, 2004**

Anand *Loafer*. Congratulations.

Hats off!!!

## CHAPTER 47

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### Gopal Varadarajan

None from our group landed a job during the placement season at ECVU. We were not surprised. We would have been amazed if someone who shared the last bench, the canteen food, the college student's union, or porn with us had got a job. We were not complete morons. We had made it up to engineering unscathed. It went downhill academically only after that. Sahir, Anand, Sandeep, and David, all of them were capable and had their own set of talents. Perhaps on a different day, we would be able to achieve something which would be appreciated.

It just wasn't our time yet.

We had a criminal case registered against us over the ragging incident from the second year. We had to hire lawyers to fight and prove our innocence. The exorbitant lawyer fees, though shared equally among all four of us, burnt a big hole in the pockets of our parents. It was as an open and shut case. Wardha and Kalpana had testified in our favor a while ago. The newspapers

had also cleared us of our 'crime'. Even then, the case dragged on until we got to our final year before it was dismissed.

Our association with the ECVU student's union was our only saving grace. We were in our eighth and final semester. It was time again for Milagro. It was our last. A five-day event was planned with Anand at the helm. He had won the CR elections with a landslide victory and was voted in as the President of the Students' Union. Milagro was a resounding success under Anand's leadership after he was instrumental in bringing in sufficient sponsorship for the event. We had a whale of a time as representatives of the student union.

David was up to his Milagro tricks again. He went up to Kalpana and asked her in a romantic tone, "Look into my eyes, Kalpana..."

Kalpana, showing genuine concern, asked, "Which eye, David? Did something fall in?"

It was David's turn to walk away with his head down!

Rachana got another opportunity to torment Sandeep. This time it was about Roshini from Wardha's class. On Roshini's dare, Sandeep showed enough guts to hold on to Roshini's hand in full public view at the quadrangle during Milagro. He held her hand for quite some time, too. Holding someone's hand in front of everyone is not considered as a show of simple affection. The consequences of Roshini's dare remained to haunt Sandeep through Rachana.

Anand looked like he had fallen for a girl. She was a fresher from Civil. The only reason we thought so was that he broke our rule: he brought her up quite a few times during our discussions about the opposite sex. We tormented him about her. But he never

admitted his feelings. We were convinced, though, that Anand who claimed to be above the pettiness of romance was a human after all.

The last day of engineering approached us. The realization started to set in that, as virgins, jobless, with regrets, we had managed to finish up engineering at ECVU.

We were thrown in prison for a crime we did not commit. We had failed to get the love of the woman we loved. We even had to watch her with someone else every day. And we were pretty much in the dumps without an income of our own after finishing education. Our miserable excuses did not matter. Every single person from our class, who had scored an aggregate of 60% in academics, had got placed. We were treated like second-class citizens at ECVU, at home and among relatives without a job. We had learned what could never be taught in classes or in management schools through the Students' Union and Milagro. But it was still not good enough to provide us with a source of income when we stepped out into the real world.

I had come across a quote by Dr. Wayne Dyer: Your life is but a parenthesis in eternity.

We felt smaller than these parentheses then.



# CHAPTER 48

---

**From: Anand Nair**                      **28 October, 2004**

Dear all,

After 5 hours of sustained winds of about 110 mph, gusts of about 175mph, and lots of downed trees narrowly missing my house and car, blown roofs, no electricity and no hot food for about a week, I am back online, safe and sound after a TORNADO hit us.

It was a fuckin EXPERIENCE, there is no other way to express it. At least not right now. I saw roofs being lifted off houses with my own eyes. It was like watching TV through my window.

The university is still closed. But I came in to get the network in our department back up. There is no power in the house yet, won't have it for perhaps another week. But since department is powered up and functioning I will be here more than at home.

# #

**From: Gopal V**

**07 November, 2004**

With God's grace, good to know that you are fine. We in India cannot imagine what hurricanes or tornadoes would feel like.

I also heard there was an article about David published in a newspaper. Anybody have any clues on what it said?

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

**08 November, 2004**

Well I read the article, it is in Youth Herald..... I must say I am really impressed. The article has a big photo of David and his band. Seems they will be releasing their debut album soon. Their music is actually a fusion of all exponents like rock, pop, reggae, classical, etc.....

Finally David seems to be on his way up, doing what he likes most. Three cheers to David, Hip hip hurray!!!

He had to face a lot of hardships and no one was around to encourage him as far as I know..... Even his family was not supportive, maybe his sister was. I am happy for what he is doing.

I wish him all the very best.....

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan**

**09 November, 2004**

Congratulations David—felt happy to know about your progress. That's the way to prove your capabilities to everyone who doubted you.

# #

**From: Anand Nair**

**14 November, 2004**

Did you guys happen to know that PORNOGRAPHY is the No. 1 reason why people get online? I am not kidding, someone

has done extensive research on why people would want to use the internet majority of the time.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

**15 November, 2004**

I did not know that porn is the No.1 reason why people get online..... But with David and his types plenty in this world, I am not obviously surprised.....

## CHAPTER 49

---

### Anand Nair

“Hi, loafers. How are the LOVE disappointments doing today?” I asked as I opened the door of my house to let the three of them and David in. There wasn’t much to do after engineering. Nobody wanted to give us jobs with the kind of marks we had earned.

Sandeep was in a foul mood. “And you’ve actually achieved superstardom in this field, haven’t you?”

Sandeep was facing the most pressure to get himself employed. He had a better set of marks than any of us and was the closest to finding a job after months of unemployment after graduation. There was a change in him during this unemployed phase. He had sobered down and lost some of the carefree attitude that each of us possessed during engineering.

“You’re right. You guys at least had the fuckin guts to admit you were in love. I haven’t even come that far,” I said.

“*Macchis*, forget love, what do we do about our painful virginities?” said David. “I think if we had focused on getting rid of that first, we would be singing a different song today.”

“Hmm...” I nodded in David’s support. “When I saw these guys reacting to Wardha the first day we saw her, I knew this kind of trouble was brewing. I even warned them...”

“Yes, you did, Anand. You wanted us to focus on the slutty types,” Sahir said.

With nothing to do and the devil doing his dance in our empty friggin minds, we took every opportunity to educate ourselves on how we could relieve ourselves of our virgin statuses via whatever means we could get our eyes and ears on: books, porn videos, and subsequent analyses and interpretations. With other activities out of our focus, it was the beginning of the era when we started to view the female form very, very differently.

“Did you know that guys in the US don’t remain virgins by the time they finish high school?” I asked as we watched porn. We had the whole house to ourselves. My parents and my older sister were in Trivandrum for a wedding in the family. I fucking hated such family gatherings. My relatives asked me at every friggin opportunity what I was doing in mechanical engineering, instead of taking up medicine. And now, without a job, it would be even worse. I was fucking sick of their questions and of finding a convincing answer EACH TIME. My parents no longer asked me to come along. They knew, I wouldn’t want to.

At our age, with the new found freedom of adulthood we preferred catching up on porn, the Indian magazines *Debonair* and *Fantasy*; and even the international *Playboy* whenever we get hold of it. We were above eighteen and had no restrictions to go to or hire any of these ‘blue colored’ movies either. We got to know the

difference between ‘X’ rated, the ‘XX’ rated and the ‘XXX’ rated ones. We came across the ‘pink’ ones as well, we were unsure if there was anything else in the whole world that was more disgusting.

Our knowledge graph about how else the actual act could be done was showing a never before climb. Until then, we did not even know that there were MULTIPLE ways of doing it.

When we had seen enough that day, we made ourselves comfortable on the terrace, under a clear night sky, with a crate of beer, couple of bottles of Black Label whisky and a bottle of Old Monk rum.

“*Dai*, Anand, how do you get information that guys in the US lose their virginity at sixteen? Did some Doctor in your family conduct a survey on US residents and their virginity status?” David asked with his speech slurring, unconvinced of my declaration. David loved rum and it was claiming its victim. Rum seemed to clear David’s head, making him think rationally.

“Believe me, guys. That’s the fucking truth. There’s an elaborate social setting called ‘prom’ when they finish high school. That’s when the ‘action’ is planned. Most succeed, even those who are right at the bottom rung of the social ladder. And look at us, all finished with undergrad and none of us have even come close. What the fuck is WRONG with us?” My voice had started to rise. I loved whisky. Sandeep kept his hands off spirits and was sipping coke while the rest drank beer.

“And we’re going to overtake China. We are going to become the most populous country in the world. Can you believe that?” Gopal chipped in, adding fuel to the fire.

“We’re a fucking bunch of hypocrites. That’s what we are. Every fucking single one of us. We discuss sex in hushed tones,

behave like prudes every time we see a girl wear a sleeveless dress, a miniskirt, or jeans, beat up couples on Valentine's Day, we have the strictest censorship in movies. We get locked up and get fucked over for talking to girls, that too in a fucking library, for fuck's sake! And still manage to reproduce at the highest rate. FUCK! How did we end up like this? What the fuck is wrong with this country goddammit!"

I smashed a half-filled bottle of beer against the wall. I was getting worked up. None of them had seen me this pissed. Ever.

Everyone looked on in silence. I realized that I was speaking the truth. We were all fucked up. It looked like the country was fucked up. The morals and values we were being brought up with seemed to be fucked up as well. What logical explanation did one have for the rate at which we were reproducing while everyone in the country behaved as if they were SAINTS, above all this pettiness?

Things cooled down after a while. I said, "I have Salma Hayek's *Desperado*."

Everyone nodded.

*Desperado* had hit the screens a couple of years earlier. I had got hold of a good video on rent. Salma Hayek looked gorgeous and made us forget the kind of shit we were in for the duration of the movie. How could anyone resist that hot a girl who could fire a gun and jump off rooftops with the ease only seasoned action heroes possessed? The movie's title had some relevance to the messed up state our minds we were in.

Then, just like that, it happened. At least, as close to 'it' as possible.

She was seventeen, not the studious type, and willing. I

was twenty, with a driving license that said I was a couple of years older, and desperate. She was from Civil and had completed her first year at ECVU. The guys suspected that something was brewing between us, but I never admitted to it.

She seemed to like the silent types, which suited me just fine.

We kissed. She liked it. I touched her 'inappropriately.' She was reluctant, then got used to it, and got HOOKED.

We met for movies, for 'watching' those that were not doing too well at the box office. The emptier the theater, the more 'privacy' we had to ourselves. Theaters, stairways, bus stands, restaurants, car rides; I could not keep my hands off her. It was not love, but I was loving it. I was lead to believe she was, too. This was what an American termed 'making out'. We did that in plenty.

She was my little secret. None of the guys knew.

Then, it ended.

She wanted to talk!!!

TALK, for fuck's sake!!! FUCK!

# CHAPTER 50

---

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **18 November, 2004**

Anand, I ran into your friend from civil..... She was incidentally asking about you. I thought you were in touch with her.....

##

**From: Anand Nair**                              **19 November, 2004**

Why will she friggin ask about me? I have no idea!!! Haven't seen her in ages.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **20 November, 2004**

We really believed that there was always something going on between you two.....

I had been to Tumkur, an hour's drive from Bangalore, for a family function. There was this girl there who was openly throwing me the bait. She is a far off relative. Her name is Bhavani. I could

have easily bitten it, but I controlled myself. In these kinds of gatherings, if I even spoke to a girl, elders would try to get us hooked up. One such elderly gentleman recommended that I give her a thought. It is obviously the beginning of a lot of trouble when elders start to think about you this way.....

Towards the end of the get-together, she discretely winked at me before leaving.

She actually scares me.....

##

**From: Anand Nair**

**21 November, 2004**

Well, of our lot David and Sandeep were the LADIES' men. But on the plus side we all now have excellent experience in what NOT to do ;).

To be fair to guys, ECVU girls were never the outgoing kind. Girls in other colleges were always much more outgoing. Their college fests were evidence enough even then. ECVU girls used to hang out outside the placement office. The PLACEMENT office for fucks' sake. Well so did most of the guys.

As you can tell, that whole placement shit drives me MAD. To reduce the value of one's entire education to getting into some fucking company!!!! The worst was that they had us convinced that was cool! I can't believe I used to look up to some who had their fates sealed even before they left college.

If anyone tells me that shit again, I will pull off their fucking testicles and make them eat it, WITHOUT salt. Looking back, I feel blessed that we had our set of experiences.

If I had to do it all again, I would do it the same.

Well, I might eat less of the canteen food. That shit was nasty. I can't believe we (me and David primarily) used to gorge on that.

# #

**From: Gopal V** **22 November, 2004**

I have some news.

I had not mentioned earlier, but I travelled 2 Singapore for the project with my colleague. Her name is Sarala. We have got very close over the past two months. As we hardly knew other people here in Singapore, we used 2 spend a lot of time with each other.

Yesterday, after thinking about it for a long time, I asked her and she accepted.

She is of a different caste than ours. I don't know when and how I will take this up with my parents. With God's grace, everything should work out fine.

# #

**From: Anand Nair** **22 November, 2004**

Gopal, you seem to have assimilated the last set of mails well.

Congratulations!!!!

You had said that you are going to Singapore for six months back in November. You have about FOUR more months in Singapore with Sarala.

As I had said, enjoy it while it lasts. These things never come back. It is now or never.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** **23 November, 2004**

Everybody is falling into the 'pit' one after the other....

I actually don't think David is single (or even a virgin) anymore. Dude David, do you have any updates about yourself to share with us???

I am surely the last among all of us on such things....

# #

**From: David Williams** **24 November, 2004**

*Dai!!* As I had said earlier, I am committed to all pretty babes.

Shame on you guys for still having doubts about my virginity status!!!

# CHAPTER 51

## Sahir Hassan

“Dude! Why do you want to actually study philosophy after getting an engineering degree?” Sandeep asked me in one of his more serious moments. We were standing in a serpentine queue to apply for passports. Everybody wanted passports. We thought we might need them some day, had time on our hands and by getting them, we had nothing to lose.

Sandeep had started to address everybody as ‘dude.’ I suspect it had its origins in the several non-Hindi movies we were watching then.

“I want to do something for myself,” I replied.

They were offering an option of twenty-year validity on passports—by charging extra, of course. Passports expired every ten years—the twenty year validity was a recent introduction. Sandeep didn’t think he needed a passport for more than ten years. I borrowed money from him for the twenty year validity on mine.

“Is this sudden interest in philosophy actually because of Wardha?” he asked.

I looked at him. I thought about all the sleepless nights I spent over her, all the hurt I had caused and how it had ended between us. It took me a while before I shook my head as the answer to his question—no.

I didn’t elaborate further on the reasons to want to study philosophy to Sandeep. Perhaps I was not convinced about them myself. But for Sandeep, what I said was enough. There aren’t too many people who would be satisfied with such explanations, but Sandeep was a friend—one of those contented ones.

Fresh out of college, a graduate’s real world yardstick are his grades—I was too ashamed to show mine. I didn’t want the grades I got in engineering to be an index of my capabilities. I didn’t want my engineering marks to be a reflection of my efforts at getting educated. I decided on higher education. For me, that was the only way.

Four years at ECVU had taught me that there was more to life than electrical engineering. If I was going to study further, I was not too inclined to study only electrical engineering again. I ruled out the GATE option to pursue further studies in India that Gopal had decided on.

During and after finishing undergrad in electrical engineering, I sat in libraries for long hours reading up on philosophy—just out of interest. Philosophy got me thinking, like I never had.

Philosophy, to me, seemed to be the highest echelon of the entire hierarchy of knowledge. Science and engineering appeared to be branches of philosophy.

Also, why was a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D) the highest obtainable degree? The kind of questions philosophy asked and answered were at a higher level, which science, by itself failed to answer.

I was convinced that philosophy was the path ahead for me. Studying philosophy seemed like a bigger challenge. I did not want to restrict myself understanding a subset when bigger and more complex things were there to be explored and solved.

Around that time, the Internet had 'arrived' and was influencing our lives, changing the world, and making an impact like nothing else ever had. I Googled and found a program called "Analysis of Ideas and the Study of Methods" in the University of Chicago. I went through the syllabus and it seemed to deal with the answers that I sought from philosophy. It fit the kind of higher education I wanted for myself. I was thrilled.

I decided to write the GRE for higher studies in the US. It was a moment of profound clarity. I had a purpose. There was something I wanted to do.

I prepared for and wrote the GRE and sent in the necessary scores and supporting documents to colleges. The program at the University of Chicago topped my list of preferences. I pinned all my hopes on it, willing it to come through. I had applied to electrical engineering programs in a couple of other universities for a 'just-in-case' scenario.

While waiting to hear from these universities, I met Shylaja Ma'am. After she got to know that I wasn't doing anything at all, she asked me to join ECVU as a guest faculty. She wanted to take me in despite my dismal marks in engineering. I said yes to Shylaja Ma'am. Wardha had graduated by then.

I began teaching the very subjects I had flunked in earlier. I learned more while teaching the subject than I ever had as a student. I started to feel that electrical engineering was not that bad, after all. Electrical Machines, Power Systems, Transmission and Distribution, Power Electronics, and Microprocessor/ Integrated Circuit Design (among others) were all exciting to me now. I had regained the technical curiosity and inquisitiveness I had lost as an engineering student. How the engineering system was organized, as a rat race where we 'trained' and not 'taught' had perhaps put us off.

Meanwhile, I started to get rejects from most of the universities in the US that I had applied for. I was not surprised considering the grades I had managed to earn during engineering.

I was devastated when University of Chicago did not give me an admit into their Analysis of Ideas & the Study of Methods graduate program. There were moments earlier when self doubts crept in and I wanted to drop the idea of studying philosophy in Graduate school—the reject from University of Chicago hammered the last nail on the coffin of this desire.

After getting rejections from most of the universities I applied to, I started to wonder if my desire for higher studies in the US of A would remain a dream. When I was considering other options, I heard from Wright State University in Ohio. They had granted me an admit to their electrical engineering program.

My parents were overjoyed that their son was showing some intent after they had seen me drifting away aimlessly without a job after engineering. I had a few cousins who had taken the path of GRE -> US -> MS Degree -> Job in US -> Earn in Dollars -> Make parent's life in India easy. Engineering in India was soon forgotten and my Dad loosened his purse like I never knew he



could.

Getting a student visa to the US was a breeze. The ‘just-in-case’ scenario seemed to be working.

Meanwhile, Sandeep had got a job in a software firm and was making steady money while progressing up the corporate ladder. Anand—after doing some soul searching—wrote the GRE as well, got an impressive score, and got admission to a computer science program in Florida. He was scheduled to fly to the US in a week. David had started his own event management company and was happy doing what he loved to do, while making money in the process. Gopal wrote GATE, and through it, got admission into an M. Tech. program in a premier engineering institute at Surathkal. His course had commenced a month earlier.

The gang came down to see me off at the airport. “Both of you are going all the way to the US,” Gopal said to Anand and me. “We don’t know when we’ll see each other next. Will you guys at least keep in touch?” he said with a lump-in-the-throat expression.

We nodded and hugged. We had gotten so used to having each other around for everything—it was painful letting go.

The gang gifted me a pack of Kamasutra Xtra Pleasure condoms. Every one of them believed I would need them very soon. I marveled at their confidence in me and their enthusiasm to see the tag of virginity removed from my neck. Did they think there would be naked women waiting for me in the US of A—wanting to sleep with me as soon as I landed?

“Is Wardha ultimately a closed chapter for you?” Sandeep asked while hiding the condoms in my carry-on bag.

“No. I don’t think it can ever be a closed chapter, for me at least,” I said. Sandeep did not look at me while I replied.

“What about Playboy, then?” Sandeep looked at me and smiled. I smiled back at him. We had started out with a common ambition.

“In a few years, I’ll see you without the virgin baggage and with a philosophy degree under your belt,” Sandeep said as I waved my goodbyes, while walking to the security check looking forward to what US had to offer me. I was going for an electrical engineering program. Philosophy and loss of virginity seemed quite a long shot.

I still smiled.

## CHAPTER 52

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**From: Sahir Hassan**                      **25 November, 2004**

Hey Guys,

All the distractions apart, I defended my master's thesis within fifteen months of an official admit into the graduate program. It is a record at the Department of Philosophy at Wright State—nobody had defended their Master's thesis sooner than fifteen months.

I did a little jig in broad daylight within and around the department like a footballer does after he scores the all important goal for his country—with screams, pumping fists, and jumps—when the data spelt out new significant conclusions building on some well established ones.

“This is the kind of work that actual research is made of,” Dr. Heft, my graduate advisor commented before I took off. Dr. Heft is the Department Chair

and is well respected in his line of work—such praise from him means a lot. He also offered me a Ph.D. position under him.

It is a proud moment.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **25 November, 2004**

Congrats Sahir—so are you really a Philosopher' now? ;-)

# #

**From: Gopal V**                                      **26 November, 2004**

Yes of course he is Sandeep. He is proud of it too.

Sahir, I am very happy for you. So what are you going to do next? Are you planning to finish your Ph.D. there? With all the hard work you have already put in, and with God's grace you could soon be a Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy ;-)

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan**                      **28 November, 2004**

'Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy'—that was a good one Gopal.

I am writing up my thesis now. After the thesis is accepted, I can apply for the MS degree—which I think will take a couple more months.

It was my mom's birthday yesterday. I called her up to wish her and also let her know that my professor was very happy and offered me a Ph.D. position under him.

This is what she said (verbatim)—“If you are even thinking of studying any further, I will jump off the second floor of our house”.

That put an end to my Ph.D. plans. I have to look for a job now.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 19 November, 2004

Your mother actually wants you to settle down soon..... With two MS degrees, I don't think it will be too difficult for you to easily find a great job in the US.

Good luck on that.....

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 15 December, 2004

It is winter here in Ohio—it is cold and miserable. My job search does not look like it is going anywhere yet. I don't have a source of income from the next month and have no money saved up either.

Most of the *desi* public here has gone to India for the winter vacation and we are here in this cold, freezing our arses.

I have some news to share. There is this girl Nicole—she is in our department as an assistant to the graduate program secretary. She is tall, pleasant faced, and attractive—not in a 'Baywatch babe' way. She has applied for the Masters in Counseling Psychology program here at Wright State.

I passed by where Nicole sat almost every day on my way to meet my Advisor for Thesis work. The good thing about Americans is that they smile at you out of politeness – Nicole used to smile at me as well. I had spoken to her on just a couple of instances when I had to enquire about the whereabouts of the Graduate Program secretary or if my Advisor was in.

I asked Nicole out last month. She said yes. She is the

only one—as you guys know—who has said yes to giving 'us' a chance. I have to admit, without her giving us a chance, I would perhaps have been a broken man.

We see each other often now.

PS: Anybody who wants to put *batti* about this or instigate my Mom, please choose some other occasion and time.

# #

**From: David Williams** 18 December, 2004

*Dai Sahir*, now that you have heeded to my words, focus on the future. Get married and have kids. ;-) *Carpe diem*.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 22 December, 2004

There is a saying: "He prays for his love to succeed, when it does, he actually prays for a breakup so that he can start all over again."

Not the exact words, but it goes something like that.....

# #

**From: Gopal V** 22 December, 2004

A lot of guys here r still praying for the love 2 succeed.

# #

**From: David Williams** 24 December, 2004

There is another dialogue which goes like this, 'World is not short of girls, if not a micro mini we will go for a mini, if not for jeans, if not for a sari and so on.' It is too difficult to phrase it in English but it is something like that.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 28 December, 2004

If you try and find fault with every girl you come across in life, you will obviously never get married. Try to understand it is hard to find perfect girls....

# #

**From: Anand Nair** 29 December, 2004

I heard a couple of suggestions for you guys to get married in that flurry of mails. DON'T. Don't do anything stupid like that any time soon. A couple of you are employed in the city you like and amongst the friends you love. The last thing you want right now is more responsibility.

Enjoy it while it lasts. These things NEVER come back. It is now or never. This applies to all the loafers.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 14 January, 2005

My company is sending me for some work to San Francisco. I still have the visa formalities to complete....will probably land there sometime next month for a five week duration.....

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 15 January, 2005

It's really cold out here in Dayton. It is around -12 degrees Celsius and we had record snowfall last week as well. There are mountains of snow everywhere. It is coupled with what is called a wind chill which makes it feel like -22 degrees. We can't even step out.

Sandeep is on his way to San Francisco Bay area—which is very close to the Bangalore kind of weather. I envy him.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 04 February, 2005

My visa has been approved..... I will be landing in SFO on the 11<sup>th</sup> of this month.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 06 February, 2005

I have a couple of interviews lined up in San Francisco.

Sandeep—I am coming down to SFO. I might land there as you arrive. See you there soon.

This seems like the end of the road for Nicole and me. If I move out of Dayton, I am not sure if and when I shall be able to return. Parting with Nicole became unavoidable with my job search taking me out of Dayton.

There was no bitterness, though it hurt that we had to part.

# #

**From: David Williams** 08 February, 2005

*Machan* Sahir, find someone local in SFO. Now that you were able to succeed with one, success with others should come easy.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 12 February, 2005

David, how do you really know about women in America, succeeding with them, and their dating patterns? How are you blatantly making such assumptions???

San Francisco is totally awesome. I landed here only yesterday. Sahir was here to receive me.....Among the first things I did was to skydive. It was tremendous. It cost me \$200 but was well worth it. Pics attached.....

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 05 March, 2005

We made sure Sandeep had a proper American experience while he was here—which included a visit to the strip club. But the club and the girls in it were nowhere close to the babes in Diamonds, though.

Our ‘pure vegetarian’ Sandeep has started to like chicken here. McDonald’s chicken is his favorite—it is next to impossible to get good and clean vegetarian food here, so Sandeep made that switch.

Intel, Oracle, and even Sun Microsystems interviewed me. Nothing worked out. Am I so unworthy of a decent job here in the US—in the land of opportunity?

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 05 March, 2005

Dude Sahir! Why did you actually have to tell everybody that I eat chicken!!! Anyway, damage is done.....

I was really embarrassed at the strip club taking the lap dance in full public view. There was no separate enclosure here like what Sahir had said.....

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 15 March, 2005

We took Sandeep on a road trip in California. Sandeep gave me the nick name ‘Truck Driver’ as I drove non-stop for about 40 hours. We just took breaks for restrooms, eating, and for filling gas.

Anyway, back to reality and job hunting after a refreshing trip—thanks to Sandeep.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 28 March, 2005

I am heading back to India after finishing the project. Thanks to Sahir, my stay in the US was really memorable.....

My mom says she has received a couple of alliances for me and wants me to meet the girls immediately after I come back to India. For people looking for sons-in-law or husbands back home, US trips usually are of great significance.

As in my case, as soon as I land in the US, my mother starts to get alliances for me in India including one from Bhavani....the same girl who winked at me at a wedding in Tumkur.

The ‘craze’ for NRI or US-returned grooms really sickens me. But I am also sick of not being able to find anybody by myself. I guess the arranged marriage option is the most convenient for me now.....

Good luck Sahir on the job front. Hang in there.....

# #

**From: Gopal V** 29 March, 2005

It’s now Sandeep’s turn 2 fall into the pit. Choose a good *bhabhi* for us. I won’t be surprised at all if u land yourself in Bhavani’s bait.

Sahir, on the job front, with God’s grace, it should all work out fine.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 02 April, 2005

I am starting off my new career in a *desi* restaurant as a delivery boy/ waiter/ kitchen help from tomorrow. I have to work 10 hrs a day.

I haven't told my parents yet. Guys in touch with my parents in Bangalore—don't let them know.

PS: I will hardly have any email access—will be sending out job applications on any internet time I get on these days. I might be able to check mails but don't think I will be able to reply to your emails :-(

# #

From: David Williams

24 April, 2005

*Dai Sahir!!* It's been a while since you wrote to this group. Don't disappear. At least try to mail now and then.

## CHAPTER 53

### Sahir Hassan

“So what is the point of having two Master's degrees, then?” Hardeep Singh, who made the most delicious butter chicken and mango lassi, asked me. “A waste of parents' money and your time. You have ended up working in a hotel like us—you should have started earning much earlier.”

I smiled as I picked dirty dishes off tables at a *Punjabi* restaurant—the only place willing to employ me after several months of job hunt in the San Francisco Bay Area. I had two graduate degrees (MS) from the US of A, and as far as I knew, they were not in the area where jobs had gone extinct. How did I end up waiting tables and mixing dough in the Mecca of innovation? I could smile—more at my plight than anything else.

I believed that this phase would not last—it was six months without a job matching my educational background which translated to a decent income. My bank had called me a couple of times informing me that

my balance started to show negative. I had not even spoken to my parents for a while now because of this cash-strapped situation—calling cards to India cost money.

I owed thousands of dollars on my credit cards and on those I had borrowed from my ever willing-to-help cousins to pay for my graduate education. It was the biggest reason preventing me from looking for opportunities back home in India—I could not pay back thousands of dollars (which translated to lakhs of rupees) with the mere thousands I would make in India. It was a vicious cycle. It was the same story with the thousands of graduate students who came from middle class Indian families chasing the American dream. Our parents weren't millionaires. I was—like many I knew—basically fucked.

Ajay Singh, the restaurant owner, shook me from my reverie. “Sahir!! *Utho*. You taking a nap? The customer's glass is empty.” It was three-fourth full with water. “Don't stand there doing nothing. Move!!”

Ajay would frown and scream instructions if he found me standing at one spot for more than ten seconds. I had to ‘appear’ occupied with work. It was as if he owned me for the five dollars an hour cash he paid. I believed that he converted every dollar into Indian rupees to get the feeling he paid me more than I deserved.

Ajay made me an offer that evening. “I like you. You work hard,” he said. “These are difficult times, but I am willing to help you out. I will sponsor your work visa. I will give you \$1000 per month. I will take care of your accommodation as well.”

He took me in his BMW and showed me where he would put me up. It was a three-bedroom house where about fifteen Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi souls chasing the American dream—by waiting on tables—were already bunched up.

If I took up the offer, I would have to give up hope of finding a job in my field and become his slave for the next few years at least. It was a dilemma. I needed the money and I saw no way out. What now?

The answer came sooner than I expected.

Ajay was building another restaurant. That week, when my pay was due, he told me, “Sahir, you have to wait another month for your pay. We are running a little short on funds and the construction needs to go on. Look at Hardeep, we owe him three months pay. He has absolute confidence in us.”

I went back to the studio apartment I lived in and thought it over. I was sharing the apartment with Pavan, a roommate from my Masters. He had agreed to let me stay without expecting payment.

But, I still had to pay credit card and phone bills. My cousins had helped me enough—I could not borrow further from them or anyone else. I needed the pay. I lived paycheck to paycheck. This was not happening.

Ajay looked his grumpy self at work the next day. I told him, “Ajay, I need the money. If you cannot pay me for the month, then there is no guarantee that you will pay me the next month either. What do I do then?”

“*Arre bhai*, I will pay you next month. Things are a little tight and the construction of the new restaurant needs to go on. I owe Hardeep three months pay, and he has the confidence that we will pay him soon. Have confidence in us... *bharosa rakho*,” Ajay tried assuring me.

“No, Ajay. I need the money. What if you cannot pay me for the next three months like what you have done to Hardeep.

What do I do then? I will not work until you pay me now.” I stayed firm.

“*Pagal ho gaya kya?* Have you gone mad, Sahir? I am telling you that I cannot pay you now and I will pay you next month. I have offered you a job and have even agreed to sponsor your work visa. Is this how you want to repay me?”

“Ajay, don’t see it like that. I need the money. I will not work until you pay me.” I stood my ground.

Ajay sped off in his BMW. I waited.

He returned and said “Here is your money. I don’t want you to work here anymore.”

I was not too upset. I had thought it over. If Ajay had sponsored my work visa, I would have to work for him full time. If he had said he wouldn’t be able to pay me then, I would have been in deeper shit. I wouldn’t have had a choice but to wait until he paid me. Perhaps it was better this way.

“Thank you for everything, Ajay,” I said, before I left.

Ajay made sure that I would not wait tables in any of the *desi* restaurants in that area.

I was without any source of income.

Hardeep’s words started to echo in my ears again, “What is the point of having two Master’s degrees then?”

*“The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone”*

– Harriet Beecher Stowe

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## PART

# TWO



# CHAPTER 1

---

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 30 May, 2005

Dude Sahir..... How are you? It has been more than two months. Why aren't you mailing to the group at all.....? I even spoke to your Mother. All are definitely worried about you.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** 02 June, 2005

I have very less email access. I look for and apply for jobs whenever I am online. Situation has become desperate. But I do follow the discussions going on in the group.

By the way, I have an offer from India. They seem to have liked my background. They had a test for me and I cleared that as well. Find the offer letter attached. What do you think?

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** **03 June, 2005**

The pay is definitely a little less, dude.... You surely won't be able to pay your loans on that salary. You would need minimum 70% more than that to easily pay your loans and live comfortably in any of the metro cities.

I have another news. I am actually getting married to Bhavani. The wedding will be in July.... You had once said that you will make it to my wedding. All others, including Anand are planning to come to the wedding.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** **04 June, 2005**

Congratulations on your wedding. Very happy for you. I really wish I could make it to your wedding. It is looking impossible as of now.

Looks like I will have to turn down the offer. I am happy that at least someone other than restaurants and grocery stores offered me a job.

# #

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** **05 June, 2005**

I would have been definitely very happy if you came to my wedding, dude.....

Let me know what the company guys say after you turned their offer down.

# #

**From: Sahir Hassan** **07 June, 2005**

The company guys have doubled the offer. Can you believe it? I had told them that I cannot come back to India on their earlier

pay package. They seem to think that I am worth so much. I don't have any excuses now to say no to them.

So, now tell me—when is your wedding date???

## CHAPTER 2

### Sahir Hassan

I had been reading up on how India was rising. India now had the kind of opportunities and pay as well that one could not have imagined a decade ago. India's economy was booming and innovation was encouraged like never before. People with multidisciplinary backgrounds were sought out to think out of the box and bring diverse perspectives to the ideation table.

The company offered me the option to work either in Mumbai or Bangalore—there was no doubt where I wanted to work out of.

Back in Bangalore, it all came gushing back. There were other girls in Dayton, but there had not been anyone else—before Wardha or after—who remained so much in my thoughts over such a sustained period of time. It came as a surprise to me that I should still be thinking about her—it had been more than five years since I had even seen her.

I closed my eyes. I saw myself looking at her, her eyes looking into mine. I could feel her breath on my face. Her deep throated laughter rang in my ears. I could smell the shampoo in her hair. I recalled trivial bits of our conversation, my last phone call to her—when I was able to blurt out my name and only the “I love you” part of the intended message.

That I told her that I loved her, remained the last words spoken.

All those memories felt real—I was re-living every moment.

I had even learnt the slow dance.

I searched faces at malls, restaurants, book shops, the railway station, for her—to see her just that one more time.

I longed to look into her eyes, to see her eyes looking into mine—just that one more time.

Would she look the same?

Would I look the same to her?

Ways I could react on seeing her started to play like old reruns in my head—they had done so about a million times already. Should I talk to her like nothing happened? Should I show surprise, relief, pleasantness, remorse...? Or should I look away? Walk away from her? Denying that I ever knew her? That she shook my entire world? That she was the reason for a range of emotions that I never knew existed?

I hadn't known what falling in love felt like until then.

That she perhaps felt the same—felt and still feels surreal.

Would it hurt to see her?

Would it hurt her to see me?

Life is not meant to be perfect.

This was not like a comic book. This was real. It just did not fit into little circles and boxes called ideal that are drawn for it.

Her name still found its way to my lips.

*Wardha hain, Wardha hain...*

*Wardha hain, Wardha hain...*

Events from the past unfurled. Wardha's smile as she took my note which ended everything, flashed in my mind. She had taken that note without batting an eyelid, without the least bit of hesitation about me or my intent. It topped the list of those 'What were you thinking!' moments in my life.

I slammed my fist into the wall. There was no pain. It brought me back to the reality of the present—of her absence in my life. I started to imagine alternate paths where there could have been no hurt, no bitterness.

It was not even 'cool' to be so heartbroken for so long.

For so long—over the same girl.

The Wardha episode had been an incomplete chapter which my head kept getting back to.

Why was my gramophone record stuck on Wardha? Why did the song not progress? Why was it playing the same line over and over and over again? It had stopped sounding melodious a while ago.

I could not live like this. How could I stop letting my past screw up my present? How could I go about life in peace?

I had no answers.

*"Har waqt guzar jaata hai,*

*Par dard tabar jaata hai.*

*Sab bhool bhi jaaye koi,*

*Kuchh yaad magar aata hai."*

– Mansi (Aishwarya Rai) in the film *Taal* (1999)

(Time goes by,

But the pain remains.

Even if everything is forgotten;

There will always be something which will be recalled.)

I planned my move back to Bangalore to be in time for Sandeep's wedding. I landed a week before he was scheduled to get married. We met at ECVU at the first opportunity.

"Dude! Welcome back," he said.

"Congratulations on the wedding. I see that you could not escape Bhavani's 'bait'."

He smiled and we hugged. I gave him my visiting card. It said:

**Sahir Hassan.**

**MS Electrical Engineering, MS Philosophy.**

"The pack of condoms you guys gifted are still unused, though," I winked.

"What a waste," he said and laughed. He then reached for his wallet and gave me his visiting card with the Sun Microsystems logo embossed on it. Sandeep had taken up an offer with Sun a couple of months before he began his wedded life.

"Wow. That's great, dude. Who would have thought we

will end up this way,” I said.

He then said, “You will surely be happy to hear this. Shylaja Ma’am is now the Principal.”

“Is she? That’s wonderful. Let us meet her first”

I remembered the day when we first walked into the Principal’s office, when the constables had tied our hands with rope, our protests, the *lathi* hitting Sandeep on his head and we being herded away in a van like pigs.

Shylaja Ma’am broke into a big smile on seeing us. “I am proud of you two,” she said after she learnt what we did for a living.

After meeting Shylaja Ma’am, we walked around the campus in silence. We went to our classrooms, to the library—through its non-silent zone, to the electrical engineering department by the very spot I gave the note to Wardha. There was a new IT department; a cyber center had also come up. The shack called ‘canteen’ still existed. There were no weeds on campus, the walls had been painted, and the toilets were cleaner.

We looked at people in the college as we strolled through it—teachers, administrative staff, the canteen maama, the library madam, and the students. We smiled at the ones who showed even a flicker of recognition. It was six years since we finished undergrad. The students loitering in the campus appeared a generation younger.

I noticed that they laughed at the slightest excuse. In fact, they did not need an excuse to keep grinning—it seemed like a smirk was glued to each of their faces.

We had been like that then.

The most telling sign of receding youth is not balding or a

paunch, it is when you do not feel like laughing as much anymore.

This ‘youth brigade’ we saw reminded me of all the fun we perhaps had denied ourselves at that age—by hurting ourselves and spreading hurt.

“Do you want to turn back time and do engineering again?” I asked Sandeep.

He stopped and looked at me for a moment. “It would be really nice. We had lot of fun,” he said.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

He thought for a bit. “On second thoughts, I don’t think I actually want to put my Mother through the struggle again,” he said. “What about you?”

“Yes, we had fun. I did a lot of stupid things. I hurt a few people. I don’t want to let go of the wisdom and the understanding of life I have perhaps gained,” I said.

“Umm. I completely agree, dude” he said. “Also, if we had pursued a different path for revenge and done something really stupid, we could not even have completed engineering...,” his voice trailed off.

“I think we are very lucky to be able to stand here and talk to each other like this—after what we went through” I said.

We sat down at the *katte* taking everything in. There was a lump in my throat, perhaps Sandeep had one, too—but I haven’t known him as the sentimental type.

“Do you still think about Wardha?” he asked.

I couldn’t deny it. I nodded “Yes, I do.”

“In spite of the Ritu, Nicole, Sally, Carla...and the strip clubs? Come on dude...” he said with a tone of disbelief.

I just bowed down and shook my head. How could I stop thinking about Wardha? Not because I hadn't tried. I just did not have a convincing enough answer to that lingering question.

At the *katte* in ECVU, I did not even have to close my eyes to see events from the past unfolding—the scene when we saw Wardha first walk into ECVU played out in front of me. I was getting that urge again to slam my fist into the nearest wall.

At that moment, Gopal, Anand and David walked in, smiling at us snapping me out of me reverie.

“Fucking good to see all you loafers,” Anand said as we hugged and slapped each other's backs in pure joy.

Gopal was working for a networking giant. After his confession about Sarala to us, Gopal was going through the struggle of convincing his parents—a breakthrough seemed just around the corner. Anand was finishing up his PhD in the Center for Complex Systems and Brain Sciences in the USA and had planned his annual India visit to coincide with Sandeep's wedding. David was working on an album and travelled the world over.

How we even managed to complete engineering never ceased to amaze us. We remembered the classes, the labs, viva after the labs, the examinations, the manuals, the fat text books—it was all a haze.

We recalled all the fun we had had at shoestring budgets. We agreed that no amount of money we now had in our banks would buy us the joy we had felt then.

Sandeep brought a couple of photo albums with him of our college days. We cheered loudest on the one which showed us pointing our middle fingers at the principal's nameplate hanging outside his office.

The five of us at the *katte* was just like the old times at ECVU. As we caught up on the days gone by—the student's union, Sushmita Ma'am, Electrical and Mechanical engineering, Jishi, even Wardha and Kalpana—we were able to realize that none of us had 'grown up' or had changed all that much.

We were all still the same. We had just learned to behave better in public.

Importantly, we had all turned out all right.

From: Anand Nair

08 August, 2008

# CHAPTER 3

---

Dear *Loafers*,

How is everyone? Hardly any mails. Even the regular nude pics have been missing. Make some noise once in a while, guys.

Saw the movie Kung Fu Panda recently. It was less of a cartoon for kids and more of a discourse on philosophy for adults. Reminded me so much about Sahir and his philosophizing.

##

**From: David Williams** 10 August, 2008

*Machan*, especially for you and to rekindle old memories, find some photos of our very own Shakeela attached.

Another news from my side is that my last album has done well and I recently signed a contract for two more. That and my event management company takes care of my livelihood for the next

couple of years at least.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 10 August, 2008

That is great, David. I am really happy for you....

News from my side is that I recently became a father of a baby boy. Both mother and son are doing well....

Life has become really hectic after the baby. Hardly get time to sleep. I haven't seen Kung Fu Panda. Will try to see it soon.....

##

**From: Gopal V** 10 August, 2008

Congrats Sandeep. By God's grace, u have become a full family man.

Great David. I thought u will share some exciting stories of ur interactions with the opposite sex. Any latest news?

Enjoyed pics of Shakeela. All of us were great fans of her in college. Even now we are, I don't want 2 deny.

My work is going on as usual. Want to shift to a company with more babes around. It is getting boring in the office these days.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 12 August, 2008

Congratulations to Sandeep. Now we have ample proof that the stuff going down the drain has been put to good use. ;- ) ;- )

##

**From: David Williams** 13 August, 2008

*Machans*, if a majority of the stuff had not gone down the drain, then Sandeep would have been fathering multiple kids by now.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**

**14 August 2008**

Congrats to both Sandeep and David. I did see Sandeep's son at the hospital. He looks more like his mother fortunately.

I have been mostly busy with work and paying off my debts from US.

## CHAPTER 4

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### Sahir Hassan

**November 2008, Bangalore**

I turned thirty earlier that year and my time as an 'eligible' bachelor was running out. The pool of prospective brides had also started to dwindle as soon as I touched thirty. All my efforts at finding that 'right' girl to get married to on my own had been a complete failure.

"Did your mother give you her photographs and bio data?" my Dad asked from behind a newspaper. Cutting and splashing noises indicated my Mom's presence in the kitchen.

I was halfway through the day's list of forwarded smses. I kept the phone away and took my time sifting through the envelope which my mother had given me the previous day. I had kept that away until then too disregarding that it was my Dad who had brought the alliance and was waiting to hear about it from me.



“She looks pretty. Profile says she is an Oncologist. Wow. I am surprised that she is still single,” I said.

“That’s fine. What about the alliance? Do you think it will work?” The chair creaked under his weight.

The kitchen fell silent. “Why would she even want to marry me?” I asked, keeping the profile back in the envelope.

“We think it will be a good match. You should at least consider her. She is worth it. We know her family since the past forty years—from even before you were born,” my Dad said, lowering the newspaper just enough to look me in the eyes through his horn rimmed glasses.

Our grandfather clock ticked as he waited for my answer.

“I want to meet her alone somewhere outside,” I said. I did not want the drama of twenty people accompanying me to their house to see her. The pressure cooker in the kitchen whistled.

My Dad stopped rocking his chair, folded the newspaper up and kept it aside. He had a long look at me and while I thought he would ask me if I had lost my senses, he grunted his approval. He then looked up their number in his pocket dairy to make the ‘arrangements’. He did not trust his cellphone enough for saving all his contacts.

“Trust me on this one. You won’t find someone as qualified and as beautiful for a bride even if you search the whole of India,” he said, after setting up my meeting with the Oncologist.

Four filter coffees, two cheese sandwiches and three glasses of water later, ‘the prospect’ walked into India Coffee house on MG Road for our first meeting. She was more than an hour late and looked stunning in her full sleeve, Nehru neck white *kurti*, hand embroidered lavender *dupatta* and white *chudidaar*—making the

wait worthwhile. I tried to look as casual as I could in my black sports shoes, a six pocket trouser and a round neck, full arm tee.

“My brother dropped me off,” she said, and did most of the asking after that.

I kept thinking ‘why would she marry me?’ and mumbled some incoherent answers to her questions. She insisted on sharing the bill—I did not protest. She—fortunately for me—did not ask me about my bank balance which was non-existent from paying off my debts.

She said yes about ‘us’ to her parents. My Dad did not even ask for my approval.

Our marriage was scheduled a week before I turned thirty-one.

## CHAPTER 5

---

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**                      **18 November, 2008**

Seems like our Sahir has finally found his match. The girl is a Doctor... an Oncologist.

Hearty congrats Sahir. Really happy for you....

##

**From: David Williams**                      **19 November, 2008**

Hearty congratulations, Sahir *machan*.

So you will finally get to use the box of condoms that we had gifted you almost ten years ago.

##

**From: Gopal V**                                      **19 November, 2008**

Welcome 2 the married people's club, Sahir. With God's grace, it should be fulfilling. It is a different feeling coming home to a wife and kids.

David, I am sure condoms come with an expiry

date. Sahir would have thrown those condoms long time ago. I am sure even if he has them, he won't use those now.

##

**From: Anand Nair**                                      **19 November, 2008**

Finally, Sahir. It is time to fuckin move on to the next stage of your LIFE. Wishing you the best, as always.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**                                      **19 November, 2008**

Thank you all.

I threw those condoms away a couple of years ago. I did not check, but as Gopal said, they must be past their expiry date by now.

By the way, I wasn't sure why she wants to marry me when she said yes—actually, I am still not sure what she saw in me to say yes.

##

**From: Gopal V**                                      **20 November, 2008**

When God gives u something good, u just thank him. Don't ask him why and spoil everything.

##

**From: David Williams**                                      **21 November, 2008**

*Machans*, I still somehow cannot agree that marriage is a good thing. But seems like everyone has to experience marriage and then conclude if it is good or bad on his own. Good luck though, Sahir.

## CHAPTER 6

### Sandeep Gadwal

December 2009, Bangalore

Gopal, Sahir, David and I casually caught up for a movie and dinner.... Anand had taken up a position at the prestigious National Institute of Health in the US. His last India trip was for my wedding and we mostly saw him through his Facebook updates.

David brought a really pretty girl along with him to the movie. He introduced her to us as Shreya, a 'good friend'. Within a few minutes, it was easily obvious to all of us that they were more than 'just good friends'....

"How do you know each other?" Sahir asked them. They looked at each other uneasily and David let Shreya speak.

"I am a *Bharatanatyam* dancer. We met at one of the events which David organized last month," Shreya smiled.

As we ordered dinner after watching the movie *3 Idiots*, I said "That was a great movie.... Totally full on entertainment, just like ECVU."

"These filmmakers are making a connection." Gopal observed.

"*Machans*, ours would really make an awesome college story too. With us, Anand, ECVU, Wardha, Kalpana, Rachana," David said, while Shreya watched wide eyed at the prospect of knowing the secrets of her new 'friend' revealed through a book.

"Sally, Carla, Ritu, Nicole." Gopal added, smiling at Sahir.

I smiled at them and added, "Sarala, Jenny..."

It was Sahir's turn to add more names. "Let's not forget Pallavi, Roshini, Jishi..."

"Story could also include what we actually went through during the ragging episode and prison," I said.

"Prison?" Shreya said while her jaw dropped a few inches.

"That's a long story—David should tell you about it some time," Sahir replied.

There were a few moments of silence after that. I then said "I actually have no doubts that it would be an awesome story."

"I would love to read it," Shreya said.

Sahir nodded at her. "That it would make a great story has been said more than once already. It came up earlier as well, when I was in the US."

"What do you really have in mind?" I asked.

Sahir must have thought about it for a while. "Let's write it up," he said, with a fair degree of conviction.

“I don’t know. It seems like a lot of hard work,” Gopal said after some thought.

“*Dai*, do you think it is that easy to write a book with everything else that is going on?” David asked.

I added, “same here. I actually don’t know either. I don’t want to commit and ditch you...”

“Guys—it should not be that much work. You just need to write down your perspectives on what went on about what you remember of ECVU. I will talk to Anand about this as well. It will be like four points-of-view on something that happened in our lives. It would be great,” Sahir told us confidently.

Shreya was vigorously nodding and grinning from ear to ear, egging us on.

“I don’t know,” Gopal moaned. David and I were shaking our heads at all the work we might have to surely put in if we decide to write our story...

## CHAPTER 7

---

**From: Gopal V** **08 December, 2012**

I was passing by Mount Carmel College yesterday. I think it was their ethnic day and the dress code was white saris. You guys can imagine the rest.

##

**From: David Williams** **09 December, 2012**

*Sooper, machan.* The sexiest babes around in white. I know some of them as well. I have them in my friends list on Facebook—check them out.

##

**From: Sandeep Gad** **09 December, 2012**

I recently read that social networking has overtaken pornography as the top reason why people want to get online....what an achievement for Facebook and LinkedIn.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan**

**10 December 2012**

Yes, it is indeed a great paradigm shift that social networking is the top reason people get online.

Also guys, I have some news.

I have put together the book about us—about what we did and what we went through in engineering and what we ended up doing after it, to get to where we are and what we do today.

I imagined parts of it and have interpreted what we all went through, used what you all sent me as your perspectives, what you said in mails or in person—not just the expletives—to form the crux of this story.

If any of you have any kind of objections about us becoming a story and that it should not be told to anyone—especially like this—speak now or forever hold your peace. A draft version of the book is attached with this mail.

As you guys know, the seed of this idea was sown in one of those moments with Sandeep, Gopal and David, when discussions meandered over everything and nothing, especially those everythings and nothings called women during engineering at ECVU and beyond it as well. In a moment of sheer and absolute foolishness—which we still possess in ample quantities—we concluded that ours would make a worthwhile story and that it needed to be told.

A part of the book is fiction and the rest of it is based on facts and actual events that took place in our lives. Separating the imaginary from an honest version of the truth would be a test for anybody else, but I have no doubt our group would be able to do so without much difficulty.

There were numerous times when I thought this was too much work, that I already had too many commitments and couldn't trust myself to do justice to this. The fact that there are a few million books around was intimidating as well. The thought that this book might not be appreciated—when and if it got published—and would even be rubbished—in spite of the kind of thunder it created using our lives crossed my mind several times.

Nevertheless, I chugged on. I realized that this story went beyond these obstacles. And like a masochist relishing in his misery, I was more than willing to suffer through phases when the glamour associated with writing a book went away and the reality of an ugly skeleton of words in black and white took its place.

By the way, I have written quite a bit on my version of what went on between Wardha and 'us'—this story would not have been complete without her, would it? I don't think everyone here knows what happened (or what did not happen)—Sandeep included. I don't think everyone wants to know either—Anand in particular.

After more than ten years, the chapter was complete. What I wrote in this book, is its conclusion.

Such peace.

It's been emotional.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal**

**14 December, 2012**

Wow Sahir. I finished reading the book in only one sitting yesterday and loved it....

Please tell our wives that it is imaginary. Don't

embarrass us. Let us actually retain some dignity in their presence.

##

**From: Gopal V** **16 December, 2012**

I read it too. It must be one of the first books I managed 2 complete reading cover to cover. Feels like a trip back 2 the college. It is great that you managed 2 initiate and complete it.

When will it be published?

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** **17 December, 2012**

Publishing the book would take some time—maybe a year or more. It’s a long process. Have to write to all these publishers and work out something with them. Lets see...

##

**From: David Williams** **23 December, 2012**

*Adaa paavi*, Sahir!!!

I finished the book just now.

Why have you given Wardha such focus in the book?

##

**From: Anand Nair** **23 December, 2012**

I tried hard not to reply, but obviously I have failed. Here is my reply:

AIYYOOOOOOOOO OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

When I have more time I will translate it.

##

**From: David Williams** **24 December, 2012**

*Machan* Anand—your expression is worth a thousand words and transcends all language barriers.

There are so many other fun things which could have been the focus in the book. Why look at the long closed door?

Where is she, by the way?

##

**From: Gopal V** **24 December, 2012**

Perhaps they are right Sahir. Why have you given her so much attention in the book?

I saw her profile on LinkedIn. It says that she is a project manager with a company here itself in Bangalore. I don’t know how up-to-date that information is. She is not on Facebook or any of the other social networking sites.

##

**From: Anand Nair** **26 December, 2012**

Sahir, some of your sections in the book are like friggin APOLOGY letters. Do you realize how pathetic you sound?

What did you think? She will drop everything that is going on in her life and come running to you? My arse!!!

It has been close to FIFTEEN YEARS since she went her way.

In all politeness, why don’t you fucking jerk off all your pent up frustrations until your balls shrink to the size of raisins and GET OVER HER goddammit!!!

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 27 December, 2012

David, Anand: I am actually surprised at your hostility towards Sahir.... This is obviously about a book and the story about all of us. The idea of the book was triggered in discussions with the four of us....Gopal, Sahir, David and me. It is clear to me that this story would surely not have been complete (at least the story about the three of us and engineering) without Wardha in it. I admit that Sahir has made her a focus, but please don't read more into it.....

Also, aren't we all past this? After all, Sahir is married now.

David.... two of your albums have been released and are doing well with your event management company. Kudos to you.

Anand... you are officially a doctor now. You are at the prestigious NIH and have found love (and have married her as well). Hats off to you.

Gopal has married Sarla, and they are proud parents of a beautiful daughter.

I had my second kid last year....

All of us (at least in worldly terms) by God's grace are doing very well and are as happy as anyone can be...

This book in a way is a crown on our heads. It is really a slap on the faces of those who thought that after prison we would be good for nothing.

Balls to them!!!! I am so proud of us....

Sahir has put in a lot of effort on the book. Let this be the redemption which he seeks.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 28 December, 2012

Thanks Sandeep.

As I said earlier—the story of us in engineering would not have been complete without her.

Come to think of it—at least for me—the story about us and engineering without her in it would not have been worth writing about.

##

**From: David Williams** 29 December, 2012

All that is fine, *da*.

But I don't understand what you want from her. She would have been married by now and have a couple of kids as well. What are you expecting to achieve with this book?

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 29 December, 2012

Again, as I had said, I just want to make peace with myself and with her. If she is married, with kids and happy, nothing like it. Good for her.

We were all friends once. In spite of everything that has happened, if she thinks we can all be friends again, and end this wall of silence that has come up, then great.

Else, life still goes on as it has been doing so all these years.

##

**From: David Williams** 29 December, 2012

*Dai*, friends with us? *Poda!!!* Why do you think she will want to

be friends with us again?

I think she will have enough of her own friends.

##

**From: Sahir Hassan** 30 December, 2012

That is upto her right. In a way, I was responsible for her falling out of favor with you guys. So, if this book is able to clear whatever misunderstandings there have been, then in a way I will feel so much better about the whole thing.

Atleast some day, I hope that we don't behave like complete strangers when we run into her.

##

**From: David Williams** 01 January, 2013

Happy New Year to all. To welcome the New Year on a positive note, find some old hot nude pics of Pamela Anderson attached.

##

**From: Sandeep Gadwal** 03 January, 2013

I acted as a Doctor in a play at my office for the New Year function. Find some pics attached.....

##

**From: David Williams** 04 January, 2013

Nice pics Sandeep. Did you just play the Doctor's role or did you get to play Doctor-Doctor with any of the leading LADIES ;-)???

Anyway, it is official now. I am at last taken.

##

**From: Anand Nair** 05 January, 2013

Congrats loafer. More details please. Plus you don't have to sound like somebody raped you ;)

##

**From: David Williams** 06 January, 2013

Thank you Anand. Shreya is an artist, a *Bharatanatyam* dancer. We kept running into each other each other now and then, during the events which I managed. We have been seeing each other for a while now, before we decided to get married.

##

**From: Gopal V** 07 January, 2013

Congrats David. When is the wedding? Is it the same girl who came along with u when we watched *3 Idiots*?

Don't forget 2 invite all of us...

##

**From: David Williams** 08 January, 2013

Yes, Gopal. It is the same girl.

The wedding will be in Bangalore in March. Hope most of you guys can come down to the wedding.

##

**From: Gopal V** 08 January, 2013

We knew when we met u that there was something going on.

News from my side is that I started with my new company last week. With God's grace, I got a 40% hike.



The HR team here has a lot of babes and all of them are really hot. There was one sexy female wearing a white see through blouse and ... ..

##

*Someone has spoken a great truth. It is impossible to straighten a dog's tail.* – Unknown

And We Remained...

## Epilogue

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### Wardha

January 2014, Bangalore

Kalpana called me as I was on my way back from work. “Shylaja Ma’am had called. She is retiring and wants us to come for her farewell.”

*“Humein jaana chahiye.* We should go. She was a great support during engineering and at BULSH,” I said.

I joined Kalpana in the ballroom of the Lalit Ashok for the farewell party. The setup was grand. Except Sushmita Ma’am, none of the other lecturers were present. Shylaja Ma’am wanted the moment to be between her and a set of handpicked students.

Hoobastank’s *The Reason* played in the

background

*I'm not a perfect person,  
There's many things I wish I didn't do,  
But I continue learning,  
I never meant to do those things to you...*

The song made me think about Sahir. The note, his call, all the hurt. I closed my eyes for a longer moment.

My gaze then drifted to the hall entrance. Sahir and Sandeep were walking in.

I couldn't exhale. My heart had stopped beating.

It was fifteen years since I last saw Sahir. He was in a round neck tee and a six pocket trouser. Sandeep was in a check shirt and jeans. Both did not look like the mosquitoes they did during undergrad.

It did not hurt to see them again.

Fifteen years was a long time to sustain any hope in today's world on matters of the heart. "Picture abhi baaki hai, mere dost", the movie is not finished yet, my friend... worked only in blockbusters or romantic novels. I had not intended to create either.

I nudged Kalpana. She smiled. Had she known they were coming?

I asked her "Tumhein pata tha? Did you know?"

She shrugged and continued to smile. She did not confirm or deny.

Sahir saw us and paused for a moment.

Sahir: *You here???* look.

Me: *You here as well???* look.

Sahir: *All good with you???* look.

Me: *Why do you care...???* look.

Sahir: Still the *All good with you...???* look.

Me: *Why do you care...???* look.

Sahir: *There have been things left unsaid...* look.

Me: *Is that so...???* look.

Sahir: Still the *There have been things left unsaid...* look.

Me: Still the *Is that so...???* look.

After this, Sahir continued on his way to meet Shylaja Ma'am.

Shylaja Ma'am met them before going up to the dais to give a farewell speech. There were a lot of wet eyes when she sat back after fifteen minutes.

The dance floor was set up with disco lights and foot-tapping music, Indi-pop and *bhangra*. After some rounds of disco and *balle balle*, the guys took the liberty to go berserk on the dance floor doing gyrations and thrusts, the *dappan koothu*. Shylaja Ma'am was all smiles and seemed to be enjoying herself with her favorite students around her.

The music changed after the organizers had enough of *dappan koothu*. They slowed the tempo down.

Sahir then held my gaze for a moment.

Sahir: *Should I???* look.

I kind of knew what he was thinking.

Me: *What???* *You can't be serious!!!* look.

Sahir: Still the *Should I???* look.

Me: *Like you have the guts???* look.

Sahir then looked at Sandeep. Sandeep gave him a knowing smile and nodded. It was as if Sandeep knew what Sahir was going to do next.

Sahir then started to walk towards me. He seemed unsure of what he needed to do and stopped a couple of times before continuing to walk towards me.

“Hi, Wardha,” Sahir said when he came close enough. I looked at him in the eye. I could not trust myself to say anything.

“Do you know the slow dance?” he asked.

I looked at him for a longer moment and shook my head - I didn't.

“I do,” he said and held out his hand.

*There is a theory that nothing in nature is ever lost—that every sound ever made, every word ever spoken exists somewhere in space and time and may one day be recalled.* – Sidney Sheldon, *Tell Me Your Dreams* (1998).

## Acknowledgements

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*Yeh ghazal meri nahin, yeh ghazal hai aapki,  
Maine to bas woh likha jo kuchh likhaaya  
aapne...*

– Ravi Verma (Rishi Kapoor) in the film  
Karz (1980)

*(This verse is yours, not mine,*

*I wrote only what you made me write...)*

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## Author Bio

Asad Ali Junaid is a design professional in Bangalore working in the area of Human-Machine Interaction.

Junaid's book – *And We Remained* – started as a story which needed to be told... and one which needed to be told differently. While he was struggling to get the narration style and structure right, he joined a three week in residence 'Just Write' fiction writing workshop where he got a chance to learn the nuances of and hone his story telling skills from authors Anil Menon, Anjum Hasan and Rimi Chatterjee.

Junaid writes whenever there is a compelling story inside him bursting to get out. Junaid has written several short stories and is currently editing his second book – which like his first one – has an absorbing story and is very different in narration style.

Junaid has been a resident of Bangalore most of his life except for brief stints in the US for higher

education and work.

Junaid's wife is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. Their toddler completes their home while keeping them on their toes.

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