



When, I'm Gone

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Nothing is more seductive for a human than their freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering.

Characters:

Pratyush, Renita, Devesh, Heisha, Aarhan

Scene I

Pratyush: (calls) Hi, Are you free?

Renita: (picks up the call) Something important

Pratyush: Can we please meet?

Renita: Yeah, you want me to come home or meet outside?

Pratyush: You decide,

Pratyush: I don't know.

(Lights Fade out)

Scene II

Pratyush: I never spoke to you about Alvin, also I never felt it was important to say anything about him, but this friend, lives in Bangalore. I had not seen him for the last few months, I don't know how long but I didn't even get time to think about that, I just couldn't contain myself and I called you, I messaged him last night as I remembered him and it's been some time, I heard from him. I got a reply after a long time, saying that Alvin is no more and he died about two months ago.

I asked how, and the person, on the other hand, responded that he is his elder brother.

The world froze for me at that moment, I just dint know what to do. I couldn't believe that he was no more. I had a chat with him a few months ago. He seemed fine. I mean there was something always strange about him

Renita: Strange, in what sense.....

Pratyush: There was always some mystery about him. I don't know about him. He never said anything much about his family.

Renita: There are mysteries, secret zones in each individual.

(silence)

Pratyush: I had a chat with him a few months ago.... Let me check when....

(While he is checking his phone)

Renita: When did you last speak to him?

Pratyush: That was when I met him, but I also don't remember when!

(Continuing checking his phone)

Pratyush: I will have to check

Renita: Did you ask how did he die?

Pratyush: His brother responded that he gulped down sleeping pills and he fell in the arms of eternal sleep.

Renita: He committed suicide.

Pratyush: Yeah

Renita: You know the reason.

Pratyush: I didn't have the heart to ask, Renita.....

(Pratyush breaks down)

Pratyush: I feel like going to Bangalore and meeting his family, maybe his brother.

Renita: But you don't know them

Pratyush: I don't know him, either. He was a mystery,but I know he loved me.

Renita: What.....

Pratyush: Yeah, he did. He always said that.....

Pratyush: and you?

(silence)

Renita: Are you sure about going?

Pratyush: I think so.....

Renita: and your film shooting,

Pratyush: I've already called it off for now.

Renita: Then you know, you are going. Don't think then, just go and see.

Pratyush: Yeah,

Renita: Do you want me to come.

Pratyush: No, I shall work this out..... I have to.

Renita: There is no way that you're the reason, right? I mean not in the sense that you did anything. But you not returning his love or something like that.....

Pratyush: I don't know. And I will never know until I go..... But I never promised him anything of that sort. I didn't do anything that could hurt him. He loved me from a distance.

Renita: And You?

(Silence)

Renita: Did you love him?

Pratyush: I don't know

(Silence)

(Lights fade out)

Scene III

(Arhaan is typing and working on the script as follows)

Arhaan: It was another night but the same loneliness. My computer screen was on, a new Word document, actually old now. Every night I thought I would write something new but all I did was stare at that blank page in the deceiving hope that I would fill it with words, feelings, pain, lies, half-truths, brokenness, caged flight, countless fights, a periscope of the soul. But in the end, it was only a blank page.

In my flat, the lights were left on but there was terrible darkness outside. The city had finally gone to sleep. Unable to fall asleep I poured myself a glass of wine and sat at the window. I was wondering looking outside how could everyone be sleeping in the building, opposite to mine? Probably everyone was snoring in their darkness except the flat on the first floor. She was sitting like me at the window looking outside. An empty narrow street down, covered with yellow spring flowers was an inviting carpet. The yellow light of the street lamps lit the street with a yellow loneliness. I again looked at her and she was looking in my direction. I wanted to smile but I didn't. My lips wouldn't stretch to my cheeks as if they were stitched and couldn't move. Seeing my paralytic face, she smiled. the moment she smiled, the stitches on my lips were loosened and I smiled back. I looked at the narrow yellow street down, she too looked down, I looked at her, she looked at me and we both looked again at the yellow carpet down.

(Arhaan walks down captivated by the girl with blue eyes)

Arhaan: Guess, you aren't feeling sleepy today.

Heisha: Most of the nights I don't.

Arhaan: Then you sleep in the day?

Heisha: No, I don't sleep even then. I guess it's my insomnia.

Arhaan: (smiles) Been there for many years?

Heisha: Recently, and you? What about your insomnia?

Arhaan: It's on and off. There are nights I sleep well and then there are nights such as these when my eyelids won't drop.

(Both of them walk together)

Heisha: Do you write?

Arhaan: How do you know?

Heisha: Just, guessed it!

Arhaan: Just like that.

Heisha: That's why it's guessing, it's just like that – without any reason.

Arhaan: (smiles) Yeah, I write but have not been able to write anything for quite some time now.

Heisha: lacking inspiration?

Arhaan: I do have thoughts in my mind but all of them are scattered.

Arhaan: If it were not for these horrible sleepless nights, I would never write at all. But they always recall me to my dark solitude.

Heisha: Did you know, who said it?

Arhaan: Franz Kafka

Hesiha: (smiles) Nothing was sorted in Kafka's head; he couldn't even complete a novel.

Heisha: But you're not Kafka, so you can at least sort them out.

Arhaan: That's the problem, I can't sort them out. They are all scattered, some dancing to frenzied trance some floating on clouds of despair, and some trying hard to fly away, even when they know they can't as they weigh heavier than even me

Heisha: (smiles) You don't seem that heavy

Arhaan: That's because of my height, it hides my weight.

Heisha: Probably.

(Smiling Silence)

Heisha: So, what do you usually write about?

Arhaan: Everything that concerns life.

Heisha: and what concerns life?

Arhaan: Everything, like choices, dreams, habits, ideas, hope, love.

Heisha: Isn't writing a lonely job?

Arhaan: It is a lonely place, even a little frightening. During the actual work of creation, I often cut off from all others and confront the subject alone. Often it's like moving into a realm where I have never been before — perhaps where no one has ever been

Heisha: Are you in love?

(While walking, he stops, beat, looks at her)

Arhaan: I don't know

Heisha: I don't know, that means you're unsure

Arhaan: Maybe. I don't know. Whether I'm in love or I was in love or is it even love?

Heisha: You're taking in the past and present tense at the same time. So, you know that there is no present without the past, and an unsure present is an unfigured past.

Arhaan: I don't know, I don't think about it.

Heisha: So you know that you don't want to think. If you're so unsure about your current situation, then there is certainly a lot of unsorted pasts.

(silence)

Heisha: Are you stuck in a cage of the past, dreaming about a future but caught in the present; a cage made from the past. Probably, that's why you can't even write!

Arhaan: Are you here to make poetry out of my existence?

(Smiling silence)

Arhaan : I can't write and then I feel suffocated as if I'm almost dying of life.

Hesiha : The writer dies the day when he can't write anymore, his pen is his breath.

Arhaan: And that's why I feel so suffocated. And I feel it more in the darkness of the night.

Arhaan : Because it is then, that the noise of the outside world has died down and all that remains is your own silence trying to speak to you in muffled voices.

Arhaan: There are times when I don't want to hear those muffled voices, often they are deafening.

Heisha: Are you scared of these voices?

Arhaan: I don't know.

(Lights fade out)

Scene IV

(Devesh and Pratyush are sitting in a Café)

Pratyush: There were voices when you typed 'that he took sleeping pills and slept eternally', those voices don't let me sleep.

Devesh: Is that why you came here?

Pratyush: I didn't know him; I came here to know him.

Devesh: How did he love you, if you didn't know him?

Pratyush: How do you know, he loved me?

Devesh: It was a suicide, it had to be investigated. We had to go through his phone.

Pratyush: I'm sorry.

Devesh: You couldn't love him, why should you be sorry?

Pratyush: I never knew that something like this could happen.

Devesh: None, of us knew. He was a mystery, a brother – whom I knew so little about, he never troubled us, even though he suffered so much. Mom couldn't see his suffering, but she also despised him.

Pratyush: But why? Why was he suffering?

Devesh: Didn't you know?

Pratyush: I don't know.....

Devesh: You can't be so ignorant that you don't know.

Pratyush: I'm sorry, I don't know.

Devesh: Didn't you know he was suffering from?

Pratyush: He had mentioned something of that sort, but never said how complicated was it.

Devesh: He suffered for about nine years, before finally giving up.

Pratyush: He didn't tell me this exactly.

Devesh: What did he tell you?

(Silence)

Devesh: Didn't he tell you he had two surgeries?

Pratyush: He did, but later. And he didn't explain to me the gravitas of the surgery?

Devesh: Someone's body is ripped, someone's brain is opened up, don't you think that's serious?

Pratyush: I'm sorry, I didn't know. When he went through the surgeries, he never explained what they were for. Also, he said to me about it, after years.....

Devesh: That, I'm aware.

Pratyush: How!

Devesh: Because, for three years after that stroke, he couldn't text properly. He didn't remember much. He couldn't call. I saw your chat, he got in touch with you three years after the surgery. But I'm surprised that you didn't speak on the phone to him about it. I always thought that he must have spoken to you on phone, and the chat may be blank....

Pratyush: He never said anything,

Devesh: He wouldn't, probably he didn't want to bother you. Or probably he was scared of again going down the spiral.

Pratyush: I wish he spoke.

Devesh: He did, you didn't listen...

Pratyush: I'm sorry.

Devesh: He loved you, it's a surprise to me that you didn't even know him. I understand he kept some secrets about his family, which anyone in his place would. He was scared and more than that he was miserably hurt and his condition was pitiable for his mother. Mother could never come to terms with anything. She was happy that her son was a lawyer, living the perfect life that every mom dreams of in a big city like Bombay. He was just four months old in the city when he had that stroke. Mom wished that he never went to Bombay because if he

didn't then he would have never met that man who ruined his life, all of ours..... I lost Vikram, we lost him.

Pratyush: He mentioned to me about the boy he loved, though I don't remember his name.....

Devesh: We don't take his name; we have forgotten him.

Pratyush: Vikram spoke only once to me about him, when he met me for the second time.

Devesh: He met you the second time, after seven years.

Pratyush: Yeah, that was the time, he was in Bombay for some work purpose and he said that he would like to meet and spend the night together.

Devesh: Didn't you see the difference?

Pratyush: I was surprised, he looked like a different man.

Devesh: He was a different man. He was a man who had spent three years in bed, not knowing if he would wake up the next day. You, met the man who saw death every day sleeping next to him, not knowing which night the angel of death would embrace him.

Pratyush: I don't know anything about those three years. He never mentioned them.

Devesh: How would he? He has to remember them; he was barely alive to know anything. We loved him dearly and yet he wrote to you

(reading a chat from the phone)

"A few days back, I felt as if I didn't have a home, members of my family didn't know me. Now I realize that no one knows anyone, not even themselves. Aren't we all lonely?"

Devesh: He has only met you once and he wrote this to you when he began chatting with you.

Devesh: It's bewildering to me that five long years after you first met, he wrote a text to you and you responded with cordiality. The only difference was that you were someone.....

Pratyush: I was with Alvin then.....

Devesh: That part, I don't know.

Scene V

(The both talk while walking)

Heisha: Most of your answers are concealed in your 'don't know'

Arhaan: The voices are deceptive.

Heisha: Is it?

Arhaan: Most often I feel they are my imagination; they don't even exist.

Heisha: Imaginary voices are good.

Arhaan: How so?

Heisha: Imagination makes us feel beautiful about life, it takes care of our needs, and it provides us where reality fails. It helps us float on clouds and takes us to destinations only seen in dreams.

Arhaan: Exactly, that's why I run away from them.

Heisha: But running away from them, they won't stop.

Arhaan: Yes, they keep on chasing me, most often when I'm all alone when it's night when everyone is asleep, I stare outside at the resting world from my unwearied eyes.

Heisha: and then?

Arhaan: And then I think about it all. All that's over, all that's gone by. I look at my past from these unwearied eyes and my hand tries to touch those fainting memories filled with colours and the moment I do touch them; the colours fade away and I end up in uncontrollable tears.

Heisha: What is it that you want to touch?

(Silence)

Heisha: What is it that you've lost?

Arhaan: I don't know, I don't know if I've lost him. I don't know if he was ever mine. I don't know if it was love. I really don't know and that's what hurts, the inability to know.

Heisha: Where is he now?

Arhaan: He is around.

Heisha: That's a good thing that he is around, that he isn't gone.

Arhaan: Sometimes, I wish he was gone. It all would have been over then.

Heisha: Just because someone moves out of your sight, it doesn't mean you won't remember anything at all. Our souls are strange, we often don't know what they seek.

Arhaan: That's exactly what it is, I don't know what my soul seeks.

Heisha: Most often we know, we just realize it until we lose what we had.

Arhaan: I want to outlive myself. Eat, sleep, sleep, eat. Exist slowly, softly, like these trees, like this car, no not this car, like this lamp pole, that won't move

Heisha: Don't wish for something that you don't know of. So many people can't experience the life they wish to but are glued to their beds.

Arhaan: Physical pain isn't everything.

There is the pain that resides in the being, a nauseating pain gobbling the individual and one day the individual can become nothing else but pain I prefer to be a bench in a garden or a lamp pole instead of the pain of being human.

Heisha: You don't know the pain of being in a vegetative state.

Arhaan: Who do you know in a vegetative state? Whom have you lost?

Heisha: We all lose someone close to us, the only difference is some of us fill our lives with so much weight that we don't realise the emptiness of what we have lost. But when the weight is lifted there is not emptiness but an invincible void. Some of us get these weights from our work, our wanderlust, social charities and zealous sex.

Arhaan: I fill it with work and weed.

Heisha: Weed and work both are weights and heavy ones.

(Silence)

Arhaan: What was your heaviness?

Heisha: I wanted to die. What held me back was the idea that no one, absolutely no one, would be moved by my death, that I would be even more alone in death than in life.

Arhaan: I thought you had the answers to life.

Heisha: No one has all the answers, Albert Camus said 'the meaning of life is whatever you're doing that prevents you from committing suicide'.

Arhaan: So you have some answers, and some unanswered questions I believe.

Heisha: Because the questions keep changing. It's a cycle, the moment you think, you've found the answer, a new question springs up.

Arhaan: As long as one is happy, the questions shouldn't bother.

Heisha: But they do because happiness is a temporary state and it comes in a quota. It comes with a quantity, kind and expiry date. Happiness exists as long as there is meaning in what you do. Once the meaninglessness begins then it's downhill, a quest for happiness. And there is no meaning that's not perpetually remodelling itself. As long as you're looking for an indissoluble answer in a changing world, you're doomed to eternity.

Arhaan: So, what are you trying to say, that I should stop thinking and go on with life?

Heisha: Are you even sure if you're thinking? You don't even know if you've lost him? You don't even know if you loved him? But you wish that he was gone.

Arhaan: Yes, I wish that he was gone because he broke my heart. I didn't know that I loved him until I saw him with someone else.

Heisha: Did you know this someone else?

Arhaan: No, and I don't want to know. I was hurt.

Heisha: Didn't you ask him, why?

Arhaan: I couldn't ask him.

Heisha: why, didn't you ask him?

Arhaan: Because I didn't know I love him.

Heisha: What?

Arhaan: Yes, I didn't know I loved him. I don't even know now. Only, when I saw him with someone, something changed within me as if he didn't love me.

Heisha: Did he ever tell you he loved you?

(Silence)

Arhaan: No

Heisha: Did you ever tell him, you loved him?

Arhaan: He was with Alvin, then.

Heish : But did tell him, you love him?

Heisha: Why

Arhaan: I don't know.

(Lights fade out)

Scene VI

Pratyush: Yeah, I never mentioned the name to him but I said to him on the chat that I'm seeing someone. He was happy for me but he did say that he loved me. And he has never met anyone like me after that.

Devesh: But you didn't believe him?

(Silence)

Devesh: Because you thought, he was a sex maniac.

Pratyush: I'm sorry, I never said that.

Devesh: But didn't you imply that?

(silence)

Devesh: Just because he vividly described both of your first nights together which was graphically illustrated in his mind. You thought of him as a sex freak.

Pratyush: I'm sorry, I didn't mean.....

Devesh: For three years his brain was paralyzed, then it took him two more years to gain some sense of life. We didn't let him go anywhere alone. Also, he was incapable of going anywhere. His brain had erased many parts of his memory. It surprised me that he remembered every detail of the night he spent with you. He describes that he never had a night like that ever before.... And you stupefied him because he equated it to a spiritual experience. I know that my brother kept going back to that one night and you always stopped him from talking about it because that was probably the last time, he had sex before he had the stroke. Three days before that stroke, his so-called lover said to him 'beg on someone else's door and that there is no love between them and even if he dies, he doesn't care but stop reaching out to him'. He met you then, had the sexual rendezvous, and two days later fell into a stroke. Of course, it was nothing to do with you. He couldn't bear to believe that the man whom he loved, his first love in the big Bombay, never loved him and only wanted to use him, his feelings.

Pratyush: He came to our house with my flatmate Nikhil, both of them were working on some case till late at night. I saw him in the kitchen, Nikhil introduced him briefly, and after completing my chores, I went to my bedroom. He was handsome, in the kitchen he was in his singlet which made him look more attractive. After some moments, when Nikhil was asleep, I went to the kitchen to fill my water bottle in the dim kitchen light. It was a full moon light; the September sky was blue and the radiant light of the moon was filling the kitchen. I filled the bottle to the brim and closed the tap, the momentary sound of water gave up to the echoing silence of the kitchen night and when I turned around, he was standing there. His eyes glowed like a Greek God and I gave myself to his arms. We sometimes encounter people, even perfect strangers, who begin to interest us at first sight, somehow suddenly, all at once, before a word has been spoken.

Devesh: You describe the same night poetically,

Pratyush: But it was purely sexual

Devesh: He calls it divine

Pratyush: I know, I never understood his obsession with that..... I expressed that in my messages to him, whenever he spoke about the night.

Devesh: Two days after that night, he had a stroke, and our daily hospital trips began. Initially, the doctor said it was highly difficult for him to emerge from it. His brain had a tumor.....

Pratyush: He never messaged me after that night, I knew it was all about one night.

Devesh: And five years later, he messaged you describing this night and how much he loved you.

Pratyush: He only mentioned he had an accident and that he lost my number in transit.

Devesh: But that he loves you and he never spent a night like that...

Pratyush: It irked me; he spoke often wanting to sleep again.

Devesh: And you kept driving him away.

Pratyush: I was just out of an unbearable relationship with Alvin. He loved me intensely but he also wanted to possess me, his love was becoming an obsession and he became a fanatic. I loved him, and he loved me a lot but also, he was becoming tormenting. when he didn't get what he wanted from me, his behaviour turned excessive and violent. One day, in anger he raised his hand on me. No one had ever done that before, I didn't know what to do, so I went hiding under a table. He cried, he tried to get me out, from under the table. I was terribly hurt, probably scared, and I never came out of the table until he left or I asked him to go, now I don't remember.

When he raised his hand to me, that was when I decided to put an end to our story. It wasn't that easy for him to leave me or either way, eventually we split and it was during that time Vikram messaged me. I wasn't ready for anything. I had no love, nor sex, everything was drained and over.

I can't lie to you but Vikram scared me too, he seemed possessive and I didn't want to land into something like what I had with Alvin, ever again. It was messy. I feared Vikram is possessive.

Devesh: But did you love him?

Pratyush: I don't know!

(Lights fade out)

Scene VII

Heisha: Can you poke your I don't know a bit and ask, why didn't you tell him that you love him?

Arhaan: No,

Arhaan: I didn't because I didn't know what I felt for him until I saw him with someone and till then I had decided to walk away from his life, I didn't want my heart to bleed.

Heisha: What if you had made a choice and said you loved him?

Arhaan: I didn't know what it was, I still don't know.

Heisha: What if you know and you don't want to recognize that what you felt was love?

Arhaan: I don't know

Heisha: Concealed in your 'don't know', is what you don't wish to know. Life is after all a consequence of choices that we make and often there is no 'U Turn'. Words once said can never be taken back and mistakes once committed need enormous strength to be corrected.

Arhaan: I've anyway come too far for a U-turn and there is no U-turn for me.

Heisha: Truth is always found when we have come too far. Unfortunately, we understand life, when things have become past and gone away when they are there in front of us we are too inexperienced to react to them fruitfully.

Arhaan: So then, the Present only makes sense when understood in context to the past.

Heisha: Maybe that's why, you want him gone, because he is your past as well as your present.

Heisha: it's enough of him, I can't take it anymore.

Arhaan: That's probably, because you like the state of 'don't know', so there is nothing to think about and nothing to know or answer. But in that silent state, you find beauty. The beauty of the loss. The loss that provides you with the strength to live once again. To love is to suffer and there can be no love otherwise. The loss that makes you believe in no one but yourself. But in the end, you are lonely.

Arhaan: I may be lonely, but I'm fine.

Heisha: Some of us spend our whole life trying to be just fine.

Arhaan: Aren't you too doing the same, trying to be fine?

Heisha: More than often I had to think about others being fine. While taking care of everyone else, I almost forgot what I wanted from life.

Arhaan: Do you regret that?

Heisha: Do you regret your state of mind? How it lets you suffer!

Arhaan: I don't suffer and I don't regret. There is nothing left to regret, it's all over now, especially when I did tell him 'It's over'.

Heisha: What do you mean you said to him it's over? You both never even discussed what you felt for each other.

Arhaan: After I walked from his life on the pretext of work pressure at the office, he didn't really understand that I was moving away from him. He was so busy then that I had moved away and he didn't even realize. He was really in love with him, I thought so and tried my best to immerse myself in work as you say I was filling my life with weight.

Arhaan: A year later he called me to meet him over coffee, I didn't go but he had a brief conversation on the phone and he said if in any way he had hurt me he was sorry for that.

Heisha: But how did he know he had hurt you, because you had never confronted anything to him?

Arhaan: I don't know, he did that. I don't know why he did it. I really don't know

(Lights fade out)

Scene VIII

Pratyush: He met me for the second time when he came for some work.

Devesh: He didn't have any work... He made an excuse that he had some work. He was doing better then. We thought it was fine for him to go alone. It was the first time in six years that he was traveling so far on his own. He was incapable of working. Probably, he was embarrassed by that. 35-year-old him, dependent on his family financially. He couldn't afford to go to a regular job, work 8 hours, deal with people, commute, and come back. His brain wasn't able to take that toll. There was no work but he made some reason of work to come to meet you.

Pratyush: He hugged me the moment he saw me, a deep embrace on the streets and he didn't care about anyone looking. He almost lifted me with his hug.

Devesh: He was happy to finally see you, He always wanted you to know that getting to be around you was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Pratyush: Yeah, he said that often. We dined, talked for a long, and made love. While making love, that night he held me tight as if I would run away if he loosened his grip. But he didn't speak about his condition, he briefly spoke about it, however no details. He spoke about the present, then the past. He asked me for my birth details, he said he would send me my life details after charting a horoscope. I said to him that I don't believe in all this. It was a different Vikram, this Vikram's hair was different. His thick-rimmed square spectacles were gone. The muscles of the Greek God had a different shape, he also had a tikka on his forehead. As morning came, he was gone.

Devesh : Over the years, he changed. He was able to move which he never imagined. He thought he would die on the bed. But with Mom wrecking God's kingdom, she must have put God at stake to bring him to his senses. Vikram became better, that's how he met you six years later when he felt good. He had come to believe in God, Durga Ma to be precise. He developed an uncanny devotion to her.

Pratyush: yeah, he mentioned that. I found it strange.

Devesh: To a postmodernist you, this was unacceptable.

Pratyush: It was strange, he was a devout religious man. When I met him for the first time, he was almost an atheist. And this man talks about Durga ma and wants to make my horoscope chart.

Devesh: Probably, his Durga ma had granted him a new life which he didn't conceive of, even if it gave him limited liberties, he was able to move and do things. Mom was happy, she only hoped now that he never become involved with a man. She kept strict vigil to keep him away from anything of that sort. Of course, he didn't do anything. But for my mom, his sexuality came to be associated with deceitful unnatural order. She blamed his sexual choice for ruining his life, she didn't realise that this all could have happened in Bangalore too. She never

accepted his sexuality, she cursed it, and it ruined her son's life. That's why I didn't ask you to come home, you shouldn't meet her.

Pratyush: I understand, but does she know about me?

Devesh: No, she doesn't.

Devesh: Your messages with Vikram were sincere, there was nothing about them because of which he went to sleep forever. "The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for." Only he knew what that suffering felt like, and when he lost finally what kept him alive, it compelled him to sleep for eternity.

Devesh: Your messages were investigated but there was no material of any kind which could lead to any clues. It's been nine years since the first time he went to Bombay and what remained shocking was that, after everything, he only contacted you. He had no other friend other than you in Bombay. He remembers everything he did with you. Though it was a one-night affair, he couldn't forget you and wrote to you after five years. Surprisingly, you remember your first encounter with him in poetic detail. Maybe you loved him too.....

Pratyush: I loved him after making love that night. I waited for his message, but he didn't connect. I felt if he had a beautiful night, why wasn't he connecting? I waited for next few days, hoping to receive a message. I loved him then, He had the qualities that I could love. I always loved his thick-rimmed glasses and his white shirt tucked neatly in his grey pants.

Devesh: I remember that you mentioned it several times in your messages.

Pratyush: When he didn't respond. I realized it was just about one night, a lustful affair. I loved him then, even if it began with sex but his message never arrived.....

Devesh: because two days later, he had a brain stroke. And it took him five years to connect to you, not knowing how would you respond. Your response was amiable. He was happy. He also made your horoscope after meeting you the second time, but when he sent you that.....there was no chat for several months after that.

Pratyush: So, you don't know after that.

Devesh: There was no chat for about six months, what happened?

Pratyush: I don't know

(Lights fade out)

Scene IX

Heisha: Because he loved you and when he realized that there was something between you both, he did make a point to connect to you again. Maybe even he didn't know it was love, and when you left him, it was then, he must have understood that there was something more in your friendship.

Arhaan: Till then it was too late.

Heisha: Why didn't you just go for coffee with him?

Arhaan: I was with Neha by then and I was very happy. Finally, she was.....

Heisha: able to fill the emptiness that he left.

Arhaan: Not really, maybe yes.

Heisha: maybe, yes?

Arhaan: We were together for a few months and even we separated.

(Silence)

Heisha: What if you had gone that evening with him for coffee, even if you were in love with Neha?

Arhaan: I don't know

Heisha: Would you have gone for coffee with him if you were not with Neha?

Arhaan: I don't know.

Heisha: Sometimes you really 'don't know'

(Lights fade out)

Scene X

Pratyush: He sent me the Horoscope and we spoke on a call. He wanted to convey some things. He said a lot of things, but I didn't find them true. I discredit his horoscope chart as thrash. What he had to say were strong statements about my life which I found to be maligning and untrue. I called it thrash. He was hurt that he made it with effort and didn't believe anything about it. He accused me of living in denial. I hung up the phone. We never spoke.

Devesh: Until six months later, when you messaged him.

Pratyush: Wasn't it him?

Pratyush: I don't remember who did, but I realised I shouldn't speak about anything to do with religion or astrology to avoid what happened last time. Once he said 'Sometimes the nights are darker and therefore the stars are brighter, When the grief is deeper, the closer is Durga ma, She talks to me'. He was devoutly religious and was taking some classes in astrology.

Devesh: Being at home all day killed him. He never thought that life would be a daily suffering. I think he took up astrology because probably he could earn some money with consultation, I'm sure he felt financially imbecile at home. He wanted to do something. His new life gave him Durga ma. The realm of superstitions, fortune-telling, presentiments, intuition, dreams, and all this inner life of a human being excited him. He was a new Vikram with a newer interest. The brother that I knew while growing up wasn't there. But we were happy for him to be there with

us, what more could we ask for? But inside, he was wallowing by seeing pity for him in the reflection of his eyes.

Pratyush: It's such a pity that I was looking for the Lawyer I met on a fateful September night in Bombay. And I kept searching for him, little did I know that the man who emerged from the storm was a different man. I kept asking him to wear those spectacles and dress like that and I even asked him why couldn't go back to his job as a lawyer but he never said to me that he could not go back to that life.

Devesh: You loved him when he was coming out of a painful relationship. He loved you when you were coming out of a torturous relationship. Such a pity that you couldn't love each other at different time and not at the same time

Pratyush: Yeah, when he met me for the third time and the last time. It was about nine months ago when he said he was coming to meet his doctors. This time he spoke truthfully and he was clearer, he was dressed almost like a hippie when I met him last, now I know why, He knew he was going to die soon. He didn't need to go back to the life of economics, law, politics, and societal norms. And I was searching for the man in a crisp white shirt tucked in grey trousers, with black thick-rimmed glasses. The man I fell in love with was no more there.

Devesh: But probably this man loved you more and you said to him that you can only meet him if there is no sex involved. He was heartbroken. Sex with you was like a spiritual experience to him. You denied him that spirituality. He came to meet you.....

Pratyush: We both held each other that night, spoke for long hours until the night turned into dawn, and went to sleep in each other's arms. We didn't make love in the way people make love but we know we loved each other.

Devesh: You said to him 'Love is not something that happens between the legs, that's simply biological need. Love is far away from it, deep beyond the skin of the soul embedded in the layers of life. You added, You wanted a relationship with a man with whom you don't make love.

Pratyush: He couldn't understand that.....

Devesh: Nor do I understand.....

Devesh: He was so full of healing wounds; he couldn't take any more disappointments. He was dying. Love makes living possible else life becomes oblivion. What if you had loved him?

Devesh: I loved him, I loved him, only that when he is no more, I realized what he meant to me,

Devesh: One must love life before loving its meaning ... yes, and when the love of life disappears, no meaning can console us. You, both met only thrice in nine yearsHe called those 3 nights the '3 Holy Nights of his Life'. Until one day he slept in arms of such a night, from which he never woke up.....

(Lights fade out)

Scene XI

(Eventually they stop while walking and talk)

Arhaan: Yes, I don't know

Heisha: But you do know that the emptiness left from him and her..... which you're filling it up with the weight of work and weed.

Arhaan: Yes, I'm filling my emptiness with work and weed, so what?

Heisha: Life is simple and the man continues to complicate it by " waving the still water " What is it that you're stuck with?

Heisha: If you ask yourself, what is that you're stuck with probably you will be able to see the vacuum before it turns to void.

Arhaan: It's your life more than mine that needs to be fixed, looks like you're more broken than me.

Heisha: Not everything that is broken can be fixed, sometimes we just have to carry the shattered pieces and move with it.

(The below sub-scene can be directed poetically, where it may be a pre-recorded voice-over or blending the scene with Arhaan back at his typewriter narrating/typing the incident on the same paper)

Arhaan: The sky had turned pink by then, and the city was slowly waking to the new sunrise. She wanted to pick some yellow blossoms before the sweepers could sweep the road. She crossed the street to the other side as those were freshly fallen blossoms. For a moment, I was ecstatic looking at her, she was a wounded angel stopping down and gathering those yellow blossoms like pieces of her broken heart, there was something peculiar about her, probably the grace in which she was gathering those blossoms, a grey milk van stopped in between to unload some milk bottles, I walked few steps to continue seeing here and she wasn't there.

Devesh: Stars, creation, and destruction are always syncopating, seasons change, and everything does. People come and people go, each one of them leaves its mark in its unique ways and life is no longer the same. Every loss makes us understand what we didn't know about ourselves, a side of us we never reckon existed, or possibly a side we thought we didn't have. Every loss reveals what we are made of.....

(Pratyush is in Devesh's arms crying and gradually Lights fade out)

CURTAIN

“Human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they’re finished.”

‘When I’m Gone’ is an attempt to look into the existential crisis of what’s lost and cannot be retrieved, be it people, moments or even spaces. Most often we live life in scattered pieces of a picture that are in a *making*. These pieces remain an enigma until the moment is gone. Often from the present we try to look into the past and only then does the picture start making sense but until then it’s too late. The picture of the past is the picture of the *present in making* on the verge of completing but never finishing. An unfinished present is a collection of lost moments and lost people. The play grapples with the philosophy of losing. The only possibility to save us from the regrets of an unlived life is a path of compassion and love. *When I’m Gone* is a play about the tenderness of life and loss of life

