

WHEN TIME STOOD STILL
THOSE FOUR
Days

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

New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

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BlueRose ONE
Stories Matter
New Delhi • London

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ISBN: 978-93-7139-194-8

Cover design: Daksh

Typesetting: Sagar

First Edition: August 2025

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Chapter 1

The Beginning of the End

It was a calm, serene night with twinkling stars scattered across the night sky. Just a day after dussheera, the air still held the gentle warmth of the festival, and everything seemed calm—at least on the surface. But in India, as we often say, *"Jo bolte ho, wahi ho jaata hai"*—what you speak, manifests. And maybe, just maybe, that morning, I had unintentionally spoken my fate into existence.

I remember waking up early, feeling oddly unsettled. The breeze was sharp yet peaceful, but something didn't feel quite right. Out of irritation, I had said aloud, *"Aaj ka din hi kharab hai."* And somehow, those words echoed back at me by the end of the day as a cruel prophecy.

Let me take you back to the evening, the exact moment where it all began.

Danny had just returned home from work. He seemed relaxed—had his dinner with us, laughed a little, engaged in some light hearted conversations with everyone at home. It was like any other evening. Everything appeared normal, even joyful. But as they say, *"Trouble doesn't send a message before arriving."* That evening, without any warning, the power went out in our house. A complete blackout.

Danny, always spontaneous and cheerful, decided to take his bike out to meet his childhood friends. He wanted to make the most of the sudden free time. I couldn't stop him, and honestly, I didn't even get to speak much with him. We had unexpected guests at home, and my attention was split between hosting them and worrying about my younger brother, who was stuck at a birthday party because his auto rickshaw had broken down.

In the middle of that chaos, Danny and I shared a quick moment. We ate ice cream together—just the two of us. A simple joy. It was spontaneous, unplanned, just like most beautiful things in life. I never imagined that would be the **last** time I'd share anything with him. The last bite. The last laugh. The last glance.

He left on his bike, waving as he always did.

I went back home, had a short conversation with my mentor over the phone, and laid down to rest. It was a

long day, and my mind was scattered with responsibilities and small worries. But never did I imagine that the seemingly ordinary day of 14th October 2024 —would be marked forever in my memory as the most **devastating** day of my life.

Do you know who I am?

My name is **Ria**.

Today, I am a 30-year-old married woman, juggling a multitude of roles with strength and grace—or at least trying to. I am a corporate trainer, a businesswoman, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a daughter, an elder sister. And among all these roles, the most important one which I have slowly begun to rediscover is the role of **being myself**.

Being a woman in today's world, especially in our culture, isn't just challenging—it's often suffocating. There are unspoken expectations, endless roles, and a constant pressure to hold everything and everyone together, even when you're falling apart inside. We are told to nurture, to sacrifice, to endure—but rarely to feel, to grieve, or to be selfish with our pain.

But that night, I was just a wife waiting for her husband to return.

But little did I know that the next few days would change me forever—from a carefree, emotionally

dependent woman into someone who would have to walk through fire, alone. That transformation began the moment Danny took his bike and rode into the night, never to return the same again.

In Chapter 2 begins a new journey—one that starts not with love, but with silence. The kind of silence that screams louder than any words ever could.

The journey of how I, Ria, was forced to grow from a girl lost in love... to a woman facing the road of unimaginable challenges.

Chapter 2

The Last Call

It was one of those chilly spring nights, when the breeze carries just a hint of winter's farewell—a comforting coolness that wraps around you like a soft blanket. I remember feeling slightly drowsy, exhausted at the end of a long day. I walked to the front gate of our floor and opened it slightly, just the way I always do, so Danny wouldn't have to knock when he returned. It was our little routine—simple, silent, and comforting.

He wasn't home yet, but I wasn't too worried. Not then.

It was just around 11:00 p.m. I glanced at my phone. I reassured myself—*He must be enjoying with his childhood friends. Let him have this moment.* After all, he had very few of such carefree evenings. Still, a small unease started to creep in. I picked up my phone and called him. He answered immediately.

His voice was calm, normal.

“I’m on my way, Ria. Just half an hour more,” he said casually.

I scolded him gently, part annoyed and part sleepy. “Come soon, Danny. You know we both need proper rest. It’s already late.”

He chuckled and promised he’d be back soon.

A few minutes passed, and then I received a WhatsApp message from him. It was a screenshot of a group chat with his friends. They were discussing jobs, opportunities, and support—something Danny has been secretly struggling with for a while. That moment made me proud of him and yet worried at the same time. He was trying, silently. Behind that smiling face and easy going nature, he was carrying responsibilities and silent battles I couldn’t always see.

Still half-sleepy and irritated, I called him again. “Just be on time, please. It’s almost midnight now.”

He replied, softly, almost whispering, “You go to sleep, Ria. Just keep the door open. I’ll be there soon.”

That was it.

The last time I ever heard his voice.

His final words to me, spoken with love and assurance, were, “*You sleep, Ria. Just keep the doors open,*

I'm coming." I never knew those would be the last words I'd hear from him in this lifetime.

You know how people say, "Live each day like it's your last"? I never thought that advice could extend to the smallest moments—the last ice cream together, the last phone call, the last smile, the last 'I'm coming home.'

We always think we have more time. More moments. More chances to say things we mean, or to hear the words we've gotten used to. But life... life is cruel in its unpredictability.

It was 12:15 a.m. I was waiting by the door, phone in hand, hoping he'd walk in any second, tired but smiling. I called again. This time, no answer. The silence on the other end didn't just echo—it screamed.

I waited.

And waited.

And waited some more.

Every minute stretched into hours. The clock kept ticking, but time, for me, had already started to slow down. Something inside me began to shift. An intuition—a woman's silent sixth sense—whispered something wasn't right. My heart felt heavy, my eyes tired, but I couldn't bring myself to sleep. Somewhere inside me, I knew this night would be different.

But even then, I didn't imagine how different.

That moment, that hour... I never imagined it would mark the beginning of the most painful journey of my life. I never imagined that I would never again hear him call me "*Bae*", never again ask him, "*When are you reaching home?*", never again feel the peace of knowing that no matter what, he'd always come back to me.

That night wasn't just another night. It was the beginning of the end.

I didn't know then that I had just spoken to Danny for the last time.

I didn't know then that love can break so silently, so suddenly, without permission or preparation.

I didn't know that my whole world—my laughter, my dreams, my comfort—was already drifting away, silently, into a dark void I wasn't yet ready to face.

What do you do when your soul's safe place becomes a memory?

How do you prepare yourself for a goodbye you never got to say properly?

In that moment, I was still holding on—to faith, to hope, to the promise in his voice. I believed he would return, knock softly, and I'd open the door, half-asleep,

pretending to be angry. We'd laugh, maybe argue a little,
and then sleep in each other's arms like always.

But sometimes, life doesn't wait for you to say
goodbye.

Sometimes, all you get is a voice fading into the night.

And an open door that never closes the same way
again.

Chapter 3

When Silence Screamed

I remember waking up the next morning with a strange heaviness in my chest. The kind of heaviness that doesn't come from a bad dream or a restless sleep—it comes from something your soul already knows, even before your mind does.

I hadn't heard from Danny.

The last words he said to me were still echoing—“*Just keep the doors open, Ria. I'm coming.*” But morning had come, and he hadn't. I tried convincing myself he must've crashed at a friend's place, maybe his phone died, or perhaps he just didn't want to disturb anyone. My mind created excuses to silence the fear my heart had already started to feel.

And then the phone rang.

A call from my aunt downstairs.

I picked it up, expecting to hear something casual—maybe a neighbour’s query or a small household matter. But her voice sounded different. Heavy. Uneasy.

“Ria... someone called your father-in-law about Danny,” she said.

My heart stopped.

. Someone called about Danny? What did that mean?

I ran downstairs, anxiety building like a storm in my chest. My father-in-law was on the phone. His face, usually calm, was now painted with panic. I stood frozen. Time seemed to stop. My ears strained to hear, but my heart had already understood.

He turned to me, voice shaking, and said words I wish I could erase from my memory forever:

“Danny met with an accident. He’s in critical condition. We have to rush to the hospital. Now.”

My knees almost gave way.

I couldn’t believe it. Accident? *No, not Danny. Not the Danny I kissed goodbye just a few hours ago. Not the Danny who promised he was on his way. Not the man who held my entire world in his laughter.*

I tried to steady my breath. Maybe it was just a minor accident. Maybe he’d hit his head or fractured a bone—

something that could be fixed. He was strong, young, healthy. He'd be okay. He had to be okay.

Mumma and I rushed out of the house. I'll never forget the helplessness I felt in that moment—running out without knowing where exactly I was going, not understanding how things had spiralled so fast. That day, I learned something painful and important: **every woman should know how to drive**. It's not just a skill; it's survival. In emergencies, time is everything, and I hated that I was dependent on someone else to get to my husband.

The car ride was suffocating. Silent, except for whispered prayers and my loud, terrified thoughts.

Is he bleeding? Is he conscious? Is he calling out for me?

Is he in pain? Is he scared?

Will I get to see him?

Will I get to talk to him again?

My phone rang. It was a friend. His voice trembled as he spoke: "Bhabhi... rush to the hospital fast. Bhaiya is not keeping well. Please hurry."

That sentence... that tone... broke something in me. The air around me felt heavy, like I was breathing

underwater. The world seemed to blur. My limbs were moving, but my soul was paralyzed. I wanted to scream, to cry, to run faster, to teleport to him—but I could do none of that. I was trapped inside a nightmare that was playing in slow motion.

When I reached the hospital, I couldn't believe what I saw.

So many people. So much chaos. So much noise. But inside me, there was only one emotion—**fear**. Pure, paralyzing fear.

I never knew hospitals could feel like hell.

It wasn't just the smell of disinfectant, or the coldness of the walls. It was the people. The cries. The rushed footsteps. The prayers. The silence of those waiting for answers they didn't want to hear. My eyes scanned every face, but I was only looking for one—Danny's.

I was finally allowed to meet the doctor.

His words felt like gunshots to my chest. "Severe head injury. The left hemisphere of his brain has shifted to the right. He's undergone emergency surgery. We've placed him on a ventilator."

I couldn't comprehend it. *His brain... shifted? A ventilator?*

"No... no, this isn't happening," I whispered.

But it was.

The doctor said they were doing everything they could. He said Danny was fighting. That his brain was still showing signs of life, and that the next few days would be critical.

I nodded. But inside, I was screaming.

I held the doctor's hand and begged. "Please save him. Please. Do whatever it takes, but please save him."

That night, I returned home a different person.

I wasn't the same woman who had shared an ice cream with her husband just a day ago. I wasn't the same woman who had complained about being sleepy, or who had told him off for being late.

I was a woman whose entire world now lived inside a hospital room.

That night, I didn't sleep. I sat in silence, staring at the ceiling, wondering how life could change so much in a matter of hours. I kept praying, whispering promises to every God I knew. I asked the universe to be kind. I asked fate to take a step back.

Please. Just give me one more chance.

In that silence, I started writing the next chapter of my life.

A chapter not of love or comfort, but of pain,
uncertainty, and silent prayers.

A chapter where the man I loved more than life itself
was breathing with the help of machines, and where I
was slowly learning that sometimes, love alone isn't
enough to keep someone with you.

Chapter 4

Shattered

If I had to describe what my heart felt in one word that day—it would be **shattered**.

But even the word *shattered* felt too small, too contained, too weak for the weight I was carrying. Because when something shatters, it breaks immediately. But what I felt that day wasn't just breaking—it was the slow crumbling of every part of my identity, every ounce of my strength, every belief I had held about love, safety, and the future.

There was only one word that defined that day: **hopelessness**.

I remember the morning light filtering into the house. But it felt dimmer than usual, as if even the sun was reluctant to rise. My mother-in-law and I got ready for the hospital. Each second felt like a mountain. My

body was moving, but it didn't feel like mine. My limbs felt heavy, my eyes swollen, my heart... numb.

I called my father that morning.

And the moment I heard his voice, I broke.

The dam I had built to hold back my emotions just burst. My words disappeared, and only sobs remained. He kept saying, "Ria, sambhalo apne aap ko... sab theek ho jaayega," but those words floated above me like mist. I couldn't grasp them, couldn't believe them.

Because deep down, a part of me already knew.

Something had shifted in the universe.

I walked into Danny's room and touched the towel he had used the day before. I held one of his shirts and buried my face in it just to breathe him in. The scent—the scent of someone you love—is a memory your soul never forgets. That day, I clung to every piece of clothing, every trace of him I could find, as if they were lifelines.

And then, it was time to go back to the hospital.

The drive there was cold. Silent. Heavy with dread. And when we arrived, I was finally allowed to see him.

He was lying on a hospital bed inside the ICU.

Unconscious. Still. Quiet.

His eyes were closed, his body still, his chest rising only because of the ventilator. His head was fully wrapped in thick white bandages. The face I had kissed a thousand times now looked like it belonged to a stranger—a stranger who had fought a storm.

But it was still Danny.

My Danny.

The one who once couldn't stop talking, who laughed loud, who lived fully, who loved fiercely.

Now silent.

Machines beeped beside him, blinking rhythmically, counting breaths he couldn't take on his own. I stood there, trying to decode the numbers on the monitor. His heart rate. His oxygen level. His blood pressure. Suddenly, these numbers weren't just medical readings—they were **hope**. I had stopped praying for miracles. I had started praying for better numbers.

I leaned down, kissed his hand, and whispered, "I'm here."

That first visit broke me. But strangely, it also gave me strength. I didn't know from where it came—maybe from Danny himself, maybe from the soul that connected us, maybe from God. But I stopped crying when I stood next to him. I started speaking to him like he could hear me.

“Danny, get up na... sab pareshaan hain. Let’s go for dinner... remember we were supposed to try that new place? You promised, remember?”

I told him everything, like I always did. As if nothing had changed.

In that sterile, clinical room full of machines and death’s whispers, I chose to believe in life. Not because I was brave—but because I had no other option.

I remember looking around the ICU. So many other families, each holding their breath, praying for someone they love. The corridors echoed with whispered prayers, muffled sobs, hopeful glances. I wasn’t the only one hurting. Pain, I realized, is universal. But in that moment, mine felt the deepest.

Doctors came and went, speaking in half-sentences. “We’ll observe him closely.” “Let’s wait for 48 hours.” “His brain is still active, but we need time.”

What they were saying wasn’t hope—it was delay. They were giving us time not to save Danny, but to prepare ourselves.

Still, I kept hoping.

Because hope... is the last thing a heart lets go of.

Friends and family surrounded me. They prayed with me, held my hand, brought me water, wiped my tears.

They told me, “Danny is strong.” “He’s a fighter.” “He’ll pull through.”

And I believed them—not because their words made sense, but because I needed something to hold on to.

But the truth?

The only person I wanted to hold me... was lying unconscious, unable to speak.

Despite everyone around me, despite the prayers, the support—I was alone. Utterly, devastatingly alone.

Because the one person who could silence all my fears was silent himself.

That evening, I sat beside him for hours. I watched every flicker of the machine. I studied the rhythm of his breath. I whispered our memories to him. Our first date. Our wedding day. The stupid fights. The laughter. The dreams.

And then I whispered the one truth I was terrified to say aloud:
“I can’t lose you, Danny. I don’t know how to live without you.”

But even as I said it, somewhere deep within, a shadow had already begun to grow.

It was a turning point.

Chapter 5

Scene at Hospital

Revisiting this chapter of my life feels like reopening a wound that never truly healed. Even as I sit here and try to pen down these memories, I can feel the tremor in my hands. My eyes grow moist, my throat tightens, and there's a heaviness in my chest that words fail to carry. The flashbacks to those days in the hospital are as vivid as they were then—raw, painful, and unforgettable. They weren't just difficult; they were the most harrowing, soul-wrenching days of my entire existence.

To me, the hospital was never merely a place of healing. It was a space soaked in silence, suffering, and endless waiting. It is, in my experience, the one place where pain walks freely in the hallways, and hope clings desperately to every passing second. The smell of antiseptic, the echo of hurried footsteps, the constant beeping of machines, the muffled sobs, and the prayers whispered under shaky breaths—these became the

soundtrack of my life during those days. I began to see what pain truly looked like—not just through my own eyes, but in the eyes of everyone around me. It was universal, unfiltered, and utterly overwhelming.

It wasn't just my family that was hurting. Every corridor held stories of broken hearts. I saw mothers clutching photographs of their children, fathers holding on to prayer beads, lovers sitting outside intensive care units with tear-streaked faces and eyes red from sleepless nights. The pain around me was so intense that at times it felt like the walls themselves were grieving. Age, class, and background didn't matter. In that hospital, we were all bound by one thread—love and the desperate, fragile hope that our loved ones would survive.

Every single time I walked into the ICU to see Danny, my heartbeat would accelerate, out of pure anxiety. I would immediately fix my eyes on the monitor beside his bed, scanning every number, every heartbeat, every oxygen level, as if my life depended on those flickering digits. And—it did. His body was lying still, attached to machines that breathed for him, fought for him, lived for him. The ventilator hummed steadily, almost like a lullaby trying to soothe a storm. But to me, it was terrifying. It was the sound of a war he was silently fighting.

And yet, despite all the machines and silence, I always felt like he was trying to speak to me. His stillness never

felt lifeless to me—it felt like resistance. As if he was telling me, "I'm trying. I'm still here. Don't stop believing in me." I believed in those silent conversations with all my heart.

I used to talk to him as if he could hear every word. I'd whisper, "Let's go for a drive, Danny. Let's sneak out and have ice cream. Should I get you your favorite Maggi?" Silly, ordinary things—but they were ours. I would touch his hands gently, feeling their once-warm texture now turned cold. I'd stroke his lips, even though they were now covered with oxygen pipes, just to remind myself that this was real—that he was still here with me. I remember every little detail—the color of the hospital jacket he wore, the way his hair curled slightly at the sides, the faint scent of antiseptic mixed with something still uniquely his.

I did everything I could to bring positivity around him. I would sit by his side and read spiritual books, recite verses, play chants—anything that could bring a ripple of peace to his surroundings. I wanted him to be surrounded by light, by love, by every ounce of hope I had left. Because at that moment, I wasn't just fighting for him—I was fighting for us.

They say that in the best of times, we often forget God. But when tragedy strikes, when everything begins to fall apart, we find ourselves desperately reaching for faith. And that's exactly what happened with me. In

those days, spirituality became my refuge. My family and I became more devout than we had ever been. We visited temples, mosques, churches—we left no place untouched by our prayers. We lit candles, offered flowers, tied sacred threads, and held hands as we begged the universe for just one miracle. Just one moment of clarity, one sign of life, one movement—anything to tell us he was coming back to us.

Danny became the centre of every prayer, not just ours, but of everyone who knew him. I had never prayed with such intensity in my entire life. Every breath was a plea. Every moment was a silent conversation with God. *Please, let him wake up. Please, let him stay.*

I believed with all my heart that Danny was a warrior. In the brief but beautiful time we had spent together, he had shown immense strength—physically, mentally, emotionally. He had dreams, he had passion, and he had so much love to give. I used to think, “He’s not going anywhere. He will rise again. He will come back to me.” And that hope, fragile as it was, kept me going.

During those dark days, I learned that the most honest conversations we have are often with ourselves—especially when life strips us down to our rawest selves. There’s a strange kind of silence in suffering. And in that silence, you meet your soul. We often connect deeply with our inner self at two times in life—once when we’re

overflowing with joy, and once when we are drowning in sorrow. The latter, though painful, is transformative.

I learned to sit with my emotions. I stopped pretending. I stopped running. I just felt—every ache, every fear, every small flicker of hope. I became more aware of myself than I had ever been. I could hear my soul cry, but I could also hear it whisper, *Hold on*. And I did.

I leaned into spirituality because it gave me strength. I needed to believe that something bigger than me was at work. That maybe—just maybe—our prayers would be answered. I remember sitting in the waiting room, staring at the door of the ICU, just longing for one sentence from the doctor: “*He moved his fingers,*” or “*He opened his eyes,*” or “*There’s a small improvement.*” I was ready to hold on to even the tiniest thread of hope.

But they never came.

And still, I prayed.

Because when you love someone with your whole heart, you don’t stop hoping—not even when the world tells you to. You fight until your last tear, your last breath, your last prayer.

That’s what I did for Danny.

And I would do it all over again.

Chapter6

The Final Night

By this point, it had become our daily routine—waking up each morning with the same hope, the same silent prayers, and the same conversations repeated in our heads. Every single day, all of us clung tightly to the belief that Danny would finally open his eyes. Maybe today he would move his hand. Maybe a flicker of movement in his eyelids. We held on to every "maybe" as if it were a promise.

I, too, spent my entire days lost in thought—imagining different versions of the future. *What will life look like if he wakes up? Will I be able to handle life if he doesn't? Will my strength and my faith in God be enough to carry us through? Will I ever get the chance to say, 'Yes, we saved him'?* These questions haunted me constantly.

I chose to title this chapter *The Final Night* because I truly believe that destiny, the universe, or perhaps some

divine force wanted me to witness that night—to live through it with him. It was the third day of *Those Four Days*—and by far the most excruciating. That evening, the doctors informed us that they had made the decision to switch off his ventilator. They needed to evaluate how his body would function without mechanical support and artificial oxygen.

The moment I heard that, I made up my mind—I wasn't leaving his side. It felt as though the universe was insisting that I be there, to spend those final precious hours with him. Maybe it was my last chance to talk to him, to be near him, to love him in the only way I still could.

That night, I watched over him the way I had every night since the incident—carefully monitoring every movement on the machines. I kept my eyes on the ventilator, on the beeping monitors tracking his pulse and oxygen levels, clinging to the hope that something might improve.

He lay there wrapped in a hospital gown, its checked pattern softly folding around his body. My beautiful, chubby Danny—his lips slightly pink, eyes closed gently like a baby in peaceful sleep. He looked so calm, so still, as if he had just dozed off for a while and would wake up any moment. His face retained the same sweetness and innocence I had always adored. His hands—those soft hands—lay quietly beside him, and I remember thinking

how unfair it was that something so full of life could be so lifeless now.

The ICU was filled with the sounds of one-way conversations. All around me, people were talking to their loved ones, most of whom were unconscious, just like Danny. I could hear them—wives, husbands, parents, siblings—trying to reach those lying silent in bed. It felt like a room full of hearts pleading for miracles. I realized I wasn't the only one hoping my voice could somehow reach the soul of someone I loved.

So, I began talking to Danny.

I said things I always said. *"What do you want to eat when you get better?"* I reminded him of our shared dreams: *"Let's go for a long drive again. Remember our plan to visit Kerala? We'll finally do it together."* I talked about our future—marriage, travel, our own family—everything we had imagined together.

And then I spoke of the present, the raw truth of that moment. It was just after 1:00 a.m., and I sat by his side for nearly three hours, speaking as if it was any other day. But deep inside, I knew. This might be the last time I'd ever speak to him.

What was strange—and beautiful—was that even though he was unresponsive, it felt like he was listening. Like his soul was still present in that room with me, responding without words. There was a warmth, a

presence that surrounded me. I spoke, and in my heart, I felt him speak back. It no longer felt like a one-sided conversation. His spirit was still there, trying to hold on. I could sense that connection between our souls—it was unspoken, but undeniably real.

I kept talking, begging silently for him to come back. Every part of me hoped that my words would somehow pull him back to consciousness. That if I just said the right thing, or said it with enough love, he would wake up. I had begun to live for the flicker of those machines—the numbers on the monitor were my only sign of hope, my new definition of faith.

But that night, something shifted. For the first time, I felt uncertainty take over. A strange 50-50 feeling crept in. Half of me still clung to hope, but the other half started preparing for the worst.

Later that night, my brother turned to me and said something that pierced through the very core of my being. He said, “*Didi, now you have to learn how to live alone. Jiju won’t be there to support you anymore.*” Those words hit me like a wave of harsh truth. It was painful, but something inside me clicked at that moment.

I realized that a strong woman doesn’t just need love and support—she needs a resilient heart, a determined mind, and the strength to carry herself through the

darkest days. She needs courage. She needs to be her own anchor.

People come and go in our lives, and though it breaks us at times, life doesn't stop for anyone. It moves on. And so must we. Even though Danny wasn't going to be with me in the way I had hoped, I began to accept that I had to find a way to live without him.

When he finally passed—when his soul left his body—I was praying. I was in the middle of worship, lighting a candle, asking God with all my heart to bring him back. But the answer I received wasn't the one I wanted. It was silent, solemn, and final.

It felt like God was telling me, *"This is your truth now. You must stand on your own. You must learn to live alone."* That moment changed everything. I knew then that no more miracles were coming. The only way forward was through acceptance, strength, and a belief that I could build a life again—even without the person who I thought would always be by my side.

Conclusion

A Love Beyond Four Days

Grief doesn't ask for permission. It doesn't knock. It doesn't warn. It walks in uninvited and stays far longer than you'd ever imagined.

As I close the pages of these four unforgettable days, I am no longer the same woman who once waited at the door for her husband to return from a night with friends. I am no longer the girl who believed love is always forever in the form we want it to be. Today, I am a woman who has met death up close, a woman who has sat beside her soulmate, begging him to breathe, hoping that love alone could bring him back.

Those Four Days were not just about losing Danny—they were about losing a part of myself. The version of me who used to complain about his late-night arrivals, who believed the world could never change in a blink,

who thought she'd always have tomorrow to say "I love you" one more time.

But life has a strange way of teaching us lessons wrapped in pain. It taught me how precious time is. How silence can scream louder than sound. How even the strongest souls break when the heart shatters. And yet, in that same darkness, I discovered a light within me—a light I never knew existed.

I remember sitting in that hospital, whispering to him as machines beeped around us, willing his soul to stay, begging God to change his mind. Those whispers became my prayers, and those prayers became my strength. Because when someone you love slips away slowly, you're forced to hold onto the tiniest signs, the faintest pulses, the last words they said. "*Keep the door open, I'm coming.*" He never did come home, at least not in the way I expected.

But his presence never left me. Even today, I feel it in the wind, in the sudden hush of a quiet room, in the warmth of a memory. Danny may no longer walk beside me physically, but he walks within me—in every decision I take, in every tear I wipe, in every smile I slowly learn to wear again.

They say the hardest goodbyes are the ones left unsaid. I now believe it. But *Those Four Days* were also a gift. A cruel gift, yes—but a gift that allowed me to love

harder, to speak to his soul, to realize that we are far more connected than we think. That love doesn't end with death. It evolves. It matures. It grows stronger in silence.

I don't know what the future holds. But I do know this: I carry him with me. In the strength I now find to face the world. In the grace I offer myself on the hard days. In the faith that has slowly begun to rebuild. In the hope that one day, I'll see him again—and this time, I won't have to say goodbye.

So, to those reading this, maybe holding your own pain, waiting for your loved one, crying quietly through sleepless nights—I want to say, you're not alone. Loss is not a journey that ends; it becomes a part of your story. But you *will* find your way through. You *will* smile again. Not because the pain disappears, but because your love was so strong, it shaped you into someone new.

Those Four Days were my undoing—but they were also my awakening.

And from those ashes, a new Ria rises—not forgetting, but carrying forward. Not broken, but brave. Not alone, but eternally loved.