

Paper Hearts and The Permanent Scars

KARTIKI SONKUSARE



BlueRose ONE^{.com}
S t o r i e s M a t t e r

New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

Copyright © Kartiki Sonkusare 2026

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

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



BlueRoseONE^{com}
S t o r i e s M a t t e r
New Delhi • London

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

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

www.BlueRoseONE.com

info@bluerosepublishers.com

+91 8882 898 898

+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7825-293-8

Cover design: Shariq Ansari

Typesetting: Simran Maurya

First Edition: May 2026

Preface

This book is a teenage book where all the random happenings in a teenager's life is discussed, relating to everyday situations where the teenagers like me are stuck. This is a simple talk-out of all the overthinking in a teens mind. This book will offer an understanding and act as companion for your diverted mind, bringing peace to a distracted mind.

The main purpose of writing this book is to simplify the key concepts and make them simple and accessible for a wider range of readers. Making people realize that all these happenings are a part of life and its unexpected happenings and after all the things are going to be "okay". Each of the chapters holds a place in every person's life relating to each situation and being a relief factor for all the readers.

While writing this book, I have taken up and covered all the stuff which has been taken from my own experiences, inspirations, mistakes and learnings.

I hope this book may act and serve as a relief factor and truthful companion in your journey of understandings and learnings.

-Kartiki Sonkusare

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards all of those people who supported, guided and kept me motivated during this writing journey.

Firstly, I would thank my family members who made me capable of writing this first book of mine. Without their constant support, encouragement and guidance, writing this book was nearly an impossible task.

I am also grateful to my friends who kept me motivated and, on the track. Their suggestions, feedbacks helped me improve and bring clarity to the writing of this book.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my readers who chose to read this book. And also, all of those who contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of the book.

**To My Papa, Sachin Sonkusare and
My Mummy, Snehal Sonkusare**

*“I stand today not on my own feet, but on the quiet
courage of everything you chose to give up on me.”*

Contents

Chapter-1: After the Lockdowns	1
Chapter-2: In the Desert of Emotions	6
Chapter-3: A Change	8
Chapter-4: The Mixture of Feelings	11
Chapter-5: The Architecture of Noise	14
Chapter-6: Lightened	18
Chapter-7: The Mystery of the Hidden Tressure	20
Chapter-8: The Playground of Rivals	24
Chapter-9: The Screen Trap	27
Chapter-10: The Eldest Child Supremacy	33
Chapter-11: The Healing Spot	36
Chapter-12: The Two in One	41
Chapter-13: The Career Question	46
Chapter-14: The Slow Fade of Childhood Friendships	49
Chapter-15: The Creative Path of Boredom	55
Chapter-16: Wearing the Mask of “Fine”	59
Chapter-17: Academic Burnout	63
Chapter-18: The Safe Place	69
Chapter-19: Hate for Mornings	73
Chapter-20: The Music Obsession	78

Chapter-21: The Spark-First Crush	83
Chapter-22: The First Heartbreak	90
Chapter-23: ‘Phone’ or ‘Passport’?	95
Chapter-24: Blood vs. Bond	103
Chapter-25: The Weekly Reset.....	110
Chapter-26: The “Not Enough” Loop.....	113
Chapter-27: Importance of Third Place	120
Chapter-28: Learning a New Skill	126
Chapter-29: Outing with Friends	131
Chapter-30: Solo Scholar	138
Chapter-31: Can a Boy and a Girl Be Just “Friends?”	144
Chapter-32: Siblings? More Like Best Friends... ..	150
Chapter-33: The Weight of “Expectations”	154
Chapter-34: First Taste of Independence.....	160
Chapter-35: Family Conflicts.....	165
Chapter-36: Where Smile Learns to Lie.....	170
Chapter-37: “Care” or “Control”	172
Chapter-38: The Silent Candle	175
Chapter-39: Prioritizing “Self”	179
Chapter-40: The Final “Glow”	183

Chapter-1

After the Lockdowns

As we attempt to turn the page toward a new beginning or a new chapter in our life to forget all that had happened in the past, well we all deep down know that the echoes of the past would refuse to be silent and keep on haunting.

My own narrative is followed by a similar story. After the covid, lockdowns, and all the anguish that had took place, there are many people who suffered and lost their loved ones, no, I did not suffer but yes, I did lose a loved one of mine. This one incident itself changed a lot of things as well as it changed me. The unexpected things which I thought can never happen were now the inescapable reality I had to face and embrace, it was a thing I could no longer deny. Loneliness became my most constant companion-a shadow that refused to depart, and remained even when the room was full of people that I loved. I could see their sufferings, sorrow but I did not really know what I had to do. All that I knew was, I had to console them-my family but however I felt ill-equipped to offer the consolation they so desperately needed.

“I will forever be the girl who was told at her father’s funeral that she had to take care of her mother but nobody told her to take care of herself”.

I always think what I did to deserve losing my father so early.

I lost him even before I knew what permanent loss was. Watching other children talk to their father, hug them, express their worries to them was the hardest part to see knowing I don't have my father in existence whom I could call "papa".

Father's absence is not just an absence but it leaves a lifelong emptiness. Because when a child loses a father, it's not just a loss, it is the loss of comfort, safety, and everything that once felt like home. "Home" does not feel like "Home" anymore hereafter. A protector, a guide I gone missing, and the silence grows louder than words. I am always proud that I can handle everything on my own, until I see someone with their father who is there to solve all their problem and protect them and that's when I understood what my weakness really is, the whole world thinks I am strong but they can never see the part of me that still craves for dad's love which was taken away from me even before I could understand what love really is.

Whenever anyone says I look like my father, it makes me scattered and more sad than happy because it is the only thing I have left with me which is going to stay forever. I always feel foolish whenever I remember how fast I wanted to grow and become a doctor not knowing I would lose a part of my heart which was never going to come back even before I could enter my teen years. He is just as a missing piece of the puzzle of my heart which can never be found.

Crying alone at night so that no one notices is very hard because sometimes I just want to go loud when I am crying. But at the same point I don't want anyone to think I am weak. Though I miss him-maybe more than anyone.

"I may look normal and very happy with my smiley face but deep down I just want to cry loud in my father's arm and tell him how hurt, silent and angry this world has made his naughty little princess."

I don't remember what his last words to me was, I don't even remember the last time I had talked to him. All I know is that I regret that I wasn't even able to tell him how much his daughter loved him and could not even tell him a proper goodbye.

I can still clearly recall the moment the world shifted. I learned that the person I loved the most-the man who had been the center of my universe for 10 years-was now a figure I could only encounter in the corridors of memory. I wasn't ready for this at all, no one is, and no one should ever have a situation where they would have to get ready for this. It was hard, really hard to get out of all this trauma and even when I did, it still strikes, the chaos, panicking, disbelief, everything was jumbled up together.

Keeping all my feelings aside I had to gain their trust, especially of my mother's so she could share her feelings with me without getting hesitant. I knew my responsibilities as the eldest daughter but didn't really knew how to really implement them. As the eldest daughter, I felt like I was wearing a crown with a crushing weight I never asked if I wanted to wear.

You cannot really trust anyone, the world seemed more artificial than ever. It was like an artificial play I was forced to watch but somehow, I knew that I had to get out of my comfort zone, like we all have to do maybe this is the most challenging in a life of an introvert.

It's that quiet, weird question that keeps me up at night, staring at the ceiling while the rest of the world seems to be on sleeping mode. I watch them-the extroverts-and it feels like I'm observing a different type of species through a very different world of mine. They move with the crowd so effortlessly, pulling people into their circle, laughing without checking if their voice is too loud, existing in a way that feels so... loud. And from a long time, I genuinely wondered-How? How do they do this?

I used to think their secret was a lack of fear. I thought it was a god gifted thing that made them an extrovert. I thought maybe they just didn't care. But the more I look, the more I realize it's not that they don't care about what others think-it's that they have this beautiful, type of courage to be seen anyway. They aren't emotionless robots who flow through social interactions, they feel the same aches of insecurity and the same desperate need just as everyone does. The difference is, they let their loud and lighted version spill out even if it might cause a danger.

There's a specific kind of contentment and bravery in living freely. It's about the choice about deciding that being seen is more important than being safe, it is just as to trade the safety of the shadows for the warmth of the sun, even when knowing the sun can burn. When an extrovert shares a story or reaches out to a stranger, they aren't ignoring the risk

that they might get judged by anyone, they're just deciding that the connection might be worth the cost. It's obvious, right? They aren't hollow. They aren't "easy." They are just brave enough to let the free and confident side of theirs out of the cage.

I'm realizing that being an extrovert isn't about having a shallow heart; it's about having a heart that's so full that it just naturally spills over. It's about having so much life filled inside that it simply refuses to be contained. They do feel everything the joy, the rejection, the adrenaline and they choose to keep the door open. It makes me realize that maybe I don't need to "fix" my quietness, but I can definitely learn from their loudness and roar. Because at the end of the day, we're all just human beings trying to find our way home, whether we do it in a whisper or in a loud shout.

Chapter-2

In the Desert of Emotions

Just after the dust began to settle, I came to know that I had to change my school, the school where I previously went had been my sanctuary, a place where I was truly connected to friends who truly understood the architecture of my soul, I was very attached with them and did not want to let go of them, leaving them left like closing a book before the final chapter with my mind filled with great suspense.

My family believed that transferring me to a school with all other siblings of mine would provide a safety net, but the reality was way too different. Despite their physical presence, I found myself in an emotional and quiet desert. I never opened up to them; I became my own provider for strength, exploring the corridor as a stranger among everyone who knew each other.

Now I am the senior most among all my siblings who study in the same school as me. Where in my previous school I never got below 95 percentages, in my 5th standard which was the start of my new school, I got average percentage and my mother's disappointment was noticeable, yet she could see the war I was fighting internally. Even I knew that I could do better, the low percentages were just because I could not focus on my studies because a lot was going on and I had to handle

all of them, my emotions, my health even though my rest of the family took good care of me, I was trying to manage an emotional landscape and my own fragile health. while my family provided for my physical needs, I yearned for a sanctuary of a different kind-a “consulting session,” or perhaps just a soul who could bear the weight of my words.

The loneliness grew heavier with each passing day. I was surrounded by people, yet I remained silent. I was terrified that if I spilled my sorrow and emotional pain, it would drown them. I feared their tears because I knew I didn’t have the strength to dry them; if they started to cry, I would have no choice but to walk away, my own cup was already overflowing.

Chapter-3

A Change

On my first day at the new school, a heavy sense of fear hung over me; the excitement that usually accompanies a first day was replaced by an environment of unease.

When I boarded my bus and saw many students looking at me, my pulse quickened under the collective gaze of the other students. Somehow, I was lucky enough to find an empty seat to sit through the whole journey from home to school. As the classes till now were all online and we had been stuck in a world of video calls and mute buttons, where my peers were nothing more than icons on a flat screen. I did not know who was my classmate in the bus or were there even any or I did not even know where I was supposed to go. once, I entered the school premises Finally, I found a face similar to a girl whom I had seen on the screen of our online classes and I was sure that she was one on my classmates. She seemed taller than me but as I was the tallest in my class in previous school, I started comparing my height with her, no; I did not talk to her but guessed it all by myself in my mind.

I was a bit relieved when I first saw her because she became my silent compass, I walked behind her following her at some meter distance, letting her lead me through the maze of the school corridors without her noticing that I was following her. And I did as I thought I would do, I followed her and maybe

she knew that I was following her, well I knew it because of the insane side eye she gave me. But then it was not the thing that mattered, what mattered was I should get into the class before the bell rung.

Then just as I entered and saw a crowd of some thirty or more students sitting on their places gazing at me like I had come from an entirely different planet and started discussing something which I still couldn't catch their words, I felt their weight.

My nerves sharpened into a cold, weird fear. Social anxiety didn't just kick in; It took the center stage and I sat on the last bench of the corner row. When I saw my class teacher walking in, I was more relived. As she entered the class we all stood up and said good morning and got ready for the prayer.

After all these things, my class teacher called me Infront of everyone and asked me to introduce myself to all the classmates, I hesitated and got further till my teacher's table and with a very low, ghostly voice started introducing myself "hello everyone, my name is Kartiki and I am an introvert" I said, even the teacher who was sitting just some inches away could not hear what I was saying, but the girl I followed till the class was looking at me and suddenly she offered a soft, encouraging smile.

At that moment I could not think off anything and then I just returned it with a faint, weird smile. But my low voice did not really matter as no one was even listening or even looking at me. On the top of it I was spinning a pen with two fingers of my right hand, at that point I don't know where I had lost my manners and etiquettes, and well to be more precise I found myself absentmindedly poking the pen in my nose.

To my immediate relief only one girl whom I followed noticed that embarrassing moment of mine while all others were busy in their own work. Finally, the bell rang, the day dissolved and I could finally get to the place where I could be more like “me”.

I was tired as but still my soul refused to rest. To lighten some burden, I started seeking a quiet place for my heavy thoughts, I went to the library nearest to my house and sat in the corner with a book in my hand, I wasn't really reading the book but instead I was using it as a prop for my wandering mind.

Just then I saw a shadow falling on the page of the book which I was holding. I looked up, it was the girl whom I had followed till the class, ‘Hii’ she said with a voice full of warmth. ‘Hello’ I replied. Before she spoke further, I said “please don’t judge me for when I had accidentally poked the pen in my nose” she giggled and said “don’t worry I am not going to tell anyone, gossiping isn’t my thing” I said ‘thank you’. Then we sat together and talked about random stuff and she told me about the new classmates and how the school was. She asked me about why I had included that I was an introvert while giving my introduction, well I did not have an answer to that, I just had to say something.

She asked me further, “why do you think that you are an introvert?”, I replied “I don’t know I just hate talking to people or I don’t like becoming much social, I like to keep it to myself” she then said something which I felt was an important impactful note for me, she said-

"You don't hide away because you're empty or silent. You hide because you are so full of everyone else's stories and struggles that you've run out of room for your own breath."

Chapter-4

The Mixture of Feelings

We carried on, till now I was mixed up with her and I had shared all that had happened because of covid and what the pandemic had taken away from me, if there was nothing like the covid-I might have been living a much easier and dreamy life. I said “now my mother wants the old me who used to get 95 percentages” the words were finally coming out of the walls of a broken dam. “She wants the girl who consoles everyone. But I feel like a counterfeit. Even my inner software tells me I’m a victim of counterfeiting every time I open my laptop to study” I added. The girl laughed and said “maybe we all are counterfeits now who wants to become a version of ourselves who died two years ago”. As it was getting late, we decided to leave the library and walk to our homes.

I had realized that I had opened up to somebody I met just some hours or days ago and she had already gained my trust somehow. That day I felt so light after many days.

Finally sharing the truth with someone feels like you have been underwater for years, fighting a silent, harsh reality that no one else could see, and then suddenly, someone finally reaches down to you to save you and pulls you into the air.

For so long, you carry the heavy, unspoken pieces of your grief and the crushing weight of who you should of have to

be. "Honestly" it's exhausting trying to act like a perfect person when you are actually falling apart from each and everything. Trying again to be that 95-percent student or the girl who fixes everyone else and it becomes a physical burden that makes you feel heavier than your actual weight and exhausting just as if it's a companion which is meant to be forever. You walk around feeling like a "counterfeit," a ghost living a life that doesn't seem to belong to you anymore, and the energy it takes to maintain that mask is exhausting.

Finally, the moment when your words which are hidden in your mouth decides to come out of the cage finally letting you to express your feeling, it's a strange, beautiful contentment feeling you get by giving or sharing your pain away with to someone else, you actually get to keep the best parts of yourself.

When that girl at the library looked at me and didn't see me as a failure, but saw the good and doable version which was yet to come out, the isolation that acted like a cage finally just vanished. That "lightness" I felt while walking back home was the feeling when my soul was allowed to exhale out along with breathing. It's about the realization that you don't have to be the "alone" thing while surviving in the hardest part of life. For the longest time, it feels like you're just floating. You're trapped in this floating air filled with unheard feelings, scared that if people knew the real you-the messy, "not-okay" version they'd look at you like you're fake or even weak. Carrying the deepest loss which no one can see is the most exhausting thing among any other thing.

But then, something shifts. You finally stop hiding. You decide to be honest, even if your voice shakes and stumbles when you say it.

The ground finally feels solid under your feet again because you aren't alone floating in the air anymore. You're human living on the solid ground. Being honest is the most authentic, bravest thing we can ever do. It's like this sudden lightness in your chest, like your heart is finally coming up for taking in fresh air.

We can't go back and edit the past. We can't hit "undo" on the things that broke us. But we can 100 percent change how much those things crush us. All it takes is the courage to stand up and say, "This is me, and I am struggling."

It is the quietest, most intense relief in the world to realize that people can see the real you-the struggling you and still choose to stay. It's the feeling of being known and accepted exactly as you are. It turns that lonely, miserable walk home into a journey toward finally being okay. You aren't just surviving anymore; you're finally coming home to yourself.

Chapter-5

The Architecture of Noise

In the beginning there was no such term called as “my space”. to grow up in a joint family is to live in a house where the walls have ears and you cannot even trust on anyone, you can't tell if someone from your own family is judging you. every floor, every tile has its own memories, and every room belongs to everyone and no one all at once. My memories were similar to anyone who might have lived in a joint family like those memories of thumping sound while washing clothes, the whistle of the pressure cooker and the silent sound of adult conversation that I wasn't supposed to understand but felt within myself. Me and my siblings were the small observer in between of any other elder living in the house. In a joint family, you learn hierarchy before you learn your alphabets.

You are small but still deep down you know that each person in the family itself has a hatred for one another, for a reason I still don't understand why. You tend to learn whose words carries the most weights and whose silence is more dangerous. And since I was a first child to my parents, I wanted things to be done by my way. listening or following other people's direction was not really my thing.

Once, I was the most loved one of the family but as my younger siblings came the love had to be distributed and even though sharing was not my thing. I used to question their existence but never really blamed them because of their existence, because I knew that I was the one who prayed to God for a younger sister. I liked playing with her, I still do but still as every elder one feels that the love they used to get now has decreased to a certain level, the same feeling would come up to me. I know it was all natural and a part of the process that had to be followed. We are told that love multiplies, but to a child, it often feels like simple division. When my sister arrived, the 100percent of the love I once owned was suddenly sliced and divided. I remember looking at her and feeling two opposing truths at once, the need and attempt to protect her, caring for her, sharing with her and on the opposite side-not feeling to divide the love I used to get.

"For the younger siblings, the noise and the chaos of the house is a base reality, but for the elder sibling it is the sudden shift from peace to chaos. The peace that younger one never knew existed "

I had to learn all the family's triggers and whose silence is more dangerous and whose loudness is more peaceful. Being the elder sibling means simply walking through the hard parts first so the other younger siblings could follow a safer, easier road.

We realize this late but "the people who are meant to guide us are just as lost as we are."

We don't choose our family, but we do choose how much of their "weight" we continue or want to carry. The hatred you

sensed might never fully be explained, because it likely started long before you were born. Ultimately, being the eldest is an exercise in becoming a bridge. You are the link between the old world, 'your parents' past and the new world, 'your siblings' future. It is a heavy, thankless position, but it gives you a perspective no one else has. You saw the foundation being built which no other could see; you know where the cracks are hidden. And because you know where it's broken, you are the only one who truly knows how to build something better.

We aren't just stuck being what our home made us; we are the ones who build our own way out. We take all the hard things thrown at us and use them to build a path to a better life.

Sometimes, a kid in a house like that learns to be hyper-vigilant. They can tell just by the sound of a key in the lock if their parent is just 'tired' or if they are 'looking for a reason to explode.' Living in this constant 'red alert' mode changes how your brain works. Your nervous system never really learns how to relax or power down. You grow up into an adult who apologizes for things you didn't even do, mostly because you spent your whole childhood trying to stop a storm you didn't cause before it even started.

"In a house of glass hearts and stone tongues, the children learn to breathe without moving, fearing that even a sigh might shatter the fragile peace." Why does the hatred exist?" "Why is there so much tension among the members of the same house?"

When you're the firstborn, you remember how things used to be before everything changed. You're the one who sees that moment when your parent just stops being happy. You watch the bitterness build up slowly, like dirt settling at the bottom of a river, one fight at a time until everything feels too messy and dark to even understand anymore.

Family hatred is like a ghost that sits right there at the dinner table with you; you don't have to hear it to know it's there, and it sticks around for years without anyone asking it to. Eventually, every kid who grows up in a house like that has to make a choice. Do I stay and try to fix a mess I didn't even start, or do I leave and build a happy life of my own?

Chapter-6

Lightened

Healing begins when you stop trying to understand why they hated each other and start focusing on how you can love yourself. The "process that had to be followed" ends with you. You are the one who knows where the weights are kept and where the silences are buried. That knowledge is your power. You can choose to speak a different language, one of boundaries, of clarity, and eventually, of a peace that isn't just a ceasefire, but a genuine stillness.

It is always said that the moment you start loving yourself, everything starts falling in the right place and somehow, I always consider it as a fact. Marking oneself as our first priority should not be felt guilty, instead it has to be praised. The day I started prioritizing myself was the major achievement I made, everything felt lightened and I could finally breath freely. Teens often feel they must solve the puzzle of why their parents, peers, or anyone act the way they do. Healing begins with understanding and accepting that "you don't need to understand their darkness to find your light".

These are the things unsaid. In many households, "not talking about it" is the rule. Breaking that silence internally is the first step toward power. Society often tries to mix self-care

with selfishness. For a healing teen, prioritizing themselves is actually self-preservation.

The Fact of Self-Love-It isn't just a "nice feeling", it is a functional tool. When you love yourself, you become a filter. You stop letting every negative comment or chaotic energy pass through your system.

For a long time, I thought that being "good" meant being available for everyone else's emergencies while I was drowning in my own. But that's not being good; that's just being a ghost in your own life.

Healing feels like finally coming home to yourself after a long trip where you weren't even the one driving. It's the realization that you are allowed to be happy even if the people around you aren't ready to be. You aren't "quitting" on them; you're just finally showing up for yourself. And honestly? That's the bravest thing any of us can do. It's not about being loud or making a scene; it's about that small, steady voice inside that finally says, "I matter, too."

Chapter-7

The Mystery of the Hidden Treasure

One day while I was playing with my sister I found a silver-colored key, me in my imagined world exclaimed to my sister “this is a key that will lead us to the hidden treasures” my sister was still very small to understand what I was saying, glad she was small or she would have declared me as dumb. After I said this, I heard a giggling sound from behind, they were mom and dad laughing. While laughing they told me that it was the key to the lock of the front door. I was embarrassed, I made up a grumpy sad face and then I walked away. My parents knew I was a bit sad or more than just a bit.

Next day when I woke up in morning my mom handed over a key to me and exclaimed “are you ready to find the treasure?” I quickly without wasting a second hopped out of my bed and brushed my teeth and went to find the mystery of the hidden treasure. With all the clues my mom and dad gave me I finally found a gift in a box waiting for me in the cupboard, it was a toy! it was kept in a box which I had to open using a key. I was on the top of the world and happy for the next two weeks. I still wonder how easy was it to make me happy. Just hand me with a toy that’s all, but now, even I don’t

know what makes me truly happy or what can bring a sense of relief to me.

Maybe that's the hardest part of growing up, the treasure maps disappear, and we're left to draw our own. Back then, happiness was a destination, a physical object tucked away behind a wooden door.

I find myself looking at my hands, sometimes expecting to find that old silver colored key, but they are usually just holding a phone or a cup of coffee. I've realized that relief doesn't come from "finding" anymore, it comes from unloading the mind and heart filled with unwanted thoughts. It's in the quiet moments when the world stops asking things of me, or in the unusual, unscripted laugh that reminds me I'm still the same person who once ran to find a toy in the cupboard.

Growing up isn't some cinematic montage where everything just clicks, it's more like waking up every day in a body and a life that doesn't quite fit anymore. One minute you're laughing with your friends, feeling like you finally own the world because you have your own keys and a little bit of freedom. Then, out of nowhere, you see a toy or hear a song from your childhood, and your chest just tightens. You realize you're standing on a bridge that's burning behind you.

You're grieving for a kid who didn't have to worry about "who they were" or "who they're supposed to be." Now, everything feels heavy; the expectations, the silent rooms, the pressure to have a plan. It's lonely, honestly. You're too old to go back to being comforted by your parents, but you're still too young to know how to comfort yourself. You're just stuck

in the middle, trying to figure out how to be this new version of you without losing the parts of yourself that actually felt real.

The difficulty lies in the fact that these feelings rarely travel alone. You can feel incredibly lonely in a room full of your best friends, knowing you are just one step or breath away from your own confidence vanishing into imposter void. We're taught to label emotions as "good" or "bad," but growing up teaches you that they are usually a gray, swing. You might feel a heavy sense of grief for leaving your childhood home, even while you're shaking with excitement to start a new chapter. Holding both of those truths at once is exhausting. It's like trying to listen to two different songs at the same time and being expected to dance perfectly to both.

There's also the quiet pressure of "figuring it out." Everyone asks what you want to be, but rarely does anyone ask how it feels to be now. You're expected to build a foundation for the rest of your life while the ground beneath you is still shifting and not settled. It's okay to feel like a walking puzzle. It's okay to be brave and terrified in the same breath at the same moment. That friction-that uncomfortable, stretching feeling-is actually the sound of you expanding.

It's the most difficult work you'll ever do, but it's also what makes your story uniquely yours. You aren't "broken" for feeling mixed up, you're just assembling a much more complex and beautiful version of yourself. The truth is, while the middle of the storm feels like it will never end, there is a quiet, steady promise waiting on the other side. All those tangled knots of anxiety, the late nights spent wondering if you're doing it "right," and the heavy silence of not being

understood-they eventually begin to soften and become more settle. Life has a way of smoothing out the sharpest edges of our growth. You'll look back one day and realize that the very things that felt like they were breaking you were actually the things that were shaping your resilience.

The "mixed" feelings don't necessarily disappear, but you get better at carrying them and understanding them you learn that you are strong enough to hold both the sorrow and the joy without being crushed by either. You find your peace, you find your people, and you find a version of yourself that is comfortable in its own skin and in its own way. It won't always be easy, and it won't always be clear, but it will be worth it. Just keep breathing through the messy parts, because despite how loud the doubt is right now, it really is going to be okay.

Chapter-8

The Playground of Rivals

As I grew up, I had some friends of my society with whom I played almost every day. Well, I wouldn't call them friends back then they were my first enemies. Whenever I would ask to play with them, they would tell me that they were going to go home now, and sent me back to my home. As I returned home, they started playing. Like they never actually wanted me to be with them or play with them. It was like they wanted to avoid me or exclude me.

Whenever I complained about them to my parents, my parents would ask me not to complain about anyone and solve these things myself. Yes, I obviously got angry every time they said this but I couldn't help myself. That time I had a major hatred for all of them. But as I turned eight my dad took a decision that we would move away to a different society, in the same city. When I told my friends or enemies whatever you would like to call them, they showed like it would affect them but their faces could literally tell that they were happy in my absence.

I kept on visiting my grandparent's home every weekend and somehow with time, they played with me like I was a good friend to them. After sometime the pandemic happened and lockdowns were all over the country. No one got out and I suddenly even lost my father. After this, my mom, me and my

sister we all three moved again at my grandparent's home. Eventually I started playing with my society friends more than ever, it was like I was a part of them and they included me every time. I don't know whether it was to give me sympathy or they really wanted me to be their friend. But as more time passes we all five people became closer and an inseparable part. We all could now be given a title as "best friends". I could never have really imagined that such thing could happen. I always thought we'd be enemies for life.

The notion of "enemies for life" is a heavy title for a child to carry, yet in the small, narrow-minded world of a neighborhood society, those rivalries feel as ancient and unyielding as the tectonic plates. We had spent years drawing invisible lines in the dirt, marking territories with nothing but stones and the stubborn refusal to share a ball. But grief and isolation have a way of erasing those borders. When the world outside turned quiet and the air inside my home grew heavy with the absence of my father, the friend-dispute of the past simply evaporated, leaving behind a raw, human need for connection.

What started as just a small effort to get along during the pandemic ended up being the one thing that saved me. We went from being people who just lived in the same neighborhood to being the only people who truly knew what was going on in each other's heads. There's something so cool about when a group of friends stops trying to be "cool" and just starts looking out for one another.

Staying at my grandparents' house changed how I looked at everything. Those quiet afternoons weren't boring; they were actually peaceful. I realized that friendship isn't just about the big moments or constant jokes-it's about that feeling

of knowing someone actually gets you. My grandparents' place, which used to just be for weekend snacks, became the spot where I finally figured out who I was. They just watched quietly as I turned people I used to clash with into the best I never had.

They taught me that the heart has an infinite capacity for expansion. Just because it is occupied by sorrow doesn't mean there isn't room for a new kind of joy. I watched how they looked at us-five messy, desperate people woven together into something that actually felt strong. It was like seeing a blurry picture finally snap into focus. I realized then that the "enemies" I'd spent so much time hating weren't actually villains at all. They were just friends I hadn't been brave enough to really get to know yet. It's scary to let your guard down, but seeing us all together made me realize how much time I'd wasted being angry at people who were just as lost as I was.

"Fate chooses our relatives, but we choose our family. And sometimes, the most profound choices are the ones we make when we have nothing left to lose."

We were no longer the children who played in the dirt under the flickering streetlights of the society. We are the architects of a shared history. The pandemic took much from us-it took the world we knew, and for me, it took the man who was my north star-but in the vacuum left behind, it gave us each other.

The "best friend" label feels almost too small now. It doesn't capture the way we can communicate with a single look, or the way we carry each other's burdens without being asked. We are a witness to the fact that beauty can grow in the most scarred landscapes.

Chapter-9

The Screen Trap

As I grew older the connection increased. Not with any person or a pet, but with a phone. It had become my best friend, the friend my parents disliked. Although I knew that scrolling on the screen was not so good but I was deeply attached as if I was nothing without it.

Though I got many scoldings from various people but no one was strong enough to break the bond. My entire mood depended on the feed I scrolled through the screen.

My phone is the last thing I touch before I go to sleep and the very first thing I reach for when I wake up. Sometimes, I don't even remember picking it up. My hand just knows where it is. It's like a piece of me, like a third hand or a second heart that lives in my pocket.

I know people say we're "addicted" to our screens, and maybe that's true, but it's more than that. When I'm scrolling, the rest of the room kind of disappears. My mom could be talking to me, the TV could be on, and the dog could be barking, but I don't hear any of it. I am somewhere else. I am in the "glow" of the glowing screen.

The weirdest part is the "itch." If I'm standing in line for thirty seconds and I don't check my notifications, I start to

feel tensed. I feel like I'm missing something huge, even though it's usually just a random video or a "Hi" message in the group chat. It's like I've forgotten how to just stand there and do nothing. I've forgotten how to be bored. And honestly? That's kind of scary.

It's actually like I am not the controller instead the phone controls me. I've realized I get ready not just to attend any function but rather to spend thirty minutes trying to get a perfect click.

It happened on a random week day-Monday. The power went out during a storm. Usually, this would be a minor inconvenience, but when the Wi-Fi router's green eye turned off, a physical wave of panic hit me. My phone was at 2percent.

I sat on my bed in the sudden, heavy silence of the house. No sound of the fridge. No distant TV. Just the rain. I looked at the black screen of my phone, and for the first time in years, I saw my own reflection in the glass. I looked tired. I looked like someone who had been staring into a sun for ten hours a day.

I tried to just "be in existence." I laid back and stared at the ceiling.

Minute 1: My brain started listing things I needed to Google. How long do sea turtles live? What was that actor's name from that movie?

Minute 5: The twitching started. My thumb kept moving in a scrolling motion against my bedsheet. A literal muscle memory of a habit I didn't even know I had.

Minute 10: The silence felt aggressive. It felt like the room was closing in because there was no "elsewhere" to go. I wasn't in the "glow" anymore. I was just in a dark room, and that reality felt terrifyingly small. The next day, I decided to do something radical. I left the phone on the kitchen counter and walked to the park.

It felt like walking naked. I felt exposed, vulnerable, and most oddly-invisible. If I saw a beautiful sunset and didn't take a photo of it, did the sunset even happen? If I had a funny thought and didn't blast it into the group chat, was I even funny?

I sat on a bench and watched an old man feeding pigeons. I waited for the "itch" to dissolve. It took nearly an hour. But then, something strange happened. My brain, starved of the constant dopamine hits of "lols" and "likes," started to fill the silence itself.

I noticed the way the wind moved through the random trees-not as a background noise, but as a peaceful symphony. I noticed the specific shade of orange on a bird's wing. I started to wonder about the old man-not by looking up his profile, but by imagining his life. I was daydreaming. I was bored Afterall.

And in that boredom, I felt a spark of something I hadn't felt in years, a sense of creativity sparked in me and I gave more time to myself and some creative stuff in order to break this toxic friendship, Afterall I couldn't spend my whole life with it. I finally realized that the internet wasn't just a tool, it was an environment I was living in. And that environment was loud, crowded, and increasingly toxic. It was a place where

everyone was screaming to be heard, and yet no one was actually listening.

I started setting boundaries, not because I hated technology, but because I loved my own mind too much to let it be colonized by an algorithm. The scary part isn't the phone itself, it's what we give up for it. We trade the deep, slow-burning joy of being present for the cheap, flickering neon of "engagement." We trade the complexity of a real conversation for the shorthand of an emoji.

I still feel the "itch" sometimes. I still find myself lost in the "glow" on a Sunday afternoon when I should be outside. But now, I know how to find my way back. I know that the world inside the screen is a map, but the world outside is the territory.

I'm learning how to be bored again. And honestly? It's the most exciting thing I've done in years. sometimes you just have to let things go, so that you can make way for the good things those are waiting to enter in your life. It's hard but always possible, you just have to give it a chance. In a world full of social media that points towards the physical appearance, insecurities of people, the chaos, you have to give yourself time in order to start loving yourself and discovering things that gives you peace and you feel free.

We live in a digital funhouse of distorted mirrors. Every time we unlock our phones, we aren't just looking for information, we are looking for validation. We see the highly filtered highlights of a thousand other lives-the filtered skin, the perfect vacations, the effortless smiles, and we subconsciously use them as a purpose to measure our own

messy, unfiltered reality. It's a game we are designed to lose. How can my "ordinary" Tuesday compete with a stranger's "best" moment?

The insecurity starts as a whisper. It tells you that your jawline isn't sharp enough, that your life isn't productive enough, or that you're falling behind because you didn't buy that one product that promises to fix your soul. We begin to perform our lives rather than living them. We position the coffee cup just right for the photo, letting the drink get cold while we search for the perfect caption. We trade the warmth of the moment for the cold approval of a "like."

Finding peace means realizing that the "glow" doesn't just distract us from the room, it distracts us from our own worth. To love yourself in this age is an act of rebellion. It's choosing to believe that you are enough even when you aren't "trending."

There is a quiet, radical power in having a beautiful day and telling no one about it. When you stop documenting, you start experiencing. You begin to notice that the "flaws" social media taught you to hate are actually the things that make you human. The laugh lines, the tired eyes from a night spent talking with a real friend, the messy room that shows a life actually being lived. These aren't things to be edited out. They are the evidence of your existence.

I've started to treat my attention like a bank account. Every minute I spend scrolling through someone else's filtered "perfect" life is a minute I'm withdrawing from my own peace of mind. By letting go of the need to compare, I've made room for the things that actually matter.

The "good things" waiting to enter your life aren't found in a notification. They are found in the gaps between the pings. They are found in the heavy, unedited and unfiltered silence of a rainy eve, in the awkwardness of a first conversation, and in the slow process of building something with your own two hands.

It's hard to look away from the chaos because the chaos is addictive. But once you step out of the stream, you realize the water was freezing and you were drowning. Standing on the shore, you finally feel the sun. You realize that you don't need a filter to be vibrant, and you don't need an audience to be whole. You just need to be you-unplugged, unmasked, and finally, beautifully, at peace. It isn't wrong if you realize somethings late, but rather it's about you not implementing it even after realizing it.

Chapter-10

The Eldest Child Supremacy

As we talk about the eldest child which is me, I quite know certain things which are needed to be talked about. many people would agree with me and so quite many people would also disagree.

The eldest child usually carries more weight of others, often forgetting they also have emotions. once they know that they have responsibilities that are even more than their age they tend to forget they are still small and start thinking like an adult.

Before even the child turns ten, they are told that they have to be a perfect role model for their younger siblings by their elders. "But they forget that 'the perfect role model' is also a first-time human. You can't expect an expert performance from someone who is still figuring out the script" we don't even know how most things work. "Before they even understand the script of life, many children begin editing their own emotions to play the role of the 'perfect' lead."

If the younger sibling is influenced by something bad or learns something which is not appropriate according to their age, in this case the person an elder find to blame is the eldest child. Like "what is even the fault of the eldest child in this?"

when you are in the growing up phase people say, “you’re a grown up now, you shall know how to do this” and then they say “you’re still a child you shall not do this”, it’s obviously according to their advantage. But it is though true, that when you are growing up you find yourself in a situation where something’s feel that they are right and also wrong at the same time. Well, it’s not actually our fault, instead it’s a part of life and you just have to go with the flow and not overthink about it. as many things are already ongoing and overthinking does not solve anything instead it adds up to the problems.

Being the eldest child isn’t just a birth order, it’s a psychological blueprint that often demands a child sacrifice their own childhood to build a foundation for everyone else.

To be the eldest is to be the family’s first draft. You are the experiment, the pioneer, and the crash test dummy all at once. When you are born, your parents are learning how to be parents through you. Every mistake they make, you feel; every anxiety they have, you absorb. But as the years crawl by and younger siblings arrive, that role shifts. You are no longer the experiment; you are the deputy. The youngest child gets the version of the parents that is relaxed, experienced, and perhaps a bit tired, which translates into freedom. The youngest gets to be messy. They get to be “the baby” long after they’ve even grown up.

But the eldest? The eldest carries the Ghost of Expectation. Even as adults, eldest children often struggle to relax. They are the ones who organize the holiday dinners, who check the flight status for everyone else, and who feel a crushing sense of guilt if they sit down to rest while there is still “work” to be

done. They have been trained since the age of five that their rest is a luxury they haven't earned Eldest Child Supremacy." It's a bit ironic, isn't it? It's a supremacy built on being the last one to eat, the last one to complain, and the first one to apologize.

There is a unique kind of loneliness in being the "responsible one." Who does the eldest child go to when they are falling apart? They can't go to the younger siblings; they have to protect them. They often feel they can't go to the parents because they don't want to break the illusion of the "perfect child."

If you are an eldest child reading this, know that your worth was never your "helpfulness." You were not born to be a shield or a buffer. You were born to be a person.

Chapter-11

The Healing Spot

Each and every person has a thing set for themselves through which they feel peace and get healed. And this is a very important thing in a person's life, no matter what the thing is. It is a particular thing or place where the whole world stops spinning. Why do we "set" these things for ourselves? It's like our brains were never meant to be "on" all the time. We're constantly being hit by these tiny waves of stress that eventually add up-the annoying buzz of a notification, the panic of a deadline hanging over our heads, or that heavy feeling in your chest when you're holding back what you really want to say to someone you care about. It's a lot to carry, and honestly, it's exhausting to always be "plugged in" when all we really need is a second to just breathe.

The healing spot acts as a transitional space. It is a threshold where you leave behind your roles as student, parent, employee, citizen and return to your core self. In that spot, you are not being "evaluated." You are simply being "you". The importance of this cannot be exaggerated without a space where evaluation stops, the soul begins to wither under the heat of constant search. A healing spot is rarely about the physical furniture of a room or the specific geography of a map. It is about sensory safety. For some, it is

the rhythmic, mechanical click of knitting needles, for others, it is the specific way the light hits a kitchen table at 6:00 AM before the rest of the house wakes up. There is a common emotional trap in this journey. The belief that the "spot" must be grand to be effective. We tell ourselves, "I will be healed when I am sitting on a beach in Bali," or "I will find peace when I finally have a dedicated homework study table."

The most profound healing spots are often found in the frame of our plans.

The best kind of healing doesn't usually happen in a therapist's office or during some big, planned event. It happens in the random, quiet spots where the rest of the world just fades out-like sitting in your car while the rain hits the roof, or on a park bench in the middle of the night when everything is finally still. Even in a hospital waiting room, when things feel heavy and sad, you can suddenly feel this weird sense of peace. The coolest part about it is how normal those moments are. You don't need anything fancy, you just need a little bit of silence to finally hear yourself think. The importance lies not in its aesthetic, but in its reliability. If you can find peace in a cup of tea, you are more powerful than someone who can only find it in a five-star resort. What happens when your healing spot is taken away? This is the most painful turn in a person's emotional life. Perhaps it was a person who was your "spot," and they left. Perhaps it was a hobby you can no longer perform due to injury.

This loss is actually the final stage of healing.

When your external "thing" is removed, you are forced to realize that the peace you felt there was actually generated by

you. The bench didn't have the peace; you brought the peace to the bench. This is the ultimate emotional evolution moving from a "Healing Spot to "Healing". Without a healing spot, we suffer from emotional hemorrhage. We give and give until there is nothing left. The "thing" is your refueling station. It is where you gather your scattered pieces and join them back together the world is full of noise that tells you who you should be. The healing spot is where you remember who you actually are. It is the place where you can admit your fears without judgment and celebrate your small wins without ego. It provides a "True North" for your identity.

Imagine a life without this spot. It is a life of continuous motion, a hamster wheel of "doing" with no "being." The emotional toll is a graying of the world-a loss of color, joy, and spark.

We don't go to our healing spots to hide from the world; we go there so we can gather enough strength to face it again. Whether it's a physical corner of a room, a repetitive task, or a mental landscape, that "thing" is your anchor in the storm.

In my case my emotion supporter, my healing place was a basketball, and a basketball court. even in my school I was I a basketball team. it always gave me peace and an opportunity to escape the reality. and take the stress out of me

This healing sport was not chosen by me instead it came walking toward me.

it all started when I had just entered the sixth standard, middle school in the new school. It was a very first games period, me being with just one friend and totally nervous, made a spot in the line and walked towards the ground, it was

connected with a basketball court. our sports teacher who leads us to the ground was the basketball coach of the school.

I was standing alone on the ground, just when a girl approaches and tells me that the basketball coach was calling me, before this, just some months ago I used to play on a court, I had joined basketball classes which were near my home. after the girl told me this and went away, me who was confused and nervous and everything jumbled up in my mind, I went towards him, our coach.

he told me, your height is pretty good. I wasn't happy or surprised cause I had been hearing this from many people even though I wasn't too tall to be called a giraffe or an Eiffel tower. I said thank you to my coach. then he asked me whether I play basketball, I replied "I used to". to which he said will you join our basketball team, the moment he said this, I felt so happy and first time proud of my height. without showing much happiness, I said "yes, why not"

He asked me to do stay backs for the training of basketball and I did stay backs and went home from primary bus which departed from school after two hours of middle and high school students' departure.

I even played just one match representing my school, it was an inter school match. I was very proud of myself and always grateful that I got this opportunity. but basketball didn't stay with me for too long. at a point I was in a situation where I had to choose between my tuition and my sport. well, I wasn't really my choice as it was my mother who chose it for me. I wasn't bad at all at studies instead I was very above average.

still, I had to join tuitions as it was the new trend in this generation.

When I used to play basketball all the stress, tension was no more, it was my safe personal spot. it was a sport that healed me. for some people sport is just about matches, but for the people who really play sport, for them it is not just a sport but it is an emotion.

Chapter-12

The Two in One

As we finally enter that teenager period. we have phones of our own or at least we get engage in our parent's phone if we don't have our own. we get more involved in the social life. This is the age where we open our first social media account and sometimes get addicted, too much. These social media apps are where we have our group chat where we are all cringe, weird and just being ourselves in front of our friends because we think they wouldn't judge. We have an entirely different personality in front of them. We share almost everything with our friends we open up with them. The language, the tone, the behavior, the actions are just totally different than what we are like Infront of our family.

when we are with any member of our family, we do not usually open up thinking that they might scold us if we share anything personal with them. We are more likely the shy, introverted kid Infront of them but the truth is known only to our best friends. The transition from childhood to the teenage years is often marked by a sudden, inexplicable loss of words at home. One day, you're a child narrating every detail of your playground rivalry the next, a simple "How was your day?" feels like a deposition. It isn't that we have nothing to say, it's that we have too much to say, and no confidence

that it will be understood without being dissected. In front of parents and elders, many of us adopt the "Good Kid" or the "Quiet Kid" personality. It's a survival mechanism. We keep our responses single-worded like "Fine," "Yeah," "I don't know." We hide our opinions because we fear the "lecture"-that inevitable spiral where a small confession about a bad grade or a new crush turns into a three-hour seminar on our future and our failures.

At home, we are careful. We watch our tone. We dress the way they expect. We are the "introverts" they think they know, living in a quiet room that feels more like a waiting room for our real lives to begin. Then, the door closes. The blue light of the phone illuminates the darkness, and suddenly, the introvert vanishes. In the group chat, we are loud. We are "cringe." We are historians of our own inside jokes and architects of a language only five people on Earth understand. Living this double life isn't without its weight. It creates a strange kind of loneliness. Even when you are surrounded by family who love you, there is a stinging realization. They love a version of me that doesn't really exist anymore.

We find ourselves "addicted" to social media not because we love the apps, but because we love the validation of being known. Every notification is a reminder that somewhere out there, someone sees the real "me", the one who makes bad jokes, listens to vague music, and struggles with anxieties we'd never dare mention at the breakfast table.

The greatest fear of a teenager is the "bridge", the moment these two worlds might collide. It's the panic of a parent asking to see a phone or a friend showing up at the house and acting "too much" like themselves. We spend so much energy

keeping these lives separate because we aren't yet sure how to integrate them. We are waiting for the day we are "grown up" enough to just be one person. The "two-in-one" existence is a bit more like a passage. It is the messy, beautiful, and often heartbreaking process of carving out a space that belongs only to you. While it feels like a betrayal of family, it is actually the first step toward independence. One day, the walls between the "quiet kid" and the "group chat legend" will crumble, and a more authentic, singular person will emerge. Until then, we keep typing in the dark. In the presence of family, the personality we adopt is often built on legacy and expectation. To our parents, we are still the toddlers they carried, the children they coached, and the investment they are nurturing for the future. This creates a heavy atmospheric pressure.

When we sit at the dinner table, we aren't just ourselves; we are a reflection of their parenting. If we speak too loudly, use slang they don't understand, or express a radical opinion, it isn't just a conversation—it's a "worry." We see the flicker of concern in their eyes, the "Where did we go wrong?" or the "Who told you that?" This leads to a self-imposed censorship. We become polite ghosts. We move through the house with a muted frequency, offering just enough information to keep the peace but not enough to trigger an interrogation.

This "home personality" is often characterized by The Safety of Silence Choosing not to share a struggle because the "fix" from a parent feels like a lecture rather than a hug.

Keeping our faces neutral so no one asks, "What's wrong?", because explaining what's wrong would take more energy than we have.

Doing the chores and following the rules not because we agree, but because it buys us the privacy we crave later.

Why do we feel more "real" with a friend we've only known for two years than with a parent we've known for fifteen? It's because the group chat is a judgment-free laboratory.

The Shared Struggle, our friends are in the same trenches. When we vent about a teacher or a bad day, they don't offer "solutions" that feel like more work- they offer "same," and that "same" is the most healing word in the teenage vocabulary.

The Boldness of Distance is a strange courage that comes with a keyboard. We say things we'd be too shy to say in person confessions of love, deep existential fears, or wild dreams of leaving our hometown. The most difficult part of having two personalities is the transition period. It's that moment when you walk out of your bedroom, where you were just laughing hysterically at a voice note and have to instantly reset your face to "bored and compliant" because your mom is in the hallway.

This constant switching is exhausting. It leads to a feeling of being a "fraud" in both worlds. You wonder, if my parents saw my chat logs, would they hate me? If my friends saw how quiet I am at dinner, would they think I'm boring? We become experts at compartmentalization. We keep our phone notifications hidden and our bedroom doors closed, not because we're doing something "bad," but because we are protecting the only space where we feel we can breathe without being corrected.

When we share something personal with a family member and they react with judgment, it feels like a door slamming

shut. We tell ourselves, "Okay, I'm never mentioning that again." Each of those shut doors builds the wall higher. Eventually, the person our family sees is just the wall, while the "real us" is thriving, crying, and growing entirely on the other side of the screen.

This "two-in-one" existence is a survival strategy for the bridge between childhood and adulthood. It is the way we figure out who we are before we have to show the whole world.

The goal isn't to be the "group chat version" of ourselves everywhere-that would be chaotic. The goal is to eventually reach a place where we don't feel the need to hide. One day, the "shy, introverted kid" and the "weird, loud friend" will shake hands and merge into a single, complex adult who can be both respectful and radically honest.

Until then, the phone remains the portal to the only world where we feel fully seen, even if the people seeing us are just as "cringe" and confused as we are.

Chapter-13

The Career Question

When we were kids, we always used to get excited whenever anyone would ask whether what I wanted to become. but as we all grew up and entered the teen years, we always get irritated whenever anyone asks whether what you want to become.

we always used to love this question about what we wanted as a profession when we were kids, but now as a teenager it doesn't feel more than a burden adding up to the stress.

Remember when you were five? Someone would come close and lean down, smile, and ask the Big Question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Back then, the world was a buffet. You could say "a princess" or "a professional artist" or "an astronaut-doctor," and everyone would clap. It was cute. It was a game. We loved that question because it felt like a superpower. It wasn't about a salary; it was about imagination. We weren't choosing a job; we were choosing a costume.

But then, the clocks started ticking faster. Middle school hit, then high school, and suddenly, the tone of that question changed. It's no longer cute. It's an interrogation Now, when an adult asks, "So, what are your plans for the future?" it feels like they're asking you to prove you have a right to exist. It's

not a conversation starter; it's a stress inducer. You can see them scanning you, waiting for a "serious" answer like Engineering, Law, or Medicine. If you say, "I don't know yet," or "I want to make art," you get that look. You know the one—the "tilt of the head" and the "worried eyes" that say, oh, so you're going to be a failure.

As teenagers, we are living in the "in-between." We are old enough to feel the pressure of the real world, but young enough that we haven't actually lived in it yet. It's like being forced to pick a destination on a map before you've even been allowed to leave your hometown. How am I supposed to know if I want to be a corporate lawyer if I can't even decide what I want for lunch?

The stress comes from the fact that we're told this one decision defines everything. We're taught that your career is your identity. If you pick the wrong major, you've wasted four years. If you waste four years, you've wasted lakhs of rupees. If you waste the money, you've failed your parents, your future, and yours. We are terrified of "locking in" to a life we might hate. We see adults all around us who are "burned out," "grinding," and "waiting for the weekend." Why would we be excited to join that? The "Career Question" feels like a trap door. Once you pick, the door shuts, and you're stuck in that room forever. Then there's the social media factor. You open your phone and see a 17-year-old who just started a tech company, or a 19-year-old who is a world-famous influencer, or a classmate posting their "Acceptance Letter" to a top-tier university. Suddenly, "finding yourself" feels like you're falling behind. We aren't just competing with the kid in the next

desk; we're competing with an algorithm that only shows us the 1-percent of people who have it all figured out.

A career is not a destination; it's a journey. You don't "become" something and then stop. You are a human being, not a human doing.

Whenever someone asks you about your career, you don't owe them a roadmap. You can give yourself the grace to say, "I'm exploring my options," or "I'm focusing on being a person right now." The weight you feel? That's just the pressure of a world that's obsessed with the future. But the future hasn't happened yet. All you have is the "right now." Take a breath. The silences you've buried, the weights you've kept, let them go. You don't need to have a career option to have a life. You just need to be you.

Chapter-14

The Slow Fade of Childhood Friendships

Almost all of us had that first best friends of ours whom we considered that we were inseparable and called it as a friendship forever.

although not all friendships end with a fight, most of it just keeps on getting quiet and we don't know whether you can even call them your just friends. you don't know if they consider you at least their friends or you guys have just become as a stranger. but since we keep on making new friends and this is a slow process of becoming a stranger to a person you considered your best friend. we don't realize that the friendship is no more alive, you just don't care because you have more than ten friends. so, the loss of just one friend does not hurt you much. in this process of becoming best friends to strangers, you tend to lose that connection, attachment, feelings you had for each other. therefore, it does not hurt much or we don't get too sad.

Though we don't get hurt from this detachment, we still remember some moments that cannot be forgotten, we still remember how strong our friendship was until something made it disappear. it may be a situation or someone getting transferred to a different place. even though we have a phone

through which you can contact them but you were too small to use a phone to call them and your parents did not think much about this friendship. although you would talk to them at least one time in two to three months, there was not much to talk about. there was just a sense on silence from both the sides. or sometimes the only time you call them is on their birthday just to mark your presence for them.

My story is quite about the same, the one I used to call my best friend, the first ever person I called my friend. she is the one I very rarely talk to. when I was about three to four years old my father's friend had a daughter and one day my father took me and my mother to meet them. my mother got the company of my father's friend's wife, my father and that uncle were already friends and they had a daughter who was one year elder than me. we found a good company with each other. we got enrolled in the same school in Raipur and eventually became good friends.

We used to meet often almost every weekend at a mall with our families and play at our peak. she was a great friend to me.

But as we both got shifted to Nagpur, we used to meet very less. like only on birthdays but at least we used to meet then. soon as covid started, we never met. the last time I met her was after my father's death when they had come to visit us. this was the last time I had physically saw her. but a good thing is that we still know each other's presence as call each other on birthdays to wish them. There was a time when a "best friend" was a singular, towering figure in a child's life. When that one person moved away or stopped calling, it felt like a limb had been severed. But as we enter the teenage years and gain access to the infinite scroll of social media, our "friendship inventory" grows.

When you have ten, twenty, or fifty people you can "engage" with at any moment, the individual loss of one becomes a statistical shrug. We develop a subconscious defensive mechanism: don't put all your emotional eggs in one basket. If one friend stops replying, there are three other group chats pinging with memes. We use the crowd to numb the sting of the individual.

However, this leads to a "shallow-water" effect. We have many friends, but the water only goes ankle-deep. We don't get hurt because we didn't let them close enough to bruise us in the first place. We trade depth for durability.

Childhood friendships are often held together by the glue of proximity and parents. You are friends because your houses are close, or because your parents are friends of them

Social media creates a "limbo" state for friendships. You aren't "friends," but you aren't "strangers" either. You see their new haircut, their vacation photos, and their new group of friends. Because you "know" what they are doing, you feel less of a need to actually reach out.

This creates a strange emotional numbness. You watch the friendship die in slow motion, one "unliked" post at a time. By the time you realize you haven't actually spoken in a year, the grief has already been processed in tiny, daily doses. The "detachment" isn't a sudden break; it's an erosion.

That "sense of silence" you described is the most honest part of a dying friendship. It's the moment during a call where you both realize that the only thing you have in common is the past.

You try to bring up an old joke, but it doesn't land the same way. You try to talk about the present, but it requires too much explanation. The silence isn't awkward because you dislike each other; it's awkward because you are mourning the versions of yourselves that used to fit together. You are trying to wear a pair of shoes that are three sizes too small.

We tell ourselves we don't care because we are "busy" or "have other friends." We prioritize the new, the loud, and the present. But every once in a while, a specific smell, a song, or an old photo trigger a memory of that "strong friendship" that disappeared.

In those moments, the "painless" detachment reveals itself to be a quiet kind of tragedy. We didn't lose a friend; we lost the person we were when we were with them.

In this era, we have to learn a new skill: The Art of the Graceful Fade. We are learning to accept that some people are meant to be "seasons," not "lifetimes." We are learning that a silence on the other end of a phone isn't a failure, it's just the natural end of a chapter.

Even if we have ten other friends to fill the gap, that one specific silence remains a tiny, permanent part of our history. We move on not because we don't care, but because we have to grow into the people our old friends wouldn't recognize. The evolution of a "lost" friendship is a ghost story we all eventually inhabit. When a bond that once felt like the center of your universe slowly drifts into the periphery, it creates a specific kind of emotional static. It isn't an explosion; it's a slow fade-out, often accelerated by the fact that our parents didn't see the "soul" of the friendship only the "playdate."

For a teenager, a best friend is a witness to their transformation. For a parent, that same friend is often just a name on a screen or a body in the backseat of the car. This disconnect is where many deep childhood bonds go to die.

Parents often operate on a "replacement theory." They assume that if you move schools or if a friend moves away, you will simply "make new ones." They see friendship as a utility-someone to eat lunch with or go to the movies with rather than an emotional anchor

When a friend moves, parents might offer a quick "You'll see them in the summer," not realizing that for a fourteen-year-old, three months is an eternity.

They don't understand that a phone call can't replace the shared silence of sitting in the same room, or the spontaneous "cringe" moments that happen when you're physically together.

In the past, when a friendship ended, the person vanished. Today, they remain as a permanent, digital shadow. You don't just "lose" a friend; you become a spectator to their new life.

There is a specific, sharp pang of jealousy that comes from seeing an old friend post a photo with someone else. They are laughing the same way they used to laugh with you. They are using the same emojis. You realize that the "unique" bond you thought you had was actually a role-and someone else has been cast in your part.

The Comparison Trap- You see them thriving. They look happier, more stylish, or more "social" than they were with you. It makes you wonder: Was I the thing holding them back?

The "Like" Dilemma- Do you like the photo? If you do, it feels desperate. If you don't, it feels like you're bitter. So, you do nothing, and the silence between you grows another inch.

Even when we have ten new friends, the memory of that one person remains heavy. This is because childhood and early teenage friendships are "firsts." They are the first people we trusted outside of our families

We don't get as "sad" as we think we should because society doesn't give us a ritual for "friendship breakups." If a romantic partner leaves, you're allowed to cry and listen to sad music. If a best friend drifts away, you're expected to just "move on."

But the nostalgia hits at 2:00 AM when you see an old meme or hear a song you both loved. You realize that you miss the version of yourself that existed in their presence. You miss the person who wasn't afraid to be "weird" because you knew they'd be weird right back.

Ultimately, the "two-in-one" life teaches us that people are like mirrors. Some mirrors show us who we were as children; others show us who we want to be as adults.

The friendship didn't "disappear" because it wasn't strong; it disappeared because it served its purpose. It was the training ground for your heart. The silence that now sits between you and that old friend isn't a sign of hatred, it's the sound of two people growing in different directions.

We keep the memories, we keep the "cringe" jokes tucked away in our minds, and we accept that while we have ten friends now, none of them will ever know the "small" version of us that the old friend knew. And that's okay. That version of us belongs to the past, and it's safe there.

Chapter-15

The Creative Path of Boredom

When teens are busy, they want free time but don't know what to do in that free time they are given. While some spend it overthinking for hours and the outcome; it is zero. Then there are others who spend it productively. They sit for painting, reading book, some sports such as cycling, football, basketball, cooking food, learning something new, they don't simply waste their time. The only similar thing in both the cases is, they do it when they have nothing else to do or they get bored. So, to keep themselves engaged one in both the cases is the solution to fight the boredom. It is great to understand it as early as possible that wasting time is not really cool, especially when you are wasting it on overthinking.

The mind of a teenager is very active; it keeps on generating questions which do not even make any sense. Like, why do we even have toes? Or what if gravity just decided to take a five-minute break while I was in the middle of a math test? These thoughts aren't "useful," but they are the sparks of a brain that refuses to sit still.

Honestly, being a teen is just one big cycle of wishing we were busy when we're bored and wishing we were bored when we're busy. When I'm drowning in history homework, I'd give anything for an afternoon of nothing. But then Saturday hits,

the Wi-Fi goes down for ten minutes, and suddenly I'm staring at the ceiling like it's a cinema screen.

That's where the "overthinking trap" starts. If you don't find something to do, your brain starts doing things to you. You start replaying that embarrassing thing you said to your crush three years ago. You start wondering if your friends actually like you or if they're just in a giant group chat without you. It's exhausting, and like the text says, the outcome is literally zero.

But then there's the "Creative Path." This is the weird magic that happens when you're so bored you actually start doing something "unproductive" that turns out to be awesome

We're told constantly to be productive. "Study for the test," "Practice your papers," "Clean your room." But when you're bored, you aren't doing things because someone told you to. You're doing them because you're trying to survive the silence.

The Random Hobby: This is how I ended up trying to learn how to bake sourdough. It was a disaster, and my kitchen smelled like a swamp, but for three hours, I wasn't scrolling TikTok. I was a scientist in a four-covered lab.

The Accidental Artist: Have you ever noticed that your best doodles happen in the margins of a notebook during a super long lecture? That's your brain trying to stay alive. When we give ourselves the space to be bored, we give our creativity permission to come out and play.

The Deep Philosophy: Those "nonsense" questions? They're actually the start of being a deep thinker. Questioning why things are the way they are is how people come up with new inventions or better ways to live.

The trick is catching yourself before the overthinking spiral turns into a black hole. It's about realizing that "wasting time" isn't the problem-it's how you waste it.

If you waste time imagining a story, or trying to kick a ball into a trash can from twenty feet away, or even just sitting outside and looking at the clouds, your brain is actually recharging. You're building a world inside your head that belongs only to you.

Being a teen is loud. Everyone has an opinion on who you should be. Boredom is the only time it gets quiet enough for you to actually hear your own voice. So, next time you're bored, don't just reach for your phone. Let your brain generate those nonsense questions. Let yourself be a little weird. That's where the best versions of us are hiding. The thing about boredom is that it's usually treated like a bug in the system, but when you're a teen, it feels more like the default setting of the universe. We spend so much energy trying to "patch" it with 15-second videos or group chats that die out after ten minutes, but we rarely just let the boredom sit there.

If you actually let it sit, it stops being a "waste of time" and starts becoming a weirdly productive laboratory. Here is why that empty space in our heads is actually where the most interesting stuff happens.

We live in an age of constant notification pings. Our brains are basically wired to expect a hit of dopamine every time we unlock our phones. So, when that stops, when the phone is dead, or there's no one to hang out with, or you've finished your chores-it feels like a physical itch.

The text mentioned that some teens spend this time overthinking. That's the "glitch." When the brain doesn't have an external mission like a video game or an essay, it turns inward and starts attacking itself. You start analyzing the way you walked past someone in the hallway or wondering why you aren't as "productive" as that one influencer who wakes up at 5:00 AM to drink green juice.

But overthinking is just creativity going in the wrong direction. It's the same energy you'd use to write a song or paint a canvas, but you're using it to build a horror movie starring yourself. The goal isn't to stop thinking; it's to change the channel.

The mind of a teenager is like a high-powered engine that someone left running in a parked car. If you don't put it in gear, it's going to overheat. Those "nonsense questions"? Those are actually brain sparks.

When you ask, "Why do we even have toes?" or "What would a color look like if it wasn't a color?" you are practicing divergent thinking. That's the ability to see multiple solutions to one problem. AI can't do that. Adults, who are often too busy with "real" problems, lose the ability to do that. Only a bored teenager has the mental real estate to wonder about the fundamental weirdness of being alive.

The "Creative Path" isn't about being a straight-A student or an athlete. It's about realizing that you are the most interesting thing in the room, even when the room is empty and there's nothing to do. Boredom isn't the enemy; it's the invitation to see what your brain is actually capable of when no one is watching.

Chapter-16

Wearing the Mask of “Fine”

We teenagers are considered as great actors; we have the ability of hiding our emotions in front of everyone. we pretend that we are fine but there is something else which is going on in our minds, which we cannot express in front of anyone. we don't trust anyone enough to tell them how we really are feeling, it's not like we never trusted anyone fully before. Whenever we trust a person completely, they just end up ghosting us badly. This then never allowed us to trust anyone, even if we know that the person is the man of his words. If we share our emotions with others, we feel like they are going to think us as any weak person.

So, we just keep the script running. We laugh at the jokes, we keep up the streaks, and we give that short, sharp "I'm good" whenever a teacher or a parent asks.

It's easier to be a character than it is to be a person, honestly. Because a character can't get their heart trashed. A character doesn't have to explain why they felt like crying in the middle of a crowded cafeteria for literally no reason. The thing about being ghosted after opening up is that it doesn't just hurt-it teaches you. It teaches you that your "real" self is a burden. You tell someone about the mess inside your head, thinking they're your person, and then suddenly their name

stays at the bottom of your inbox for weeks. You see them active on Instagram, but your message is just sitting there, "Delivered."

That silence is louder than any argument. It tells you "See? This is why you stay quiet." So, the next time someone asks, "What's wrong?", you don't even think about the truth. You just pull that mask tighter. You become the funny friend, the chill friend, or the "I don't care" friend, because those versions of you are safe.

We've been sold this idea that "strength" is just holding everything in until you're basically a pressurized soda can ready to explode. We're scared that if we show one crack, the whole world will see us as "too much" or "dramatic."

But the truth is, it's actually exhausting to be a "great actor" 24/7. Your brain is running two different programs at once—one that is trying to survive the day, and another that is doing damage control on every thought you have. It's like trying to run a marathon while holding your breath.

The hardest part is knowing that some people do care, but the fear of being ghosted again acts like a firewall. We treat everyone like they're going to leave, even the ones who are actually standing there with their arms open.

Maybe the goal isn't to take the mask off for everyone. Maybe it's just about finding that one person—or even just a notebook or a hobby—where you don't have to perform. Because eventually, the "fine" mask gets so heavy that you forget what your real face even looks like. And that's the scariest part of the act, losing yourself in the role.

But that does not literally mean you shall keep the feelings inside you and never talk that out. Building trust again feels like trying to reconstruct a glass vase that didn't just break, but shattered into a million microscopic pieces. When you're a teen, and someone you actually let in decided to ghost you or treat your feelings like a joke, it doesn't just hurt-it changes your DNA. You start looking at everyone like they're a potential "villain being" in your life.

But living behind a mask is exhausting. It's a lonely, high-effort performance that eventually burns you out. If you're tired of the act and want to start letting people back in, you have to do it like a software update- slow, steady, and with plenty of security checks. Before you can trust anyone else, you have to stop gaslighting yourself. A lot of the time, after we get hurt, we blame ourselves for being "too much" or "too sensitive."

Admit that being ghosted or betrayed sucked. Don't call it "drama." It was an opening of contract.

Part of the reason we stop trusting others is that we stop trusting our own judgment. We think, "I thought they were cool, and I was wrong, so my 'people-radar' is broken." It's not broken; it just needs a recalibration.

Start being honest with yourself first. If you're feeling like trash, don't tell yourself you're "fine" in your own head. If you can't be honest with yourself, you'll never be able to filter who deserves your honesty. Building trust isn't a straight line. There will be days where you feel like you took two steps back and want to lock yourself in your room and never talk to anyone again. That's normal.

The goal isn't to live a life where you never get hurt. That's impossible. The goal is to build enough self-trust that you know even if someone ghosts you, you'll be okay. You aren't "weak" for having emotions; you're human. And while the "fine" mask is a great shield, it makes for a really terrible home. Slow down. Breathe. Share one tiny, real thing today. See what happens. Afterall everything that you feel during your teenage years is totally common and normal.

Chapter-17

Academic Burnout

Amongst all other things, the most important and the most stressful things are the exams.

For a certain age till you were in fifth or sixth standard, you were the topper, and did not even go one percent below ninety. But suddenly as you entered the above classes, you had a sudden downfall. You still are not able to figure out what is the major problem for this downfall.

The feeling of hitting a wall after years of being the "gold child" is a specific kind of quiet heartbreak that nobody really prepares you for, because when you're ten years old and effortlessly pulling nineties, everyone just assumes you're "gifted" and that the momentum will carry you forever, but then the world gets louder and the books get thicker and suddenly that natural spark starts to feel more like a flickering candle in a wind or even a hurricane. we spend our early years being defined by those high percentages, wearing them like a shield, and our identity becomes so wrapped up in being the "topper" that we don't even know who we are without the validation of a red pen circling an A or an A+, so when the downfall happens, it doesn't just feel like a bad grade-it feels like we are literally breaking into pieces.

You sit at your desk staring at the same paragraph for forty minutes or maybe even one full hour and the words just swim around like ink in water, and you start to wonder if you suddenly became stupid overnight or if the "old you" were just a fluke, a version of yourself that you can't seem to find the directions back to no matter how hard you try.

It's the exhaustion of trying to run a marathon at a sprint pace for years, only to realize that the finish line keeps moving further away, and the people around you keep saying "you just need to focus" or "you're not trying hard enough," which is the biggest lie because you are trying so hard that your bones literally ache from the stress of it.

Academic burnout isn't just being tired; it's this deep, hollow sense of dread that hits you the second you wake up and realize you have to face another day of being "less than" what everyone expects you to be, and the guilt is almost heavier than the textbooks because you remember how easy it used to be.

You remember when math made sense and history felt like a story, but now it all feels like a giant, unsolvable puzzle that everyone else seems to have the instructions for except you. You start avoiding your friends because you don't want to talk about scores, and you avoid your parents' eyes because you can see the silent "what happened?" hanging in the air, and even when you try to explain that you're drowning, it feels like you're screaming underwater. You're mourning the version of yourself that was "the smart one," and it's terrifying because if you aren't the topper, then who are you even supposed to be?

It's a cycle of setting an alarm for 4:00 AM to "catch up," hitting snooze because you're physically paralyzed by the fear of failing again, and then spending the rest of the day hating yourself for being lazy when really, your brain is just out of fuel.

The pressure isn't just coming from the exams themselves; it's the weight of the "potential" people keep telling you that you have, which feels less like a compliment and more like a debt you can never pay back. You're stuck in this middle ground where you're too "smart" to give up but too exhausted to keep going, and every time a teacher hands back a paper with a lower grade than you're used to, it feels like a physical blow to the chest that reminds you how far you've fallen.

You try to look for the "major problem," searching for a single reason why things changed- maybe it was the new curriculum, maybe it was a bad teacher, maybe it was social media, but the truth is usually just that the human spirit isn't meant to be a performance machine that produces 90percent results 365 days a year without ever stopping to breathe. We're taught how to memorize and how to test, but we're never taught how to fail or how to handle the psychological crash that comes when our self-worth is tied to a number that is suddenly dropping, leaving us feeling like ghosts of the kids we used to be, just trying to find a way to survive the semester without losing our minds completely.

The way parents talk about academic burnout usually starts with a kind of confused nostalgia, where they constantly bring up the version of you that existed in the fifth grade as if that person is a stranger they're mourning, and every conversation feels like a deposition where they're trying to

find the exact moment you "broke" or "got lazy." They sit you down with that specific look of concerned disappointment—the one that hurts way worse than them being angry, and they start listing off your old achievements like a grocery list, reminding you of the trophies on the shelf and the certificates in the folder, asking "where did that kid go?" as if you purposefully hid them in a closet somewhere.

They talk about your potential like it's a bank account you're recklessly spending, and when they see you staring at a blank screen or lying on your bed staring at the ceiling, they don't see a brain that has literally run out of motivation, they see a lack of discipline. They say things like "we just want you to do your best," but their definition of "best" is strictly tied to the 90 percent you used to hit without trying, so when you actually do your best and come home with a 70 percent because you were fighting a panic attack the whole time, they look at the paper and ask what went wrong with the other 30 percent. They compare you to your cousins or the neighbor's kid who is apparently a robot that doesn't need sleep or joy, and they frame it as "motivation," not realizing that every comparison is just another brick in the wall that's separating you from them.

Their language is filled with "if only" and "just," like "if only you'd put down the phone" or "just focus for two hours," acting as if complex neurological exhaustion can be solved by a digital detox or a better planner. They talk about the "real world" and how competitive it is, trying to scare you into performing, but they don't realize that for a teen today, the "real world" already feels like it's crashing down on us every single morning. When they talk to their friends or other

parents, you can hear the shift in their voice, the way they lower their tone to discuss your "slump," treating your burnout like a family secret or a shameful phase that they're "helping you through," which usually just means more tutoring and less free time.

They focus so much on the "downfall" in the grades that they completely miss the downfall in your spirit; they talk about the math grade dropping but don't notice the way you've stopped laughing at dinner or how you've started wearing your hoodie like armor. They try to be supportive by saying "you're so smart, you're just not applying yourself," which is actually the most painful thing to hear because it implies that the failure is a choice you're making every day, rather than a symptom of a system that has finally pushed you past your limit.

Even when they try to be "chill" about it, the underlying tension is always there, vibrating in the way they ask "how was the test?" before they even ask how your day was. They talk about your future as if it's a house that's currently on fire, and every low grade is another room burning down, which makes every study session feel like a life-or-death mission instead of just learning. They don't see that the world changed between their generation and ours—that the volume of work, the constant digital surveillance of our grades via apps, and the sheer pressure to be "extraordinary" just to be "average" has created a weight they never had to carry.

When they talk about it, they're looking for a "major problem" like a bad influence or a secret habit, because they can't accept that the problem might just be that the "topper"

they raised was never allowed to be a human being who makes mistakes.

They keep trying to fix the "student" without realizing they're losing the child, and that's the hardest part of the conversation when trying to tell them that you're still in there, you're just tired, and you need them to stop talking about your grades and start looking at you.

Chapter-18

The Safe Place

As we grow up and enter that “teenage phase”, we often find peace in some place even if it is in our own house. we don’t know “why?” but the place has its own positive aura where we can sit for hours without even realizing. we feel safe and forget whatever is going on in life, this place plays a major role in maintaining our mental health. after coming back from school, tuitions, whenever we come back from any place which exhausts us, we tend to just simply sit in that place relaxing and resting.

This place can be like a couch in your room near the window through which you can look out to the stars glowing, or it can also be your own bed, on which you can sit still for several minutes to hours without getting bored. These places we consider our safe place as no one can disturb us there or call you out for a certain work. it’s like your private place where no one can enter. Having such places is very important because the world just gets so loud sometimes. It feels like every time I step out of my room, someone is asking me for something, judging what I’m wearing, or reminding me about a test I haven’t even started studying for yet. In that safe corner-whether it’s tucked away in the back of a closet with

some fairy lights or just that one specific spot on the floor where the sun hits perfectly, I don't have to be "on".

"I don't have to be the student, the daughter, the son, or the friend who has it all figured out. I can just be me, staring at the ceiling or scrolling through my phone, and for once, the clock doesn't feel like it's ticking against me.

It's weird how a physical space can change your internal mood so fast. I've noticed that when I'm in my spot, my breathing actually slows down. It's like my brain knows it can finally take its armor off. We spend so much of our day performing for people-teachers, parents, even our friends on social media, that we forget what it's like to just exist without an audience. Having that "safe place" gives me a chance to process all the stuff that happened during the day. Like that awkward thing I said in second period? In my safe place, I can think about it, cringe for a second, and then let it go because nobody is there to remind me of it.

Sometimes, I think adults forget what it's like to feel that constant pressure. They think because we don't have "real bills" to pay, we don't have stress, but being a teenager is like constantly being in a beta test for a game that keeps crashing. Everything is changing my body, my thoughts, my friendships, and having one corner of the world that stays exactly the same is the only thing that keeps me grounded. If I didn't have that spot to retreat to, I think I'd just explode from all the noise. It's not about being lazy or "antisocial," it's about recharging my battery so I can face the world again tomorrow. It's my little sanctuary, and honestly, everyone deserves to have a piece of the world that belongs only to them.

It is so important because, honestly, the world feels like it's turned up to 100 percent volume all the time. When I'm at school, I'm being graded. When I'm at tuitions, I'm being pushed to do better. Even when I'm on my phone, I'm seeing everyone else's "perfect" lives and feeling like I'm falling behind. That safe place is the only spot where the expectations stop. It's like a bubble where the air is thinner and easier to breathe. Sometimes I just sit there and listen to the silence, which is actually kind of loud if you think about it, but it's a good kind of loud. It's the sound of my own thoughts finally getting a chance to speak without being interrupted by a notification or someone calling my name from downstairs to come set the table.

In this spot, I don't have to pretend. I don't have to laugh at jokes that aren't funny or act like I'm not tired when I actually feel like I've run a marathon just by existing. Most people don't realize how much energy it takes just to be a "normal" teenager. You're constantly navigating these weird social rules that change every week, and your brain is basically a construction site where the workers are always on strike. Having a physical space; a corner of the couch, a patch of carpet, or even just a specific way I lean against my headboard gives my mind a signal that it can finally go "offline" for a bit. It's not about escaping reality; it's about gathering enough strength to go back out and face it.

I think about my safe place when I'm stuck in a boring lecture or when I'm feeling overwhelmed in a crowded hallway. Just knowing it's waiting for me at home makes the day easier to handle. It's my anchor. Without it, I think I'd just drift away into all the stress and the "what-ifs" that keep

me up at night. It's where I can cry if I need to, or just stare at a wall and do absolutely nothing, which is actually a really underrated thing to do. In a world that tells us we always have to be doing something productive, having a place where you are allowed to just "be" is the best kind of medicine. It reminds me that I'm a human being, not just a student or a kid with chores, and that my peace of mind is worth protecting more than anything else.

Chapter-19

Hate for Mornings

Waking up early doesn't excite us anymore. Growing up has made us the morning haters and more of a night owl. We used to be excited for a new day-go to school-meet friends-come back home-get an afternoon nap-study with help of parents-repeat. It was indeed a great schedule. We loved it. But now, as we grew up, night was a perfect time for us to study. We don't sleep till 2-3 am, even after knowing that we have to attend school early morning.

The main moto for us to attend school is seeing friends, talking, gossiping about something and eating together. We keep waiting for the break between lectures or sometimes or always talk during a lecture.

When we sleep at late night, and suddenly just after 2 mins the alarm rings, we wonder where the hours between 2 am and 6 am go. frustrating we get out of the bed and blame ourselves for not sleeping early or we blame the school for not keeping the school late.

We get the major ideas to do something at night after 12 am and doing the thing takes about 2 hours and when we try to sleep, the sleep...? it's gone. we love nights more than mornings as teenagers, it's not because we hate going to school in morning but because the world feels silent and not chaotic.

while everyone in the house is sleeping, we teens find peace at night, or the sleep does not find us. The night is all silent and the mornings are much chaotic, and because of all the things going on in a teenager's life is very crazy, irritating, we finally find time for ourselves at night. It's more like we own the night. There is a specific kind of silence that only exists after the rest of the house has stopped breathing loudly.

Floorboards have finally stopped creaking. The hum sound of the refrigerator feels like a low-fi beat, and for the first time in twelve-sixteen hours, nobody is calling your name. Nobody is asking if you've finished your practical's, nobody is reminding you to take the trash out, and nobody is judging you for staring at a wall for twenty minutes straight.

At night, the "chaos" the world expects from us just... evaporates. During the day, being a teenager feels like being a performer on a stage where you haven't memorized the script. You're constantly pivoting between being a student, a child, a friend, and an athlete. But at night? At night, you're just a soul in a hoodie or in some random comfy pajamas.

We've all lived through that glitch in the matrix. You finally close your eyes at 3:00 AM after a deep dive into a random hobby-maybe you suddenly decided you needed to know everything about deep-sea creatures or how to edit a perfect montage, and then, BAM...

The alarm goes off. It's 6:30 AM.

It feels like you blinked, and the universe robbed you of four hours. That walk to the bathroom is the hardest trek known to man. Your eyes feel like they're full of sand and sleep, and you spend the first ten minutes of the day blaming

everyone. You blame the school for starting before the sun is even fully awake. You blame your past self for thinking that third episode of that show was "mandatory viewing." But mostly, you just mourn the quiet you lost.

People call it procrastination, but let's be real, it's Revenge Bedtime Procrastination. We stay up because the daytime doesn't belong to us. Our schedules are owned by teachers, coaches, and parents. The night is the only time we can actually think.

Mornings are loud. Not just the noise-the vibe is loud. It's the sound of slamming lockers and doors, the smell of roasted coffee or the slurp of anyone drinking a simple cup of tea, and the constant, vibrating anxiety of "being on time."

But at night, the world is soft. The shadows are long, the air is cooler, and the expectations are zero. We aren't "lazy" that loving the night; we're just looking for a place where we can finally hear ourselves think over the noise of growing up.

Once we were the kids who were scared of night and didn't ever wanted night to exist, thinking a ghost might take us away. but now as we have grown up, the night feels like our partner. The transition from the sanctuary of the night to the cold, unforgiving reality of the morning is a psychological heist that every teenager experiences but no one truly prepares for. It starts with that specific, haunting shade of deep navy blue that begins to bleed into the edges of the window frame around 4:30 AM, the visual signal that your private world is about to be reclaimed by the public one. There is a profound, heavy dread that settles in your chest when you realize the birds are starting to chirp, because those sounds aren't a

peaceful melody; they are an alarm clock that you can't snooze, a rhythmic reminder that you've traded your future sanity for a few hours of midnight clarity.

You sit there in the glow of a screen or the dim light of a bedside lamp, watching the shadows that felt like a protective cocoon just an hour ago start to sharpen and fade into the mundane shapes of a desk piled with unfinished assignments and a closet full of clothes you aren't ready to put on. This is the moment where the "peace" turns into a frantic calculation of how many minutes of "power nap" you can afford before your biological clock crashes entirely, leading to that soul-crushing realization that two minutes of sleep somehow consumes four hours of real time. The dread is rooted in the contrast the night is where you are a philosopher, a creator, a gamer, or just a person who finally breathes without a filtered lens, but the morning is a chaotic factory that demands you be a "productive member of society" before your brain has even finished processing its cycle.

You find yourself blaming the very architecture of the school system, wondering why the world is built for the "early birds" when the "night owls" are the ones doing the actual thinking, the actual grieving, and the actual growing up in the silence of the dark. The transition is violent; it's the shift from the quiet hum of a sleeping house to the jarring, metallic clatter of a locker, the blinding fluorescent lights of a hallway that feels five miles long, and the constant, buzzing social pressure to "be on" when you haven't even finished being "off." It's a cycle of self-blame where you promise yourself at 7:00 AM that you'll go to bed at 9:00 PM, only to find yourself back in that same 2:00 AM trance twelve hours later because the

night is the only place where the world doesn't feel like it's screaming at you to hurry up and grow into someone else.

You're trapped in a loop where the silence of the night is so addictive that you're willing to pay for it with the exhaustion of the day, even if that means walking through your lectures like a ghost, waiting for the sun to go down so you can finally feel alive again, even as you watch the sunrise with a sinking heart, knowing the chaos is about to begin all over again and you are completely, utterly unprepared to face it.

Chapter-20

The Music Obsession

Listening to music feels like we are on the way to escape the reality, and indeed it provides us with an escape from reality which was utterly needed. Between all the chaotic life, we have a sudden obsession of listening to music. The music genre we listen is based on our current mood, sad, happy, energetic etc. Music helps us to feel those emotions.

Once we hated whenever our elders turned those old songs and tunes on. But now we are the biggest fan of this old retro kind of music. That feeling of putting on headphones and just... disappearing? It's unmatched. It's like the rest of the world goes on mute, and suddenly, you're the main character in a movie that actually makes sense. It's funny the music our elders played. We used to roll our eyes at those "boring" melodies from the 70s or 80s, thinking that they were outdated. But then, one day, you're feeling a specific kind of lonely or tired, and suddenly a track your dad used to play just hits differently.

Maybe it's because those songs feel solid. In a world of 15-second viral clips and disposable hits, those old tunes feel like they were built to last. They carry a weight-a history-that makes our current chaos feel a little more manageable. We aren't just fans of the music; we're fans of the feeling of belonging to

something older than our own stress. Our playlists are basically a diary that we don't have to write.

When you need to feel invincible before a test or a game. The bass is high, the tempo is fast, and for three minutes, you actually believe you've got this.

Sometimes, you don't want to feel better; you just want to feel understood. There's a certain comfort in a sad song that mirrors your exact brand of heartbreak or frustration. It's like the artist is reaching through the speakers saying, "Yeah, I've been there too."

This is the ultimate "reality escape." It's the music for 2 AM staring at the ceiling, wondering if everyone else is as faked-out as you feel.

Why the obsession? Because music is the only thing that doesn't ask anything of us. It doesn't need us to be productive, or happy, or "on." It just exists.

Whether it's the crackle of a vinyl record we "borrowed" from a grandparent or a digital stream shared between friends, it's the bridge between the reality we're stuck in and the world we actually want to live in. We're all just looking for that one perfect melody that makes the chaotic life feel like it has a rhythm after all.

For me the music feels like a supporter who stays with me through each stage. whenever life starts feeling too heavy or I get a scolding from my parents for a certain reason, I put up my headphones and sit at a specific corner of my house and start playing the music.

That specific corner is right by the window where the light barely reaches, and honestly, it's the only place where I feel like I can actually breathe after a day like today. It all started when I got home and my mom immediately started in on me about my room being a mess and how I'm "always distracted," and then my dad chimed in about my grades, and it just felt like this huge wave of noise that I couldn't escape from no matter what I said. I could feel that hot, itchy, unwanted feeling in my chest where you want to yell but you know it'll just make things worse, so I didn't say anything at all; I just grabbed my headphones and retreated to my spot, pulling my knees up to my chin and hitting play on that one playlist I made for when the world feels too loud.

Suddenly, the sound of chaos, stress faded into this low hum, replaced by a slow, heavy bass line that felt like it was physically shielding me from the house and the whole surrounding, and I just closed my eyes and let the lyrics take over. I started thinking about the bus ride home earlier, how I saw two people sharing a pair of wired earbuds and looking so happy, and I realized how much I wish I had someone who just got my taste in music without me having to explain it.

Then I remembered that old CD I found in the random cupboard my mother asked me to clean last week, the one with the handwritten title that's all faded and I wondered if whoever made it felt as trapped as I do right now, and if they sat in a corner just like this one waiting for the song to finish so they could feel brave enough to walk back into the living room. It's crazy how you can be in a house full of people but feel like you're on a different planet just because of what's vibrating in your ears, but in that moment, I didn't care about

the chores or the lectures or the "future" everyone keeps barking about; I just cared about the way the bridge of the song built up and then dropped, making me feel like I was floating instead of sinking.

I stayed there until my legs went numb and the sun went down, just letting one track and music blend into the next, because as long as the music was playing, I didn't have to be the "disappointing" kid or the "distracted" student-I was just me, and for once, that was actually enough.

Eventually, the last song on the playlist fades out, and that heavy silence from before starts creeping back into the corners of the room, making me realize I can't stay hidden forever even if I really want to. Taking off the headphones feels like losing a shield; suddenly, the house sounds are way too sharp, like the distant clinking of dishes in the kitchen or the muffled sound of the TV, and I have to take a deep breath just to feel myself alive. I usually sit there for a few extra seconds, just blinking in the dark and trying to hold onto that calm feeling the music gave me, hoping it sticks to my skin like a layer of armor before I walk back into the "real world."

I stand up, my legs feeling kind of heavy and pins-and-needles from sitting crumpled up for so long, and I head toward the kitchen where I know everyone is still probably annoyed. It's that awkward walk where you don't want to make eye contact because you're not ready to be lectured again, so I just focus on the floor, trying to act casual even though my heart is thumping out loud. When I walk in and see them, I can tell they're waiting for me to say something or apologize, but I just head straight for the fridge to get a glass of water, keeping my movements slow and quiet.

The trick is staying in that "music headspace" even when the music isn't playing anymore. I just tell myself that their words are just background noise, like static on a radio station I'm not tuning into. If they start talking about the chores or the grades again, I just nod and say "okay" or "I'll do it now," because the music taught me that you don't always have to shout to be strong; sometimes being quiet is its own kind of power.

I carry that last melody in the back of my head like a secret, and it makes the scolding feel smaller, like I'm watching a movie of my life instead of being stuck in the middle of a mess.

Facing everyone is still hard, and the tension in the room is thick enough to cut, but I feel a little more solid than I did an hour ago, like I've got this hidden battery inside me that's finally charged up. I finish my water, put the glass in the sink, and start doing whatever they asked me to do, not because they "won" the argument, but because I've got better things to think about-like what song I'm going to play as soon as I get back to my room.

Chapter-21

The Spark-First Crush

That magical, dizzying shift in the atmosphere of your daily life starts exactly when you least expect it, usually right around the time you're still trying to figure out how to navigate the social minefield of the hallways without tripping over your own feet, and suddenly, the word "crush" isn't just a vocabulary word or a joke your older siblings make, but a living, breathing, heart-racing reality that turns your world into a more of and well-organized person of its former self.

It begins with a glance, maybe across the cafeteria or during a particularly dull lecture where you are tapping your pen on the bench to make sounds that might keep you awake or even in a random unexpected place or any kind of situation, and before you can even process the chemistry of what's happening, your brain has essentially checked out of reality and moved into a permanent residence in a fantasy world where every conversation you have with your friends inevitably loops back to them, much to the exhaustion of everyone around you who, despite being the ones who probably dared you to talk to them in the first place, now think you've lost your mind because you can find a way to connect a discussion from tomorrow's test to discussing about

the way your crush smiled at you. weird...right? but it's all part of the so-called life process.

Everything becomes a sign or a symbol; you find yourself memorizing their schedule without even trying, knowing exactly which hallway they'll be walking down at 11:45 AM, and suddenly, that specific five-second window where you might pass each other and share a split-second nod or a "hey" becomes the entire sun around which your solar system orbits.

School, which used to be a panic stage of early alarms and heavy backpacks, transforms into a high-stakes stage where the main reason to show up isn't the diploma but the possibility of a shared glance near the lockers, and even though you know deep down that it's a massive distraction that makes focusing on a certain formula feel you're like trying to make that certain formula yourself, you wouldn't want to trade that nervous, exciting feeling for anything because it makes boring life feel like an fantasy genre movie.

Your friends suddenly become your biggest hype crew and your most annoying trolls. The second your crush's name even comes up, they start roasting you, but for once, you aren't even mad. Instead, you're just there blushing, awkwardly touching your hair, and wearing a dumb, "guilty as charged" smile.

It's honestly a total emotional rollercoaster. Your whole mood depends on if they looked at you or where they're sitting in the assembly. Even though it's stressful and your heart is doing literal backflips, it feels like you've unlocked a secret level of life. Suddenly, the boring school routine feels like a high-stakes, heart-pounding movie that you never want to turn off.

The moment you step into the school building, it's like the world shifts from black-and-white to high-definition. You aren't just walking into a hallway; you're entering a high-stakes environment where every corner might hold a glimpse of them. That normal school buzz starts to feel like a live wire, making you feel more awake and alert than you've been all morning. It's a total system shock that turns a boring Monday into something that matters.

Suddenly, your brain becomes a specialized camera, zooming in on things that everyone else just walks past. You aren't just looking at a person; you're noticing the exact way they lean against a locker or the specific messy way they tie their laces. While your friends are complaining about homework, you're busy memorizing the exact sound of their laugh from three tables away in the lunchroom. It's like you've been given a secret map to a world no one else can see. Even though it's exhausting to be this "on" all the time, you wouldn't turn it off if you could. It makes every small, quiet moment feel like a major scene in the story of your life.

Every interaction, no matter how brief, becomes a puzzle to be solved in the group chat later that night, where you and your friends act like amateur detectives, dissecting a three-second "hey" or an accidental brush of shoulders in the line for lunch as if it were a scene from a movie filled with hidden layers of meaning. You find yourself picking out clothes in the morning with a level of strategy that borders on a military operation, wondering if that specific shade of blue makes your eyes stand out or if wearing that one vintage hoodie will somehow signal a shared interest that sparks a thirty-minute conversation that changes your entire life.

There's this weird, internal feeling where you internally play tug of war where one half of your brain is screaming at you to be cool, calm, and collected, while the other half is busy orchestrating a full-scale panic attack because they happened to look in your general direction during a sports event. You become a master of the "side-eye," perfecting the art of watching them without actually looking at them, because the thought of making sustained eye contact feels like staring directly into the sun-blinding, dangerous, and likely to leave you permanent disoriented.

Even the things you used to hate, like a rainy Tuesday or a double-period of boring history lecture, take on this glow of importance because they are the backdrop to this internal movie which you're starring in, where every song on your playlist suddenly feels like it was written specifically about your life and this one person who probably has no idea they've become the protagonist of your every waking thought. It's an exhausting, exhilarating cycle of hoping they notice you and then immediately wishing you were invisible the moment they actually do, leaving you in a state of perpetual, beautiful confusion that defines the very essence of being young and "crushing" for the first time

The distraction of a crush is a total, ground-up renovation of your brain's priority list where suddenly the things that used to matter, like passing your chemistry midterm or remembering to turn in your permission slip, feel like background noise in a movie where the only high-definition character is that one person who probably has no idea they've become your entire Empire. You find yourself sitting in a lecture hall or a classroom, staring at a whiteboard filled with

equations that might as well be ancient because your mind has hijacked your eyes, forcing them to drift toward the back of a specific head or a certain pair of shoes which are under the bench. This isn't just a casual "oh, they're cute" thought; it's a full-scale cognitive blackout where you lose twenty minutes of a lesson because you were busy mentally drafting a conversation that starts with a random comment about the random imagined "never-gonna-be-real" talk but ends with the two of you realizing you're soulmates.

It's like your brain and your body stop talking to each other the second you see them. One minute you're walking down the hall like a normal person, and the next, you've completely forgotten how legs work. Every step feels like you're all glitch in front of a stadium full of people. Your knees turn into literal non movable, and suddenly you're overthinking the most basic things-like, "Are my arms swinging too much? Do I look weird just letting them hang there?" It's a total glitch in your system.

The worst part is how it completely hijacks your social skills. You could be deep in a conversation with your best friend, someone you've known since you were five, someone you can usually talk to about anything and the moment your crush walks into the room, your brain just shuts down. You'll literally trail off in the middle of a sentence, leaving your friend staring at you like you've lost your mind.

The room could be loud, your friend could be telling the funniest story ever, but everything else just fades into the background. You're stuck in this clumsy, silent bubble, paralyzed by the fact that they're just there, existing in the same space as you. It's frustrating and embarrassing, but at the

same time, it's that specific kind of "crush chaos" that makes school feel less like a chore and more like a movie. You're an awkward mess, sure, but you're an awkward mess because something exciting is finally happening. It's that messy, uncoordinated, "lost for words" feeling that you'll probably look back on and actually miss one day.

Even your phone, which used to be for memes and gaming, becomes a source of constant, twitchy distraction where every vibration in your pocket feels like an electric shock, making you check the screen with a mix of hope and terror only to realize it's just a notification from a weather app or a random group chat, leading to a crushing wave of "what if" that prevents you from focusing on literally anything else for the next hour. You start to see them in everything- a song lyric that suddenly makes perfect sense, a character in a book who shares their eye color, or even a random street sign that starts with the same letter as their name, until your world is less about reality and more about this distorted, beautiful, and incredibly frustrating map of associations that all lead back to them.

It's an exhausting way to live because you're essentially running a heavy-duty software program in the background of your mind at all times, draining your battery and making you "lag" in real-life conversations, yet there's a part of you that loves the chaos because it makes the boring parts of being a teenager feel like a cinematic masterpiece. You're distracted by the way they laugh at someone else's joke, distracted by the possibility of them seeing your new outfit, and distracted by the sheer intensity of your own heart doing backflips over a

simple "see ya later," proving that a crush is the ultimate thief of productivity but the greatest source of everyday adrenaline

And the most awkward and embarrassing situation is when you are daydreaming about them in between your lectures sitting on your seat, your one hand on chin and cheek, not paying attention to whatever is going on in the class. suddenly then your teacher calls out your name-a question is asked to you by your teacher but the answer to the same question is not really known because you were busy in your own world and now the teacher blames you for not paying attention in front of the whole class.

Chapter-22

The First Heartbreak

Till you are crushing over someone, daydreaming about them between lectures, it is all fine, the world is beautiful. The person you are crushing on doesn't know that you like them. But somehow as a news spread quick and you hear about them, already being in a relationship with someone else. At this point, you are all disturbed. and the worst part is when you get to know this when your exams are approaching. All of a sudden, you feel as if your own world has betrayed you. before you could even confess to them, an earthquake strikes and you are all lost in your own world-the imaginary world which you yourself had built.

After you get to know this, you stop talking to your friend even if they have no role in this thing. Also, when you get home, you keep your bag aside, you go to your room and lock yourself up without talking to your mom and your mom wonders what had strike you all of a sudden. Because she knew you had left home in a happy mood unaware you would come home in a pretty bad mood.

You feel like an earthquake has strike and you stop eating and your parents still wonder what the reason is. Afterall they also get worried. On the top of it, you cannot even tell your parents about it, feeling they would scold you instead of

consoling. But you somehow have to act like you are perfectly fine as nothing had happened, because you cannot let them know exactly what has happened. The exams are approaching. So, you sit there, staring at a textbook where the words have turned into blurry ink blots, and every time you try to memorize a formula for math's or a date of history, your brain just loops back to that one sentence you heard in the hallway, that mention of them being with someone else that hit you harder than any physical blow ever could.

You start questioning every look they ever gave you, every time they accidentally brushed past you in the cafeteria, wondering if you were just a background character in their movie while they were the entire plot of yours. Your phone buzzes with a text from that friend you're ignoring, the one who's probably wondering why you vanished and all of a sudden, you feel this weird mix of guilt and anger because they don't understand that your heart feels like it's being squeezed, and the thought of "small talk" feels physically impossible right now. You hear your mom's footsteps outside your door, the soft rhythm of her hesitation before she decides not to knock this time, and it kills you because you want to run out and cry on her shoulder, but then the fear kicks in, the fear that she'll say you're too young to feel this way, or that you should be focusing on your future instead of a "silly, stupid, crush," and you just can't risk having your pain dismissed as a phase.

The room feels like it's shrinking. You're sitting there in the dark, the only light coming from your desk lamp, and it finally hits you that "imaginary world" you built in your head wasn't just a fun daydream. It was where you felt like a main character in a fantasy movie.

You try to eat something because your stomach is whole empty, but the food tastes like literally nothing. You just push it away and hide your face in your arms. It's wild how someone who doesn't even know you're upset can have this much power over your entire mood.

Then the "Sunday Scares" hit, but worse. You start stressing about tomorrow having to walk past them in the hallway and act like you're totally fine. You have to put on this "blank face" mask, pretending you aren't hollowed out inside, and the thought of having to perform like that all day makes you want to just crawl into bed and sleep for a year.

The worst part is the loneliness. It's the realization that you're the only one grieving a relationship that never actually happened. It's a silent heartbreak. There's no breakup post, no sad songs people send you, and no "reason" to be loud about it. You're just drifting through your day, feeling like everyone else is speaking a language you've completely forgotten.

The silence in the room feels like its gonna tear your ear apart, and as you stare at the closed door, you realize that the wall you've built between yourself and your mom is only making the "earthquake" inside your head louder. You start to think about all the times she's sat on your bed when you were little, or the way she can tell something is wrong just by the way you drop your keys on the counter, and a tiny, flickering thought begins to take shape- what if you're wrong about the scolding? You imagine the conversation a thousand times in your head, the words sticking in your throat like dry toast, but then you think about the alternative, spending the next two weeks of exam season drowning in this hollowed-out feeling,

pretending to study while your heart is actually stuck in that hallway where you heard the news.

You finally stand up, your legs feeling like dead, and you walk toward the door, every step you are shaking with the fear that if you speak the truth, it makes the heartbreak real, but as you turn the handle and see her sitting in the living room with that worried crease between her eyebrows, you realize she's already thinking about the version of you that walked out the door happy this morning. You realize that maybe she doesn't need to understand the "crush" specifically; maybe she just needs to see the hurt, because even if she hasn't been a teenager in years, she's been a human who's felt invisible, and that's a language she definitely speaks.

As you sit down beside her, the air in the room finally feels thin enough to breathe again, and even before you find the first word, you see her expression shift from confusion to a soft, quiet kind of recognition that tells you that you don't have to carry the ruins of your imaginary world all by yourself. You start to realize that while the "earthquake" took away your daydream, it didn't take away the people who actually know your name and love you without a second thought, and suddenly, the terrifying prospect of opening up feels less like a risk and more like the only way to stop the ground from shaking beneath your feet. But still, you don't have the courage to talk about it with your mother.

Finally, it's evening and it's more heavy for you to keep it inside yourself and you have to need to get consoled. Even though it's like your heart is on fire-burning inside, you get that courage from somewhere to finally talk your feelings out. You take a deep breath, and finally walk into the kitchen

where she's making a cup of tea. For a second, you almost turn back, but then she looks up, and the look in her eyes isn't one of anger it's just heavy, quiet worry. "Mom?" you say, and your voice sounds so small and cracked that it doesn't even feel like yours anymore. You sit across from her, picking at a loose thread on your sleeve because you don't wanna make that eye contact, and the words start tumbling out, messy and unpolished, about the daydreaming in lectures and the sudden, sharp reality of finding out that they are with someone else. You wait for the lecture, for the "focus on your grades" speech, or the "you're too young to know what heartbreak is" talk, but it doesn't come. Instead, she just reaches across the table and puts her hand over yours, her palm warm and steady against your shaking fingers.

That feeling," she says softly, and it catches you off guard because you always saw her as just 'Mom,' not as someone who once had a world that felt like it was ending over a person who didn't see her. She tells you that it's okay to be 'disturbed,' that your feelings aren't a distraction from your exams, they're just part of being alive. She doesn't try to fix it with a lecture; she just sits there with you in the ruins of your imaginary world, making it feel a little less like a wasteland.

The weight in your chest doesn't vanish, but it shifts, becoming something you can actually carry. You realize that you don't have to be a stone-faced version of yourself to be successful or 'grown-up.' As she offers to make you some toast and sit with you while you try to look at your notes, the 'earthquake' finally starts to settle into a dull hum, and for the first time since you heard the news, you feel like you might actually make it through the week.

Chapter-23

‘Phone’ or ‘Passport’?

As teens enter that period of life where everything-whether I want to do it or not depends upon one’s ‘mood’. One of such things is travelling. When a child enters that phase as a teen, they don’t know what they actually want. There are two types of teenagers when it comes to travelling-first is the ‘comfort seeker’ and second is the ‘explorer’. Although sometimes the comfort seeker can be wanting to become an explorer, and the explorer sometimes wants to be a comfort seeker. As I told earlier that it is thus, completely depended upon their moods.

Still confused what I am talking about? okay then, let’s dive in.

Let’s first just talk about that ‘explorer’ kind of teen.

Some are the ‘adrenaline rush’ lover. which simply means they love adventure, and whenever a destination has to be selected for the next vacation, while the whole family chooses the comfort and peace giving place, while these teenagers suggest the places where there are sites for activities such as-bungee jumping, river rafting, sky diving etc. you want to have these experiences so that you can talk about it to your friends, post it on social media and create memories. At least you try to face your fears even though it is for social media, you are

facing your fears, and that is what is the most important thing here. You feel that you are most likely increasing your 'aura' by posting a pic or a reel of yourself doing that certain activity.

In the current social media generation, a vacation isn't just a break, it's a portfolio of their life's most exciting moments. While a 'comfort seeker' might be content with a cozy bed and a movie, the explorer feels a sense of urgency to be out in the world, capturing the perfect shot.

For we teens, the "adrenaline rush" isn't just about the hormone; it's about the story we are writing for ourselves. Every daring activity, whether it's exploring a foreign city or trekking through a dense forest. we are testing our limits to see who we are outside of their hometown. we want to return home with stories that set us apart. Being the first in our friend group to visit a specific place or try a unique thing for first time gives us a sense of status and individuality.

However, being an 'Explorer' is exhausting. This is where the mood-dependent nature of being a teen kicks in. After three days of non-stop action, sightseeing, and content creation, even the most hardcore explorer might suddenly hit a wall.

They might wake up on the fourth day and refuse to leave the hotel, suddenly switching into 'Comfort Seeker' mode. This isn't because they've stopped liking the trip; it's because their "social battery" or physical energy needs a recharge before the next big adventure. To keep an explorer happy, the itinerary needs to be a high-stakes balance.

Explorer' teen is just a hyperactive kid who can't sit still. You see us looking at our phones and then looking at a

mountain, and you think we're disconnected. But honestly? You've got it all wrong. Being an Explorer isn't just about the "trip", it's about the vibe, the energy, and, yeah, the 'aura' we bring back home.

When we say we want to go bungee jumping or find a cliff to jump off of into some blue water, it's not just because we're "reckless." We live in a world that's constantly coming at us through a 6-inch screen. Everything is polished, filtered, and served to us on a silver platter. So, when we travel, we want something that actually makes us feel awake.

The 'Explorer' teen is chasing that specific high where your heart is hitting your ribs and you realize you aren't in your bedroom anymore. If the whole family is voting for a "peaceful retreat" at some quiet villa where the highlight of the day is a slow walk to a garden, we are going to lose our minds. To us, peace feels like boredom. Boredom feels like wasting time. And when you're a teen, time feels like it's running out because everyone keeps telling us "These are the best years of your life." If these are the best years, why would we spend them sitting in a lobby?

for an Explorer, the "moment" and the "memory" are the same thing. When we're out there river rafting or skydiving, we aren't just doing it for the 15 seconds of the video. We're doing it because we want to be the person who is adventurous. Posting that Reel or TikTok is just how we archive our lives. It's our digital scrapbook.

Think about it. Back in the day, people would come home and show 300 blurry physical photos to their bored neighbors. We're just doing the modern version, but with better editing

and a good soundtrack. If we go to a site for an activity, we're looking for that "main character energy." We want to feel like the protagonist of a movie, not just a background character in our parents' vacation.

What most people don't realize is that the Explorer is actually on a secret mission—we're looking for a version of ourselves that doesn't exist at school.

At school, you have a label. You're the "quiet one," the "athlete," the "smart one." When an Explorer travels, all those labels stay at the airport or a train station. If I'm in a city where nobody knows my name, I can be whoever I want. I can be the person who talks to the local street food vendor in broken Spanish. I can be the person who navigates the subway system like a pro. That sense of competence of actually doing something difficult in a foreign place gives us more confidence than any grade on a report card ever could.

Now, here's where it gets complicated. Even the most intense Explorer has a "battery life." This is what the photos meant by everything depending on our "mood."

One day, I'm the one dragging everyone out of bed at 7:00 AM because I found a "secret" viewpoint on Reddit that we have to see before the crowds get there. I'm the one with the energy, the one pushing for "one more activity," the one who wants to try the weirdest food on the menu.

But then, 48 hours later? I might be the one who won't get out of the car.

It's not that I've suddenly become a 'Comfort Seeker' forever. It's just that being an Explorer is physically and socially exhausting. We are constantly scanning the

environment for the next "peak experience." We're processing new sights, new smells, and the pressure of making sure the trip "counts." When that battery hits 0-percent, we need to retreat, we need to energize. We need our headphones, our hoodies, and about six hours of staring at a wall.

If you're traveling with an Explorer, you have to understand that we don't want a "vacation" in the traditional sense. A vacation is for people who are tired of work. We aren't tired of work—we're tired of the same old thing.

If we're taking a video of a sunset or a jump, don't tell us to "put the phone down and live." To us, capturing it is living. It means we found something beautiful enough that we wanted to keep it forever.

If the destination has something high-energy, zip-lining, a night market, a massive concert make it happen, these are the things wanted by us. That one hour of adrenaline will buy you three days of us being "chill" during your museum tours.

In the end, being an Explorer kind of teen is about hunger. We're hungry for the world. We're hungry for stories. We're hungry for a version of ourselves that feels brave and "cool" and capable. We might be moody, we might be obsessed with our 'aura,' and we might be expensive to keep entertained but at least when we go back to school on Monday, we'll have a soul that feels a little bit bigger than it did before we left.

As this was all about the "explorer" version, now it's time for us to talk about the "comfort seeker".

These comfort seekers are very simple. They just want to be in their comfort zone. That is, just lie in your bed whole day scrolling through the phone without having any tension

about the exams and all other things. Feels so cozy and warm but how can this happen without you not getting scolded by any of your parent. You don't have interest in waking up early or going for a morning walk.

If the 'Explorer' is all about high energy and 'aura,' the Comfort Seeker is all about the vibe. Sometimes the vibe is just staying under a blanket for twelve hours straight. Adults look at us like we're wasting our lives, but they don't get that being a teenager is exhausting. Between school, exams, friends, and the constant noise of the internet, sometimes the best "travel" is just traveling from the bed to the fridge and back again. Being a Comfort Seeker doesn't mean we're lazy. It means we've found our "happy place," and usually, that place has a charger and 5G Wi-Fi. When a parent says, "Get up, we're going for a sunrise seeing. We literally feel as we the parent has said "Get up, we're going to walk for hundreds of kilometers just to see a sunrise!". A Comfort Seeker feels a literal pain in their soul. Why would we leave a warm, soft bed to go stand on a cold mountain before the sun is even up? It makes zero sense to us. For us, the perfect vacation isn't about how many miles we walked or how many monuments we saw. It's about the feeling of zero pressure. No one is asking us about our grades. No one is telling us to study. We just want to exist without being "productive."

Adults always complain about us being on our phones during a trip. They say, "You could do that at home!"

But that's the point! Doing it at home comes with chores, homework, and parents scolding for doing no homework. Doing it on vacation maybe in a nice hotel or a beach side farmhouse is different. It's "Premium Scrolling." You're

scrolling through TikTok, but you're doing it with the sound of the ocean in the background or in a room with better AC. To a Comfort Seeker, the phone is our connection to our "real" world. Our friends are in that phone. Our jokes are in that phone. Traveling can feel lonely if you're dragged away from your social circle. Being on the phone is how we stay grounded while the world around us is changing.

most sightseeing is just walking until your feet hurt to look at something that looks exactly like the picture on Google Images. One of the reasons why we teens hate sightseeing or traveling much.

We prefer "Slow Travel." If we're going to a new city, we'd rather find one cool boba shop and sit there for three hours than try to visit ten different museums. We like the feeling of a place, not the history of it. If the cafe has comfy chairs and a good soft playlist playing in the background, we're winning. If we have to stand in a line for two hours to see a statue? That's a nightmare.

it's all about the mood. Sometimes, even a Comfort Seeker gets a random burst of "Explorer" energy. Maybe we see a cool shop or a pool that looks fun, and suddenly we're down for an adventure.

But the opposite is also true. An Explorer can suddenly turn into a Comfort Seeker if they get overwhelmed. The difference is that for the Comfort Seeker, "Relaxed" is the default setting. We only move if the benefit of our effort is equal to the prize.

At the end of the day, neither the Explorer nor the Comfort Seeker is "wrong." "The Explorer wants to collect

experiences and show the world what they're doing. They want to feel big and brave. The Comfort Seeker wants to protect their peace. They want to recharge their battery because life is loud and they just need a break.

Traveling as a teen is basically just a constant battle between wanting to see the world and wanting to stay in bed. Sometimes we want the passport, and sometimes we just want the phone. As long as there's no scolding and plenty of snacks, we'll probably survive the trip either way.

Chapter-24

Blood vs. Bond

This is something which is very common in a teenager's life. As we spend more time with our friends than family, the bond that we create with our friends is stronger than that we have with our own family.

It's wild how we grow up being told that "family always comes first," but then you hit your teens and suddenly, your friends feel like your entire world. It's not that we stop loving our parents or siblings; it's just that life starts happening outside the house. In a family, trust is almost expected. You're born into it. But with friends, trust is something you build from scratch. It's about those 2:00 AM texts when you're feeling down, or knowing that if you tell them a secret, it's not going to end up being a lecture at the dinner table.

When you find people who "get" you without you having to explain yourself, that bond becomes stronger and more trustworthy. With friends, there's no pressure to be the "perfect daughter" or the "successful son." You can just be you, weird jokes, bad moods, and all. It sounds harsh to say out loud, but sometimes the people we choose are more supportive than the people we're related to.

And it's probably because:-

We're going through the same school stress, the same heartbreaks, and the same identity crises at the exact same time. Friends usually listen to understand, whereas family sometimes listens just to give "advice" or "fix" us. It starts small. You're sitting at the dinner table, and your parents are talking about your grades or what you're wearing, and you realize they're talking to a version of you that doesn't really exist anymore. Then you get a notification on your phone—a meme from your best friend that makes you laugh and you realize that person knows your soul better than the people who raised you.

That's the gap. On one side, you have Blood: history, DNA, and a room you've lived in since you were born. On the other, you have the Bond: the people you chose, the ones who saw you cry over a failed test and didn't tell you to "just study harder next time." But rather they understand us and help more in studies

Trust isn't just "not lying." For a teenager, trust is a currency. We don't give it away for free because we've seen how easily it can be used against us.

The biggest difference between family trust and friend trust is the reaction. If I tell my mom I'm feeling overwhelmed, there's a 90-percent chance it turns into a lecture about time management. If I tell my best friend, they usually just say, "Me too, everything sucks right now. And they ask whether we want to go somewhere just to freshen our mood.

That's why the bond feels stronger. Trust grows in the "No Judgment Zone." When you know, someone isn't going to try

to "fix" you or punish you for having a human emotion, you open up. You stop filtering. And once the filter is gone, the bond becomes unbreakable. Family is supposed to be your safety net, but sometimes the net feels more like a cage. Although it is understood that our parents hold a huge responsibility and have to look after so many things, but we can't really just deny our own feelings.

Nothing bonds people faster than surviving something together. Whether it's a terrifying math teacher, a bad breakup, or just the general chaos of being fifteen, those shared moments create a different kind of DNA. It's our "emotional DNA."

When you spend some hours on a call or sitting on a comfy chair talking about nothing, you're just surviving your almost same kind of lives together. You start to have your own language, your own inside jokes, and a loyalty that feels more "real" than blood because you earned it yourself.

The kitchen table feels like a battlefield sometimes. On one side, you have the people who gave you your name, your house, and your DNA. On the other side, you have the people who actually know what you're thinking before you even say it.

When "Blood" and "Bond" clash, it isn't just a small argument. It feels like a full-scale war where you're the prize, the prisoner, and the spy all at once. The first clash usually starts when your parents realize they don't recognize the person coming home at 4:00 PM. They remember the kid who loved cartoons and followed them everywhere. Now, they see

a teenager who spends three hours on FaceTime and speaks a language of inside jokes they don't understand.

They start asking questions that feel like interrogations-

"Why do you need to talk to them? You just saw them at school."

"What do you guys even talk about for that long?"

"I don't like the way that friend influences you."

From a teen's perspective, this is insulting. It's like they think we're hollow vessels that just soak up whatever our friends say. They don't realize that we chose those friends because they reflect who we actually are inside. When a parent questioning a best friend, they are accidentally questioning the parts of us we love the most.

There's this weird pressure at home to prove that "family comes first." But loyalty isn't a light switch you just flip or turn because someone says so.

like just imagine-You had a terrible day. You felt invisible at school, you messed up a presentation, and you're having to stay with your anxiety. You walk through the front door, and your "Blood" starts complaining about the dishes in the sink or a B grade on a test paper. They see the output, not the person who worked hard.

Then, you get a text from the "Bond." It's a stupid meme or a "Hey, you, okay? You looked stressed during the lunch break."

Your parents want your attention because they "provide" for you. Your friends get your attention because they "provide"

for your emotions and your soul. When parents demand loyalty while making us feel judged, it pushes us further into the arms of the bond. We start hiding things-not because they're bad, but because we're tired of defending the people who actually make us feel safe.

One of the biggest sparks for a clash is when parents compare themselves to our friends.

"I'm your mother, not your friend."

"He's known you for two years; I've known you for fifteen."

This is the ultimate emotional "Blood" card. It's meant to end the argument, but it usually just starts a cold war. You can live in a house with someone for fifteen years and still feel like a stranger. You can know someone for six months and feel like they've read your entire diary of life and how you actually are. The clash happens because parents feel threatened. They see the "Bond" taking up the space they used to own. They don't realize that as we grow up, the "space" in our hearts expands. Loving a friend doesn't mean we love our family less-it just means we're building our own world. The Group Chat is the headquarters of the "Bond." It's where we go to decompress after a clash with "Blood."

When you're arguing with your parents and you feel like you're losing your mind because they "just don't get it," the group chat is there to validate you.

"My dad is doing the same thing, don't worry."

"You're not crazy, that's actually unfair."

Parents hate the phone because they see it as a wall. To us, it's a kind of a bridge. It's the way we stay connected to the

people who keep us alive mentally when the house feels like a pressure cooker. The "clash" here is about presence. Parents want us "present" at the dinner table, but if the dinner table is a place of tension and judgment, why would we want to be there at the first place?

Every parent has that one friend of yours they blame everything on. If your grades drop? It's that friend's fault. If you're moody? It's because you're hanging out with "that crowd." "This is the biggest clash of all. It's "Blood" trying to control "Bond" by labeling it as toxic. But usually, that "bad influence" is just the friend who encouraged us to speak up for ourselves or try something new.

When a parent attacks a friend or talks about a friend, they are attacking our judgment. They're saying, "You aren't smart enough to pick good people." That hurts more than any lecture. It creates a "Us vs. Them" mentality. Suddenly, it's you and your friends against your parents.

The clash between Blood and Bond is just the sound of a teenager trying to figure out where they belong. We want the safety of the house, but we need the freedom of the life we want. We want the history of our family, but we need the future our friends represent.

The strongest families are the ones that realize the "Bond" isn't the enemy. It's 's just the family we found along the way. It's the hardest conversation to have because it feels like you're trying to explain a new language to someone who doesn't even want to learn the alphabet. You want them to understand that your friends aren't "replacing" them, but that the bond you have with your peers is a different kind of survival tool.

Parents often think friends are just for "fun" or "trouble." They don't realize that for us, friends are emotional first-responders. The reality is, the clash might not end overnight. "Blood" is protective, and "Bond" is exciting. As a teenager, you're the bridge between them.

The best way to prove that the "Bond" is healthy is to stay consistent. Show your family that your friends make you a better version of yourself, not a different one. When they see that your friends keep you grounded, happy, and supported, they themselves will ask you to spend time with your friends.

Chapter-25

The Weekly Reset

Amongst our school, college and work life, we keep waiting for Saturday so that we can sleep and wake up late on Sundays.

Earlier we used to wait for Sundays hoping that our parents would take us somewhere for picnics, at the mall or a night dinner at a restaurant. But now it doesn't matter much, not because don't want any holidays we obviously look forward in getting a holiday always, but rather because whenever Sunday is here, we are busier on Sunday-packing bag fir the next day, setting alarm, revising topics, doing homework and etc. We are clueless that how the day went so fast, Afterall we had just woken up. Sundays no more feel fun but rather boring, at least on weekdays we can meet our friends and talk about some random things.

We spend the whole week waiting for Friday or a Saturday, dreaming about getting more sleep and recovering the hours we didn't sleep on the weekdays. And then we wake up just to realize that- Sunday morning is here and we still have very much work that has to be done before the clock hits 7 pm on Sunday.

You wake up on Sunday at like 11:00 AM, feeling like a champion because you finally caught up on sleep. But that

feeling lasts for exactly five minutes. Then, the "list" starts playing in your head like a background track you can't pause. The list probably includes-The math assignment you "forgot" about on Friday. The clothes that are currently to be washed and are lying on your bed as a mountain of clothes. That one project you told your group you'd "finish over the weekend." "Checking your school group and seeing three new notifications.

Suddenly, you're not relaxing, you're just procrastinating with anxiety. You try to watch a show or play a game, but in the back of your mind, you know that 7:00 PM is coming. And 7:00 PM on a Sunday is the worst hour of the week. It's that moment when you realize the weekend is officially dead, and you haven't actually done anything fun. You've just been preparing to survive Monday. It's weird, right? We complain about school and work all week because we want to be alone and "relax." But then Sunday hits, and it's the loneliest day of the week. On weekdays, even if you're stressed, you're stressed with your friends. You're in the hallways laughing about a dumb reel, sharing snacks, or just complaining together.

We feel like we are actually living in a loop. We constantly keep on waiting for the weekend, but the weekend is just a preparation for more work. It's like we're running a race where the finish line just keeps moving five miles further every time, we get close.

If we're going to survive this, we probably need to change what "The Weekly Reset" actually means. Maybe it shouldn't be about packing bags and prepping for Monday. Maybe it should be about-

Doing absolutely nothing for at least one hour-No phone, no homework, no "planning." Just existing for yourself.

Checking in on friends-Instead of just talking about "random things" at school, actually calling someone on Sunday just to say, "Hey, I'm stressed too."

Accepting that "perfect" isn't the goal and making mistake is fine-Sometimes, the bag doesn't get packed perfectly, and the alarm is the only thing we set. And that's okay. At the end of the day, Sundays shouldn't feel like a chore. We're young, and we shouldn't be spending our "free time" mourning the fact that Monday is coming. Monday is going to happen anyway-we might as well enjoy the sun while it's still out on Sunday. Sundays should always be exciting us, Afterall the time is not going to stop just so you feel that Sundays are bigger than any other day of the week.

Chapter-26

The “Not Enough” Loop

Feeling like we are not enough-thinking that we are not making your parents proud and thinking that we are not a good friend or a good company to our friend. It is all completely normal to feel this way particularly in this age where nothing feels “perfect” or at least “good” or even “better”.

Even though we have done something which is quite impressive and our parents and friends are praising us for it, still you are in a loop where we feel that we are not doing anything good and always disappointing our parents. That "not enough" loop is like a heavy fog that doesn't care how bright the sun is shining or how many people tell us the view is great; it just sits there, making everything look grey and uncertain. It's a strange, quiet battle where our brains become experts at ignoring evidence. We could win an award, finish a massive project, or be the person everyone leans on, but the moment we sit down in the quiet, a small voice starts whispering that it was just luck, or that we should have done more, or that the people praising us just don't know the "real" us yet.

This feeling often starts from the high pressure of the modern world, where we are constantly shown the "highlight

reels" of everyone else's lives, making our own everyday efforts feel small and insignificant by comparison. We start to believe that "good" is the bare minimum and "perfect" is the only goal worth reaching, which is an impossible standard for any human being to maintain. When we live in this loop, we stop celebrating our wins because we're already worried about the next thing we might fail at. We look at our parents or our friends and, even when they are smiling at us with genuine pride, we filter that love through a lens of guilt, wondering when we'll eventually let them down.

But the truth is, this loop is a liar. It ignores the fact that being "enough" isn't a finish line we cross or a score we earn; it's a baseline. We are enough because we are here, because we try, and because we care enough to even worry about these things in the first place. Breaking the cycle starts with the uncomfortable task of believing people when they say they love us, and eventually, learning to say it to ourselves, even when we haven't "earned" it through some grand achievement.

Life isn't a performance to be graded, and we don't need to be perfect to be worthy of the space we take up in the world. This "not enough" loop doesn't just stop at our individual achievements; it weaves its way into the very fabric of depth of how we interact with the world and how we perceive our place in the future. We often find ourselves living in a state of "waiting", waiting for the day we finally feel like we've done enough to earn a break, or waiting for a version of ourselves that is finally "fixed." But this internal checklist is a moving target. Every time we reach a milestone we once thought would make us feel whole, the loop simply shifts the goalposts further down the road.

We tell ourselves that once we get that specific grade, that specific job, or that specific amount of praise, the heavy weight in our chests will lift. Yet, when we arrive at that destination, we find that the satisfaction is fleeting, replaced almost instantly by the fear of losing what we've gained or the realization that there is yet another level of "better" we haven't reached. This creates a cycle of constant motion without progress, where we are running as fast as we can just to stay in the same place emotionally.

We also tend to carry this loop into our relationships in a way that creates a wall between us and the people who truly care. We feel like we aren't "good enough," we start to believe that our value in a friendship or a family is based entirely on what we can do rather than who we are.

We become the "fixers," the "listeners," or the "over-achievers," thinking that if we ever stop providing value, people will realize we aren't worth keeping around. This leads to a deep, quiet exhaustion. We are so busy trying to be the "perfect" version of a friend or child that we forget how to just be with people. We miss out on the beauty of a quiet moment or a simple conversation because our brains are busy calculating if we've said the right thing or if we've been supportive enough.

We treat our own presence like a debt we are constantly trying to pay off, never realizing that the people who love us aren't keeping a tally. They aren't looking for a "return on investment"; they just want us.

This "not enough" loop often robs us of our ability to be present in our own lives. We spend so much time looking backward at what we think we messed up, or looking forward

at what we're afraid we'll fail at, that the "now" completely disappears. We could be sitting at a dinner table with laughter all around us, but we aren't really there; we are trapped inside our own heads, replaying a mistake from three years ago or worrying about a task we have to do tomorrow. This mental static makes it impossible to feel the warmth of a genuine compliment or the peace of a job well done. We become observers of our own lives rather than participants. We see our successes as "luck" and our failures as "proof." This perspective turns life into a series of hurdles to be cleared rather than a journey to be experienced.

To truly break out of this, we have to start practicing the idea of "maintenance over perfection."

Just as we wouldn't expect a car to run forever without fuel or a garden to grow without enough water, we cannot expect ourselves to be in a constant state of "becoming better." There has to be a space for "just being." We have to learn to recognize the "not enough" voice not as a reality giber of our life, but as a defense mechanism-a part of us that is so afraid of being hurt or rejected that it tries to beat everyone else by rejecting ourselves first. If we can look at that voice with a bit of compassion, acknowledging that it's just trying to protect us. We can start to turn down the volume. We can begin to accept that being human is inherently messy, and that our "not enough" days don't define our "always" value.

The most important thing we can realize is that the loop thrives in the dark. When we keep these feelings to ourselves, they grow. But when we talk about them-when we admit to a friend that we feel like we're failing even when things look

good-we often find that they feel the exact same way. In that shared honesty, the loop loses its power.

We realize that we aren't uniquely broken; we are just part of a world that has forgotten how to celebrate the ordinary. By choosing to be kind to ourselves in the middle of the mess, we aren't "giving up" on being better; we are finally giving ourselves the free truthful ground we need to actually grow.

Growth doesn't come from a place of lack or less-it comes from a place of security. When we finally accept that we are "enough" right now, in this very second, the loop finally begins to break, and for the first time, we can actually breathe. Feeling this not enough loop has many disadvantages and dangers that can take place;

When the "not enough" loop takes hold of our minds, it doesn't stay trapped in our thoughts; it eventually leaks into our bodies, changing the way we physically function. We often think of stress as a mental weight, but our bodies treat it like a physical threat. When we are constantly telling ourselves that we aren't doing enough or that we are disappointing the people we love, our brain stays in a state of "high alert."

It's as if we are permanently exhilarating for a blow that never comes. This constant state of tension means our muscles are always slightly tight-our shoulders move toward our ears, our jaws clench without us noticing, and our breathing becomes small day by day. Over time, this "exhilaration" leads to chronic fatigue because our bodies are burning through energy just to maintain a defensive posture. We feel exhausted not because we've been physically active, but because our internal system is running a marathon of anxiety that never reaches a finish line.

This physical toll becomes most obvious when we look at our sleep patterns. For those of us stuck in the "not enough" loop, the bedroom isn't always a place of rest; it becomes a courtroom. The moment the lights go out and the distractions of the day fade away. We lie there in the dark, and instead of drifting off, we start a mental replay of every interaction, every task left unfinished, and every perceived failure. This is often called "revenge bedtime procrastination" or simply "intellectual alertness." Our bodies might be desperate for sleep, but our brains are convinced that we haven't "earned" the right to rest yet.

We feel like we need to solve the problem of our own inadequacy before we can allow ourselves to close our eyes. Consequently, we stay awake for hours, scrolling through our phones to numb the noise or staring at the ceiling, which only tend to promote the idea that we are failing at yet another basic human function which is sleeping. When we finally do fall asleep, the quality is rarely restorative. Because our nervous system is still stuck in "fight or flight" mode, we often stay in the lighter stages of sleep and not the deep sleep.

We might wake up multiple times throughout the night or experience various, stressful dreams that mirror our real-life anxieties. We wake up feeling just as tired-if not more tired-than when we went to bed. This creates a dangerous feedback loop, because we are exhausted, our brain's ability to regulate emotions weakens. This makes the "not enough" voice even louder the next day, as we lack the mental energy to fight back against its lies.

We become irritable, our focus slips, and we make small mistakes at work or school, which we then use as "proof" that

the loop was right all along-that we truly aren't good enough. Beyond just sleep, the "not enough" loop can wreak havoc on our digestive systems and heart health. Many of us carry our stress in our stomachs; we might lose our appetite because we feel too nauseous with worry to eat, or we might overeat to find some small sense of comfort and control. Our hearts bear the burden too, as the constant drip of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline keeps our heart rate higher than it should be. We might experience pains-headaches that won't go away, backaches that have no clear cause, or a general sense of heaviness in our limbs. These are all ways our body is trying to tell us that the weight of our expectations is becoming too much to carry.

We aren't just "tired"; we are physically worn down by the impossible standard of perfection we've set for ourselves. Breaking this physical cycle requires us to treat our bodies with a kind of "aggressive gentleness."

We have to realize that rest isn't a reward for being "enough"-it is the fuel that allows us to exist. When we feel the loop starting to tighten its grip, sometimes the best thing we can do isn't to think our way out of it, but to move our way out of it. A simple walk, some deep breathing, or even just unclenching our jaw can send a signal to our brain that we are safe. We have to teach our nervous system that it's okay to stand down. By prioritizing our sleep and listening to the physical signals of our bodies, we start to reclaim our health from the loop. We begin to understand that a body that rested and cared for is much better equipped to handle the occasional "not enough" thought than a body that is running on empty.

Chapter-27

Importance of Third Place

While our life revolves around the “school” and “home” loop, we need to find a place that we feel like it totally belongs to us. A place where nothing can make you feel distracted, not even your phone. Where you can spend time with yourself and just feel your own existence. These places such as cafe, library, a bench of the park are usually the third places in everyone’s life and also very important. Whenever you feel that everything feels heavy to carry around-emotions, work load or stress, spending just 20-30 minutes can make you feel lighter and breathable.

When you’re a teenager, it honestly feels like your whole world is just a constant back-and-forth between a classroom and your bedroom. At school, you have teachers telling you what to do, grades to worry about, and the pressure to fit in with everyone else. Then you go home, and even though it’s supposed to be your safe spot, there’s still homework, chores, and parents asking you a hundred of questions about your day. It’s like you’re always “on” and never really getting a break from being a student or a kid. That’s why finding a third place is so huge and important.

It’s that one spot where nobody is judging you for any kind of marks or expecting anything from you. Maybe it’s a corner

in the public library where it's super quiet and you can just breathe, or that one specific bench at the park where you can watch the sunset and realize the world is way bigger than you ever thought.

It's crazy how much of a difference just twenty minutes in a place like that can make.

When my head feels like it's going to explode from all the stress and the constant notifications on my phone, going to my third place feels like hitting a giant reset button. I don't even look at my phone when I'm there because, for once, I don't care what everyone else is doing on social media. I'm just there, sitting with my own thoughts, and it makes me feel like a real person instead. We all need that space to just exist without being judged or told what to do next. It makes the heavy stuff feel a lot lighter, and it gives you the energy to go back to the "school-home" loop without feeling like you're losing your mind. Without a third place, life just feels like a chore, but with one, you actually have a little bit of peace that belongs totally to you.

Finding that one spot where you can just be yourself is the most important thing when everything else feels like a loud mess of voices and rules and expectations that never seem to stop because being a teenager is basically like living in a glass box where everyone is watching you and waiting for you to do something wrong or do something great but nobody ever just lets you sit still and breathe without a reason or a goal. It is like our lives are these two circles of home and school and we just spin around them like a toy that never runs out of batteries even when we are tired and our brains feel like they

are full of static from staring at screens and listening to lectures about things that do not feel real in the moment.

When you find a third place it is like you finally stepped out of that box and into a world where you are the only one who matters for a second and it does not have to be a big fancy place or somewhere that costs money because sometimes the best places are just a patch of grass by a fence or a corner of a library where the books smell like old paper and fun secrets. You sit there and you realize that you are not just a student or a kid with a certain list of chores to do at home but you are a whole simple person with thoughts that are only yours and feelings that do not have to be explained to a teacher or a parent who might not understand anyway. It is about that feeling in your chest when the air starts to feel easier to breathe and the tightness in your shoulders just melts away because there is no clock ticking and no one is going to walk by and ask you why you are not being productive or why are you not doing any chores or any homework or why you are just staring into space. Sometimes staring into space is the most productive thing you can do for your soul because it lets all the heavy stuff settle down to the bottom like sand in a glass of water until the water is clear again and you can see who you actually are. You look at your phone and for the first time in the day you do not feel that weird pull to check every app or reply to every message because the world right in front of you is actually enough and it is peaceful and it belongs to you in a way that your bedroom or your classroom never could. Those places are shared and they have rules but your third place is like a silent agreement between you and the universe that you can just exist without a purpose for a little while and that is okay.

You might see a bird landing on a branch or watch the way the shadows move across the ground as the sun goes down and these tiny things start to feel more important than the drama at lunch or the project that is due on Monday because they are real and they are happening right now and you are there to see them. It makes you feel like you are actually connected to the earth instead of just being a ghost moving through a schedule and that sense of being grounded is what keeps you from floating away into all the stress and the noise of being young. You realize that you have this internal world that is huge and beautiful and the only way to get in touch with it is to step away from the places that demand things from you and find that neutral ground where you are just a human being. It is like a secret garden that only you have the key to and even if other people are there it does not matter because you are in your own zone and your own headspace where the volume of the world is turned all the way down. You start to notice how your own breath feels and how your hands feel and you remember that you are alive and that being alive is actually a pretty big deal even when it feels like a lot of work. When you finally stand up to go back to the loop of home and school you feel like you are wearing a suit of armor made of quietness and it helps you get through the rest of the day without feeling like everything is crushing you down. This is why we need these spots so much because without them we just become robots following a path but with them we stay human and we stay ourselves even when the world is trying to turn us into something else.

Now if the thing is how to find “the best space” because you are feeling as if someone can judge you if you sit alone at the park doing nothing. So, first of all, the thing is that you

don't have to think or even care about what others are saying about you. They are existing the same way you are; they are not really gonna approach you just for sitting on a bench. Secondly if you are an introvert and still think about what is going on in other people's mind or feel insecure when someone walking by stares at you then you should consider going to a packed place when no one can judge you. And the most preferable place can be a library where everyone is minding their business and don't have even a single second to run off to judge you or you can just go at a quite aesthetic cafe and using any book as a "do-not-disturb" sign.

Sometimes the best part about being in a crowded place like a library or a busy coffee shop is the feeling of being invisible in plain sight because when everyone is moving around with their own goals and their own messy lives, they don't have the brain space to care about what you are doing or why you are sitting there by yourself. It is like being a background character in a movie where you get to watch all the action happening around you but you don't have to say any lines or follow a script which is kind of a huge relief factor when your actual life feels like a constant performance for teachers and friends and family.

You can just find a sitting spot near a window and just watch the rain dripping on the glass of the windows or look at the way people walk by and realize that every single person has a whole world inside their head just like you do and they are probably worrying about their own mess or their own grades instead of judging the way you are sitting. It is a weird kind of comfort to realize how little we actually matter to strangers because it gives us the freedom to just exist without

the pressure of being perfect or interesting or productive. You can even bring a pair of headphones even if you aren't listening to anything because it creates a physical barrier that tells the world you are in your own world and it makes you feel like you have a tiny private room wherever you go. Or you could find a hobby store where people are so obsessed with their own crafts and projects that they will just see you as another person who likes quiet things and you can blend into the rows of colorful yarn or tiny models. Even a public transport hub like a train station can be a great third place if it has a waiting area because everyone there is just passing through and nobody expects you to stay or go or be anyone who is very specific. You can just sit on a plastic-comfy chair and feel the vibe of the world moving around you while you stay just perfectly still and it makes the fast pace of life feel a lot less scary because you are choosing to pause while everything else keeps spinning. These spots are like little personal islands of peace in a giant ocean of noise and once you find the one that fits your vibe, you start to look forward to that time all day long because it is the only time you feel like you are truly in control of your own energy. It doesn't have to be a big deal or a life-changing event every time you go; it just has to be a place where you can breathe and remember that you are a person first and a student second and that your value doesn't come from how much you do but just from the fact that you are here.

Chapter-28

Learning a New Skill

Learning a new skill such as any new language, outdoor game, mind games like chess is good and one should try rather than just imagining and thinking about doing it. It plays a major role in keeping oneself occupied and not overthinking. When you start something new, it feels like your brain is finally waking up from a long nap. Most of the time we just sit around scrolling on our phones or watching videos of other people doing cool things, but actually doing it yourself is a totally different vibe. It is so easy to just dream about being good at playing the guitar or speaking a different language, but dreams don't really get you anywhere if you just stay in bed.

Starting to learn any skill is the hardest part because you feel kind shy or just lazy at first. Like if you try to learn a new language, you sound like a little kid and you make so many mistakes, but that is actually good because you learn from your mistakes. You have to be okay with looking a bit silly before you can look cool. One of the best things about picking up a hobby or a skill is that it stops your mind from overthinking and you can actually focus on one thing at a time. When you are focused on trying to move a chess piece or trying to learn a language so either way, you don't have time to worry about

that embarrassing thing you said some years ago. It keeps you in the moment. You don't have to be a genius to start. You can pick anything. Some people like sports because they want to run around and get tired, and other people like things like coding or drawing because they want to create something from scratch. There is no right or no wrong, you just have to start. Learning a skill makes you a more interesting person too. When you meet some new people, you actually have something to talk about. You can share what you are working on or even find friends who are into the same things. It builds a community around you without you even trying that hard.

There is this specific feeling when you finally get something right after failing a hundred times and it feels like a big achievement in itself. That rush of energy is better than any video game win. It proves to yourself that you are capable of growing. It makes you realize that you aren't stuck being the person you are today. You can literally build a new version of yourself just by practicing a little bit every day. It takes patience, which is hard because we want everything fast, but the slow progress is what actually sticks.

So instead of just imagining how cool it would be to know how to do something, just go out and do the bad version of it today. Tomorrow you will be slightly less bad, and in a year, you will be the person that others are imagining they could be. The best part about starting a new hobby is that it actually gives you a reason to get off your bed and stop staring at the ceiling and stop scrolling because when you are busy learning how to cook a new meal or trying to figure out how to learn a foreign language your brain is too occupied to worry about all the small things that usually make you feel stressed out. It is

like you are building a whole new world for yourself where you are the boss and you get to decide how fast or slow you want to go without anyone judging you or telling you that you are doing it wrong because at the end of the day it is your journey and nobody else's. Even if you just spend twenty minutes a day practicing a new skill, those minutes add up so fast and before you know it you are actually good at something that you used to just dream about doing while you were bored in class. People think you need to have a natural talent to be good at things like drawing or playing chess but that is not really true at all because most of the people who are amazing at those things just spent a lot of time failing until they finally stopped failing so much. When you see a pro athlete or a famous artist you are only seeing the final version of them and not the hundreds and thousands of hours where they looked silly or made mistakes or felt insecure just like you are doing right now which is why you should never feel bad about being a beginner.

Being a beginner is actually a superpower because you have so much room to grow and every single thing you learn feels like a big win that keeps you motivated to keep going even when it gets frustrating or hard. Most teenagers spend so much time worrying about what other people think of them but when you are focused on a skill, you start to care way less about the drama at school or who liked whose photo on social media because you have something real to do and that belongs only to you. It gives you a sense of pride that you can't get from just watching someone else be successful on a screen and it makes you realize that you have the power to change your own life just by putting in a little bit of effort every single day.

You could decide today that you want to start learning the thing you wished you knew or you could just think more about it and waste more of your precious time. Learning things also makes your brain sharper and helps you solve problems in other parts of your life because you get used to the feeling of being stuck and then finding a way out which is a skill that stays with you forever. It doesn't matter if the skill is something big or something small like learning how to sing or how to do a specific dance move because the process of learning is always the same and it always makes you a stronger person in the end. Sometimes you might feel like giving up because progress is slow and you feel like you aren't getting anywhere but that is usually right when you are about to have a breakthrough so you just have to keep pushing through the boring parts. The more things you try the more you realize what you are actually passionate about and you might even find a career or a lifelong hobby that started just because you were bored one random afternoon and decided to try something new instead of taking a sweet nap. It is all about taking that first step and being brave enough to be bad at something for a while because the reward of finally mastering the skill which you wanted to learn from a long time it is the best feeling in the entire world and nobody can ever take that away from you once you have earned it.

You start to see the world differently too because you notice details that you never saw before like how a song is put together or how a certain move in a dance was made and it makes life feel a lot more interesting and fuller of possibilities. Instead of just being a consumer who watches things happen, you become a creator who makes things happen and that shift in mindset is the most important thing you can ever learn as

a teenager. So just pick up that pen or that ball or that instrument and start practicing because the version of you in the future is going to be so happy that you didn't just sit around and wait for things to happen on its own. Every expert was once a total beginner who didn't know anything and the only difference between them and everyone else is that they didn't quit when things got frustrating or difficult. You have so much time to explore different versions of yourself and trying out new skills is the fastest way to find out who you really want to be in this world. It keeps your hands busy and your heart full and it turns all that nervous energy you have into something beautiful or useful or just fun which is exactly what life should be about. You don't need a plan that covers the next ten years you just need a plan for the next ten minutes where you actually try to do the thing you have been thinking about doing for weeks. Once you get a chance which is offered by yourself to you just break the glass of fear and watch how everything gets easier and you will wonder why you waited so long to just start because actually doing the thing is always better than just the imagining and overthinking. It creates a sense of confidence where the more you learn, the more you believe in yourself and that confidence carries over into your schoolwork and your friendships and your goals for the future. You stop waiting for permission to be great and you just start being great in your own way at your own speed which is the coolest thing anyone can do.

Chapter-29

Outing with Friends

When you are in high school and the group chat of the whole group of friends finally decides to take the things out of the chat and something is officially planned like that of going to a movie and spending the whole day close friends and especially without the uniforms, it is the most exciting day. you cannot sleep the entire night imagining about the things that will happen and then thinking what you are going to wear. You wait for this day the most.

The thing about finally making it out of the group chat is that it feels like a literal miracle because usually someone says we should go to the mall and then everyone just likes the message but nobody actually says a time or a place so the plan just dies of all the other times we said we would go to the mall or go to the play zone but then this one time it actually happens and the excitement is just at its peak.

You spend the whole night before basically having a fashion show in your room by yourself which is kind of embarrassing because you are trying on your favorite jeans and then realizing they are looking like you haven't washed them since a year from and then you panic and try on something else but nothing is really working and not matching the vibe for the day so you throw it on the floor and then your floor

disappears under a bunch of clothes and you are just sitting there in your pajamas wondering if your friends are going to think you are looking cool or if they are all going to show up wearing something with a totally different vibe and vibe is what matters most in today's date.

Then the morning comes and you wake up before your alarm even rings because your brain is just excited and every second keeps wishing that nobody will cancel the plan and you keep checking the group chat every five seconds to make sure nobody has cancelled at the last minute because there is always that one person who wakes up with a problem saying that he or she can't come due to some blah-blah reasons and if one person cancels then the whole group might suddenly cancel the plan and you will be stuck at home watching some random show while eating something random out of a box. But today everyone is actually awake and texting continuously and saying they are on their way or their dad is dropping them off and you start feeling that rush of adrenaline where you are literally shaking because you finally get to see your favorite people without having to worry about a test or some teacher yelling at you for no reason because once you take off that school uniform it is like you become a whole different human being with actual personality and style. And then, when you finally get to the cinema or the park and you see them walking towards you it is the best feeling ever and you do that awkward embarrassing jog thing because you are too excited to walk normally and then you all start talking and laughing at the same time so loud that people are staring but you don't even care because you have so much to catch up on even though you literally saw each other in the school yesterday, but

hanging out in the real world just hits different and everything is ten times funnier than it is at school.

You buy the biggest tub of popcorn that costs like a lot for no reason and you end up spilling half of it because you are laughing at some inside joke that isn't even that funny but in the moment it feels like the funniest thing that has ever happened in the history of the universe and then you go to the play zone and spend all your money on a claw machine that is definitely frustrating but you keep trying anyway because your friend says they can see the soft toy moving and then you just end up with a most random thing that looks like no use but you treasure it like it is made of pure gold because you feel like to keep it as a memory of an outing with friends. Then you wander around the shops for hours not actually buying anything because you are all broke but just looking at weird stuff and trying to take aesthetic photos of each other that look terrible but you know you are going to post them anyway with some random emoji because they capture the vibe of the day perfectly and then you find a photo booth and all try to come inside even though it is made for like just two-three people and you end up with a strip of photos where half of your face is not really visible and someone is making a face which is weird and funny but that is the whole point. Right...?

By the time the sun starts going down and you have to go home you feel that little bit of sadness coming inside but your feet are in pain and your voice is kind of gone from talking so much and you just know that the group chat is going to be blowing up tonight with all the new things and the photos you took and you realize that these are the days that actually matter more than any grade or any homework assignment because

you are just being young and messy and happy with people who actually get you.

You get home and your room is still a disaster area from your morning panic for finding the perfect clothes but you don't even care because you just jump onto your bed and scroll through the pictures while smiling like a total weirdo because you finally did it and you actually had the best day ever and you already start typing in the chat that we should totally do this again next weekend knowing deep down it might take another eternity to plan but it was fully worth the wait.

The best part about finally getting out of the house with your friends is that it feels like you are finally living in a movie and not just staring at a screen because for once the plans actually worked out and everyone showed up which is basically an unbelievable.

You spend the whole time after the outing just reliving every single second of it in the group chat and it is like the day never actually ended because every time your phone buzzes with another notification it is another photo or a video of someone doing something embarrassing or funny. Everyone starts requesting for the photo dump because they want to see how they looked in the pictures or they want to find that one perfect shot to post on their story so they can show everyone else that they actually have a life outside of school.

It is so funny how one person will send a photo where they look amazing but everyone else looks like a total mess with their eyes closed or their mouth open while eating and then the arguments start about which photos are allowed to be seen

by the public and which ones have to stay hidden in the chat forever. You end up with like five hundred new photos in your gallery in ten minutes and your storage is probably full but you do not even care because these are the memories that make the boring school days feel worth it. For the next two weeks at school, you do not even talk about homework or teachers because all you do is sit at lunch and bring up the same stories over and over again like they just happened five minutes ago. Someone will just say one word like popcorn or shoes or any random word and then the whole table starts to get filled with laughter because it reminds you of that one specific moment where everything went wrong in the best way possible. It is like you have this secret bond now that makes you feel closer than ever and even the people who were not there start feeling jealous because they missed out on the most fun day of the year. You find yourself scrolling back through the memories of that day during your boring class. The jokes just keep evolving and getting weirder and you start using certain words that only your group understands which makes you feel like you are part of a special club.

Even when you are tired and you have a lot of studying to do you just look at those photos and remember how much fun it was to just be free and not have to worry about rules or uniforms for a few hours. You start planning the next trip almost immediately even though you know it might take forever to actually happen again but the dreaming part is half the fun part. Every time you see one of those friends in the hallway you give them a look and you both know exactly what you are thinking about and it is like this silent high five that lasts about all day long. The energy stays high for so long because you are all sharing the same feeling of happiness and

you keep finding new things in the photos that you did not notice before like a funny person in the background or a weird sign on a wall. It is the best feeling to know that you have these people in your life who can make a simple walk to the mall feel like a giant adventure that you will talk about for the rest of the month.

You realize that the clothes you wore or the money you spent does not really matter as much as the fact that you were all together laughing until your stomachs hurt and that is something you cannot buy or learn from a book. You keep the conversation going late into the night every single evening because nobody wants the vibe to die out and you keep sending "goodnight" messages that turn into another hour of talking about what you want to do the next time.

It is a cycle of good and energetic vibes that keeps you going through the stressful parts of being a teenager and it makes you realize that as long as you have your friends and a phone full of blurry aesthetic photos you are doing just fine.

You start to feel more confident in yourself because you know you have a squad that has your back and you stop caring so much about the people who are not in your circle because they do not know the inside jokes. The photos become like a timeline of your life and you can see how much you are changing and growing but the way you laugh with your friends stays exactly the same no matter how old you get. It is just so simple and perfect to be young and have nothing to do but hang out and then talk about hanging out until the next time comes around and you get to do it all over again with the same people who make you feel like the best version of yourself.

You keep adding more and more people to the chat or you keep it small but either way the feeling of being included is what makes those two weeks of talking after the outing so special because you know you were part of something real and unimaginable at the same time. You might even print out a few of the photos and stick them on your wall or stick them in your personal diary so you can see them whenever you are having a bad day and it instantly fixes your mood because it reminds you that life is actually pretty great when you are not overthinking everything.

Chapter-30

Solo Scholar

Till we were small, our mothers used to teach us and studying felt lighter but as we have now grown up-self studying is what we have to do. Even though we go for tuitions we still have to self-study and that is obvious but sometimes it's just very hectic, first do 6 hours of schooling and then tuitions and then self-study. We usually don't get time for our hobbies but that is what growing up really is. When you are small you have plenty of time but not the mind to use the time for right purpose, and when you are growing up and have the grown brain, you just don't have any time. In these cases, time management is very important along with studies, doing something you like is important.

when you were small you needed at least one of your parents with you to sit along while you are doing your homework but now it's different, you like being alone than having anyone around while studying except for school and tuitions. when we are small, we don't have any competitions for studying but as we grow up, our parents start comparing our marks with our own friends and somehow it might create jealousy instead of thinking about learning from them.

It's honestly just so exhausting because everyone tells you that these are the best years of your life but most of the time

it feels like I'm just a machine running on low battery trying to balance a stack of books that's taller than me and it's not just the books it's the constant expectations in my head and the day we get to know the marks of a particular subject, first our parents will ask our marks and then the marks of our friend to compare. Even if you get 92 marks out of 100 and your friend gets 97, then our parents be like "how did he get much", like we know the answer. When I was small I just cared about my colors and drawing book, and my mom would sit there and the world felt small and safe and now the world feels huge and scary and I'm supposed to find the way all by myself while sitting in a room that feels like a cage sometimes because self-studying is basically just staring at a wall until the wall starts looking better than the math problems and then you realize you've already wasted thirty minutes and now you're now out of time and some motivation that you had was gone.

The only difference between a school and tuitions you could see is that, tuitions are part two of schools with less hours, but no matter how many hours of studying, you always feel every minute is taking an hour to pass by and it's weird how as you get older you crave being alone but being alone also makes you think too much about how you're failing at everything even when you're doing your best and the jealousy thing is the worst part because I actually like my friends but then our parents turn us into rivals just because of the marks of a simple school test and it makes it hard to just hang out without thinking about who is "ahead" and who is "falling behind". you feel like running back to the time when the biggest problem was losing a tooth or not being allowed to watch cartoons because now the problems are just so heavy to

carry and sometimes I just want to turn my brain off and sit in the rain and not worry about getting bad marks or anything but I can't because if I don't finish this chapter tonight then tomorrow is going to be even more of a stress with some mess for free

It is just this never-ending cycle where the sun comes up and I'm still tired cause I slept at 3 am learning a chapter which I was supposed to learn at daytime and everything feels heavy. And whenever I look at my old toys I always wonder when did the switch exactly took place because I was just running after my friend to catch him to just running after scores because that is what it feels like now just a long performance for teachers and parents and the my future self who is probably disappointed that I spent twenty minutes looking at the ceiling instead of practicing formulas and the walls of my room are covered in sticky notes that I don't even read anymore because they just look like a mess of things I haven't done yet.

it's weird how we are told to be independent but then we are told to follow a path our parents chose for us and all you can do is either speak for yourself or regret in future. Study doesn't mean anything loud instead it is filled with the loudest formulas because it's filled with all the things I'm worried about like what if I'm not as smart as I think I am or what if I am smart but I'm just too lazy to make it count and then the guilt and regret starts eating away our brain at the time I should be using to actually work so I end up doing nothing while feeling guilty about doing nothing which is even more exhausting than just doing the work in the first place.

I miss the old days when just drawing an apple seemed as an achievement in itself and now getting marks feels like a temporary relief before the next mountain of exams appears and it's all just so messy and exhausting because my heart wants to be outside or learning to play a guitar or just sleeping for twelve hours straight but my head is stuck in this loop of productivity and competition and the jealousy that strike in when you see someone else succeeding is the worst kind of poison because it makes you feel small and when you really just want to be happy for them but you can't because their success feels like your failure in this weird system we live in where there is only room for a few people at the top and I don't even know if I want to be at the top I just want to be somewhere where I can breathe without feeling like I'm wasting time and the transition from being a kid where someone held your hand to help you in homework to being a "scholar" where you're judged by just a number on a marksheet is so dumb feeling that it feels like I am made for solving exams and nothing else and I'm trying to find myself in the middle of all these textbooks but all I find are definitions and dates and none of them explain why I feel so lonely even when I'm surrounded by people who are all going through the exact same thing but we can't talk about it because we're too busy trying to go in front of the other.

It is so strange how we spend our entire childhood wishing we were older and had more freedom but then as soon as you get on that stage of life, you realize the freedom is just a big box of responsibilities that you get complementary each year you grow up and that responsibilities never stops growing and you look back at those days when your mom would sit at the kitchen table with you and explain a simple subtraction

problem and it feels like a different universe because the only thing you had to worry about back then was making sure you didn't go outside the lines with your crayons and your biggest stress was maybe a scraped knee or losing a toy under the bed but now the stress is deep inside your chest and it stays there from the moment you wake up until you finally pass out at night while the cycle of school and tuition and self-study just keeps spinning faster and faster and back then the cycle was so gentle because it was just waking up and having your breakfast made for you and going to a classroom where you played more than you worked and then coming home to a house that felt like a fortress where nothing bad could actually happen to you because someone else was in charge of all the scary stuff like bills and future plans and what you were going to eat and now you are the one who has to be in charge of your own brain which is the hardest thing to manage because it wants to go in a thousand different directions while the world tells you to stay on one narrow path and you miss the way your mother's voice sounded when she told you that you did a good job on a spelling test because back then you believed her and you felt like a genius for knowing how to spell "apple" but now even when you get a high grade on a complex exam it doesn't feel like a victory it just feels like you survived another day of being judged and compared and you think about how simple the air felt back then when you could just run until you were out of breath for no reason other than it felt good to move and now you only run because you're late for a class or a deadline or because you're trying to catch up to an image of success that seems to keep moving further away the harder you try to reach it and the repetition of childhood was a comfort like a favorite blanket that always smelled the

same but the repetition of being a "solo scholar" is more like a treadmill that you can't get off of even when your legs are shaking because if you stop for even a second you feel like you're going to fly off the back and lose everything you've worked for and it's just this heavy realization that the "grown-up brain" everyone talked about is actually just a brain that knows how to worry about things that haven't happened yet while the childhood brain only knew how to be right there in the moment where the sun was warm and the snacks were ready and the only thing you had to do was exist and be loved without having to earn it through marks or achievements or being better than your friends and you just want to go back to that kitchen table for one hour and have someone tell you exactly what to do and how to do it and tell you that everything is going to be fine without you having to figure out the "how" and the "why" all by yourself in the middle of the night.

Chapter-31

Can a Boy and a Girl Be Just “Friends?”

Talking about this topic is just very confusing. If any person sees a girl and a boy walking or talking everything that comes in their mind is that the girl and the boy must be in a relationship. I don't know what to call this, maybe a “cheap mentality” or maybe I just don't know but this thinking of people quite shocks me. What if that girl and a boy are just friends or siblings finally opening up to each other and just talking. But sometimes people cross their limits and intends to pass a comment, like what in the world has even happened to people nowadays, weren't they supposed to develop?

This mindset that a boy and a girl cannot simply exist in the same space without some romantic hidden agenda is honestly one of the most exhausting things about our society. It feels like we are living in a world where people have forgotten the basic essence of human connection. Why is it that the moment two people of the opposite gender share a laugh, or sit together in a cafe, or even just walk down the street discussing a project, the world around them begins to whisper? It is like there is a lens that filters out "friendship" and replaces it with "suspicion."

We talk about progress, about technology, and about moving forward into a new era, but when it comes to the way we view human relationships, it feels like we are stuck in the dark ages. It is a very narrow way of thinking. It assumes that men and women are so fundamentally different that the only thing that could possibly bring them together is a romantic interest. But what about shared hobbies? What about intellectual compatibility? What about just being two souls who happen to understand each other's humor?

When people pass those "cheap comments" or give those judgmental looks, they aren't just being annoying; they are actually destroying the beauty of a bond. They make people feel self-conscious. A girl might hesitate to call her best friend who happens to be a boy, or a boy might stop himself from sharing a problem with a female friend, all because they are afraid of what "people will say." This fear of judgment creates a wall. It stops us from being genuine. It stops us from developing as a society because it limits our support systems. If we cannot see a boy and a girl as just friends, we are basically saying that we don't believe in the power of pure, honest companionship. We are saying that a person's gender is more important than their character or their heart. It is shocking that in a time when we should be more open-minded, we are actually becoming more judgmental about things that should be normal.

A friendship between a boy and a girl is often one of the most trustable kinds of friendship. It offers different perspectives and a different kind of emotional support. To remove the tags such as "rumor" of a girl and a boy being in a relationship even though they are just friends, we need a development in our society's mind. We need to get on that

mentality first where people don't comment on anything before knowing anything. Only then can we truly say we have "developed. This "cheap mentality" mentioned before isn't just a personal annoyance, it's a cultural weight. Just try to think about how many beautiful friendships have been broken or maybe just became complicated because of the fear of what neighbors, relatives, or even random strangers might think. We live in a world where a boy and a girl talking late at night on a balcony are immediately assumed to be a girlfriend talking to her boyfriend, while they are sharing the work load, they had today to the person they really trust. It's as if society doesn't like the concept of "a boy and girl being friends" unless it's tied to a wedding ring or a dating status. This lack of sense is actually quite insulting to our knowledge that yes, a boy and girl can thus become just friends. When we allow ourselves to have friends of the opposite gender, we open up a whole new world of perspective. A girl might help a boy understand the nuances of emotional intelligence that he was never taught. A boy might offer a girl a sense of security or a different way of problem-solving that she hadn't considered. These aren't romantic exchanges; they are human exchanges. If we keep looking at the world through this "couple " lens, we tend to miss out on so much. We miss the chance to have a "brother from another mother" or a "sister who just gets it." We miss the chance to have a support system that can really understand us no matter their gender. Sometimes, you don't need a lover, you just need someone who sees the world more differently than you do to tell you that you're going to be okay.

We see high-rise buildings, we see people using the latest smartphones, and we see the world becoming a "global village." But are we really developing if our minds are still

stuck in a place where a girl and a boy can't share a park bench without being the subject of a scandal? Development isn't just about technology; it's about the evolution of thought. If we haven't reached a point where we can respect a person's boundaries and their choice of companions, then we haven't really moved forward at all. We are just living in a more expensive version of the past. Real development would be a world where a girl can walk with her male best friend and the only thing people notice is that they look like they're having a great conversation. The change has to start with us. We have to be the ones who stop looking twice when we see a "mixed" group of friends. We have to be the ones who don't ask our friends "Is he just a friend?" with that annoying wink in our eyes. We need to stop the "teasing" that starts in school, where a boy and a girl sitting together is met with whistles. That's where the "cheap mentality" begins, and it's up to our generation to end it.

We need to realize that every person we meet is a world of stories, experiences, and emotions. To reduce a person down to just their "gender" in relation to ourselves is a very small way to live. Let people talk, let people laugh, and let people be. Life is already hard enough; we shouldn't make it harder by judging the very friendships that help us get through it.

It is honestly heartbreaking to think about how much mental energy we waste worrying about what others think. This "cheap mentality" creates a constant state of anxiety. Imagine a girl who has a really bad day and the only person who truly understands her situation is her male best friend. Instead of just calling him or meeting him to vent, she has to pause. She has to think, "If I meet him at the park, will my neighbor see? If I post a picture with him, will my relatives

start calling my parents with 'concerns?'" This is a mental prison. We are literally teaching people to suppress their emotions and hide their support systems just to satisfy a society that refuses to grow up.

When we talk about the impact on mental health, it is very real. separation is one of the biggest causes of sadness and stress. By putting these invisible walls between boys and girls, we are forcing people into being segregated. We are telling a boy that he can only share his deep feelings with a "girlfriend," which puts a certain amount of pressure on romantic relationships. Why can't he just have a female friend to talk to? Why does every deep conversation have to lead to a proposal? This narrow mindset makes people feel like they are "doing something wrong" just for being a good friend. It creates guilt where there should be gratitude. If you are someone dealing with these judgmental looks or comments, the first thing to remember is that their "shock" is a reflection of their own limited mindset, not your character. When people pass a comment, they are probably showing that they cannot imagine a world where a man and a woman respect each other without a romantic thing. That is a very sad and lonely way for them to live. You don't have to carry their baggage.

The best way to handle it is often through quiet confidence. When you stop acting like you have a secret to hide, people eventually lose the power to "expose" you. If you are walking with a friend, walk with your head held high. If someone asks a weird question, just give a simple, direct answer, "Yes, he's my best friend," or "She's like a sister to me." You don't need to do a long explanation for those who are stuck in the narrow mindset. sometimes these two people are

actually siblings or cousins. The fact that society is so quick to judge that they might even mistake a brother and sister for a couple, this shows how disgusting and disturbed this mentality is. It proves that people aren't actually looking at the people, they are just looking at the genders. Whenever they see two people of opposite gender and their brain automatically says that they are in a "Relationship." They don't see the, the shared childhood, or the protective bond, it is okay that a person might not be knowing what the girl and the boy are to each other but without even knowing what they are to one another and just passing comments is wrong.

A big part of this change needs to come from home. If parents trust their children and understand that their friends, regardless of gender and it is a part of the growth, the "cheap mentality" of the outside world won't matter as much. When a home is a safe space where a girl can say, "I'm going out with my friend," where you don't have to hide or hesitate to tell your parents that you are going with a gender opposite of your gender and the parents say, "Have fun and be safe," this is the foundation where you have trust on them and there is no need to hide anything.

The truth is, a boy and a girl can absolutely be just friends. They can be the best of friends. They can be the reason someone doesn't give up on a hard day. They can be the reason someone learns to laugh again. And if the rest of the people are too "confused" to see that, then that is the people's problem, not theirs. We should focus on being the kind of people who see the heart first, and the gender second. That is true development. That is the only way we can move forward and leave this "cheap thinking" behind for good.

Chapter-32

Siblings? More Like Best Friends...

The jealousy because our sister or brother got more chocolates than me was way too funny because whenever we look back to the days, we were small, we realize that we didn't like sharing anything with our sibling. We always used to hide the chocolates so that our sibling would not be able to find the chocolate, and later when we used to open the cupboard where we hid the chocolate seemed empty with no chocolate at all. We wondered where had the chocolate gone and the only person, we would suspect was our sibling and then we would run crying to mom complaining about the robbery of the chocolate.

We used to get angry and did not wish to talk and we would spend hours sitting in different corners of the house thinking that we would never be friends again but as the days turned into years something started to change slowly without us even noticing it because the same person who stole our chocolates became the person who understood our silence and we started to realize that mom and dad were great but they belonged to a different world and a different generation so there were things they just would not understand like the stress of school or the way a certain friend made us feel or the silly dreams we had for the future and that is when the shift

happened because we began to whisper in the dark at night sharing secrets that we knew would be safe with no one else but each other and the sibling who used to be a rival became a protector and a partner in everything we did so now when something happens the first person we think of calling is not our parents but our sibling because they know the whole story without us having to explain the beginning and they know our history better than anyone else on this earth and we find ourselves sharing our deepest fears and our biggest wins with them before anyone else knows and it is funny how the person who once refused to share a single piece of candy is now the person we share our whole lives with and we trust them with our heart more than we ever thought possible because they have seen us at our worst and they still stay by our side and this bond is stronger than any friendship because it is built on years of growing up together and learning that even though we are different we are part of the same soul and we find comfort in knowing that no matter how much the world changes or how old we get we will always have that one person who remembers the chocolate robbery and who will always be there to listen when no one else does.

The transition from being enemies over a piece of candy to being the first person we call when life gets hard is the most beautiful part of growing up because it happens so quietly that we do not even realize the shift is occurring until one day we are sitting together as adults and we find ourselves telling them things we would never tell our parents or even our closest friends from school.

There is a specific kind of comfort in knowing that this person saw us at our most bratty and our most selfish and yet

they still choose to be the person who stands in our corner when the rest of the world feels like it is moving too fast for us to keep up with. We start to notice that the things that used to make us scream and cry like a borrowed shirt or a broken toy have been replaced by a deep need to make sure they are doing okay and we find ourselves checking in on them just to hear their voice or to share a joke that only the two of us would find funny because of some random thing that happened in our childhood kitchen twenty years ago. Our parents are the foundation of our lives and we love them deeply but there is a wall of respect and a gap in age that sometimes makes it hard to tell them about our failures or our heartbreaks because we do not want to disappoint them or see the worry in their eyes but with a sibling that wall does not exist because they have already seen us fail a thousand times and they have seen us cry over spilled milk and skinned knees so there is no pressure to be perfect in front of them. We began to realize that they are the only people who truly understand what it was like to grow up in our house with our specific rules and our specific family quirks and that shared history creates a language that does not need many words to be understood.

We share the burden of taking care of our parents as they get older and we share the joy of seeing each other succeed in careers or relationships and every step of the way we are leaning on each other more than we ever thought possible when we were kids fighting over who got the bigger slice of cake. The secrets we once hid from them are now the secrets we share only with them because we know they will never judge us and they will always have our back even if we are in the wrong because that is what it means to be a sibling. We

move from being roommates by birth to being companions by choice and that choice is the most important one we ever make because it secures a future where we are never truly alone no matter what happens in the outside world. We talk about the future and our kids and the way we want to stay close forever and we laugh at the idea that we ever let a chocolate bar come between us because now we would give them everything we have without a second thought. This bond is a living thing that grows every time we pick up the phone or send a text or sit in silence together and it is the greatest gift our parents ever gave us even if we did not realize it at the time.

We are the keepers of each other's memories and the witnesses to each other's lives and that role is something we hold sacred as the years pass by and the world changes around us while we stay the same in each other's eyes.

Chapter-33

The Weight of “Expectations”

As we keep on growing up-our elders tend to expect too much from us. Though we study hard but if we get bad results then they don't see the hard work we did instead they see marks. Sometimes they say something which they think is encouraging us but rather than us getting encouraged, we get more likely sad and hurt. It doesn't encourage us to work more harder instead we feel as if we cannot do anything. When they say, "You can do better," they think they are handing us a ladder to do more better. They see a version of us in their heads that is perfect, flawless, and always at the top. But to us, those words don't feel like a ladder; they feel like a reminder that where we are right now, after all the late nights and the stress isn't good enough.

It's like we are running a marathon and we finally cross the finish line, gasping for air, only for someone to look at their watch and say, "Why didn't you run faster?" The achievement is erased instantly. The effort we put in becomes invisible. The problem is that elders often speak from a place of result, while we are living in the process.

They see a 'B' or a 'C' and think of the secure future, careers, and stability.

We remember the nights we skipped hanging out with friends, the headaches from staring at screens, and the genuine fear we felt during the exam. When they focus only on the result, it feels like they don't see us. It makes us feel like we are only as valuable as our report cards. If the marks go down, does our value in their eyes go down too? That's the question that keeps us up at night. Sometimes, they use comparisons. They talk about a cousin, a neighbor, or even how they were at our age. They think this will spark a fire in us to "catch up." Instead, it just makes us want to hide. It builds a wall of resentment. We start to think, "If you like their results so much, why am I the one standing here?" Even when they say it nicely that "I know you have more potential" still it carries a hidden weight. "Potential" is a scary word. It means there is a version of me I haven't reached yet, and until I do, I am a disappointment. It makes us feel like we are constantly failing a test that never ends

We wish they understood that sometimes, we just need them to say, "I saw how hard you tried, and I'm proud of that effort." We aren't looking for an excuse to be lazy; we are looking for a safe place to fail and try again another time. When the world is already so competitive and loud, home should be the place where we don't have to be "better" than anyone rather just be ourselves where we are more likely to be motivated. We just want to be seen for who we are, right now, in this moment those smudges, mistakes, and all. There's a specific kind of tiredness that sleep can't fix. It's the exhaustion of trying to be a "version" of yourself that fits someone else's blueprint. Every day, we wake up and go to school, navigating social scale, internal anxieties, and the massive pressure of a curriculum that feels like it was designed

to break us. We come home, and instead of a sanctuary, we find a second classroom.

When an elder says, "You can do better," they think they are lighting a candle to show us the way. To us, it feels like they're setting the floor on fire. It creates this constant state of "fight or flight." We feel like we have to defend our right to rest, our right to have hobbies, and even our right to be unhappy. If we aren't "doing better," then in their eyes, we must be "doing nothing." They don't see the hours we spent staring at a single page of math because our brain felt like it was melting, or the way we stayed up late rereading a chapter just to make sure we didn't miss a single detail.

"Almost" is the most painful word in the English language when you're a teen.

"You almost got an A+."

"You're almost there."

"You're almost as good as your brother or sister."

"Almost" means you failed, but with a side of hope that just makes the failure sting more. It suggests that the finish line is just an inch away, but no matter how fast we run, that inch stays an inch. It turns life into a treadmill where we are sprinting at full speed but staying in the exact same spot of "not quite enough." We start to wonder that Is there ever a point where I can just stop? Is there a version of me that is allowed to just exist without needing to be "better"?

Eventually, we stop seeing ourselves as people and start seeing ourselves as projects. We look in the mirror and don't see a human being with feelings and dreams; we see a list of

"improvements" that need to be made. We become our own harshest critics because we've spent years downloading the voices of our elders into our own heads.

When we take their "encouragement" the "other way" meaning we take it as an insult or a weight it's because we've run out of room to carry it. Our "emotional cup" is already overflowing with the pressure of the world. Adding "you can do better" to that cup doesn't make us want to try harder; it makes us want to knock the cup off the table and walk away. It leads to that "I don't care" attitude that adults hate so much. But "I don't care" is usually just a shield. It's easier to act like we don't care than to admit that we care so much it's breaking us

we need someone who understand us, we need a parent. We need someone who can look at a "bad" result and ask, "Are you okay?" instead of "What happened?" There is a massive difference between those two questions. One focuses on the human while the other focuses on the output.

If elders want us to do better, they need to realize that confidence is the fuel for improvement, not shame. Shame makes us small. It makes us hide our mistakes instead of learning from them. Confidence comes from knowing that even if we fail, we are still loved and respected. If we knew that a bad grade wouldn't change the way our parents looked at us at dinner that night, we would actually have the mental space to figure out how to improve. The saddest part of this "weight of expectations" is the silence it creates. We stop talking. We stop sharing our dreams because we're afraid, they'll be turned into more "goals" or "expectations." We stop telling them

about our day because we don't want to hear a lecture on how we could have managed our time more efficiently.

We retreat into our rooms, our phones, and our own heads. We find communities online or with friends who don't expect anything from us other than just being there. In those spaces, we can breathe. But at the back of our minds, that voice that elder's voice is still there, whispering that we should be doing something "productive". The weight of expectations doesn't just change our grades; it changes our relationship with the people we love most. It turns a home into a performance stage, and we are tired of the play. We just want the curtains to close so we can finally, for one second, be enough. When the weight of those expectations starts to feel like it's crushing your ribs, you can't just stand there and let it happen. You have to find a way to breathe. As a teen, you often feel like you have zero power, you live in their house, you follow their rules, and you carry their dreams.

But you can't just let yourself feel hurt by anyone else's expectations, we have to set a goal which will make ourselves proud.

The crushing weight of expectations often feels like an invisible barrier between a teenager's effort and an elder's approval, creating a painful cycle where "doing your best" never seems to be enough if the results don't match a specific, predetermined standard. When elders say "you can do better," they believe they are providing the fuel of ambition, but to a teen already exhausted by the academic and social pressures of modern life, those words sound like a dismissal of the grueling hard work they've already poured in. This disconnect turns "encouragement" into a source of hurt and inadequacy,

leading many to retreat into silence or indifference as a defense mechanism against the constant feeling of being a "project" rather than a person. To navigate this, it is essential to build a private sense of worth that isn't tied to external grades, communicate clear boundaries about how pressure affects your mental health, and recognize that an elder's high demands are often just a poorly expressed reflection of their own fears for your future. By focusing on your own internal growth and finding "bridge" talking to your elders is a good choice or even people like mentors or counselors who validate your struggle, you can learn to put down the heavy burden of trying to be perfect and instead focus on being a resilient, authentic version of yourself.

Chapter-34

First Taste of Independence

And at a point of age, you finally do not have to beg too much to your parents for the permission to go out. Your parents finally start to trust you a bit and do not live in the fear that you might get kidnapped. Cause now you are grown up-at least as much as you can take care of yourself safely. This is when your elders finally rely on you and finally let you take your own decisions though to major but some decisions that they think you are capable of. They finally include you in the adult talk. This is a different kind of happiness.

That shift from being a "child" to a "person" in your family's eyes is like finally catching a breath after being underwater for years, and it's not just about the big things like staying out late or picking your own clothes, but it's that subtle, almost invisible change in the air when your parents stop talking at you and start talking to you, like you're finally a part of the inner circle where the real life happens. It's that moment during dinner when they stop asking if you finished your homework and instead ask what you think about a family problem or a cousin's wedding or even the news, and suddenly you realize that the walls of your world just expanded by miles because they aren't just shielding you anymore, they're letting you stand beside them. It feels like a quiet victory every time

you grab your keys and say "I'm heading out" and all you get back is a "Be safe" instead of a thirty minute irritating and exhausting interrogation, a thousand "What ifs," and a GPS tracker on your soul, and that trust is honestly more addictive than any rebellion because it makes you feel like you're actually capable of handling the heavy stuff.

But it's also a weirdly heavy feeling too, because once you're in the "adult talk," you can't really go back to the mess of not knowing why everyone looks stressed at the end of the month or why your mom's voice gets tight when she's on the phone with your grandma. You're seeing the cracks in the armor they've worn your whole life, and while that's a different kind of happiness the happiness of being seen, it's also the first time you realize that being grown up isn't just about freedom, it's about carrying a piece of the world on your own shoulders. You start to see your parents as humans instead of just "The Parents," and that realization is a total trip; you see their fatigue, their jokes that aren't meant for kids, and their weird little insecurities, and it makes you want to prove yourself even more. You want to show them that their trust wasn't a mistake, that you can navigate the streets and the conversations and the decisions without crumbling, even when inside you're still that kid who just wants to be told everything is going to be okay. It's a bittersweet, electric, terrifying, and beautiful transition where the "permission" you used to beg for becomes the "responsibility" you're now learning to hold, and even though the world feels much bigger and a lot more complicated than it did yesterday, there's nothing quite like the rush of finally being allowed to hold the map yourself.

The "adult talk" is like a secret language you've been hearing through closed doors your whole life, and then one day, someone finally pulls out a chair for you and says, "Sit down, we need to talk about this." It's an instant rush of adrenaline mixed with a strange, heavy lump in your throat because you realize that the bubble you lived in the one where your only job was to eat, sleep, and go to school has officially popped. Suddenly, you aren't just hearing about the weather or what's for dinner; you're hearing about the bank accounts, the health scares, the family feuds that have been brewing for decades.

And the genuine fears your parents have about the future. It's the first time you see the "human" behind the "parent," and while it's incredibly empowering to be trusted with the truth, it's also the moment you realize that the adults don't actually have all the answers they're just winging it, just like you are. You start to notice the way your dad's hands shake slightly when he talks about work, or the way your mom tries to hide a sigh when she looks at the bills, and you feel this fierce, protective urge to step up and be the person they can lean on.

This independence isn't just about being allowed to stay out until midnight; it's about the quiet weight of knowing things you can't "unknow," and the realization that your childhood was a gift of ignorance that you've finally outgrown. You're standing on this thin line between being a kid who needs protection and being a person who provides it, and every time you weigh in on a major decision like where the family should move or how to handle a crisis you feel your spine get a little straighter. It's a different kind of happiness

because it's rooted in respect rather than just permission, and even though the world feels a lot less certain than it did when you were ten, there's a profound beauty in finally being seen as an equal, even if the "adult talk" makes the world feel a little bit more fragile than it used to.

Making a major decision on your own for the first time feels like standing at the edge of a cliff where you can finally see the horizon, but you're also likely aware of how high up you are. Up until this point, your life has mostly been a series of "yes" or "no" answers to questions someone else asked, but suddenly, the question is blank and you're the one holding the pen. It usually starts with a heavy silence in your room or a long walk where the noise of everyone else's opinions your parents' expectations, your friends' cool indifference, the "right" thing to do finally starts to fade into the background, leaving only your own heartbeat and the reality that whatever happens next belongs entirely to you. There's this weird, electric tension in your chest because you realize that for the first time, you aren't looking for a nod of approval or waiting for someone to catch you if you trip; you're stepping into the "grown up" space where consequences are real and the safety net has been pulled back just a little bit.

When you finally say the words out loud, whether it's choosing a career path that doesn't match the family plan, walking away from a toxic friendship that everyone else thinks is fine, or deciding how to handle a massive mistake you made it feels like the air in the room changes. It's a terrifying kind of freedom, a "cold water to the face" realization that you are the captain now, and even though your hands might be shaking as you steer, there's an incredible, quiet pride in

knowing you didn't just take the path of least resistance. You start to understand that being an adult isn't about always being right, but about being brave enough to own the "wrong" if it happens. That first big choice is the moment you stop being a passenger in your own life; it's the birth of your true identity, where you trade the comfort of being told what to do for the raw, unfiltered power of deciding who you are going to be, and even if the world feels a little more dangerous now, it also feels infinitely more yours.

Chapter-35

Family Conflicts

The most probable reason for people shifting from joint family to nuclear family might be the war happening within the house. These conflicts acts no less than a trauma. It is either in between parents and grandparents or between parents themselves or maybe in between anyone in the house. The one suffering the most is not anyone from the elders rather the most sufferer is the child silently watching the war from the back.

Though as a teen we think we can speak in between to stop the conflict but it instead takes a turn towards us and the topic they get about fighting upon issues. But we were there just to stop the fight.

If we ever try to confront an elder that the conflict among them is destroying us and we are living in depression, by hearing the word depression, they burst and say;

“You are too small to use the word depression”

Though it is true but then what other word do we use if being depressed is how we feel. Our elders think that if they are fighting with less voice or silently, we may not hear them but they forget that we are the silent observer and we tend to know everything that is ongoing in the house. If ever our

parents fight Infront of us thinking that we shall know what is going on though we already knew, each of them thinks we should take the side of any one parent not knowing how it affects us. It's like the game of tug-of-war and we are the rope getting stretched and hurt as if we are emotionless just like the rope. Choosing one between the both or taking only one parents side was never our goal, rather we wanted to conclude the conflicts and the misunderstandings taking place out of nowhere.

The weight of being a peacemaker in a house that doesn't want peace is a heavy, invisible anchor that we drag behind us every single day. We spend our childhoods becoming experts in the "weather" of the home; we can tell by the specific click of a door or the tone of a "hello" whether we need to take cover or if it's safe to come out for dinner. It's a constant state of high alert that we didn't ask for, but we've mastered it because we had to. We become the silent negotiators and observers, trying to soften the blows or distract one parent so they don't notice the other is upset, acting like a human shield in a war where we are supposed to be the civilians.

When we are told we are "too small" to feel depression, it feels like our very reality is being erased. We aren't just sad; we are exhausted from the mental gymnastics of trying to keep two sides from collapsing. We feel like we are living in a house made of glass, and everyone is throwing stones while we try to catch them all the time before they shatter the floor beneath us. We see the elders we are supposed to look up to acting like children, and suddenly, we find ourselves growing up too fast, losing our own innocence just to fill the gap of maturity that they've left behind.

It's a lonely kind of pain because we can't talk to our parents about the hurt, they are causing without being accused of "taking sides" or being "disrespectful," so we just swallow the words until they feel like lead in our stomachs. We watch our friends talk about their homes as safe havens, while for us, home is the place where we have to be the strongest, the quietest, and the most invisible. We just want to be kids to worry about exams or hobbies or who likes whom but instead, we are worrying about whether the silence in the kitchen is a calm before a storm or just a temporary ceasefire. This constant tug-of-war doesn't just stretch us; it thins us out until we feel like there's nothing left of our own personalities, only the role of the "mediator" that we've been forced to play. We are tired of being the rope, tired of being the observer, and mostly, we are tired of the elders forgetting that while they are fighting for their point of view, they are losing us in the process.

The silence that follows a storm in our house is never a peaceful one; it is a heavy, suffocating blanket that makes us want to scream just to break the tension. We find ourselves walking on eggshells, measuring the volume of our footsteps and the clink of our silverware, because we know that the smallest sound could be the spark that restarts the fire. It's an exhausting way to live, constantly scanning faces for the slightest twitch of a muscle or a change in the set of a jaw. We become experts in a language that shouldn't exist, the language of slammed cupboards, heavy sighs, and the specific, chilling coldness of a "fine" that clearly means anything but "fine". We are the ones who carry the emotional maps of the house, knowing exactly which topics are landmines and which rooms are off-limits at certain hours. This constant vigilance

drains us, leaving us with little energy for the things that should actually matter at our age, like our dreams or even just our hobbies.

We often wonder if the elders realize that their "silent treatment" or their "hushed arguments" are actually louder than any shouting match could ever be. We hear the walls talking; we feel the vibration of the resentment through the floorboards. When they tell us we are "too young to understand," it feels like a slap in the face because we understand more than they do. We understand that their pride is costing us our sense of safety. We understand that their inability to forgive each other is teaching us that love is conditional and volatile. We see the way they use us as messengers or as bait, asking us "what did your father say?" or "why is your mother acting like this?", forcing us to play a game of telephone where every word we repeat feels like a betrayal of the other. We are tired of being the bridge that everyone walks on but no one stops to repair.

The most painful part is the internal divide it creates within us. We want to love both sides, but the house demands we choose, and so we split ourselves in half. We become different people depending on which parent or grandparent we are with, carefully curating our stories and our smiles to keep the peace. This is the "counterfeit" life we were talking about earlier, the version of us that is just a collection of mirrors reflecting whatever the adults need to see to stay calm. We lose our own voices in the process, buried under the rubble of their constant friction. We start to believe that our only value is our ability to be a buffer, a peacemaker, or a quiet observer who doesn't cause trouble. We feel like a guest in our

own home, someone who has to earn their stay by being perfectly behaved and perfectly invisible.

When we try to bring up how this is affecting us, and we are met with that dismissive "you don't know what real problems are," it creates a loneliness that is hard to describe. It's like being trapped in a room with a leak that is slowly filling up with water, and when we point at the rising tide, the people who are supposed to protect us just tell us to stop complaining because they are the ones who have to pay the water bill. Our "depression" or our "anxiety" isn't a choice; it's the natural reaction to living in a war zone where the borders are the walls of our own bedroom. We start to look for exits everywhere in the glowing screens of our phones, in the lyrics of songs that seem to know us better than our families do, or in the long hours we spend at the library just to avoid going back to the heavy air of the living room.

We wish they could see that we aren't just "the kids." We are the future versions of the people they are currently breaking. We are learning how to handle conflict by watching them fail at it every day. We are learning that vulnerability is dangerous and that speaking the truth leads to more fighting.

But despite all of this, there is a small, stubborn part of us that still hopes for a day when the house feels light again not because we've shared our secrets with a stranger, but because the people inside the house finally decided to lay down their arms. Until then, we keep our heads down, we keep our grades up as best as we can, and we wait for the day we can build a home of our own that is filled with the kind of quiet that actually feels like peace.

Chapter-36

Where Smile Learns to Lie

We are living in a generation, where getting physically hurt does not pain much than getting our mental health destroyed. We teens do not tend to trust and share things with others and keep our emotions in our mind and then start overthinking which we know is bad but still we have no option because we think trusting someone might take a bad turn and if we try to share things with our parents, it is not easy to open up.

The pain of a scraped knee or a broken bone is nothing compared to the quiet, heavy ache that settles in our chests when we feel like our mental health is slowly being dismantled. Physical wounds are easy for people to see and understand; they offer bandages and sympathy because the damage is visible. But when the damage is inside our heads, it feels like we are carrying a secret world that no one has the map to. We find ourselves trapped in a loop of overthinking, where every small mistake or harsh word becomes a mountain, we have to climb over and over again in our minds. We know that keeping it all in is making us drown, but the fear of trusting someone of showing them the messy, unpolished parts of ourselves is even more terrifying. We worry that if we open up, the other person might use our

vulnerability against us, or worse, they might just look at us with confusion and tell us to "get over it."

This wall is even taller when it comes to our parents. We want to tell them that we are struggling, that the pressure of the 95 percent and the constant "counterfeiting" is breaking us, but the words get stuck in our throats. We see them dealing with their own "wars" and their own stresses, and we don't want to be another burden on their list. Or maybe we've tried before, and they dismissed our feelings as "just a phase" or told us we were "too young" to know what real stress is. So, we learn to be the perfect silent observers. We become experts at smiling when our hearts are heavy and saying "I'm fine" when we are actually falling apart.

This silence creates a hollow space within us, a loneliness that feels like being in a crowded room where no one actually sees you. We just want to be understood without having to prove that our pain is "real" enough to deserve attention. We want to know that it's okay to not be okay, and that our mental health matters just as much as the grades we get or the chores, we finish. Until we find that safe place to speak, we keep our emotions locked away, hoping for the day the "lightness" finally returns.

Chapter-37

“Care” or “Control”

We often mistake our parents care thinking they are controlling us. But there is a major difference between care and control which we always forget and then do a minor talking fight with them just because of the misunderstandings.

The thin line between being cared for and being controlled is often where we find ourselves stumbling most, and it creates a specific kind of frustration that is hard to explain to our elders without sounding ungrateful. We know deep down that their constant questions about our grades, our friends, and our future come from a place of love, especially after the world felt so fragile during the pandemic, but in our ears, those questions often sound like a lack of trust. It's hard to tell them that when they double check our work or track our locations, we don't feel "protected"; we feel "monitored," as if the person we are becoming isn't someone, they trust to make the right choices.

This creates a friction that sparks those "minor talking fights" where we snap back or roll our eyes, not because we want to be disrespectful, but because we are desperately trying to find the room to breathe and grow as our own individuals. We feel like we are being held too tightly, and like a bird in a clenched fist, the tighter they squeeze to keep us safe, the more

we want to struggle just to get some air. We wish they could understand that true "care" feels like a safety net there to catch us if we fall, whereas "control" feels like a cage that prevents us from ever trying to fly in the first place. When we are told we are "too small" to understand their motives, it only pushes us further away, making us retreat into our rooms and our silences. We want to be able to tell them, "I know you love me, but your fear is starting to look like my prison." The "counterfeit" versions of us that we present to them are often built out of this exact tension; we act the part they want to see just to avoid the lectures, while our real selves are tucked away where their control can't reach. We aren't trying to be rebels; we are just trying to be humans who are allowed to make mistakes. If they could just trade a little bit of their surveillance for a little bit of genuine curiosity about how we actually feel, the weight in the house would lift. We crave the kind of care that listens more than it directs, a kind of love that trusts the "software" they've spent years installing in us instead of constantly trying to run the program for us. Until that balance is found, we keep having those small fights, each one a tiny, desperate cry for them to see the difference between keeping us safe and keeping us small, because we aren't just their children, we are people who need to know that our own wings are strong enough to carry us through the world.

It is so easy for us to look at a parent's worry and see it as a cage rather than a safety net, mostly because at this age, our entire being is screaming for the chance to prove we can stand on our own two feet. We often mistake their care for control because, to us, "care" should feel like a quiet wind at our backs, pushing us forward, but instead, it often feels like a hand

firmly on our shoulder, pulling us back. When they ask a million questions about where we are going or who we are with, we don't hear their heartbeat racing with the fear of a world they no longer recognize; we hear a lack of trust in our judgment.

We feel like they are trying to manage our lives like a project rather than supporting us as people, and that friction is where all those "minor talking fights" begin. We get defensive because we are trying to protect the small spark of independence we've finally found, and any instruction, even the kindest one feels like an attempt to put that spark out. We forget that they are also "counterfeiting" in a way; they are pretending to have all the answers and all the strength while they are actually terrified of seeing us get hurt in ways they can't fix. We see the "No" and the "Not yet" as a wall, but for them, it's a shield they are desperately holding up. It's a huge misunderstanding where both sides are speaking different languages, we are speaking the language of "let me grow," and they are speaking the language of "let me keep you safe." When those two collide, it feels like control, but if we could peel back the layers of our own frustration, we'd see that their hovering is just a clumsy, unpolished way of saying they don't know how to exist in a world where we don't need them for every little thing anymore.

We mistake the grip for a leash, but often, it's just them holding on because they aren't ready to let go of the child we used to be, even as we are fighting to become the adult we are meant to be.

Chapter-38

The Silent Candle

While growing up the saddest part is that we no more feel like celebrating birthdays anymore. The day for which we started countdown 2-3 months before, now on the same day the excitement is something which is erased from the dictionary.

The transition from counting down the days to a birthday to barely wanting to acknowledge the date is one of the quietest heartbreaks we experience as we grow up.

When we were younger, a birthday was a day of pure magic, a time when the world seemed to stop just for us, filled with the bright colors of balloons and the sweet anticipation of a cake that symbolized another year of possibilities. But now, as we navigate these teenage years, that "silent candle" on the cake feels more like a reminder of everything we've lost rather than everything we've gained. The excitement has been erased from our dictionary because the context of our lives has shifted so dramatically. For those of us who lost parents during the pandemic or those who are watching the "wars" inside our homes, a birthday is no longer a celebration of life; it's a milestone of survival that feels incredibly heavy. We look at the photos of our younger selves, the kids who genuinely smiled because they didn't know what a "counterfeit" self was,

and we feel a profound grief for that version of us. We realize that the older we get, the more expectations are piled onto our shoulders. Instead of being excited about a new age, we are anxious about the new responsibilities, the grades we need to maintain, and the pressure to finally figure out who we are supposed to be.

The excitement is gone because we've become "silent observers" of our own lives. When your house is a tug-of-war between parents or grandparents, a birthday often feels like another landmine. We worry that a celebration will just provide a new stage for a fight, or that the "care" our parents show on that day will feel even more like the "control" we struggle with every other day of the year. We start to feel like the attention is a burden; we don't want to be the center of a room where the air is already so thick with unspoken tension. We'd rather want the day just pass quietly, like a ghost, so we don't have to perform the role of the "happy child" for an audience that is barely holding it together themselves. There's also the internal software that keeps telling us we aren't doing enough. How can we celebrate ourselves when we feel like a counterfeit? When we look in the mirror and see a student who is struggling to hit that 95 percent mark or a teen who feels "too small" to mention their depression, the idea of a party feels like a lie. We feel like we are celebrating a version of us that the world likes, while the real us is sitting in the dark, wondering when the "lightness" will finally come back.

Eventually, we realize that the loss of excitement is a side effect of growing up in a world that asks too much of us too soon. We've traded our balloons for burdens and our cake for "minor talking fights." We aren't being ungrateful or "moody,"

as the elders might think; we are just tired. We are tired of pretending, tired of being the rope in the tug-of-war, and tired of the mental health battles that no one seems to see. The "silent candle" represents the flicker of hope we still carry, even if it's dim. We don't want the big parties or the loud countdowns anymore; what we actually want is a day where we don't have to be a counterfeit. We want a day where the mind is free from overthinking which may not happen and the heart is quiet, where the house is peaceful, and where we are allowed to just be, without the weight of everyone's expectations crushing the spark out of us. Until we find that kind of peace, our birthdays will remain just another normal day of the week, a quiet reminder that while we are still here, the version of us that loved the countdown is a ghost we are still learning how to say goodbye to.

Birthdays for us have become a day where the silence feels much louder than the music, a day where we are forced to face the giant gap between the happy person, we are supposed to be and the tired, lonely person we actually are.

birthday pulls us into a spotlight that we never asked for, making us feel like a stranger at our own party.

We wake up with a heavy feeling in our chest because we know we have to spend the next twelve hours "counterfeiting" a smile for everyone who wants to see us celebrating. The "silent candle" on the cake is a perfect symbol for how we feel; it's a flicker of life that no one is really listening to. We feel lonely because we realize that while people know our date of birth, very few of them know the versions of ourselves that died or changed over the last two years. Every "Happy Birthday" text feels like it's being sent to a version of us that

doesn't exist anymore, and the effort it takes to reply with an emoji and a "thank you" feels like a manual labor we aren't strong enough for. We look at our old childhood photos and feel a deep ache for that kid who didn't have to think about "software" or "depression," and that nostalgia makes the present moment feel even colder. We are surrounded by family and friends, but we feel like we are shouting from the bottom of a well because no one is asking how we really are they are just asking if we like our gifts. This day makes us realize that we are growing up into a world where we have to be our own biggest supporters, but on our birthday, we just want to be kids again who are allowed to be sad without being told we are "too small" to feel this way. The loneliness isn't about being alone; it's about being seen by everyone but understood by no one, making the most celebrated day of the year the one where we feel most invisible.

The birthdays are the day on which we are more of a fake person than any other day, the fake smile when anybody says "happy birthday".

Chapter-39

Prioritizing “Self”

In the middle of all the chaos and drama, the thing which we must not forget is to have self-worth, self-confidence and we should be our first priority along with our family and studies. Our health is what is most important if we want to fulfill our own goals which we set for ourselves.

Building self-worth when we feel like a "counterfeit" is the hardest work we will ever do, because it means we have to stop measuring our value by the 95 percent on a screen and start measuring it by the strength it takes to just get out of bed. We have been taught that our priority should be everyone else's happiness, everyone else's peace, and the grades that make our parents proud, but we are finally realizing that we cannot pour from an empty cup. Prioritizing ourselves isn't about being selfish; it's about survival in a world that is constantly trying to turn us into something we are not. We need to understand that our mental health is the foundation for everything else without it, the goals we set for ourselves are just weights that will eventually pull us under. We spend so much time worrying about failing our families or failing our exams, but we rarely stop to think about how much we are failing ourselves by not giving our minds the same care we give to our laptops or our grades.

Real self-priority means being honest about our limits and learning that "no" is a full sentence that we are allowed to use when we are drowning. We have to stop apologizing for our grief and stop feeling guilty for the days when our "software" feels slow or broken. We are not machines built for constant productivity; we are human beings who have walked through a global trauma and are still standing. Impactful living for a teenager today means reclaiming the right to be a "work in progress" instead of a finished product. It means realizing that if we lose our health while chasing a percentage, we've actually lost everything. We need to be our own first priority because, at the end of the day, we are the only ones who truly know the weight of the invisible bag we are carrying. Choosing ourselves means choosing to heal, choosing to speak our truth even when our voices shake, and choosing to believe that we are enough exactly as we are, not as the 95 percent version of two years ago, but as the brave, honest version of today.

We often think that success is a destination we reach once we hit that 95 percent or fulfill every expectation our parents have for us, but true growth is actually the quiet, messy process of rebuilding ourselves from the inside out when the world feels like it has fallen apart.

Success, for a teenager who has faced loss and the pressure of being a "counterfeit," isn't about being perfect; it is about being authentic. It is realizing that the old version of us didn't die two years ago, she just evolved into someone who knows the value of a deep breath and an honest conversation. When we start prioritizing our own mental health and self-worth, we are finally defining success on our own terms. It is the moment we stop looking at our laptops as judges of our value

and start seeing them as tools for our own dreams. Growth is the courage to tell our mothers that we are struggling, not to be difficult, but because we want to be whole again. It is the strength to walk away from the library feeling "light" because we finally let someone else see the cracks in our armor. We are learning that our health is the only real wealth we have, and without it, no academic achievement or family approval can ever make us feel truly successful. We are choosing to be the architects of our own lives, building a foundation of self-confidence that isn't dependent on a grade or a birthday celebration, but on the simple, powerful fact that we are still here, we are still trying, and we are finally learning how to love the person we are becoming, even with all our "software" glitches and broken dams. We almost forget that success is not a number. Prioritizing self is self-worth, taking stand for oneself is very important skill which we are meant to learn as soon as we can. Being independent does not mean having money of our own, rather it means we have the right to take our own decisions. Though small wins but still they are wins and it is not guilty if we celebrate those wins.

We are finally realizing that our growth isn't measured by how well we can hide our pain, but by how bravely we can face it. For too long, we thought success meant being a perfect machine a "95 percent" student who never cracked, a daughter who only consoled and never cried, and a person who kept their "software" running even when the system was crashing. But that isn't success; it's just a very convincing performance. True growth is the moment we decide to stop being a "counterfeit" and start being the architect of our own healing. It's understanding that we don't owe the world a version of ourselves that died two years ago. We owe ourselves the

chance to be whoever we are right now, even if that person is tired, even if that person is struggling, and even if that person doesn't have all the answers.

Success is the quiet victory of choosing our mental health over a deadline. It is the strength to tell our parents, "I need you to listen, not just control," and the wisdom to know that our worth is not a number on a screen. We are learning that prioritizing ourselves isn't a betrayal of our families or our studies; it is the only way to actually fulfill the goals we set for our future. We are trading the "silent candle" of our lonely birthdays for a fire that actually warms us, a fire built on self-confidence, honesty, and the realization that we are enough. We aren't just "the kids" anymore; we are a generation that is learning to heal out loud. We are moving from the darkness of overthinking into the "lightness" of being known, and that, more than any grade or trophy, is the greatest success we will ever achieve.

Chapter-40

The Final “Glow”

Life teaches us many lessons but they are literally of no use until we learn something from it. Life isn't a toy to play with; it is something real and full of expectations. Learning from a past mistake is good but not moving on from that mistake isn't the solution. Memories are the most valuable thing because we realize the thing after something is gone, all that is left behind are the memories that come to give us the support and break from all the chaos. Time does change things and a change is important for us to survive. After all the dried leaves from the tree are supposed to fall for the tree to look fresh and beautiful. Likewise, we cannot hold onto the negative and dried things for all. The journey toward our own "final glow" is not about returning to the person we were before the world broke, but about accepting that the pieces we are picking up now can be glued together into something even more resilient and honest. We must realize that being a "silent observer" in a house of conflict was a survival skill, but it doesn't have to be our forever identity; we are allowed to step out from the background and occupy our own lives with noise and color and unapologetic truth. Every time we choose our mental health over a crushing academic percentage, we are performing a revolutionary act of self-love that proves our worth is not a currency to be traded for someone else's

approval. We have to stop treating our memories like a weight that keeps us anchored in the past and start seeing them as the fuel that drives us toward a future where we don't have to counterfeit our smiles. It is incredibly impactful to understand that we are not the "rope" in anyone else's tug-of-war; we are the ones holding the scissors, and we have the right to cut the ties that drain our energy and steal our peace. Letting the "dried leaves" of negative thoughts fall is not a sign of weakness or forgetting, but a necessary shedding so that our new growth, the parts of us that are brave, vocal, and self-prioritizing can finally reach the sun. We are the generation that is learning that "fine" is a dangerous word when it's used to bury depression, and that asking for help is the ultimate power move, not a surrender. Success is not a destination where everything is perfect, but the ability to look at our "software glitches" and say, "I am still a masterpiece in progress." We must remember that we are the only ones who get to define our glow, and it doesn't come from external validation or hitting 95 percent; it comes from the quiet, steady heat of knowing that we are finally, truthfully, on our own side. The most impactful thing we can ever do is to stop waiting for the world to become safe and instead decide that we are a safe place for ourselves, turning our internal chaos into a classroom where we learn that we are enough just as we are.

Finding our own "glow" is the quietest, most revolutionary thing we can do for ourselves, especially when we've spent years feeling like we're just a background character in a story about survival and "counterfeiting." It's a strange, shaky feeling at first, like learning to walk on a floor that's no longer tilted, to realize that our value doesn't actually depend on how

many people we've comforted or whether we've managed to perfectly mimic the version of ourselves that existed before everything changed. We start to see that the "software" glitches we were so ashamed of, the overthinking, the sudden drops in mood, the feeling of being a fraud were never actually bugs in our system; they were signals that we were trying to live a life that was too small for the truth of what we've been through. Growth for us means finally giving ourselves permission to stop being "the girl who consoles everyone" and start being the one who actually says, "I'm not okay, and that has to be enough for today." It's about understanding that we aren't the rope in a tug-of-war, and we aren't a "toy" to be moved around by the expectations of elders; we are the ones who get to decide which memories we carry as support and which ones we let fall like dried leaves.

When we finally prioritize ourselves, the air in our room literally feels different, because we aren't using all our oxygen to hold up a mask that was suffocating us anyway. We start to see that success isn't a 95 percent on a screen, but the moment we can look at our laptop and not feel like a victim of our own goals. It's the realization that while we can't change the past or fix the "wars" that happened around us, we can absolutely decide that our internal world is no longer a battlefield. We are learning to trust our own rhythm, to celebrate the "silent candle" of our resilience even when no one else is clapping, and to recognize that our health is the only thing that actually makes any of our other goals worth reaching. We are shedding the "dried things", the guilt of not being "productive" enough, the fear of being "too small" for our own feelings, and the constant need for control and we are replacing them with a steady, quiet confidence that comes from finally being on our

own side. This is our "final glow", not a flash of light that disappears, but a warm, constant heat that tells us we are finally becoming the most honest version of ourselves, and that version is more than enough to handle whatever comes next. To every teen who has felt like a "counterfeit," to everyone who has carried the heavy weight of being a "silent observer" in their own home, and to those of us who have forgotten what it feels like to genuinely celebrate a birthday; this is our moment to finally exhale. We need to understand that the "software" glitches in our minds aren't failures; they are the evidence of our survival through years that tried to break us. We are not the 95-percent grade on a screen, we are not the mediator of our family's friction, and we are certainly not "too small" to own our emotions or our depression. Real success is the day we choose our mental health over a perfect performance, realizing that our worth is already whole, even if it feels fractured right now. We must give ourselves permission to let the "dried leaves" of expectations and guilt fall away so that our true self, the one that is brave, vocal, and self-prioritizing can finally catch the sun and start to glow. Our "final glow" isn't about being perfect; it's about being authentic, about trusting ourselves enough to share our burdens, and about knowing that we are the only ones who get to write the ending to our story. We are a generation of resilience, and as we step into our own light, we realize that we were never actually "counterfeits", we were just masterpieces waiting for the right moment to finally be seen for who we truly are.