



FROM THE BEST SELLING AUTHOR OF *LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT*

# PREETI SHENOY

*When  
Love  
Came  
Calling*



## *About the author*

**Preeti Shenoy**, among the highest selling authors in India, is also on the Forbes longlist of the most influential celebrities in India.

She is the recipient of several awards, including 'Indian of the Year' award for 2017 by Brands Academy and Academia award for Business Excellence by the New Delhi Institute of Management. She has been interviewed on BBC World, which was telecast 14 times, reaching over 200 countries worldwide. She is a motivational speaker, having given talks in many premier educational institutions and corporate organisations like KPMG, ISRO, Infosys and Accenture, etc. An avid fitness enthusiast, she is also an artist specialising in portraiture and illustrated journals. Her other interests are travel, photography and yoga.

Her short stories and poetry have been published in magazines such as *Conde Nast* and *Verve*. She has represented India in International literature festivals at Birmingham, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, among others. She has been featured by all major media, including BBC World, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Hindu*, *Verve*, *The Times of India*.

Her blog is among the top 50 blogs in India. She wrote a weekly column in *The Financial Chronicle* for many years. Her work has been translated into many Indian languages, and also into Turkish.

Connect with Preeti. She always responds.



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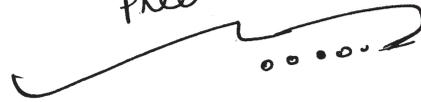
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# *When Love Came Calling*

May you always  
explore, discover, grow!  
with love  
Preeti Shenoy



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## Arush

*8.30 am: Wake up*

*Turn the basking light on*

*Change water in the bowl*

*Turn humidifier on*

*9.30 am: Feed banana/kiwi/watermelon/cantaloupe*

*11.30 am: Feed freshly-chopped green squash and add rocket or spinach.*

*Add calcium supplements*

*3.00 pm: Take Vincent to the garden to sunbathe*

*8.00 pm: Remove food plate*

*10.30 pm: Switch off the basking light*

Iguanas are not hard to take care of, but you have to be meticulous. So, I write down the instructions and make three photocopies – one each for my three housemates. I stick the one I wrote on the wall in the yard, right above Vincent’s home. It is a thirty-gallon aquarium tank fitted with a reptile humidifier, basking heat lamp, plants, branches for Vincent to climb on, a fresh water bowl and everything to make his home an ultra-luxury pad. The duties have been divided between the three of them. Given that all three are fond of Vincent, I think he should be fine. But a part of me is still worried.

‘Don’t worry. We will get Vincent his sunshine,’ Josh assures me as he reads the instructions. ‘And I know all of this. I have been taking care of him, just as much as you have,’ he says.

‘When do you leave, again?’ Tom asks, leaning back on the bed, peering up from his laptop, as he sips his black coffee from Kofra.

‘Tonight, I leave for my parents’ home in Derby, and in three days, I fly to India.’

‘Excited?’ asks Jenna as she carefully pins my instructions on the peg board above her desk.

‘Terrified,’ I reply honestly.

‘Isn’t India home?’ Tom frowns.

‘That’s racist. Derby is home. I haven’t even been to India. Not even once. I was born here, raised here. I am as British as any of you. How can it be home?’ I say, my voice deadpan.

‘Of course. I’m sorry. That isn’t what I meant. What I meant is, it isn’t like you are visiting China or Ho Chi Minh City,’ he hastens to add, digging himself into an even deeper hole.

‘I am just messing with you,’ I chuckle now, seeing Tom’s intense discomfort. He has turned red at being called a racist.

‘I fell for it. I thought I had offended you,’ he says and throws a cushion at me. I duck. It hits Jenna on her head.

‘Clowns!’ she says, shaking her head.

I wasn’t offended at all. There’s nothing Indian about me except my looks and my name. When you grow up in a country where you look different from everyone else, you adapt. My father wanted to name me Andy or Aaron. My mother said that though she agreed on raising me as a Brit and not as an Indian, she wasn’t willing to westernise my name. She insisted on Arush, which means ‘first ray of the sun’.

My name is a compromise.

Like everything else in my life.

My father tries to be British, but deep down he is Indian enough to think that the only careers that count are Medicine or Engineering. Perhaps even Law or Finance. Everything else is lesser.

When I won a full scholarship for my art college here at Norwich, the full ride, which meant I don't have to pay any tuition fee, my father wasn't impressed. He thought he could make me back out by refusing to pay for my living expenses. But you cannot give up your dream of a lifetime for minor obstacles, can you? It wasn't hard to find part-time work at the charity shop, every other day for three hours. The best thing about it? I only have to sit behind a counter and it allows me to draw.

'Look at this! You are going here and you say you are terrified?' Tom raises his eyebrows as he turns his laptop towards me.

'Welcome to God's Own Country' reads the caption. The photos of boats in calm placid backwaters surrounded by miles of coconut trees, magnificent hill stations, unspoilt verdant tea estates and many such flash attractively across the screen as we watch.

I have looked at these pictures a hundred times.

'It is a slice of heaven!' exclaims Jenna. She is right, of course.

'You're a lucky bastard,' says Josh.

'He worked hard for it. He deserves this. His work is exemplary,' Jenna is a sport. She isn't sour that I got chosen and she didn't. We had both applied for the international programme where the selected recipient spends three months in a foreign country doing a bit of volunteer work and learning a new skill.

At the selection interview, when they asked me why I wanted to travel to India, I said I wanted to see the land of my origin and discover my roots. I wanted to see for myself where my forefathers

came from, so I could understand my heritage and culture better. They were impressed by my answer.

The real reason was that my parents refuse to take me to India, and this was a chance for an all-expenses paid trip. I want to see for myself what it is about India that my father hates.

Though I had spoken with bravado and enthusiasm at my selection interview, I am a nervous wreck now. The tightness in the pit of my stomach refuses to go away. Three months in a foreign country is a long time. I wish I could back out. But the tickets have been booked, all arrangements have been made.

It's too late.



## Puja

Every person who is successful (that includes my father, mother and sister) says the same things – ‘Find your passion’, ‘Work hard’, ‘You have to love what you do’, and the worst one – ‘Everything happens for a reason’. They don’t tell you how to find your passion. They don’t tell you *what* the reason is. (For instance, what is the reason I am being forced to study in a course I have no interest or aptitude for?) I don’t love what I do (or rather, what I am being forced to do).

Which brings me to the question: What do I *want* to do? I have no clue. Where do people like me go? All of this is just a load of feel-good new-age bullshit spouted by people who have already figured out what to do with their lives. They say it to make others feel worse about an already crappy situation.

Okay, I admit. I do feel good about *some things* for sure. One of them is what I am doing right now – sitting in my favourite spot on the wicker sofa at the far end of the expansive wooden-tiled balcony, overlooking the ocean with my cup of tea and onion pakodas (made by Shanti chechi just the way I like them), scrolling through Instagram. I click a picture and post it as a story. Then I check out my friends’ feeds. One of them has posted pictures of her vacation in Koh Samui. Another has posted pictures of his trip to Egypt. They are travelling with their parents, but the pictures they post make it seem like they are on their own.

My sister Divya (Miss Perfect) walks out just then. She is chatting on the phone with the guy she claims to be her ‘true love’, her fiancé Karthik.

‘Oh, my baby. I miss you too. When will you come here next?’ she asks, not spotting me.

True love, my foot. I doubt if my sister would have agreed to marry the guy had he not been:

1. Wealthy
2. Dad’s best friend’s son (hence the built-in parental seal of approval)
3. Good-looking

I roll my eyes and focus on the ships sailing on the horizon. It is beginning to drizzle lightly now and the rain makes a foggy mist form on the horizon of the ocean.

The balcony is large with lots of greenery, a private lawn and a fibre-glass dome that keeps the sunshine in but the rain out. Papa believes in the finest things money can buy. He hired a top-notch interior designer from France when he bought all the four flats on the twenty-second floor, turning our home into an extra-spacious ten thousand square feet penthouse, with tastefully done interiors that channel in the great ocean. Its design allows us to have expansive sea views from all the rooms in the house. He has even named our home ‘Life is Paradise’. My father is corny that way.

As though it is not enough that my sister is here to ruin my little soirée with onion pakodas, my mother has now walked out as well – a rare sight. Being a leading cardiac surgeon in one the best hospitals in Kochi means she ignores her family as she pleases.

Divya hangs up as soon as she spots my mother. But not before making those sickening kissing noises into the phone. People in love act as though no one else exists. They think they have invented

love and are the first people on earth to feel this way. Annoying twerps. My mother smiles indulgently at her though. Divya can do no wrong in her eyes.

I try sinking deeper into the cushions, hoping to hide. But they spot me.

‘Ah, there you are!’ says my mother, as they both walk towards me.

Oh, hell.

‘Have you thought about what you want to do for your summer holidays, Puja?’ asks my mother as she settles down on the sofa opposite me, blocking my sea-view.

My mother and sister are the kind of people who do internships during college holidays so that it looks good on their CVs.

‘Oh, nothing. I don’t think I will do anything,’ I reply coolly, as I sip my tea, watching my sister’s eyes widen in horror.

‘I don’t think it is a good idea for you to sit at home,’ says my mother.

‘I agree,’ Miss Perfect chimes in.

‘I want you to enrol in a community development programme,’ my mother tells me, placing a brochure on the table in front of me.

Divya helps herself to the onion pakodas and I glare at her.

‘What?’ asks Divya. ‘I am sure Shanti chechi has made more. Don’t tell me you were going to hog this all by yourself.’

‘I don’t want to do any community service,’ I reply.

‘It is a good programme,’ my mother insists.

I idly flip through the brochure. Pictures of lush green forests, groups of happy young people posing with kids from underprivileged backgrounds, a picture of an older lady squatting on the ground, planting a sapling with a group of kids surrounding her – none of it interests me.

The NGO at Wayanad works with tribals, Dalit women and economically disadvantaged children. They require volunteers for teaching, gardening, marketing and an art project. They provide three traditional home-cooked organic meals. The minimum period one has to sign up for is eight weeks.

Eight weeks! That is the *entire* duration of my summer vacation, which means I won't get any free time at all. How can this programme be good?

'I don't want to go,' I say again.

'Look Puja,' my mother sighs, 'Do you have an alternate plan? Is there anything you would like to do instead?'

I shrug. Other than watching Netflix and sleeping, I have no plans, but I don't think that's what my mother wants to hear.

'Pack your clothes. I don't want you wasting your vacation. I will get Anthony to drop you, and you can carry your meds for travel sickness,' my mother says.

She pushes back her chair and stands up, handing me the forms.

It is clear there will be no more discussion on this. My mother isn't someone who will take a no for an answer.

She leaves the balcony and Divya follows her.

I stare in sullen silence at the ocean.

The ships have vanished from sight.



## Arush

Ma has packed two cartons of stuff for me to take to India. She has been packing for the last three days, ever since I arrived from my college in Norwich. Had I known I was to carry all this, I would have left from Norwich, without coming to Derby first.

‘Ma! Is this absolutely essential?’ I ask, pacing up and down our living room.

‘Yes. It is. Don’t worry. Chandru mama will meet you at Delhi airport. You only have to hand both over to him,’ she says, her brows forming little mountains as she seals them with packers’ tape. She always furrows her brows when she is stressed. She has even made handles from the packers’ tape, so I can carry the cartons like suitcases. They look exactly like the ones she brings her sarees in, on her trips back from India, and I hate them. They make me look like a saree salesman.

My mother runs an Indian garment shop in a small section of my father’s grocery store in Derby which sells Indian groceries and other products. It’s not too far from my home. Her brother and his wife run an Indian restaurant next door. It’s a life I cannot imagine for myself.

‘Will you call me and tell me about India?’ asks my little sister Rhea, as she darts out of the house and out through the gate, right up to the waiting cab, on her big bouncy ball. There’s a nip in the

air and her cheeks have turned red from all the bouncing. She looks like a cherub.

‘Of course, I will,’ I assure her, as I ruffle her hair.

At six, everything is an adventure for her.

‘Maybe I can visit you,’ she says as she hands me a card.

‘Rhea, this is lovely. Thank you!’ I say. She has drawn a lady, a stick figure in a salwar kameez with criss-crosses on the wrists.

‘What are these?’ I ask as I study her drawing and point to the criss-crosses.

‘They are bangles. Like the ones Ma has in her shop,’ answers Rhea.

‘Ah! You have captured all the details, haven’t you?’ I say. I recognise the colours she has chosen. She has tried to copy the mannequin in Ma’s store.

‘Yes, I want to be an artist like you,’ she nods, pleased with my observation.

I smile at her. I tell her I have to leave.

I hug my family and I set out to Heathrow. I can’t believe I am travelling to India.

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