

# Echoes of Love

## Chapter 1: Never- Oh Wait! Have I Ever...?

**N**ineteen years,

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three months, and thirteen days. That's how long I've been alive, yet love remains a mystery which I can't seem to untangle. It's not for lack of trying—I've been bullied, felt puppy love, and fallen apart in ways I never imagined, all while navigating a country so unfamiliar that it's starting to feel like a fever dream. But the question lingers: who or what is to blame for my confusion?

As a little girl, I believed in fairy tales where a prince would come, sweep me off my feet and guide me to a

happily-ever-after. Yet, life doesn't wear rose-colored glasses. My once-bright confidence in love dimmed, crushed by realities I couldn't have foreseen. Where I come from, love is a privilege—not a right. It's tangled in the web of discrimination: wealth, status, and that rigid caste pyramid, all standing like iron gates between two hearts.

Maybe I've always misunderstood love, giving too much of myself to anyone who shines slightly brighter than the rest. Maybe I've been shaped by my family, unconsciously mimicking patterns I didn't choose. Whatever the reason, one truth haunts me: I've yet to know love that doesn't demand, that doesn't leave me asking for the bare minimum—respect, kindness, effort and understanding.

This is my story. A search for love, belonging, and the courage to rewrite the fairy tale I was promised. Never- Oh wait! Have I Ever fallen in love?

## Chapter 2: A Fated Journey

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grandma's story began in the land of Tibet, where she was born and raised in a chaotic household. She lived with her father, mother, stepmother, and a total of 13 siblings—or rather, nine. Four of her siblings passed away young, their lives cut short by cruel misfortune. As a child, she shouldered responsibilities far beyond her years. She was the dependable caregiver, ensuring her siblings were fed and cared for, even at the expense of her own dreams of being educated. While her brothers attended school, chasing their dreams of education, she stayed behind, sacrificing her own chance to learn so they could eat before heading off each day.

Then, one day, things changed. A family arrived at their home with a proposal, a marriage proposal for my grandmother. She

was given no voice, no choice. Her future had been decided by her parents, as it was common back then. The man she was to marry was a stranger, someone she had neither met nor seen. His past and his character were mysteries to her. Yet, as was the tradition, love wasn't part of the equation. Without ever experiencing the spark of romance or the comfort of familiarity, she found herself married and preparing to leave her home land behind to start a new life in Nepal with her husband, my grandfather.

A few days ago, I asked her a question that had lingered in my mind: “Why did you settle with and have children with someone you didn't love or even know? You could've simply said no”. Her answer was simple, yet profound: “I had no choice back then. I was just another daughter, with none of the rights or privileges that you have today.”

Her words struck me deeply, forcing me to reevaluate the concept of love and the freedom I often take for granted. Today, I have the opportunity of meeting people, forming connections, and falling in love on my own terms. Her story isn't just a glimpse into her past, it's a reminder of how far we've come and the freedoms I shall never take lightly.

## Chapter 3: Running Away For Love

**M**y mom,

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in the small village of Bagan, Nepal, my mother's story began. Her family was wealthy, a rarity in their small community, and my grandparents decided to use their fortune wisely or so they thought. They sent all their 3 children to a boarding school where English was taught, determined to give them a bright future. This decision was especially meaningful to my grandmother, who had never been afforded the opportunity to learn herself. Denied an education in her youth, she passed on her dreams to her children, ensuring they have access to a privilege she could only imagine.

But my mom? Well, she wasn't the picture of a responsible, dutiful daughter. Instead of attending class, she'd sneak off to the market to meet a boy. She was in love. A love that

didn't care about social status or wealth. According to my grandma, the guy was poor—so poor that people in the village couldn't stop gossiping. He wasn't the type of man my mom was supposed to marry, not by any standard. She was from a rich family, and in those days, rich girls were expected to marry someone educated, someone with status. But none of that mattered to my mom.

Looking back, it's hard not to think my mom's love was a bit reckless. She fell for this guy and shut all other doors. She locked herself into a life with someone who couldn't give her the things she deserved, no roof over her head, no food on the table, and certainly no family who truly cared for her. She had it all—the wealth, the family, the chance at a bright future and yet, she threw it all away for love. Or maybe it was more than love. Maybe it was a desire to feel something real, something that felt worth fighting for, even if it meant leaving everything else behind.

## Chapter 4: Love Finds Me in NYC

# L<sub>ove</sub>

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has always spun me into a storm of unanswered questions and restless wonder. Was it something I had failed to see or was it something I had never truly felt? For much of my life, I was a relentless seeker of love, chasing it down rather than letting it find me. I wanted so badly to be loved the right way, not realizing what I truly craved was simply to feel genuinely loved.

Back in Nepal, love came wrapped in the bittersweet package of friendship. My best friend—a boy I secretly had a crush on—moved to a different district, yet every three months, he'd come back to visit me. The days I wasn't home, he'd leave his phone number scribbled on a paper, asking the guy next door to hand it to me. The moment I saw him again, my face would light up with the kind of joy I couldn't hide. But by the time he finally confessed his feelings for me, it was already too late.

Before his feelings reached me, life took me halfway across the globe to the United States. A month after my move, another friend of mine mustered the courage to ask me to be his girlfriend. I felt excited—it seemed like the start of something beautiful. We'd spend hours on the phone, and he always made time for me. But beneath the sweet words lay a bitter truth.

While I remained loyal across the distance, he wasn't. He had someone else—a girl, a so-called friend of mine, who lived close to him. The betrayal was a harsh blow, leaving me with trust issues and a heart too wary to believe in long-distance love again.

It took time, but I eventually allowed myself to hope again. Another love found its way into my life—a man who seemed like my savior. He lifted me from the depths of heartbreak, cared for me when I felt broken, and made me feel like I could open up about anything. He was my fairy tale—or so I thought. He'd come see me the days I couldn't attend school, treat me like a princess, and respect my choices. But over time, the mask slipped. What I had mistaken for a prince turned out to be something toxic and controlling. My dreams of fairy tale love crumbled, leaving me to pick up the pieces once more, all alone.

I became a wanderer, desperate for love but lost in the search. I wanted flowers for no reason, to be shown off proudly, respect, safety, and above all, to feel truly valued. Yet chasing love only brought me further from myself, turning me into someone I hardly recognized. So, I stopped looking.

And that's when he appeared. He was that handsome man every cliché story paints, and to me, he was perfect. Tall, with fair skin, plump lips which I'd die to kiss, thick eyebrows which I wish my kids will inherit later on, brown eyes which speaks what his mouth can't, and a button nose which I fell in love the most with, he stood out in a way that made my friends

judge my taste. But something about him made me take a leap of faith, despite the fear of another heartbreak.

And what a leap it was. He didn't shower me with grand gestures or lavish gifts, but his love was quieter, more profound. He cooked meals for me, made sure I was never hungry, took me to the claw machine place where my inner child would come out happily, brought me heating pads for my bad period cramps, kinder joy (the egg looking chocolate with toy inside) just to make me happy and medicines when I was sick. He did the dishes when I stayed over and even carried me when I felt exhausted. And at the end, I have come to realize that his actions speak louder than any bouquet of flowers or instagram stories ever could.

Watching K-dramas and scrolling through social media, I used to envy the picture-perfect couples displaying their love—the flowers, the grand gestures, the constant affirmations. It made me question the standard I had set for myself, and I fell into the trap of comparing what we had to what others showed on social media. I began asking for more, overlooking the quiet, genuine ways he worked on to make himself better for me. I see now how I failed as a girlfriend to show my appreciation and give enough credits for the effort he poured into us. But as the saying goes, “it's better late than to never do,” and I've finally opened my eyes.

From the outside, like social media, people see and tell us how we're the perfect couple. They see the flowers he brings, our laughter on dates, the efforts we put on making new things to

surprise each other and our photos of joy and adventure. What they don't see are the cracks we work hard to mend—the misunderstandings we talk through, the tears from arguments, the difficult conversations about a future where we know our families might not approve. Yet, despite all of it, we're still here, fighting for us. But, together this time.

It's not easy, but love isn't about the highlight reels. It's about the effort, the forgiveness, and the choice to stay through the storms. Today, as someone who's grown to understand the love I truly want, I know it's with him. I'm done letting the curated lives of others cloud the happiness I've found in the imperfect, beautiful reality we've built together.

No one is born perfect, and neither is he or myself, but with time, I learned that perfection was never what I wanted. It was love—true & deep, understanding and adjusting to one another's needs, commitment, unwavering support and perseverance—that I'd been seeking all along. And to think I found it in New York City, of all places, it makes me question because it wasn't the love I imagined as a girl, but it was the love I needed. And now, looking back, I wouldn't change a thing. I wouldn't trade any of these experiences for anything because those are what made me who I am today, built me stronger every time with all those love, heartbreak, support and struggles I faced along the way.

## **Chapter 5: The Hunt for Something Real: Love in NYC**

**N**ew York City,

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that's what they call the city of lights; chaotic yet very charming. But what people don't understand is how it's like to look for love here. By love, I don't mean the one where people come and go, where it's only a one night stand thing or just a fling. Looking at the past, things have changed a lot but there are people out there who still seek that old school love. Think about it, in the current generation that you are living in, where you see most of the people being addicted to drugs, others dating their partner simply to fulfill the desire of sex, and there remains the kind of people who are loyal and date only to marry. People these days can't even do the bare minimum and expect their partner to stay and fight for it all alone. And this is that city. New York City, a city with no hope in terms of love. New York is a diverse place with people from all over the world residing but the privilege to be able to experience this city life and build a proper connection is what they often take for granted. Love isn't solely based on the idea of romance, it's more than that. Respect, personal space, boundaries, security and showing up for one another is what people often don't understand. When there's an argument between couples, they should know that they are fighting against the problem, not

with each other. And many fail to realize that they are fighting to save themselves, finding it difficult, their ego and self pride getting in the way of love. Finding true love in NYC is like hunting for the last decent bagel at brunch—yes, possible but hilariously chaotic. Where the city's dating pool is huge, maneuvering it is a mix of serendipity and swipe fatigue. Between dodging Wall Street workaholics and chasing artsy romantics in Brooklyn, it's a rollercoaster ride. True love may be just around the corner, but first, you're going to meet a momma's boy at Queens with commitment issues. But hey, if you can handle the city that never sleeps, love is just another adventure waiting to surprise you. And this is what love is like in NYC.