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Preface

Life is filled with moments that leave an imprint on our hearts—whispers of emotions, echoes of memories, and the silent presence of something that lingers between us. This book, *Between Us, Something Lingers*, is an exploration of those unspoken feelings, the intangible yet profound connections that shape our relationships and experiences.

Within these pages, you will find stories, reflections, and insights that delve into the beauty and complexity of human bonds. Some encounters are fleeting yet unforgettable; some words remain unspoken but resonate deeply. This book is an attempt to capture those delicate moments, to give voice to the emotions that often remain in the shadows.

As you embark on this journey, I invite you to embrace each chapter with an open heart. Perhaps, in these words, you will find pieces of your own story, reminders of past emotions, or even newfound perspectives on the ties that bind us together.

May this book serve as a gentle reminder that between us, something always lingers—be it love, longing, or the silent understanding that words sometimes fail to express.

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A Thousand Miles Apart

The morning was unusually quiet in the small village on the outskirts of Medan. Loura stood by the wooden gate of her family's house, her hands clasped tightly in front of her.

The bus that would take Tom to the airport was already parked by the road, its engine humming softly.

"This is really happening, isn't it?" Loura asked, her voice barely above a whisper. Tom, standing just a few feet away, adjusted the strap of his backpack. His expression was a mix of excitement and sadness.

"It is," he said, his voice steady despite the knot forming in his chest. "Jogja is waiting, Lou."

Loura forced a smile. "I know. I just... I didn't think it would feel this hard."

He stepped closer, reaching out to take her hands in his. "Hey," he said softly, "It won't be forever. It's just two years. You'll be busy with your own studies here, and I'll be back before you know it."

“But two years feels like a lifetime when you’re not here,” she admitted, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

Tom cupped her face gently, his thumbs brushing away a tear that had escaped. “We’ve been through so much together, Lou. This is just another challenge. I promise, we’ll get through it.”

She nodded, even though her heart ached at the thought of him leaving. “Promise me one thing,” she said, her voice trembling.

“Anything.”

“Don’t let the distance change us.”

“I promise,” he said firmly. “Nothing will ever change how I feel about you.”

The bus driver honked the horn, signaling that it was time to leave. Tom sighed, glancing back at the bus before looking at her again.

“I have to go,” he said reluctantly.

Loura nodded, forcing herself to let go of his hands. "Take care of yourself, okay? Don't forget to eat properly and call me whenever you can."

He chuckled, pulling her into a tight hug. "You sound like my mom."

"Someone has to remind you," she teased, though her voice cracked.

As he stepped back and climbed onto the bus, Loura stood frozen, her hands clutching the gate tightly. Tom waved from the window, and she waved back, her tears finally spilling over as the bus pulled away.

The months passed slowly.

Loura buried herself in her studies at the local university in Medan, trying to focus on her dream of becoming a teacher. But no matter how busy she kept herself, she couldn't shake the emptiness she felt without Tom by her side.

Their nightly calls became her lifeline.

“Lou,” Tom’s voice came through the phone one evening, his tone warm and familiar.

“Guess what?”

“What?” she asked, a smile spreading across her face at the sound of his excitement.

“I aced my first presentation! My professor said it was one of the best he’d seen this semester.”

“That’s amazing, Tom!” she said, genuinely proud of him. “I knew you’d do great.”

“It’s because of you,” he said, his voice softer now.

“You’ve always believed in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself.”

She laughed lightly. “You give me too much credit.”

“It’s true,” he insisted. “And I miss you, Lou. Every day.”

“I miss you too,” she said, her heart aching with the weight of his absence.

“But I’m proud of you, Tom. You’re doing what you’ve always dreamed of.”

“So are you,” he reminded her.

“You’re chasing your dreams too. That’s why we’re doing this, right? To build a future together.”

“Yeah,” she said, her voice steady despite the tears threatening to fall. “Together.”

A year passed, and the distance grew easier to bear, though the longing never faded. Loura visited Tom in Jogja once during her semester break, and those few days were like a breath of fresh air. They explored the city together, from the bustling Malioboro Street to the serene Borobudur Temple.

“Jogja suits you,” Loura said one evening as they walked along a quiet street.

“It’s beautiful,” Tom agreed, his hand intertwined with hers.

“But it’s missing something.”

“What’s that?” she asked, tilting her head.

“You,” he said simply.

She blushed, nudging him playfully. “Stop being so cheesy.”

“It’s true,” he insisted. “Jogja could have all the beauty in the world, but it’ll never feel like home without you.”

As the second year drew to a close, the excitement of Tom’s return began to build. Loura counted down the days, imagining what it would be like to finally have him back.

One evening, as she was studying in her room, her phone buzzed with a message from Tom.

“Two more weeks. I can’t wait to see you, Lou.” Her heart soared. She quickly typed a reply “Me neither. I’ve missed you so much.”

When the day finally arrived, Loura stood at the same gate where they had said goodbye two years ago. This time, she was waiting for his arrival.

The sound of a motorbike approaching made her heart race. She stepped forward, and there he was taller, slightly more tanned, but still the same Tom she had fallen in love with.

“Lou,” he said, his smile brighter than the morning sun.

She ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck. “Welcome home, Tom.”

“I’m home,” he said, holding her tightly. “And I’m never leaving again.”

The Melody Of You

In the heart of a bustling city, where the streets hummed with the sounds of life, there was a small, quaint café tucked away on a quiet corner. Its faded blue door and flower-laden window boxes drew in passersby, inviting them to escape the chaos outside. This café was known as “Melody,” a name that resonated with the tunes of a local musician who played there every Friday night.

Lily, a passionate violinist, had just moved to the city, chasing her dream of becoming a professional musician. Each Friday, she spent her evenings at Melody, listening to the enchanting music of a man named Ethan, whose guitar melodies seemed to weave a spell over the audience. She admired him from afar, captivated by his talent and the way he poured his soul into every note.

One rainy Friday evening, Lily arrived at the café, her violin case slung over her shoulder. The familiar scent of coffee and pastries enveloped her as she took her usual seat in the corner. The café was busier than usual, and she could barely see Ethan through the

crowd. Just as he began to play, the lights flickered, and the power went out, plunging the café into darkness.

A collective gasp echoed through the room, but Ethan didn't miss a beat. He continued to play, his fingers dancing over the strings of his guitar, filling the space with warmth and magic. Inspired, Lily decided to join him. Taking a deep breath, she stood up and stepped into the spotlight, her heart racing.

"May I?" she asked, her voice barely audible over the gentle strumming.

Ethan looked up, surprised but intrigued. He nodded, and she took her place beside him, her violin in hand. Together, they created a beautiful harmony—a blend of strings and guitar that transcended the darkness. The café patrons fell silent, captivated by the unexpected duet.

As the last notes lingered in the air, the lights flickered back on, revealing a room full of applause. Lily's cheeks flushed with excitement and embarrassment as she locked eyes with Ethan. He

smiled, a warm, inviting smile that made her heart flutter.

“Wow, that was amazing!” he exclaimed, his enthusiasm infectious. “I didn’t know you played.”

“I—I do,” Lily stammered, still overwhelmed. “I’ve always wanted to play with you.”

“Then why don’t we make it a regular thing?” Ethan suggested, his eyes sparkling. “I could use a talented violinist for my sets.”

Lily’s heart soared at the thought. “I’d love that!”

From that night on, they became inseparable. They spent countless evenings practicing together, sharing stories, and laughing over cups of coffee. As they collaborated, their music blossomed, and so did their friendship. Each note they played brought them closer, revealing layers of vulnerability and passion.

One evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a golden hue over the city, they found themselves sitting on the café’s rooftop, the sounds of the city below fading into the background. They shared

their dreams and fears, their laughter echoing in the twilight.

“Do you believe in love at first sight?” Ethan asked, his gaze locked on hers.

Lily felt her heart race. “I don’t know. But I believe in connections that feel like home.”

Ethan leaned closer, his voice barely a whisper. “I think we have that connection.”

In that moment, the world around them faded away. Their lips met softly, a gentle promise of what was to come. The kiss was sweet, filled with the melodies they had created together, harmonizing their hearts.

As the weeks turned into months, their bond deepened. They performed together at various venues, their chemistry evident to everyone who watched. Yet, amidst their growing success, they faced challenges—long rehearsals, late nights, and the pressures of their rising careers.

One night, after a particularly grueling performance, tensions ran high. Lily, exhausted and overwhelmed,

snapped at Ethan. “You don’t understand how hard this is for me!” she exclaimed, frustration spilling over.

Ethan, taken aback, stepped back. “I’m trying to support you! But you keep pushing me away!”

The silence that followed was heavy, filled with unspoken words and hurt feelings. That night, they parted ways with a rift between them, uncertainty clouding their hearts.

Days turned into weeks, and they drifted apart. The café felt empty without their music filling the air, and Lily often found herself replaying their last argument in her mind. She missed Ethan more than she cared to admit, realizing that the connection they shared was worth fighting for.

One evening, she gathered her courage and returned to Melody. The café was bustling, but Ethan was nowhere to be found. Heart heavy, she approached the owner, an elderly woman named Clara.

“Ethan... where is he?” Lily asked, her voice trembling.

Clara smiled knowingly. “He’s been waiting for you, dear. He’s been practicing every night, hoping you’d come back.”

Lily’s heart swelled with hope. She rushed to the rooftop, her favorite spot, and there he was, guitar in hand, playing a soft tune that echoed her own feelings.

“Ethan,” she called out, her voice breaking.

He looked up, surprise and relief flooding his features. “Lily!”

They met in the middle, their hearts racing as they embraced tightly. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, tears streaming down her cheeks. “I didn’t mean what I said. I need you.”

Ethan cupped her face, wiping her tears with his thumbs. “I need you too. Let’s not let anything come between us again.”

With that, they kissed, a sweet reunion that felt like a promise. They returned to the café, their hearts intertwined, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead—together.

Their music resumed, stronger than ever, resonating through the city, a melody of love, resilience, and unity. As they played, it became clear that their hearts were forever harmonized, a beautiful duet that would never fade away.

The First Moment

Caroline raced down the long hall of her friend Amelie's apartment. She was running a little late for the small gathering Amelie hosted that night. Her heels clicking against the wooden floor matched the beat of her heart racing. But her steps came to a sudden stop.

The man leaning against the wall at the other end of the hallway rolled the sleeves of his shirt up. His brown hair was slightly tousled, as if the wind had run its hands through it, but the tousled look really suited him. Time seemed to come to a crawl for Caroline. Her gaze involuntarily met his hazel eyes—a pair of warm, soothing eyes that appeared to shoot directly into her heart.

The man looked just as surprised to see Caroline. His lips twitched into the faintest of smiles, and that instant seemed like an eternity caught in time. “Oh, excuse me. Were you trying to pass?” he said, his tone low and soft, nearly a whisper, yet it shot a ripple through Caroline's chest.

Caroline blinked, snapped out of her daze. “Oh, it’s fine,” said her voice, very low. This time she forgot to look away for a moment. Who was he? Why was he here? Her head was spinning with questions.

The exchange was followed by a look that lasted a little too long, until the door to Amelie’s apartment opened wide and their spell was broken by Amelie’s bright voice. Caroline walked in the door, but that first instant remained with her. The man’s eyes tracked Caroline until they both melted into the warm bustle of Amelie’s gathering.

Caroline thought that would be their last meeting. A few days later, however, she found him again. Now there he was out in a big tree on campus, camera out, immersed once again in searching for something invisible. Caroline froze, stunned by the coincidence’s beauty — one so perfect that it didn’t seem like coincidence.

But she didn’t approach him. She kept at arm’s length as he lost himself in his own universe. From that day forward, Caroline started seeing him more

frequently — at the library, at a little café close to the faculty buildings or sitting quietly in the campus gardens. But she never had the guts to say 'hi'.

What Caroline didn't realize was that the man from the hallway, William, noticed her too. When she sat in the corner of the library with her books, or when she laughed with her friends at the café, his eyes would often follow her. He recognized her from afar, but like Caroline, he had his feelings locked up and wouldn't say a word.

Days became weeks and weeks became months. Their separate lives continued, passing by one another, a glance here, a glance there but none converging. There developed, instead, between them an unacknowledged affection, a kind of fondness neither wanted to articulate. But fate was determined to separate them.

Finally, Caroline graduated and moved out of the campus for a new chapter in her life. William also relocated to another city for his career. They never spoke again after that first moment in Amelie's hallway. But in their memories, beneath the flurry of things to do

and all the consternation that life brings to bear on those memories, there was a small place kept clear, a moment of connection that must have hung around in the air like something waiting to be seen, quietly eternal.

They would never be more than platonic lovers, but their story was the romance of silent admiration turned beautiful, the romance of yearning that never satiated. Caroline and William continued their own endless journey of their lives, far from each other but somehow connected by the otherworldly strings of that first instant — a moment, however long most would consider it, a tiny fragment of evermore.

Pixel Love

Reya and Axel were two teenagers from completely different worlds, yet they were inseparable. Reya, a hardcore gamer who never went anywhere without her beloved pink cap, was known for her cold demeanor in real life but shone brightly in the virtual realm. Meanwhile, Axel, a stylish young man with a mischievous smile, carried warmth wherever he went. However, behind his cheerful personality lay a dark past he tried to keep hidden.

They often met at a retro café called Pixel Space—a sanctuary where they shared stories, played games, and momentarily escaped the struggles of the real world.

That night, rain drizzled against the windows of Pixel Space, the neon blue and purple lights reflecting off the puddles on the street, creating a warm yet melancholic atmosphere. Reya sat in her usual corner, wearing her signature pink cap, her fingers flying across the buttons of her portable console. Her face was serious, but a faint unease lingered in her eyes.

“Don’t tense up like that, Reya. You’ll end up blowing up your game,” Axel teased as he appeared out of nowhere, his trademark grin lighting up the room. He plopped into the seat across from her, sliding over two glasses of the café’s signature drink, Pixel Potion. “You need this.”

Reya let out a small huff but accepted the drink. “Thanks, but I can handle it on my own. Not everyone hides behind a fake smile like you, Axel.”

“Hey, my smile’s genuine, you know,” Axel replied, pretending to be offended. “But if you’d like, I could stop smiling and get all gloomy like you. Maybe we’d finally look like a perfect match?”

Reya glared at him, though a slight smirk tugged at the corner of her lips. As annoying as Axel could be, he always had a way of lightening the mood.

Pixel Space had become a second home for the two of them—a cozy café filled with holographic-lit tables, retro gaming posters adorning the walls, and soft chiptune music flowing from the speakers. It was their

refuge, a place where they could forget the weight of the world.

But that night felt different. Axel, who was usually brimming with energy, seemed unusually subdued. After a few moments of silence, he finally spoke.

“Reya, I need to tell you something,” he said, his voice quieter than usual.

Reya paused her game, raising an eyebrow. “What is it? Did you lose another bet?”

Axel let out a small laugh. “No, it’s... more serious than that.”

He took a deep breath before continuing. “I’ve been diagnosed with a serious medical condition. The doctor says... I only have about a year left.”

His words hung in the air like a weight neither of them could lift. Reya stared at Axel, searching his face for any hint of his usual joking nature. But his gaze was too honest, too heavy.

“You’re joking, right?” Reya’s voice was barely above a whisper.

Axel shook his head. “I wish I were.”

Reya looked down at the table, unsure of what to say for the first time.

“That’s why I’ve made a list of things I want to do before my time runs out,” Axel said, forcing a smile as his eyes glistened. “And I need your help to complete it.”

Reya sighed deeply before nodding. “Alright. I’ll help you. But you need to know one thing, Axel,” she said firmly.

“What’s that?”

“You’re not going anywhere without a fight,” she replied, her eyes blazing with determination. “And I’ll be right here to make sure you win.”

The weeks that followed were filled with adventures Reya had never imagined. They entered a gaming tournament, created viral videos, and even tracked down a rare retro gaming console Axel wanted

to gift to his estranged younger sister. But amidst their adventures, trouble began brewing.

Unbeknownst to them, someone was watching—a shadow from Axel's past. Enter Magnus, a former friend turned rival, who once shared Axel's passion for gaming but had now turned to the darker side of the industry. Magnus ran an underground gaming ring that exploited young talents, and he wasn't pleased to see Axel shining in the light while he lurked in the shadows.

Magnus's motives weren't just rooted in jealousy. Axel had once exposed Magnus's illegal activities, leading to the collapse of his early ventures. Now, Magnus wanted revenge.

It started subtly. Axel's accounts were hacked, and strange messages began appearing on their shared gaming forum. Then, during the finals of a major gaming tournament, Magnus sabotaged their equipment, nearly costing Reya and Axel the victory.

"This isn't a coincidence," Reya said, her voice icy as she examined the hacked console. "Someone's targeting us."