

Ums

The book cover features a stylized illustration. At the top, the title 'Ums' is written in a large, elegant, white cursive font. Below the title, a large, glowing orange sun is positioned in the center of the sky. The background is a teal landscape with rolling hills and mountains. In the foreground, a woman on the left and a man on the right stand back-to-back, both looking upwards. The woman is wearing a purple hijab and a white and purple garment. The man is wearing a brown jacket over a white shirt. The overall color palette is warm and artistic.

ZEBA ALI

Contents

[Uns](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Ghaflat](#)

[Sifar](#)

[Maazi](#)

[Iztiraar](#)

[Maazi](#)

[Taghافل](#)

[Maazi](#)

[Qurbat](#)

[Maazi](#)

[Aashna](#)

[Maazi](#)

[Mukhtasar](#)

[Maazi](#)

[Izhaar](#)

[Bedaari](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

Uns

A Short Story

Zeba Ali

Copyright © 2023, Zeba Ali

All Rights Reserved

Edited and Proofed by: Half Baked Beans

@halfbakedbeans

Cover Design by: Wiktorja Sklarek

@vicaruss_

Dedication

*To my kid, Zain, with whom I'm
learning to live again.*

Ghaflat

Carelessness

The Blue Mountains changed its color with pastel shades of orange as the sun set on its journey for farewell. The majesty of the mountains was nearly forgotten by the people, busy with their race for food and work. Just like Sairah Hameed.

The book stack made its usual sound as she slammed it inside the rack. Sairah loved her work as a caretaker of this library but surviving her day without her coffee was too much to handle. She again glanced at the giant wall clock showing at half past five.

Still half an hour!

“Mark!”

Sairah had to yell from her desk because she knew, Mark would be at the farthest corner. The part where they had stacked all the children’s fiction.

“You can’t survive without me even a minute?”

“Nope.”

Sairah shook her head with a smile as Mark sat on her desk with a huff. As the people were busy in the hangover of the winter holidays, the rush was less than usual. Just a few nerds who were too anxious to leave books and attend the winter parties.

“I’m so bored, Mark. Talk to me.”

Mark was the eighth-grade kid who used to hide in the children’s section in between humongous books. Sairah totally knew what was the secret behind that. He just wanted to save himself from helping his mother in her grocery store.

“I left those 20 pages just to hear you groan.” Mark rolled his eyes behind his thick-framed glasses, sliding from the desk, “Grow up.”

“Look who is talking!”

Sairah teased with a giggle as Mark returned to his usual spot, not before sticking his tongue out at her. For half an hour she had to kill time so she made her way to the washroom.

Fixing up her scarf while looking in the mirror, she felt something weird. Like a heavy boulder was moving on the road and coming near them. Was Mark again doing some prank with her?

“Mark! Stop it.”

Her heart was banging her rib cage as Sairah opened the door in a hurry only to lose her balance. Ignoring her imbalanced steps, she focused on the scene which was more horrible than anything else.

The huge bookshelves were shaking like they had no weight. The silence of the library was disturbed by the dangerous thuds. Her eyes watered seeing the cracks forming on the floor.

She had to find Mark and leave this place. Sairah had to do something. She couldn't let him or herself die in this earthquake.

Sifar

Nothingness

The faint sun was doing its best to sparkle the majestic architecture. Shadows of cat claw creepers on the brick wall felt dim in the setting sun. The Royal Hospital of Newcastle had less rush than usual but Uzair Ahmer was busy in a three-hour-long surgery. A heart surgery in which he was assisting his senior Dr. Thomson.

“Good work, Dr. Ahmer!”

A faint smile rested on his lips for a mere moment as Uzair nodded his head. Removing the gloves, he headed towards the washroom. Maybe he needed a little rest. It was the fourth day he ditched going home.

“Don’t think, just go.”

He knew who it was. Ken, his colleague of four years. Uzair hated Ken for understanding him so well, even in silence. Perhaps it was because they were childhood friends or maybe because they both had seen the roller coaster rides in each other’s lives for twenty-three years.

“I don’t feel like it,” Uzair wiped his hands with the napkin as he saw Ken playing with the faucet, “and stop doing that!”

The constant whoosh of water irritates him.

“We have to do some things that we don’t ‘feel like’.” Ken air quoted and Uzair moved past him for the exit.

“Who can know better than me?”

He knew by the taps behind him that Ken would bug him more when all that Uzair needed was some time alone. His heart was emptier than usual as if someone removed a thing from his heart that he didn’t know was there for so long. It felt odd and he couldn’t comprehend why it was like this.

The silence of the hospital broke with the loud sirens of the ambulance and the crowds that scattered around in search of help. The place became congested for him as the air felt to be holding the smell of soil, blood, and ruins. There was a sound

of crying, mothers with helpless tears, people with wounds and blood.

“Uzair, move.”

It was Ken who shook him. He didn't know for how long he was stuck in that one place while the whole world revolved so quickly. He moved to the ambulance that had just stopped and the door opened to reveal an unconscious kid whose face was red with blood.

“Move him quickly.”

That voice. Uzair could never forget that voice.

The girl ran with the stretcher as Uzair again remained rooted to his spot. Could someone just force him to work? He was a doctor, for God's sake and he was behaving like a prissy. He turned around to look at the girl who was now entering the main door, her hand holding the bag tightly, her habit of every day. Maybe she didn't notice him.

Did this earthquake seriously push him back in Sairah's path?

Maazi

Past

I

The train made its mighty presence as the loud sound broke every tiny silence around. The six-year-old Sairah tightly held her mother's skirt to move along with her. She could feel something inside her, that thud constantly going near her chest like she was at some wrong place. Her legs had to move on their own as the packed crowd pushed her ahead. Sairah's hand left her mother's skirt as her father picked her up in his arms.

“Ya Habibi, move fast.”

Her father, Hameed yelled at her mother above the noise and chatter of the rush. She knew her mother would be mumbling something in her native language but Sairah didn't want to hear that because her eyes were stuck on her father's bandage. The wound that he got while coming from work.

Sairah tried hiding her face behind her father's shoulder. The images of that day came back to her when her father came with blood coming from his forehead and ordered her mother to pack quickly. Sairah was running behind him to wipe that blood off, she didn't like seeing blood. But her father wasn't paying attention to her. He just kissed her forehead once and got back to pack his stuff.

Sairah had no idea what was happening. Why all of a sudden, they were on a train? She only heard her father saying that difficult times were coming for them. It was not safe for them to stay in Tripoli. But she didn't want to move from there.

She was praying that they could just go back to their old house. Sairah loved her house. It was not as big as Fatmeh's, but it had everything. Her small room was stuffed with two dolls and mud toys, and a kitchen with two more rooms. The wall of some rooms showed bricks but Sairah found it too beautiful to see.

“Abi, where are we going?”

“I don’t know, Sairah!”

She never heard so much haste in her father’s voice as they made their way among the crowd. Sairah just wanted to go back.

Iztiraar

Restlessness

Sairah made sure to fist her hands to hide their shaking. Her mind was torn between her family and Mark. She had no idea about her family or Mark's condition either. It was all in a flicker of an eye. She had had fun with Mark a few minutes ago and now he was in the operation theatre.

Royal Hospital was one of the oldest hospitals in Newcastle. Sairah was grateful that they had rooms enough for everyone. She would make sure to keep Mark away from the library until he didn't get healed properly.

Didn't know why he never listened to her. Sairah told him every time to never sit in those corners to read, but he had to do it. Because she used to bug him. But that single mistake had brought him here.

Those huge bookshelves had fallen on him making his head bleed. By the time the rescue team brought him out, he was taking shallow breaths. Sairah never wanted to lose him. She didn't want another connection to break.

“Miss. Let me bandage you.”

An elderly nurse held her hand to make her sit on the chair. Sairah looked at her hands pouring sanitizing liquid on the cotton ball. She killed a wince on her lips as the cotton ball touched her cheek. She was so engrossed in Mark's condition that Sairah had no idea about her wounds.

This was the biggest earthquake Australia had ever witnessed and she knew that the earthquake must have taken many lives. She didn't know how Abbu and Ammi were.

The loud siren of the ambulance again filled the running chaos of the hospital. The place was full of hustle. Sairah had seen many patients going through various rooms.

The door opened with a click forcing Sairah to stand. She looked at the doctor with hope but her throat became parched looking at the man behind him.

Uzair Ahmer.

The man was now doing his best to avoid her gaze. How could she forget him? Those eyes. Those sharp blue eyes that were looking at everything but her.

“Miss, you’re with this kid?” Sairah nodded at the doctor’s question. “We did our best but he lost a great amount of blood. I’m not sure if he could survive. We just have to wait.”

Sairah nodded again but this time her body was losing its energy. She pressed a hand on her collarbone. Her gesture was to remember that she was in a panic and needed control.

From the corner of her eyes, she saw Uzair who waited a little too much even when the other doctor moved away. But she sat on the waiting chair ignoring him and the prick in her heart as if they didn’t exist. Just like she was living till now, without him.

Maazi

Past

II

The sun shyly granted another morning to the people of Newcastle in the bone-chilling winter. Sairah picked up the stack of Women's Weekly and Sydney Herald, moving towards the rack at the main door. She would never understand her mother and her affection for Kibbe. She would make that pathetic meat pie, that too in breakfast, and force her to eat it.

"Another morning without food?" It was Matthew, the librarian whom she used to assist in the winter holidays, mostly without breakfast. He was an old man in his early seventies, always spoke in his thick Australian accent but was a decent fellow, the reason why Abbu gave her permission for this job.

"I mean can you imagine it's the fourth time this week she made Kibbe." said Sairah while putting the magazines in the rack, "I don't understand why she can't make me some other dish."

Matthew fixed his glasses with a smile while going back to his seat. She was assisting him every winter for three years and now he knew every syllable she would utter in the morning or maybe he knew how moody a sixteen-year-old can be.

"You will be here at noon, no?" Matthew called her as she fetched her half-finished novel from the shelf, "I have to grab a gift for Emma."

Emma was his granddaughter who was celebrating her sixth birthday today. "Yes." Sairah nodded, flipping the pages. She was craving a sandwich or something. Her mind reached a peak point of anger in hunger. Sairah had no idea how would she survive the afternoon.

"Finish this."

A plastic container slid towards her showing two pieces of cheese sandwiches. Sairah didn't know how to show her happiness as she gave a big smile to Matthew. A smile that was unusual for her.

“That bloke never sparing us!”

Uzair hummed at Ken, finishing his soda can. That thesis would kill him. He needed a good sleep but his professors were hot on their heels for him. He would be all fine if that thesis submission was not due in six weeks. Uzair didn't even think about the title yet.

“Mate, I think that's a bad idea,” James yelled from behind as they walked towards the library. The only solution to their piled-up problems. “I hate looking at books.”

“Books hate looking at us too. That's a fair deal.” Uzair said kicking his soda can, “But now we don't have a choice. My old man will kill me if the college kicks me out!”

“Nothing to fret here mate. You can always do a job in your old man's hospital.”

“As if.”

Uzair twisted his lips at the mention of his father. He was the strictest dad on the whole planet. A surgeon by profession, he didn't feel any difference in cutting people's skin or their self-respect. That's why Uzair rarely spoke to him.

“I'm going to the biology section,” James announced loudly while entering the library pushing Uzair and Ken in a fit of snickers.

“We know what you want to see there.”

“Don't be a whiner mate” said James running towards the biology section.

The lot moved towards the science section to grab some medicine books. James was the loudest of them. In between their constant snickers and talks, they didn't pay any attention that they were not alone.

Uzair looked up from the book as he felt a silhouette stopping in front of them, his smile vanishing with every passing second. A girl with furrowed brows was staring at them, her lips pursed while she put the book in her hand on the table.

“This is a library.” She spoke in a thin accent, just like his grandmother spoke Arabic.

“Oh, Uzair, we thought it was the cinema hall.”

Uzair didn't pay any heed to James as he was still looking at the girl with a long black braid.

She wasn't that beautiful, was she? Like who wore those extra baggy clothes? It was the 1980s, for god's sake!

People ignored them at any cost because skirts and minis were the new trends. Then why was he unable to look away? Her eyes were still on them as she angrily fixed her round glasses.

“Oh really! But you have to stay silent even in a cinema hall too so that you don't disturb others. Shut up now.” The girl picked up the book and gave him a cold glare, moving away. She threw her long braid back on her waist and Uzair felt as if some kind of mesmerism broke.

Taghaful

Indifference

Her lips barely moved. Her thumb tapped on her fingers. Her eyes were closed, the only thing Uzair was grateful for. Because he could stare at her all he wanted. She was sitting at a distance, on one of the waiting chairs.

She hadn't changed a bit in these four years. Except for the scarf over her head. It's rare to see girls wearing scarves nowadays. Sairah Hameed would never follow trends. When people used to wear tight clothes, she was going behind baggy ones, and now this scarf!

But that scarf wasn't stopping her face to glow. Her porcelain white skin was still radiating just like the first time he saw her.

The sky turned into a darker shade as the night widened its wings. Uzair took a sip from his cup, his shoulder rested on the wall. He could search for a new task or something fruitful. But seeing Sairah Hameed after a long time had snatched his brain cells.

"Your girl, isn't she?" Uzair straightened on Ken's voice as he stood beside him. "You talked with her?"

Uzair shook his head, "She doesn't even look at me."

Ken nodded. He was the only one who knew what he had done. More likely, what a great mistake he had made.

In between their talk, Uzair stopped speaking as Sairah looked at their way. Her lips stopped mumbling as her eyes furrowed for a split second and then she looked away.

"It's graver than I can imagine man."

Uzair looked at Ken who moved away from him, not before patting his shoulder in a consoling manner. Why did she have to come back in his life?

"The farthest room is good for you."

The elderly nurse showed her way to the place where she could offer her prayers. She wasn't regular with her prayers. Like praying two or three prayers a day. But the wait was overwhelming for her.

Sairah couldn't sit idle and let the negative thoughts fathom her, the thoughts about her family, Mark, and whatnot. The landline of the hospital was working but nobody was picking up the call at her house.

She bit her lower lip. Her father's face was the only thing that Sairah could remember right now. And that pushed so many tears to her eyes. Umami would be fretting over her absence, killing Abbu's ears with her loud blabber. Abbu was a calm man but her mother always kept him on his toes.

Sairah was getting emotional with everything around her. Maybe due to hunger. She didn't have a proper lunch and now she didn't have guts to eat.

She regretted opening the door of the room to spot Uzair on his prayer mat.

He was making a dua and when she turned around, his voice stopped her.

“Stay. I'm going.”

Sairah didn't turn to look at him again. She couldn't. That would remind her of the time when she met him for the first time.

Just when she thought he was gone, Uzair was in front of her, forcing a gasp from her. He put a chocolate bar on her prayer sheet holding hands and took a step back from her.

“I know you get too emotional when hungry.”

The corridor echoed with his voice for a moment as Sairah stared at his back, not liking the details he still remembered about her.

Maazi

Past

III

He made sure to not make any noise, he would find out who was the criminal hiding behind that curtain.

“Hey!”

Sairah covered her gasp as she looked at the over-smiling face of Uzair Ahmer. She didn't know what his problem was. For one week she was seeing him here and she should add this, she hated him.

Too loud, too talkative, and a bugger. If he remained in the library that meant Sairah had to run behind him now and then.

“What?”

“Nothing, mate. I was just passing by so thought of saying hello to you.”

Sairah closed the book, and the sound of it echoed in the library. She was so close to finding out who was the criminal and Uzair ruined everything.

“You did. Now just go.”

“Why are you so rude?”

Sairah looked up at him, “Why are you so over-friendly?” her eyes glanced at her unfinished book. It was rare to see such a bugger in Australia. People never bothered each other. So, in her life, there were too few people. Her parents and Matthew.

“Because I like seeing you.”

Uzair took a seat on the table, right in front of her. Sairah gulped seeing his pearly white smile.

“Shameless man. I will tell Matthew about you. I'm sure he would ban you from this library.”

“I would like to see you try.”

Uzair hit the thin book on her head, running towards the exit. Just before leaving, he winked at her. Sairah was sure, she never hated anybody this much in her whole life.

“Mate, you would become a scholar by these frequent trips to the library.”

Ken threw the coke can at him, and Uzair caught it mid-air.

“I’m working on my thesis.”

“That girl with the long braid is your thesis.”

Uzair smiled putting the empty can on the wall as his eyes looked at the setting sun. Sairah’s face gravitated to his world. His whole chaotic mind came to ease looking at that girl. But he must admit, she was annoying.

Why did you do that?

Stop talking.

Will you stop yelling?

Phrases like these and more. Uzair had heard everything. But maybe he liked her thin accent, that’s why he wouldn’t stop bugging her.

“Man, you’re in some trouble.”

Punching his friend in the gut, Uzair shoved out a thin file from the front seat of his car.

“Read the title.”

”Can constant love and affection show a drastic change in someone’s behavior?”

Ken read loudly as Uzair rested his back on the car with a smug smile.

His friend still seemed in confusion, “What’s that?” said Ken.

“That’s Sairah. You were right. That girl is my thesis.”

The sun moved down, a little ashamed of Uzair’s words. It was selfishness, a terrible game, and Uzair had no idea he was

about to lose.

Qurbat

Closeness

Sairah opened her eyes on a slow caress over her head and closed them again to think of it as a mere illusion.

”Habibi!”

Her round eyes opened wide as she saw her father standing in front of her. What on earth?

“Abbu...” Sairah held his hand standing up just to make sure she was not in a dream or something, “What? How did you come here? You-”

As her sleep went away, Sairah began to remember the other day. The day when she again had to pretend to be strong. The dark memories forced her throat to clog and tears rushed to her eyes.

Mark was in the same condition from yesternight. There was no change in his condition and now she was becoming more afraid with every passing second. Last night she was able to contact Mark’s parents’ house but they were out of town for three days, the neighbor informed her.

Abbu understood her condition and with a small smile he brought her into his embrace, “It’s all fine, Sairah.”

She pursed her lips as everything came out to her at once, “How did you know I was here?”

Abbu smiled and then looked at the end of the hallway, “Dr. Uzair Ahmer brought me here.”

Uzair’s heart moved into a little pillow of contentment as Sairah hugged her father with teary eyes. That feeling of likeness was weird. It pushed you to see happiness even in the most unusual things.

Who could have thought Uzair Ahmer would feel happy seeing a girl meeting her father? But that girl was not ordinary.

She was Sairah Hameed. When it came to her, every feeling took a one-eighty-degree shift.

From yesterday, he had seen her desperation. The hope in her when she would dial her home from the hospital's telephone. But Uzair had the idea that most phone lines were dead.

So today morning he decided to give it a try. To his luck, roads to her house were clear. His father didn't know him but Sairah's name made them an acquaintance. Her mother was dangerous. He remembered everything Sairah used to tell him about her. She was damn right.

Speaking in her native language with thin English, Sairah's mother could talk a whole day if her father hadn't interrupted her.

“Dr. Uzair Ahmer brought me here.”

The father-daughter duo came forward and Uzair noticed how Sairah refrained from looking at him.

“Thank you so much, sir. I don't have words to thank you properly.”

Uzair held his folded hands with a small smile, “That's not needed, Mr. Hameed. That's the least I can do for-” he looked at Sairah whose eyes stuck at him for a split second, “anyone.”

“Ms. Sairah, take him to the canteen. Have a good breakfast, you haven't eaten a proper meal from yesterday.”

He said in a hurry, quite surprised with his confidence that his guilt was letting him speak. Sairah nodded moving away with her father.

Uzair's hand stopped pushing the door of his cabin as he heard the sound of footsteps, “You don't have to do it. That won't—” He turned to see Sairah with crude expressions, waving a hand between them, “That won't change anything.”

He gulped to keep the feeling of anger at bay. Maybe it was hurt, he felt in the corner of his heart.

“Thanks for informing me.” said Uzair stopping Sairah in her tracks, “Also thanks for showing me that you haven't

changed.”

“Excuse me?”

“Still difficult for you to say thank you. I know but... You're grateful.”

Sairah huffed and went back to the canteen without answering him. The sun shone its brightest rays after a long time and the universe witnessed Uzair's beautiful smile as he chuckled seeing Sairah retreating back.

Maazi

Past

IV

“She’s not in a good mood, be careful.”

Uzair smiled looking at Matthew. True to her words Sairah had complained about him but his charms worked and now he and Matthew were good friends.

“Why? Anything serious?”

Matthew gave a small laugh, “Again a fight with her mother over breakfast.”

Uzair glanced at Sairah who was making notes from a huge book. He turned and left the library reaching the sandwich van at the corner.

Fetching two boxes full of sandwiches and fries, he was in front of Sairah who didn’t even look up. He put the boxes with a thud trying to grab the girl’s attention but she was one of her names.

“C’mon, just look up mate. I brought you breakfast!”

“That won’t help you anywhere.”

“But it can help you,” Uzair grabbed the chair in front of her and opened the box welcoming the faint aroma of melted cheese around them, “I’m a doctor. You know you need food for a constant supply of energy.”

Sairah’s eyes moved from the sandwiches towards him, “Everyone knows this simple thing, nobody needs a degree to know that.”

Uzair huffed, “Okay, eat the special breakfast your mom made then.”

“I will.”

Uzair moved one box towards her as Sairah again showed herself busy in the books. It’s been two weeks and this girl wasn’t showing any kind of change.

“What did your mom make by the way?”

“Kibbe Pie,” She shoved out a tin box moving it towards him, “Eat it. I hate its smell.”

Sairah looked at Uzair with disgust as he moaned taking another bite of Kibbe Pie. Like seriously! Who could eat that? Maybe it was his first time, if she shoved it down his throat every day, he would hate it too.

“How could you not eat that?”

“Because I’m human.”

Sairah took a long sigh as the smell of sandwiches twisted her gut with hunger. She would not take them.

“Why are you so rude, Sairah?”

“That’s none of your concern.”

Their talks were interrupted by a low meowing. It had to be her library pet, Muffins. Taking the small bottle of milk and a bowl she moved towards the entrance.

“Aw, Muffins. You missed me?”

Sairah sat on the last stair and talked while pouring the milk into the bowl. Muffins forced a giggle out of her as it purred around her legs. A hand on Muffins made her look up to see Uzair patting the kitten with a smile.

“So, you do have some friends! Good name though, Muffins.” Uzair scratched its head as Sairah gulped in jealousy. Her pet was enjoying it, “From where you did you buy it?”

“Found him near the library a few months ago. Wounded. I and Matthew tended his wounds and now we’re friends.”

Sairah picked it up, kissing his furry brown head, her hands becoming sweaty all of a sudden as she could feel Uzair’s smiling gaze on her.

“That’s the real Sairah hidden beneath so many layers.” Uzair held up his hands in defense as she furrowed at him,

“Fine. I’m going. Tell your mom that Kib—whatever was amazing and,” He took some steps away from her as if he was scared, “The sandwiches are on the table and you look pretty when you giggle.”

And with that, he was gone leaving her heart beating at the rate of a pumping iron. Muffins was now hiding in its paws and Sairah mindlessly caressed it.

“Can I really trust him, Muffins?”

The kitten meowed in response as Sairah came back to the table. As there was no trace of Uzair, she could eat those sandwiches without any problem. She just had to try to kill that feeling of gratefulness towards Uzair!

Aashna

Companion

Sairah's heart shivered like an autumn leaf as she saw a hustle outside Mark's room. She had just returned from the canteen and the commotion was forcing weird thoughts to her mind.

Uzair glanced at her for a moment and quickly vanished inside the room.

"What happened?" said Sairah holding one nurse's hand.

"The patient had a serious seizure."

She gulped a heavy lump in her throat as her hand quickly moved to her collarbone.

"What happened, *habibi*?" Her father's voice seemed to be coming from a faraway land as Sairah turned to see him, "Tell me, why are you crying?"

Sairah touched her now wet cheek, "Abbu. Mark..." She gestured towards the door and ran for it.

Abbu's reassuring hand was on her shoulder as she watched doctors around his bed. For two years they knew each other. Mark came in the most weird phase of her life. The time when people used to scare her because she had made the mistake of trusting the wrong ones.

He was just ten, for God's sake. He doesn't deserve to witness all these hardships and difficult things. He should just get enough time to read at her library. That was it.

The doctors moved away from his bed and a nurse quickly came out, "You're Sairah?", Sairah looked at Abbu and then nodded, "Come inside. The patient is calling you."

Her heart showed its existence with its heavy beating as she moved near Mark's bed, putting her shaking hand on his bandaged forehead. Her mind and the room were the same, filled with too many noises. That irritating beeping sound.

"Hey..."

Sairah sniffed to push back every feeling of crying, “How dare you be so irresponsible. You know how scared I was-”

“Stop it...,” Mark closed his eyes for a moment, “Tell my mother, I loved her.”

Sairah fisted her hands as he said those words, “Stop being dramatic, Mark. I will slap you,” A bile rose in her throat as her gut churned.

“Nobody jokes on his deathbed.”

“Please don’t say—that Mark.” Her breath hitched as tears began to flow when she put her head on his shoulder.

His small hand moved over her scarf, “Now, you have people to care for you. I’m going.”

“No... Please no, Mark. You aren’t going anywhere. Pl-” Sairah’s plead died in the middle when Mark’s hand dropped down. The hall came to a sudden silence as the beeping changed to a long lull.

She covered her lips looking at his closed eyes, getting away from his bed as the doctors came near him. They were trying but that straight line on his monitor was the proof for Sairah, the proof of the bitter truth.

Maazi

Past

V

“You okay?”

Sairah looked up from the book as Uzair grabbed a chair beside her.

“Yes.”

Her mind was not in its right place. She was on that same page for thirty minutes and still couldn't understand anything. It was not because it was difficult, but because she was lost. She was lost in thinking about Matthew.

He was in the hospital. A few days ago, his blood pressure dropped too low, making him unconscious in the library. Doctors told them it was normal at his age but Sairah's heart was dreading the coming moments.

She was a bad luck to everyone. Whatever she felt attached to, Allah had this urge to remove that from her life. First, it was her hometown, then her friends, Fatimah, and now Matthew.

“You ate something?”

Sairah shook her head, pushing the plastic container of Kibbe Pie towards him, “You can eat it.”

She never liked anyone's help but her insides went into utter calmness seeing Uzair beside her. For three days, he stayed by her side like a good friend, during the hospital trips and lunch. From dropping Sairah at her house, he had done everything, without even her asking.

When did she have someone to talk to, and share something that was running inside her head? Uzair, though she talked a few times, stayed with her, and listened to her, without showing any signs of boredom.

“Eat something, Sairah. How will you get the energy to fight with me?”

Uzair opened the box of fries with a smile, pushing a small one to hers too.

Sairah picked a fry, “I can beat you without even eating,” She carefully put that piece in her mouth, stopping in between as her vision blurred with tears.

The silence of the library broke because of a little screech of the chair. Sairah straightened, wiping her tears as she sensed Uzair’s warmth around her.

“You can cry in front of me, Sairah. I won’t tell anyone.”

Uzair picked the heavy book from the table and hid behind it so that nobody could see Sairah’s face.

“You’re silly,” whimpered Sairah as her wet eyelashes touched her cheeks, she covered her face with her palms. “I’m not crying in front of you.”

Uzair chuckled as she shoved his hand that was holding the book. He could see that she was acting strong but, she needed to let her guard down. Nobody could pretend to be strong for long.

“I should head to the hospital. My heart doesn’t let me rest.” Sairah said looking at her gold-coloured watch.

Uzair got up seeing Sairah picking up her bag, “You came back just now, Sairah.”

The ringing of the antique phone on the reception broke their conversation, pushing her to take the call after three rings.

Uzair looked on as the shadows covered Sairah’s face and how she dejectedly placed the receiver down. He could see her shivering as her hand tried to form a grip on the table while she covered her face.

He had no clue what he was supposed to do but seeing her in this condition was too much for him. With long strides Uzair came beside her, making sure his warmth was around her even though he was not touching her in any way.

Sairah looked at him with her eyes full of tears and at that moment Uzair understood, he never wanted to make her cry. He hadn't seen her laughing but her smile was becoming the most precious thing for him as he looked in the depths of her teary eyes.

“He is gone. Matthew left me.”

Uzair took a long sigh, he had some clue of Matthew's condition but there was little hope of betterment. He opened and closed his fist, the grief inside him taking control of everything.

Sairah's silent sniffs were echoing around him when he got enough courage to pat her head, without any words. He turned a little so that she was hidden from everyone while she cried her heart out.

They were in a weird bubble. A bubble of uncertainty. They both didn't know where they were going but Uzair was now somewhat sure. Sairah meant something more than a research project to him.

Mukhtasar

Limited

The crickets' sound was the only thing that cut the haunted silence of the night. Uzair's eyes were stuck on his wristwatch as he counted Sairah's pulse. He was doing his best not to glance at her features; those pale and anxious features that held weird attraction.

She was unconscious since she heard news of Mark's death the other day. It was a nervous breakdown, the result of her fake strong demeanor. He had sent her father home because he was here for two days and was not taking enough care of himself.

Uzair pursed his chapped lips and began to check her blood pressure.

“Mark.”

A whisper left her lips as she tried opening her eyes resulting in pushing some tears out. Uzair took a long sigh and tried to sound professional, without any trace of fear or worry.

“Sairah...”

Another whimper escaped as her hand moved to her lips, “I don't want to live anymore, Uzair.”

He was more than shocked to hear his name from her, surprised that she was talking to him in the first place. The name on her lips still held a weird attraction.

“Why, what happened?”

Uzair removed the belt from her arm and finally looked at Sairah who was now looking at him with dazed eyes as if she was not fully awake.

“I'm a burden on everyone... I am a bad luck. I kill everyone...”

Having said that she closed her eyes, and a lone tear dropped from the corner of her eye. Uzair knew she had gone back to sleep.

“You didn’t kill me, Sairah,” He whispered getting up and fixing the duvet over her, “instead you gave me reasons to live.”

He had no idea why he was saying that when she couldn’t listen to him but maybe that’s why it was easy. It was his lost habit to cheer her mood with his antics. Though he was not the same Uzair anymore, he could give her peace at least.

Nothing had changed much. His eyes still shone with brightness yet the light on his features had dimmed a little bit. Uzair shook hands with her father as his eyes stayed on her for proper three seconds.

She didn’t want to dwell on that feeling, that emotion; the emotion of being alone again. The sadness of Mark’s absence was enough for her but that unusual itch in her heart was leaving her tired.

Every time Sairah looked at Uzair she knew that it would be her last time seeing him. No matter how much she hated that thought she couldn’t help it.

She excused herself from them for a glass of water and wiped the corner of her eyes. How weird was love?

It felt as if she had buried the seed of love in the soil of hatred. But the rain of his one glance sprouted all her buried feelings in no time.

“Mark won’t like seeing you like this”

Sairah silently turned to face Uzair who was holding the water cup for her.

“But you like seeing me like this, don’t you?”

Uzair glanced down for a moment and when he looked up, his eyes were drowned in pain.

“No.” He took a step ahead forcing Sairah to move a little back, “I hate seeing you cry, Sairah. Your tears always seem to cut me.”

“How can I trust you, Uzair? Your actions are always so different from your words.”

Sairah moved from his side and went to her father who was waiting for her at the gate. She would try to never glance back, not at Uzair or not even at her past, again.

“I regret what I did, Sairah. I’m sorry!”

Those were his last words that she tried to ignore, making herself hard as if she didn’t even hear them. But every fiber of her body was echoing that statement.

Maazi

Past

VI

The clouds gathered on the wide expanse of Newcastle, giving a warning of a huge storm on its way. But the residents were too busy to hear the message in the cold breeze.

Sairah took a last observation of the grand hall and covered her lips to hide her smile that crawled up seeing her hard work. It was the Annual Celebration of their library along with the International Book Festival.

Her life again came into a routine after Matthew. Just like Allah always gave her Sabr, this time was no different. Yes, she missed him and his warm smile every day when she entered her library but now Sairah had learned to befriend those memories.

“Don’t tell me you did all of this?”

Sairah turned with a smile to see Uzair standing in awe, looking around him.

She blushed and tucked the loose strand behind her ear, “You like it?” Not liking how she had started behaving in front of him.

“Love it.” Uzair gave his signature smile and then looked at his watch, “Any place where I can finish my work? Have to submit the project tomorrow.”

Sairah nodded while taking him along to the reading room. Those past few weeks became easier only because of the man who was walking beside her and she couldn’t thank Uzair enough for being with her through thick and thin.

She tried a lot to push him away from her life but didn’t know what was his core ingredient. He didn’t listen to her and made a special place for himself. And now when Sairah looked back, it felt like she wouldn’t have survived anything without him.

After a long time, yesterday Sairah went through her treasure box. Just to make a good gift for Uzair to thank him for being her good friend.

“Ken invited himself over, okay with you?”

She knew how chaotic they were together, as replayed her first meeting with them.

“Only if you both promise to be quiet,” Sairah answered with a giggle.

“You all know the drill,” Uzair felt his lips imitating the smile seeing Sairah smiling, looking at the cue card, “The one who answers all the questions correctly will get the lifetime membership of the library.”

The audience went into a roar, the only time of the year when nobody got scolded for yelling, as Sairah had told him. He was off the limits for the quiz. He couldn't remember his books, answering these bookish questions would be too much for him.

“First question, If I had a gun, this poem is written by which poet?”

Only a boy with thick glasses raised his hand, looking around as if someone would shoot him if he gave the wrong answer.

“Yes.”

Sairah's voice boomed around him as she came near the boy and gave him the microphone.

“It's Gig Ryan.”

“Correct answer.”

The hall filled with applause as the boy looked down in shyness. That boy was a specimen, Uzair thought with a smirk while going back to the reading room.

“Mate, just finish your work then go back to your princess.”

“Shut up.” Uzair hit the book on Ken’s head and moved back to his research project.

There were so many moments where he felt the urge to move out on hearing the roars of laughter because he knew Sairah would be in it. Laughing with them or the way her eyes would be shining when someone would give a correct answer.

Uzair bit his lower lip and opened another book on brain study. The way his mind was moving behind Sairah, was dangerous. For God’s sake, he had to complete this project today! But her long hair and that shy smile were something else. How could he think of something else when she was his research project?

Yes. He took it as a challenge, or more like an experiment to see if she could change. But now Uzair felt proud. Proud that Sairah was coming back to normal, she had started smiling and the reason was him.

It was clinical depression she had developed over the years, that started maybe when she was six as per his study. It was the time when she had to leave her hometown because of the civil war, Sairah had told him once when he was dropping her home.

She needed someone in her life who would be with her, who would understand all her mood swings and he was grateful that he became that person for her. Now, the thought of Sairah being with someone else and sharing her secrets created a twisted knot in his gut.

“Finally,” Ken took a big yawn, “let’s go and put them in place.” He suggested making a stack of the books they were using. After long five hours, they finished their work to call it a decent research project.

“You sure she won’t come to know about this fuss?”

“What fuss?”

Uzair asked rolling his fist to move the pain from too much writing. His questioning friend looked too worried.

“Your lies, Uzi. Your behavior with her, it’s all fake.”

“Who will tell her? Also, it’s not what you think,” Uzair gulped, feeling emotional after a long time, “I think I like-”

“Uzair...”

Ken’s widened eyes gave Uzair the proof that his worst nightmare was becoming a reality. His friend may have sensed the grave situation as he left understanding his eye language. He turned around with a normal face only to shatter from seeing Sairah’s tears.

“Sorry...” she sniffed moving his research project file towards him, “I thought you left and forgot this here.”

She put a piece of paper in front of his face, his rough notes where he had jotted everything about her, “I am feeling proud of being your experiment.” Sairah moved a hand over her features, her voice breaking with every word she spoke, “Dr. Uzair Ahmer.”

“Sairah, I can reason out everything.”

“Tell me. What am I, Uzair? A rat? A rat who loses its life just because some scientist decided to test his ideas on it.” Uzair gulped as she wrapped her arms around herself, looking at him in question. Suddenly his words felt too heavy to leave, “Remove my doubts Uzair. Tell me that I’m not a research project for you.”

On his silence, a lone tear escaped her, “Just when I thought I found a good friend in my life...”

At that time Uzair felt the need to pull her and hug her tight, just to remove every ill thing between them but the guilt was eating him alive, not leaving any power to him.

Uzair turned on his heels, not sparing a glance at Sairah as he left the library without any answer. His insides were screaming at him just to look back for one last look at her, a memory of a lifetime. But maybe it was decided, what he would always remember would be her teary face.

Izhaar

Expression

The realization of the stillness and the low sounds of crickets broke his reverie. His hands were around his knees as his eyes tried to look at the far end of the garden. He looked on until his vision blurred.

The best thing about the darkness is that nobody can see you having emotions or feelings. Nobody could judge you. Uzair wanted this. He wanted to cry his heart out with a voice loud enough to tear apart the skies.

He let his tears flow because at this moment he didn't want to stop himself. He didn't cry four years ago because he was wrong. But today Uzair felt he had no chance left to mend things.

"You okay?" Uzair was so lost in his grief that he didn't notice the sound of a heavy metal gate as his father came and sat beside him, "You came after a long time."

"Yeah..." His voice croaked at the end and he cleared his throat to sound fine, "That earthquake was bad, injured many people."

His father nodded and then they both fell into an awkward silence. They never were on proper talking terms, earlier his father liked to keep him in discipline, and later Uzair made himself so busy that he didn't need him. He had seen a change in his father when Uzair got his degree and many times he felt that he needed him, but they both had no idea how to come close.

"You want to eat something?"

His father asked and Uzair shook his head, he didn't want to be alone. His thoughts were cluttered and he had no energy left to go through them once again.

"You want to talk, son?" Uzair's shoulder felt a little touch of warmth from his father and he just looked down.

“I don’t know. I want to, but I feel like I have nothing to say or so much to say all at once.”

“Is this about Sairah Hameed?”

Uzair’s eyes widened on hearing Sairah’s name from his father as he gave him a small smile. “What do you expect me to do, son? You are never home so I go through our library. A long time ago, I found the thesis and the rough notes tucked in it.”

“She’s gone. She didn’t want to see me.” He wiped that sudden teardrop and looked at his father who was looking far away, “And I don’t have guts to go to her. Last few days, I forgot that she would leave me, that I have to be alone once again...”

And then Uzair told everything, from the first moment he saw her to their last words spoken. His heart didn’t want to stop talking about Sairah and felt quite easy to share everything with his dad because he was listening to him.

“After hearing everything I think, she will be coming back.”

Uzair looked down with a humorless laugh. His father had no idea who Sairah Hameed was, forget coming back, she wouldn’t even think of him again.

Sairah held her bag tightly, taking a long breath. The sunset made the sky look as if yellow cotton was scattered.

She hid near the end wall as her eyes found Uzair who was busy talking with some doctor.

He was fine.

Now she could go.

She hated how her heart had twisted everything for her. His words hadn’t left the premises of her mind. Sairah could still hear them ringing inside her and that pain in his voice hadn’t let her sleep for the whole week. That one apology had washed every ill feeling she was knitting for him in her heart. Now, she was feeling only care, protection, and love.

And now she was scared, afraid that this man would do something worse with himself, the grief in his voice had pushed her to think like this.

She moved back towards the parked vehicles. She should now go to her house else her mother would eat her ears off with her worried banter.

“That’s mine, Sairah.”

Sairah put a hand on her mouth to kill the gasp of fear, hearing Uzair’s voice. What was worse than to be found in his hospital and that too beside his car? If Earth could just swallow her right now.

“I came for a check-up.”

“I didn’t ask,” Uzair played with the keychain and Sairah felt a bead of sweat forming on her forehead. “I like Allah’s plans though.”

His eyes were dancing with amusement and she didn’t know why her stomach was dropping.

Was it joy or anger?

“What?”

Sairah tried to grip everything going around her and compose herself after that scary encounter.

“You understand how I felt when I came to meet you at the library. When you didn’t want to see me.”

Sairah looked down as the memories played in front of her eyes. Yes. There were many days when she used to find Uzair waiting outside the library in the evening, his eyes used to plead to hear him but she didn’t pay heed to him because he had hurt her. Hurt her a lot. And one day he stopped coming.

“I didn’t come to meet you. It was my check-up.”

Sairah held the bag strap tightly as she turned her back to Uzair.

“Quite a serious condition mate. Huh!? I’ve been seeing you here for three weeks, regularly.”

She ignored him, though her heart had started beating too loudly. But those loud heartbeats were replaced by heavy footsteps behind her as her elbow was in someone's grip and she was pushed to the wall.

Sairah thought her head would get a heavy bump from the wall but Uzair's hand behind her head had saved her. She could feel the fire on her cheeks as the man in front of her stared into her eyes, she could feel his breath on her face.

"I'm tired, Sairah."

For the last three weeks, he was seeing her. The first time he thought she was really here for the check-up. She had no idea that he could see her from his cabin's window. And then he began to observe her and felt happy when Sairah would wait to have a glance of him and then run away.

It was quite hard to pretend to be busy and ignore her when all he could think of was Sairah who was trying to hide herself near the wall and peeking at him. But today he couldn't resist. He showed too much patience.

The secluded place of the parking lot made their heartbeats even louder in his ears as he looked into her eyes for a moment and then she looked down. This was the time he could speak whatever was in his heart.

"I'm tired, Sairah." Sairah didn't look, he saw her toe making a small pattern on the dirt.

"From the moment I got away from you, those four years were horrible for me. I wasn't able to sleep because..." He took a long breath to gather his guts, "I hurt the only girl who meant so much to me. The girl I had begun to love more than anything else. The girl with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life."

Her fingers curled on his doctor's coat as Uzair heard a low sniff from her. This was the moment when they both looked at each other, their eyes meeting and they both found tears in each other's eyes.

Sairah pushed him a little away from her and quickly wiped her tears, “Can you drop me at my house?” Uzair’s brows furrowed as this was not the statement he was expecting.

For God’s sake, he just confessed!

“And you can talk to my father about our marriage.” Uzair’s surroundings went blur as he couldn’t grasp anything for the time being, “Baba doesn’t like the Australian way so, do it in the Lebanese way.”

He could die right there. Uzair felt he had everything in one place. His heart went into a peaceful state, giving bliss to everything, and in between all of it was Sairah. Standing a little away from him, her features were dancing with amusement as she gave him a bright smile. After a long time!

“Do you want to kill me?” He came near his car where Sairah was waiting for him.

“This is the least I can do after everything you did” Sairah answered as she sat in the front seat and Uzair chuckled, driving towards Sairah’s house.

The Blue Mountains changed their color with pastel shades of orange as the sun set on its journey for farewell. The majesty of the mountains was nearly forgotten by the couple in their talks about everything, their life, their present, and their future. Just like Sairah and Uzair.

Bedaari

Wakening

Epilogue

Sairah was about to remove the pin from her scarf when the door opened with a click, and Uzair entered. They both exchanged a formal smile and moved their gazes away.

It was half past one at night. Sairah moved her index finger over her thumb and watched as her toe moved on the plush beige carpet. She was waiting for Uzair to go to the washroom so she could just remove her scarf.

It was more than awkward. No book taught ‘how to handle these weird somersaults in your gut just after your wedding ceremony’. Yes, they both loved each other but to stay together in the same room felt overwhelming.

“You okay?” Sairah looked up in the mirror and found Uzair’s reflection coming closer to her and holding her upper arms. Not too tightly, just a graze of touch as if he was scared, “You look lost.” He turned her to face him.

She nodded merely, not sure what to say in words. Her mother, the blunt speaker she was, gave her every little detail about marriage and Sairah couldn’t move them away from her mind. Especially in the presence of Uzair.

“Are you nervous?”

Sairah eyed the carpet under her feet, not having the guts to look into this man’s eyes, and she nodded.

She heard a chuckle as a finger under her chin lifted her head, “I’m nervous too.”

“But how can you?” This was the first time she got some guts to speak, maybe Uzair’s attempts to put her at ease were working, “You are a boy...you don’t-”

Uzair’s tender smile stopped her mid-sentence. His smile was beautiful, the one that touched his eyes as he made her sit on the edge of the bed and took a seat beside her.

“Before being a boy, I’m a human and I have the right to go through every sort of emotion that you girls go through.”

Sairah bit her lower lip as a smile bubbled up inside her and she had no way to hide it, so she just looked down. Uzair bent his head to look into her eyes and queried.

She shook her head, “I didn’t know Uzair Ahmer could talk sense.”

On that, Uzair’s laugh echoed around her, “Sairah Hameed should take some credit for this sense.” He held one of her hands, his index finger moving on her knuckles while she just tried to remain stoic, not showing how his touch was affecting her, “I forgot to tell you, you’re looking beautiful.”

His other hand went to the pin at the back of her scarf as his eyes met her surprised ones, “May I?”

Sairah could just die with all the chivalry Uzair was showing. She nodded and turned her head a little to give him easy access. With a tug, her silk scarf came undone revealing her hair in a sleek bun.

It felt odd, to show herself like this to Uzair after a long time. His grip tightened on her hand as he moved forward, putting his lips on her forehead erupting so many senses in her.

Uzair cupped her cheek as his thumb leisurely moved under her eye. When he moved a little back to look into her eyes, Sairah’s heart missed several beats.

“Change if you want, Sairah. Don’t feel uncomfortable around me.”

Sairah smiled, “I’m not.”

Who was she kidding!?

Uzair made the stack of books again on his study table. An entire facade to show himself busy. Though he could give the exact numbers of how many times, Sairah shuffled through her clothes in her luggage.

“Is there any problem, Sairah?”

She quickly shut the suitcase and stood up making a ball of the clothes in her hands, “No.” A hasty reply and in a dash, she were out of his sight.

He shook his head with a chuckle moving towards his cupboard. Uzair changed into his pajamas till Sairah was in the washroom. He dimmed the light and began to wait for his Sairah while starting the room heater as July was showing its weird coldness to the residents of Australia.

Just when he thought of knocking on the washroom door to check on his wife..., which felt unusual while thinking but felt good, Sairah opened the door and took a step back seeing Uzair close to the door.

“I’m sorry.”

Uzair’s heart went into a total frenzy seeing her in this attire. It was not anything revealing but the fact was, he never thought he would see her like this in reality. It was an ankle-length nightgown with a really deep neck that Sairah had successfully covered with her scarf. Her hair was now open, making their beauty known to him.

“I’m going to kill my cousins.” She said with a sniff and moved towards the bed, ignoring him, “I will really...”

Uzair came out of his trance on her weep and found her wiping her tears as she tried to hide her face from him. He took her hands in his and looked at her red face and swollen lips.

“What happened?”

“They packed rubbish in my luggage. I told them I would pack it but my mother...” She stopped in the middle and covered her face as Uzair began to listen to her silent crying.

It would be too much or maybe nothing but he couldn’t let her cry. He spread his hand over her back, biting his lips to hide the smile on her flinching as he made her closer to himself, resting her head on his shoulder.

“We can go shopping tomorrow. Buy whatever you want.” Sairah shook her head, her fist bunching his shirt as he placed his lips on her hair, “You know one thing?”

“What?”

Her voice was at the edge of cry as she looked at him, wiping her face with one hand.

“Your hair was the first thing that made me crazy for you.”

A smile, then a giggle which she hid behind her palm as she looked down with a blush, “Really?”

“Yes. That girl with a long braid would always come in my dreams.” Uzair said, quite happy that he was able to make her smile.

“Stop it.”

Sairah hit his chest as she tried to shy away from him but Uzair held her hand and placed a kiss on her knuckles. “Also, you should know this, I hate seeing you cry. Your tears are unbearable to me.”

“Dr. Uzair Ahmer will always have his way with words.” Sairah watched him with a smile, an odd but beautiful combination of tears and smiles.

“Flattery, Mrs. Uzair Ahmer.” He tucked her hair behind her ear, his hand caressing her cheekbone as he slowly went near her jaw and placed a kiss, earning a tiny gasp.

He could see Sairah was more than scared and nervous in his presence and he didn't want to force her into anything. But seeing her like this in front of him was not easy for him so he had to steal one kiss. Now he should just take a step back.

“C'mon, let's sleep.”

Sairah bit her lower lip and she was sure she tasted the metallic taste of blood. Her mother and cousins had really filled her brain with garbage, dumping every detail of the wedding night and how much of a bad wife she would be if her husband rejected her.

Now even when she didn't want to think about it, she was doing it because Uzair had taken a step back from her and wanted to sleep. He rejected her! What could she do?

She was scared and nervous about everything. It was all new for her, even sharing a room with a man. Sairah looked as Uzair turned off the already dim light and took the other side of the bed. She also lied down, her mind muddled up with so many thoughts.

Uzair's hand on her waist gave goosebumps on her skin as she tried to make out his face in the dark. She turned on her side to face him as he pulled her a little closer.

“You're happy with this marriage, Uzair?”

“I am. Why won't I be? This is the happiest day of my life. You are with me.” Uzair made random circles on her back, “Why are you asking me this? Aren't you happy?”

“I am... Just that. Nothing.”

Sairah didn't know how to share everything that was going around in her mind. But she also knew how she could share everything with her best friend, Uzair. Maybe she could just try.

“My mother told me that I would be a bad wife if my husband rejected me and...”

“And you think I rejected you?” Uzair chuckled, pulling her closer so that she could feel his breath on hers, “God, only I know how much I have to control myself to stay away from you. Just because I don't want to force anything on you.”

“And I think it's mere stupidity to think like that, Sairah. Being a bad wife just because a husband doesn't want to be intimate with you. Marriage is a work of willingness. It should be from both sides. If you're not willing to do anything, I should not force you. It's that simple.”

Sairah smiled in the dark and cupped his face, and maybe it was worth it to show him some affection because of his sensible words. She traced his lips with her fingers and then pecked them.

“Now that's how you're going to test me?”

Uzair groaned and turned. She squealed when she was under him as he nudged her nose with his, her heart missing

several beats.

“Tell me now if you want me to stop because after that there won’t be going back,” Uzair rested his forehead on hers and Sairah closed her eyes feeling his warm breath on her skin, she shook her head as he chuckled, “And I’m joking. Tell me to stop whenever you feel uncomfortable.”

Sairah moved her fingers in his hair and pulled him, caging his lips in a kiss. It was all she read in the books and not at all. At one point she felt they all were right and at another point, it felt like words couldn’t describe the sparks going in her body.

Uzair held her waist with one hand and cupped her face with the other, his lips moving in sync with hers. Sairah kissed his cheek, “I love you, Uzair Ahmer. I don’t regret a single moment spent with you.”

He smiled removing a fringe from her face as he placed a kiss on her forehead and after that, they lost themselves in words, acts of adoration, and whispers of amour as the night covered them in its velvety blanket. The majesty of Blue Mountains was nearly forgotten by the couple, engrossed in each other with their love.

About the Author

Zeba Ali writes clean romance, stories that give people hope and something to think about. She's a reader of romance herself and likes to talk about books to anyone who wants.

She lives in Indore, with her family of five. Her days are filled with trying to balance home, reading, writing and taking care of her one-year-old.

You can check out her social profiles for insights on her writing and reading journey.



Acknowledgements

Well, a book is always the work of a writer but there are so many people that make it possible. This book has been written in 2020. I had taken everyone's suggestions on what type of story they wanted to read and now I have put it in front of you all.

Starting off thanking my Allah for giving me the strength to move forward. Then comes the turn to thank my mummy and papa, who always gave me what I needed and wanted. Thanks for making me able, to do what I dream of.

A big thanks to my husband, Ubaid, your unending support and patient ear to listen my every plot is commendable. Sanno maa, your support and help with everything has pushed me to pursue my dreams when I thought everything would take a back seat. Lateef Khalu, for being my biggest promoter. To my eagle gang, Azzi and Hunnu for guiding me with marketing, to promoting my book and making it happen. Munnu for always being fan of my writing and being my personal fan-boy!

To my beta readers, Ayesha, for being my biggest fan and hyping me up. Rizna for your deep insights on my work. Hunnu for reading my book even though you're not a reader and giving your much needed feedback.

Lastly a big thanks to my cover designer, Wiktorija Sklarek and my editors at Half Baked Beans, you did an amazing job.