



Excerpt: Waterlogged from **Things We Do Not Tell The People We Love**

by **Huma Qureshi**

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She had settled for him knowingly because she was so tired of being alone, of waiting for her situation to change. The truth was she had been in love with someone else for years, ever since university, but this boy, Leon, never took her seriously enough. She was never officially his girlfriend, merely his bookend, the one he came back to inbetween everyone else. Everytime he drifted away again, she sat in her pale blue nightgown crying at the kitchen table while her housemates made her cups of tea, and told her he was a dick anyway, that she deserved better. Everywhere she looked, everyone else was getting married. One by one, her flatmates moved out to move in with long term boyfriends who would sooner or later become their fiancés. When she finally told Leon that it had always been him and she asked him to commit, aware that she sounded like a teenage girl suggesting they go steady, he put his hands to the side of her face and said earnestly, “Darling, let’s talk about this tonight.” But tonight never came, because he never called and never again picked up his phone whenever she rang him. The idea of him was a fantasy; Leon would never have done what he’d have to do to be accepted by her family anyway.

In the end, oblivious to their daughter’s heartache, her parents found Harun for her. Harun and Shona had only known each other for eighteen months before Raffy was born; sixteen of those as husband and wife. He proposed, or rather his parents did, after they had met just three times, twice of those in the presence of their families and a swift two-month

engagement followed. After years of rejecting similar suitors, mostly because of Leon, Shona was swayed to marry Harun by the pros she carried in her head, all the things she felt ashamed of thinking about: at least he shared her background, at least he lived alone, at least she wouldn't have to move in with in-laws she didn't even know. Sometimes she thought that she could love him, if only he toned it all down a little; if only he noticed the little things about her like how she liked to be held in bed or how she loved to have someone tuck her hair behind her ear or if he ever paid attention to the books she liked to read. Harun was not a reader; he didn't have time for fiction, he said. Of all things, maybe it was this that Shona regretted the most; that he lacked imagination, that he didn't see beauty or poetry or the possibility of love in unobvious, subtle things.

But Shona had known all this about him. She had accepted the certainty of this way of life, over the unknown of waiting for Leon to change. She had always thought she could live with it, that the stability of a family she could call her own would in some way make up for it, but more and more, there were days when she was no longer sure.