

Everyone Needs Closure

VIPUL GOYAL



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Dedication

Writing *Everyone Needs Closure* has been a journey of reflection, growth, and healing.

For everyone who has ever needed closure—
may you find the courage to speak your truth,
the strength to forgive,
and the hope to begin again.

This story is purely a work of fiction. It is a tribute to the messy, beautiful process of facing our pasts and choosing connection. Any resemblance to actual events or persons or any other work of art, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

Thank you for joining me on this path. May these pages inspire you to seek your own closure,
embrace your imperfections, and step boldly into new beginnings.

With gratitude,
Vipul Goyal



Prologue

There are moments that linger long after they pass.

A glance held a second too long.

A goodbye left unspoken.

A truth swallowed to keep the peace.

We carry them like echoes in the background of our lives—
unfinished conversations, fractured friendships, aching
questions without answers.

We move forward, or at least pretend to.

But the weight of the unresolved stays with us.

This is a story about that weight.

About what happens when silence runs too deep.

When love is real but messy.

When forgiveness is possible, but not promised.

And about how, sometimes, it takes returning to the past—

to a summer filled with light and heartbreak,

to a wedding that should bring people together but threatens
to tear them apart—

to finally say the things we never dared to say.



Because the truth is simple:

everyone needs closure.

Even if it arrives late.

Even if it hurts.

Even if it changes everything.



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Chapter One:
Hansíni and the Invitation



Hansini, aged 31, is a middle school English teacher, aspiring poet, and always thoughtful, introspective and quietly resilient—one who holds everything in until it threatens to break her.

She was once the emotional anchor of her college friend group, the quiet observer who held others' secrets like glass. She was in love with Joe during college, but they never officially dated—he was with Chitra. The affair between Joe and her was brief, intense, and unresolved.

It arrived on a Thursday. A cream-colored envelope with her name written in careful, looping script—“*Hansini Suketu*”—as though the sender was trying to soften a blow with elegance.

Hansini stared at it for several minutes before opening it. She already knew what was inside. There was only one reason Chitra would write to her after seven years of silence.

“A wedding.”

Of course, it would be a wedding.

The invitation was thick and embossed, expensive in the way Chitra always liked things to be. The names were printed in gold foil—*Chitra Subhashini & Joe Mendis*, followed by a line that made Hansini's stomach turn: *We would be honored to have you with us as we begin our forever.*

She sat down on the edge of her kitchen counter, one socked foot tucked under the other leg, and let the invitation rest in her lap. The whole kitchen buzzed faintly with the hum of the refrigerator and the smell of morning coffee gone cold. She read the names again.

Joe Mendis.

That name still echoed somewhere between her ribs.

It wasn't just that he had been her ex—it was that he had been her almost. Almost something. Almost everything. And Chitra... well, Chitra had once been her best friend. The kind who knew her favorite cereal, who held her through a panic attack in the middle of a biology exam, and who promised to never lie to her.

Hansini let out a breath that felt too heavy for a Thursday.

Why now? Why invite her at all?

Part of her wanted to rip the envelope in half. Another part—the smaller, more dangerous part—wanted to go. To look both of them in the eye. To say all the things, she never said.

But what would that even sound like?

“Hi, I'm Hansini. You might remember me from your personal history. I was the collateral damage.”

The coffee machine beeped, startling her back to the present.

Hansini stood up and placed the invitation carefully on the counter, as if it might shatter. She wasn't sure what she would do yet. But one thing settled in her mind, heart and soul for forever like a stone gets stuck in a hole to not allow anything to pass on, a feeling which echoes always. You can't move forward with your heart clenched shut.

Maybe, ... this was her moment to open it.

Hansini folded the invitation, slid it back into its envelope, and placed it in the drawer next to her sink—the one filled with loose batteries, expired coupons, and things she wasn't ready to throw away.

She stood there for a while, just breathing.



Her phone buzzed against the countertop. A message from her sister.

SHARMISTHA:

You got yours too?

Hansini stared at the screen, her pulse skipping. She hadn't realized Chitra had invited everyone.

HANSINI:

Yeah. Just now.

The typing dots appeared immediately.

SHARMISTHA:

She has some nerve, huh.

There was a pause. Then—

SHARMISTHA:

You going?

Hansini didn't answer. Instead, she walked to the window. Outside, the street was slick with last night's rain. An old couple held hands at the crosswalk. A teenager biked past with no helmet and too much confidence.

The world kept moving, even when people were stuck in yesterday.

Her fingers hovered over the screen, typing, erasing, and typing again.

HANSINI:

Not sure yet.



That was the truth. She wasn't sure of anything anymore. Not of what she felt. Not of what she wanted. Not of whether seeing them would make things worse—or finally set something right.

Her phone buzzed again, this time with a name she hadn't seen in months.

CALL FROM: MILIND SUBHASH

She let it ring.

MILIND.

Another ghost in her collection.

When the call went to voicemail, she let herself sit on the couch and stare at nothing. She thought about the last time she saw Joe. The last time Chitra looked her in the eye. The last words they spoke.

What had she said again?

“Take care.”

As if that was enough. As if that could close the wound cleanly.

But it hadn't.

And maybe that was the point.

She opened her laptop. Flights to Bengaluru weren't cheap, but she clicked through them anyway. One click, one step closer to whatever it was she was about to do.

She didn't know if it would help.

But she knew one thing.

She was done living with unsaid things.



Chapter Two: Chitra

Chitra aged 31, a wedding planner, a social media Entrepreneur, is someone who is confident, charming, and hyper-organized—but emotionally avoidant, and who keeps up appearances no matter the cost.

She is the former queen bee of the group—charismatic and magnetic, but often guarded. She started dating Joe in college and held onto him through the years despite deep incompatibilities. She always suspected there was more between Joe and Hansini, but chose denial over confrontation.

Her upcoming wedding is her way of "securing" the perfect life—but something in her still feels hollow.

The dress didn't fit right.

Chitra stared at herself in the three-paneled mirror at the boutique, hands resting lightly on her back. From the outside, it was perfect—ivory satin, hand-stitched lace, a silhouette made to flatter—but something about it felt... wrong. Like it belonged to someone with less history, someone unburdened.

"You look stunning," the stylist chirped behind her, clasping her hands like Chitra was a princess in a movie.

Chitra forced a smile. She knew how to perform.

She knew how to *appear* at peace.

But the truth was, ever since she'd sent the invitations, sleep had been coming in fragments. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw Hansini, or worse—Hansini not speaking, Hansini leaving, Hansini disappearing without a word after that night, the silence between them louder than any fight.



Joe had asked once, early in their engagement, if inviting Hansini was a good idea.

“She won’t come,” Chitra had said, brushing it off.

But that wasn’t true.

Deep down, some stubborn, haunted part of her *wanted* her to come.

Needed her to.

“You okay?” asked Sumitra, her cousin, sipping an iced latte and looking up from her phone. She kept with the tone by asking again “Seems like you are struggling with some thoughts in your head.”

Chitra let out a sharp, humorless laugh. “Just thinking.”

“About the dress? Or *the past*?”

Chitra turned, her expression cooling. “Do you have to do that therapist thing every time we hang out?”

Sumitra shrugged. “You invited your ex-best friend and your fiancé’s almost-girlfriend to your wedding. You’re not asking for emotional fireworks.”

Chitra looked away. “We’re all adults. It’s been years.”

“Time doesn’t always mean closure,” Sumitra said, more softly this time.

Chitra’s throat tightened. She looked back at her reflection. She’d spent years curating this version of herself: composed, successful, unshakable. But under the veil of perfection was the guilt that had never really left. Not for what happened with Joe. Not for what she let fall apart with Hansini.



She had rewritten the story so many times in her head, trying to be the hero.

But the truth was, they had all hurt each other.

And none of them had ever cleaned the wound.

Later That Evening...

Alone in her apartment, Chitra poured a cup of tea she wouldn't finish and opened her laptop. The guest list spreadsheet glowed against the dim light of her living room. She clicked Hansini's name.

Beside it, in the "RSVP" column, it still read: "**Pending.**"

Chitra sat back and whispered into the quiet:

"Please come."



Chapter Three:

Milind



Milind, aged 32, a documentary filmmaker, is empathetic, restless, and insightful, one who sees everyone clearly—except himself, he had always been good at saying the right thing.

That was the problem.

He knew what people wanted to hear. He'd learned that early—watching his parents spin fake smiles through real fights, nodding in all the right places. “You’re so thoughtful, Milind,” teachers used to say. “So polite.” But none of them ever noticed how little he actually said.

Milind was Hansini’s closest friend—after everything with Joe collapsed. He has always supported Hansini in his own way. He loved traveling the world to explore, and to avoid the aches, caused by the emotions or things which are not expressible—which couldn’t be said, and yet stays inside the chest like a burden. It was his refuge, his escape, his method to find ways, to be more creative, and to understand the perspectives to turn his emotions into words.

He’s just returned to town after years away, filming a project about grief and legacy.

Now, standing outside his apartment with a half-smoked cigarette and a text from Joe asking if he was “still down to be best man,” Milind found himself at a familiar crossroads.

Lie or leave.

He flicked the cigarette onto the sidewalk, stepping on it with a quiet finality.

JOE:

Still down to be best man, yeah? Big day coming.

MILIND:

Yeah. Of course, man.

He didn't send it yet. His thumb hovered over the screen.

He hadn't seen Joe in nearly a year, not since their last drink at a half-empty bar downtown—two bourbons, no closure. They didn't talk about the past. They barely talked at all. It was always easier that way. Surface. Safe.

But with the wedding creeping closer, so was the past they'd all left rotting behind them.

He knew Hansini had been invited. Chitra told him. Or warned him. He was still in dilemma.

"Might be good for everyone," she'd said, but her voice had trembled on the word "*good*," like even she didn't believe it.

And Hansini... God.

He hadn't spoken to her in five years. Not since she stopped replying. Not since he stopped trying. There had been something there once—electric, almost—but nothing they'd had was ever named. And maybe that was the problem. Everything unsaid had grown teeth over time.

He finally hit send.

MILIND:

Yeah. I'm in.

Lie or leave.

He chose the lie.

But his chest felt heavier for it.



Later That Night...

Milind sat on his fire escape, notebook in hand, pen tapping against his knee. He used to write music, once. Before everything. Before people became too hard to hold. The page was blank now, as most of them were. But a thought drifted in—uninvited but persistent.

Maybe closure isn't about getting answers.

Maybe it's just the guts to speak, even if no one hears.

He scribbled the lines down, closed the notebook, and stared out into the streetlight-smeared city.



Chapter Four:

Joe

Joe, aged 33, is a commercial architect with a personality that is steady, likeable, and emotionally blocked; he is the one who always takes the path of least resistance.

Joe was torn between Chitra's certainty and Hansini's quiet depth. He chose Chitra because it was easier—more defined. He never truly admitted to himself how much Hansini meant to him, and he never took accountability for the triangle that fractured them all.

He's now coasting into a life he's not sure he chose with a woman he cares about, but may not truly *love*.

Joe hated tux fittings.

The sleeves were always too stiff, the pants too tight in the wrong places, and the mirrors—'*why so many mirrors?*'—always seemed to catch him in the one expression he couldn't control: regret.

The tailor was talking, something about lapel styles and cufflinks, but Joe wasn't listening. His mind had drifted the moment he saw Chitra's name flash on his phone.

CHITRA:

Hansini's probably coming. Just so you're not blindsided.

Blindsided.

As if he hadn't been walking around half-blind for the last seven years.

"Sir?" the tailor prompted.

"Yeah," Joe said. "Sure. That one's fine."



He wasn't even sure what he'd agreed to. A vest? A pocket square? Didn't matter. Chitra would have an opinion anyway. She had an opinion about everything.

And God, he loved her for it. Her certainty. Her fire. The way she could take chaos and turn it into control.

But sometimes, like now, he wondered what it would be like to love someone who let you fall apart a little.

Someone like Hansini.

He shook off the thought like a dog shaking off water. Useless. Dangerous. Old.

But that was the thing about the past. It had a long fuse, and a loud ending.

Later That Day...

Joe sat on the edge of his bed, turning an old photo over in his hands. It was the one from that summer—him, Hansini, Chitra, and Milind on the roof of that shitty house they'd all rented for one perfect, impossible month. Before everything fractured.

Before *he* fractured it.

He used to think he could explain what happened. That if he ever got the chance, he could say something Hansini would understand. Something like:

It wasn't about who I loved more. It was about who I believed could still love me after.

But he'd never said it. Never wrote it. And when Hansini disappeared without a word, he let her.

Let her go.



Now she might show up. At the wedding. At *his* wedding.

And part of him was terrified.

The other part?

Wasn't sure which name his heart would flinch at first—hers or Chitra's.

Incoming Text — MILIND:

She got her invite, yeah?

JOE:

Yeah. Chitra thinks she's coming.

MILIND:

Think she'll say something?

Joe stared at the screen a long time before replying.

JOE:

I hope she does.

Chapter Five:
The Table of Re-union Before
the Big Day



The restaurant Chitra picked was small, quiet, and too intimate for what this really was: a ticking time bomb disguised as a dinner party.

The waitress had just taken drink orders. Water glasses sweated on linen napkins. Jazz hummed from somewhere overhead. The air smelled like rosemary and restraint.

Chitra smiled too much. Joe drank too fast. Hansini showed up seven minutes late, and Milind had already checked the exit twice.

“Glad we could all make it,” Chitra said, raising her wine glass. “It’s... good to see everyone together again.”

Hansini nodded, polite. “Thanks for the invite.”

Joe cleared his throat. “Yeah, it’s—uh, been a while.”

Understatement of the century.

No one touched the bread.

“So,” Chitra pushed on, eyes darting between them, “how’s the city treating you, Hansini?”

“Still there,” Hansini replied. “Still surviving.”

“Thriving,” Milind added gently, a hint of warmth in his voice that lingered a beat too long.

Chitra noticed.

So did Joe.

Silence slid into the middle of the table like a fifth guest.

Joe reached for his drink again. “You still working at that nonprofit?”

Hansini gave a thin smile. “Still trying to fix broken things, yeah.”



Chitra's jaw tensed. "Some things don't want to be fixed."

The words landed heavier than intended. Even Chitra looked startled by them.

"I guess that depends," Hansini said quietly, "on whether you broke them on purpose."

Joe set his drink down, hard enough to clink.

"Can we not?" he said, voice tight. "This is supposed to be—"

"What?" Hansini snapped, "A celebration? Of what, exactly?"

Chitra's smile fractured. "Of starting fresh. Of letting the past be the past."

"But it's *not* the past," Milind said, finally speaking up. "Not if none of us ever talked about it."

They all went quiet again.

Jazz kept playing, blissfully unaware.

Hansini stood. "I shouldn't have come."

"Wait," Chitra said, standing too. "Please, don't walk away again."

That hit hard. Hansini froze. Her eyes glistened, but her voice was calm. Measured.

"I didn't walk away. You just never followed."

Then she left.

Milind looked at Joe.

"You should go after her," he said.

Joe shook his head. "No. I think you should."

Chapter Six:
Then — The Rooftop Summer, the Fall.

Seven Years Ago

It was the summer they all thought would last forever.

Four friends. One house. No rules, no clocks. Just late nights, loud music, cheap wine, and a rooftop view of nothing in particular—but it was theirs.

Hansini remembered that rooftop—the heat of the shingles on bare thighs, the smell of salt and old cigarettes, Milind playing guitar, quietly, like the strings might tell the truth if he didn't.

Chitra danced barefoot in a sundress. Joe laughed in that easy way that made people want to fall for him. And sometimes, just sometimes, he looked at Hansini like he already had.

They were all so close back then.

Too close.

One Night, in the Kitchen

It was 1:07 AM. The others were upstairs. Hansini stood at the fridge, drinking orange juice from the carton.

Joe walked in. “Reckless move,” he said, nodding at the carton.

She wiped her mouth on the back of her hand. “You gonna tell Chitra?”

He leaned on the counter beside her. “Chitra tells me less than she used to.”

Hansini didn't answer. The air shifted. Softer. Warmer. Dangerous.

“You ever think about... what happens after all this?” Joe asked.



“You mean when we go back to pretending, we don’t know too much about each other?”

He gave a short laugh. “Yeah. That.”

She met his eyes, and it hit her like it always did—that quiet, magnetic ache. The thing between them they never named.

“Don’t,” she whispered.

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t look at me like that.”

He didn’t stop.

And when he kissed her, she didn’t stop him.

Not at first.

Not until the guilt showed up like a door slamming shut inside her.

She pulled away. “We can’t.”

“I know.”

But he didn’t mean it. Or maybe he did. That was the problem with Joe—he always said things that felt like promises, but disappeared when you reached for them.

Hansini left the kitchen knowing that whatever happened was wrong as Joe was dating Chitra at the time—but things were “complicated.”

The next morning, Chitra made pancakes. Milind played a new song. No one said a word.

But something had changed.

Something that shouldn’t have changed.



Later That Week

Chitra found Hansini's notebook in the laundry room. She read the half-poem about an almost-kiss and a boy with ocean eyes.

She never said a word.

Not then.

But she started pulling away. From Hansini. From the house. From the summer itself.

And one night, while the others slept, she crawled near Joe's bed and whispered softly in his ears, "Pick me over her. Just pick me."

As if she realized that the bond between him and Hansini could break the vows they were silently taking with each other, an insecure dilemma in Joe's head might have started making the relationship for him a selection process over a love affair and make his life more miserable.

But Joe silently acknowledged the gesture of Chitra by taking her hand in his hands, a silent assurance of his commitment towards her for their forever.

And Hansini, well, she disappeared the day after they packed up the house, leaving a note that just said, "*I hope this was worth it.*"

Chapter Seven:
Mílind & Hansíní — Move to Repair the
Damage



Present day

The café was almost empty. There was a quiet hum of early risers, ceramic mugs, and rain against the windows.

Milind spotted her instantly—curled into the corner booth, hoodie up, hands wrapped around a mug like it was the only thing holding her together.

He hesitated at the door. He didn't want to ambush her. But then again, maybe it was time they all stopped pretending that the timing wasn't already bad.

He approached slowly.

"Mind if I sit?"

Hansini looked up. Tired. Guarded. But she didn't tell him to leave.

"That depends. Are you here to tell me I overreacted?"

Milind shook his head. "I'm here to say I should've said something years ago."

She blinked. That she hadn't expected.

He slid into the seat across from her. Silence settled for a beat, soft but loaded.

"I thought about writing you," he said, fingers tracing the rim of his mug. "After you left. After that summer. But I didn't know what to say."

"I would've read it," she said, barely above a whisper.

"I know that now." He looked up at her, eyes steady. "We all let too much rot in silence."



She smiled, sad and tired. “Even you?”

“Especially me.”

She studied him. “Why are you really here, Milind?”

He sighed. “Because last night made me realize something. You weren’t the only one who got hurt. But you were the only one who left. That took guts.”

“And you think I’m brave?” She scoffed, more bitter than amused.

“I think you did what the rest of us were too scared to do. You stepped out of the story.”

Hansini looked away, toward the window where people passed under umbrellas like characters from someone else’s novel. “I didn’t want to be the villain.”

“You weren’t,” he said. “None of us were. We were just messy. Human. But that doesn’t mean we can’t write a better ending.”

She stared at him.

“Why now?” She asked.

“Because this time, if you walk away again, I want to know I didn’t stay silent.”

Her eyes softened. Something behind them cracked, but didn’t shatter.

“You still write?”

He nodded. “Not much. But I still think in verses.”

“Then write me something honest,” she said, quietly. “Not perfect. Just true.”



And for the first time in years, they smiled at each other. Not like people dodging ghosts, but like people finally brave enough to face them.

Chapter Eight:
The Rehearsal Dinner



The room buzzed with laughter and clinking glasses, but beneath the noise was a thick undercurrent—unsaid words, glances sharp enough to cut glass, and smiles stretched thin like fragile masks.

Chitra moved through the crowd, smoothing her dress, catching eyes that avoided hers. She spotted Joe by the bar, ordering a drink with that same nervous edge she'd learned to read like a second language.

Hansini arrived late, just like last time, and this time the entire room seemed to notice. Whispers floated like wildfire: *She's here. Really here.*

Milind stayed near the back, arms crossed, watching. His eyes flicked between Hansini and Joe, a storm brewing quietly behind them.

The dinner began with toasts that rang hollow.

"Chitra and Joe," the best man said, raising his glass. "Two people who found each other. Even when the past tried to get in the way."

Joe caught Hansini's gaze across the table. Neither looked away.

As the night unfolded, conversations fractured—between old friends, former lovers, and the ghosts they'd tried to outrun.

At one point, Hansini found herself face-to-face with Chitra.

"Glad you made it," Chitra said, voice steady but brittle.

"Thanks for inviting me," Hansini replied. "Really."

They stood there, the room swirling around them, the distance between years and heartbreaks.



Milind stepped in, breaking the moment. “Maybe this is the night we stop running.”

Joe appeared beside them, hesitant but resolute.

“I don’t want to lose you all again,” he said.

And just like that, the walls started to crumble.

Chapter Nine:
Hansini and Chitra — The
Confrontation



The soft hum of laughter and clinking glasses faded around them, as if the room itself held its breath.

Hansini and Chitra stood just a few feet apart near the corner, but the distance between them felt like miles of years.

Chitra's eyes were sharp, her voice steady but low.

"So. You really came back."

Hansini met her gaze evenly, the edges of her calm fraying.

"Yeah. I did."

Chitra's jaw tightened.

"You know, I wasn't sure if I wanted you here. After everything."

"After everything," Hansini echoed. "You mean after you chose him?"

Chitra's hands clenched into fists.

"Don't pretend it was that simple."

"Wasn't it?" Hansini challenged. "You both made your choices, and I was the one who disappeared without an explanation."

"Because you were scared," Chitra said quietly. "Scared of what you wanted, scared of what you'd lose."

Hansini's breath hitched. "I was trying to protect myself."

"By breaking all of us?"

"By leaving you to pick up the pieces, yes."

They stood there, tension crackling like static electricity, the crowd around them blurring into background noise.



Chitra's voice softened just a bit.

"I missed you. Every day. But I hated you too."

Hansini's eyes shimmered.

"I never stopped wanting a family."

Chitra swallowed.

"Neither did I."

The silence that followed was heavy—not with anger, but with something fragile, like the first cracks in a wall built to keep out pain.

Hansini finally said, "Maybe... maybe this is the closure we both needed."

Chitra nodded slowly.

"Maybe."

They didn't hug. Didn't smile. But they stayed. Close enough to begin healing.



Chapter Ten: Milind's Moment



Milind stood nearby, watching Hansini and Chitra's tension unravel into something raw, and vulnerable. It wasn't the fight he'd expected. It was quieter—like the calm before a storm, or maybe the first breath after a long hold.

He stepped forward, clearing his throat softly, drawing both their attention.

“Look, I don’t know if any of us have been very good at this whole... talking thing,” Milind began, voice steady but laced with something deeper—regret, hope, maybe a little fear.

Hansini looked up at him, eyes searching. Chitra’s jaw relaxed just enough to listen.

“We all carry pieces of the past with us. Some are heavier than others. But holding onto it like a weapon—that’s what’s been killing us,” he said.

He paused, then took a breath.

“I’ve been scared too. Scared to say what I felt. Scared that if I spoke, it would only make things worse. But hearing you both just now—I realized that maybe the real risk was staying silent.”

Hansini’s eyes softened. Chitra’s lips parted, as if to speak but stopped.

“I don’t have all the answers,” Milind admitted. “But maybe closure isn’t about perfect endings or forgiveness. Maybe it’s just about finally being honest—even when it hurts.”

He looked at both of them, then glanced toward Joe, who’d quietly joined the group, watching.



“And if we don’t try—if we keep pretending this isn’t broken—then nothing will ever change.”

The room felt lighter, as if some of the weight had lifted. The first step was out of the silence.

Milind smiled, small but genuine.

“Maybe that’s enough to start.”

Chapter Eleven:
Hansíni & Mílind — Quiet After the
Storm



The chatter and clinking glasses seemed miles away now. The air between Hansini and Milind had shifted—it was lighter, but charged with a new kind of understanding.

Milind leaned back against the wall near the window, the dim light casting soft shadows across his face.

Hansini approached slowly, hesitating like she wasn't sure if she belonged in this fragile space.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"For what?" Milind asked, eyes gentle.

"For saying what no one else would."

He shrugged, a small smile tugging at his lips. "Sometimes the hardest part is just starting."

She nodded, looking out at the city lights flickering in the night. "I've spent so long trying to forget, or pretending it didn't hurt."

"And it did," Milind said softly. "It hurt all of us."

She glanced at him, vulnerability flickering in her eyes. "I didn't know if I could face any of it again."

"You don't have to face it alone," he offered.

The words hung between them, simple but heavy.

Hansini swallowed and met his gaze. "Maybe... maybe this time, we try together."

Milind reached out, brushing a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "I'd like that."

For a moment, there was no past—just two people, standing quietly in the aftermath, ready to start something new.

Chapter Twelve:
Then — Flashback to the Quiet Night
of the Last Summer Together



The night was warm, the kind of summer evening where the air holds still and the world feels paused.

Hansini and Milind sat side by side on the old wooden dock by the lake, legs dangling just above the water's surface. The only sound was the gentle lapping of waves and distant cricket songs.

Milind pulled his jacket tighter around him.

"You're cold," Hansini said softly, nudging him.

"Not as cold as I'd be without this," he smiled, slipping his arm around her shoulders.

She leaned into him, feeling the steady rhythm of his breath.

They didn't say much—words felt unnecessary here.

After a while, Milind spoke, voice low and sure.

"You ever think about what it'd be like if we didn't have to worry about anything? No secrets. No past."

Hansini smiled, eyes shining in the moonlight.

"Sometimes. I think about that a lot."

He turned to her, hope flickering in his eyes.

"Maybe one day, we'll get that chance."

She met his gaze, heart pounding with something close to hope.

"Maybe."

They stayed there, quiet and still, as if the whole world was holding its breath alongside them.



Chapter Thirteen: Chitra's Reflection



Chitra sat alone on the balcony outside the venue, the hum of the party drifting behind the sliding glass doors. The city lights stretched out below, glittering like distant promises.

She wrapped her arms around herself, not from the chill, but from the swirl of memories and emotions she couldn't quite settle.

The summer they all lost—those long days, the rooftop nights, the tangled moments—felt both painfully close and impossibly far.

She thought about Hansini's words during the confrontation, and how raw and real they sounded.

"Maybe this is the closure we both needed."

Closure. A word Chitra had avoided, afraid of what it meant. To forgive? To forget? To admit the cracks in the foundation?

She glanced at her phone but didn't unlock it. Messages from Joe, from Milind—everyone trying in their own way to bridge the silence.

Chitra sighed, leaning back to look up at the sky. The stars were faint, shy behind the city glow.

"I never stopped wanting a family," Hansini had said. And maybe neither had she.

But wanting wasn't the same as knowing how.

She thought about the night she whispered to Joe, the night she asked him to choose—and what it had cost them all.

Maybe this reunion, this fragile reckoning, was the first step—not just for Hansini, or Milind, or Joe—but for her too.

Chitra took a deep breath. Maybe it was time to stop running.



Chapter Fourteen: Joe's Battle



Joe stood by the window in his small apartment, watching rain blur the city lights. Outside, everything seemed washed clean, but inside, his mind churned with the weight of old mistakes and unspoken words.

He ran a hand through his hair, the familiar ache settling in his chest.

Why now? He wondered. Why does it all have to come crashing back before the wedding?

He thought about Chitra—the way she looked at him when she whispered that desperate plea: “*Pick me over her.*” He’d chosen her then, but at what cost?

And Hansini—her sudden disappearance had felt like losing a part of himself. He’d buried that pain beneath layers of distraction and denial.

But now, with the rehearsal dinner, with Milind and Hansini reappearing in his life, everything was raw again.

He didn’t know if he deserved forgiveness. Didn’t know if he even deserved to face them.

Still, something inside him stirred—a flicker of hope that maybe, just maybe, there was a way to make things right.

He pulled out his phone and stared at the blank screen.

Should I reach out? He thought.

The rain tapped against the glass, steady and relentless.

Sometimes, he realized, you have to risk breaking everything to build something new.

Chapter Fifteen:
Joe's Letter, A Flashback towards
Confessions

To whoever reads this someday,

TI never was good with words. Not the ones that matter. The ones that could've saved us. The ones I needed to say but kept locked inside.

I'm sorry, Hansini. Sorry for leaving you in the dark. Sorry for choosing the easy way out when everything got messy. You deserved more than silence. You deserved truth.

Chitra, I don't know if I ever told you how scared I was that I'd lose everything—the friendship, the love, the chance to fix what was broken. Maybe I was selfish. Maybe I still am.

Milind... I'm sorry too. I see now how we all were tangled in this web of things we didn't say. I wish I'd been braver.

Tonight, as I sit here, I realize that closure isn't about forgetting or pretending none of it hurt. It's about facing it. It's about finally being honest—even if it means opening wounds.

I don't know what tomorrow holds. Maybe forgiveness is too much to ask. Maybe some things can't be fixed.

But I want to try.

I want to be better. For all of you. For myself.

If you find this, know that I'm sorry—and that I hope, somehow, we can find a way forward.

—Joe

Chapter Sixteen:
Hansíni's Quiet Moment



Hansini sat on the edge of her bed, with Joe's letter unfolded in her hands. The words felt heavy, like echoes of a past she wasn't sure she wanted to revisit, but couldn't ignore.

Her fingers traced the paper, reading and rereading his apology, his hope, and his fear.

"You deserved truth." Those words hit her hardest. She had spent years questioning why he never spoke, why silence became their barrier.

Tears welled up, not just for the pain but for the possibility—the fragile hope that maybe things could be different now.

She whispered to the empty room, "Maybe he's right. Maybe closure means facing the hurt, not running from it."

A small, tired smile crept across her lips. For the first time in a long while, she felt the faint stirrings of forgiveness—for him, for herself, and for all the broken pieces.

Chapter Seventeen:
Chitra's Quiet Moment



Chitra sat alone at her kitchen table, the letter tucked beside her untouched cup of coffee.

Her mind raced with memories—laughter, heartbreak, and the night she told Joe to choose.

She felt a knot in her chest unraveling, slow and uncertain.

She wanted to believe Joe could change, that the wounds could heal.

But the question lingered like a shadow: *Can we ever truly let go?*

Her phone buzzed — a message from Joe simply reading, “*Can we talk?*”

Chitra stared at the screen, breath caught in her throat.

Maybe this time, she thought, they would finally say what needed to be said.

Chapter Eighteen:
The Confrontation of the four



The room was thick with silence as the four of them gathered in the dimly lit living room—the flicker of candles casting long shadows on their faces.

Chitra stood by the window, arms crossed, eyes flicking between Hansini, Milind, and Joe.

Hansini sat on the couch, gripping the edge of the cushion, fighting the nerves twisting in her stomach.

Milind leaned against the doorframe, his usual calm replaced by something raw—vulnerability.

Joe took a slow breath, breaking the silence.

“I wrote a letter,” he began, voice rough. “Maybe it’s the closest thing I have to saying what I should’ve said years ago.”

Hansini’s eyes met his, and for a moment, the weight of everything hung in the air.

Chitra spoke then, voice steady but edged with pain.

“We all made mistakes. We all hurt each other. But the silence—that was the hardest part.”

Milind nodded.

“Yeah. Pretending nothing happened didn’t make it go away.”

Hansini’s voice trembled as she finally spoke.

“I don’t want to carry this forever. But I also don’t know how to forgive without understanding.”

Joe swallowed hard.

“I want to be honest now. With all of you. No more running.”



A charged pause. Then Chitra took a step forward.

“Maybe that’s what closure really means—showing up. Even when it’s hard.”

Milind looked around the room, eyes resting on each face.

“So, what now?”

Hansini exhaled slowly.

“We start by talking. Really talking.”

The walls they’d built over the years began to crack—fragile, imperfect—but real.

For the first time in a long time, there was a glimmer of hope.



Chapter Nineteen: The Reckoning



The air in the room felt thick, charged with years of silence finally breaking.

Hansini was the first to speak, her voice quiet but firm.

“I was lost. When I left, I thought disappearing was the only way to protect myself—from the pain, from the uncertainty. But all I did was leave you all behind. I’m sorry.”

Chitra’s eyes softened, but the hurt lingered.

“I felt abandoned. Like I wasn’t enough—that I wasn’t worth fighting for. And maybe I wasn’t, back then. But I wanted to try, even when it felt impossible.”

Milind stepped forward, hands clasped tightly.

“I was angry. At all of you—and at myself. I thought if I kept my distance, I could avoid the heartbreak. But avoiding didn’t make anything better.”

Joe swallowed, his voice raw.

“I was scared. Scared of losing everyone I cared about, scared of making the wrong choice. And I did. I lost us, piece by piece.”

There was a long silence, heavy but honest.

Hansini’s eyes glistened with tears.

“I don’t know if we can fix everything. But I want to try.”

Chitra nodded, a tentative smile breaking through.

“Me too.”

Milind looked at Joe.

“Maybe this time, we keep the walls down.”

Joe met his gaze, hope flickering.



“Yeah. No more running.”

Together, they sat, the weight of their past slowly giving way to the fragile light of forgiveness.



Chapter Twenty: The Breakthrough



The room was heavy with unspoken words until Hansini finally let her shoulders slump, the tension releasing like a held breath.

Tears welled up, and before she could stop them, they slipped down her cheeks.

Chitra's eyes softened instantly, and without hesitation, she crossed the room and took Hansini's hands in hers.

"I'm sorry," Chitra whispered. "For everything."

Hansini squeezed her hands back, voice trembling.

"Me too."

Milind stepped closer, placing a steady hand on Chitra's shoulder and then another on Joe's arm.

Joe looked down for a moment, then met Milind's gaze, nodding.

One by one, they closed the small distances between them, until they were a circle—imperfect, fragile, but together.

Milind broke the silence with a small laugh, breaking some of the heaviness.

"We're a mess, huh?"

Joe smiled faintly.

"Yeah, but maybe that's what makes us real."

They held that moment, with no need for words, and just a quiet reconciliation wrapped in shared pain and the hope of something better.



Chapter Twenty-One: The Disruption



The moment was still hanging in the air—soft and fragile, when a phone buzzed on the coffee table.

It was Joe's. He ignored it. Then Chitra's phone lit up. Then Hansini's.

A string of messages. Same subject line.

"Saw this and thought you should know."

Attached: a photo.

Milind picked up Hansini's phone as she froze. His face changed instantly.

"What is this?"

He turned the screen to the others. The photo showed Joe and Hansini—not recent, but recent enough—sharing what looked like an intimate moment outside a bar two weeks ago.

Joe's face blanched.

"I... it wasn't what it looks like."

Chitra stepped back like she'd been slapped.

"You said you hadn't seen each other in months."

Hansini's voice cracked. "We ran into each other. It was just a conversation."

Chitra turned toward her, wounded and wary.

"After everything we said... after we finally—"

"It wasn't betrayal," Joe said quickly. "It was closure. I didn't want to tell you because I didn't want to stir this all back up again."

Milind let out a slow breath. "Too late for that."



The air felt taut again, the warmth of forgiveness suddenly teetering on the edge.

And now, in this volatile moment, the truth had to hold—or everything they rebuilt would collapse again.



Chapter Twenty- Two: Fault Lines



Chitra stood perfectly still, her arms at her sides, hands clenched into fists.

It wasn't the photo. Not really.

It was the *lie of omission*. The choice to leave it out, after all their words about honesty and showing up.

"You said this was about moving forward," she said, voice flat, eyes burning. "But you were still rewriting the past without me."

Hansini took a step forward, eyes wide, voice shaking.

"Chitra, I swear—nothing happened. We talked. We cried. That's it. I didn't say anything because I didn't want it to hurt you. But maybe that was selfish."

Chitra turned to her, trembling.

"You had the chance to tell me. You *both* did. And you didn't."

Joe, his face pale, tried to steady his voice.

"I didn't know how to bring it up. It wasn't a secret... but it felt like admitting it would break everything before we even began."

Milind let out a hollow laugh and ran a hand through his hair.

"This is exactly what I meant when I said I stayed away to avoid the heartbreak. This. Right here."

He looked at them all, jaw tight.

"You all say you want closure. But maybe closure doesn't mean dragging every scar into the light just to pretend it heals better that way."



Silence. Heavy and raw.

Then Chitra looked at each of them, her voice softer now but steadier.

“You didn’t break us. We were already cracked. Maybe this... just shows us where we still bleed.”

She stepped back.

“I need time. That’s not punishment. It’s space. For *real* clarity.”

Without another word, she walked out the door, leaving them in a silence that no longer felt shared.



Chapter Twenty-Three: Chitra Alone



The air outside was sharp and cool, biting against her skin as Chitra walked through the quiet streets. She hadn't brought a jacket, and hadn't even realized she'd left the house until the door clicked shut behind her.

She kept walking.

Her shoes clacked against the pavement, a grounding rhythm against the chaos in her chest.

The image of Joe and Hansini outside that bar played on a loop in her mind—not the closeness of their bodies, but the *familiarity* in their posture. The easy comfort she hadn't shared with him in years.

She wasn't jealous. That wasn't it.

She was *tired*.

Tired of being looped into triangles and unfinished stories. Tired of trying to be the bigger person. Tired of *hoping*.

She stopped at a small, closed café she used to frequent—its lights off now, a forgotten chapter. She slid down onto the curb, knees to her chest, and let herself cry.

But it wasn't just sadness.

It was grief.

For the girl she'd been that summer.

For the friendships, they'd all worn them like armor.

For the versions of each other they kept pretending they were still real.

She thought about Milind, steady but hurt. Hansini, guarded but still reaching. Joe, torn and remorseful.



They were all fractured.

And still—some part of her wanted to believe healing was possible. But not without honesty. Not without hard choices.

Chitra wiped her eyes, took a deep breath, and whispered aloud into the quiet street:

“I deserve something whole.”

And maybe that meant walking away.

Or maybe... it meant walking back with her on her own terms.



Chapter Twenty-Four: The Choice



The morning light found Chitra still sitting on that curb.

She hadn't slept. But for once, that didn't feel like a weakness.

It felt like clarity.

The city was just beginning to stir, the streets washing themselves clean with early traffic and the warm scent of brewing coffee from shops beginning to open.

Chitra pulled out her phone, her thumb hovering over her messages.

There were notifications from all three of them—Milind, Hansini, and Joe.

She didn't open them.

Not yet.

Instead, she opened her notes app. Not to text. But to write—to herself.

Closure isn't about who's sorry.

It's about who's honest.

It's about whether I can sit in a room with these people and *still be myself*.

Not the version of me they remember.

Not the version that keeps the peace.

Me.

She stared at the words, then exhaled.

Standing up slowly, she looked around like she was seeing the neighborhood for the first time. There was a quiet



strength building in her, like something had finally clicked into place—not a fix, but a *center*.

She started walking again. But this time, she wasn't running away.

She was heading toward something—maybe not reconciliation, not yet—but her own version of truth.

She texted Hansini first: “Let’s talk. Just us.”

Then Milind: “I see you. I appreciate you.
I’ll reach out soon.”

And finally, Joe.

She paused the longest before typing.

“I don’t hate you. But I need to understand you better before I can trust you again.”

Then she tucked her phone away and kept walking—toward herself, toward the mess, toward whatever was waiting next.



Chapter Twenty-Five: Just Us



They met at the park. Neutral ground. Open air. No expectations.

Hansini was already seated on a bench under a massive sycamore tree, her legs crossed, hands fidgeting in her lap.

Chitra approached slowly, and quietly, and sat beside her—leaving a respectful space between them.

No one spoke at first.

Birds chirped lazily overhead. A jogger passed. Somewhere nearby, a dog barked.

Finally, Hansini broke the silence.

“I was afraid you wouldn’t come.”

Chitra glanced at her, expression calm but unreadable.

“I almost didn’t.”

Hansini nodded. “Fair.”

Another beat of silence passed before Hansini spoke again, her voice low.

“I didn’t tell you about seeing Joe because I was ashamed. Not because of what happened—but because it meant something. And I didn’t know how to explain that without sounding like I was still caught between you two.”

Chitra turned to face her more directly now, her voice quiet but steady.

“I would’ve rather heard that than been blindsided. I’ve spent years trying to guess how people really feel. I’m done with that.”



Hansini's eyes filled, but she didn't look away.

"You have every right to be angry. I wasn't honest. I told myself I was protecting you, but maybe I was just protecting *us*—the version of us I didn't want to lose."

Chitra blinked slowly.

"You didn't lose me because you saw him. You lost part of me when you didn't trust me with the truth."

Hansini looked down at her hands, twisting a silver ring around her finger.

"I miss you, Chitra. Not the old days. *You*. I don't know who I am without our friendship."

Chitra's voice softened.

"You're someone who's still learning. So am I. Maybe that's the only place we *can* meet right now."

They sat with that for a long moment—neither forcing forgiveness nor offering it blindly.

Then Chitra reached out, gently placing her hand over Hansini's.

A peace offering. Not a promise, but a *possibility*.

Hansini squeezed it.

"No more lies?"

"No more pretending," Chitra replied.

And somehow, that felt more honest than forgiveness.



Chapter Twenty-Six: The Mirror



Joe sat on the floor of his hotel room, back against the bed, the unread messages glowing on his phone like silent confessions.

He'd read Chitra's text five times.

"I don't hate you. But I need to understand you better before I can trust you again."

He ran a hand through his hair, staring out the window at the city's blurry skyline. It used to feel full of possibility. Now it felt like a question mark.

The photo had been reckless, sure. But the lie? That had been *calculated*.

He had told himself it was mercy. Sparing Chitra from unnecessary pain.

But the truth?

It had been *cowardice*.

He hadn't known how to face what was still alive between them—those years of unsaid feelings, of roads not taken. So, he buried it under silence.

Joe reached for the small leather notebook he always carried—half lyrics, half confessions. He flipped to a blank page and started writing.

I told myself I protected you.

But I only protected myself.

Because if you knew how much I still cared—

You'd see how weak I still am.

I'm not afraid of losing you.



I'm afraid you'll never trust me again.

And I deserve that.

But I'm still here.

Still hoping.

He stared at the words, then tore the page out. Not to throw away—but to give. Eventually. Maybe.

His phone buzzed again—Milind, this time.

“You, okay?”

Joe stared at the message for a long moment.

Then typed: “Not really. But maybe that’s the point.”



Chapter Twenty-Seven: The Distance Between Us



Milind found Joe alone at the edge of the hotel rooftop bar, leaning over the glass railing like the skyline might offer answers. The late afternoon sun painted the buildings gold, but the weight between them dimmed the light.

Milind didn't say anything at first. He just walked over, leaned beside him, hands in his pockets.

Joe glanced sideways.

"You came to throw a punch?"

Milind shrugged. "I thought about it."

A quiet beat passed between them.

Joe gave a dry laugh.

"Well, that's fair."

Milind turned his gaze toward the horizon.

"I didn't care about the photo. Not really. Not even about you and Hansini talking."

Joe looked over, surprised.

Milind went on.

"I cared that you didn't say anything. You always think you're the one protecting everyone, but really, you just don't want to feel responsible when it all falls apart."

Joe flinched. "That's not—"

"It *is*," Milind interrupted. Calm, but firm. "You disappear when it gets messy. And when you don't disappear, you deflect."

Joe looked down at his hands, gripping the railing.



Milind's tone softened.

"I used to think you had it all together. You were always the one people wanted. But man... underneath all that charm, you're just as scared as the rest of us."

Joe laughed bitterly. "You think I don't know that?"

"I think you pretend not to," Milind said. Then, quieter:

"And I think Chitra sees through that now."

Joe's mouth opened, then closed. The truth settled like dust.

Finally, he asked, "Do you hate me?"

Milind took a long breath.

"No. I just don't trust you."

Joe nodded slowly. "That's worse."

"Maybe," Milind agreed. "But it's honest."

They stood in silence, city wind tugging at their shirts, the skyline stretching far beyond the mess they'd made.

Then Milind clapped a hand on Joe's shoulder—not in forgiveness, but in acknowledgment.

"You want to fix things?" he asked. "Start by showing up. Without excuses."

Joe nodded once, solemn.

"I will."



Chapter Twenty-Eight: Dressing for the Truth



Chitra stood in front of the mirror, holding two dresses. One was soft blue, flowing, and romantic—the kind of thing people expected her to wear. Gentle. Graceful. Unthreatening.

The other was a deep maroon. Structured. Bold. A little dramatic. It made her shoulders look strong and her spine feel taller.

She looked between them, then hung the blue one back up without a second thought.

She wasn't dressing for nostalgia. Not tonight.

As she slipped into the maroon dress, her hands felt steady. No tremble. No second-guessing. The fabric hugged her like memory—but the kind that no longer stung.

Her phone chimed. A message from Hansini.

“See you soon. Whatever happens, I’m proud of you.”

She smiled softly, tucking the phone away.

Chitra turned back to the mirror, taking in the whole image: her face, calm but unreadable; her eyes, no longer searching; her posture, rooted.

She wasn't going to the pre-wedding reception for closure anymore.

She was going to be seen—*as she is now*. Not who she was that summer. Not the girl caught between love and loyalty.

Just Chitra.



She applied lipstick like war paint—not to impress, but to *arrive*.

Then she picked up her bag, exhaled once through her nose, and walked out the door into the evening light.



Chapter Twenty-Nine: The Moment Before



Milind stood near the entrance to the reception hall, tucked just off to the side beneath a warm archway of string lights and ivy. People drifted past in elegant waves—laughter, music, and polite conversation weaving through the air—but his gaze stayed fixed on the cobblestone path.

He hadn't been waiting for her.

But he hadn't stopped watching, either.

And then, she appeared.

Chitra.

Walking slowly, deliberately, alone.

The maroon dress caught the golden-hour light like fire. Her hair was swept up, neck bare, and back straight. Every step she took was unhurried—not cautious, not hesitant, but *decided*.

She didn't glance around for anyone.

She wasn't looking for him.

But *he* couldn't stop looking at *her*.

Milind felt something shift in his chest—not the old ache, not quite longing, but something else.

Respect.

Awe.

And the distinct, quiet grief of realizing he didn't know this version of her.

Not yet.



She walked through the archway and into the reception without noticing him. And Milind let her pass, not calling out, not chasing.

But as she moved past him, her perfume caught on the air—soft, familiar—and she paused.

Just for a second.

Her head didn't turn, but he saw her shoulders still.

She had known he was there.

And still, she kept walking.

Milind let out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding.

“Okay,” he whispered, more to himself than anyone.

Then he followed her in—a few steps behind, exactly where he needed to be.

For now.



Chapter Thirty: Just Between Us



The garden terrace behind the reception hall was quiet—string lights glowing above rows of unclaimed cocktail tables. From inside came faint music, bursts of laughter, clinking glasses.

Hansini stood near the edge of the terrace, her back to the party. A glass of champagne in one hand, the other lightly resting on the cold stone ledge.

She didn't hear Joe approach until he was only a few steps away.

"You always did hate crowds," he said gently.

She turned, unsurprised. "And you always manage to find the one person trying to disappear."

He offered a small smile. "It's a gift."

They stood there a moment, looking at each other—not with heat or longing, but with a deep, unsettled familiarity.

"I talked to Chitra," Hansini said softly.

Joe nodded. "I figured."

"She's not mad the way people think she is. She's just... done being managed."

"That's fair," he said, voice low. "I've been managing everything for years. Turns out, people don't want caretakers—they want *truth*."

Hansini took a sip of her drink. "So why didn't you tell her? About us talking again. About what you felt."

He didn't answer right away.

Finally:

"Because I didn't know what it meant. And I didn't want to confuse that uncertainty with love."



Hansini looked down at her glass, swirling the bubbles.

“You think this—us—was ever about love?”

“I think,” he said, meeting her eyes, “it was about *understanding*. And maybe being seen when we felt invisible to everyone else.”

She blinked, caught off guard by the clarity of that.

Joe stepped closer, but not intimately. Just honestly.

“You were there when everything broke. You were *real* with me. I clung to that. But it doesn’t mean I belong with you.”

Hansini smiled, but it didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Closure’s a funny thing. Sometimes you don’t get it through the person. You get it through the *conversation*.”

They clinked glasses softly. A toast to no longer being ghosts.

“Are we good?” He asked.

Hansini shrugged. “We’re honest. That’s enough.”

And with that, she turned and headed inside—not cold, not emotional.

Just *finished*.

Joe stood a moment longer, watching the space she’d left behind.

He didn’t feel lighter.

But he did feel *clear*.



Chapter Thirty-One: The Threshold



Hansini stepped back into the reception hall, the warmth and noise hitting her like a wave. People milled about in curated pockets of joy—smiling too brightly, sipping too carefully, spinning stories too tightly.

She moved slowly, scanning the room out of habit more than intent.

And then she saw her.

Chitra.

Standing near a table of flickering candles and tall glasses of wine. Laughing—not loudly, but freely—at something someone had said. One hand on her hip, the maroon dress catching the light like something alive.

Hansini stopped walking.

The sight caught her breath.

Not because Chitra looked beautiful—she always had—but because she looked whole. Not performing. Not reaching.

Just... herself.

Chitra turned just then, as if pulled by something unseen. Her eyes met Hansini's.

The smile faded into something gentler. Curious. Careful.

Hansini took a breath. She crossed the floor slowly, heels clicking against the polished wood.

When they were face to face, there was no hug. No apology. Just presence.

Chitra spoke first.

“Hey.”



“Hey,” Hansini echoed, softer.

A pause. A long one.

And then Hansini offered, not forced:

“You look like you’re exactly where you’re supposed to be.”

Chitra’s smile curved at the edges. “For once, I think I am.”

Another silence. But not a cold one. Just *full*.

Hansini gestured toward the candlelit table. “Want to sit for a second? Just us?”

Chitra glanced around—the party humming, Milind somewhere in the crowd, Joe somewhere behind them.

Then back to Hansini.

She nodded.

“Yeah. Let’s sit.”

And for the first time in what felt like years, they sat *with each other*, not around the past.

Not pretending.

Not performing.

Just women. Just friends. Just honest.

And that, finally, was enough.



Chapter Thirty-Two: Third Chair



Milind spotted them from across the room.
Hansini and Chitra.

Sitting side by side at a candlelit table near the edge of the reception space. No fanfare. No tension. Just two women, once fractured, sharing silence like it meant something again.

He stopped mid-step, drink in hand, unsure whether to approach or give them space.

Something about the moment felt sacred.

He watched as Chitra leaned in slightly, murmuring something that made Hansini smile—not the camera-ready kind, but the small, genuine kind Hansini used to reserve for inside jokes and Sunday mornings.

The sight brought an unexpected tightness to his chest.

Not jealousy.

Not even longing.

Just *gratitude*—that they'd found their way to this place. That he hadn't broken it beyond repair. That they could sit beside one another, after everything, with nothing left to prove.

Hansini glanced up first and saw him.

She tilted her head, half-inviting, half-challenging. As if to say, “*Are you coming or just going to stand there like a lost puppy?*”

Chitra turned next. Her expression was unreadable at first.

Then: a slight nod. Open. Calm.

Milind crossed the room slowly, his every step deliberate.

As he reached the table, Hansini smirked. “Look who remembered how to walk.”



He gave a lopsided smile. “I’ve been training for this moment.”

Chitra gestured to the empty chair between them.

“You gonna sit, or just orbit?”

He sat.

And for a few long seconds, none of them spoke.

The candles flickered. Music swelled faintly in the background. Distant laughter floated through the air.

Then Hansini raised her glass. “To impossible conversations.”

Milind clinked his glass gently against hers. “And the people brave enough to have them.”

Chitra met their eyes, then tapped her glass to theirs.

“To the ones who stayed.”

And with that, the three of them sat—not fixed, but *together*.

It wasn’t resolution.

It was something better:

Beginning again.



Chapter Thirty-Three: The Edge of the Circle



Joe stood in the shadow of the archway near the bar; his fingers curled around a sweating glass of water he hadn't touched.

He hadn't meant to watch them.

But when he saw Chitra, Milind, and Hansini sitting together—three points of a triangle that had once threatened to collapse inward—he couldn't look away.

No fireworks. No drama.

Just the simple, impossible reality of them laughing. Low, easy laughter. Heads tilted in, faces soft, the tension of years dissolving under the low light of string bulbs and quiet courage.

He felt like a man standing outside a home with the lights on—able to see the warmth, but not touch it.

Chitra looked different tonight. Not just the dress or the poise—but something beneath it. She wasn't waiting for someone to choose her.

She had chosen herself.

Hansini had softened, too—not in posture, but in presence. The sharp edges she'd worn like armor had given way to something wiser. She wasn't fighting anymore. She didn't have to.

And Milind...

Milind, who once stood behind Joe in everything—sports, school, girls, grief—now looked like someone entirely his own. Steady. Rooted. Present.

Joe swallowed hard.



For the first time, he wondered if maybe he'd been the one circling the story, not the center of it.

His thumb rubbed the condensation from the glass.

He didn't feel bitter.

He felt *small*.

But in a strange, necessary way.

He took one step forward, then stopped.

The old version of him would've interrupted, inserted, and tried to reestablish control of the narrative.

But tonight, he simply watched.

Let them have this moment.

Let them be *whole*.

And quietly, without a word, he turned and walked outside, into the night.

Not in retreat—

But in recognition.



Chapter Thirty-Four: The Test



The morning of the wedding day dawned bright, but the calm was deceptive.

As the group gathered to finalize preparations, an unexpected visitor arrived—Chitra’s father, Dev, a man she hadn’t seen or spoken to in years.

His presence was a shockwave, stirring old wounds and threatening to unravel the delicate peace they’d all fought to build.

Dev’s eyes scanned the room, resting on Chitra with a mixture of regret and something harder to read.

“Chitra,” he said, voice low but carrying across the room, “we need to talk.”

The air thickened instantly. Hansini’s hand tightened around Milind’s arm. Joe’s jaw clenched.

Chitra took a shaky breath, her heart pounding. She wasn’t sure if she was ready for this confrontation—not now, not after everything.

But there was no turning away.

The group watched silently, their fragile trust and newfound hope hanging in the balance.

Would they stand together or fall apart at the first real test?



Chapter Thirty-Five: Facing Dev



Chitra stood in the quiet foyer, the buzz of the wedding preparations fading behind the closed door.

Dev's eyes searched hers, heavy with years of regret and unspoken apologies.

"I never thought I'd see you again," he said, voice rough. "Not like this. Not after everything."

Chitra's throat tightened. Memories surged—the fights, the silences, the night she left home with nothing but a suitcase and a heart full of questions.

"Why now?" she asked, voice steady despite the tremor inside. "After all this time... why show up today?"

Dev looked away, shame flickering in his gaze. "Because I'm afraid you'll walk away for good. Because I want to try—if you'll let me."

She swallowed hard, the years of hurt and anger rising to the surface.

"I spent so long waiting for you to be the father I needed," she said, tears threatening. "But you weren't there. And I had to learn to be strong on my own."

He stepped closer, hesitating. "I know I can't change the past. But I'm here now. I want to make it right."

Chitra looked at him, searching for the man behind the mistakes.

Maybe forgiveness wasn't forgetting. Maybe it was choosing to face the pain—together.

Her voice softened. "I don't know if I'm ready to forgive you. But I'm willing to try."



Dev nodded, relief and hope mingling in his eyes.

For the first time in years, a door opened—a chance for healing, fragile but real.



Chapter Thirty-Six: The Aftermath



Chitra rejoined the group in the garden, her face pale but eyes steadier than before.

Hansini was the first to notice.

“Chitra, are you okay?”

Chitra gave a small, tired smile.

“I talked to him.”

Milind stepped closer, concern etched across his face.

“Dev? Your dad?”

Chitra nodded.

“It was hard. But... I think it was the first real step toward something I’ve been avoiding for years.”

Joe let out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding.

“That takes strength.”

Hansini reached out, her voice gentle.

“You don’t have to do this alone.”

Chitra looked around at the faces she’d come to trust again—imperfect, but present.

“Thanks. I’m scared, but... it feels different this time.”

Milind gave a reassuring smile.

“We’re with you. Every step.”

Joe added, “Whatever happens, we face it together.”

The group gathered closer, the bond between them deepening—not just from shared pain, but from a newfound commitment to healing.



Outside, the sun broke through the clouds, casting a warm glow over the day.

And for the first time in a long time, hope felt real.



Chapter Thirty-Seven: The Last-minute Twist



The ceremony was unfolding beautifully—the gentle hum of guests settling, the soft rustle of flowers, and the promise of new beginnings hanging in the warm air.

Chitra stood at the altar, heart pounding but calm, surrounded by those who had fought so hard to reach this moment.

Then, just as the officiant began the opening words, a sudden commotion stirred at the back of the garden.

A woman stepped forward—someone unexpected: Dev’s estranged wife, and Chitra’s stepmother, Kala.

Her voice was sharp, cutting through the quiet.

“Chitra, wait. Before you say your vows, there’s something you deserve to hear.”

Gasps rippled through the crowd.

Chitra’s eyes widened in shock. Joe shifted protectively. Hansini’s hand tightened around Milind’s.

Kala’s presence threatened to unravel the fragile peace, forcing Chitra to face yet another piece of her past—and the choice of whether to let it shadow her future.



Chapter Thirty-Eight: Chitra's Crossroads



Chitra's breath caught. The crowd blurred around her like a distant tide, crashing but fading.

Kala's words felt like a storm breaking over her—uninvited, wild, and relentless.

What now? Her mind screamed. *Not again. Not today.*

Memories tangled inside her: the years of silence, the shattered promises, the sharp edges of rejection.

Her heart pounded, a chaotic rhythm of fear and anger and exhaustion.

Can I stand here? Can I forgive again? Can I protect myself this time?

Her eyes flicked to Milind, steady and waiting. To Hansini, whose quiet strength bolstered her. To Joe, who'd fought to rebuild trust.

They're here. I'm not alone.

The weight on her chest began to lift—just a little.

She took a slow breath, gathering the fragments of herself.

This is my moment.

With trembling hands but steady eyes, she squared her shoulders.

Kala's words might shake the ground, but Chitra would decide whether to fall—or to stand.

Chapter Thirty-Nine:
Chitra Speaks



The garden held its breath as Chitra stepped forward, her voice calm but unwavering.

“Kala, thank you for coming. I’m sure what you have to say feels important, but this—” she gestured to the gathering, “—this moment is mine.”

She paused, eyes steady.

“I’ve spent years facing pieces of my past I never thought I could survive. I’ve wrestled with pain, with silence, with fear. But I’m standing here today because I choose to move forward.”

Her gaze softened but didn’t waver.

“If there’s something that needs to be said, it can wait. Today is about new beginnings—not reopening old wounds.”

Kala’s face tightened, caught between frustration and something like respect.

Chitra took a breath and looked out at the crowd.

“I’m ready to say my vows—not because my past is perfect, but because I’m ready to be brave enough to build a future.”

A quiet murmur of approval rose around her.

She met Joes’s eyes and smiled—a promise shared between them.

And with that, she turned back to the officiant, ready to begin.



Chapter Forty: Strength in Unity



As Chitra's voice settled, a wave of relief washed over the group.

Hansini stepped forward first, offering a warm smile.

"That was incredible, Chitra. You owned that moment."

Joe nodded, his eyes shining with pride.

"You stood your ground. You showed all of us what it means to be strong."

Milind exhaled, a weight lifting from his shoulders.

"I'm so glad you didn't let the past steal today from you."

Chitra looked around, her heart swelling with gratitude.

"I couldn't have done it without you—all of you."

Hansini reached out, taking Chitra's hand gently.

"We're in this together, no matter what comes next."

Joe pulled the group into a loose circle, their hands overlapping in the center.

"This is our family now."

They shared a quiet moment, the kind that needs no words—a testament to their shared journey from fractured to whole.

Outside, the ceremony resumed, but inside the circle, a new strength had been forged—one built on honesty, courage, and unwavering support.

Chapter Forty-One:
Quiet Reflections After All of the Chaos
and Embrace

Chitra

As she stepped back, Chitra felt a weight lifting—a fragile hope stirring inside her chest. The tears had been a release, but more than that, they were a sign she was ready to heal. For years, she had carried bitterness like armor, but now, for the first time, she felt the courage to lower it. The path ahead was uncertain, but maybe, just maybe, she could find peace without running.

The confrontation with Hansini, her father, and Kala's interruption—all felt like storms she'd weathered. Now, standing here, she embraced the imperfect beauty of this moment. Closure wasn't a destination, she realized—it was a series of choices, made every day.

Hansini

Hansini's hands still tingled from holding Chitra's, a warmth she hadn't expected. Forgiveness was never easy for her—she had built walls to protect herself—but the moment softened those defenses. Watching Chitra, she felt a swell of pride and tenderness. Their journey had been rocky, but seeing Chitra claim her strength gave her courage to face her own shadows. Maybe closure wasn't just about endings—it was about connection, too, it wasn't about erasing the past; it was about accepting it and choosing to move forward, even with the scars. A small, cautious optimism took root. She vowed silently to nurture these bonds they'd rebuilt.

Milind

Standing in the circle, Milind felt a strange calm settle over him. The anger and frustration that had simmered beneath the surface began to fade. What mattered now wasn't who was to blame but what they could build together moving



forward. He promised himself to be more present, more honest—not just for the group, but for himself. Milind’s gaze lingered on Chitra, admiration deepening with every breath. The fragility they’d all shown made their future feel real and reachable. He felt a renewed commitment—not just to Chitra, but to being present, honest, and brave. The past was behind them; what mattered was what they built now.

Joe

Joe looked around at the others, their faces reflecting the same mix of vulnerability and hope he felt inside. The letter he’d written was just the start; this moment was the real turning point. He understood that trust would have to be earned, not demanded, and that meant patience. But he was willing—finally—to put in the work. He felt a quiet peace settle inside him, rare and welcome. He still carried regrets, but for the first time, those regrets felt like lessons, not chains. He promised himself to keep earning trust, one day at a time.



Chapter Forty-Two: The Quiet Talk



After the ceremony, as guests mingled and laughter filled the air, Chitra found a quiet corner of the garden where Hansini was sitting alone, watching the sunset.

Chitra approached softly.

“Hansini?”

Hansini looked up, her smile warm but tinged with emotion.

“Chitra. You look radiant.”

Chitra sank beside her.

“Today felt like a turning point—not just for me, but for us. For everything we’ve been through.”

Hansini nodded, her eyes glistening.

“I was scared we’d never get here. But maybe closure isn’t about endings—it’s about the courage to keep trying, to keep showing up.”

Chitra smiled, feeling the truth in Hansini’s words.

“I’m grateful to have you by my side. For the honesty, the fights, the healing.”

Hansini reached out, taking Chitra’s hand gently.

“No matter what happens next, we face it together.”

They sat in comfortable silence, the sun dipping low, painting the sky with colors of hope.

Two souls, imperfect but united—ready for whatever came next.



Chapter Forty-Three: Celebration and New Beginnings



The music swelled softly, mingling with laughter and the clinking of glasses as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Chitra and Joe moved together across the dance floor, their smiles bright with the promise of the future.

Around them, friends and family shared stories, danced, and celebrated—not just a wedding, but the journey that brought them here.

Chitra laughed freely, her eyes sparkling as Joe pulled her into a playful spin.

For all the pain, the fights, and the doubts, this night was proof that closure wasn't an end—it was a beginning.

Under the twinkling lights, surrounded by love and renewed hope, they found their peace.

And as the stars emerged, the world felt wide open—full of possibility, forgiveness, and the courage to move forward.



Chapter Forty-Four: Milind's Letter of Closure

Later in the evening Hansini found something in her room:

She found it in the second-hand book he'd slipped into her bag.

"You mentioned you missed this one," he'd said, handing her an old copy of *The Bell Jar* with the spine cracked and the margins scarred with someone else's thoughts. She hadn't realized until now that he'd added one of his own.

Folded neatly between pages 87 and 88—right after that line about wanting to be everything and nothing all at once—was a single sheet of paper.

She didn't open it right away.

Hansini sat on the edge of her bed; the room dim except for the lamp's golden pool. Rain tapped on the window. The city outside blurred like a memory refusing to focus.

When she finally unfolded it, her hands trembled—not from fear, but from knowing *this mattered*.

To Hansini,

Since you asked me to write the truth the other day so here it is.

I don't know if this is a letter or a poem.

Maybe it's both.

Maybe that's what we were too—something in-between.

Not quite a love story, not quite a friendship.

Just pages we never finished writing.

There are a hundred things I never said to you,



because I thought silence was safer.

I thought being the quiet one meant I couldn't be blamed for the fire.

But maybe silence is just another kind of match.

You asked me once what I believed in.

I told you "Timing."

But I was lying.

I've always believed in you.

Not the version everyone saw.

Not the polished, polite, trying-to-please-everyone Hansini.

I believed in you who stayed up late asking questions too big for the room.

The you who left when it hurt too much to stay.

The you who deserved someone to follow her,

but never asked anyone to.

I should have followed.

And if I'm being honest—

There was a part of me that loved you.

Not loudly. Not clearly.

But in the quiet way a song gets stuck in your head long after the music stops.

So, this isn't a love letter.

But it is a beginning.

And I hope you read it
and feel a little less alone
in the wreckage of what we never said.

—Milind

She read it once.

Then again.

By the third time, tears slid down her cheeks, silent and unchecked. Not the kind that comes from pain—but the kind that arrives when you realize someone saw you... even when you were trying not to be seen.

It wasn't just the words. It was the *space* between them.

The ache. The hesitation. The apology tucked inside the metaphors.

And the line she read over and over again:

There was a part of me that loved you.

Not loudly. Not clearly.

But in the quiet way a song gets stuck in your head...

She closed her eyes, and for the first time since returning, the anger inside her eased just enough to let grief breathe.

And then, something else.

Not quite forgiveness.

Not quite resolution.

But maybe the beginning of *readiness*.

She folded the letter again, carefully this time, and slid it back between the pages. Not to hide it—but to keep it safe.



Chapter Forty-Five: Hansíni's Reply



She stared at the blank message on her phone for twenty minutes before deciding it wasn't right.

Too cold. Too easy to ignore.

Instead, she pulled out a notebook. The same one she used to write poems in when they were all still pretending nothing was broken.

And this time, she didn't try to make it pretty.

Milind,

I don't know what this is either.

Not a letter. Not a poem.

Maybe just a pause.

I read what you wrote—three times, actually.

Not because I didn't get it, but because I did.

Too much, maybe.

It made me feel like I was seventeen again and someone finally turned the lights on.

I remember everything from that summer.

The rooftop.

The jokes that turned into secrets.

The silence that turned into distance.

You were always the quiet one. But not the absent one.

You were there.

When Chitra stopped calling.

When Joe started lying.



When I started fading.

You were always there. I just didn't think anyone noticed me
falling.

And now I'm here, years later, and you hand me this letter
like it's nothing—

But it's everything.

Thank you.

For seeing me.

For remembering.

For not asking for anything but the truth.

So, here's mine:

There was a part of me that loved you too.

Not the way stories usually tell it.

But in the way I kept looking for you in every room—

Even after I left.

I don't know what happens next.

But I'm still here.

If you want to talk.

Really talk.

—H

She didn't send it right away.

She sat with it. Re-read it. Didn't change a word.

Then she snapped a photo of the page and hit send.

No emojis. No explanation. Just her words, on paper.



And then she waited—not with dread, but with something unfamiliar.

Hope.

Chapter Forty-Six:
Milind — What Comes After

The photo came in just after midnight.

Milind was in bed, half-asleep, headphones on, listening to that same old Backstreet Boys album. He almost ignored the ping—thought it was just a news alert or some algorithm reminding him to drink water.

But then he saw her name.

Hansini.

His breath caught a little, like his body knew before his mind did.

He opened the message.

One photo.

A page from a notebook.

Her handwriting—half cursive, half rushed. Familiar in the way old songs are: soft and haunting and too much, all at once.

He read it once.

And then again, slower.

The corners of his mouth twitched. Not a smile, exactly. Something heavier. More *real*. Like someone had just pressed their palm to the centre of his chest and said, *See? You're still beating.*

He set the phone down, lay back, and stared at the ceiling for a while.

She'd said *she used to love him, too.*

Not clearly. Not loudly.

But *truly.*



And she was still here.

If he wanted to talk.

He got up, made tea he wouldn't drink, and sat at the kitchen table where the light was warm and the air was still.

Then, finally, he typed:

I don't know what this is either.

But I'd like to find out.

Coffee? Or maybe that park with the giant willow tree you used to write under?

I'll bring the kind of silence that lets you breathe.

And this time, I won't let it do all the talking.

He hit send.

No panic. No second-guessing.

Just a quiet certainty in his chest:

Whatever this was becoming—it deserved a chance to begin.



Chapter Forty-Seven: The Willow



The tree looked smaller than she remembered.
Or maybe Hansini was just taller now. Older. Wiser.

Tired.

She arrived first, notebook in hand, even though she hadn't planned to write.

The willow hung low and soft, its branches brushing the grass like it was trying to whisper secrets to the earth. The wind carried that warm pre-summer hum—lazy, alive, and just unsettled enough to match her nerves.

Then she saw him.

Milind.

Gray hoodie. Two coffees. That quiet walk that said he never needed the world to look at him to feel present in it.

He spotted her and raised one of the cups. "Still drink it black?"

Hansini nodded, smiling. "Only if I'm trying to feel something."

He handed it over, then sat beside her on the bench beneath the willow's wide, green shadow.

For a while, they just drank.

No words. No rush.

And then—

"You really kept the same number?" She asked.

He chuckled. "It was linked to my streaming account. Changing it felt like too much work."

"Lazy or sentimental?"



“Both,” he said. “But mostly... I think I was hoping someone might still use it.”

She glanced at him. He wasn’t looking at her—just staring at the branches above, where sunlight slipped through in slices.

“I was angry with you,” she said softly.

“I know.”

“For not stopping me.”

“I didn’t know how.”

“You were always the only one who saw me clearly. And still... you didn’t say anything.”

Milind set his coffee down, and turned towards her. “I thought loving you quietly was better than risking you walking away. Turns out, silence doesn’t protect anything. It just postpones the loss.”

She swallowed. “I wish you’d told me then.”

“I’m telling you now.”

Silence again. This time not heavy, but full.

Then Hansini asked, “Why now? Why not let it stay buried?”

Milind hesitated. Then:

“Because watching you come back and pretend none of it mattered was killing me. And because closure isn’t silence. It’s speaking the things you never thought you’d be brave enough to say.”

She looked down at her notebook, and ran her fingers over the worn cover.



“I used to come here and write about what I wanted from you,” she said. “But I never thought to just... ask.”

He waited.

So, she asked.

“What did you want from me, Milind?”

His eyes softened.

“Not much,” he said. “Just your truth. And maybe... your hand.”

Slowly, without fanfare, she reached for him.

And this time, no one let go first.

Epilogue:
Rising Light



The next day, the wedding celebration had slowly melted into the soft hush of evening, everyone gathered for a final sign off before promising to meet again, regularly, often or may be in some next big event. Warm laughter and lingering conversations drifted through the garden, where paper lanterns glowed faintly, waiting to be set free.

Hansini stood among her closest friends—Milind, Chitra, Joe—each holding a lantern, the delicate paper cool and fragile in their hands.

They each took a moment to write a single word, a name, or a feeling on their lanterns. Some wrote forgiveness, others hope, and some names long tucked away in shadow. Hansini's fingers trembled as she traced the word closure, a word she once thought out of reach.

The group gathered close, sharing a collective breath—a silent ritual that bound their past, present, and future in one hopeful moment.

With a gentle nod, Hansini released her lantern. It floated upward, glowing like a fragile star against the deepening sky.

One by one, the others followed. The garden filled with shimmering orbs drifting higher, carrying their fears, regrets, and pain—leaving behind the weight of old wounds.

Joe squeezed Chitra's hand softly.

“Here's to new beginnings!”

Hansini smiled, eyes shining with quiet strength.

“To healing, and to never walking alone!”

Milind watched the lanterns soar until they were tiny lights, swallowed by the vast night.



“I’m ready for what’s next,” he said softly.

Under the endless stars, they stood united—imperfect, hopeful, and ready.

The lanterns disappeared into the darkness, but their light lingered—an eternal reminder that closure is not about forgetting, but about rising, letting go, and moving forward together.



Everyone Needs Closure

Final Words



Closure is not a destination—it is a journey.

It is the courage to face the past,
the grace to forgive,
and the strength to move forward.

It is messy, imperfect, and deeply human.

Hansini, Chitra, Milind, and Joe remind us that everyone
needs closure—

not just to heal old wounds,
but to open new doors.

To step into the future with open hearts,
even when shadows of the past remain.

Their stories reveal a quiet truth:

Closure does not mean forgetting or erasing pain.

It means embracing all parts of ourselves,
choosing connection over silence,
and daring to hope again.

Because in the end,
closure is not about endings—

It is about beginnings.

विपुल गोयल

शब्द के शायर