



SIYAHİ STORIES · 6 POEMS · FRIENDSHIP

Small Mercies

Nobody assigns you a friend and nobody makes you keep one. That's exactly why it counts.

SIX POEMS · ONE LONG AFTERNOON · FROM THE SIYAHİ ARCHIVE

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Family is a fact you're handed. Love, when it comes, arrives with sirens — everyone can see it coming from a mile off, including you. Friendship is the quiet one. It doesn't announce itself, doesn't require a proposal, doesn't need witnesses. It just sits down next to you one day and stays, and you only notice how load-bearing it's become the day it isn't there. This is a walk through six poems about that specific, undersold kind of love — the one that asks for the least and somehow ends up holding the most.

It doesn't need an occasion to resume

The strange grace of an old friendship is that it doesn't restart from zero. It restarts from wherever you left it, sometimes years later, as if no time passed at all.

पुराना ही था दोस्त जिससे, नयी एक मुलाकात हुई है ...

सच है ये की बाद उसके, हर तनहाई में भी बात हुई है !

शब्द खुद लिखते हैं हम, और धुन आपकी होती है ...

मिलते ज्यादा हो नहीं, ये शिकायत हमारी होती है !

मानता हूं यार मैं, दोस्त है वो प्यार नहीं ...

दोस्ती इतनी अच्छी हो तो, इससे बेहतर संसार नहीं!

तारीफ नहीं करूंगा ज्यादा, इंसान हो भगवान नहीं ...

इतना जरूर केह देता हूँकी, अपने हो, मेहमान नहीं !

बोल तो दिया सब, अब सिर्फ ये केहता हूँ...

हमेशा मिलते रहो तब, मुश्किल में जब रहता हूँ!

खूबसूरत तो आप हो ही, हमेशा बस खुशहाल रहो ...

खिल उठें आप साथ जिसके, पास आपके, हमेशा वो इंसान रहो...

खुशिया होंगी गम भी होंगे, बिलकूल ना परेशान रहो,

हर लमहा एक छोटी ही सही पर चेहरे पर मुस्कान रहे!

— an old friend, one new meeting, and suddenly even solitude talks back. He's careful to name what this isn't — not love, not worship of a person turned near-divine — only the plainer, sturdier claim: you're not a guest here, you belong. [Read “Purana Hi Tha Dost” in the book →](#)

Notice the correction he makes mid-poem — *dost hai wo, pyar nahi*, a friend, not a lover — as if worried the warmth might be mistaken for something more dramatic. It doesn't need to be. Friendship gets to be exactly this size and still be enormous.

II

And it doesn't need to be serious to be real

Ask anyone what they actually do with their closest friends and the honest answer is rarely profound. It's mostly teasing. It's mostly nonsense. That's not a lesser form of love — it might be the purest one, because nobody performs nonsense for someone they're trying to impress.

Hua pyar to jata denge, kuch tafleefein bata denge...

Kuch aap kro gustakhi, thoda hum bhi sata denge...

Dosti ki yehi to tasveer hai...

Kagaj aap le aao bs, rangon se hum saja denge!

— if love happens, we'll hear about it, complaints and all — and we'll tease you a little too. That's the whole picture of friendship: you show up with the blank paper, we'll fill it in with colour. [Read “Hua Pyar To” in the book →](#)

That last line is doing more work than it looks like. *You bring the paper, we'll colour it in* — friendship as collaboration on a project neither of you designed alone. You supply the raw material of your life; they supply the running commentary that makes it bearable.

III

But underneath the teasing, something is actually keeping score

Not score in a petty sense — score in the sense that memory is doing accounting work you didn't ask it to do, quietly filing away who showed up and who didn't, long before you consciously notice the pattern.

एका क्षणात सगळ्या आठवणी, डोळ्यासमोर दर्शन देतात...

पक्षी चाललेत उडून म्हंटल्यावर, अंगावरती शहारे येतात ...

कठीण काळात मदत करून जे आपल्या झोळीत पुण्य घेतात...

जीवन काय, जगतात सगळे, अर्थ त्याला मित्र देतात...

— in one moment, every memory arrives at once; even the thought of birds leaving sends a shiver through the body. Everyone lives a life, but it's friends who hand that life its actual meaning — especially the ones who helped when it was hard, quietly banking good karma while they were at it. [Read “Eka Kshnat” in the book →](#)

Two lines in Marathi, and they contain an entire theory of memory: it isn't the big events that resurface first, it's the felt sense of who was standing next to you during them. Birds

leaving is nothing. Birds leaving while someone specific was watching with you – that's a memory with teeth.

IV

Which is how you end up loving someone with no name for it

Here the book gets unusually honest about a kind of closeness that doesn't fit any category cleanly – too intimate to be ordinary friendship, never spoken of as anything more.

Azmane se khul jati hai rishte ki buniyaad, itrane se nhi...

Khokar bhi rehta hai har pal koi yaad, mit jaane se nhi...

Shayad kuch bhi nhi thha humare beech...

Par bina palak jhapke bheed mei bhi neeji batein hoti thhi...

Wo ankhein yaad hai... batein yaad hai...

Rishte ko naam nhi thha shayad par ehmiyat jrur thhi...

Badahpan nhi, masumiyat jrur thhi...

Na humne kbhi btaya na kisine puchha...

Sukhi mitti ko sajane wali wo barish ki bund thhi...

Hath tham kar baithta thha... duniya hi alag lagti thhi...

Pta hai wo duniya meri nhi thhi par kasamse kafi khoob thhi...

Rona bilkul nhi chahunga kbhi, par ant tak har kvita rula deti hai...

Wo yaad, wo nazdiki, har gum bhula deti hai...

Pichhe mudkar ab sab sapna lgta hai...

Najane ab wapas kab nind ayein...

– a bond gets tested, not flaunted, before you know what it's actually made of. Maybe there was never a name for what this was – only private conversation held steady in the middle of a crowd, eyes that are still remembered, hands once held that made an

unfamiliar world feel, honestly, quite wonderful. He doesn't want to cry writing this, but every poem manages it by the end anyway. [Read “Azmane Se” in the book →](#)

This is the longest, most unguarded poem in the set, and it's placed here deliberately – the emotional centre of the whole piece. Every other poem here is confident about what friendship is. This one admits that sometimes you don't get a clean label, only the unmistakable feeling that something mattered.

v Which is exactly why you have to be careful who gets this close

Having just admitted how much an unnamed bond can hold, the book pivots – almost defensively – into practical advice. If closeness costs this much, it can't be handed out freely.

Jinho ne baat karna bhi nahi seekha,
Unse thhodi mulakat rakhenge...
Na jinho ne mushkil wakht dekha,
Unse thhodi jazbaat sikhenge...

Ye badi ehem soochi hai yaron,
Jara dhyan se chunna...
Socho, sath jinke jeekar kabil bane hai hum,
Unhe thhodi khudse durr rakhenge!

– those who never learned how to talk, keep at a polite distance. Those who never faced real hardship, don't expect them to teach you feeling. This is an important list, friends – choose carefully. And whoever you became capable alongside – obviously, keep them close, not far. [Read “Jinho Ne Baat Karna” in the book →](#)

Notice the closing line does something quietly clever – it says *keep them thhodi khudse durr rakhenge* (keep them a little away from yourself), but means the opposite of what it says

about the people who mattered: don't you dare let them drift. It's a poem about boundaries that ends by refusing one.

VI

Because you're at exactly the age where this still needs figuring out

The set closes not with an answer but with an honest confession of being caught in the middle – too old for careless friendship, not old enough to have it all worked out.

Hum dekhenge!

Bachhe nahi hai, jo bas aagey dekhenge...

Budhe thodi hue, ki bas pichhe dekhenge...

Beech kahin lakir kheechlo,
bas wahin ke jawan hai hum...

Rishte aur kam ka santulan,
pata nahin hum kahase seekhenge!

– we shall see! Not children who only look forward, not old enough to only look back. Draw the line anywhere in between and that's exactly where we stand – young, mid-figuring-out. Where anyone is supposed to learn the balance between relationships and responsibility remains, honestly, an open question. [Read “Hum Dekhenge” in the book →](#)

Six poems, and not one grand declaration among them – just an old friend resuming a conversation, a joke about bringing paper to colour in, a shiver at the memory of birds, a bond too private for a name, a warning to guard it, and an honest shrug about never quite mastering the balance. That shrug might be the truest thing said in the whole set. Nobody masters this. You just keep showing up, and hope the people worth keeping keep showing up too.

Return → Lightness → Memory → The Unnamed Bond → Discernment → The Ongoing
Balance

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Siyahi by Saumitra S. Phatak

Original poems in Hindi, Marathi, and English.

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