



*The*  
**NAMELESS**  
*relationship*

**PREETI SHENOY**

**The Nameless Relationship**  
**Preeti Shenoy**

Westland Publications Private Limited

61, II Floor, Silverline Building, Alapakkam Main Road, Maduravoyal,  
Chennai 600 095

93, I Floor, Sham Lal Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002

This ebook edition first published by Westland Publications Private  
Limited 2018

Copyright © Preeti Shenoy 2018

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organisations, places,  
events and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or  
used fictitiously.

Cover design for this ebook edition copyright © Westland Publications  
Private Limited 2018

All rights reserved

# Contents

[The Nameless Relationship](#)

# The Nameless Relationship

## Preeti Shenoy

Some of the best relationships that exist in this world are nameless ones. They crouch behind those sanctioned by society: the legitimate ones, the ones that you can define because they are approved, allowed, understood and *normal*. There are names for those relationships. Fiancé–fiancée, husband–wife, boyfriend–girlfriend, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, cousin, maternal aunt, paternal grandfather, anything that you can think of, the entire gamut—neatly labelled, sorted, slotted and defined.

I wonder sometimes if Dhiraj and I give a name to whatever it is that we have between us, legitimise this somehow—though I know that it is impossible—whether it will take a different turn. I am certain it will. But I am happy with the way things are. Any more and it will crumble, fall apart. He refuses to see it that way though, and it is he who wants to change it.

‘What are you thinking about?’ he asks as he rolls over and props himself up on his left arm, tracing a line on my face with his right, moving from my forehead to my nose and then my lips.

With my lips pursed I nip his finger and he lets it remain in my mouth. I bite a little hard.

‘Ouch,’ he says. ‘That hurt.’

I release his finger from between my teeth and take his hand in mine.

‘God, you are breathtakingly beautiful,’ he says as he attempts to cup my naked breasts, but I pull the duvet up to my chest and I turn to face him.

He is so young; his eyes shine eagerly and the way he scours for answers, looking into my eyes, searching, yearning, longing—a strange

mixture of apprehension and hope, excitement and unsureness, lust and love all mingled together, makes me stop breathing for a second. Most of all, it is his youth that breaks my heart.

‘Look, this really cannot go on. I have been telling you that,’ I say.

His expression changes instantly. He presses his lips together and narrows his eyes.

‘I’ve told you earlier and I am telling you again. I know this is the real thing for me. I am in love with you, Lithika.’

I pause and draw in a breath. ‘There is no place in my vocabulary for things like love. That is for young people like you. Come on, Dhiraj, I am pushing fifty-three—you are just a few years older than my son. And we have been through this so many times. I cannot leave my husband.’

‘Do you love him?’

‘That is a meaningless question. You don’t walk out on someone you have spent thirty years with.’

‘Look, Lithika, be honest at least with yourself. You cannot stand the guy. Why do you continue in it then? It is not as though your children will not understand. They are adults themselves. It’s not like the divorce is going to be messy or even contested.’

‘What divorce, Dhiraj? When have I ever mentioned that word? Over and over I have made it clear to you that this thing between us can never go anywhere.’

‘It has gone beyond anywhere, Lithika. It has been, what, seven years now? It has only grown. At that time you wanted me to wait, saying that I would fall for a woman my age. At twenty-nine, I thought that perhaps there was some truth in what you said. But now I know—I just cannot imagine anyone taking your place in my life. Just do it. Leave your husband. Look, if it’s your children you are afraid of facing, I will talk to both of them. Rashi really will be happy for you, and so will Maanav. They remember the kind of toxicity they suffered growing up. They will only be happy if you break away from him.’

‘Dhiraj, all marriages are like that. I might have led you to believe that things are more terrible than they really are. But you must remember that it is only when I had a fight with him and was feeling desperate that I turned to you, confided in you. I have never mentioned the happy times we have had together.’

‘Come off it. Don’t make excuses for that wimp of a guy. I have no respect for him.’

‘Shut up, Dhiraj. I know how you feel about him, but I will not have you talking about Neel this way.’

I get out of bed and start putting on my clothes. He gazes at me transfixed.

‘I will never get tired of looking at you,’ he says as I fasten the straps of my bra, pull up my salwar and slip my kurti over my head.

This is what I miss in my relationship with my husband. At sixty, he seems to have reached a place of complacency. He keeps himself busy with his golf and his evening visits to Bangalore Club where he plays rummy with his set of friends—all people like him, wealthy businessmen from ‘old Bangalore families’, which is a closed circle by itself; one you have to be privileged enough to have been born into or married into; pedigreed, perfect, proper ‘gentlemen’ who love their whiskey, their cards, their immaculate homes and sometimes their spouses too. I find their discussions revolving around politics and golf and gossip about different people in their circles barely tolerable. When I am with them I nod, trying hard to focus, stifling yawns and secretly checking my watch or my phone. The other wives seem to enjoy it, though. I idly wonder if any of them are like me—having this ‘thing’ with someone seventeen years younger than them. I doubt it. They all look their age and, from the way they behave, I’m sure none of them would be inclined to seek pleasure outside their marriage. But then again I guess they probably think the same thing about me. I am good at hiding what I feel, and pretending to be the perfect wife—I have done it for so many years, you see. And nobody has any clue, which suits me fine.

When I am with Dhiraj, it is so different. We talk about yoga, fitness, movies, the latest trends in the tech world, some Hollywood celebrity gossip, my plans for my business, his work and many other things. The conversation never stops. Dhiraj makes me feel young—makes me forget my age, makes me feel alive. Every bone in my body sings in ecstasy after a ‘session with Dhiraj’. That is how I have termed it inside my head. He calls it ‘amazing sex—the best he has had’. Whenever he says that I tell him he needs to get more experience. Secretly, though, I am thrilled. He is the elixir of youth and I drink him in hungrily, revelling in the attention he showers on me.

He is still young enough to believe that happy endings are possible. But at my age, I know that is just optimistic, foolish thinking. The very thought of telling my adult children about him fills me with dread. It's all good that they live on their own and have great jobs, but at the end of the day, they are still my babies—something that Dhiraj can never understand. Heck, I am closer to his mother's age than his! His mother is sixty, something that I once mentioned to him.

'You are nothing like my mom!' he had exclaimed, and that much I had to concede was true. His mother is a traditional, saree-clad, bindi and mangalsutra-wearing, devout wife whose world revolves around temples, bhajans and the murukku-making business that she runs with three other women. It is not that I have anything against her; it is just that I am so different from her. I am what she would call 'modern'; my hair is in a pixie cut and I have not bothered to colour the streaks of silver. Yoga and running have kept me fit. I also have my own interior design business which I set up way back, when Dhiraj was probably still in school. I have some elite clients who like that my designs refrain from tawdry ostentation. I am also very practical when it comes to space management, and over the years I have developed my signature style which has been described as 'contemporary but rooted'. I now have offices in Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai, and a great team of people all hand-picked by me. My work has won a couple of awards in the industry and I am respected and well established now. A few years back, I travelled a lot for my projects and it was during one of my trips that I met Dhiraj.

He was working at a high-end luxury hotel in Mumbai where I stayed for a fortnight as I was working on a corporate project. He had been polite at first, asking if my stay was okay, asking if I needed anything, asking if I was comfortable. He made it a point to hover by the breakfast counter every single day that I was there, and I knew by the third day, by the way he looked at me, that this was something beyond the normal guest-relations executive call of duty. Till then I hadn't really noticed him. And as shallow as it sounds now, all that drew me to him the first time I really looked at him, was his phenomenal body. It was evident that he was into fitness and his hotel uniform couldn't hide the taut, rippled abdomen or those muscular arms. After I got to know him



better, I confessed that the only reason I had spoken to him was because of his physique.

‘All those hours at the gym paid off then,’ he had chuckled.

‘Paid off? All you could net was a woman almost as old as your mom? That’s not paying off.’

‘Pffft. Younger women? Been there, done that,’ he had said, as though to prove his sexual prowess.

‘So what am I then? Where do I fit in? The notch on your bedpost for an older woman?’ I had countered.

‘No, definitely not a notch. You are . . . precious,’ he had said after a moment’s hesitation, and it left me speechless.

We had sex on the fifth day of my stay there, and it was phenomenal. We ended up in bed every single day from then on, and each time it only got better. As far as I was concerned, this was only about sex. My no-strings-attached fling. When the time came for me to return to Bangalore, I did not even say good-bye and did not give him my phone number. For me it had been an escape that came with a set expiry date. That was where it began and ended. I had had a couple of flings before. Marriage is a very harsh sentence to bear without these minor distractions, but I never let any of my flings grow into anything serious. I had always chosen married men who were looking for distraction themselves and who had as much to lose as I in the whole process. In time, they fizzled out.

But this was something else. I never expected him to be serious about me. He found out my number and my email id from the hotel records and started writing to me. He was articulate, intelligent and well-read. And he had a fabulous sense of humour. His mails were friendly, warm and funny. I found myself looking forward to reading them and began writing back. He was genuinely interested in all that I did, sending me interesting stuff about my field of work. Gradually over the next two years we developed a great friendship. My trips to Mumbai became more frequent. After two years he quit his job there and took up one in Bangalore where he was being offered a post at the signature hotel of a reputed international luxury chain that was starting in India. It was an exciting career opportunity for him: he was moving from guest relations into marketing, which he loved. He had been feeling saturated in his

present job and he was looking for an opportunity in sales. Plus, of course, the added advantage of being in the same city as me.

He rented an apartment that was a twenty-minute drive from my office. I helped him do it up.

‘The tiny advantages of having an interior designer as a girlfriend,’ he had remarked.

‘Girlfriend, my foot. I am not one of your girls,’ I had said, and he had chuckled, saying he loved how indignant I got.

His apartment was our special place. I let myself in whenever I needed a break from work and when I didn’t want to go home and face Neel.

Of late, Neel had started going on a tirade about the level of pollution in the water bodies of Bangalore city, and how builders were constructing on land with scant regard for the environment. He would also talk about how the government wasn’t doing anything about it. It seemed to be his favourite topic, and whenever he started on another rant, I switched off mentally. It didn’t interest me at all.

Being in sales, Dhiraj had the flexibility of ‘being out for client meetings’, and we were able to meet at least once a week. I hadn’t expected things to last this long. I was pretty certain he would find a younger woman who wanted to get married to him, have his children. But Dhiraj would not hear of it. ‘I am not your regular guy, Lithika. I don’t believe in reproducing for the sake of it and bringing a child into a world that is already over-burdened with excess population and depleting resources.’

‘You don’t want children, but you want marriage. That too to a fifty-three-year-old. How crazy is that?’ I had said.

‘As crazy as I am about you,’ he countered.

I was in bed with him when the call came. It was from the house staff, saying that Neel had collapsed.

Dhiraj wanted to accompany me to the hospital, but I wouldn’t hear of it. ‘What, are you crazy?’ I snapped. I had kept Dhiraj away from my family and friends. Our relationship existed only in secret, in that pocket of grey that creeps into every marriage. And as distraught and rattled as I was, it didn’t take me even a second to decide that that was how it would stay. I rushed home, organising an ambulance on my way there. I called

Rashi but couldn't reach her, so I sent her a text. Maanav said he was taking the next flight home.

It was a cardiac arrest and he was dead even before he reached the hospital.

I was numb with shock. But I did not cry. I think my brain just went into freeze mode. I don't know how I managed to get his body home, organise a pandit, inform his brothers and sister as well as his friends and my relatives. I think when you are faced with a situation of this magnitude, your emotions get locked. Frozen. Shut out. At least it was so for me. I could deal with them later. At the back of my mind was a dull, throbbing pain and a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that I ignored and pushed aside. There would be time for that later. Right now there was so much to be done.

In a matter of two hours, our home was teeming with people. Until his retirement, Neel had been an executive chairman and one of the eleven founder members of a software company that was one of the biggest in India. He was also the founder member of a well-known charity that housed destitute children with AIDS, a cause close to his heart. Almost everyone in Bangalore seemed to have turned up at our home to pay their last respects.

When Maanav arrived, I hugged him tight. He put his arm around me and I was relieved to have him around. He told me Rashi was on her way.

I was on auto-pilot. Neel looked like he was asleep. I couldn't believe this was happening. All of it was surreal. A few hours back my life was normal, and now this—I was sitting next to my husband's dead body. Rashi arrived and I hugged her. I still couldn't cry even as she sobbed. I held her and comforted her. My sister and my brother arrived too with their families and I hugged them silently. We sat beside the body as the stream of visitors continued.

That was when I saw him. He was in the long line of people waiting to pay their last respects to Neel. I had forgotten all about his existence till then.

I sat there with Maanav on one side and Rashi on the other, my brother and sister and their families right behind me, and watched him as he finally made his way to Neel's body. He touched his feet, stood in a minute's silence and placed a garland on him. His eyes met mine then.

I turned away.

I couldn't bear to look at him anymore.