



**BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS**

India | U.K.

Copyright © Jasmine Meher 2025

All rights reserved by author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

BlueRose Publishers takes no responsibility for any damages, losses, or liabilities that may arise from the use or misuse of the information, products, or services provided in this publication.



For permissions requests or inquiries regarding this publication,   
please contact:

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

www.BlueRoseONE.com

info@bluerosepublishers.com

+91 8882 898 898

+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7139-176-4

Cover design: Yash Singhal

Typesetting: Namrata Saini

First Edition: August 2025

Contents

[Chapter 1:](#_Toc202355473) [The Silence Before the Dance 1](#_Toc202355474)

[Chapter 2:](#_Toc202355475) [Ghosts and Gods 5](#_Toc202355476)

[Chapter 3:](#_Toc202355477) [The Girl Who Danced for No One 9](#_Toc202355478)

[Chapter 4:](#_Toc202355479) [The First Frame 12](#_Toc202355480)

[Chapter 5:](#_Toc202355481) [When Truth Echoes 15](#_Toc202355482)

[Chapter 6:](#_Toc202355483) [The Sacred Detour 19](#_Toc202355484)

[Chapter 7:](#_Toc202355485) [The Girl in the Back Row 23](#_Toc202355486)

[Chapter 8:](#_Toc202355487) [The Noise of Applause 27](#_Toc202355488)

[Chapter 9:](#_Toc202355489) [The Mirror That Didn’t Lie 31](#_Toc202355490)

[Chapter 10:](#_Toc202355491) [The Silence That Speaks 35](#_Toc202355492)

CHAPTER 1

The Silence Before the Dance

The temple bells tolled softly in the dawn mist, their gentle chimes weaving through the ancient banyan trees that stood like silent sentinels around the courtyard. The scent of sandalwood and marigold lingered in the crisp air, curling around the feet of the few early wor shippers who had come to greet the day.

Avni stood barefoot on the cold stone floor, her eyes closed, the first rays of the sun brushing her face like a sacred blessing. She breathed deeply, steady and calm, feeling the pulse of the world slow around her.

In this quiet hour, the noise of the world — the expectations, the whispered questions about marriage, the curious glances — felt impossibly far away. Here, in the temple of Lord Shiva, she was unbound.

“Shivoham,” she whispered, the mantra steady on her lips.

I am Shiva.

The words carried a power beyond their sound — a declaration, a prayer, a promise.

She opened her eyes slowly, watching the curling smoke rise from the incense sticks at the altar. The flickering flame of the oil lamp danced like the cosmic tandava — Shiva’s eternal dance of creation and destruction.

Her heart stirred, not with the longing she had been told to feel for love or marriage, but with something quieter, deeper — a reverence for the stillness within herself.

Avni’s life had always been different. As a child, while other girls whispered about crushes and dresses, she was drawn to the stories of saints and sages, of women who loved God with a passion that eclipsed all earthly desire.

Her mother, a devout Shiv bhakt, would wake her before dawn for prayers, her voice soft as she chanted the ancient hymns. Avni never understood why others found love so urgent and necessary, why they craved companionship with such desperation.

It was only now, at twenty-six, when the questions about marriage began to weigh on her like stones, that she realized the truth she had buried beneath years of polite smiles and quiet refusals: she did not desire romance.

Not like others did. Not at all.

In college, suitors came and went — their eyes bright with hope, their voices trembling with admiration. She was beautiful, yes, graceful like a dancer weaving the air with her movements. But to their eager advances, she felt only a restless irritation, a tiredness that gnawed at her spirit.

She tried, once or twice, to pretend she felt what they expected. For a few days, maybe a week, a flicker of something — attraction, curiosity — would kindle within her. But it was never enough. It never lasted.

She ghosted them quietly, slipping away before the illusion could shatter.

The confusion gnawed at her. Was there something wrong with her? A fault hidden beneath her prayers and devotion?

One friend, Rajat, understood. Not because he had the answers, but because he listened without judgment.

When he learned of her struggle, he said simply, “You are not broken, Avni. Maybe the world just doesn’t have a name for the way your heart beats.”

He stood by her side, quietly, as she sought doctors and healers, as she tried everything from therapy to ancient healing rituals. Nothing changed the truth inside her.

And so, she returned again and again to Shiva.

To the silent spaces between breaths, where no words were needed.

To the dance of the cosmos that asked nothing but surrender.

Here, in the temple, she found a sanctuary.

Here, she began to believe she was whole.

“O Lord of the Dance, teach me to embrace the silence in my heart. Let me walk my own path — unshaken, unashamed.”

Her feet moved instinctively, stepping into a slow, sacred rhythm — a dance of light and shadow, creation and destruction.

Each movement was a prayer, each breath a hymn.

She was not a story of love.

She was a story of being.

Chapter 2

Ghosts and Gods

The train roared past the mustard fields outside, but Avni barely noticed. Her chin rested on the window ledge, eyes tracing the golden blur of farmland and distant trees like memories slipping past too quickly to hold.

Her phone buzzed. “Hey, Avni. Why did you stop replying?”

It was the third message from Sarthak.

She stared at it. Then quietly locked the screen.

He had been kind. Gentle. He had taken her to a jazz cafe, tried to talk about films and philosophy. For a few days, she thought she felt something — a flutter in her chest, a smile that lingered a second longer than usual.

But it faded. Always, it faded.

And when it did, guilt followed.

Journal Entry: 14 January, 6:10 PM – Train to Varanasi

*Dear Mahadev,*

*I try. I really do. I sit across from men who seem sincere. I smile. I sip tea. I even pretend to care about their playlists. But by the third meeting, my chest feels like a locked room with no one inside.*

*Why am I this way?*

*Am I cursed? Broken? Or have I just wandered too far into Your silence?*

When she reached Varanasi, she didn’t go to the guest house. She went straight to the ghats.

The sun was dipping into the river, dyeing the sky copper-orange. Bells rang from a distant temple. She knelt at the water’s edge and cupped her hands, letting the coldness kiss her palms.

People spoke of love as fire. For her, it had always felt like drowning.

She had drowned in expectations — to flirt, to marry, to submit.

But in Shiva’s river, there were no such demands.

Only silence.

The next day, she met Rajat after many months. He looked older, his eyes more careful now.

“I heard you stopped seeing that guy,” he said gently.

She nodded.

“Did you tell him why?”

“I didn’t know how to explain it,” she said. “I never do.”

Rajat studied her for a moment. “Maybe it’s time you stop explaining and just start understanding yourself.”

They sat quietly on the ghat steps, watching a stray dog drink from the river. Somewhere in the distance, a shehnai played.

“You know,” he said, “you’re the only person I’ve met who never fakes interest. That’s rare. Maybe your love isn’t missing. Maybe it’s just… elsewhere.”

Letter to Shiva – 15 January, Midnight

*Why do You not speak to me, Mahadev? Or have You always spoken in silence?*

*I know now — I do not love like they do. I do not desire skin. I do not long for hands or lips. My longing is for something older, something nameless.*

*If I am alone in this path, then make me strong. Let me walk it with grace. Let me become whole in You*.

When she returned to Delhi, she began something new.

She stopped seeing doctors.

She stopped apologizing.

Instead, she opened a fresh notebook and scribbled the first line of her film idea:

"A woman who does not fall in love — she rises in devotion."

She closed the notebook. For the first time in months, her chest felt warm. Not with desire.

But with purpose.

Chapter 3

The Girl Who Danced for No One

The house in Bhubaneswar had mango trees on either side of the gate, their crooked branches dipping low in summer. A rusted swing hung from one. As a child, Avni would climb the trees barefoot and hide between the leaves, escaping the noise of relatives, the clatter of steel plates, the eternal hum of expectations.

Her mother, Meenakshi, had once been a Bharatnatyam dancer. Her wrists still carried the poise, her eyes the memory of rhythm.

“Dance, beta,” she would say, adjusting Avni’s posture in the living room. “Like Radha dances for Krishna.”

But Avni didn’t dance for Krishna. She danced when she was alone. At dawn. At dusk. For no one. For nothing.

Just for herself.

Just for the God with ash on his skin and silence in his eyes.

Diary Entry – Age 12

*Today I danced in front of the tulsi plant when no one was watching. I imagined Mahadev watching me. Not like a hero. Not like a groom. Just watching — still, kind, without asking anything from me.*

*When I finished, I wasn’t tired. I was light. Like smoke.*

When she was fifteen, her mother started worrying. The other girls wore kajal and giggled about film heroes. Avni read books on saints and asked for copper vessels to do abhishek during Shravan.

“You’re still so young,” Meenakshi would say, brushing Avni’s long hair. “It’s just a phase.”

But years passed. The boys came and went. And Avni never once whispered anyone’s name with longing.

She had crushes, sometimes. Admiration. But not desire.

Never that.

One afternoon, during summer break, an aunt from Kolkata visited. While sipping tea, she leaned toward Meenakshi and said, “You must get Avni married soon. Such beauty must not go to waste.”

Avni heard this from the kitchen and something inside her recoiled.

As if her worth lay in being consumed.

That evening, she sat alone on the terrace. The sun was bleeding gold across the sky, like a flame stretched thin.

Letter to Shiva – 10 June, Age 17

*Why does everyone look at me like I am a room waiting to be entered?*

*You never looked at Parvati that way. She chose You. Sat for years in the forest, silent, wild, sacred.*

*Let me be like Her. Let me become a woman of the forest. Let me never belong to anyone but myself.*

At nineteen, she moved to Delhi for college. She carried with her two sarees, her ghungroo, and a framed photo of Nataraja.

She kept dancing. In her room. In her dreams.

She avoided clubs and Tinder and “friends with benefits.” But not out of fear.

Out of fatigue. Of playing roles she didn’t feel.

Her roommates found her odd — graceful, poised, but emotionally distant.

“She’s beautiful, but cold,” one boy once said.

No one saw the fire inside her. It didn’t burn for men. It burned for creation. For surrender. For art.

Now, as she sat at her desk in her tiny Delhi apartment, she re-read one of her old diary pages and felt a strange ache — not of regret, but recognition.

She opened her film notebook again and wrote:

“Scene 3: A young girl dances barefoot in front of a Shivling. She is not rehearsing. She is remembering.”

Chapter 4

The First Frame

Delhi’s winter had a way of wrapping even noise in hush. As fog curled around the campus lamp posts, Avni stood in the corridor of the Department of Arts and Aesthetics, her fingers clutching a thin brown envelope — her first short film proposal.

The title on the application read:

Ekantika: A Story of Devotion Without Desire.

She had spent months refining it — drawing from her journals, her letters to Shiva, even her childhood memories of dance and withdrawal. The idea wasn’t to explain asexuality. It was to embody it — through silences, still shots, and movement without seduction.

Director’s Note (from Proposal)

This is not a story about what is missing. It is a story about what is present — devotion, stillness, inner fullness. The woman in this film does not run toward a man. She does not run away either. She simply stands where she is. And watches herself blossom.

Two weeks later, the rejection email came in.

“Unconventional theme, difficult to market.”

She didn’t cry.

Instead, she lit an oil lamp in front of her Nataraja frame and sat cross-legged on the floor, spine straight, as she had done since childhood. This time, no dance. No movement. Just stillness.

She was learning: not everything that is true finds a stage easily.

Letter to Shiva – 19 January

*They want stories that end in weddings or betrayals. But I… I’m trying to write a story that ends in self-realization.*

*Wasn’t Sati a woman who chose fire over compromise? Wasn’t Meera in love with something she could never touch?*

*Maybe I’m not the first. Maybe I’m just the first to say it aloud.*

*If no one funds my film, I’ll still make it. With my phone. With my dance. With my breath.*

She turned 26 that year. Her mother called, as usual, weaving “marriage” delicately into every third sentence.

“Don’t you want someone to hold you in your old age?”

“I want someone to hold my camera steady,” Avni replied. Her tone was calm, but it cut.

“Beta… you are being stubborn. You are just afraid.”

“No, Ma,” she said, gently. “I’m just not hungry for what you think I should crave.”

There was silence on the other end.

That evening, Rajat came over with two cups of ginger chai and a new mic for her videos.

“You look lighter,” he said.

“I feel... more truthful.”

He smiled. “That’s more difficult than being happy, you know.”

Avni nodded. “I’ve stopped trying to be anything. I just want to be honest.”

Later that night, she filmed the opening scene of her short:

The camera pans over an empty temple courtyard at dawn.

A woman in a simple white cotton saree dances alone — her feet sure, her hands in prayer.

Her eyes are not on the camera, nor on anyone else.

She dances for a presence the world cannot see.

Journal Entry – 20 January

*Let me become the image I never saw on screen.*

*A woman unclaimed. Unnamed by a man.*

*A woman who is not lonely, but alone — and whole.*

Chapter 5

When Truth Echoes

It began without warning — a quiet ripple.

One night, a spiritual blog reposted Avni’s short film with the caption:

“Not All Longing Is Romantic. Watch This Sacred Solitude.”

Within days, her inbox began to fill. A yoga teacher from Rishikesh wrote: “You’ve filmed what I’ve always felt but never spoken.”

A girl from Chennai messaged: “I thought something was wrong with me. I showed your film to my mother. We cried.”

Avni read each message slowly, like sacred mantras. Her fingers trembled — not from fear. From relief. She was not alone in her aloneness.

A month later, she received an invitation to speak at a panel titled:

"Love Beyond Labels" at an alternative film festival in Pune.

Rajat was worried. “You sure you want to go public with this? India loves categories. You’re… un-categorisable.”

Avni smiled. “That’s exactly why I must speak.”

The auditorium was modest. Rows of eager faces, rainbow badges, and a backdrop that read “Unspoken Desires, Unlived Truths.”

When it was her turn to speak, she stepped to the mic in a pale green cotton kurta — hair tied back, no lipstick, no effort to please.

“My name is Avni Mishra.

I do not dislike men. I do not hate romance.

But I do not crave it — never have.

They call it asexuality. I call it… quietness.

Not emptiness — just the absence of a certain hunger.”

The audience clapped, cautiously at first. Then louder. One woman stood up and wept silently.

But by evening, a storm began online.

Some said: “Attention-seeking elitism.”

Others mocked: “Maybe no one ever liked her. Sour grapes.”

One comment read: “This is what happens when women read too much and marry too late.”

And beneath one viral post:

“Shiva bhakt? These are the kinds who insult Indian culture in the name of self-expression.”

Avni stared at her phone that night, heart racing. Her limbs felt cold, not from fear — from grief.

She had touched something raw. And it had bitten back.

Letter to Shiva – 3 February

*You sat in silence while the world burned around You.*

*Teach me how.*

*How to be fire and still — not consumed by it.*

*They say I dishonor tradition. But what if I am the tradition they’ve forgotten?*

*Like Akka Mahadevi, like Meera, like Andal — women who longed for God more than men.*

*Let me become memory again.*

She switched off her phone for a week. No social media. No emails. No calls.

She returned to Bhubaneswar. Spent her days in silence. Climbed the mango tree again. Sat in the same terrace swing from childhood.

One night, she danced barefoot under the moonlight. Alone. As always.

Only this time — with no apology.

Journal Entry – Bhubaneswar, Age 27

*They can mock me, misunderstand me, uninvite me.*

*But I have tasted freedom. I have heard the God within me say:*

*“You are enough. Even in your stillness.”*

Back in Delhi, she began scripting her first feature film.

No voiceover.

No male lead.

No romance.

Just a woman walking barefoot across India — temple to temple, mountain to mountain — searching for nothing, finding everything.

The title?

Ekantika.

Chapter 6

The Sacred Detour

Avni hadn’t planned the trip. It began with a temple dream — vivid, unsettling. A woman in white, standing alone at Kedarnath, the mountain wind whispering:

“Come. Not to ask. Just to remember.”

She packed lightly: a notebook, a single change of clothes, and her camera.

Rajat drove her to the station. As she stepped out, he placed a folded piece of paper in her palm.

“You don’t need me,” he said, smiling. “But if your silence ever gets too loud, read this.”

She nodded — no hug, no tears. Just presence. That was their love.

Stop 1: Varanasi.

The ghats were burning. Always burning. Avni stood beside a pyre, her breath catching. Death felt so raw here, and yet... peaceful.

A sadhu with saffron eyes approached her.

“Why no sindoor, beti?” he asked, half-joking.

She smiled. “I am married to solitude.”

He blinked, then laughed loudly, clapping once.

“Ah, ekantika! The most faithful bride.”

She walked away — his laughter echoing like a blessing.

Stop 2: Kedarnath.

She reached the temple just before dusk. The mountains were cruel in their silence. The temple bells rang not for the tourists — but for those who truly listened.

Avni knelt at the threshold, hands joined, head lowered.

“I am not here to beg.

I am here to bow.”

As her forehead touched the cold stone, a strange release surged through her — not joy, not grief — something wordless. She sat there for hours. A guard gently tapped her shoulder at nightfall. “Didi, time’s up.”

She smiled through tears. “It never is.”

That night, she opened Rajat’s letter under a thick woolen quilt in her tiny lodge.

Avni,

You once told me that most people walk toward something — a lover, a title, applause. But you, you walk inward.

Still, remember this: Even saints cried. Even Sati burned. You’re not weak if you hurt. You’re just human.

I believe in your silence. But don’t let it turn into self-punishment.

With you — always just beyond the frame. — Rajat

She held the letter to her heart and wept — not out of loneliness. But from finally being seen.

Stop 3: Kailash (in a dream).

In her sleep, she dreamt of Shiva — not as a god, but as a mirror.

“Why me?” she asked.

“Because you chose the path no one claps for,” He replied.

“Will I be loved?”

“Not as a woman. But as a soul.”

“Then I accept.”

Journal Entry – Somewhere between mountains and memory:

*There is no word for what I am.*

*Not nun. Not loner. Not wounded.*

*I am a river that flows inward.*

*Let them name me what they will.*

*I know who I am.*

*Ekantika.*

Back in Delhi, months later, she began filming her debut feature.

She cast a silent dancer as her lead. No dialogues. Only movement.

The final scene would show a woman walking into the Himalayas barefoot, smiling — no destination, no lover waiting.

Just freedom.

Chapter 7

The Girl in the Back Row

The premiere wasn’t grand.

No red carpet. No sponsors. No press.

Just a white screen in a makeshift auditorium of an arts college in Ahmedabad. A projector flickered. A slow tabla track began.

Avni stood in the corner — back straight, eyes lowered. She had made peace with the idea that this film wasn’t for applause. It was her offering.

In the second-last row sat a 19-year-old girl named Ira. She hadn’t meant to attend. A friend dragged her in saying, “Yaar, this one’s weird. Zero romance. Just a woman walking barefoot. Might suit your mood.”

Ira hadn’t smiled in weeks.

The film began.

The silent dancer moved across temples, forests, deserts — barefoot, sometimes bleeding, sometimes laughing.

No dialogues. No explanation.

Just movement.

And then… the final frame.

The woman in white stood still on a mountaintop, her back to the camera, wind in her hair, arms stretched wide — not to fly, but to merge.

As the screen faded to black, no one clapped. Just stillness. And one sob — quiet but guttural.

Ira.

She ran out before the lights came on. But Avni saw her. The way a mountain sees a falling leaf.

Journal Entry – 22 August, Delhi

*I did not want impact.*

*I only wanted honesty.*

*But perhaps when we stop trying to teach,*

*we begin to heal others.*

Two weeks later, a letter arrived by post. Not email. A real letter, in shaky handwriting.

Dear Avni Ma’am,

I watched Ekantika and something inside me cracked — not in pain, in recognition.

Ira Shah. 19. Biotech student. Everyone thinks I’m cold. My ex-boyfriend told me I must be 'traumatized'. My parents say I’m too ‘bookish’ for love.

But your film showed me a different kind of woman — one I didn’t know I could be.

I think I’m asexual. Or spiritual. Or maybe I’m just… quiet.

Thank you for making that feel okay.

With reverence,

Ira.

Avni didn’t write back. She didn’t need to.

Instead, she placed the letter at her home altar, beside a small brass statue of Ardhanarishvara — the deity of wholeness beyond gender or desire. Meanwhile, a small indie magazine published an anonymous review of the film:

“Ekantika isn’t a film. It’s a prayer. One not meant to be heard — only felt. For those who’ve been told they are ‘too cold,’ ‘too quiet,’ or ‘too much’ — this film leaves behind silence, and in that silence, a kind of home.”

Avni clipped the article and tucked it inside her diary, beside a pressed marigold.

She went back to her routine — yoga at dawn, editing, writing, dancing alone in her terrace under the stars.

Until one evening, Rajat appeared with a spark in his eye.

“Avni,” he said, holding up his phone.

“I think your film’s being added to the curriculum at NID — under ‘Gender and Non-Normative Narratives.’ Also... you’ve been invited to speak at a global summit on Solitude and Spirituality in Barcelona.”

Avni blinked. Laughed once — a soft, rare sound.

“Funny,” she said. “All I ever wanted was to be left alone.”

Rajat replied, grinning,

“Well, seems like solitude is trending now.”

Letter to Shiva – 25 August

*You let me walk alone so I could become a road.*

*Now they walk it too.*

*Let me not turn into a guru.*

*Let me remain a pilgrim.*

*A dancer.*

*A shadow.*

*Just Avni.*

*Just... Ekantika.*

Chapter 8

The Noise of Applause

The hall was glass-walled, overlooking the cobalt sea of Barcelona. Inside: scholars, yogis, filmmakers, thinkers — people with tags and titles, clapping politely as names were announced.

Our next speaker — Avni Iyer.

Filmmaker. Mystic. India's quiet revolution.”

She walked up slowly, in a plain white kurta. No makeup. Hair tied in a loose bun. Eyes calm, yet guarded.

The mic squeaked.

She stood still. Silent for a moment too long.

“I didn’t come to speak,” she began softly.

“I came to listen.”

Some laughed, thinking it was a clever line.

She didn’t smile.

“In my country,” she continued, “a woman is measured by her ability to attract, to nurture, to sacrifice.

But some of us... are not interested in being altars. Or flames. We are smoke.”

A hush fell. She spoke not with confidence — but clarity. The kind that doesn’t seek validation.

“My film Ekantika wasn’t about being asexual.

It was about being allowed to not want.

To not be defined by hunger.

To walk without craving.

To still matter.”

Applause broke. Loud. Enthusiastic.

But Avni’s eyes glazed over — not with pride, but distance. Something felt off.

Later, in the green room, a glamorous woman approached her — red lipstick, heels clicking, a journal tucked in her arm.

“Loved your talk,” she said.

“It’s time India heard voices like yours. By the way — Netflix Europe is interested. They want a limited series on Ekantika. More drama, maybe a forbidden romance angle? Just to—”

Avni gently cut in.

“Thank you. But Ekantika is not a product.”

“It could be inspiring!” the woman persisted.

“Millions of young women might finally feel seen.”

Avni smiled, a little too quietly.

“If they need to see me to see themselves...

then they’re not looking in the right mirror.”

She walked out. Down the mosaic stairs of the Gaudí hall. Into the street. The sun had set. The Mediterranean wind carried whispers in a tongue she didn’t know — but her soul somehow understood.

Later That Night – Hotel Room

She sat on the floor, writing in her journal.

Letter to Shiva

*Why do they want to name me?*

*Saint. Icon. Asexual. Feminist.*

*I am none of these.*

*Just a leaf that fell inward*.

She closed the diary. Got up. Danced barefoot on the marble floor. No music. Just breath and movement.

In that moment, she was not a speaker, or a visionary.

She was a girl who once stood before a mirror, confused why love songs made her feel… nothing.

And now, she was peace in motion.

Email Received at 3:07 AM (Subject: “From Ira”)

*Ma’am,*

*I’m in Barcelona. For a student exchange. I attended your session today. Couldn’t gather courage to speak. But… may I take you out for coffee before you leave? I promise I’ll be quiet. Just want to sit in your presence.*

*No selfies. No social media. Just tea.*

*Ira*

**Avni read the email twice.**

**Then smiled and replied:**

*Tomorrow. 9 AM. Near the harbor.*

*You bring the silence. I’ll bring the tea.*

Chapter 9

The Mirror That Didn’t Lie

It was still early — the harbor was painted in a blue so pale, it almost looked translucent. Boats rocked like cradles. Sea gulls cried and dipped through the breeze.

Avni sat cross-legged on a low bench, pouring hot masala chai from a flask into two earthen cups she’d carried from India. No paper. No plastic. No noise.

Ira arrived, breathless from jogging. A messy bun, a cotton scarf, and nervous eyes.

I didn’t think you’d actually reply,” she said, hesitating.

Avni gestured to the cup.

“Drink. India shouldn’t taste like cardboard.”

Ira chuckled — the kind of laugh you don’t know you needed until it slips out.

They sat. Quiet. Watching waves.

Minutes passed.

Then Ira, softly:

“You don’t look how I imagined.

You’re… warmer.”

Avni smiled.

“You imagined a stone?”

“A goddess.”

“Ah. Those are more dangerous than stones.”

They sipped. The wind carried fragments of tabla rhythms from a street performer down the road. Stray notes. Almost like memory.

“Ma’am… do you ever wish you were… normal?”

“What’s normal?”

“You know… wanting someone. Feeling things. Romance.”

Avni looked at her, not with pity — but with understanding.

“I felt things, Ira. I just didn’t want to own them.

Love came. I didn’t open the door.

That’s also a way of loving — from the other side.”

“But weren’t you scared of being alone?”

A pause.

“Terrified,” Avni said. “Until I met God.

Not in temples. In quiet. In movement.

In the way my breath still keeps rhythm when no one is watching.”

They sat again in silence.

Then Avni pulled a folded page from her journal — a note, handwritten.

“Here. I want you to have this.”

'To the one who doesn’t feel the way others feel:

You are not broken.

You are the pause between two sounds.

The breath before a prayer.

And in you, lives the quiet God no one knows how to name.'

Ira held the note like something sacred.

“Ma’am… do you think I can… ever be like you?”

Avni shook her head.

“No. You’ll be better. Because you’ll start earlier.”

They stood. Hugged. No selfies. No hashtags.

Just a wordless blessing passed between two women — not teacher and student, not elder and youth, but two fires that chose not to burn outward.

Voice Message to Rajat (Unsent)

“Ira reminds me of who I could’ve been, had I not wasted so much time doubting.

She’s not trying to be seen. She’s just trying to understand.

That’s rarer than brilliance.

I’m ready to come back.

But not to make more films.

Maybe… to teach.”

Final Journal Entry – Barcelona Airport Lounge

I came to show a film.

But I found the next frame.

One that doesn’t need a camera.

She looked out the window. A plane took off. So did something inside her.

Chapter 10

The Silence That Speaks

Two Years Later

Location: Bhairavi Retreat, near Rishikesh

No advertisements. No social media. Just word of mouth. A small ashram nestled between pine trees and river echoes. Bhairavi Retreat had no guru, no dogma — just a wooden sign that read:

“Here, we unlearn.”

Avni never claimed ownership. She didn’t teach. She held space.

Every morning, a group of women and a few quiet men gathered — to dance without rhythm, to write without agenda, and to sit in stillness without guilt.

Among them: Ira.

Now a researcher of gender psychology. Still wearing loose cotton. Still walking barefoot.

Final Dance

It was the last night of a full-moon retreat.

No lights. Only fireflies and the moon’s spine across the Ganga.

Avni danced alone under the banyan tree.

Her eyes closed.

Her feet kissed the earth like an old friend.

Each movement a prayer.

Not to be seen. But to belong.

From a distance, Ira watched. No applause. No camera. Just tears.

It was beauty that didn’t ask to be named.

Final Letter (Unsent, found in her journal after her passing)

To the One Who Feels Nothing,

The world will try to fix you. Diagnose you.

Make you softer. Warmer. Easier to explain.

But remember —

A lamp doesn’t need fire to glow.

A mountain doesn’t crave applause.

You are not missing something.

You are the space where longing ends.

Yours in stillness,

Avni

Years Later

Ira curates an exhibition.

Not a museum. A room of unfinished things:

A torn sari from Avni’s first solo performance

Her journal, opened to a blank page

A short film playing in loop: just a single frame — her eyes, closed in dance

Outside the gallery, the inscription:

“Ekantika: One who chose solitude, not as escape, but as embodiment.

Last Scene

Somewhere, a girl reads the letter.

She doesn’t cry.

She just breathes — deeper than she ever has.

A small smile.

A wordless freedom.