

BETWEEN US

**THE JOURNEY FROM
SILENCE TO IMPACT**

FROM THE HOST OF BETWEEN US STORY LAB™

SANTOSH KUMAR



BlueRoseONE^{com}
Stories Matter

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DEDICATION

For Those Who Carried Me

This book exists because of the people who believed in it
before it believed in itself.

To my Ammamma (Maternal Grandmother), T. V. Lakshmikutty Amma, my first storyteller, a lifelong teacher, and someone who always wanted me to be a writer. This book carries something of your love, your faith, and the stories you placed in me long ago.

Other than these two additions, nothing else needs to be changed. The manuscript is otherwise complete from my side.

To my father, Late Shri Rama Krishnan, who is no longer here in the way I wish he could be, but whose presence lives in every page of this book. You taught me that quiet people carry the loudest truths. I hope wherever you are, you can hear me finally saying the things I didn't know how to say when you were here.

This one's for you, Papa.

To my mother, Leela Devi, for the smile that lingered two seconds longer when you were worried, for the love you showed through every quiet, unspoken gesture. You never needed a stage to be powerful. I learned that from watching you.

To my brother Bobby, for showing up, in your own way, always. For being the one constant in the in-between spaces of our family story. I see you. I'm grateful for you, more than these words can hold.

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To Sarah Carlson, for bringing your voice so generously into this journey. From being your first podcast and my first guest in Season 2, to writing a foreword that reflects not just the work but the path behind it, your presence has meant more than I can fully express. I'm deeply grateful for the clarity, warmth, and insight you bring.

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And to Dr. Rupa Rao Naik, my guide and my soul sister. You helped me sit with the silences I had been running from my whole life. You held space for the parts of me I hadn't yet learned to hold myself. You gave me the tools not just to survive, but to finally, truly speak.

I would not be here, truly here, without you.

This book is for all of you.

And to the many others, seen and unseen, who have shaped,
supported, and inspired me along the way. Your presence lives
in these pages.

And for the quiet boy who needed someone to tell him:

“Your voice matters.”

Between us, always.



My parents on their wedding reception day. At that moment, I did not exist, my dreams did not exist, and this book did not exist. Yet everything that made them possible stands in this frame.

FOREWORD

I came to know Santosh at a time when we were both a little lost and struggling—but also filled with hope for the future we sensed was possible. We reconnected years later, after we had each followed that quiet inner voice and reshaped our lives to reflect our values. This makes us, in a sense, brother and sister in the quest to be fully human and fully ourselves in a world that doesn't make that easy.

If you are lucky, you will find a friend in his words, as I have found in him. And as you take your own steps toward the future you feel called to, you may discover companions like him along the way.

Santosh and I are kindred spirits in this work. I, too, am an author and teacher on these themes, yet even for me, his book was a reminder that the goal is not to do what we do *perfectly*, but *honestly*. To trust that honesty is enough, that *we* are enough, and that the world is made better when we share our gifts.

This book could not be more timely. Our world feels shaky, and many of the things we built our careers and identities upon no longer feel certain to deliver what they once promised. Santosh looks at that reality with clear eyes and an open heart. He shares what it feels like to face those truths and make courageous choices about who you are and who you want to become.

He writes with vulnerability about what it's like to feel alone in a world obsessed with surfaces, to crave authenticity and real connection, and to experience the emptiness that can accompany outward "success" when it's misaligned with your inner truth. His reflections are a breath of fresh air—each short

section a capsule of wisdom and encouragement that leaves you wanting more.

I am deeply honored to write this foreword, because his story is, in many ways, my story—and perhaps a universal one. It's about learning to see who we truly are and to integrate the parts of ourselves we were never taught to value: the quiet, the perceptive, the reflective. In a culture that prizes constant motion and extroversion, Santosh reminds us that stillness and authenticity are forms of courage.

Not everyone is as brave as he is. Through his journey, he offers a living example of what it means—and how it feels—to honor who you really are and to bring that truth into the world. He also reminds us what's at stake if we don't: disconnection, numbness, depression—what Thoreau called “lives of quiet desperation.”

And even once you've made the choice to follow your true path, this book reminds you that the journey doesn't end there. Crisis and challenge will arise. Doubt will return. The call to abandon yourself will echo again and again. But this book is a companion for those moments—a source of solace, courage, and wisdom. It's something you can return to over and over when you need to remember that the journey is, indeed, worth it.

And perhaps most importantly, it reminds us that living your truth doesn't end with solitude—it includes *sharing your story*. Reaching out. Connecting with another human being in honesty and compassion. That's the beauty of Santosh's work, his podcast, and his life itself. After leaving the corporate world, he created a space for real stories and true connection. Through his words and his voice, he shows us that authenticity is not only a personal act of courage—it's also a gift we give to one another.

— **Sarah D. Carlson, JD**

Author of *The Five Principles of Effective Self-Advocacy*

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वक्रतुण्ड महाकाय सूर्यकोटि समप्रभ ।
निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव सर्वकार्येषु सर्वदा ॥
जय श्री राधे कृष्ण
ॐ साई राम

CHAPTER 1

The Boy Who Listened More Than He Spoke

I was never the loudest voice in the room. Not at school. Not at home. Not even in my own head.

While other kids were cracking jokes, shouting over each other during games, or performing to be noticed, I was often somewhere at the edge—watching. Listening. Observing people more than speaking to them. Not because I didn't have things to say. But because I was still learning how to hold my own voice.

I remember sitting cross-legged on the floor in our living room, surrounded by family, and feeling the buzz of conversation swirling around me like wind. It was warm, chaotic, familiar. But I rarely interrupted it. I'd respond when asked, and smile when someone looked my way, but mostly—I just listened. I was curious. Curious about what people said, but even more curious about what they didn't.

I wasn't shy. I was tuned in. But at the time, no one really had words for that.

The First Truth I Learned

In those early years, I figured out something quietly powerful: *people show you who they are, not just by what they say—but in the pauses, the glances, the slips of silence.*

While others were chasing attention, I was collecting insight. I noticed the tired eyes behind my father's jokes. The way my mother's smile lingered two seconds longer when she was worried. The tension in a teacher's tone when she spoke too kindly. I was taking mental notes—on people, on life, on what it meant to *be someone*.

But I didn't share these notes. I didn't know if I was allowed to. So, I kept them close, like secrets in my pocket.

Language, Labels, and Not Fitting In

As a child, you're always being told who you are—by adults, by classmates, by marks on a report card. "Smart but too quiet." "Disciplined but not confident." "Good listener, but needs to speak up more."

Every sentence had a "but." Like I was incomplete. Like something had to be fixed before I could be enough.

At school, I learned quickly that volume often passed for value. The louder you were, the more visible you became. The more visible you were, the more you were rewarded. And so, the silent ones like me became part of the background.

I wasn't angry about it. But I *noticed* it. And quietly, I promised myself: *someday, I'll find a different way to be seen.*

When Silence Was My Strength

My silence was not empty. It was where I learned how stories worked. How people revealed themselves. How pain hides behind laughter, and how truth sometimes arrives in whispers.

Looking back, those quiet years gave me something most people spend decades chasing: a way of seeing the world that wasn't performative, but perceptive. I didn't need to be the center of attention. I just needed to understand the edges better than anyone else.

That's where stories live. In the edges.

And Then Came the Question

One evening, someone asked me at a family gathering, "Why are you always so quiet?"

I must have been around ten. I shrugged. I didn't know how to explain it. But what I wanted to say was, "*I'm not quiet. I'm just full of things I haven't said yet.*"

The Early Spark

Even before I could name it, I felt pulled to stories. I wasn't reading for plot. I was reading for emotion. For connection. For the parts where characters slipped out of their expected roles and said something real.

I started writing in journals. Fragments, mostly. One-liners. Observations. Moments that didn't have a place in conversation but felt too important to let go of.

Those scribbles became my language before I found the courage to use my voice out loud.

Looking Back Now

That quiet boy—he’s still in me. And I’ve come to realize he was never “too quiet.” He was just waiting to speak with purpose.

He was soaking in the world so he could one day speak in a way that would matter—not to impress, but to connect.

Because when you’ve spent enough time listening, you start to hear what most people miss.

And Maybe You Too...

Maybe you were the quiet one. The one who blended in, who observed more than you spoke. Maybe people told you to be louder, more visible, more *something*.

But maybe your strength was never in the noise. Maybe it was in your stillness. Your habit of noticing. Your ability to feel what others overlook.

If that’s true—hold onto it. The world needs voices that don’t just fill space but say something that matters when they speak.

A Quiet Thought

This chapter isn’t just about me. It’s about all of us who learned to listen before we learned to speak.

Because maybe silence isn’t the absence of voice.

Maybe it’s the preparation for it.

CHAPTER 2

In a Room Full of Noise, I Found Silence

Some rooms are loud with sound, but even louder with expectations.

Classrooms. Birthday parties. Job interviews. Family dinners. They all had one thing in common: everyone seemed to know the script—except me.

People talked easily. Laughed easily. Raised their hands, cracked jokes, and joined the middle of the crowd without hesitation. I stood at the edge, wondering how everyone made it look so easy. I wasn't afraid. I just couldn't find my rhythm in all that noise.

I would often catch myself scanning the room—not for attention, but for exits. Not physical ones, but emotional ones. Tiny spaces where I could breathe without pretending. I wasn't shy. I was just... elsewhere. Somewhere quieter. Somewhere I could be more me.

The Pressure to Perform

In group settings, silence gets misread. People assume you're disengaged or uninterested. But most of the time, I was listening more closely than anyone else.

The noise in those rooms wasn't just volume—it was performance. Everyone was playing a part. And while I admired their confidence, I couldn't fake it. I could laugh, sure. Join in. But it never felt like *me*. It felt like I was borrowing someone else's voice—and it never fit quite right.

The few times I tried to be louder, it felt off. Like I was betraying a part of myself. So, I retreated. Not out of fear—but out of integrity.

The Safe Place Within

While others found comfort in the crowd, I found mine in solitude.

Give me a notebook and a quiet corner, and I could process the entire world. I didn't need applause. I needed honesty. I needed meaning.

Looking back, I realize I was creating space inside myself for things the room didn't have time for—like wondering why people say “I'm fine” when they're not, or why grown-ups pretend they're not afraid. That internal space became my safe place. It still is.

The silence I found in noisy rooms wasn't absence. It was presence. A kind of deeper listening. A tuning in, not a tuning out.

When You Don't Belong, You Observe

Not belonging teaches you to observe. You learn to read between the lines. Pick up on shifts in energy. Understand tone better than words. And that becomes your superpower later in life.

It's what helps me today as a storyteller, a podcaster, and an entrepreneur. I can sit with someone and hear the things they're

not saying. I can feel when a guest on the podcast is holding back—and gently guide them somewhere more real.

This started in childhood. In classrooms where I didn't speak much. At birthday parties where I stood near the snacks rather than in the spotlight.

Observation isn't passive. It's deep engagement.

Not All Noise Is Sound

As I grew older, the noise changed. It became career ladders, social media feeds, family expectations, and endless to-do lists. But it was still noise.

And I still had to find my silence within it.

Even during meetings, presentations, and conferences—I learned to pause. To center myself. To make room for what *I* thought, before being swept up by what everyone else wanted.

It's not easy to do in a world that rewards fast answers and instant reactions. But that silence saved me. It reminded me who I was when everything else felt loud.

The Power of Knowing Yourself Quietly

There's a strange kind of strength in being quiet in a loud world. It's not rebellion. It's clarity.

You start to realize that speaking less doesn't mean you have less to say. It often means you're taking your time to say it right.

When I started my podcast, I didn't want it to be another voice shouting for attention. I wanted it to be a space for real connection. For the quiet truths people carry. For the questions that don't get asked in noisy rooms.

That was always the heart of it. A room where silence had a seat at the table.

If This Is You Too...

If you've ever felt out of place in a crowd—not because you don't belong, but because your mind works differently—you're not alone.

You don't need to change your wiring. You need to find your way of expressing it.

Sometimes the best storytellers, leaders, creators aren't the ones who speak the most. They're the ones who listen best.

And when they do speak—people lean in.

A Quiet Thought

There's a line I once heard that stuck with me: "*Still waters run deep.*"

If that's true, then I've spent most of my life learning how to swim in those still waters.

And now, I'm learning how to invite others in.

CHAPTER 3

What My School Never Taught Me

School taught me how to solve equations, write essays, memorize capitals, and raise my hand before speaking.

It taught me how to sit still, follow instructions, and stand in line. It taught me grades mattered, attendance mattered, neatness mattered.

But it didn't teach me how to understand myself.

It didn't teach me how to navigate failure, process grief, manage fear, or trust my instincts. It didn't teach me how to ask for help without feeling weak. It didn't teach me what to do when I didn't fit in.

School gave me structure, yes. But it rarely gave me space.

The Curriculum of Conformity

We were all measured the same way—test scores, report cards, red and blue ink. There was no room for nuance, no points for emotional intelligence, and no extra marks for quiet resilience.

You either fit the mold or you fell behind. And if you weren't good at math, science, or being loud—you learned to shrink yourself.

I was good at a lot of things that didn't show up in exams: making sense of people, noticing things others missed, and

asking better questions than I could answer. But there was no grade for that.

So, I kept those parts of me hidden, like secret talents that the system didn't care about.

Learning to Pretend

School, unintentionally, teaches performance.

You learn how to give the “right” answers even when you don't understand the question. You learn how to be liked by teachers, how to speak only when it's safe, how to mold yourself into what gets rewarded.

And slowly, without realizing it, you stop asking, “*What do I want to learn? What do I want to create? Who am I becoming?*”

Instead, the questions become: *Will this be on the test? Will this get me marks?*

I wish someone had told me that curiosity matters more than correctness. That asking “why” can be just as powerful as knowing “how.”

What I Did Learn (Outside the Textbook)

Not everything was a loss. School gave me friendships. Moments of laughter. Teachers who tried their best. But the real learning often happened in the in-between.

I learned empathy from watching classmates struggle quietly.

I learned resilience when I failed something I thought I'd ace.

I learned self-worth from moments when someone believed in me, even when I didn't raise my hand.

I learned that sometimes the most important lessons don't come with certificates. They come with experience.

The Day I Started Teaching Myself

One afternoon, after a rough day of feeling invisible in class, I came home and pulled out a notebook. I wasn't sure what I was writing—just thoughts, questions, and fragments. But it felt like freedom. Like I was speaking to a part of me that had been waiting patiently.

That notebook became my real school. I wrote down things I felt but couldn't explain. I imagined different versions of myself—some brave, some angry, some full of ideas.

No red marks. No fear of being wrong. Just truth.

That's when I realized: maybe I wasn't failing school. Maybe school was just not built for kids like me.

The Gap Between Learning and Living

So much of life happens in the spaces that schools often overlook.

- How to apologize.
- How to listen without interrupting.
- How to bounce back from rejection.
- How to sit with discomfort.
- How to create something from nothing.

I learned those lessons the hard way—through trial, through error, through living.

And today, as someone who mentors, speaks, creates, and listens—I see how valuable those hidden lessons were.

The world rarely asks what grade you got in history. But it always wants to know: *Can you understand people? Can you build something that matters? Can you get back up when you fall?*

If I Could Go Back

I don't blame my school. It did what it was designed to do. But if I could go back, I wouldn't change who I was. I'd change what I believed about myself.

I'd tell that younger version of me:

You're not slow. You're thoughtful.

You're not behind. You're deep.

You're not weak. You're sensitive—and that's a strength the world desperately needs.

What I Teach Myself Now

These days, I'm still in school—but it's a different kind. I'm learning through conversations, through failures, through building my own path.

I learn through every podcast episode. Every time someone tells me, "I've never said this out loud before." Every story reminds me that we're all unlearning the things we were once taught—about success, about voice, about worth.

And now, I teach what I wish I'd known:

That your story is enough.

That silence is not the opposite of intelligence.

That impact doesn't need permission.

A Quiet Thought

The school system wasn't built to teach me who I really was. But life did.

And in the quiet pages of notebooks, late-night thoughts, and every mistake that taught me something new—I finally found the education that mattered.

CHAPTER 4

The Things We Don't Say at Home

Every home has two versions of itself.

The one you see—the furniture, the meals, the photos on the wall. And the one you feel—the glances, the silences, the things that are never quite said.

I grew up in a home where everything looked fine on the outside. Neat, structured, mostly functional. But beneath the routines and rituals was a language made up of pauses. A kind of quiet code—where love wasn't always said, pain wasn't always named, and difficult emotions were folded into politeness and practicalities.

It wasn't a bad home. It was just... emotionally cautious. Like too much honesty might break something.

Unspoken Rules

There were rules. Not the kind printed and stuck on the fridge. The kind you learn slowly.

Don't talk back.

Don't cry in front of others.

Don't ask too many questions during dinner.

Don't show anger. Don't raise your voice. Don't be too emotional.

And most of all—don't be difficult.

These rules weren't harshly enforced. They were quietly absorbed. Through reactions. Through tone. Through what was rewarded and what was ignored.

Over time, I learned to edit myself.

Reading the Room

By the time I was ten, I could sense tension before it had a name. I could tell when something was wrong, even if no one said it out loud. I became fluent in reading the atmosphere.

A slightly longer pause before someone responded. A look that was exchanged between adults. A door closed more gently than usual.

These were the moments that stayed with me.

No one sat me down and said, "We're not okay right now." But I felt it. And because I didn't have the language or permission to ask, I internalized it. I made it mine.

That's the thing about kids. We don't just soak up love—we soak up silence too.

What We Called Love

Love was there. But it didn't always arrive in words.

It came through meals. Through asking, "Did you eat?"

Through a hand on the shoulder instead of a hug.

Through saving the last piece of fruit.

Through letting the TV stay on just a little longer when you were clearly tired.

Love wasn't loud. But it was steady. And sometimes, that's what keeps a home running—even when feelings go unnamed.

Still, I used to wonder: what would it be like to grow up in a home where people said "I'm proud of you" without needing a

reason? Where sadness was allowed to sit at the table? Where we didn't have to smile through everything?

The Cost of Emotional Economy

When emotions are rationed, you learn to keep yours hidden too. You learn to downplay your needs. To become “low maintenance.” To smile and say you're fine, even when you're not.

I carried that into adulthood. Into friendships. Into love. Into work.

I became skilled at hiding my struggles, at making sure I didn't make anyone uncomfortable. I was always the calm one, the strong one, the one who “has it together.”

But inside, I sometimes felt like I was screaming in a library—desperate to be heard, afraid to be too loud.

The Turning Point

It wasn't one big moment that changed things. There were many small ones.

A late-night conversation with a friend who didn't rush to fix me.

A stranger's story on a podcast that cracked something open. The day I said, “I'm not okay”, for the first time—and realized the world didn't end.

Those moments helped me unlearn years of quiet conditioning. They taught me that vulnerability isn't a burden—it's a bridge.

If This Is Your Story Too...

Maybe your home was like that too.

Maybe you grew up translating silences into meaning. Maybe you learned to love without saying it. Maybe your strength was mistaken for indifference. Maybe you're still learning how to let people see your softer parts.

If so, I see you.

You're not emotionally broken. You were just taught to speak in a language that didn't have enough words for what you felt.

Learning a New Language

These days, I try to name my feelings, even when it feels awkward. I try to say the things I once thought were too much:

"I need help."

"I miss you."

"I'm hurt."

"I love you—even when I don't know how to show it."

And most importantly:

"I forgive you. And I'm learning to forgive myself too."

Because breaking cycles doesn't always look like rebellion. Sometimes it's as simple as speaking the sentence that always felt too heavy to say.

A Quiet Thought

The things we don't say at home don't disappear. They echo. They shape us. They live inside our choices.

But here's the hope: we get to choose again. We get to speak differently. Love differently. Show up differently.

And maybe one day, someone will grow up in a home where emotions aren't edited for comfort—but welcomed as truth.

CHAPTER 5

Fitting In, Standing Out

There's a strange pressure in growing up—to belong without being noticed, and to be noticed without standing out too much.

We're taught to color inside the lines, follow the rules, blend in just enough to be accepted—but still shine just enough to be remembered.

For a long time, I didn't know how to do both.

I tried fitting in. I copied what others wore. Laughed at things I didn't find funny. Downplayed what I was curious about so I wouldn't seem odd. It worked, sometimes. I became likable, even friendly. But underneath, I felt like a version of myself I didn't quite recognize.

It was like wearing a jacket that almost fits—but not really.

The Shape of Belonging

I used to think belonging was about similarity. That I had to be like others to be accepted. Those differences made people uncomfortable. And maybe, in some rooms, they did.

But in trying to blend in, I also began to blur out.

There were parts of me I stopped showing: my fascination with how things work, my love for stories, my deeper thoughts about

people and life and purpose. These didn't feel like "group conversation" topics.

So, I became good at surface talk—smiling, nodding, small talk. But it left me feeling hollow. Like I was attending my own life as a guest.

When Standing Out Feels Like a Mistake

I remember the first time I raised my hand in class and gave an answer that made people pause—not because it was wrong, but because it was different. The teacher appreciated it. But my classmates stared. Someone made a joke. I laughed along, pretending it didn't matter.

But it did. It stayed.

There's a certain loneliness in being the one who sees the world differently. Especially when you're young and all you want is to not be *the weird one*.

So, you retreat. You tuck in your edges. You try to soften your difference. But it doesn't go away. It just gets quieter. And heavier.

The Cost of Shrinking

Shrinking yourself to fit in always comes at a cost. You start to second-guess your instincts. You hesitate before you speak. You seek approval before authenticity.

And worst of all, you begin to forget what made you, *you* in the first place.

There was a period in my life where I became a master of adaptation. Different rooms, different roles, different versions of me. And while that helped me navigate the world, it also pulled me further from the grounded sense of who I really was.

Fitting in can feel safe. But sometimes, safety is a trap.

The Slow Return to Self

What started to change everything wasn't some grand epiphany. It was small moments of truth.

The friend who said, "I like the way your mind works."
The project that allowed me to create from a place of meaning.
The mentor who encouraged me to lead with *my* voice—not someone else's script.

And slowly, I began to understand: standing out isn't arrogance.
It's honesty.

It's the decision to bring your whole self into the room, even when it's different. Especially when it's different.

Fitting In vs. Belonging

There's a difference between fitting in and belonging.

Fitting in requires you to change.

Belonging accepts you as you are.

I didn't know that as a child. But I'm learning it now.

And now, I seek spaces where people aren't impressed by performance, but moved by presence. Where vulnerability is welcome. Where difference is not just tolerated—but valued.

I'm building those spaces myself—through my podcast, my conversations, the choices I make every day. I want others to feel what I once searched for: *a place to belong without pretending.*

If You've Ever Felt This Too...

If you've ever felt too much, too different, too deep, too sensitive—know this: you are not wrong. You're not a misfit. You're just meant for a different rhythm.

The world may not always reward authenticity right away. But in the long run, it's the only thing that sustains connection.

Fitting in might get you applause.

But standing out, truthfully, gets you *home*.

A Quiet Thought

I spent years trying to become someone the world would accept. But the real turning point was the day I decided to become someone *I* could accept—fully.

If that means I stand out a little, speak differently, and walk a less crowded path—so be it.

Because I'd rather be alone in my truth than surrounded by performance.

CHAPTER 6

Dreams I Never Said Out Loud

Some dreams arrive like whispers.

They don't come with grand announcements. They don't kick down the door and demand to be seen. Instead, they sit quietly inside you—tucked between the things you do because you have to, and the things you long to do but don't know how to say out loud.

As a child, I had dreams I couldn't name. They didn't come with job titles or clear goals. They came as feelings. A sense that I wanted to *create*, to *connect*, to build something meaningful with words. But no one told me that was an option.

So, I kept those dreams to myself.

Why We Stay Quiet

Sometimes we don't speak our dreams because we're afraid they'll sound silly. Or fragile. Or worse—unrealistic.

We fear that if we say them out loud, someone might laugh. Or worse, they might not care at all. And what could be more disheartening than handing someone your most delicate hope, only to have it dismissed as impractical?

So, we tuck them away.

We pursue the dreams that are easier to explain. The ones that get nods from the adults in the room. The ones that come with degrees, promotions, LinkedIn endorsements.

But the real dreams? The ones that tug at your soul quietly at 2 a.m.? Those stay hidden. At least for a while.

The Ones I Buried

There were so many versions of myself I wanted to explore.

I wanted to be a writer.

A creator.

Someone who asked meaningful questions for a living. Someone who sat with others and helped them feel seen. Someone who built things that *mattered*.

But I never said any of that. Not at school. Not at home. Not even in college. I pursued what made sense. What sounded right. What checked the boxes.

And in doing so, I lost years to roles that looked good from the outside but felt empty inside.

The Weight of Unlived Dreams

Unspoken dreams don't die. They wait. Sometimes patiently. Sometimes painfully.

They show up as restlessness. As envy when someone else lives freely. As burnout in a job that doesn't feed your spirit. As a deep, aching question: *Is this really all there is?*

Mine showed up in the middle of "successful" seasons. Even when I had a good paycheck, recognition, security—I'd feel a strange sadness I couldn't explain.

It wasn't depression. It was disconnection. From who I really was.

The First Time I Spoke It

I remember the first time I admitted—out loud—that I wanted to create something of my own. A podcast. A platform. A space where stories could breathe. Where people could be real.

Even saying it felt rebellious.

But once I said it, I couldn't un-say it. That dream had finally tasted air. And it wasn't going back underground.

It didn't matter that I had no plan. No investors. No guarantee it would work. What mattered was I'd finally owned it. And that changed everything.

Why Dreams Deserve Air

Dreams aren't fragile because they're small. They're fragile because we starve them of sunlight. Of belief. Of momentum.

We wait for the right time. For approval. For someone to tell us, "Yes, this is valid." But the truth is—no one can give you permission to be who you are. You have to claim it.

And sometimes the only thing standing between a dream and its first breath is your voice.

If You've Been Holding Something In...

Maybe you have a dream sitting inside you too. Something unspoken. Something quiet but persistent.

Maybe it's a project.

A different career.

A story that needs to be told.

A version of you that's been waiting patiently for years.

If so, this chapter is your nudge.

Speak it. Write it down. Tell one person. Let it exist outside your mind. Because once it's real, even just a little—it starts to grow.

A Quiet Thought

I've learned that the most powerful transformations begin with a single brave sentence:

“This is what I really want.”

It's not always convenient. It won't always be met with applause. But it will be honest. And honesty, when repeated with care, becomes purpose.

I used to believe I had to prove my dream before I could pursue it.

Now I know: you pursue it because it matters.

Because it's yours.

Because it's time.

CHAPTER 7

The Resume Looked Better Than My Life

There was a time when my resume looked perfect.

Big brands. Global exposure. Promotions. Recognition. A collection of words that told a polished story: strategic, high-performing, impactful.

It was everything I thought I wanted. Everything I had worked hard for. And yet—behind the scenes, I was quietly unravelling.

It's strange how success can sometimes be the best disguise for struggle. You get so busy performing the part that you stop noticing you've drifted away from yourself.

On paper, I had made it.

But in life, I was barely present.

The Illusion of Arrival

We chase goals like checkpoints. Thinking, *Once I get there, I'll feel secure. I'll feel proud. I'll finally be enough.*

But “there” is a moving target.

Every achievement just led to the next expectation. Every applause faded too quickly. Every win made me wonder: *What now?*

There was no space to breathe, only space to perform. And the more I performed, the more hollow I felt.

From the outside, I was climbing. But inside, I was disconnected—from my purpose, from people, even from my own joy.

The Burnout No One Talks About

Burnout doesn't always come with exhaustion. Sometimes it comes with numbness.

I'd show up to work, hit my targets, and smile at meetings—but there was no spark. No creativity. No real curiosity. Just routine.

Even small things started feeling heavy—emails, deadlines, decisions. Everything required more effort than it used to. But I pushed through. That's what we're taught to do, right?

Push. Deliver. Excel. Repeat.

Until one day, the pushing stops working. And you're just... tired.

Living for Validation

The truth is, I was addicted to approval. Not in an obvious way—but in a deep, subtle way.

Every nod from a senior leader. Every good review. Every “great job” on a deck or presentation—it became fuel. Not because I was vain, but because I didn't yet know how to validate myself from within.

So, I kept building this version of me that others liked. One that looked right in boardrooms, sounded right in emails, and dressed right for events.

But the real me? He was fading.

The Cracks Begin to Show

It wasn't one big breakdown. It was small signs.

Waking up with dread, even on a Friday.

Forgetting what I loved doing outside of work.

Starting to avoid conversations that felt too real.

Noticing that I laughed less—and when I did, it didn't feel full.

I began to wonder: *Is this it?*

Was this what I worked for all these years? A life that looked good on a slide deck, but felt empty in my chest?

When Success Stops Making Sense

There's a moment—quiet, personal, almost untraceable—when the path you're on stops making sense. Not because it's wrong. But because *you've changed*.

Your values evolve. Your definition of success shifts. And suddenly, what once made you proud starts to feel... off.

You start craving meaning more than metrics. Connection more than competition. Impact more than income.

And that craving won't let you sleep.

The Decision to Pause

I didn't quit everything overnight. It took time. Reflection. Courage. Conversations with myself that were uncomfortable but necessary.

But the first real shift came when I allowed myself to admit that this isn't working for me anymore.

That admission didn't solve everything. But it opened a door.

It made space for something else to begin—something not built on prestige, but on purpose.

If You've Ever Felt This Too...

If you've ever had a life that looked fine on the outside, but felt misaligned on the inside—you're not alone.

So many of us build lives based on who we were expected to be. And we forget to ask who we *want* to be.

It's not selfish to question the script. It's survival.

And rewriting it isn't failure. It's freedom.

A Quiet Thought

There's a line I came across once that stayed with me:
"Don't confuse what you're good at with what you're meant for."

I was good at many things. But I wasn't meant for all of them.

My resume told one story.

My heart was quietly writing another.

It was time to follow the one that felt real.

CHAPTER 8

What America Gave Me (and What It Took Away)

When I first landed in America, it felt like everything was possible.

There was something cinematic about it all—the clean highways, the towering skylines, the coffee in paper cups, the ease with which people said “Have a great day.” It felt like I had stepped into a story I’d only seen in films.

For a while, I tried to live that story.

I worked hard. Spoke in the right tone. Adapted to meetings that started on time and calendars that ruled everything. I got good at email etiquette and cultural nuance. I understood the unspoken rules of belonging in a different country.

And for the most part, I thrived.

But over time, I started to notice what I had traded in exchange for that belonging.

A Land of Opportunities—and Expectations

America gave me chances I might not have had back home. It gave me access. It gave me systems that worked. It gave me mentors, networks, platforms.

It gave me confidence—because for the first time, I saw myself succeed in rooms where no one knew my backstory. I was just *me*, judged on what I could bring to the table.

But the same place that lifted me also made me question parts of myself.

The silence I was once proud of became a liability. If I wasn't outspoken, I risked being overlooked. If I didn't self-promote, I was forgotten. The subtlety I was raised with didn't translate well in a culture that celebrated clarity, confidence, and quick answers.

So, I adjusted. I performed. I learned how to be “on.”

But it came at a cost.

Cultural Trade-offs

There were things I missed that I didn't even know I missed—until much later.

- The ease of shared language without needing to explain your references.
- The sound of your mother tongue in a public place.
- The feeling of being part of something, not just visiting it.
- The kind of community that doesn't need a calendar invite to show up for you.

In America, I learned independence. But I often felt alone.

In India, I had chaos, unpredictability, texture. In America, I had structure—but sometimes, it felt sterile.

Both had beauty. Both had blind spots.

And I lived in that tension for years.

Success, but at What Pace?

America teaches ambition like a religion. Move fast. Work harder. Optimize everything. Don't pause for too long—you'll fall behind.

I became good at the hustle. Too good.

Weekends blurred into Mondays. My worth was tied to productivity. Rest felt like guilt. And though I was getting ahead professionally, I often felt like I was drifting emotionally.

I missed slow dinners. I missed long conversations. I missed myself.

The Loneliness of Reinvention

Reinventing yourself in a new country is both empowering and exhausting.

No one knows your history—which is freeing. But it also means you're constantly explaining yourself. There's no shorthand. No context. You're starting from scratch, over and over again.

And that gets lonely.

I had friends, sure. Good ones. But there's something about being an outsider that never quite goes away. You carry it with you. Not as a wound, but as a quiet awareness.

What I Brought Back With Me

When I eventually returned to India, I wasn't the same person who had left.

America had taught me how to back myself. How to lead. How to dream without apology.

But it also taught me to question hustle culture. To ask: *What am I building, and why?* To realize that growth without grounding isn't success—it's escape.

I came back with new skills, yes. But more importantly, with new values.

I didn't want to just *do well*. I wanted to do work that meant something. Work that could make a dent in people's lives. Work that didn't just reward performance—but connection.

If You've Ever Lived Between Worlds...

Maybe you know what this feels like.

To belong in two places, but fully in neither.

To carry both gratitude and grief for what you gained—and what you lost.

To feel homesick for a version of yourself that doesn't exist anymore.

If you do, I see you. I know how hard it is to explain.

And I also know how powerful it can be.

Because when you live between worlds, you learn to see. You learn to bridge. You learn to carry truths across borders—and plant them wherever you land.

A Quiet Thought

What America gave me wasn't just opportunity. It gave me contrast. A mirror. A choice.

It showed me who I could become. And it reminded me who I didn't want to forget.

I didn't leave America behind. I brought it with me. But I brought something else too—my voice.

And this time, I wasn't afraid to use it.

CHAPTER 9

Mistakes That Made Me Human

We don't talk enough about the moments we'd rather forget.

The late replies. The wrong calls. The friendships we didn't nurture. The projects we couldn't finish. The versions of ourselves we outgrew too slowly.

I used to run from those moments. Hide them behind big words and polished bios. Like they didn't belong in the story I was trying to tell.

But over time, I realized something simple but freeing: the mistakes I was ashamed of were the very moments that made me real. They gave my story depth. They gave me lessons that no success ever could.

They made me human.

Mistakes Have Texture

Success is smooth. Mistakes have texture. They stay with you. They rub up against your ego and scrape away all the layers you once used to protect yourself.

I've made mistakes in silence and in public. I've said yes when I should have said no. I've stayed in rooms too long out of fear. I've walked out too quickly out of pride.

And in every case, I learned something I couldn't have learned any other way.

Like how growth often feels like loss at first.

Like how saying sorry, sincerely, is a skill.

Like how messing up is inevitable—but what do you do after it? That's your character.

The Mistake That Taught Me Courage

There was a time I took on a role I wasn't ready for. It looked like a step up. More money. Bigger title. More visibility.

But within weeks, I knew I was drowning. I didn't say anything at first. I kept showing up, wearing confidence like armor.

But deep down, I knew.

Eventually, it showed. The cracks became visible. A project fell apart. A deadline slipped. My team felt it. I felt it. And finally—I admitted it.

That moment—of saying “I'm in over my head”—felt like failure.

But it was actually courage.

Because from there, I rebuilt. I asked for help. I learned. I grew into someone who could lead better—because I had failed first.

The Ego Hits

Some of the hardest lessons came from moments when I thought I knew better. When I let ego speak louder than empathy. When I held onto control instead of trusting people. When I avoided feedback because I thought I didn't need it.

Each of those moments left a mark.

Not a scar—but a reminder.

A reminder that growth requires humility. That leadership isn't about knowing everything—it's about creating space for others to bring their best. That listening is more important than defending.

I learned those things the hard way. And honestly, I'm glad I did.

Forgiving Myself

Making mistakes is one thing. Forgiving yourself for them is another.

I carried guilt for a long time. Guilt over words I shouldn't have said. Emails I didn't send. People I let down. Opportunities I lost because I hesitated.

But guilt, when held too long, becomes punishment.

So, I started doing something new. When I made a mistake, I wrote it down. Not to shame myself—but to understand it. I'd ask:

- What did this teach me?
- What would I do differently next time?
- How do I make it right, if I can?

It wasn't a perfect process. But it helped me see myself not as broken—but as *becoming*.

If You're Carrying a Few Too...

If you have a few moments in your past that still make you flinch—know this:

They don't disqualify you.

They humanize you.

They make you more compassionate, more grounded, and more real.

Mistakes are not the opposite of success. They're part of it.

So, talk about them. Share them. Learn from them. Laugh at them, if you can. And most importantly—keep going.

You are not your worst decision.

You are the person who lived through it, and came out wiser.

A Quiet Thought

Looking back, I don't remember the perfect days. I remember the days I had to choose growth over guilt. I remember the people who stood by me even when I faltered. I remember how every mistake I thought would break me... actually built me.

Mistakes don't ruin your story.

They make it worth telling.

CHAPTER 10

Losing to Win

We're taught to fear loss. To treat it like the end of the road. A red mark. A missed step. Something to move past quickly.

But some of the most important shifts in my life started when I lost something.

An opportunity. A role. A friendship. A version of myself.

And while it hurt in the moment, those losses made space for something better—something I couldn't have seen if I had kept clinging to what I thought I was supposed to hold onto.

I lost. And then, somehow, I found something more honest.

The Wins That Didn't Feel Like Wins

There were times I “won”—got the job, got the project, got the praise—but felt empty inside.

Because a win that doesn't align with your truth isn't a win. It's a transaction. It's something you collect and then quietly question when no one's looking.

Those moments taught me that not all wins are created equal. Some are just disguised distractions—pulling you further from your real self while making it look like you're moving forward.

Losing a Version of Me

One of the hardest losses wasn't a person or a job—it was an identity.

I had spent years building a version of myself that was polished, respected, and predictable. He was capable. He got things done. He didn't make waves.

But that version also silenced his curiosity. Buried his intuition. Hid his restlessness behind to-do lists.

Letting go of that identity wasn't a one-time decision. It was a slow, unglamorous unraveling. But it had to happen.

Because you can't grow into who you are becoming while holding on to who you were trying to be.

When Something Ends Before You're Ready

I once left a project I loved because it no longer aligned with the values I was starting to own. It wasn't toxic. It wasn't dramatic. It just wasn't *me* anymore.

But walking away was brutal.

I felt like I was giving up. Like I was wasting effort. Like I was letting people down. And for weeks, I carried the weight of that decision like a silent failure.

But slowly, in the space that opened up—I found myself thinking bigger. Braver. I began exploring what I *actually* wanted to build.

What felt like loss at first was just redirection.

The Quiet Gift of Losing

Losing forces you to look inward.

It strips away the noise and leaves you with questions you can't ignore:

- Who am I when things don't go my way?
- What really matters to me now?
- What am I willing to rebuild from scratch?

Those aren't questions we ask when everything is working. But when things fall apart, they find you.

And answering them changes you.

Winning Isn't Always Loud

Sometimes the biggest win is subtle.

It's choosing rest over hustle.

It's saying "no" to what once defined you.

It's walking away from something that others admire—but you no longer believe in.

Those don't make headlines. But they make healing possible.

And healing is a kind of victory too.

If You've Lost Something Recently...

If you're in the middle of a loss right now—professional, personal, internal—hold on.

Not just to hope, but to yourself.

Sometimes, losing something isn't the worst-case scenario. It's the necessary clearing that allows your real life to finally take root.

You are not behind. You are not broken. You are being rerouted.

A Quiet Thought

Losing isn't easy. It's uncomfortable, messy, sometimes humiliating. But if you pay attention, it's also clarifying.

Because once the dust settles, you get to choose again—this time with more truth.

And that's how you win.

Not by never falling.

But by getting up with a clearer heart.

CHAPTER 11

Loneliness in a Full Room

There's a kind of loneliness that has nothing to do with being alone.

It shows up in meetings, in social gatherings, at dinner tables, and even in relationships. You're there. People are there. Words are being exchanged, maybe even laughter—but something's missing.

It's connection. Or maybe authenticity. Or maybe just the space to be real.

I've felt this kind of loneliness many times. And for a long time, I thought it meant something was wrong with me.

But eventually, I learned: sometimes we feel lonely not because we're alone, but because we can't fully *be ourselves* in the space we're in.

The Smile That Didn't Match the Feeling

I remember being at a networking event once—surrounded by smart, successful people. Everyone was talking, exchanging cards, pitching ideas, making plans. I smiled. I nodded. I even said the right things.

But inside, I felt invisible.

Not because no one saw me—but because no one really *knew* me. I wasn't sharing anything real. I was performing a version of myself that made sense in that room. Polished, agreeable, strategic.

By the end of the night, I wasn't tired from the people—I was tired from not being myself.

The Disconnection in Familiar Places

Loneliness doesn't only show up in unfamiliar spaces. Sometimes, it creeps in at home. With people who love you but don't understand your inner world. With friends who knew a past version of you but haven't met the person you're becoming.

It's hard to explain.

You care about them. They care about you. But the conversations stay surface-level. The questions stop at “How's work?” The silence after “I'm fine” goes unquestioned.

And slowly, you start to wonder: *Is anyone really listening?*
Or worse—*Am I even allowing them to?*

Self-Protected, Self-Isolated

I realized I had a habit of hiding in plain sight.

I knew how to say just enough to sound open, without actually being vulnerable. I could steer conversations away from things that mattered, even when I craved someone to dig deeper.

That wasn't because people didn't care. It was because I didn't know how to invite them in.

I was lonely—but I was also well-defended. That's a hard combination to break.

The Turning Point: Letting Someone In

It wasn't a grand gesture that changed things. Just a quiet conversation with someone who said, "You seem a little far away today."

They didn't pry. They didn't pressure. They just noticed. And in that moment, I felt seen—not for the role I was playing, but for the reality I was in.

It was enough to let a little truth out. Enough to remind me that connection is still possible—but it requires honesty. And risk. And showing up without a mask, even when it's uncomfortable.

How I Found My Way Back

I started asking myself new questions:

- Who am I being in this room?
- What part of me is missing from this conversation?
- Am I present—or just performing?

And slowly, I began to change how I showed up.

I stopped going to places that drained me just to be "seen." I started choosing spaces that felt safe, even if they were smaller. I learned to speak even when my voice trembled—and to listen for what others weren't saying, too.

And in doing that, I felt less alone.

If You've Felt This Too...

If you've ever felt like the loneliest person in a crowded room—this is for you.

You're not strange. You're not broken. You're just deeply in tune with something real: the need for meaning in your connections.

Not just noise. Not just presence. But resonance.

You don't need hundreds of people to feel less alone. Sometimes you just need one moment of truth—with yourself or with someone else.

A Quiet Thought

Loneliness in a full room isn't about absence. It's about access.

To your own heart. To someone else's. To a space where you don't have to hide who you are.

And that kind of space is worth searching for.

Or better yet—*creating for others.*

CHAPTER 12

Success Isn't Always Loud

We're taught to recognize success by its volume.

Applause. Awards. Announcements. Followers. Funding. Likes.

But the older I got—and the more I unlearned what I had absorbed without question—the more I realized that real success often moves quietly. It doesn't always come with a spotlight or a press release. Sometimes, it doesn't come with recognition at all.

Sometimes success is simply showing up, again.

Choosing integrity over attention.

Keeping a promise to yourself.

Healing a part of you no one knew was hurting.

And if you're not paying close attention, you might miss it.

The Pressure to Be Impressive

There was a time when I thought success had to be impressive. Big numbers. Big platforms. Big reactions.

I curated my life to look like momentum. Always building, always striving, always “on.”

And I got good at it.

But after a while, I began to notice how exhausting it all felt. Not because I wasn't proud—but because I was performing too much of it for others. I was living for the next “wow,” the next validation hit, the next milestone that would keep the story moving forward.

But what about the wins no one sees?

Like choosing rest over burnout.

Like walking away from a toxic opportunity.

Like finally forgiving someone—even if they never asked.

Those moments didn't get posted. But they changed me.

The Success of Soft Choices

One morning, I woke up and realized something small but profound:

I was at peace.

Not ecstatic. Not overly proud. Just still. Settled. Comfortable in my skin. No performance. No internal rush.

And I thought, *“Isn't this success too?”*

Why don't we celebrate these quieter wins?

- Saying no without guilt.
- Saying yes without over-explaining.
- Being happy for someone else without comparing.
- Letting go of something you outgrew with grace.

These aren't headline moments. But they matter. Maybe more than the ones that are.

Rewriting the Definition

For me now, success looks different.

It looks like:

- Doing work I believe in—even when no one's watching.
- Creating conversations that stay with people long after they end.
- Living a life where I don't have to pretend in any room I walk into.

It's about alignment, not applause.

It's about waking up proud of who I am becoming—not just what I'm achieving.

The Silent Wins That Shape Us

There are moments in everyone's life that feel like private victories.

- The first time you stood up for yourself.
- The time you trusted your gut and it led you somewhere better.
- The day you stopped chasing someone's approval and reclaimed your own.

No one else may notice. But *you* will. And that's enough.

In fact, those are often the wins that shape us the most—because they're born in truth, not performance.

If You're Quietly Growing Right Now...

If you're doing the work without the spotlight...

If you're healing in silence...

If you're building something no one understands yet...

You're still succeeding.

Success doesn't have to be loud to be real.

Your pace is valid. Your way is enough. Your story doesn't need noise to matter.

A Quiet Thought

In a world that teaches us to broadcast everything, sometimes the bravest thing you can do is grow quietly.

Because real success isn't about who claps for you.

It's about who you become when no one's watching.

CHAPTER 13

The Year I Forgot Myself

There was a year I can't fully remember. Not because it was uneventful—but because I was so busy surviving it that I wasn't really living it.

On paper, everything looked fine. Work was steady. Responsibilities were met. I showed up, responded to messages, and delivered results. I laughed at the right moments. I said, “I'm fine”, like it was rehearsed.

But inside, I was somewhere else.

Detached. Drifting. Running on autopilot.

It was the year I forgot myself—not dramatically, but gradually. And that, in some ways, is harder. Because you don't even realize it's happening until you wake up one day and wonder: *When did I stop feeling like me?*

The Slow Fade

Losing yourself isn't one big decision. It's a series of small ones.

- Saying yes when you mean no.
- Pushing through fatigue because “there's no time to rest.”
- Making space for everyone else while erasing your own needs.

- Choosing the safer path instead of the one your heart aches for.

None of these choices felt life-altering at the time. They were just small compromises. But together, they built a version of me that looked complete—but felt hollow.

Signs I Missed (Or Ignored)

There were signs.

I stopped journaling. I stopped dreaming. I stopped asking deeper questions.

I stopped reaching out to people who mattered.

I started feeling tired—not just in my body, but in my spirit.

Music didn't move me like it used to.

Books felt heavy.

Silence became a little too loud.

But I kept moving. Because stopping felt scarier than continuing.

I told myself, *This is just a phase*. But phases aren't supposed to feel endless.

The Breaking Point

I wish I could tell you there was a single, cinematic moment that changed everything. There wasn't.

Just one ordinary evening when I sat on my bed, stared at my reflection, and didn't recognize the person looking back.

Not in a dramatic way. Just... a quiet sense of distance. Like I had become a ghost in my own life.

That's when I knew something had to change.

Not the job. Not the city. Not the circumstances.

Me.

The Long Way Back

Reclaiming yourself after forgetting who you are isn't instant.

It's awkward. Slow. Often uncomfortable.

I started with small things:

- Morning walks without headphones.
- Writing one sentence a day, no matter how scattered.
- Cooking for myself, not because I had to, but because it felt nourishing.
- Saying no to things that drained me, even if it disappointed others.

And most importantly, I started telling the truth again—at least to myself.

About what I wanted. About what I missed. About what needed to be let go.

Who I Found Beneath the Noise

In the quiet that followed, I met someone familiar. Someone I hadn't seen in a while.

A version of me who didn't perform, who didn't rush, who cared deeply, who asked questions, and who created without overthinking.

I hadn't lost him forever. I'd just buried him under obligations and expectations.

But he waited. And when I was ready, he came back.

If You're In That Year Right Now...

If you're in your own season of forgetting—if the days are blending, and your spark feels dim—please know this:

You're not lazy.

You're not broken.

You're just tired from carrying too much for too long.

And the way back isn't performance—it's permission.

To rest.

To pause.

To ask, *What do I need right now?*

Even if the answer is silence.

A Quiet Thought

Forgetting yourself happens.

But so does remembering.

And when you come back—it's not to the person you were, but to the person you're becoming.

More aware.

More grounded.

More whole.

CHAPTER 14

When Rock Bottom Was a Gift

Rock bottom doesn't always announce itself.

Sometimes it arrives slowly. Quietly. Like a shadow that stretches across your life until one day you realize—you don't recognize your days anymore.

That's how it was for me.

No dramatic collapse. Just a growing sense that I had lost my way. A heaviness I couldn't shake. A voice inside that said, *This isn't it. This isn't who you're meant to be.*

For a while, I ignored it. I told myself to push through. Be grateful. Keep going. Other people had it worse. I had responsibilities.

But one day, I couldn't keep going—not in the same way. The mask slipped. The energy ran out. And I crashed.

And in that stillness, when there was nothing left to hide behind, I found the truth I had been avoiding.

The Moment That Broke Me (and Saved Me)

It wasn't one event. It was everything piling up. Work. Silence. Pressure. Emotional fatigue.

One evening, I remember sitting in my room, staring at my to-do list, and feeling... nothing; not stress, not panic. Just

numbness. Like I had left the building and was watching myself from outside.

That scared me more than anything else. Because it wasn't about missing deadlines anymore. It was about losing my sense of self.

And strangely—that moment of numbness was the beginning of healing.

Because when everything falls apart, you stop pretending. You stop performing. You stop running. You finally sit with what's real.

What I Learned at the Bottom

Rock bottom is raw. It strips away illusion. It doesn't care about titles or metrics or opinions. It just asks:

Who are you now, without all of that?

At first, I didn't know how to answer. I felt like a failure.

But slowly, something else surfaced.

- The courage to admit I wasn't okay.
- The wisdom to ask for help.
- The humility to start again—not from the top, but from the inside.

That's the thing about falling—you don't just land. You learn.

You learn what matters.

You learn who shows up.

You learn what you never want to compromise again.

Rock Bottom Is Not the End

We treat rock bottom like a dead end. But it's not.

It's the place where your old life no longer fits, and your new one hasn't begun yet. It's a liminal space—a doorway.

And if you're brave enough to stay there for a while, without rushing to fix it, you'll begin to see clearly.

I did.

And what I saw wasn't failure—it was freedom. Freedom to rebuild. To redefine success. To reconnect with meaning.

The Gift of Rock Bottom

I would never want to go through that season again. But I also wouldn't erase it.

Because without that collapse, I wouldn't have started *Between Us*.

I wouldn't have told the truth about my story.

I wouldn't have become the version of myself that feels whole—not perfect, but real.

Rock bottom taught me that the life I had built was no longer big enough for who I was becoming.

And sometimes, things have to fall apart so that something better—something truer—can rise in their place.

If You're There Right Now...

If you're reading this from your own version of rock bottom, let me tell you this:

You are not lost.

You are in transition.

And transitions feel like breaking—but they're really just breaking *open*.

You don't have to have a plan right now. You just have to stay soft. Stay honest. Stay breathing.

Let this be the beginning—not the end.

A Quiet Thought

Rock bottom didn't destroy me. It introduced me to myself.

Not the version I thought I had to be. But the version I could finally believe in.

And for that, I'm grateful.

CHAPTER 15

All Cats Are Gray in the Dark

There's a certain kind of stillness that only arrives at night.

The world softens. The distractions fade. And all the roles we wear during the day—our job titles, our polished routines, our curated selves—begin to fall away.

It's in that stillness that I've often seen the most honest parts of people.

I remember sitting in a hospital corridor once. It was around 2 a.m. A friend's father had been rushed in. I wasn't family. I wasn't expected to be there. But something told me to show up anyway.

The hallway was filled with people—some in crisp work clothes, some in worn-out pyjamas, some barefoot, pacing. No one asked where you worked, what you did, or how important you were. We were just humans in a holding space, each waiting for news that might change everything.

That night, I remembered a phrase I'd once heard:

“All cats are gray in the dark.”

And suddenly, it made perfect sense.

The Moment That Taught Me

In the harsh light of day, we learn to differentiate—status, success, who has what.

But in the dark, those lines blur.

In the dark, what matters changes.

You're not the impressive bio or the polished pitch.
You're someone hoping. Worrying. Loving.

Just like everyone else.

That night wasn't dramatic. No life-altering speech, no cinematic moment.

But it stayed with me—because in that corridor, I saw what equality looks like in real life.

Not written into law. But felt, quietly, in shared vulnerability.

The Truth Behind Performance

We spend so much time constructing identity.

We're taught to introduce ourselves by what we do.
We hustle for relevance. We craft our personal brands.
But when the lights go out, when life shakes us awake—none of that is what remains.

The most powerful moments on my podcast haven't come from accolades.

They've come from pauses. Cracks in voices. The raw truth of someone saying,

“I was afraid,”

Or

“I didn't know how to ask for help.”

Because connection doesn't live in performance.

It lives in presence.

The Real Questions

I've come to see that darkness—whether it's night or an emotional shadow—forces different questions to rise.

Who am I when no one's watching?

What remains when I let go of proving?

Can I be enough without applause?

These aren't easy questions.

But they're the right ones.

And they rarely show up when things are going well.
They show up when we're stripped down to our most human selves.

We're Not That Different

We live in a world obsessed with contrast.

But in the places that matter, we're more similar than we admit.

I've spoken with strangers who became friends—not through shared interests, but shared heartbreak.

I've seen confident guests break down mid-sentence—not out of weakness, but because they finally felt safe enough to be real.

That's where truth lives.

Not in filters or highlight reels—but in what survives after we let go of the roles we play.

Looking Back Now

That night in the hospital corridor wasn't extraordinary. But it shaped something in me.

It reminded me that beneath the noise, we all carry the same needs—love, safety, understanding.

And that sometimes, you have to be in the dark to finally see what's real.

A Quiet Thought

If you've ever felt stripped of your titles, your roles, your stage—don't fear it.

It's not emptiness.

It's clarity.

Because when the lights go off, we begin to meet not just others, but ourselves.

And maybe that's when we begin to see the world—not as better or worse—but simply as it is.

Equal. Human. Gray in the dark.

CHAPTER 16

Why I Walked Away From Safe

There comes a point when the thing that once gave you stability starts to feel like a cage.

It might be a job. A relationship. A routine. A version of yourself you've outgrown.

And no matter how much you try to stay, to make it work, to tell yourself, "But it's fine, it's enough"—there's a voice that starts growing louder. Quietly at first, then insistently.

It says, *this isn't it anymore*.

That voice kept me awake at night. Not out of fear—but recognition. I was no longer who I used to be. But I hadn't yet stepped into who I was becoming.

So, I did the hardest thing I've ever done.

I walked away from what was safe.

What Safe Looked Like

Safe looked like a steady paycheck.

Like nods of approval from people who mattered.

Like a calendar full of meetings.

Like being the “reliable one” who never dropped the ball. Like predictability, routine, and a version of success I could explain at dinner parties.

There was comfort in it. Familiarity. Even pride. I had worked hard to build it.

But deep down, I knew: I had built a life that made sense—but didn’t make me feel alive.

The Ache for Something More

It wasn’t about being ungrateful. I was grateful.

But there’s a difference between *being grateful for what you have* and *pretending it’s all you’ll ever want*.

I started to crave something different:

- Work that didn’t just pay me—but moved me.
- A voice that wasn’t just professional—but personal.
- A life that felt created—not just maintained.

And that craving became louder than my fear.

The Myths That Hold Us Back

There are myths we carry about safety:

- That it’s better to stay where you are than risk starting over.
- That once you leave, you’ll never find your way back.
- That walking away is failure.
- That certainty is always better than curiosity.

I believed all of them—until I didn’t.

Until I realized: staying was slowly making me disappear.

What I Walked Into

Let me be honest—leaving wasn’t glamorous.

It didn’t come with a plan. Or applause. Or clarity.

It came with questions, with doubt; with days when I missed the simplicity of “before,” and with nights when I wondered if I’d made a mistake.

But slowly, I began to fill the empty space with something real.

- My voice.
- My stories.
- Conversations that mattered.
- A platform that wasn’t just about content—but about connection.

I didn’t just walk away from safe.

I walked *toward* something. Toward a version of myself that felt true.

If You're On the Edge of a Decision...

If you’re standing at the edge of something safe but unfulfilling, wondering whether it’s foolish to leave—this is your reminder:

It’s not foolish to want more.

It’s not selfish to outgrow comfort.

And it’s not weak to choose the unknown.

There’s a kind of bravery in walking away from something good, in search of something meaningful.

And that kind of courage changes you forever.

A Quiet Thought

I didn't leave because I hated what I had.

I left because I loved who I was becoming.

And sometimes, that love—the one you offer yourself—is the most powerful reason to begin again.

CHAPTER 17

The Voice That Was Always Mine

For years, I borrowed voices.

Voices of teachers. Managers. Mentors. Experts. Influencers. People who “knew better.” People who had walked further, achieved more, spoken louder.

I listened. I learned. I tried on different ways of speaking, thinking, presenting myself—trying to find the one that fit.

Some came close. Most didn’t.

Because no matter how polished someone else’s voice sounded, it never quite felt like home.

And then one day, I stopped trying to sound right.

I just started sounding like me.

How We Lose Our Voice

Losing your voice doesn’t happen in silence. It happens in noise.

It’s when you start speaking only what’s safe.

When you filter every thought through the question: *Will this be liked?*

When you trade honesty for approval, and truth for polish. When your ideas are shaped by trends, not convictions.

I didn’t even realize I was doing it.

I thought I was being strategic. Professional. Marketable.
But really, I was hiding.

The Moment I Heard Myself Again

The first time I truly heard myself again wasn't on stage or in a meeting.

It was in a quiet room, recording my first podcast episode.

No script. No slides. Just me, a mic, and a story I cared about.

I spoke slowly. Tentatively. But honestly.

And when I played it back, I didn't cringe. I didn't doubt.
I nodded.

Because that, that was my voice. Not perfect. Not loud.
But *mine*.

The Power of Owning Your Sound

Your voice is more than the sound that comes out of your mouth.

It's your point of view.

It's your questions.

It's the way you see the world and the stories only you can tell.

When you find that—and use it—you stop needing permission.

You start creating from the inside out.

Not for applause. But for alignment.

Why It Took So Long

For most of us, finding our voice takes longer than it should—
because we're conditioned to doubt it.

We're told to "tone it down," "be practical," "follow the formula."

And so we learn to second-guess.

But your voice was never gone. It was just waiting for you to stop editing yourself into someone else's expectations.

What Changed When I Trusted It

When I started using my real voice—whether in writing, speaking, or creating—I noticed something surprising:

- I connected more deeply.
- I attracted the right people.
- I felt lighter.
- I no longer felt like I was "selling" something. I was *sharing* something.

That shift changed everything. Not just professionally, but personally.

Because when you find your voice, you don't just speak differently.

You live differently.

If You're Still Looking for Yours...

Let me say this:

You don't have to be loud to be powerful.

You don't have to be polished to be heard.

You don't have to be like anyone else to be valid.

Your voice—raw, imperfect, evolving—is enough.

Start where you are. Speak your story. Write your truth. Ask your questions.

The more you use it, the clearer it gets.

And the world needs your clarity.

A Quiet Thought

The voice I was looking for was never out there.

It was in me.

Quiet. Waiting. Unfolding.

And once I found it—really found it—I knew:

I would never give it up again.

CHAPTER 18

Faith, Fear, and That One Leap

Every journey has a point where you either leap—or stay stuck.

Not because you have all the answers. Not because the path is clear. But because something inside you refuses to keep pretending that the current version of life is enough.

For me, that moment didn't come with fireworks. It came with fear. Stillness. A quiet knowing.

I stood on the edge of something I had built for years—stability, safety, predictability. And I walked away.

Not because I wasn't scared.

But because I was *finally more afraid of staying than of leaving*.

What the Leap Looked Like

The leap wasn't glamorous.

It was messy spreadsheets. Late-night doubts. Bank account calculations. Voice notes filled with “what ifs.” Long walks where I asked myself if I was ruining everything.

But it was also the beginning of *Between Us*.

Of telling stories for a living.

Of reclaiming my time, my purpose, my voice.

The leap wasn't one moment. It was a series of daily recommitments to a life that felt more aligned—even if it was less certain.

Faith and Fear Walked Together

I used to think I had to conquer fear to move forward.

But I've learned that fear doesn't disappear. You just stop letting it drive.

Faith isn't the absence of fear—it's the willingness to walk with it.

There were days when fear was louder than anything else. When I questioned everything. When I missed the safety of a predictable life.

But faith whispered, *keep going. This matters.*

And I listened.

The Quiet Courage No One Sees

Most leaps aren't viral moments. They happen in silence.

- The day you send a resignation letter no one expected.
- The first time you introduce yourself with your dream title, even if it feels too soon.
- The night you stay up building something no one asked you to build—but you can't *not* build it.
- The morning you wake up uncertain, but show up anyway.

That's courage. Not loud. Not always visible. But life-changing.

Everyone Thinks You're Brave—But You Know the Truth

People said I was brave.

But what I really was... was *done pretending*.

Done pretending I was fulfilled.

Done pretending I couldn't create something meaningful.

Done pretending I had to keep living the same year over and over again just because it was safe.

That wasn't bravery. That was honesty.

If You're Standing at the Edge

If you're at your edge—holding onto what you know, but dreaming of what could be—this is your sign:

You don't have to leap recklessly.

But you do have to leap *truthfully*.

The moment will never be perfect. The plan will never feel finished. The fear will never fully go away.

Leap anyway.

Your future is not built by certainty.

It's built by courage, one shaky step at a time.

A Quiet Thought

Faith and fear will both show up.

Invite them in.

Let fear keep you alert.

Let faith keep you moving.

Santosh Kumar

And when you leap, don't look for applause.

Look for alignment.

That's how you know you're flying—not just falling.

CHAPTER 19

What They Didn't Teach Me About Building Something from Scratch

They taught me how to write a CV.

How to sit for an interview.

How to climb a ladder.

How to follow the map someone else had already drawn.

But they never taught me how to build something from nothing.

How to start when there is no map.

No guarantee.

No safety net.

They never taught me how to carry a dream that others couldn't yet see—and believe in it enough to keep going.

But that's exactly what I had to learn.

Because *Between Us* didn't come from a formula.

It came from a feeling.

A need.

A truth that wouldn't let me stay silent anymore.

No Blueprint, Just a Beginning

The beginning wasn't elegant.

There was no launch party. No investor deck. Just me—drafting notes in a corner of a café, recording episodes between freelance gigs, trying to figure out audio editing at 2 a.m.

I Googled everything.

I asked stupid questions.

I messed up links.

I forgot to hit record.

I talked to an audience of zero—until it became ten, then fifty, then hundreds.

And through it all, I kept telling myself: *Build the thing you wish existed.*

So I did.

The Loneliness of the Builder

What no one tells you about starting from scratch is how lonely it feels.

You're not just the founder—you're the team, the tech support, the creative director, the accountant, the social media intern.

You're building something that lives in your heart—but hasn't yet found its form in the world. And not everyone will understand.

Some will nod politely.

Some will ask, "So... what exactly do you do?"

Some will cheer from afar, but few will stand beside you when the lights are off.

That's okay.

Because building something real requires faith long before there's feedback.

Imperfect Action > Perfect Delay

I waited too long, in the beginning, trying to get everything *just right*.

The perfect mic.

The right logo.

The right tagline.

Until I realized: no one connects with perfect.

They connect with honesty, with effort, with evolution.

So I hit publish on the first episode—even though my voice shook.

I reached out to guests I admired—even if I had no fancy numbers to show.

I told my story—not because it was finished, but because it had begun.

And that momentum changed everything.

Building Isn't Linear

Some weeks felt magical.

Other weeks felt pointless.

I'd record three great conversations and feel unstoppable—then spend a month doubting everything.

I'd get a beautiful message from a listener—and the next day, wonder if any of this really mattered.

That's the thing about creating something from scratch:

You don't just build a platform.

You build *yourself* alongside it.

And some days, *you* need rebuilding more than the thing you're making.

What I Now Know

They didn't teach me how to do this.

But I've learned that:

- Clarity comes from action, not overthinking.
- Your first version won't be your final version—and that's a gift.
- Starting scrappy doesn't make you small. It makes you *real*.
- People don't connect to perfection. They connect to *you*.

And if you keep showing up—not just for the work, but for the mission—something beautiful begins to form.

Not overnight.

But inevitably.

If You're Building Right Now...

If you're in that early stage—starting your podcast, your brand, your project, your next chapter—this is for you:

Don't wait to be ready.

You'll never feel ready.

Start anyway.

You don't need millions.

You need momentum.

You don't need all the answers.

You need to listen, learn, adjust—and keep walking.

You're not behind.

You're building.

A Quiet Thought

They didn't teach me how to build something from scratch.

But maybe they couldn't.

Because some lessons can't be taught.

They have to be lived.

CHAPTER 20

The Conversations That Changed Me

Some of the biggest shifts in my life didn't come from books or big events.

They came from conversations.

Quiet, unexpected, sometimes messy conversations—with friends, mentors, strangers, and guests on my podcast.

Not debates. Not monologues. Not “content.”

Just two people, showing up with their truths, willing to really listen.

These moments didn't always feel profound when they happened. But they left something behind. A new way of seeing. A sentence that stuck. A pause that made room for honesty.

And over time, those conversations became markers—turning points in the story of becoming myself.

The Day Someone Said, “Me Too.”

I had shared something vulnerable on my podcast. A moment I wasn't proud of. A failure I had carried for years.

Later, someone messaged me and said, “*Me too. I've never told anyone.*”

That sentence broke something open.

It reminded me that vulnerability isn't weakness—it's a mirror. It reflects back a shared humanity. It lets people see themselves in your story, not just as spectators, but as companions.

That one reply made all the doubt, all the self-consciousness... worth it.

Words That Shifted My Inner Narrative

There have been sentences that re-wrote entire belief systems for me.

- “You don't have to earn rest.”
- “Maybe this isn't failure—maybe it's a pivot.”
- “You don't need to speak louder. You need to trust that you're worth listening to.”
- “Impact doesn't always look like scale. Sometimes it's one person breathing easier because of you.”

These weren't lectures. Just passing remarks in conversations that felt safe enough for truth.

And I've carried them ever since.

What Conversations Gave Me That Self-Help Books Didn't

Books gave me language.

Conversations gave me *permission*.

They taught me that I didn't need to have it all figured out to speak. That stories matter even when they're still unfolding. That questions can be more powerful than answers.

In a world of curated content, real conversation felt like rebellion.

And I wanted more of that.

Between Us Was Born From This Need

I didn't start *Between Us* to be a podcaster.

I started it because I craved realness.

Because I wanted to hear—and hold—stories that don't usually get airtime.

Because I believed that in a noisy world, what we need more than information is *intimacy*.

And the conversations I've had on the show—some funny, some raw, some deeply personal—have changed me more than any masterclass ever could.

The Unexpected Teachers

Sometimes the conversations that change you come from unexpected places.

- A cab driver sharing his dream for his daughter.
- A child asking a question that stopped me in my tracks.
- A stranger at an airport gate who said, “You seem tired. Are you okay?”

These weren't long talks. But they stayed with me.

Because presence doesn't need a microphone.

It just needs willingness.

If You're Longing for a Real Conversation

If you're feeling disconnected, distant, or unseen—don't underestimate the power of one honest exchange.

Reach out. Ask someone how they *really* are. Share something small but true. Put your phone down. Make eye contact.

You don't need to host a podcast to create space for connection.

You just need to care.

And to show it.

A Quiet Thought

I don't remember every meeting I've attended, every deadline I've met, or every goal I've ticked off.

But I remember the conversations that made me feel real.

Because those moments—the ones where someone really sees you, or you really see someone else—they stay.

They change us.

They remind us that maybe, we were never meant to walk this alone.

CHAPTER 21

The Cost of Not Being Fully Seen

You can be surrounded by people who care about you and still feel invisible.

It took me years to understand that.

For a long time, I thought I had everything I needed—work that kept me busy, friends I could laugh with, a life that looked full. But somewhere in all that doing, I began to notice an ache.

A quiet question kept rising inside me:

Does anyone really see me?

Not just the version I share. Not the resume. Not the “fine, all good” replies.

But *me*—the doubts, the softness, the hopes I don’t say out loud.

And the truth was... not many did.

Because I hadn’t really let them.

The Quiet Ache of Half-Connection

I used to mistake being liked for being known.

I could read a room. Say the right thing. Be helpful, be present, be easy to be around.

But there’s a kind of loneliness that grows when you’re only ever met halfway.

When people like the edited version of you, but don't even know the rest exists.

That loneliness doesn't scream.

It just lingers—on long drives, in crowded rooms, in moments when you feel the need to shrink to fit in.

Why We Hide

We hide for many reasons.

Because someone once mocked our honesty.

Because we grew up being told we were “too sensitive” or “too intense.”

Because it felt safer to be agreeable than real.

I used to think being easy to be around was a strength.

Now I see that I was quietly disappearing—slowly sanding off my edges so I wouldn't make anyone uncomfortable.

But the cost of being agreeable is often authenticity.

And eventually, I missed *me*.

The Day I Realized I Wasn't Fully Showing Up

It wasn't a dramatic moment.

Just a conversation where someone asked how I'd been feeling lately, and I replied with, “Oh, you know, busy—but good.”

I wasn't good.

But I didn't have the energy—or the courage—to be honest in that moment.

Later that night, I sat with that sentence.

And I asked myself: *Why didn't you just say the truth?*

The answer wasn't simple.

But it was honest: I didn't think they'd know what to do with it.

When You Finally Let Someone See You

It only takes one moment.

One person.

One conversation where you stop performing and start showing up.

Not with the perfect story. Just with your real one.

I remember the first time I did that. My voice shook. I stumbled through the words.

But the person stayed.

They didn't fix me.

They just said, "I get it. I've felt that too."

And suddenly, I wasn't alone in my truth anymore.

If You've Felt Unseen Too

If you've spent years being liked but not known, praised but not understood, present but not truly felt—

you are not the only one.

Being fully seen is rare.

But it's not impossible.

It begins with one brave decision:

to stop hiding, even just a little.

Let yourself be seen—not just where you're polished, but where you're still figuring things out.

That's where the real connection lives.

A Quiet Thought

Not being fully seen comes with a quiet cost— a weariness, a disconnection from your own self.

But here's the truth I've learned:

You don't need the whole world to see you.

You just need to see yourself clearly— and let a few good people in.

That's where everything begins.

CHAPTER 22

When I Stopped Measuring My Life in Milestones

We're taught to track life in milestones.

Finish school. Get a job. Get promoted. Buy a house. Start something. Scale it. Marry. Build. Achieve. Repeat.

And for a while, I did exactly that.

I checked the boxes. Celebrated the moments. Posed for the pictures.

And yet—each time I hit a new milestone, the joy felt shorter. The pressure to chase the next thing came faster.

The applause faded quickly, but the exhaustion stayed longer.

That's when I started asking:

What if life isn't meant to be measured this way?

What Milestones Didn't Capture

Milestones told people I was doing well.

But they didn't capture the days I grew the most.

- The day I said “no” and meant it.
- The day I rested without guilt.

- The moment I forgave someone quietly and finally felt lighter.
- The time I let myself grieve something I never talked about.
- The day I started over—not with a plan, but with intention.

These weren't celebrated. There were no certificates, no status updates.

But they mattered.

They were *my* turning points.

The Invisible Progress

Not all growth is external.

Sometimes the biggest wins look like:

- Saying less and listening more.
- Healing from something you never admitted hurt you.
- Feeling peace in a room you used to shrink in.
- Trusting yourself even when no one else understands your choice.

No one throws a party for these.

But these are the moments that rebuild you.

Why I Let Go of the Timeline

At some point, I realized I was chasing a version of success that wasn't even mine.

I was moving according to a clock that someone else had set. And every time I felt "behind," I felt shame I didn't deserve.

So I stopped chasing.

And I started listening.

To my own rhythm.

To my own readiness.

To what actually made me feel alive, not just validated.

It changed everything.

A Different Kind of Progress

Now, I track my life in softer ways.

- Did I show up today with presence?
- Did I create something that felt honest?
- Did I listen to someone without needing to be right?
- Did I move one step closer to who I want to be?

This kind of progress is quieter.

But it's the kind that lasts.

Because it's not about proving anything.

It's about becoming *yourself* more fully, more gently, and more truthfully.

If You're Tired of the Chase

If you're tired of measuring your life against someone else's timeline, you're not alone.

You are not behind.

You are becoming.

And becoming takes time.

Real time. Quiet time. Unmeasurable time.

It doesn't always look like momentum.

Sometimes it looks like stillness.

But stillness can be sacred, too.

A Quiet Thought

I used to measure life by how much I achieved.

Now I measure it by how deeply I've lived.

The milestones still come—but they're no longer the goal.

The goal is meaning.

The goal is presence.

The goal is peace.

And that, finally, feels like progress.

CHAPTER 23

The Kindness I Wish I Had Shown Myself Sooner

I've said kind things to friends I've barely kept in touch with.

I've forgiven people who never said sorry.

I've made space for others to grow, to fail, to try again.

But when it came to myself?

I was a critic.

A taskmaster.

An impossible standard in my own mind.

And now, looking back, I see it clearly:

There were so many moments when I didn't need to try harder.

I just needed to be kinder.

The Voice in My Head Wasn't Mine

For years, I carried an inner voice that sounded like urgency.
Like pressure.

Like *"You should've done more."*

It echoed things I'd heard growing up, things society rewards:

- Hustle harder.

- Don't fall behind.
- Don't show weakness.
- Don't slow down.

And even when life got heavy, I'd still push through—because rest felt like failure.

But I never stopped to ask: *Would I ever treat a friend this way?*

The answer was no.

Moments I Wish I'd Been Gentle

There are so many versions of myself I wish I could go back and hold:

- The younger me who over-explained everything, just to be understood.
- The professional me who stayed in roles that drained him, because he thought quitting meant weakness.
- The tired me who kept showing up for others, even when his own tank was empty.
- The hurting me who smiled anyway, thinking that was strength.

All of them needed less judgment.

And more grace.

Kindness Isn't Indulgent. It's Necessary.

For a long time, I confused self-kindness with laziness.

I thought I needed to be hard on myself to grow.

That self-doubt was humility.

That self-sacrifice made me noble.

But the truth is, kindness isn't the opposite of ambition.
It's what keeps ambition from breaking you.

Kindness allows you to try again without shame.

To pause without guilt.

To speak to yourself the way you would to someone you love.

When I Started Being Kinder to Myself

It didn't happen all at once.

Just small shifts:

- Replacing “Why can't you get this right?” with “You're learning. It's okay.”
- Letting myself take breaks—real ones.
- Writing without editing every sentence to perfection.
- Looking in the mirror and choosing not to critique.

And slowly, the voice in my head softened. Not silent. But no longer cruel.

If You're Being Hard on Yourself Today

Pause.

Take a breath.

Close your eyes.

And remember: you've survived so much already.

You're doing better than you think.

Maybe today isn't about pushing.

Maybe it's about listening.

Maybe it's about saying, *“I see you. And you're enough.”*

You don't have to earn your own kindness.

You deserve it just by being here.

A Quiet Thought

If I could go back, I wouldn't tell myself to work harder, speak better, or move faster.

I'd say:

"You're allowed to rest."

"You're allowed to not know."

"You're allowed to love yourself through the mess."

And I'd say it again and again—until I believed it.

CHAPTER 24

The Truth About Starting Over

Starting over sounds like failure.

At least, that's what I used to think.

It felt like admitting something didn't work. Like walking away from years of effort. Like losing ground while everyone else kept moving forward.

But that's not the truth.

Starting over isn't failure.

It's an act of hope.

It says: *I still believe something better is possible. Even if I don't know what it looks like yet.*

And I've started over more than once.

In my work.

In friendships.

In how I see myself.

In how I show up in the world.

Every time felt scary.

But every time, it was worth it.

The Myths We Carry About Beginnings

We're told new beginnings are exciting.

And sometimes they are.

But more often, they're quiet. Awkward. Uncertain.

You don't start over with clarity. You start with confusion.

You start with letting go of what isn't working—sometimes before you know what comes next.

That in-between space? It's uncomfortable.

But it's also where growth begins.

Why I Started Over (Even When I Was Comfortable)

Comfort is tricky.

It feels like safety—but sometimes it's just quiet resignation.

I had built a life that looked fine.

But inside, I felt a growing disconnect.

And I knew: if I didn't leave that version of me behind, I'd slowly stop recognizing myself.

So I began again.

Not with a big plan—but with small, honest steps.

Creating something new, even when no one understood.

Telling stories, even when the audience was small.

Rebuilding, not because I had to—but because I *wanted* to.

The Hardest Part Isn't Beginning—It's Staying

Starting is hard.

But staying with the decision is harder.

There were days I questioned everything.

Days when the old life seemed easier.

Days I wanted to run back—not because it was right, but because it was familiar.

But I stayed.

Because I remembered why I left.

And I trusted what I was building, even before it looked like much.

That kind of faith—the daily kind—is what keeps you moving.

The Gifts That Only Come After the Restart

Here's what I've found on the other side of starting over:

- Clarity that only comes through courage.
- A deeper trust in myself.
- Unexpected new people, new energy, new direction.
- The joy of building something that's *actually mine*—not something I inherited, copied, or settled for.

And above all—peace.

Because nothing feels better than living a life that aligns with who you really are.

If You're Starting Over Right Now

If you're rebuilding something—your work, your identity, your dreams—I want you to know this:

You're not behind.

You're not late.

You're not broken.

You're *becoming*.

It's okay to be in-between. To not have all the answers. To be proud and terrified at the same time.

You don't need to explain your new beginning to anyone.

You just need to honor it.

A Quiet Thought

Starting over isn't about forgetting the past.

It's about choosing your future—deliberately, bravely, gently.

And that, my friend, is not a failure.

That's a kind of freedom most people only dream of.

CHAPTER 25

The Impact I Never Expected

I thought impact would look different.

Louder. Brighter. Bigger.

I thought it would come with titles, stages, media, numbers. I thought it would feel like recognition. Like everyone finally seeing what I had to offer.

But that's not what happened.

The real impact—the one I carry in my bones—came quietly.

It came in messages from strangers.

In conversations that lingered.

In someone saying, “You put words to something I’ve felt for years.”

It came not from being impressive.

But from being honest.

I Didn't Plan for This

I didn't set out to build a movement, a platform, a brand.

I just started sharing stories I couldn't keep inside any longer.

I started asking better questions.

I started listening—not just to others, but to myself.

And slowly, something started to shift—not just around me,
but *in* me.

I stopped chasing approval.

I stopped trying to package myself.

And in that space, people started to connect—not to a persona,
but to a *person*.

The echoes I never expected

Sometimes, someone would reach out and say, “I heard your episode and it helped me talk to my father for the first time in years.”

Or

“Your post made me pause. I really needed that.”

Or

“I didn’t think anyone else felt this way.”

None of those moments went viral.

But they meant everything.

They reminded me that impact doesn’t need a spotlight.

It needs sincerity.

Legacy Isn’t Always a Monument

I used to think legacy was about building something big.

But now I think it’s about how people feel when they leave a conversation with you.

It’s about who feels less alone because you dared to be real.

It’s about whether you choose to stay soft in a world that rewards hardness.

That's the impact I never expected—
the quiet kind.

The kind that doesn't ask for credit.

The kind that lives in the pause, the message, the moment of
resonance.

This Was Never Just About Me

Between Us wasn't just about my story.

It was about all of us.

The misfits. The feelers. The ones who've been quiet too long.

The ones who are done performing.

The ones who believe that stories can heal—even if they start
with a whisper.

This was never about volume.

It was about *truth*.

And that truth is what connects us—more than any brand, any
title, any number ever could.

If You're Wondering Whether You Matter

Let me tell you:

You do.

You always have.

Even when no one claps.

Even when no one sees the full effort.

Even when you're still in the middle of becoming.

If you lead with care—if you live with intention—you're already
making a difference.

A Quiet Thought

Impact doesn't always announce itself.
Sometimes, it just leaves the room a little softer.
Sometimes, it just helps someone exhale.
Sometimes, it just makes someone feel seen.

And maybe that's enough.

Actually—maybe that's everything.

Final Note from the Author

If you've made it to this page, thank you.

Thank you for walking with me—through silence, hesitation, curiosity, and all the in-between moments that shaped this story. I didn't write this book to offer grand answers. I wrote it to tell the truth—mine, and maybe a little bit of yours too.

Every chapter here came from a quiet place inside me. Some were written in a rush of emotion, others in the stillness that follows clarity. None of them were planned. All of them were felt.

This wasn't about creating a perfect book. It was about showing up—fully, honestly, and without trying to be more than I am.

If this book gave you a moment of pause, a sentence that stayed with you, or a feeling that said, "*I'm not alone*,"—then it's done its work.

We're not so different, you and I. We're all trying to make sense of our lives, to be seen in ways that matter, to leave something behind that feels like truth.

So if you've been holding back your voice, your story, your truth—please don't wait for permission. You're allowed to begin now.

Between us,

Santosh

Acknowledgements

I didn't write this book alone. I may have typed the words, but every chapter carries pieces of people who showed up, stayed, and believed—especially when I didn't know what I was building.

To my family: thank you for the space you gave me to grow in my own strange, silent ways.

To the people who listened to me before I had an audience—your belief was the beginning.

To my podcast guests, collaborators, and behind-the-scenes friends—you helped me discover that stories don't need to be loud to be powerful.

To everyone who ever said, “I feel that too,” after hearing an episode or reading a line—this book is yours as much as it is mine.

And to the younger version of me, who thought no one would care about the quiet things—I see you now. I hear you.

You were never invisible.

About the Author

Santosh Kumar is a storyteller, podcaster, and lifelong noticer. After nearly two decades of building a career across India and the US, he chose to leave the predictable path behind—to create something rooted in truth, conversation, and impact.

He is the founder and host of *Between Us: Make Every Conversation Count...!!*TM, a podcast that began as an experiment and became a space for people to show up as they are.

His work is led by one belief: that silence is not the absence of voice—but the space where voice is born.

This is his first book.

Let's Stay Connected

If something in this book made you feel seen—I'd love to hear from you.

Join me at the *Between Us* podcast, where real stories continue to unfold.

You can find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube.

Instagram: [@betweenusstorylab](#)

Website: [www.betweenusstorylab.com](#)

The conversation isn't over.

It's just moving forward—between us.