

Priyal Yadav – Winner of All India Short Story Competition 2016
Kloud9 Magazine

Our creative writer, Priyal Yadav from class XI, won the first prize in the All India Short Story Competition 2016 under the senior segment category of the Kloud9 magazine. Her article “CALL ME A DORK, SWEETHEART” was published in the December 2016 edition of the Kloud9 magazine.

Continue to unleash your writing potential Priyal! Best wishes from Team TOS!



The image shows the cover of Kloud9 magazine, Vol. 1, Issue 8, December 2016. The cover features a portrait of Priyal Yadav, a Class XI student from The Orchid School, Baner, Pune, Maharashtra. She is the winner of the All India Short Story Competition 2016, Senior Segment, First Prize. The title of her story, "CALL ME A DORK, SWEETHEART...", is prominently displayed in large, bold letters. The cover also includes a graphic of a hand holding a pen and a ribbon award. The story text is visible on the cover, starting with "As he walked down towards the podium, sweat broke out on his forehead and he began to have trouble breathing. Anees knew that it was not a heart attack that he was experiencing; as a matter of fact, it would have been more warmly accepted than this speech that he was being forced to deliver. The staring of the audience burnt holes in the back of his head, building up his anxiety and the sound of soft sniffling, as clear as bullet shots that filled the room, made the lump in his throat more painful and nearly forced the tears out of his eyes. He patted himself mentally for choosing a place at the back as his feet approached the podium slowly. His mind was reeling with words and phrases that he knew he would forget as soon as he set foot at the podium, but it gave him something to focus on besides the pain; and at this moment, any distraction was welcome. He really did not want to be in this situation, or, as he forced himself to believe, he was not supposed to be here. All the events that had occurred in the short span of the past seven days were still unfathomable to the deepest sections of his mind and all he wanted to do was to crawl into a dark corner and wait for his favourite person to come and get him out. Where was Liza when he needed her the most? Had they not promised each other about being there for the other in the darkest of times? Anees had deemed it necessary to block out all talk of her for the past entire week. As he approached the two people whom Liza loved the most in the world, he remembered his first meeting with them. They had not liked him initially. Even though he was of the same age as their

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daughter, he was the exact opposite of the person they wanted around her. He was tall with the appearance of a lanky yet strongly built young man and a great sense of fashion, although he wore mostly black. He had come off as an arrogant young lad with a very gothic sense, because of his quirk to talk to only those who interested him. But, appearances can be very deceptive and the family knew that, for now, the same people extended their hands towards him: for relief from the overwhelming feeling of loss, he supposed. Relief; it was something he needed himself and at that moment did not have any to offer.

Once at the podium, he turned around to stare into the grieving eyes in the small church and while he was being introduced, he realized the amount of truth that the moment held. He felt an uneasy tug in the pit of his stomach the moment he had to talk about Liza and his memories with her, as if he were bursting the little bubble of their intertwined lives. It had struck him earlier that from now on he would never be able to say that "Liza Toulson is my best



friend." He would have to modify it to "Liza Toulson used to be my best friend." Although it was just a small grammatical change, Anees could have never fathomed the amount of pain it would physically cause him to say it out loud.

He truly loathed her for making him go through this. He was too young to do this, but then again, he thought, she was too young to leave us all alone here. No one in their wildest dreams should ever be asked to make a speech on an occasion like this. Joking about a speech like this with your friends, he realized, was probably the easiest thing to do, but when you were actually forced to do so, it was as if all the pain of the world had unleashed itself on you. As he talked on and on about what Liza meant to him, all that had been drilled into his brain about death went further from his grasp.

Honestly, he knew that if someone told him that she was in a better place now, he would not believe them because his conscience had finally begun coming to terms with her permanent exit from his life and existence. He knew that there was no 'Elysium' or 'Fields of Asphodel' or 'Grounds of Punishment' that her soul, if there was such a thing, had been sent to. He realized that no matter what theo-

ry he had been taught or chose to follow about the dead, she would remain a bewitching memory—or, as she herself would have said in her primal tone, an uncanny amnesia—that he would refresh from time to time with nostalgia in his heart and a bittersweet smile adorning his face.

"Liza," he said, his voice breaking, full of barely concealed emotion, "is now a memory I am sure I will enshrine in my heart for the rest of my life. I am unsure of what I will long for more, her ability to find humour in the worst of situations or the manner in which she could express the deepest of her feelings in the simplest of sentences; but I am sure that I will give anything to have her give me one more cuddle or whisper something into my ear one last time, and that I will mourn this loss every day for the rest of my life. I know that the last words she ever said to me are not something witty or great, but they have a special place in my heart, just as deep as Liza; and those, I will keep secure within me, hearing her voice repeat them over at least once a day for just about as long as I live."

He stepped off the podium with a deep sigh and the tears he had been holding back cascaded down

his cheeks with every new thought that occurred.

As he walked back, his mind swirled with the times he knew could never be recreated; he fully accepted her cessation from his life. There was no more a Liza who would call him in the middle of the night—absolutely wasted—asking to be picked up from a club. There was no more a Liza who would call him crying, cursing for hours at the idiot who broke her heart. There was no more a Liza who would persuade him to take her to a sale at the mall and spend three boring hours while she tried on every piece of clothing that was available in her size. There was no more a Liza who would laugh or cry, or cuddle on weekends or swim in random lakes or dance around or goof around or simply lie about and talk about nonsensical things with him.

The acceptance was hard; it had taken him a little over an entire week to do it, but it was better than being in denial, with everyone's 'deepest sympathies' being with you.

Unlike all the others before him, Anees had not told anyone what Liza had last said to him. He knew they would undermine the statement as something silly and it would lose all its meaning. She had told him that he was a dork, an irritating one at that, with a smile brighter than the sun itself.

It was a simple sentence really, but to him, it meant the world. He knew that it held all the adoration she had for him. Although termed as an insult, the words were supplemented in an attempt to conceal the clichéd 'you are too cute to be around here.' Now, as Anees sat back in the place he was occupying earlier, a soft smile crept across his face and whispered into the cool church air the reply he would have given her: "Call me a dork until your heart is content, sweetheart. You and I both know that 'You love me and I you...'"

('dork' is slang for a stupid, awkward person—Editor)

