

A Sense Beyond Life

Deep Vasav



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Dedication



To my school teacher, Mr. Sandeep Palekar, who taught me to look beyond the words on a page, and into the spaces between them. He encouraged me never to dismiss a passing thought, but to let it grow and take shape. His guidance lit the spark that led me here.

Thank you for inspiring me to write, sir. May your soul rest in peace.

Book Summary



What if your final breath was only the beginning?

What do we truly leave behind when the soul parts from the body?

What if Death was not an end, but a guide into the afterlife?

This story follows a soul confronted with an intriguing choice to make—one that demands she retraces the echoes of her life, led by a companion both mysterious and strangely comforting. However, memories are never whole. What we choose to remember, and what we choose to forget, not only shapes the life we live, but also the path that lies beyond it.

As she revisits her past as a silent witness, the line between acceptance and longing begins to blur. Each step forward reveals not just who she once was, but who she is still becoming.

Profound, poetic, and deeply human, *A Sense Beyond Life* is a tale of love, loss, and self-discovery that invites readers to see death not as a conclusion, but as the beginning of something greater.

About the Author



My name is Deep Vasav. By profession, I'm an industrialist in the polymer industry, but writing has always been where I feel most myself. For years, I've written songs for musicians in my spare time, drawn to the way words can carry both vulnerability and strength. I've always been fascinated by how language can leave an impact and still feel deeply relatable.

A Sense Beyond Life marks my debut as a storyteller in prose, born from my love of character-driven journeys and the quiet questions we often leave unasked. Through this book, I hope to share not just a story, but a feeling—one that stays with you long after the last page.

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Chapter 1:

The End?



“Everything is going to be just fine,” said my husband as he held my hand, trying his best to mask his emotions with a smile. My daughter sobbing behind him wasn’t helping at all, but the poor guy was still trying, and that made me smile. The doctor changed my prescriptions a few days ago, but I didn’t think it was making a difference; maybe I didn’t want it to.

The rhythmic beeps of the machine acted like a soothing metronome, and I closed my eyes, humming a tune in my mind that seemed to blend with the flow. As the notes drifted through my mind, I felt the cold air brushing my skin. The hospital sheets had a sterile, almost too-clean scent, but beneath that, I could sense the faint smell of my daughter’s perfume lingering in the air. She always wore that jasmine fragrance. “Fitting”, I thought, “A flower trying to bloom through all this grief.”

I thought to myself that I had lived a complete life. If this was the end, I wouldn't mind passing on. Yet, despite telling myself that, my mind kept drifting back to my husband's face—the way his fingers clung to mine—and my daughter's quiet sobs. I had always prided myself on being strong, on holding things together. Now, lying here, I found myself wondering for the first time, "Will they miss me when I'm gone?"

I longed to tell my husband how grateful I was for his patience, and for standing by me even when I pushed him away. I wished I could assure him I noticed all the small ways he loved me, even when I hadn't said it back. "I should've told you more often how much I love you", I thought, watching his tear-streaked face. I hated that he had to see me like this, helpless and fading. I wished I could comfort him, tell him that it was okay to let go, that he didn't need to be strong for me anymore.

My heart ached for my daughter, more than I could explain. There was so much I wanted to tell her, but time always slipped away from me. "Do you know how proud I am of you?", I wondered, hoping that somehow, she felt it, even in the moments when I struggled to say it aloud. There were times when we drifted apart, times I hadn't been present enough, and I wished I could tell her that it wasn't her fault.

A part of me wanted to stay longer, but I thought to myself that I did my best with what I was given; it was not perfect, but life never is. Maybe, just maybe, they knew how much they meant to me. I wished I could stay, to reassure them, but something in me had already let go.

Just as I had that thought, I suddenly felt completely released from all the pain I had been enduring. I felt better than what seemed 'normal' for quite a while. "Is it not my time yet?", I wondered. I looked around the room, hoping to get a reaction from the people around me, and that's when I saw a strange man just standing in the corner.

His presence in the room felt a bit odd. His attire didn't really match the dull atmosphere the hospital was clearly trying so hard to set. He gave a warm smile, and I found myself thinking out loud, "Who are you?"

"I am Death.", he says in a way that also questioned if it wasn't obvious.

"So, I am really dead?"

"I think so. Why don't you try getting up from that bed just to be sure?", he responds calmly.

I slowly get up and stretch my arms slightly. I crack my knuckles, and it gives me the same satisfaction it always did. I looked at the man and gave him a confused smile, curiously waiting to hear what he had to say.

"Alright, it looks like you really are dead", he said, amused by his own silly joke.

I looked around once again, and that's when I realized that everything around me had come to a pause. It was as if I was no longer allowed to witness what would happen next in this world.

"Shall we?" he said, offering his hand to guide me away. I hesitate to take his hand. It's funny how, just a moment ago, I was prepared to pass on, and now I wasn't quite ready to leave this place.

"Take your time.", Death's warm, comforting voice calms me, and I take a moment to look at my earthly self. I look at all the people around me and feel grateful for having them with me till the end. After making peace with my thoughts, I felt satisfied with the way fate had decided to end my story.

With that, I took Death's hand, ready to add a full stop to my tale and move on.

"So, what's next?"

Chapter 2:

What's Next?



Death stood there, hands casually tucked into his pockets, looking surprisingly... normal. No dark cloak, no ominous atmosphere. Just him, standing in a button-up shirt and pants, like he was dressed for an office job.

"Where's your hoodie? I thought Death had a signature look," I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Too formal? Does this not scream 'casual' to you?" he replied, glancing down at himself, eyebrows furrowing in mock concern as he inspected his outfit.

I laughed. "Nah, you're fine. I was just curious. Aren't you supposed to have... I don't know, a scythe or something?"

Death chuckled as he realized the source of my confusion. "I figured we wouldn't run into much trouble on our way to the afterlife." His grin widened as he leaned in slightly. "Still not convinced you're dead, huh?"

There was something playful in his tone, the kind of sarcasm you'd expect from an old friend. I couldn't help but laugh along, shaking my head. "Well, it's my first time, cut me some slack." I paused, glancing around at the stillness that surrounded us. "So, where exactly are we headed? You still haven't told me what's next."

Death straightened up, tilting his head thoughtfully. "Ah, the grand reveal. You'll see soon enough."

Death took a moment, his gaze shifting to the horizon as if he's searching for the right words. "The afterlife itself is a completely different experience. There isn't really anything I can tell you to prepare for it."

I furrowed my brow, trying to piece it together. "Different how? It seems pretty normal to me so far."

"That's because you're not in the afterlife yet," he replied, his voice carrying a quiet chuckle, as if the question amused him.

I must have looked thoroughly confused because Death sighed softly, his tone shifting into something more patient, almost like a teacher explaining a complex concept to a curious student. "A soul's journey in the afterlife is more of an individual experience," he began, his eyes meeting mine. "I'm only here to guide you to it. You may have noticed that you can still feel your senses, like back in the hospital, when you cracked your knuckles. Even now, you can see everything, feel the breeze touch your skin."

I flexed my fingers subconsciously, realizing I could indeed still feel everything—my feet grounded against the earth, the cool air brushing my cheeks. "Yeah, I can feel it," I admitted, my curiosity growing.

Death smiled knowingly. "Technically, you shouldn't be able to have these senses anymore. You've already been separated from your body. Your body owns these senses, not your soul, and you can't carry them into the afterlife."

"So... what is this then?" I asked, glancing around at the familiar sensations.

"This is merely a transition period for you," Death continued, "It's a way to ease you into the journey. Think of it like a buffer, where you're preparing to exist without your senses."

I stared at him, trying to wrap my head around the idea. The weight of his words sank in slowly. "So, no senses at all in the afterlife?"

"Not the ones you're used to," Death said gently, watching my reaction. Death's smile lingered, warm yet cryptic. "You won't miss them though. There's something else waiting on the other side—something you can't quite understand yet."

I glanced around, taking in every sensation I still had—the breeze on my skin, the weight of my feet on the ground. It all felt so familiar, so real. I wasn't sure I was ready to let that go.

Not wanting to give up on the senses yet, I took a deep breath, savouring the last few moments of what felt like a bridge between two worlds.

Chapter 3:

A Choice to Make



I thought I was ready. Lying there in the hospital bed, I'd made my peace with it—grateful, relieved, maybe just a little exhausted. Now, standing here in this strange 'in-between' space, I couldn't help but wonder if I'd rushed that decision. Was I really ready to let go? Should I have stayed back for a while longer to feel the touch of my loved ones? Did I need more time to embrace the perfume that my daughter wore to carry it, maybe to remember her for a longer time? All these questions kept running through my mind. My anxiety being the only fidgeting presence in the stillness that surrounded us.

"So," I asked, trying to sound more casual than I felt, "what's next?"

Death glanced at me, "We have one more decision to make before you move on."

I raised an eyebrow. "A decision? What kind?"

"You'll need to decide whether you want to take one of your senses with you into the afterlife," he explained, his tone calm but thoughtful. "It'll help guide you on your journey—if you choose to keep one."

"If?" I repeated, frowning slightly. "What happens if I don't want to keep any of them?"

Death smiled gently. “Then you don’t have to. It’s entirely up to you. Some souls feel that carrying a sense with them will keep them grounded, help them navigate the next phase. Others feel it’s unnecessary and prefer to let everything go.” He gave me a measured look. “You won’t be forced into anything.”

I chewed my lip, trying to process the idea. “But... if I don’t take one, what happens?”

“You’ll move on like any other soul. It’s just that, for new souls like you, with little experience of reincarnation, taking a sense along can help ease the transition.”

I paused, considering that. “Wait, reincarnation? If I’m satisfied with how things ended, why would I need to go back to Earth?”

Death regarded me thoughtfully. He let out a sigh before responding, “As I mentioned, the afterlife is a different experience. It’s more of an individual’s journey of eternal learning. At some point, you may wish to visit Earth again in a different form for new experiences. Each life you lead adds to your soul’s growth and understanding, allowing you to continue your journey in the afterlife.”

I let that sink in. “So, I might want to come back? Even if I feel okay with everything now?”

“Exactly. Each experience shapes your soul. The desire for growth and new experiences is part of your essence, even if you don’t realize it yet.”

I took a moment to contemplate. The idea of returning to Earth, of experiencing life anew, felt daunting yet strangely

exciting. Part of me was ready to embrace the unknown, while another part clung to the familiar warmth of my past life.

“And if I choose wrong?” I finally asked.

“There’s no ‘wrong’ choice,” he reassured me. “Each sense has value, depending on what you feel will help you the most. To make it clearer, we’ll take a little walk.”

He gestured ahead, and as we began to move, the scenery around us shifted. Gone were the blurry edges of the world. Instead, something more familiar appeared—a path lined with lampposts that flickered softly, as if struggling to keep up with the moment. Ahead, a sign loomed in the distance.

I squinted and then let out a soft chuckle, “‘Memory Lane’? Really? Clichés follow me even after I’m dead?”

Death laughed along. “They have a way of sticking around. It’s fitting though, don’t you think?”

I gave him a wry smile. “I guess.”

We continued walking, and the air was quiet and still. My thoughts swirled as I tried to wrap my head around the idea of keeping, or letting go of, my senses. Part of me had already made peace with the idea of moving on completely, of leaving everything behind. Now that I had the choice, it felt like one more thread connecting me to a life I wasn’t quite ready to fully let go of.

“Take your time,” Death said softly, as though reading my thoughts. “We’re not in any rush. As we revisit your memories, you’ll get a better sense of what might serve you, or if it’s even necessary.”

I nodded, my eyes drifting down the path. The memories of my life, my moments, my choices, were waiting for me just ahead. I wasn't sure which sense, if any, I'd need for this next chapter of my existence, but the thought of holding onto something felt... comforting.

Chapter 4:

Memories of Life



As I stepped onto ‘Memory Lane’, the air around me shimmered with the echoes of my past. Each breath felt charged with anticipation, as if the memories were waiting to unfold, eager to share their stories with me once more.

“Here we are, ready to explore the moments that shaped your journey,” he said, nodding toward the vibrant scenes shimmering in the distance. I felt a warm pull towards a particular glow, beckoning me with the promise of heartfelt recollections.

We paused at the first memory, and I took a deep breath, ready to share it with him. “Oh, I remember this day!” I exclaimed as I stepped into a lively kitchen filled with the rich aroma of biryani simmering on the stove. The sounds of laughter and chatter floated through the air as my family gathered around the table with the plates piled high.

“What a feast!” Death remarked with a playful glint in his eyes. “Do you think they’ll share some with us?”

I giggled at his joke like a little girl enjoying the warmth of my family around me. “My mother’s special biryani always drew the family together. We laughed, reminisced, and savoured each bite. It felt so comforting to be surrounded by everyone I loved.”

As I revelled in the memory, the vibrant spices filled the air, wrapping me in the warmth and joy of my family. Contentment

lingered until a trace of sadness tugged at my heart, a reminder that those days were gone. Their absence loomed heavily in my thoughts.

“Do you feel the warmth of their love?” Death asked softly.

“Yes,” I replied. “It’s beautiful.”

The memory faded, but another scene soon materialized: a sunlit afternoon in the park. I found myself playing with my daughter when she was just a kid. Her gleeful laughter echoing as we swung high on the swings, followed by chasing each other in a game of tag.

The breeze kissed my skin. Beneath my feet, the cool grass grounded me. As I chased her around, the thrill of play igniting a sense of freedom within me. The brightness of the sun warmed my skin, and I drank in the joy radiating from her.

“This was such a joyful day! My baby looks so small!” I said, turning to Death with a smile. “We spent hours just playing and laughing together. It’s moments like these that make everything worthwhile.”

“I can see that,” he replied, his eyes twinkling with understanding.

In that moment, I felt deeply satisfied, cherishing the carefree days devoid of worries. I looked into her eyes, alive with excitement, and my heart swelled with gratitude to see how much she meant to me.

Just as that memory began to dissolve, I found myself transported to a quiet evening on the porch with my old friends back in my youth. The sky was painted in soft hues of

orange and pink as the sun set, and we sat together, sharing stories and laughter.

Their laughter intertwined with the rustling leaves in the gentle breeze, creating a symphony of comfort. I could see the passion in their eyes, the way they exchanged glances filled with pride and joy. Yet, as I soaked in their presence, a familiar ache settled in my chest. We were filled with promises and passion, but somehow, we lost touch over the years. I wondered how life would've been to have them with me till the end.

With that bittersweet feeling still lingering, the scene shifted once more. I was back at home, curled up on the couch with my husband, a soft blanket draped over us. The room was dimly lit, the flickering light from the TV casting gentle shadows around us.

The warmth of his arm around me felt like a protective cocoon, and the enticing aroma of popcorn lingered in the air. We shared a comfortable silence. The familiarity of our togetherness wrapped around us like a warm embrace. As I reflected on this intimate moment, a wave of gratitude surged through me. "I love this feeling of safety with him," I shared with Death, my voice filled with fondness. "It's a true blessing."

"Yes," he replied, nodding appreciatively. "Such comfort is rare."

I noticed that we were watching the video of my wedding day, and just like that, like a gentle tug on a thread, I was transported to that day. A dazzling moment etched forever in my memory. Standing at the altar, I felt radiant, adorned in a traditional red and gold lehenga that shimmered in the light,

surrounded by my friends and family. The vibrant colours of the decor danced before my eyes. Golden marigolds, fragrant jasmine garlands, and twinkling fairy lights wrapped around the pillars, creating an enchanting atmosphere.

The air buzzed with excitement, the sound of drumming and joyous singing filling the space. The sweet smell of incense mingled with the savoury aroma of delicacies gliding from the nearby kitchen, filling me with warmth and nostalgia. I stood beside my husband, heart racing with excitement, taking in the scene around me. I glanced at my husband and then caught sight of our daughter nestled among the guests, her eyes sparkling with joy.

As I savoured the beauty of that day, I felt Death's gaze shift thoughtfully. "Your daughter was there", he noted gently. "From a previous marriage, perhaps? It's interesting that you haven't mentioned your first husband at all. We've travelled through different stages of life, and I saw you being grateful for the people in your life. It's quite surprising that you left him out."

His words struck a chord within me, a subtle reminder of a part of my life I had tried to block out. In that moment of overwhelming gratitude for my current life, I had overlooked the shadows of my past.

"Interesting indeed," Death observed, his gaze turned contemplative. "You've focused so much on your current life that you've left a previous chapter behind."

I felt a twinge of discomfort, the weight of unaddressed emotions pressing down on me. There was so much more to unpack, and yet, I had chosen to embrace my life, blocking out parts of it from my memory. Do I want to carry that part of

my life any further? Does it deserve revisiting? Will revisiting a mistake; affect the way I feel about my life?

Perhaps in the memories yet to come, I would find the answers to all these questions.

Chapter 5:

Buried in the Shadows



As we stepped into the next memory, I braced myself, knowing that the past we were about to visit was one I had buried deep inside. The warmth and nostalgia of earlier memories had faded, leaving me vulnerable in front of Death, whose steady presence seemed more knowing with every step we took.

A scene shimmered into focus: a sunny afternoon in the park. I saw myself sitting on a bench, watching my ex-husband play with our daughter. She giggled, her small feet kicking up as he lifted her onto his shoulders. His hands held her securely, and her laughter echoed through the park, loud and carefree. My heart clenched as I stood there, watching them bond.

“You were happy here,” Death noted quietly, glancing at me. His voice, though gentle, cut through the fragile peace I had built around this memory.

“I was,” I said, unable to deny it. “But that was his role, wasn’t it? He always had the time to be there. I was the one who had to work.”

Death tilted his head slightly, as if considering my words. “He did more than just have the time. He stepped up whenever your daughter needed him. He was there, not just in body but in heart. Does that bother you?”

I stiffened. “No, of course not. He was... he is her father.”

“Yet there’s resentment,” Death observed. “If he did his job well, why not feel grateful for those good times?”

His question hung in the air, heavy and probing. I turned to watch the memory unfold even further, our daughter’s face lit up with joy as she rode on his shoulders. I had been proud of them both that day. Proud of him for being such a good father, proud of her for being so full of life. Although, I had never allowed myself to feel grateful. Instead, I had been bitter. Bitter that he could be there, while I couldn’t.

“Why the hate, then?” Death asked, not accusingly, but with genuine curiosity. “If there were good times, why cling to this hate?”

The question struck a nerve. My thoughts raced, the familiar walls of defence crumbling under the weight of his words. Why indeed? I wanted to lash out, to blame him, to point out every fight, every disagreement. In the stillness of the memory, with our daughter’s laughter ringing in my ears, I just couldn’t find the strength to defend myself.

“I don’t know...” I muttered.

The scene shifted, once more pulling me into another memory. This time, a darker one.

It was a school event. I saw myself rushing, late as always. The parking lot was nearly empty, and by the time I reached the school hall, everyone had left. Everyone, except for my daughter, who was standing alone by the door. I saw her eyes, wide with disappointment as she spotted me. And there, beside her, was my ex-husband, gently kneeling down to talk to her, to comfort her.

I remembered how my heart had sunk that day, not just from being late, but because I had missed the entire event. My daughter had performed on stage, and I hadn't seen it. The guilt of that moment came flooding back as I watched her tiny figure standing there with her father—her hero—while my presence, once again, was an afterthought

“You weren't there for her,” Death remarked, his words cutting through the silence.

“I couldn't be,” I whispered back, tears welling up. “I had to work. I... I had to provide for us.”

“Did she need you to provide? Or did she need you to be there?” he asked gently.

I felt a sharp pain in my chest, the weight of his words sinking deep into my heart. I had told myself so many times that I had to work for my daughter, to secure her future, to give her the best. Although in that moment, standing there alone at the end of the day, what she had needed wasn't more money or a better life. She had needed me.... and I hadn't been there.

The scene shifted once more, this time to a quiet evening at home. I saw myself in the kitchen, late at night, after yet another argument with my ex-husband. The remains of the fight are quite evident in the kitchen but I can still hear our daughter laughing in the next room as he played with her, their voices filled with joy. The sound had stung, a cruel reminder that once again, he was the one being the hero, and I was the one missing out. I remember hating the fact that he quickly moved on from our fight to play with our daughter while I stood there brooding. I felt my anger rising again, a familiar bitterness curling in my chest; but this time, Death spoke before I could.

“You blamed him,” he said softly. “You blamed him for being there when you couldn’t. But your hate... it wasn’t for him, was it?”

The truth hit me like a cold wave. I swallowed hard, my voice trembling as I replied, “No... it wasn’t. It was me. I hated that I couldn’t be there for her. I hated that I kept missing out. And he... he was always there, always the one she turned to.”

Tears streamed down my face as I finally allowed myself to admit what I had avoided for so long. The fights, the anger, the bitterness, they had all been fuelled by my own guilt. I had blamed my ex-husband for something that wasn’t his fault. I had hated him because he had been everything I couldn’t be.

“I didn’t know,” I whispered, my voice breaking. “I didn’t know how much I was hurting her. I thought... I thought I was doing the right thing.”

The weight of my guilt pressed down on me, crushing in its intensity. I felt shattered, broken by the truth I had spent years avoiding. My hands trembled as I wiped my tears, trying to hold myself together, but the weight of my own emotions was too heavy to bear.

Death watched silently. He didn’t need to say anything else. He didn’t need to. The truth was already laid bare.

I had always blamed my ex-husband. Now, standing in the ruins of these memories, I realized the blame had always been mine.

Chapter 6:

Embracing the Echoes of the Past



As I lingered in the space between memories, guilt pressed down on me like a heavy shroud. I could see a reel of images of my daughter spinning through my mind, like a camera roll I couldn't stop from turning. Each one a reminder of the emotional distance I had created between us. I was the architect of that distance, and it shattered me to accept it. Death stood beside me, a comforting presence, guiding me through the haze.

"Your daughter was always there for you," Death reminded me gently. "Even on your deathbed, she was there with you. Remember the wedding? She stood by you, proud and grateful. There were countless moments like that."

I nodded, tears brimming in my eyes. "But I was never there for her. I missed so much... School events, birthdays... I made excuses, told myself I was providing for her. Yet, all I did was push her away." My voice trembled with the weight of my regret.

"You've seen it all now," Death said, nudging my thoughts gently. "What if you could also see how she viewed those moments? What if, in her eyes, you were a constant presence despite the distance you felt?"

Taking a deep breath, I let the memories flood back, images spinning through my mind like scenes from an old film. I could picture my daughter, eyes shining with joy, her laughter

echoing through our home. I remembered her delight on a quiet afternoon when she handed me a handmade card. "Thanks for being my mom," it read, in messy crayon letters. I had tucked that card away, but the warmth of that moment surged back, softening the edges of my regret.

"Do you see?" Death asked softly. "This was a moment of pure connection. She always cherished you, regardless of the distance. You need to accept that."

The spark of realization ignited within me. We stepped into her graduation day, where she stood proudly beside me, despite the emotional absence I had felt in the years leading up to that moment. I began to understand the truth; she had always seen me as her mother, even when I hadn't fully been there.

"You've created the distance in your mind, that stopped you from ever taking a step closer", Death reminded me. I slowly realized that it was me who always assumed that she resented me; maybe she did, maybe she didn't, but it shouldn't have stopped me from connecting with her.

"Come on. Let's shift back even further, shall we?" Death said softly, urging me to move on from my thoughts.

Suddenly, the memories transitioned, pulling me back to a time when ambition flowed through my veins like a lifeline. I can feel passion and energy in my bones as I find myself standing in a familiar place, watching a little girl with big dreams, scribbling on the floor with crayons. Her face lit up by bright colours, yet there was a shadow of silence surrounding her.

At first, I felt a wave of confusion wash over me. "Who is she?" I thought, feeling detached from this version of myself.

I see myself as a little girl up ahead, sitting on the steps of a house that feels both familiar and distant. She must be no older than eight, wearing a faded red dress, her knees scraped and dirty from another climb up a tree. I remember the sting of the cuts; but she still seemed proud of the fact that she reached the top. The wind was cold against my skin, but I ignored it. I was drawn to the passion radiating from this girl. She had something to prove, and nothing, not the cold, not the pain, was going to stop her.

I watch as my younger self hugs her knees to her chest, staring out at the empty road. The air smells of rain and mud, and there's a strange stillness around me. I feel detached, almost as if this memory belongs to someone else. Was that really me?

Death stands beside me, silent this time, but I can feel his presence, as he allows me the time to embrace this moment.

I try to feel the child's ambition, her drive to succeed, but beyond all that, I can sense her loneliness. There's no one there, not a parent calling her inside, no sibling to share the evening with; just me, or rather, her. I take a step closer, feeling the gravel shift beneath my feet. The crunch of it brings back memories of how every day felt like a battle, to be more, to make something of myself.

I remember that house now. The creaking floorboards, the smell of my mother's cooking that never quite masked the scent of old wood. I used to spend hours in my room, plotting my escape. The feel of pencils under my fingers as I sketched out grand plans, the taste of chalk in the back of my throat from endless schoolwork I buried myself in. It was a small world, but back then, it felt endless.

Watching my younger self now, all the stubbornness and the determination come rushing back. Yet, behind it all, I spot something I'd once overlooked. The quiet loneliness. The absence of laughter inside the house, except for mine. How long had I been fighting to get out; to prove I could make something of myself? And at what cost?

"She was always driven," Death whispers beside me. "But she was always alone, too. Can you see it now?"

I nod slowly, feeling a lump rise in my throat. I had forgotten this part of me, the part that fought to succeed because I believed that was the only way to escape the isolation. The part that thought being independent meant cutting myself off from others. Over the years, things did improve with my family. I have learned to let people into my life, make memories filled with laughter and joy. I don't remember experiencing loneliness to this extent in recent years.

Suddenly, I'm hit with a wave of understanding. This.... this girl sitting in front of me; this was the part of me I had left behind. In my quest to move forward, to be something more, I had pushed her away. Still, she was always there, waiting, just like my daughter had been.

Tears sting my eyes as I kneel beside her, my hand hovering over her small shoulder. She doesn't look up, too absorbed in her thoughts, but I feel it, I feel the connection. The scent of rain, the sound of my own heartbeat echoing in my ears, the cold air biting my skin — all of it reminds me of who I was. Who I still am.

"She never left you," Death whispers again, but this time I know he's not just talking about my daughter. He's talking

about me—the child I used to be, the drive I had, the ambition that both fuelled me and left me alone.

A part of me wants to tell her it's okay, that everything will turn out fine. But I don't. She wouldn't have believed it then, and maybe that's for the best. It's the fight that shaped me, after all. The pain, the loneliness, whatever I am is a blend of these experiences.

I stand up, brushing off my hands. I don't need to say anything. I already know. I'm proud of her, proud of me.

As the memory begins to fade, I feel a sense of peace settle over me. The rain slows down; the smell of damp earth softens. I'm no longer that lonely child, but she's a part of me. She always was.

As I stood there, reflecting on both my childhood and my daughter's unwavering love, the distance began to dissolve. "I understand now," I said with a steady voice. "I can be proud of my flaws and my accomplishments. I need to embrace all of it. My past, my mistakes, and the people who stayed by my side."

I take a moment for myself and ask him, "Can I do it again? You told me we can reincarnate into new forms. Maybe I can get it right this time?"

"You have lived a life full of amazing experiences. Why don't we see where these take you for now," Death said, amused by my request. "We haven't even stepped into the afterlife, and you're already talking about reincarnating!"

I couldn't help but smile at Death's playful tone and start wondering about how these experiences will help me in the afterlife. Death smiled, warmth radiating from his presence.

“So, are you ready for what comes next? Have you decided which sense you wish to carry into the afterlife?”

I paused, considering my journey. I let the silence hold me for a moment, the laughter of my daughter, the fire of my younger self, and the tenderness of love threading together inside me. They no longer felt scattered or broken, they felt like they always belonged to me.

“Yes,” I said at last. “I’ve made my choice.”

Although I had much to learn and a long journey ahead, I felt a sense of peace wrap around me; like a warm embrace of understanding and acceptance. With one last look at the memories of my life, I allowed them to settle within me; not as burdens, but as lessons. The echoes of my past would walk beside me, while the mysteries of the afterlife stretched ahead like an open horizon. With a steady breath, I stepped forward, knowing that my journey was only beginning.