

STILL HERE

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Notes From a Woman Who Survived,
Left, and Returned to Herself

SONIA GUPTA



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DEDICATION



Jai Shree Radhey
For my dad, Vijay Kumar Gupta,
you taught me courage, shaped my strength,
and held my spirit in the moment the world nearly lost me.
I woke up different — whole in a way I hadn't felt in years —
because your love reached me when nothing else could.
Your presence still walks with me, quietly guiding every step,
every day.

EPIGRAPH

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

They said you unsettled the night, but the *divine feminine* was never
meant to disappear.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote this book so no one feels the way I felt through my war. And for me, it really was a war, lots of quiet battles, long stretches of loneliness, and a constant undercurrent of guilt.

The hardest part was that I was fighting my own flesh and blood. I was battling the people I loved the most, while still trying to protect them, still trying to keep everything together. For a long time, I didn't have the right words for what I was carrying. I just knew I was tired, tired in a way that sleep didn't fix, and quiet in a way that didn't feel peaceful. I kept going, like most of us do. I showed up. I did what was expected. I told myself I was fine, because that felt easier than trying to explain something I didn't yet understand myself. Writing became a place where I could be honest without having to perform or show up. Some pages were written through tears. Some with shaking hands. Some after long pauses, where I had to breathe through the weight of what I was finally allowing myself to say. Nothing here was rushed. I let things surface when they were ready — not because they were dramatic, but because they were real, and needed time to present themselves. If you recognise yourself anywhere in these pages — in the loneliness, the guilt, the trying to hold everything together — I hope this book reminds you that you're not alone. That: *it's okay not to be okay*. And that speaking, even quietly, matters. This isn't a book about having all the answers. It's a book about telling the truth while you're still finding your way.

It contains parts of my story I never expected to survive long enough to tell.

— Sonia

OPENING NOTE TO THE READER



There are some books we read with our eyes, and some we read with our wounds. If you are here, I want you to know this first: You are not alone in the places you've been silent. Many of us, especially in our culture, were taught early to hold everything together: the family, the honour, the emotions, the storms.

We learned to endure quietly, to adapt quickly, to keep the peace even when it unsettled our own.

We absorbed unspoken rules: don't disrupt, don't question, don't unravel.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di, a sentence that became less about sleep and more about shrinking ourselves so others could rest comfortably. This book is not only my story. It is a mirror. A remembering. A return.

This is an invitation to stop shrinking — and to rest without apology.

A LETTER TO THE WOMAN WHO LEARNED TO STAY QUIET



My love,

You softened your voice long before you understood its power. You learned to read the room before you learned to read yourself. You carried the peace that was never meant to rest on your shoulders. Silence became your safety. Endurance became your instinct. Strength became the performance you perfected.

But hear this clearly — you did not fail. You adapted. You were never meant to carry the weight alone, to apologise for your truth, or to disappear inside the expectations of others. You can be gentle without erasing yourself. You can be loving without losing yourself. You can want more without being “too much.”

You did not disturb the peace. You simply stopped abandoning yourself to protect it. If no one has ever said this to you, let me be the first: You are allowed to take up space. You are allowed to ask for more.

You stayed quiet to survive. Now it is time to live — and rise.

— Sonia

PROLOGUE — THE FIRST CRACK

My life began the day I finally stopped apologising for the truth my body had been carrying for years.

As I sit down to write this, the tears arrive before the sentences do. Not gently, not politely — but suddenly, as if my body remembers something my mind has spent years holding at a distance. I wipe them away out of habit; the same way I wiped them for twelve long years. As my hand lowers, my fingers brush the bruise on my chin. A small, stubborn mark that shouldn't still be there. A mark that holds a memory, my mind still refuses to return to fully. I've stopped forcing myself to remember it. Some moments stay locked away because that is how the body protects us. Some truths speak only through aching skin long after the mind goes quiet. But this I do know: every time I sit down to write, something inside me opens — not painfully, but honestly. As if the words have been waiting behind my ribs, asking to be let out.

Because this story didn't begin with a party, or a headline, or a moment the world mistook for the beginning.

It began in the years that stripped me from the inside — years that stole my sleep, my breath, my certainty.

Years of holding myself together so tightly, I didn't realise I was quietly coming undone.

And as I steady myself on the page, trying to write without breaking and breaking anyway, one sentence rises — the sentence that has followed me through childhood, marriage, survival, and almost-loss:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.

Not as blame.

Not as an accusation.

But as the echo of a life lived in vigilance. Except now, as these words finally spill free, I understand something I never admitted before, I wasn't the one disrupting anyone's peace.

I was the one awake through every storm — awake through the twelve-year unravelling that broke me, reshaped me, and finally asked to be told exactly as it was lived.

What I didn't know then was that those years of sleeplessness were moving towards something far darker, a moment when my boys would watch death knock at our door.

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CHAPTER ONE

A DAUGHTER'S INHERITANCE

There is a question that has followed me for as long as I can remember—a question that wakes when everything else finally rests.

Where does my story really begin?

Most people think it begins with my divorce. Or, the headlines. Or, the night I became, to the world, a Desi woman who dared to celebrate what our culture taught us, glorified and romanticised to an extent - to suffer in silence. But, that moment wasn't the beginning. It was the eruption.

My story begins with a sentence that drifted through the rooms of my life long before the internet ever discovered my name:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

You ruined my sleep.

You took my peace.

You made my nights restless, my heart uneasy, my spirit unsettled.

The first time I heard it as a child, it felt playful — the kind of mock-annoyance Desi parents use when their daughter has too much life in one small body. A dramatic sigh here, a teasing complaint there. Nothing serious.

Nothing sharp. But as I grew older, the sentence returned in different ways — not spoken, not declared, not thrown at me like an accusation... but *present*. In the pauses. In the looks. In the hesitations.

In the quiet expectation that my choices should always protect other people's comfort.

And, the day it stopped sounding light and started feeling heavy, something inside me cracked.

Because even though my parents never said it openly — not once, not directly — the message lived underneath everything:

Don't trouble us.

Don't shake the family.

Don't disturb a system built on your silence.

Don't be the reason anyone loses sleep.

It was never the words themselves that shaped me. It was the **underlying fear** they represented.

A fear passed through generations: that a daughter must manage everyone's emotional peace, even at the cost of her own. That quiet, unspoken version of **“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”** is the one that stayed with me. The one that taught me to shrink. To endure. To swallow my truth whole.

The echo of a sentence never spoken aloud — but still loud enough to change the course of my life.

Twelve years of tears in parked cars, tears into towels, tears pressed into my own hands because I didn't want the children to hear. Twelve years of convincing myself that if I just held it together harder, everyone else would finally be peaceful.

Because that sentence, “Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”, had stopped being a comment and had become a judgement. A subtle one. A cultural one. A generational one.

Sometimes said directly. Sometimes implied. Sometimes, looping through expectations that Desi women are raised to breathe in like

oxygen. Maintain calm. Protect reputation. Keep the peace, even if it costs you your own.

My children felt the ripple too, not through blame, but through the heaviness children sense when the woman who carried them is slowly disappearing under the weight of her own silence.

So maybe my story doesn't begin in 1976, in that humid hospital room where I entered a world already shaped by duty, culture, and unspoken rules. Maybe it doesn't begin in childhood when innocence is thinned and expectations hardened. Maybe it begins in every moment I learned to swallow my own storms, because keeping peace, even at the cost of my own—was what was expected of me.

Because beginnings are not clean. They bruise. They soften. They seep through the walls of your life until there's no hiding from them.

And then, one day, after years of sleeplessness, after years of being the quiet storm-keeper, after years of carrying cultural expectations on my back, I did the most un-Desi woman thing imaginable:

I celebrated my freedom instead of hiding it.

The world called it rebellion. Some called it disrespect. Others called it shame.

But the truth? It was survival.

So, where does my story start? It begins with two parents whose love and flaws shaped my earliest truths. And it begins again in the eyes of my children, who watched me unravel and rebuild and prayed—silently, yet fiercely, that their mother would come back home to herself.

Because the truth is this:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di” is not just a phrase someone once spoke. It is the wound I inherited, the pressure I lived under, the expectation I had to break in order to finally breathe again.

For years, they told me I ruined sleep. I ruined calm. I ruined peace. But I was the one who stayed awake trying to save a life that was killing me. And this—this is the chapter where I finally stop dying.

SOUTH LONDON

Before the storms, before the years that stole my sleep, there was South London.

I lived there only until I was ten, but those early years shaped me quietly in ways I didn't understand then. We lived on a steady, dependable street, the kind that made parents feel they'd done something right. Inside our home, life was warm and familiar. Dad's calm presence. Mum's steady routines. The soft chaos of a Desi household where love lived in actions, not declarations.

School was different.

Not loud, not dramatic — just quietly unkind in the way childhood can be. I didn't fit neatly, and I didn't know why. It wasn't anything I did. It was just who I was. I learned early how to hold back tears until I got home, how to pretend words didn't sting, how to make myself a little smaller so I wouldn't be noticed too much.

Home was my refuge.

It would take me years to understand how fragile that idea would later become.

School was where the first cracks appeared.

Long before **Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di** returned to me in adulthood as pressure and guilt, I had already begun practising the art of absorbing hurt quietly and carrying on as if nothing had happened.

Those South London years were short.

But they planted the earliest seeds of the silence — and strength — that would follow me everywhere.

EAST LONDON

When I was ten, we left South London and moved to East London, a shift that felt small on the map but enormous on the inside.

East London was louder, busier, more alive. A place where people looked like us, lived like us, understood the unspoken rules of home without needing them explained. For the first time, I wasn't the girl who stood out. I was one of many. There was comfort in that. And something else, too — an early awareness of who I was becoming. And in the middle of this new world were the three people who shaped my first understanding of love, duty, and belonging.

MY FATHER, MY FIRST SAFE PLACE

My earliest memories of my father are warm. Not because life was difficult — it wasn't. We had stability. We had provisions. We had a home where needs were met and routines held. What made it feel steady, though, was him. He was always up early, dressed before the rest of the house had stirred, shirt pressed, hair neat, shoes polished. Not out of vanity, but self-respect. A belief in showing up properly for life. Even on his days off, he carried himself the same way — prepared, present, grounded.

He wasn't a quiet man. He was expressive, engaged, and full of presence. His voice carried. His laughter filled rooms. And when he spoke, you listened. What mattered most was the way he made things feel handled. Not controlled — handled. Like someone competent was in the room.

To him, I wasn't something to manage or mould. I was his daughter. And that alone gave me a deep sense of certainty — the feeling that I was fundamentally okay, that I belonged, that I didn't need to earn my place.

His love didn't announce itself. It showed up in consistency — in attention, in quiet reassurance, in the unspoken knowledge that I was backed. Often discreetly. Often without explanation. But always felt.

With him, I felt safe without needing to justify myself.

He trusted me. He believed me. And, even when he didn't fully understand the person I was becoming, I never doubted that his love was solid.

Long before I understood the world well enough to question my place in it, he was where I returned — my first experience of safety.

MY MOTHER — LOVE WITH EDGES

If my father was ease, my mother was intention. She believed in doing things properly. In structure. In preparation. In choosing the path that promised stability. We had everything growing up — security, care, consistency — and she took pride in that. Nothing was left to chance. Love, to her, meant guidance. And guidance meant holding the line.

She moved through life with an acute awareness of consequence; how easily things could slip if you weren't careful. That awareness shaped the way she loved. Her care arrived organised. Her concern arrived early. Her affection often carried instruction alongside it.

And, I was the child who questioned everything.

Not because I lacked gratitude, but because I needed to understand. Where she trusted systems, I trusted intuition. Where she valued order, I searched for meaning. That difference existed early, even though neither of us had language for it at the time.

She loved me deeply, but her love was edged with vigilance. She wanted me safe. She wanted me protected. She wanted me spared from the mistakes she had learned to fear. Her worry showed up as correction. Her protection showed up as an expectation. Growing up, I often felt that love as pressure.

Not because it was unkind but because it was constant. Because it asked me to be careful with myself in ways I didn't yet understand. Because it made me feel responsible for getting things right, for not

disappointing, for not stepping too far outside the lines she believed kept people secure.

For a long time, I thought she didn't truly see me. I understand it differently now.

She saw me — and worried about what the world might demand of someone like me. Everything in me that pushed outward pressed against the boundaries she had learned to live within. She wasn't trying to diminish me. She was trying to protect me with the tools she knew.

But when you're young, love filtered through fear doesn't feel like safety.

It feels like an expectation.

Like responsibility.

Like something you're always close to getting wrong.

My mother loved me fiercely — even when that love felt heavy.

And learning to separate her fear from her intention was one of the first steps in understanding myself.

MY SISTER, A PLACE TO THINK OUT LOUD

My sister is younger than me, and our roles were never defined by protection or guidance flowing in one direction. What she became instead was something just as essential — a place to think out loud.

She moved through expectations differently. Where I questioned, she observed. Where I pushed against things, she paused. She seemed to understand the rules instinctively and navigated them with a quiet ease I often struggled to find.

For a long time, that difference made me feel like the difficult one. But, sisterhood isn't about hierarchy — it's about honesty. As we grew older, she became my sounding board. The person I could speak to without filtering myself. The one who let me say things out

loud without rushing to correct me, minimise me, or smooth things over.

She didn't carry my weight — she carried her own. But she listened. She reflected. She offered perspective when I asked for it, and silence when I didn't.

She didn't try to fix my thoughts or tidy them into something more acceptable. She didn't dramatise what I said. She simply gave me space to hear myself.

And in a life where I often felt torn between expectation and instinct, that quiet permission to speak without consequence mattered more than advice ever could.

THE HOUSE WHERE EVERYTHING WAS LOUD

Our home wasn't quiet. Not in sound — but in emotion. It was full. Lived in. Structured. We had everything we needed, and much of what we wanted. Faith was ever-present — grounding us, anchoring our days, giving our lives rhythm and meaning.

But within that stability, there was friction.. **I didn't talk through feelings — I reacted to them.** Conflict wasn't unpacked so much as absorbed and carried forward.

From early on, I was the one who asked questions. Who pushed back. Who struggled to accept rules that didn't make sense to my heart. And my mother and I clashed — not because there wasn't love, but because we were wired differently. I learned to read energy the way other children read books. I could sense the mood before anyone spoke. Not because home was unsafe — but because I was sensitive, observant, attuned. I anticipated reactions. I adjusted myself. Over time, that habit became a way of being.

The arguments were rarely about big things. Often, they began with me — a question, a refusal, a challenge — and grew larger than the moment itself. Not out of cruelty, but out of expectation, culture, and the pressure to do things “properly.”

My father often stepped in, calm and steady, trying to soften the edges between us. He didn't shout. He didn't escalate. He tried to restore balance in a house that already had a strong foundation.

And this is where *Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di* first entered my life. Not as an accusation. Not as punishment. But as a reflection of something simple: I was the child who unsettled the rhythm. The one who questioned. The one who didn't fit easily into the mould.

I didn't mean to disturb the peace.

But I did disrupt the ease adults were trying to maintain.

Children don't rebel to create chaos.

They rebel to find themselves. And I was beginning a journey my home wasn't ready to witness.

A DOUBLE LIFE — THE FIRST ESCAPE

When home feels tight, and school feels unkind, a girl eventually finds escape in the only place she feels she can shape her own identity: the third space. I didn't plan to create a double life. It just happened in the quiet spaces between who I was expected to be and who I felt myself becoming. At home, emotions were loud. At school, silence was survival. And somewhere in that tension, I began living the first version of myself.

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

Not because I meant to disrupt anything — but because I was the child whose feelings drew attention,

sparked worry, tilted the balance of an already delicate home. My days were predictable:

school, chores, expectations, learning early how to behave in ways that kept things steady.

So, I found an escape where I could. Sometimes it meant bunking school — day-timers where laughter wasn't policed and music

softened whatever felt too heavy to carry. Sometimes it meant slipping into spaces where no one asked me to be the sensible daughter, the careful girl, the one who didn't rock the boat. In those hours, I could just exist. And then there was him. Not a fairytale. Not a dramatic love story. Just a boy who saw me at a time when I felt overlooked everywhere else. With him, I wasn't the "difficult" daughter or the girl who caused tension at home without meaning to. I wasn't the one who made things harder.

I was simply... enough. But every double life has a limit. And mine began to fray the way all secrets do, quietly at first, then all at once.

THE CRACKS BEGIN TO SHOW

The lies started small— a quick change of clothes, a vague explanation, a late return home. But small lies grow fast. Soon, I was juggling truths and pretending I wasn't tired from the emotional weight of hiding pieces of my life. And somewhere in all of this, **I was the one losing sleep.** Not from guilt alone but from living two versions of myself that were never meant to coexist. Every time my father trusted me, my chest tightened. Every time my mother questioned me, my defences rose. Every time my sister silently protected me, I wondered how much longer she could. I wasn't ruining anyone's peace intentionally. But, I was adding worry to a home already stretched thin. Another early thread of

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

Only this time, I was beginning to feel its weight inside myself too.

THE SHIFT AT TWENTY-FOUR

By my mid-twenties, I wasn't heartbroken in a dramatic way — just worn out. The relationship that once felt like an escape slowly stopped fitting the person I was becoming.

It wasn't catastrophic.

It wasn't cinematic.

It was heavy. Emotionally draining. And when it ended, I didn't collapse or shatter, I felt lost. Not because he was gone, but because the version of me that existed around him no longer had a place to land.

The loss wasn't about romance.

It was about identity.

I lost far more sleep over who I was becoming than over who I was losing. That was the quiet heartbreak, realising I didn't yet know myself outside that escape.

THE EMOTIONAL FREE-FALL

After the breakup, life slowed, just enough to reveal what I had been avoiding.

Sleep became restless.

Days stretched.

Conversation drained me.

I wasn't grieving him. I was grieving the version of myself that had been holding on for the wrong reasons. It wasn't a breakdown. It was a slow unravelling, the kind where nothing is visibly wrong, but nothing feels right either.

At home, I carried that weight quietly. Even when I tried to hide it, the atmosphere shifted. Another soft echo surfaced:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.

This time, it lived inside me because I was the one losing sleep.

THE FIRST REALISATION

In the middle of that confusion, one truth surfaced: I didn't know who I was.

The rebellion.

The secrecy.

The hunger for belonging.

All of it came from the same place; a need to feel enough. Enough for others. Enough for myself. And, I couldn't be enough, because I hadn't met myself yet.

That realisation didn't arrive loudly. It wasn't empowerment or transformation. It was awareness. Quiet. Uncomfortable. A whisper that said:

You can't keep living like this.

THE LINGERING AFTERMATH

Real heartbreak isn't loud. It lingers. It sits behind your eyes when you wake up. It echoes in the spaces you once filled with certainty.

I didn't rise quickly.

I didn't become wise overnight.

I grew slowly — inch by inch, moment by moment.

And in that fragile transition, life was already preparing me for what came next: a marriage, a move, a life I believed would steady me and would eventually test me in ways I couldn't yet imagine.

But that's not for Chapter One.

Chapter One ends here— with a young woman standing quietly in the aftermath of her own choices,

still losing sleep, still searching for herself, and still carrying the earliest layers of **“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”** without knowing how deeply it would echo through the years to come.

“For the first time, a question I didn't dare speak aloud began forming inside me:

If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?”

CHAPTER TWO

THE CALL OF INDIA — AND THE LIFE I STEPPED INTO

India never called to me like a fantasy destination. It wasn't about romance or tradition or longing for roots.

It was something quieter, deeper — a tug in my chest that felt both personal and culturally familiar. Part of me needed space. Part of me needed clarity. And another part — the part shaped by

years of subtle messages — **believed it was time.**

Time to settle. Time to move forward. Time to do what “good daughters” eventually did. I grew up in a world where marriage wasn't just a milestone. It was a measure. A quiet expectation handed down through generations. Not demanded outright but the elephant in the room; present in every conversation, every gathering, every driven smile. By my mid-twenties, I had internalised that conditioning more than I realised. So yes, I wanted change.

Yes, I wanted marriage. But some of that desire wasn't purely mine. It was shaped by the society that raised me, by the messages I absorbed without questioning, by the belief that stability came through partnership and adulthood was incomplete without it. India represented all of that, not as pressure, but as possibility.

A place where marriage didn't feel like a desperate leap but a natural next step. A step everyone around me seemed to be expecting without needing to say a word. London felt heavy with my past — the heartbreak, the mistakes, the lost sleep, the version of myself I

didn't recognise anymore. India felt like a reset. A place where no one knew what had broken me, or the early layers of

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

I was already carrying it in my chest. So, I left. Not just for clarity.

Not just for healing. But because a part of me — shaped by culture and conditioning — believed this was the moment to step into marriage and finally build a life that made sense again. What I didn't know then was that the chapter I was stepping into would become the longest, heaviest, and most defining one of my life.

THE BEGINNING I TRUSTED

It began simply, the way most lifelong turns begin without warning. A conversation. A suggestion.

A name mentioned casually, as if the future could be placed on a table like a cup of tea. No pressure.

No lectures. No “it's time now” speeches. But, beneath the softness lay the familiar hum of cultural expectation — a daughter in her twenties, visiting India, being introduced to a possibility. And because I wanted movement, because I wanted direction, because I wanted to step into the next chapter.

The way society had taught me women should, I did not resist. I was not numb. I wasn't lost. I wasn't desperate. I was hopeful and conditioned, both at once. I wanted to build a home. I wanted to belong to someone. I wanted to become a wife because that was the script I had been handed long before I knew I had the right to write my own. So, when the suggestion came — meet this family, meet this boy, I said yes.

Not blindly. Not helplessly. Not because I could not think for myself.

But, because I wanted marriage, and somewhere deep inside,

I believed it was what I *was supposed to want*. And that mixture: hope + conditioning, felt like clarity.

Looking back now, I can see the truth gently: I wasn't choosing a person. I was choosing direction.

Choosing stability. Choosing a life chapter that every woman around me seemed to step into as naturally as breathing. I stepped forward not in surrender, but in sincere belief that this was where my life was meant to begin.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND QUIET PERFORMANCES

Our first meeting wasn't planned in the way people imagine. There was no formal introduction, no arranged seating, no awkward question-and-answer session. My cousin called him over on a false pretence, "*The computer needs fixing, can you come?*"

A harmless setup, the kind families create without admitting they're matchmaking. There was a gentle buzz in the air even before he walked in. A shared excitement. A sense of possibility. Not pressure — just that familiar cultural intuition that "*someone good is coming to meet our girl.*"

When he stepped inside, it wasn't dramatic or cinematic, but it did spark something. A warmth. A shift.

A tiny awakening inside me that said, "*This could be someone.*"

He carried himself with an easy confidence, comfortable in who he was, comfortable entering a room full of people he'd never met. There was a steadiness about him. A certainty. And me?

I wasn't frozen, analysing, or distant. I felt the excitement. The anticipation. The possibility of a new life beginning. I smiled more than I spoke. I observed the way he interacted, the way he filled the room, the way he didn't seem unsettled or unsure. There weren't fireworks but there *was* something far better:

comfort. Warmth. A naturalness that felt promising. A connection that didn't need dramatics to be real.

So, when he left, my cousin asked quietly, *"Should we call him again?"* I didn't hesitate.

I said yes, not because I didn't know what I wanted, but because I did. I wanted marriage. I wanted a fresh start. I wanted a life that made sense again. And for the first time in a long time, something in my heart felt light. Not fear. Not confusion. But hope.

SIX WEEKS TO A NEW LIFE

Six weeks later, I was stepping into a marriage, fully aware, fully present, and genuinely excited. There was no sense of rushing. No panic. No second-guessing. It felt right. My family was happy. The signs felt aligned.

India felt like the right place to begin again. My wedding wasn't a blur — I remember everything. The vibrancy, the music, the joy, the way my family came alive in a joyous celebration. And then there were my girls.

They flew out to India for me — choosing presence, time, and effort without hesitation. Women who had known me in different chapters of my life, standing beside me as I stepped into a new one. Their laughter wrapped around the days, grounding me, reminding me that I was loved far beyond the moment itself.

One of them surprised me, appearing when I didn't expect her to, turning an already emotional week into something unforgettable. That kind of love stays with you. The kind that says, *you matter enough to show up for, no matter the distance.*

At my ladies' sangeet, I danced to *Made in India*, laughing, glowing, surrounded by women whose love felt like a blessing. My bangles clinked, my feet moved freely, and for a moment I felt like the heroine of my own beautiful beginning. I wasn't pretending. I wasn't numb. I wasn't filling a void.

I was happy. Truly happy.

Excited to start my new life. Excited to step into marriage. Excited to build something stable and meaningful.

Women in my culture are taught many things about marriage — that love grows, that understanding deepens, that life settles into partnership. I believed all of that. With hope. With sincerity. With the innocence that comes with wanting your life to finally fall into place.

I stepped into marriage not as a girl running from something, but as a woman stepping toward the future she had imagined for herself. A future I had no idea would test me in ways I could not yet imagine.

EARLY DAYS — BEAUTY WITHOUT GROUNDING

The early weeks were filled with movement. Trips. Visits. Family gatherings. Travelling between cities.

Shared routines slowly taking shape. There were moments of warmth, moments where he was present, moments where I let myself believe that this was what the beginning of marriage was meant to feel like.

But there were also dissonances. Small. Quiet. Easy to overlook. Opinions brushed aside lightly.

Feelings acknowledged but not explored. Conversations that stayed safely on the surface.

Presence that was physical, but rarely emotional. None of it hurt. None of it frightened me. It was just... unfamiliar. So, I adjusted. I told myself the things women are taught to repeat:

This is marriage.

You need patience. You need understanding.

It will grow with time. What I didn't realise then was that I was learning, in tiny increments, to shrink parts of myself to keep the peace. A skill that would become second nature.

BECOMING A WIFE BEFORE BECOMING MYSELF

Very quickly, married life settled over me like a cloak stitched with unspoken expectations.

Roles appeared before I had time to question them. Responsibilities attached themselves silently.

And in the middle of it all, I became a wife before I ever had the chance to become a woman who truly knew herself. Days became quieter. More contained. More structured around what was required of me than what I wanted for myself. I missed work; not the job itself, but the identity it gave me. The sense of purpose.

The feeling of belonging to something beyond domestic space. In India, I didn't know where I fit — not culturally, not emotionally, not personally. Loneliness didn't arrive loudly. It crept in gently through the gaps in conversation, through the quiet evenings, through the smiles that didn't reach deep enough to anchor me. I didn't feel unsafe. But I didn't feel held either. And that difference, I would learn years later, was the beginning of everything that followed.

THE FIRST CRACK I COULDN'T IGNORE

A few months into the marriage, something subtle began to shift — not in him, not in the marriage itself, but for me. It happened during a short visit back home — surrounded by people who had known me long before life complicated me, people who recognised my laugh, my expressions, my true voice. Something inside me felt lighter. The fog of constant adjusting loosened. I breathed a little deeper, stood a little taller, felt a little more like myself again. Hope whispered gently: Maybe things will get easier. Maybe closeness will grow. Maybe this is just the early stage. I returned earlier than

planned, carrying that small spark of hope with me. But his reaction was muted. Not negative. Not cold. Just... absent.

A pause that lasted a beat too long. A look that didn't carry the warmth I had imagined. A moment where the effort I brought simply didn't land. It wasn't cruel. It wasn't dramatic. It wasn't even intentional. But it changed something. It was the first time I felt out of place in a life I was meant to belong to.

Not homesick. Not overwhelmed. Just quietly misaligned. A single crack — thin, almost invisible, but deep. The kind of crack you step over at first, until one day you look back and realise it was the beginning of a growing fault line. I rationalised. I excused myself. I told myself I was being sensitive. That marriage required compromise. That closeness would grow. I wasn't ready to hear what my instinct had whispered.

Not yet.

PREGNANCY AND THE WEIGHT OF EXPECTATION

Everything changed when I found out I was pregnant. The news was met with celebration — real, visible happiness. The kind that lights up a room, the kind that feels warm even when you're uncertain.

And for a moment, I let myself believe this would be the bridge between who we were and who we could become. That this new life would soften the edges, build closeness, create the family bond I longed for.

But pregnancy doesn't just grow life. It magnifies everything. Every fear. Every hope. Every silence. Every absence. My body was changing every day. Hormones amplified my sensitivity, my needs, my longing to feel safe and emotionally held. But instead of feeling more connected, I felt increasingly contained —

like I was carrying life while bracing myself emotionally. Nothing terrible was happening. Nothing dramatic.

Nothing visible. But the absence of support is its own form of loneliness. I wasn't neglected. I wasn't mistreated. But I wasn't emotionally held either. I didn't need grand gestures. I needed reassurance.

I needed softness. I needed presence — not just physical presence, but emotional availability.

Instead, I learned how to stay strong. How to self-regulate. How to soothe myself quietly.

I told myself to be grateful. To be patient. To be understanding. To be low maintenance. I told myself not to ask for too much. Because when you're pregnant — especially in a culture where women “manage” everything — you convince yourself your needs are burdens. And so, I tucked them away.

WHEN EFFORT BECOMES ONE-SIDED

As the months passed, something began to shift — slowly, quietly, subtly. I became the one initiating closeness, the one repairing the silences, the one smoothing emotional edges, the one trying harder, maybe the only one trying.

It wasn't an agreement. It wasn't intentional. It was simply the path of least resistance. Marriage slowly became a space I tended to. A space I maintained. A space I held together. The emotional responsibility sat quietly on my shoulders long before I could even realise I was carrying. I became the one who adjusted. Who often compromised. He didn't demand it. But his absence created a vacuum — and women, especially South Asian women, are conditioned to fill emotional gaps before anyone even acknowledges they exist.

The more I adapted, the less space I took up. I didn't call it shrinking. I rationalised it as maturity. I didn't call it self-erasure. I called it

effort. But my body knew long before my mind did: Something was out of balance.

The tension lived in tiny moments: A conversation where I wasn't fully heard. A silence where reassurance should've been. A moment of connection where presence felt half-given. None of these things were big enough to name. But they were heavy enough to carry. I began asking questions I wasn't ready to articulate:

Why do I feel responsible for the emotional tone of the room? Why do I feel like I have to earn connections?

Why am I always bracing? Why do I feel more alone near him than I did alone in London? But these questions stayed quiet — buried under duty, culture, gratitude, and hope. I was becoming a mother. And, becoming a mother leaves little space for becoming a woman who questions her own pain.

THE QUESTION I WASN'T READY TO ANSWER

I wasn't ready to confront anything. Not my discomfort. Not the growing distance. Not the small absences that were starting to feel big. I didn't complain. I didn't push back. I didn't break down. Instead, I started to ask myself — internally, briefly, fearfully: How long can you stay in a life that is slowly erasing you?

It wasn't a threat. It wasn't a plan. It wasn't even a conscious thought. It was grief. Grief for the woman I used to be. Grief for the emotional intimacy I longed for. Grief for the version of marriage I thought I would grow into. And grief always starts as a whisper. I didn't want to see the full picture. I wasn't ready to feel it.

I wasn't ready to name it. Because naming it would have forced me to acknowledge something terrifying:

I was losing myself. So, I soothed myself the only way I knew how: Be strong. Be patient. Be thankful. Be adaptable. Be silent. And that became my identity.

WHEN STRENGTH BECAME A HABIT

I didn't become strong because I wanted to. I became strong because the alternative felt unsafe.

I became strong because being soft felt too risky. I became strong because everyone around me needed me to be. Strength started as a necessity. Then it became a habit. Then became identity. I didn't notice when the shift happened. There was no single moment. No crisis. No event. It happened through repetition. Every time someone said "you're so strong," a part of me tightened — because what I heard was:

"I'm relieved you're not falling apart."

Strength became my survival language. And when strength is your default, your body adapts. You stop crying. You stop asking. You stop needing it. You stop being held, because no one expects the strong ones to need holding.

The world doesn't check on them. It leans on them.

But strength has a cost. A quiet one. It settles into the body; becoming tension, then vigilance, then exhaustion. Eventually, exhaustion stops feeling temporary and starts feeling like who you are.

By the time I became a mother, strength wasn't something I showed. It was something I lived inside. My body was carrying life, pressure, silence, and a marriage I didn't yet know how to name.

I didn't understand then what I know now: the body keeps score. Every unspoken need, every swallowed truth, leaves a mark.

That understanding came much later.

For now, in Chapter Two, it was just the beginning.

The beginning of strength becomes survival. The beginning of survival becoming a habit. The beginning of habit becoming identity.

The beginning of the slow, quiet erasure of a woman who had no idea how much she was losing just to stay.

CHAPTER THREE

A SENTENCE THAT SHIFTED EVERYTHING

My life shifted again; not with drama, not with confrontation, not with a fight or a fallout, but with a sentence that settled quietly into place. There had been conversations before it. Thoughts shared aloud. Practical considerations spoken about gently, over time. Nothing sudden. Nothing explosive. And then one day, the decision arrived and was not announced as an order, not framed as a demand, but as something that had already taken shape in his mind. Moving to the UK made sense to him. It felt like progress. Stability. A forward step. And I didn't oppose it. I didn't argue. I didn't challenge. I didn't ask myself whether I truly wanted it. I followed the way I had learned to follow so many things by then. Not blindly. Not unwillingly. Just without pausing long enough to check in with myself. On the surface, it felt reasonable. Sensible. Adults. The kind of decision married life is built on. And maybe, on paper, it was. But my body registered the shift before my mind did — that subtle internal tightening that comes when something important changes direction without being fully examined.

Not fear.

Not panic.

Disorientation.

The ground didn't collapse beneath me. It slid. I nodded. I adapted. I absorbed it as another adjustment to make. By then, I was already skilled at reshaping myself around new roles, new places, new

expectations. Marriage. Motherhood. Migration. Each layer added before the previous one had time to settle.

I had just begun to find a fragile rhythm; not comfort, not certainty but enough stability to stand. And then the rhythm changed again. Not because anyone meant harm. Not because anyone was cruel.

But because I had learned how to move with decisions instead of questioning what they were costing me.

THE LIE OF “ADULTHOOD”

At the time, I told myself this was adulthood. This was marriage. This was responsibility, my responsibility. This was what good women did. They adjusted. They absorbed. They coped. I told myself I was strong enough to handle it.

That other people endured much worse. That feeling overwhelmed was a failure of gratitude, not a signal of distress. I didn't yet understand something simple: I wasn't adapting. I was accumulating shocks. Change layered over change. Expectation layered over exhaustion. Loneliness layered over responsibility. Silence layered over confusion. My nervous system never had time to settle. My identity never had time to catch up.

My body never had space to ask the only question that mattered: What is this costing me? Back then, I wasn't ready to ask that. I survived instead and called it strength.

INDIA — A DIFFICULT, TENDER TEACHER

India had already changed me deeply. It stripped me. Softened me. Confused me. Humbled me.

It taught me how to read moods instead of words. How to navigate silences instead of conversations.

How to adjust instead of express. And slowly, very slowly, I had begun to shape something that resembled a life. Not a dream. Not ease. But something stable enough to stand inside.

- routines
- familiarity
- a rhythm
- small claims to space
- tiny pockets of comfort carved out quietly

Not fully mine. But no longer collapsing. Just as that fragile stability began to form, the decision arrived.

Just as I was learning how to breathe, the air changed again.

THE UNSEEN TRUTH

With distance, I can hold more than one truth at once. For him, the move may have felt like forward motion, a step toward clarity, toward something that made sense internally. For me, it felt like a loss. Not of a country but of footing. He may have experienced it as movement. I experienced it as being moved.

Both can be true. What mattered wasn't intent. What mattered was impact. I didn't feel included in the decision. I felt carried along by it. And, that distinction, invisible to everyone else — lodged itself quietly in my chest. Not loud enough to challenge. Not sharp enough to confront. Just deep enough to remember.

LEAVING INDIA — THE GRIEF OF PACKING

By May, our home in India was full of boxes. Packing is one of the strangest forms of grief — a slow dismantling of a life you were still learning how to live. You don't just pack belongings.

You pack attempts, adjustments, moments, early mornings lived half-awake, nights spent trying to rest in a place that never fully learned the shape of you. Every cupboard emptied felt like erasing

proof that I had tried — quietly, consistently, sincerely. I told myself I was being practical. I focused on logistics. But really, I was saying goodbye in pieces small enough not to break me. Around us, disappointment thickened the air.

People struggled with the decision. The environment struggled. And in that struggle, a narrative quietly formed — not spoken, not confessed, but unmistakably present. A narrative with a familiar undertone:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

You disturbed our peace. You unsettled the home. Your presence shifted what was comfortable.

No one said it out loud. They didn’t need to. I could feel it in the pauses, in the glances exchanged over my shoulder, in the conversations that softened when I entered the room. Meaning had to go somewhere, and culturally, it often goes towards the woman. The daughter-in-law becomes the container for everyone else’s disappointment. I didn’t correct anyone. I didn’t defend myself. I didn’t explain how little control I actually had, or how conflicted I felt, or how much I was losing too. Silence felt safer than truth.

And while fingers were quietly pointing at me, I was losing sleep too. Long before anyone realised it.

BACK TO LONDON — THE STRANGEST HOMECOMING

Returning to London, now as a wife and a mother to Mikhal, should have felt grounding. Restorative. Familiar. Instead, it felt like stepping back into a life that expected the old me, the one who hadn’t yet bent herself into shapes to keep a household steady.

But I was different now. Not visibly but internally, profoundly. I was, A wife. A mother. A woman shaped by migration. A woman who had learned to hold tension quietly, to absorb the moods

around her, to carry responsibility for peace that was never hers alone. My parents greeted me with warmth, but I could sense the hesitation as if they were trying to recognise me while I was still trying to recognise myself. They saw their daughter. I felt like a stranger in my own skin. And underneath the welcome,

beneath the smiles, beneath the polite questions, I sensed something else: London hadn't just missed me.

It expected me to be “fine.” To fit back into the role I'd left behind. To slip into routines as if I hadn't lived an entire emotional lifetime in another country. I didn't blame them. How could they know? Even I didn't even fully understand myself yet. Transitions don't just confuse the person living inside them — they unsettle everyone watching from the outside. And quietly, subtly, in the same way it had formed in India, another unspoken feeling hovered in the air:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

Not in blame. Not in accusation. But, in the sense that my return, my heaviness, my quiet confusion made everyone just a little more alert, a little more worried, a little more awake at night. What no one realised then, what even I didn't fully see, was that I had already entered the longest chapter of my own sleeplessness.

SURVIVAL MODE — THE YEARS THAT BLUR

The early years back in the UK were relentless. My husband threw himself into work — a familiar, predictable, measurable refuge. A place where effort produced results. Where stability could be built. Where responsibility had structure. And I, even though I didn't see it at the time, I did exactly the same.

Motherhood consumed me. I anchored myself in routine. I built a structure because everything else felt unstable. Later, I returned to work intentionally — not as escape, but as survival. Work gave me boundaries.

Work gave me identity. Work gave me something that didn't rely on emotional availability or performance, or containment. Motherhood gave me purpose. Work gave me breath.

We weren't choosing distance from each other. We were choosing survival in different languages.

But survival always comes with a cost. Left unchecked, it consumes intimacy quietly — not through malice but through exhaustion. Connection became another task neither of us had the emotional capacity to reach for. I didn't have words for this then. I only knew I was tired in a way sleep could not fix.

The kind of tiredness that lives in your bones. The kind of tiredness that makes you watch yourself from a distance.

The kind of tiredness that feels like bracing, even when nothing is happening.

LIFE BETWEEN WORLDS — THE SPLITTING OF SELF

Being back in the UK put me between two worlds that both misunderstood me in different ways.

My parents saw commitment, effort, and the appearance of stability. They saw me functioning — so they assumed I was fine. I didn't know how to articulate the erosion happening inside me without sounding dramatic or ungrateful or disloyal. On the other side, grief about the move lingered.

Loss was still being processed by others. Emotion was heightened around me. I often felt positioned as the reason for decisions I hadn't made. In that emotional landscape, I felt invisible and overexposed at the same time. So, I split. Fragmented myself. I showed one version of myself to my parents. Another to those grieving the move. Another inside the marriage. Another at work. I learned to adapt to every room, every emotional expectation, every

dynamic. Fragmentation is exhausting. But it becomes normal when you don't know who you are in your whole form.

LOSS — THE KIND THAT LEAVES A SHADOW

In 2009, my life split quietly. It didn't happen with an announcement. It didn't happen with a visible sign.

It didn't happen in a way that anyone outside the moment could fully understand. It happened suddenly — an ectopic pregnancy. A medical emergency. A rupture not just of tissue, but of belief. Loss hits differently when it follows years of emotional bracing. It is not just the loss of a potential child. It is the loss of a narrative. A hope. A private imagining you didn't even allow yourself to dream fully. There was no room to collapse. Not practically. Not culturally. Not emotionally. People around you move on because they never carried the dream in their body. But you did. Your body becomes a silent archive of what could have been.

Grief didn't break me loudly. It hollowed me quietly. I remember the numbness more than the pain.

I remember the silence more than the tears. I remember the way I picked myself up as though picking myself up was the only option available. By 2009, strength was no longer something I reached for, it was something that reached for me. Before I had time to ask myself if I wanted to be okay, I was already acting as if I was. This is what happens when endurance becomes identity: You don't choose strength. Your body performs it automatically. And life moves on even when your heart hasn't.

ANOTHER BEGINNING — HOPE WITH GUARDED EDGES

In 2010, I was pregnant again. But this time, the emotion wasn't uncomplicated joy. It was layered.

Relief lived next to fear. Hope lived next to caution. Joy lived next to grief. Pregnancy after loss is not innocent. You carry memory in your bloodstream. You measure time differently. You listen to your body with vigilance. You brace for news even when you want to trust the moment. Love exists, but it is held gently —like something precious you're scared to grip too tightly. I carried that pregnancy quietly. Protectively.

Cautiously. I didn't celebrate loudly. I didn't rush ahead mentally. I held myself still. When my second son was born, there was relief — that deep, chest-shaking relief that makes your lungs ache when you finally breathe again. My sons became my anchor in a life where everything else felt uncertain. But here is a truth I didn't understand then: Babies arrive, but unresolved trauma doesn't disappear just because a new life enters the world. Motherhood intensified everything I had been ignoring. Exhaustion deepened.

Loneliness sharpened. The emotional gaps widened. The cracks in the marriage grew more visible — not because anything new happened, but because motherhood stripped away the space I used to use to hide from my own truth. Love existed. But, so did depletion. And love cannot fix depletion when the person you're loving is disappearing inside the effort.

JULY 2010 — WHEN REALITY CHANGED SHAPE

Some moments don't break you loudly. They break you clearly. By July 2010, clarity began seeping into my life like water through cracks in a wall — slow, relentless, impossible to ignore. There were things I came to understand during that period that I won't recount here. Not out of fear. Not out of loyalty. Not out of shame.

But because this book is not about exposing anyone else. It's about the quiet violence of internal reckoning, the moment a woman realises that the world she thought she was living in was built on fault lines. And in that moment, I felt the meaning behind a sentence no

one ever said to my face, but one I recognised instantly in the behaviour around me:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

You disturbed the peace. You unsettled the home. You broke what was never yours to break.

Except the truth was the opposite. I wasn't the one who disrupted anything. I was the one living with the consequences of someone else's choices. I was the one losing sleep. I was the one carrying the weight.

I was the one rearranging myself to protect a peace I hadn't disturbed. What I had dismissed as stress was erosion. What I had rationalised as cultural difference was emotional distance. What I had labelled as adjustment was self-erasure. Realisation doesn't always arrive as a single moment. Sometimes it forms through a hundred small observations that suddenly align into something undeniable. That's what July 2010 was for me. A pattern snapping into focus so sharply I felt winded by the truth. For the first time, I stopped asking:

How do I fix this?

How do I adjust better?

How do I make myself easier to love?

And I began asking the question

my body had been whispering for years:

What am I accepting that is breaking me?

It wasn't a threat.

It wasn't a plan.

It wasn't an exit.

It was recognition.

Quiet.

Heavy.

Grounding.

Recognition is a shift that cannot be undone. Your nervous system stops lying for you. Your mind stops softening the truth. Your heart stops cushioning the impact. And your intuition steps forward with a certainty you can no longer outrun: **This marriage is costing me pieces of myself I may never recover.**

That recognition wasn't abstract. It arrived alongside facts my body couldn't ignore. I learned that my marriage was not what I believed it to be and at the same time, I learned I was carrying a child. I wanted to go home. I needed somewhere safe to land. But there was nowhere to go. My parents refused to take me back, believing endurance was still the right answer. And so, I stayed, not because I didn't see the fracture, but because every exit was closed. I didn't make a decision in July 2010.

But something fundamental broke open.

The seed was planted.

The illusion dissolved.

The truth surfaced and truth never goes back underground.

THE BEGINNING OF AN END — QUIET, SLOW, INEVITABLE

Nothing changed externally. I didn't pack bags.

I didn't issue ultimatums **inside the marriage.**

But internally, everything shifted.

Once you see a fracture, you cannot unsee it. You can paint over it, call it character, blame the angle of light — but you still know it's

there. I wasn't simply tired. I was emptied. I wasn't simply overwhelmed.

I was eroded. I wasn't simply stressed. I was grieving — grieving a marriage that existed in routine but not in relationship, grieving a self I had misplaced inside years of emotional labour no one acknowledged.

In the silence of that grief lived the quiet accusation women learn to swallow: if peace is broken, surely it must be you.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.

But I already knew the truth — even if I couldn't yet speak it:

I wasn't the one disturbing the peace.

I was the one paying for its disturbance.

THE AWARENESS THAT SHAPES EVERYTHING NEXT

Chapter Three doesn't end with action. It ends with awareness. Awareness that something essential inside me had cracked. Awareness that strength, when held for too long, stops being resilience and becomes self-abandonment. Awareness that endurance is not intimacy. Awareness that survival is not living.

And awareness that the sentence no one said aloud was already shaping me:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.

Not because I had done something wrong.

But because it was easier for the world to place the weight of dysfunction on the woman who stayed silent.

That awareness became the spine of every decision that would follow — years later, after more breaking, more awakening, more sleeplessness. Recognition came in 2010. The rest of the story unfolded because of it.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LONG MIDDLE

Shay arrived — tiny, perfect, utterly dependent. And for a while, he didn't just bring love into the house.

He brought structure. Predictability. A reason to keep going when everything else felt unsteady.

Babies do that. They make time feel urgent. They fill your arms so completely that you don't have the physical space to fall apart properly. I remember the quiet hours — his soft weight against my chest, the steady rhythm of his breathing, the purity of newborn scent. In those moments, a quiet promise formed inside me:

If I just focus on them, I'll be fine. Not happy. Not whole. Not fulfilled. Just... fine enough. And that's the trap, isn't it? "Fine enough" becomes a lifestyle. A justification. A coping mechanism. A permanent state.

A way of staying upright while telling yourself you're surviving. I didn't have one dramatic breaking moment.

I had a thousand tiny ones — distance, silence, performance, pressure — until my own life started feeling like something happening around me instead of something I was actually inside. This is that chapter.

The long middle. The chapter where nothing "happens," and yet everything changes.

THE MOTHERHOOD MASK

Motherhood gave me purpose. It also gave me cover. With two small children, nobody questions why you're tired. Nobody asks why you're fading. Nobody notices the dulling of your spark. They call it normal.

They call it phases. They call it motherhood. And yes — motherhood is exhausting. Beautiful, relentless, grounding, overwhelming. But my exhaustion wasn't just nappies and broken sleep and school runs and laundry and never sitting down long enough to think. It was the exhaustion of carrying emotional weight without putting any of it down. It was being responsible for the mood of the house, for the tension in the air, for holding everything steady so nobody could look at me and think:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

You unsettled the peace. You disrupted the calm. No one said it. But women are taught to hear it even in silence. So, I carried on. God, I carried everything. The children. The schedules. The meals. The moods. The unspoken tension. The burden of silence on my own back. Somewhere along the way, I confused peace with quiet. But quiet isn't peace. Quiet is everything unsaid. Strength becomes dangerous when it's the only way you're allowed to exist. When "strong" means:

You don't ask.

You don't need.

You don't falter.

You don't rest.

You don't break.

You just... carry.

And I carried.

LONELINESS IN A FULL HOUSE

Loneliness isn't the absence of people. It's the absence of connection. It's sitting beside someone every day and feeling emotionally marooned. It's sharing a house but not a life. My loneliness was polite. Quiet.

Well-behaved. It crept in during the nights when the children finally slept, and the house went still.

Those were the hours when the silence grew so loud it made my body restless. I stopped sleeping properly.

Not dramatically. Just slowly — a mind too alert, a heart too unsettled, a nervous system too wired from holding everything together all day. I would lie there next to someone, inches apart, yet feel like the only one awake in the entire world. And in that sleeplessness, another thought crept in — unspoken, but familiar:

Maybe I am the disruption.

Maybe I am the one unsettling the peace.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Not because anyone said it. But because loneliness makes you blame yourself for the emptiness someone else created. It surfaced at strange moments — a song in the car, a line in a film, a memory that floated up uninvited. My chest tightened without cause. My patience thinned. Tears arrived quietly — not in breakdowns, but in small leaks my body could no longer contain. My emotions spilled sideways because I had nowhere safe to place them directly. But outwardly? I was “fine.” And that's the thing people don't understand about women in long marriages: **We don't break loudly.** We fade quietly. We stop sleeping long before we stop trying.

THE ART OF APPEARING FINE

There is a version of womanhood that looks flawless from the outside. A steady smile. A tidy home.

Children who appear content. A marriage that looks functional enough to avoid suspicion. From the outside, people call it strength. Inside, it is performance. I became fluent in this performance. I knew how to soften my tone before speaking. How to swallow words before they turned into conflict. How to dim the parts of myself that made others uncomfortable. Appearance became evidence. If I functioned well, the marriage will be fine. If I look composed, the home must be peaceful. If I wasn't falling apart, then there was "nothing wrong." But performing stability is its own kind of erosion. Every smile that wasn't real.

Every silence that wasn't consent. Every "I'm fine" that was really "I'm exhausted." Women like me don't collapse suddenly. We disappear one adjustment at a time. And underneath it all lived a truth I carried alone:

I wasn't "keeping the peace." I was carrying the entire weight of it. And no one noticed because I played my role so well.

I participated in my own erasure.

Not because I lacked strength — but because culturally, emotionally, generationally, I had been trained to believe:

Your needs are negotiable.

Everyone else's peace is not. And quietly, beneath all the expectations, rested the sentiment that held me hostage for years:

"Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di"

Don't be the reason things feel unsettled.

Don't be the one who disrupts the calm.

Don't be the woman who "breaks."

So, I worked twice as hard to keep the illusion of peace —even while losing my own internal peace in the process. The long middle doesn't break you loudly. It breaks you quietly, incrementally, until one day you look around and realise:

Your life looks stable on the outside, and feels unrecognisable on the inside.

THE QUIET TRUTH

I didn't have a plan. I didn't have a timeline. I didn't even have a language for what I was feeling.

What I had was a growing awareness — quiet, steady, undeniable. Something wasn't right.

Something wasn't sustainable. Something was hollowing me out from the inside.

People around me could still call it a normal marriage. But I had begun to understand something in the privacy of my own sleepless nights:

“Normal” was not the same as peaceful.

Normal was not the same as loving. Normal was not the same as being seen. And the more I held everything together, the more I lost pieces of myself. By the end of the long middle, I wasn't breaking. I was disappearing. And somewhere inside the erosion — the sleeplessness, the self-abandonment, the quiet ache — the emotional meaning of that sentence finally took shape:

I wasn't the one who broke the peace. I was the one absorbing its cost.

WHEN A WOMAN STARTS DISAPPEARING

There is a particular kind of silence inside a marriage that doesn't happen overnight. It gathers. It settles.

It becomes part of the furniture. And before you realise it, you speak less, share less, laugh less, ask less, expect less. You become a quieter version of yourself— not because you want to, but because the space no longer welcomes your voice. I wasn't told to be quiet. I wasn't forbidden from expressing myself. It was far subtler. It was the realisation that emotional conversations went nowhere.

That my feelings created discomfort rather than connection. That anything heavy became a burden, not a bridge. And in the background of all that lived an unspoken message I internalised deeply:

Don't disturb the peace.

Don't be the problem.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Even though *I* was the one lying awake at night, losing sleep, holding worry in my chest, I was also the one shrinking— just in case my truth made things worse.

So, I reduced. Not visibly. Not dramatically. Just quietly. Needs I once owned became needs I didn't know how to justify. Parts of me faded because there was no room for their full expression. That's the thing about disappearing, it's quiet. It's efficient. It's almost graceful. One day, you look in the mirror and recognise your reflection— but not the woman living behind it.

THE WEIGHT OF HOLDING EVERYTHING TOGETHER

These were the years when every day demanded more of me than I had to give. Motherhood didn't stop.

Marriage didn't ease. Life didn't soften. Every responsibility sharpened. I became the project manager of the home. The carer. The scheduler. The organiser. The cook. The emotional buffer. The

mediator. The accountant. The motivator. The peacekeeper. A one-woman system making sure everything ran smoothly.

And when you are the one who makes everything work, **nobody notices when you start breaking.**

I kept the uniforms washed. I kept the meals cooked. I kept the atmosphere measured — because managing emotional weather became my responsibility too. And underneath it all lived that quiet, punishing expectation that so many women carry: **If the home feels unsettled**, it must be you. **Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.** So, I made myself smaller. Calmer. More contained. More adaptable. I performed stability so everyone else could stay comfortable. I was functioning perfectly... while falling apart quietly.

THE CHILDREN BECOME MY COMPASS

My boys became the centre of my orbit— the one part of life that felt pure, uncomplicated, true. In their laughter, I remembered joy. In their need for me, I found purpose. In their softness, I felt anchored.

But here is the truth I didn't admit then: I also hid inside motherhood. Motherhood became my shield, my refuge, my safe room, my way of avoiding the fractures that were widening silently inside the marriage.

When the children needed something, I didn't have to confront what I needed. When I was busy, I didn't have to acknowledge how lonely I had become. When people saw me as a good mother, they didn't question me as a woman. I used motherhood as armour. And armour is useful— but armour is heavy. By the time the boys were older, I didn't know who I was anymore outside the role that protected me. I wasn't just tired.

I was unrooted. A woman so used to protecting peace that she didn't realise she was losing her own.

THE BODY ALWAYS KNOWS FIRST

Even when the mind is in denial, the body refuses to lie. My body began whispering long before I did:

Tight chest. Heaviness in the mornings. Headaches from nowhere. Fatigue that sleep couldn't touch.

Tears appear without reason. Irritation with no source. A strange ache that comes from emotional malnourishment. A sense of floating outside my own life. I dismissed it: stress, motherhood, hormones, exhaustion. But the truth was far simpler:

I was carrying a marriage on my back while pretending it weighed nothing. I was losing sleep quietly, steadily— not because I was the disruption, but because I was absorbing disruptions I could never name.

That's the emotional truth behind the sentence women hear in its many silent forms:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

But my body knew the opposite first. My body was telling the truth I wasn't ready to speak. It whispered for years before I listened.

THE INTERNAL SEPARATION BEGINS

People think separation begins with a conversation, a decision, a fight. But emotional separation begins quietly — years before any words ever leave your mouth. It begins the day you stop expecting the relationship to nourish you. It begins the day you stop reaching out. It begins the day you stop imagining a future that feels like a partnership. It begins the day your “we” quietly becomes “me.” Mine began before Shay was born — but I didn't recognise it then. It began in the moments where disappointment became routine instead of an exception. The nights I cried silently so I wouldn't be questioned. It began the mornings I braced myself before stepping into the day. It began the years where marriage was duty

instead of connection. It began the first time I felt more myself sitting alone in the car than I ever did inside my own home. And beneath all of that lived a quiet, internal shame—the belief that **my sadness was the problem**, that if the atmosphere felt heavy, it must somehow be me.

That invisible accusation every Desi woman knows too well:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

You unsettled the peace.

You created the unease.

You caused the imbalance.

But the truth was simpler: I wasn’t disturbing anything. I was surviving. I didn’t leave my marriage in 2010.

But the version of me who entered it was already slipping away.

THE LIE OF “STAYING FOR THE CHILDREN”

When women stay in unhappy marriages, people say:

“It’s for the children.”

But here is the truth I learned later: Children don’t need perfect homes. They need emotionally present parents. What they learn from us is not what we say but what we silently tolerate. Back then, I genuinely believed I was doing the right thing. I believed stability mattered more than truth. I believed structure mattered more than connection. I believed silence was safer than disruption. I believed keeping the family together meant keeping myself together even when I was dissolving quietly inside. I thought I was protecting them. But I was disappearing in the process. And here is the part people rarely admit:

children feel everything. They feel when a mother becomes muted. They feel the emotional gaps.

They feel the unspoken grief. They feel the tension in the air. They feel the heaviness in your body long before you ever name it. And in those years, I carried another unspoken fear— the same one that haunts so many women:

If I left, would the world say **I** was the one who ruined everything?
Would they whisper,

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

You broke the home.

You caused the disruption.

Meanwhile, I was the one lying awake at night, losing sleep quietly, holding up a structure that was already collapsing. I didn’t know any of this then. I only knew how to survive.

IDENTITY LOSS — THE QUIETEST GRIEF

You don’t wake up one morning and realise you’ve lost yourself. It happens slowly. It happens when you stop choosing things you enjoy. When you stop having opinions. When you stop dressing for yourself.

When you stop dreaming. When you stop recognising what makes you *you*. When your life becomes about keeping everyone else steady instead of keeping yourself whole. I looked like me. I sounded like me.

I functioned like me. But inside, I was a faint outline of the woman I used to be. I wasn’t broken.

I was muted. And muted women don’t make dramatic exits. Muted women walk through their lives like ghosts of their former selves— hoping someone will notice their fading before they disappear completely. But no one noticed. Not because they didn’t care, but because I performed “fine”

so convincingly that no one thought to look deeper. Because I was strong. Because I was capable.

Because I never dropped the ball. Women like me rarely drop anything. Except ourselves.

And beneath that quiet erasure lived the belief I had absorbed for years:

Don't create waves. Don't disrupt the peace.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

A sentence that was never spoken—and yet lived in every silence around me.

LOSING — THE LONG MIDDLE

By the end of the long middle, nothing had exploded.

There were no ultimatums. No dramatic exits. No moment that would have made sense to anyone watching from the outside.

But something had quietly worn thin. I had learned how to endure almost anything. And in doing so, I had learned how to disappear inside my own life.

I was still functioning. Still showing up. Still mothering, organising, managing, smoothing, absorbing. Still performing the role of a woman who looked fine enough to be left alone. But the cost of that performance was no longer abstract. Sleep thinned. Joy dulled. My sense of self loosened its grip — not suddenly, but steadily.

I wasn't making plans.

I wasn't choosing exits.

I was paying attention to what endurance was doing to me.

How much effort it took to keep everything calm.

How often my needs came last.

How silence had stopped being a choice and become a requirement.

How strength, demanded endlessly, stopped being resilient and started being erased.

This was not the chapter where I left.

It was the chapter where staying began to cost more than I could carry without consequence.

Beneath all the coping, all the adjusting, all the quiet labour, one truth settled into my body:

I wasn't failing at marriage.

I was surviving something that was slowly costing me myself.

Chapter Four ends here — not with action, and not with clarity — but with the consequence of carrying too much for too long.

And once the body begins to register the cost, the long middle is already thinning — even if the leaving has not yet begun.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WINTER TRIP – HOPE AS HABIT

By the time we travelled as a family that winter, I wasn't hopeful in the way I once used to be.

Hope, by then, wasn't optimism. It wasn't a belief. It wasn't trust in better days. It had become a habit, something I reached for automatically, long after it stopped offering anything back. Still, I agreed to go.

Because that's what you do when you're trying to keep something alive that has already stopped breathing properly. You change the scenery. You tell yourself that sunlight can soften what silence has hardened. You hope a different sky might bring out a different version of the person beside you. I didn't expect miracles.

I expected relief. A little ease. A little tenderness. A little reminder of what once felt possible. But distance doesn't heal emotional wounds when the wound **is** the distance. And this trip — the one meant to soothe became the one that stripped everything bare.

THE ILLUSION OF ESCAPE

From the outside, the trip looked idyllic. Warm air. Open skies. Children laughing freely, their joy untouched by adult storms. People assume places like that are restorative, that beaches fix marriages and sunshine fixes silence. But disconnection doesn't care about scenery. It travels with you. It sits between two people, even when the sand is soft, and the light is golden. I noticed it on day one. The familiar emotional absence.

The dead air between sentences. The way conversations skimmed the surface as though depth was dangerous. Even while standing two feet away, I felt invisible. I told myself it was the first day. I told myself holidays take time to settle. I told myself not to overthink. But my body knew. It always knew first. A tightness in my chest. A quiet bracing. That eggshell awareness of managing tone, managing silence, managing mood.

I found myself doing what I had done for years: carrying atmosphere, softening edges, anticipating tension, adjusting myself to avoid emotional disruption. And beneath that effort lived a familiar, unspoken belief women internalise far too easily:

Don't unsettle anything. Don't be the reason things feel off.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

As if I was the unrest. As if I was the disruption. Even though I was the one losing the most sleep.

THE MOMENT EVERYTHING BECAME CLEAR

There is no photograph of the moment. Nothing dramatic to point to. Just a small exchange —a tone, a look, a comment —that landed harder than it should have. I won't repeat words here. This story isn't about blame.

It's about impact. Because what matters is how my body received it: Not as irritation. Not as hurt. Not even as a shock.

But as **truth**.

That cold, devastating stillness that rises from the deepest part of you when your soul recognises something your mind has been negotiating with for years. At that moment, I wasn't misunderstood. I was **defined**.

Not seen but categorised. Reduced into something fixed in someone else's eyes. And the worst part?

I recognised the feeling. Because it wasn't new. This moment was simply the one I could no longer pretend away. The mask slipped; not his, but mine. The mask I wore to keep the peace. The mask I wore to avoid being seen as the woman who "disturbs." The mask I wore to protect everyone else's comfort at the cost of my own.

AFTER THE WORDS – THE QUIET COLLAPSE

People imagine moments like this create drama — shouting, tears, confrontation. But what I felt was exhaustion. The kind that drops into your bones when you realise you've been carrying a weight far heavier than you ever admitted or beyond your years. A weight you normalised. A weight you disguised as maturity. A weight you rationalised as culture, as duty, as marriage. Once dignity cracks, it doesn't quietly reseal.

Later, when the children finally slept and the room fell quiet, I felt the moment fully.

Not anger.

Not heartbreak.

Not panic.

Finality. The inner sentence that arrives when your body stops participating in your self-denial:

"This is not a moment. This is a truth."

THE RETURN HOME — WHEN NOTHING CHANGED AND EVERYTHING DID LIFE RESUMES, BUT YOU DON'T

When we came back to the UK, the world snapped back into its usual rhythm as if nothing had happened.

Bags were opened. Uniforms were laid out. School runs restarted. Life folded itself neatly around us the way it always had. From the outside, everything looked steady. Predictable. Ordinary.

But inside me, something refused to settle. There was a line, a quiet internal line — that had been crossed on that trip. Not loudly. Not dramatically.

Just enough for my body to recognise that something was no longer sitting where it used to.

I tried, gently, carefully, to revisit that moment. Not to argue. Not to accuse. Not to inflame anything.

Just to make sense of why it echoed inside me long after the noise around us had faded.

But the responses landed softly and yet left me even more alone with the weight of it:

“You’re overthinking it.”

“It wasn’t that deep.”

“You’re too sensitive.”

“You took it the wrong way.”

No malice. No raised voices. Just a difference in perception so wide that my feelings had no place to land.

That’s the quiet ache no one prepares you for: how two people can walk through the same moment and carry completely different memories of it. For one, it dissolves. For the other, it imprints. My body remembered what the room forgot. I felt it in my chest at night. In the way my breath sat shallow in the mornings. In the way, silence felt heavier than usual. It wasn’t fear — it was the awareness that something had shifted inside me, and I didn’t know how to place it back where it came from.

And beneath all of this lived the echo I had inherited long before adulthood:

Endure.

Adjust.

Absorb.

Carry.

The unspoken cultural contract:

Don't shake the room. Don't bring up what disturbs others. Don't be the reason the home feels unsettled.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Not because of someone else's actions but because I was now lying awake with truths I could no longer ignore. The world around me looked unchanged, but the woman moving quietly inside it was not the same.

I was returning to the same life with a heart that was no longer willing to disappear into the routines that once kept me silent. And that is what no one tells you:

Sometimes the real turning point is not the moment itself but the version of you who comes home afterwards and cannot slip back into who she was before.

WHEN SUPPORT IS CONDITIONAL — AND CONDITIONAL BECOMES PAINFUL

There is a particular kind of heartbreak that doesn't come from a partner but from the people you believed would always stand between you and pain. For me, it was the moment I realised that the love I grew up depending on had conditions I never recognised until I needed it most. When I finally tried to speak, truly speak about how I felt, about the ache in my chest, about the quiet shift inside me that I couldn't shake,

I didn't meet the safety I hoped for.

I met fear.

I met with hesitation.

I met the cultural reflex to preserve the marriage before preserving the woman living inside it.

What I heard, beneath the comforting phrases and careful pauses, wasn't lack of love — but love filtered through generations of expectation.

"Log kya kabenge."

"Your children need stability."

"These things happen in marriage."

"Give it more time."

And beneath all of it lingered a familiar message:

"Don't undo what we taught you to hold together."

I wasn't asking for solutions. I wasn't asking for sides. I was asking to be understood.

But instead, a quiet grief settled into my chest — the grief of realising that my family wasn't going to pull me out of this. Not because they didn't care, but because they cared through the lens they were raised with.

It was the first time I felt the weight of being a South Asian daughter, the kind who is loved deeply but guided by rules older than her heartbreak. That night, something cracked inside me.

Not the marriage — me.

I wanted out.

Not dramatically.

Not impulsively.

But softly, honestly, with a kind of desperation I didn't yet know how to name. I wanted out of the silence.

Out of the role. Out of the version of myself who kept absorbing everything so no one else had to feel uncomfortable. I didn't want

to disappoint anyone. I didn't want to fracture loyalty. But I was starting to understand that staying exactly as I was might cost me more than leaving ever could.

It wasn't a rebellion.

It wasn't defiance.

It was the first moment of truth:

My family couldn't save me from this life.

I would have to save myself.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Not just because of the marriage, but because I could no longer sleep through the truth landing in my own chest.

THE FALLOUT — THE DAUGHTER WHO NEEDED HER FAMILY

After that conversation, I walked through the house in a kind of emotional fog — a dizziness that had nothing to do with the room and everything to do with the truth settling into me:

I was truly on my own in this.

Not unloved.

Not abandoned.

Just unsupported in the way I needed most. It is a quiet grief, the grief of realising your family loves you but cannot meet you in the version of pain you are living now. I remember sitting on the edge of my bed, phone still in my hand, staring at the wall in disbelief as a new truth whispered its way through my ribs. I wanted my family. Not the family shaped by expectation, reputation, and generational belief systems, I wanted the familiar comfort, the unconditional softness, the safety I had imagined would always be there. But when

I reached for it this time, I collided with the traditions they were raised within.

Their love was real — steady, deep, genuine but the boundaries around it were shaped by their world, not mine. And I don't blame them for that. Truly, I don't. But love offered through fear lands differently on a daughter's skin. That night, I felt a kind of emotional distance that wasn't created out of cruelty but out of conditioning. My family wasn't turning their backs. They were leaning on the beliefs that had kept them safe in a time when daughters had fewer choices. But what kept them safe was suffocating me. And that's the part no one prepares you for that moment where you understand the people you love are trying to protect you in ways that no longer protect you. I cried quietly, not wanting the boys to wake, wondering how many daughters before me had sat exactly like this: loving their families, needing them, but realising they would have to walk themselves through a pain they couldn't be guided out of. It wasn't betrayal. It wasn't rejection.

It was a generational gap so deep that no words could bridge it. My family wasn't abandoning me.

They were following the script they were handed.

But that script was not written for the woman I was becoming.

And in that space between loyalty and love, I sometimes felt as though he belonged to them more than I did.

THE CULTURAL ECHO — THE WEIGHT NO ONE NAMES

In our community, love often arrives with instruction — instruction shaped by tradition, and tradition shaped by survival. Daughters are raised with quiet commandments:

Endure.

Adjust.

Carry.

Don't unravel.

Don't disturb the home.

Don't bring shame.

Don't choose yourself too loudly.

These teachings don't come from punishment.

They come from protection, from generations who stayed because leaving was unthinkable, who learned to equate silence with safety. My family was passing down what they believed would keep me anchored.

But what anchored them was drowning me.

Understanding that didn't soften the pain.

It sharpened it.

Because suddenly I was standing between two worlds: the daughter they raised, and the woman I was becoming. And the woman I was becoming could no longer survive inside the rules that shaped my girlhood.

It wasn't anger I felt.

It was heartbreak — quiet, contained, lodged behind my ribs.

That was the night I understood something clearly:

If I wanted out, I would have to walk myself out — not because my family didn't love me, but because their version of love wasn't built to carry the weight of my truth.

THE QUESTION THAT WOULD NOT LET ME GO

After that trip, after the minimisation, after the familiar *keep the peace* messaging, one question followed me everywhere:

What happens to a woman who keeps enduring something that is quietly dismantling her?

I began watching myself honestly.

How often I swallowed my words.

How often I chose calm over truth.

How often I apologised for someone else's tone.

How often I stayed quiet to protect a fragile peace.

How often I waited for tenderness that never arrived.

And for the first time, I allowed myself to consider what I had avoided for years:

That staying might cost me more than leaving ever could.

This wasn't rebellion.

It wasn't drama.

It wasn't vindication.

It was self-preservation, slowly waking up.

THE YEARS THAT WORE ME DOWN

There is a kind of unhappiness nobody warns you about — the stretch of time when something inside you is finished, but you keep pretending it isn't.

These were the years that wore me down.

Not because anything exploded, but because nothing changed.

Every day repeated itself: tension, silence, pretending, collapsing, then doing it all again the next morning. I wasn't in a crisis. I wasn't making decisions. I wasn't ready to leave. I wasn't able to stay.

It was the in-between that exhausted me — the slow erosion of a woman trying to convince herself that the life she was living was still the life she was meant to have.

I wasn't fighting anyone.

I wasn't fighting for anything.

I was fighting the truth I wasn't ready to name.

These were the years that thinned my spirit. The years where coping became the only identity I recognised. The years where I kept telling myself *maybe tomorrow will feel different*, even though every tomorrow felt the same.

This was the quiet unravelling — long before the breakdown, long before the collapse, long before anyone else realised I was no longer okay.

The truth didn't arrive in a single moment.

It wore me down slowly, until denial became too heavy to carry.

LIVING AND WORKING IN THE SAME STRUGGLE

After Shay was born, my parents suggested I join the family business. They genuinely believed it would help — help the family dynamic, soften the tension they could sense, keep things steady. In their minds, it was protection. Support. A way of holding everything together. And when your parents say, "Beta, this will be good for everyone," you don't argue. You don't analyse. You don't ask what it might cost you. You trust their hearts.

So, I joined. What I didn't understand then was how completely it would close in around me. I wasn't just working with family — I was living and working inside the same emotional conflict, with no distance between roles, no place to put anything down. My mum. My dad. My husband. The same faces at work.

The same tensions at home. The same expectations everywhere. There was nowhere my marriage didn't follow me. Nowhere my unhappiness didn't register. Nowhere I could be just me — without being someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone responsible for keeping things calm. I was already trying to keep the peace at home. At work, that responsibility multiplied. Every interaction felt loaded. Every silence felt noticed. Every bad day felt like evidence. If I was quiet, it felt like worry. If I was distant, it felt like tension.

If I was emotional, it felt like disruption. I learned to monitor myself constantly — my tone, my face, my energy — because there was no space where my feelings didn't seem to affect someone else.

There was no neutral ground. No boundary between personal pain and shared consequence.

No exit that didn't feel like abandonment. And slowly, without anyone needing to say it, I began to feel that my life wasn't fully my own anymore. That leaving my marriage wouldn't just be my decision — it would be something that shook the family, the business, the balance everyone was trying to preserve.

That knowledge settled heavily in my chest. And underneath it all lived the sentence I had learned to carry as responsibility:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

You've caused worry.

You've unsettled things.

You've made life harder for the people who love you. No one accused me of it. I accused myself.

The family business gave me stability — but it also bound my wellbeing to everyone else's.

If I was unhappy, I felt selfish. If I struggled, I felt ungrateful. If I wanted out, I felt like I was asking permission to break something

that didn't belong only to me. There was safety in being held so tightly.

And there was suffocation. And I lived inside both, every single day.

WHEN ENDURANCE RAN OUT

By the time I found myself on the floor, the exhaustion had moved past words. I wasn't trying to be dramatic.

I wasn't trying to make a point. I was begging because I didn't know how to keep going. "Please... please let me leave this marriage. Please let me stop living like this. I can't carry this anymore." Even as the words left my mouth, the guilt rose faster than the relief. Because wanting out didn't just feel like giving up — it felt like hurting them. It felt like confirming the fear I had carried for years: that my unhappiness was the problem, that my pain was what disturbed the peace.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Not as blame from them — but as a weight I placed on myself. My suffering didn't feel private.

It felt like something I was doing to my parents. I wasn't weak. I wasn't unstable. I was exhausted and ashamed at the same time — ashamed that my pain had consequences beyond me.

And there I was, on the floor, crying, shaking, not just asking to leave — but feeling like I was asking permission to stop being the source of their worry.

WHEN MY TRUTH WAS QUESTIONED

After I begged to leave, something shifted — not into action, but into disbelief. My pain didn't register as a signal that something in my life was breaking. It registered as something being *wrong with me*.

I was still living and working with the same people, still managing myself carefully, still trying to make sure my distress didn't spill over

onto anyone else. Every day felt like a balancing act — between surviving quietly and not becoming the reason everything felt unsettled.

When my father took me to see a holistic doctor, it wasn't because he accepted what I was saying.

It was because, in his mind, there had to be another explanation. Something psychological. Something internal. Something that didn't require dismantling the life we were all trying to protect.

I didn't feel relieved. I felt exposed. I remember sitting there, choosing every word with care — trying to explain my life without sounding ungrateful, without sounding dramatic, without sounding like someone who didn't appreciate everything her parents had done for her.

I could feel it then: my pain was being examined, not believed. The doctor listened quietly. And then he said that continuing under this level of stress was putting my health at serious risk. I watched my father absorb that. And in that moment, something painful became clear to me: I had been trying to protect my parents from the truth by carrying it alone — and they had been protecting themselves from it by believing there must be something wrong with *me*. Keeping the peace had come at a cost. And that cost was landing in my body.

THE FIRST STEP OUT

Leaving didn't feel like freedom. It felt like failure. In 2014, I stepped away from the family business — not because I didn't care, not because I was rejecting my parents, and not because I didn't value what they had built. I stepped away because I needed financial independence. As long as my income, my security, and my stability were tied to the family business, I didn't feel like I had a real choice — only versions of permission.

Staying meant that every decision about my marriage, my life, my future felt entangled with everyone else's fear and responsibility. I needed to know that I could stand on my own feet.

That I could support myself.

That I wasn't asking to leave — but choosing to live. Even then, the guilt stayed close. That sentence didn't disappear.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

I still felt like choosing independence meant choosing myself over my parents — and that felt like betrayal.

But my body had already made something clear to me:

Without independence, there was no real freedom. Without freedom, there was no honest choice.

And without choice, I would keep disappearing inside my own life. Leaving the business didn't fix everything.

It didn't remove the guilt. It didn't bring immediate relief. But it gave me something I had never truly had before: The ability to make decisions without feeling like my survival came at someone else's expense.

It stopped the slow collapse. And at that point in my life, that was all I knew how to ask for.

THE END OF DENIAL, THE BEGINNING OF NUMBNESS

Denial doesn't end in a single moment.

It ends in layers — thin, painful, unavoidable layers — peeled back only when the cost of pretending becomes heavier than the truth itself.

The hardest part wasn't accepting that something was wrong. It was accepting that I had known for a long time.

My body had known.

My intuition had known.

My tears had known.

My sleepless nights had known.

I was only catching up to what my nervous system had been carrying for years.

Strength had kept me going — and it had kept me stuck.

By the time I stepped away from the business, the decision didn't arrive with emotion. There was no relief. No clarity. No sense of triumph or failure. It wasn't dramatic. It was procedural. Necessary. Quiet.

Leaving wasn't an act of courage. It was an act of containment. I didn't feel free.

I didn't feel lighter. I felt less.

That was when numbness took hold.

I wasn't collapsing.

I was shutting down.

I wasn't unhappy.

I was blank.

I wasn't living.

I was functioning.

And numbness is one of the most dangerous emotional states a woman can inhabit, because it doesn't demand change. It doesn't ask for rescue. It allows life to continue exactly as it is.

By 2014, my body made a decision my mind wasn't ready for.

It shut off access.

I stopped feeling joy.

Stopped feeling anger.

Stopped feeling hope.

I stopped feeling anything.

Numbness became safer than feeling everything I had suppressed.

And still, I functioned — perfectly, efficiently, convincingly.

But functioning is not living.

It is survival with mascara on.

I cried in the car.

Wiped my face.

Walked inside.

Cooked dinner.

Nobody noticed — because numb women perform well.

This chapter doesn't end with a fight.

It doesn't end with a decision about marriage.

It doesn't end with resolution.

It ends with a woman still standing — still coping — having removed one load from her back, only to realise how much of herself she had already lost in the carrying.

CHAPTER SIX

THE YEARS WE LIVED TOGETHER WHILE ALREADY APART

THE QUIETEST ENDING IS THE LONGEST ONE

Marriages rarely die in one moment. Some die slowly — through arguments that shake the walls, through silences that stretch across days, through tension that becomes the air you breathe.

Mine died like that. Not with a dramatic exit, but with years of erosion. We lived together.

We co-parented. We shared routines, meals, and responsibilities. From the outside, it looked like stability.

Inside, it was chaos wrapped in silence. This is the chapter people don't talk about — the chapter where the marriage is dead inside the home, but the world expects you to smile, host, perform, and pretend you're not shattering quietly.

THE HOUSE THAT LOOKED NORMAL

From the outside, our house looked steady. Predictable. Functional.

A family doing what families do — school runs, birthdays, laundry, homework. The everyday choreography that convinces everyone: things are fine.

Inside me, nothing was steady.

Don't mistake my silence for peace. It was exhaustion.

Behind every school run, every family dinner, every photograph that looked "normal," was a woman who cried in the car almost every

day. Not soft tears. Not frustration. But the kind of crying that comes from a place so deep it no longer feels like crying — it feels like grief leaking from somewhere the mind can no longer contain.

Some days, I would park outside the house and sit there in silence, hands on the steering wheel, gathering myself before going inside. Sometimes it was seconds. Sometimes minutes. I wasn't crying because of one argument or one moment. I was crying because something inside me was slowly collapsing under the weight of years.

The hardest part wasn't the tears.

It was pretending they never existed.

The moment I stepped out of the car, I slipped back into the role the world needed from me. The dependable mother. The stable partner. The woman who always held it together. Pretending became muscle memory. Smile at the door. Hold the house steady. Keep the peace. Tidy emotion the way you tidy a room — quickly, quietly, before anyone notices the mess.

Our home wasn't chaotic.

It wasn't violent.

It wasn't loud.

But it was heavy in ways you can only understand from the inside.

Some evenings, when the boys were asleep, and the house finally exhaled, I would sit on the edge of the bed and feel the weight behind my ribs — not sadness, not anger, not loneliness, but a long, slow grief for the woman I kept postponing.

Because this is what those years taught me:

You can look functional and quietly fall apart.

You can keep life moving while your spirit stands still.

You can love your children fiercely and still mourn the woman you lost trying to be everything for everyone.

The house looked normal.

I didn't.

And that silent misalignment — the gap between how life looked and how it felt — became the place where my body started whispering the truth:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.

Not because someone else stole my peace, but because I could no longer sleep through the version of myself, I was becoming.

Every night, the same question grew louder:

If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?

THE CAR

There was only one place I ever allowed myself to fall apart.

The car.

Not the bedroom.

Not the bathroom.

Not the quiet corners of the house.

The car — the one space where my grief didn't threaten anyone else's peace.

I would sit there with my hands still on the steering wheel and let the weight I carried all day collapse. Some days, the crying was soft. Most days it wasn't. The tears were heavy — heavy with a pain so deep it had no language, a pain no one could decipher and no one could relieve.

The car became my confessional.

A small metal box that held more truth than my home ever could.

I wiped my face before stepping out — quickly, sharply, like erasing evidence. The world saw a mother arriving home.

Only the car knew she was breaking.

And every evening, as I gathered myself to go inside, the same thought circled quietly:

If I fall apart here, at least no one else loses sleep.

THE RITUAL OF PRETENDING

Pretending became my survival strategy.

Pretending the arguments weren't shaking me.

Pretending the silences weren't suffocating me.

Pretending the atmosphere wasn't unbearable.

Pretending I was strong.

Pretending I was coping.

Pretending I didn't cry outside Tesco before driving home.

I became fluent in pretending because the alternative was too dangerous.

And always — always —

the cultural accusation lingered in the background:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

You disturbed the peace. You unsettled the home. You are the problem. It wasn't said directly — but it was implied in every expectation, every silence, every dismissal, every look that said:

“Stay. Adjust. Don't rock the boat.”

I wasn't disturbing peace.

I was losing sleep trying to protect it.

SILENCE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Our home wasn't quiet. There were arguments — loud, sharp, circular. But afterwards, there was silence.

The kind of silence that is harder than shouting. The kind that bruises dignity.

The kind that makes you feel like disappearing is easier than speaking. We lived in cycles:

Explosion → silence → pretending → tension → explosion.

And every night, when the boys slept, and the house went still, I lay awake. Twelve years of not sleeping properly isn't insomnia. It's trauma. It's your nervous system living in survival mode. It's your body refusing to rest because rest required safety I didn't have.

MOTHERHOOD IN MARRIAGE THAT HAD ALREADY ENDED

My boys were my anchor — but also the place I hid. Motherhood was the one role where I still felt like I was enough. Where love was uncomplicated. Where I mattered. But motherhood also became the mask that allowed me to avoid admitting the truth: I was emotionally unravelling. And this is when the **twelve years of no sleep** truly began. Not because of newborns — but because of **daily emotional pain so deep** that even exhaustion couldn't overpower it. Nights of sitting on the edge of the bed, wiping tears before anyone heard.

Nights of praying for strength I didn't have. Nights where my heart felt too heavy to lie flat. The children kept me grounded. But they also kept me trapped. Because every time I looked at them, I told myself:

“Just survive one more day.”

MY IDENTITY STARTED SLIPPING AWAY

There was a version of me before motherhood, before marriage, before survival mode. She laughed loudly.

She had opinions. She had dreams. She took up space. That version faded slowly. I stopped dressing like myself. Stopped speaking up. Stopped wanting. Stopped imagining a future. Stopped recognising myself.

Identity loss isn't dramatic. It's efficient. It happens so gradually that by the time you notice, you're already gone. And layered on top of that loss was the cultural burden:

Don't disturb the home.

Don't shame the family.

Don't break the marriage.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

So, I swallowed myself to protect everyone else.

THE STRANGE CO EXISTENCE

Living together while emotionally broken is its own kind of hell. Sharing a kitchen but not a life. Sharing a table but not a conversation. Sharing routines but not connection. We weren't husband and wife. We were co-parents. Co-inhabitants. Co-survivors. Some days were explosive. Some days were silent. Most days were unpredictable. I lived in a constant state of bracing — never knowing which version of the day I'd wake up to.

Never knowing when the next argument would erupt. Never knowing how to protect the boys from the atmosphere. This wasn't peace. This was emotional warfare done quietly.

STAYING BECOME IMPOSSIBLE LEAVING FELT IMPOSSIBLE

This was the darkest truth of all. I didn't stay because I loved the marriage. I stayed because I had **nowhere to go**. I fought with my parents every single day for seven years. Not because they didn't love me, but because they were terrified of society, shame, gossip, judgment, reputation. Their words were a mix of fear, conditioning, and heartbreak:

“Adjust.”

“Work harder.”

“Think of your children.”

“We can't take you back.”

“People will talk.”

“Stay for the children”

“How will you survive?”

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

I wasn't just battling a marriage. I was battling a culture. A culture that teaches daughters to sacrifice themselves to protect everyone else's peace. My suffering was invisible. Their fear was loud. And guilt —the heaviest, most corrosive kind — kept me trapped.

THE GUILT THAT TRIED TO SILENCE ME

Guilt didn't enter my life as a single moment.

It arrived slowly — folded into culture, reinforced by silence, inherited like a family heirloom no one admits owning. I learned it in the pauses between conversations. In sharp looks that lasted a second too long.

In the way women apologised for existing before they ever asked for anything. Guilt taught me to measure my needs against everyone

else's comfort. To shrink so others could rest. To absorb tension so others could sleep peacefully. It whispered that if anyone was unsettled, the fault must have lived in me. And guilt is clever like that. It wraps itself around a woman's ribs and convinces her she is responsible for the emotional weather of every room she enters. But guilt isn't guidance. It is fear dressed up as duty.

So, by the time I reached marriage, guilt was already living inside me louder than my own voice.

I felt responsible for everyone's peace. Responsible for holding the house together even when I was falling apart. I felt guilty for ruining my children's childhood. Guilty for disturbing my parents' dreams.

Guilty for creating tension in the extended family. Guilty for failing at a role I was never allowed to question.

Guilty for even thinking of leaving.

I already lived with the quiet shame of feeling like I'd fallen short.

I didn't go to uni.

I depended on my family more than I ever wanted to.

So, when the marriage began breaking, it felt like the one thing I couldn't afford —the final blow — as if I had failed them in every direction at once.

And beneath all that guilt sat a truth I never said out loud:

I grew up feeling like I was falling short, so choosing divorce felt like committing the one mistake a daughter is never forgiven for.

This guilt wasn't logical. It was cultural.

Because daughters are raised to believe:

Your happiness is flexible.

Your silence is duty.

Your suffering is normal.

So, I stayed — long after my body stopped coping, long after my spirit dimmed, long after the version of me I recognised had disappeared. I stayed because the thought of causing them pain felt heavier than the pain I was carrying inside me. I lost years of sleep trying to protect a peace that never protected me.

The guilt tried its best to silence me.

And for years —**it succeeded.**

WHEN SLEEP BECAME A CURRENCY

By 2016, sleep was not something I expected. I hadn't slept properly since 2010 — not in the way sleep is meant to restore you. Not the kind that softens the body. Not the kind that settles the mind.

For years, my nights had been fractured by vigilance, arguments, guilt, and anticipation.

By then, insomnia wasn't new.

What changed was this:

Sleep stopped being a private struggle and became a public currency — measured, monitored, weaponised.

Every decision I made... every movement between homes... every pause... every breath... was judged not by truth or safety, but by how much it “disturbed the peace.”

There was one sentence that followed me everywhere — not always spoken aloud, but always present in tone, in looks, in consequences:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.”

You've disturbed the sleep.

As if sleep was something I had stolen. As if my exhaustion was proof of wrongdoing. As if a woman's pain only mattered once it reached someone else's bedroom.

And underneath all of this, beneath the guilt and the duty and the cultural obedience, I carried another truth I never admitted then:

I was terrified I was destroying my parents too — breaking their rest, breaking their hearts, living a life that kept them awake long after midnight.

I didn't know that every night I lay awake was leading me towards a moment where my body would stop altogether — a moment where life and death stood on either side of me."

LEAVING WITHOUT THE BOYS — THE NIGHT THAT BROKE US ALL

When I first went to my parents' house without the boys, it wasn't impulsive. It was the outcome of seven years already living on the edge. Seven years of explaining myself. Seven years of minimising myself. Seven years of being told — gently, firmly — to endure.

They agreed to let me stay on one condition:

Do not disrupt the boys.

So, I didn't. I mothered them every single day: School runs. Meals. Homework. Baths. Bedtime stories.

The rituals that make a child feel safe even when the mother is breaking inside.

And then, at night, I left. That first night, alone in my childhood bedroom, I quietly closed the door and collapsed. The sobbing came fast and violent — the kind that empties you rather than relieves you.

The kind that belongs to a woman doing the hardest thing she has ever done and still feeling like she's failing everyone. I wasn't choosing myself over my children. I was choosing survival.

But culturally, that distinction doesn't exist.

All that mattered was this:

A mother was sleeping away from her children.

And beneath the grief lay the sentence I already knew too well:

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.”

You’ve unsettled the order.

You’ve created discomfort.

You’ve disturbed the night.

But here is the truth — the truth only my parents saw: **Leaving the boys every night wasn’t evidence of selfishness. It was evidence of pain — deep, severe, life-threatening pain.** This was not drama.

This was not a rebellion. This was not an impulsive daughter refusing to listen.

This was a woman fighting for her life.

And for my parents, witnessing this nearly destroyed them. That was the night they realised I was never going to give up on my journey. That this wasn’t a phase. That this wasn’t anger. That this wasn’t stubbornness.

This was their daughter at breaking point.

My mother stopped sleeping. My father walked the hallways waiting for the sound of my key.

Every night became a silent prayer they repeated over and over:

Is she okay?

Is she coping?

How long can she survive like this?

My sleeplessness became theirs. My boys felt it. My parents carried it. I embodied it. This was the part the world never saw. This was the part the headlines never captured. This was the part even I couldn’t say out loud at the time:

Everyone lost sleep because I was losing myself.

And still — I kept leaving every night. Not out of choice. But out of necessity. Because staying would have killed me faster. Sleep did not come.

How could it?

My body didn't know where home was anymore.

“And walking out of my sons' room every night, I felt the question burning in my chest:

If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?

THE SPINE OF THE STORY

These nights — the ones nobody talks about — became the emotional spine of this book.

People think my story began with a divorce party.

Or a headline.

Or an NDE.

It didn't.

It began in these nights, the quiet sacrifices, the guilt-soaked choices, the mother who split herself into two homes, the daughter who broke her parents' hearts by simply trying to stay alive, the woman who slept nowhere and belonged nowhere. This was the real beginning.

This was the truth beneath Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di.

I lost my sleep.

My boys lost theirs.

My parents lost theirs.

LIVING BETWEEN HOUSES – THE BODY NEVER LANDS

What followed was not stability. It was oscillation. By day, I was present for the boys. By night, I was a visitor in my own life. Two houses. Two atmospheres. No place to exhale. At home, I was expected to absorb. At my parents' house, I was expected to resolve. No one asked how it felt to live split in half. Every question carried urgency, not care:

How long will this last?

What's your plan?

What happens next?

And always — hovering — the unspoken truth:

This cannot go on. People are not sleeping. As if rest was the real emergency. My nights became shallow and alert. I woke to every sound. Every silence. Sleep was no longer rest. It was something I owed others.

THE RENTED HOUSE – INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT PEACE

Eventually, I rented a place for the boys and me. From the outside, it looked like progress.

From the inside, it was grief with a postcode. It came after years of battle and not just within my marriage, but with my family. Years of explaining. Years of justifying. Years of trying to make my pain legible to people who loved me but feared the consequences of my truth. The flat itself existed only because of quiet acts of courage around me. A friend who agreed to be my guarantor.

My family stepped in to help with the rent while I was still paying the mortgage on a house.

An interim solution. Six months. That's how I framed it. To my parents, I sold it as a trial separation.

A pause. A practical step. Something reversible. They agreed — reluctantly.

Not because they believed in it, but because resistance had exhausted us all.

But inside, I knew. There was no trial in my body. No pause in my nervous system.

No part of me believed this marriage could be repaired.

This wasn't exploration. It was confirmation.

There were days the boys stayed with their dad.

Those days dismantled me. I would hold myself together at work — functional, composed, reliable — and then collapse in the car. Crying so hard I couldn't drive. Breath catching. Hands shaking. The kind of grief that has no witnesses. The flat waited quietly when I returned. Too quietly. No backpacks by the door. No shoes kicked off carelessly. No noise. No mess.

“In that silence, the same question stalked me:

If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?”

No proof that I was still doing this right. And that sentence followed me then — sharper, heavier, more unforgiving than ever:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

You disturbed the sleep.

You unsettled the order.

You are the reason everyone is awake now. But here was the truth I couldn't unlearn anymore:

My parents hadn't lost sleep because I left. They had lost sleep because the marriage was already over — and everyone could feel it.

This move didn't create the rupture. It named it. The rented flat didn't weaken me. It clarified me. Because for the first time, the cost was visible — not just to me, but to everyone watching me hold my life together with borrowed support and a breaking heart. And still, even then, I didn't collapse.

I kept going. I mothered. I worked. I paid what I could. I carried guilt like inheritance. But something fundamental shifted. Not relief. Not freedom. Certainty. The kind that doesn't shout. The kind that settles in the body and refuses to leave. The marriage was over. Not because I wanted it to be. But because staying had already taken more than I had left to give.

RETURNING NOT BACKWARD – BUT INWARD

When we returned to the marital home, it was not hope that brought me back. It was containment.

It was the knowledge that certain moves could not yet be made publicly. That certain structures had to be preserved — for now. That appearances mattered more than truth in this phase. No one said it outright.

They didn't need to. I returned because the ground was shifting beneath me, and standing still felt safer than being pushed further out. But my body understood something my mind was still negotiating:

Returning did not bring rest. It deepened the fracture. Sleep vanished entirely. Because now I was awake not just to pain — but to consequence.

THE CLOSING OF CHAPTER SIX

The guilt that held me was as tight as the marriage itself. This chapter does not end with relief, or clarity, or strength. It ends with conflict, the kind that eats through bone. Because by the end of these years,

I wasn't just carrying the weight of a broken marriage. I was carrying the weight of breaking my family's dreams.

And that guilt became its own kind of imprisonment. The nights I didn't sleep weren't only because of arguments at home. They were because I was terrified of becoming the daughter who disappointed everyone. In our culture, a daughter's suffering is tolerated, but her return home is not.

And so I lived in a twisted emotional triangle:

My marriage.

My children.

My parents.

My marriage drained me.

My children needed me.

And I caught in the middle felt responsible for everyone's peace. My parents didn't mean to hurt me.

They were shaped by their world — a world built on one belief:

"If your daughter leaves her marriage, people will say you failed."

So even when I cried every day for years, their fear spoke louder than my pain. Under every hesitation, every silence, every "adjust," every "think of the children," every "what will people say," every "you married him — now stay," I heard the same message:

"Don't disturb our peace.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di."

So, I carried guilt as heavy as heartbreak.

Guilt that I wa

s failing my parents.

Guilt that I was failing my children.

Guilt that I was failing my culture.
Guilt that I was failing myself.
A woman can survive pain. But guilt?
Guilt is what suffocates her.
And yet, underneath all that suffocation, something else began
forming quietly inside me.
Not strength.
Not courage.
Not clarity.
Recognition.
A truth that finally rose to the surface:
I could not save my marriage.
I could not save my parents' reputation.
I could not save everyone else's sleep by sacrificing my own.
Something had to change and the only person who could change it
was me.
So, Chapter Six ends here, with a woman standing at the crossroads
of two heartbreaks:
Break herself — or break the expectations that were breaking her.
And for the first time in years,
a tiny whisper inside me dared to rise:
“Maybe your peace matters too.”
A whisper small enough to ignore, but strong enough to survive.
A whisper that becomes the doorway into the next chapter.
And the truth I finally allowed myself to speak:
I didn't disturb the peace. I disturbed the silence that was killing me.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAR WITHIN THE WALLS — AND THE WAR WITH THE LAW

Divorce is never one battle. It is a battery of combat— internal, cultural, legal, emotional — fought all at once, with no rest between rounds. People imagine the day you finally say, “I want out,” is the beginning of the end.

It isn't. For me, that sentence didn't begin with freedom. It began warfare. Not with him, that part had been quietly unfolding for years but with the world around me. A Desi woman choosing divorce doesn't just challenge a marriage. She challenges culture. Family expectation. Generational conditioning. Silence.

Shame. Reputation. Duty. And in my case, she challenges the courts too. This is the chapter where everything I had held together for years finally began to unravel. Not because I was weak.

But because I was finally telling the truth.

WHEN MY PARENTS FINALLY SAID OK! — THE BEGINNING OF WAR TWO

Getting my parents on my side was not relief. It was not a celebration. It was not “support” the way people imagine. It was the end of a seven-year battle with the two people I loved most and the beginning of a new war I had never prepared for. Years of being told:

“Don't break the home.”

“Log kya kahenge.”

“Think of the children.”

“Every marriage has problems.”

“Keep trying.”

“Don’t be emotional.”

“Don’t make a rash decision.”

“You’ll ruin everything.”

Every tear I cried felt like a personal failure to them.

Every moment I struggled was greeted with fear, not understanding.

Every whisper of separation made them feel I was dragging our entire family’s honour with me.

And the cultural wound deepened:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

“You ruined our sleep.”

“You disturbed our peace.”

“You caused this.”

It was never said directly, but I *heard* it in the silence. I *felt* it in the hesitation. I *carried* it in the guilt.

When they finally agreed, it wasn’t because the pain had become smaller. It was because they finally understood I wasn’t surviving anymore. They agreed — but support came wrapped in fear.

And with that fear, a new war began: The legal one.

LIVING TOGETHER WHILST DIVORCING — COVID MADE THE WALLS FEEL SMALLER

Divorcing someone while still living with them is emotionally suffocating in any year. Divorcing during COVID was another universe entirely. There was no café escape, no friend’s sofa, no long

drive to breathe, to create emotional distance. We were four walls, day after day, minute after minute, inside a marriage that had already died years ago. COVID took away the tiny freedoms women in unhappy marriages used to survive: the school run, the quiet car moment, the shift between worlds.

Everything blurred into one heavy, airless existence. Every morning, I woke up and thought:

“I am still here.”

In the same house with the same man in the same life, I am trying to legally leave.”

And sleep, the only minimal amount of relief I was left with, abandoned me completely.

For **twelve years**, my nights were broken, my mind racing, my chest tight, my pillow wet.

But during COVID, the sleeplessness sharpened.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di was not an accusation anymore. It was my reality. We were all losing sleep.

PAPERWORK IN THE DARK

During the day:

I worked.

I parented.

I cooked.

I cleaned.

I managed moods.

I held the house together.

I existed around someone

I was trying to divorce.

During the evenings, he was around, the children needed me, and the atmosphere was too fragile to start legal conversations. Night was the only time I could breathe enough to fight for my future. So, at 1 a.m., 2 a.m., 3 a.m., I opened my laptop and worked through:

statements

court forms

financial disclosures

solicitor emails

bundles

applications

deadlines

evidence lists

All while everyone else was asleep. And through those hours, the theme became painfully literal:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Everyone said I disturbed peace, but I was the one giving up my sleep to save my life. I whispered on the phone to my sister, exhausted and shaking, both of us bent over the paperwork as if our lives depended on every line.

She stayed awake with me night after night matching my fear, absorbing my panic, losing sleep she never deserved to lose.

It wasn't support anymore. It was solidarity.

Two sisters carrying a truth no one else was ready to face.

LOSING COURT — THEN WALKING BACK INTO THE SAME HOUSE

There is a humiliation you can't understand unless you've lived it. To lose a hearing during a global pandemic... and then walk back into the same house with the same man as if nothing happened.

Imagine this:

You log into a virtual hearing.

You present your truth.

You present your evidence.

You speak with every ounce of strength you have left.

The judge says:

“No.”

Then the call ends.

There is no fresh air.

No walk back to the car.

No café to collapse into.

No friend's house.

No moment to cry privately.

You shut the laptop and step into the hallway of the same home you are trying to leave. The kettle boils.

The children need dinner. Life continues as if your world didn't just fall apart on screen. Sometimes I sat in the car outside our house for twenty minutes just trying to breathe before going inside to act “normal.”

COVID turned every loss into a trap. And the cultural narrative stabbed its way back in:

“You disturbed the home.”

“You caused all this.”

“Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di”

But the truth?

I wasn't ruining anyone's sleep.

I was surviving nights no one else had to live through.

THE YEARS I LOST EVERY CASE

Between 2018 and early 2021, I lost every hearing. Every outcome felt like a judgment on my worth, my truth, my sanity. And after each loss, I carried a guilt that was never mine to carry.

Maybe I am disturbing the peace.

Maybe I *am* ruining their sleep.

Maybe I *am* the problem.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

became a silent echo I had never heard spoken aloud and yet I felt it in how people looked at me, reacted to me, judged me, discussed me behind closed doors. But deep inside, beneath the exhaustion, beneath the confusion, beneath the losses, something fierce stayed lit:

I am not wrong.

I am not delusional.

I am not the chaos.

I am simply the one who refuses to die quietly.

I may have lost cases, but I did not lose myself. And that mattered more than any ruling on paper.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE FINAL HEARING

When the final hearing concluded, something irreversible shifted. A judge had finally said what my soul had been whispering for twelve years: **Enough.**

The decree absolute came weeks later: March 17th, 2021 a date stamped on the end of my marriage but not at the end of my emotional exhaustion. People imagine women celebrate after divorce papers arrive.

I didn't. I was numb. For twelve years:

I had lived in turmoil —

crying in my car,

crying in silence,

crying without understanding if the pain would ever end. For twelve years, my body forgot how to sleep. Forgot how to relax. Forgot how to trust easing. And when the judge freed me, my body didn't know what to do. Relief is a language you forget when every year of your marriage was taught in fear. So, instead of celebration, I felt something else:

What now?

Who am I without the war?

How do I sleep when my body has only ever known survival?

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

was no longer a cultural ghost. It had become a biological truth.

THE HOUSE WITHOUT WAR

After separation, the house felt different but not peaceful. Where silence wasn't calm. It was hollow. The rooms felt unfamiliar, as if they didn't recognise me anymore. For years, I had survived in fight-or-flight mode. You don't simply exhale because the war is over. You learn how to exhale again — slowly, unsteadily, half-believing the

next explosion is still around the corner. And it wasn't just him I had carried the guilt for. It was my parents. Their dreams. Their expectations. Their reputation. Their fears. Their cultural conditioning. For twelve years,

I carried the unspoken accusation:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di you ruined our sleep, our peace, our honour.

Even in my freedom, that guilt whispered in my ear.

THE GUILT THAT FOLLOWS DIVORCE

Desi women are raised to protect everyone's peace except their own. So even after the divorce, I felt guilt in places where guilt should never belong.

Guilt for leaving.

Guilt for staying so long.

Guilt for the boys.

Guilt for my parents.

Guilt for the community's whispers.

Guilt for expectations I never agreed to.

Guilt for truths I was punished for speaking.

And underneath it all,

the heaviest guilt:

Had I disturbed everyone's sleep by fighting for my freedom?

Even if I did disturb the peace, it was because my own had been absent for years.

Choosing it was not selfish.

It was survival.

REBUILDING STARTED IN SHADOWS, NOT SUNLIGHT

Rebuilding didn't start when the divorce was final. It started in quiet moments, moments that didn't look like empowerment. It began with: the first night I slept 4 hours instead of 2, the first morning I didn't feel dread, the first day I made a decision freely, the first laugh that didn't feel borrowed, the first breath that didn't hurt, I had rebuilt my career while falling apart. I had raised my boys while breaking silently. I had survived twelve years of turmoil, accusations, confusion, and cultural guilt. And now, slowly, quietly, delicately, I was rebuilding myself.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

had followed me through my marriage, my family, my community, and my courtroom.

But now, for the first time, I was learning to sleep on my own terms. And in that quiet rebuilding, the woman who had been erased began her return.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NIGHT THE WAR ENDED

THE THOUGHT THAT SHIFTED EVERYTHING

The idea didn't arrive gently. It arrived as a laugh; sharp, unexpected, undeniable. What if I didn't treat this like a failure? What if divorce didn't have to be hidden? What if survival was something worth marking?

The idea felt outrageous. Which is how I knew it mattered.

Indian women are taught to suffer quietly. Leave quietly. Survive quietly. Never to celebrate.

So, I decided to do the one thing that disrupted every rule I had lived under:

I would mark my survival out loud.

PLANNING WHAT I WAS NEVER MEANT TO DO

Once the decision landed, it didn't waver. This wasn't going to be subdued. Or tasteful. Or discreet.

It would be visible. A party. Not to mock the past, but to mark the end of war. I chose colour deliberately — loud, unapologetic, alive. The opposite of the woman I had been trained to be.

A unicorn cake — playful, absurd, defiant.

A refusal to treat joy as childish or undeserved.

A unicorn bouncy castle because seriousness had nearly destroyed me.

Because play is not frivolous. It is repair. Every detail carried the same message:

I am done shrinking.

Done apologising.

Done absorbing blame.

Done carrying the night for everyone else.

THE NIGHT MY BODY FINALLY STOOD DOWN

That night didn't feel chaotic. It felt aligned. Loud music. Women laughing freely. Joy without management.

And something extraordinary happened. My body stopped bracing. For the first time in twelve years, I wasn't anticipating backlash. I wasn't calculating reactions. I wasn't managing anyone else's comfort. I wasn't surviving. I was present. I didn't cry. I didn't falter. I didn't fracture under memory. I exhaled. This wasn't grief.

This was release. The woman dancing that night wasn't celebrating divorce.

She was ending a war.

And for the first time — truly — **No one lost sleep because of me.**

Because for the first time in twelve years, I wasn't carrying it.

THE MORNING AFTER THE WEEK BEFORE

I thought the party was the moment.

I was wrong.

The moment arrived a week later! My phone detonated. Messages. Tags. Articles. WhatsApp chains.

Then headlines.

UK media.

Then India.

Hyderabad Chronicle.

She The People

Regional publications.

What I had intended as a personal marker became a cultural interruption. People reacted loudly.

But women recognised something deeper. One message said:

“I slept better after seeing this.”

That’s when it landed.

This wasn’t about a party.

It was about permission.

And only then did I understand the irony. My whole life had been shaped around one instruction: don’t disturb the balance. *Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di* — don’t ruin the peace at home, don’t unsettle the family, don’t be the reason anyone loses sleep. I lived by that rule for years. And yet, once again, I disturbed the balance — this time not just inside my home, but far beyond it. What had been contained privately for years surfaced publicly, visibly, worldwide. Once again, I didn’t sleep — but this time, silence was no longer doing the damage.

RAGE, RECOGNITION, AND THE LINE I WOULD NEVER STEP BACK OVER

The outrage was predictable.

How dare she?

An Indian woman celebrating Divorce?

Where is her shame?

I didn’t respond.

I didn't explain.

I didn't soften myself.

Because alongside the rage came something stronger.

Messages from women who had been quiet for years.

"You changed something in me."

"You said what we were never allowed to say."

"You made me feel less alone."

"You showed me I don't have to carry this forever."

That's when I understood:

This wasn't provocation.

It was recognition.

"People thought I celebrated breaking a marriage.

They didn't know I was celebrating surviving a question that nearly killed me:

If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?"

THE TRAJECTORY SHIFT

That night didn't just mark an ending. It rerouted my life.

From private survival to public truth.

From silence to voice.

From endurance to leadership.

Women weren't watching for spectacle. They were watching for language. For someone who had left and lived. So, I stepped forward.

Not carefully.

Not quietly.

Clearly. And from that clarity came something unavoidable:

It's a Sonia Thing.

Not a brand.

A refusal to keep surviving quietly.

AFTER THE WAR

By September 2021, there was no returning to who I had been. Not because of attention. Not because of the media. But because I had crossed a line inside myself. For twelve years, I had lived believing my truth disturbed the night. That party proved something irreversible:

The war was over.

And for the first time, sleep no longer came at my expense. The woman who walked forward after that night

was not reckless, not bitter, not unhinged.

She was awake.

She was grounded.

She was finally — unmistakably — **Sonia**.

I truly believed the hardest part of my story had already been lived.

I didn't know that four years later, death wouldn't knock, it would simply walk straight in."

And the next chapter of my life would begin with a moment that nearly ended me.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BODY THAT KEPT SCORE

How Survival Became a Habit and Nearly Became a Cost

When the Body Remembers What the Mind Forgets

There is always a moment: quiet, subtle, almost ignorable, when the body begins keeping records the mind refuses to open. From the outside, I looked strong: I was visible.

Speaking.

Working.

Showing up for my children.

Showing up for women who saw themselves in my journey.

Showing up in every room that asked for my voice.

It looked like momentum.

Inside, it felt like running a marathon without stopping for breath. And because I had survived so much already, I told myself:

This is nothing.

This is life.

This is fine.

But fine is a lie women tell themselves when collapse feels too costly.

THE MYTH “I’M FINE”

By then, “I’m fine” had become my most rehearsed line. Not because it was true but because it was efficient. It stopped questions.

Reassured people. Allowed me to keep moving. Allowed me to pretend my body wasn't whispering warnings. I told myself I was in a "busy season." That once the boys were older, I'd rest. Once deadlines cleared, I'd breathe. Once events passed, I'd slow down. Once anxiety eased, I'd sleep. There was always a "once", a condition and a hypothesis. But, "once" never arrived. Because when you have lived in survival mode long enough,

rest doesn't feel like relief. It feels like danger.

THE QUIET COST OF BEING NEEDED

Women came to me with stories they had never told anyone. Stories whispered at events.

Stories typed at midnight. Stories layered with shame, guilt, fear, and longing. They trusted me because I had survived what they were still living. And I held those stories tenderly, but heavily.

I carried my children's needs.

I carried my clients' pain.

I carried friends who were going through their own storms.

I carried cultural expectations.

I carried unresolved grief.

I wasn't drowning.

I was treading water endlessly.

And endless treading is its own kind of collapse.

WHEN THE BODY BEGINS TO SPEAK

The signs didn't arrive dramatically. They whispered. A cough that lingered. A heaviness in my chest.

A bone-deep fatigue that sleep couldn't touch. Mornings that felt heavier. Limbs that felt burdened.

Breath that didn't feel full. I dismissed all of it. Because women are trained to question their emotions,

their instincts, their symptoms.

"It's the stress."

"It's hormones."

"It's burnout."

"It's life."

I told myself I would rest later.

Later is where women hide their pain.

PRODUCTIVITY AS A DISTRACTION

Work became a refuge not because it was light, but because it helped me outrun stillness.

Stillness felt unsafe. Silence felt like falling. Rest felt like surrender. So I filled my calendar.

Talks.

Events.

Meetings.

Projects.

Deadlines.

Requests.

Women who needed me. I said yes when I should have said no. Not because I wanted to be everywhere but because I didn't know how to stop. When being busy has been your coping mechanism for years, slowing down feels like collapse.

THE EMOTIONAL HANGOVER OF FREEDOM

People think freedom heals everything. It doesn't. Freedom exposes what you were too busy surviving to feel.

The grief.

The depletion.

The years of hypervigilance.

The unprocessed trauma.

The toll of single motherhood.

The shrapnel of years spent swallowing your truth.

I didn't collapse during the marriage.

I didn't collapse during the battle.

I didn't collapse during the family conflict.

I collapsed after.

After the threat was gone.

After the war ended.

After the applause faded.

That's when my body said:

Enough.

THE LONE PARENT PACE

There is a specific fatigue reserved for single mothers:

The remembering.

The anticipation.

The decision-making.

The emotional labour.

The constant alertness.

Even when the boys were with their father, my mind remained on call.

What if?

What now?

What next?

It wasn't anxiety.

It was training. Years of vigilance had rewired my nervous system. I didn't know how to stand down.

And that kind of unrelenting mental load slowly erodes the body.

INDIA- WHEN MY SOUL FELT FULL

India was not the problem. India was a blessing. December 2024 to January 2025 were months of softness.

The temples.

The colours.

The air.

The presence of something holy.

Vaishno Devi.

Vrindavan.

Barsana.

Kalkaji.

Spaces that held me gently. I felt spiritually nourished. Emotionally grounded. Quiet in a way I hadn't known in years. India gave me light. But the truth is this: A nourished soul cannot repair a body that has been running on deficit for years. My spirit had been lifted, my body was still depleted. I didn't understand the difference yet.

THE LAST WARNINGS

January 2025 arrived softly:

Brushed off the cough.

Brushed off the breathlessness.

Brushed off the fatigue.

Brushed off the heaviness in my chest.

I told myself:

“Just get through this month.”

“Just finish this project.”

“Just complete this event.”

“Just manage a little longer.”

Women always manage a little longer. The body always issues warnings before collapse. But if you’ve spent years overriding pain, you override that too.

THE BELIEF THAT NEARLY KILLED ME

Here is the truth, the truth beneath every symptom: I believed my worth was measured in endurance.

How much I could carry.

How little I needed.

How rarely I rested.

How consistently I showed up.

How little I complained.

This belief had kept me alive once. It was now killing me slowly. Not intentionally. Not dramatically. Quietly.

THE CALM BEFORE THE COLLAPSE

In the days before everything unravelled, nothing looked catastrophic.

Just tiredness.

Just breathlessness.

Just a body asking — gently — to stop.

Just a woman who didn't know how.

I didn't see the collapse coming. I wasn't the type to fall apart. I had survived too much. But bodies don't care about your reputation for strength. When the body decides the mind has ignored enough warnings it does the one thing you cannot negotiate with:

It shuts down.

And in February 2025...

Mine did.

THE NIGHT MY BODY TOOK WHAT MY LIFE HAD DENIED IT

THE LONG TRAINING IN IGNORING MYSELF

By the time my body collapsed, it had been warning me for years. Not loudly. Not urgently. In the quiet language it had learned would be ignored. A cough that lingered longer than it should have.

Breath that never felt fully satisfying. A fatigue that sleep — when it came — couldn't touch.

A weight in my chest I kept feeling under *stress, burnout, too much responsibility*.

I had been trained to override discomfort. Trained to keep going. Trained to believe that stopping would cost too much.

For most of my adult life, I had lived on fractured sleep, not the occasional bad night, but the kind that rewires your nervous system. I had learned...

To function tired. To think tired.

To parent tired.

To work tired.

To live tired.

Somewhere along the way, exhaustion stopped registering as a warning and started feeling like a personality trait. I had also learned something more dangerous:

That my needs unsettled people.

That my distress disturbed the peace.

That my honesty ruined the night.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

You've ruined the sleep. So, I swallowed the signals. dismissed symptoms. Kept moving.

Because women like me are taught that collapse is failure — and endurance is virtue.

And somewhere between this world and the next, the question that shaped my entire life returned:

If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?

For the first time, the answer was brutal:

Not if I keep living like this.”

THE MORNING MY BODY REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE

The morning it happened was ordinary. That's what makes it terrifying. No argument. No exertion.

No dramatic build-up. Just breathe. Breath that felt thin. Delayed. Unreliable. I remember sitting on the edge of my bed, feet flat on the floor, one hand pressing into the mattress as if I needed to anchor myself to the room. I took a breath — and didn't get what I needed. I tried again. Still not enough. There was a metallic taste at the back of my throat. A pressure that didn't feel emotional — it felt mechanical.

My first instinct wasn't fear. It was minimisation. *This is anxiety. You're overtired. You're catastrophising.*

Women are taught to negotiate with danger until danger stops negotiating back. My chest tightened in a way that was new — not sharp, not panicked — but heavy, insistent, final. The edges of the room softened.

My body felt dense, as though gravity had increased. And a sentence arrived with absolute clarity:

This is not normal.

Not stress.

Not burnout.

Not something that would pass if I lay down.

Something was wrong.

MAKING THE CALL

I didn't collapse.

I didn't scream.

I dialled 999.

My voice surprised me — quiet, detached, as though it belonged to someone else.

“My chest...something's wrong... I can't breathe properly.”

The operator's voice became my only point of focus.

“Stay on the line.”

“Help is coming.”

“Keep talking to me.”

While we spoke, my body continued its quiet rebellion.

My fingers tingled.

My lips felt cold.

Each breath arrived too late to be reassuring. When the paramedics arrived, I was still upright.

Still conscious. Still speaking. And unmistakably failing. Oxygen mask..

A sudden efficiency that told me more than words could.

“We’re taking you in.”

HOSPITAL WITHOUT SAFETY

The hospital didn’t bring relief. It brought watching. Tests. Bloods. Scans. Numbers discussed just outside my hearing. Oxygen increased. Then it increased again. Doctors spoke carefully — not alarmist, not casual.

“We’re admitting you.” “We need to monitor you closely.” “We’ll see how you respond.”

I believed them. I believed that being inside a hospital meant I was safe.

I didn’t yet understand that collapse can be a process, not an event.

THE SLOW UNRAVELLING

Day one, I could still talk. Day two, I could just about walk to the bathroom — slowly, deliberately, dragging oxygen with me. Day three, breathing became work.

Not discomfort. Not effort. Work. My chest burned. My lungs felt shallow, unreliable.

The mask stayed on.

The numbers dipped.

Adjustments stopped helping. I don't remember anyone saying,

“We're going to ventilate you.”

And that matters. Because when oxygen drops far enough, the brain stops storing memory. It moves into preservation. I remember fragments instead: faces closer than before, voices that sounded farther away, a shift in the room's energy that told me this had crossed a line. And then — absurdly, instinctively — humour surfaced. I looked at my son and said something like:

“Tell people to come and see me.”

Not to frighten him.

Not to exaggerate the moment. But because some deep, quiet part of me knew this was serious in a way I had never experienced before. Humour has always been how I tell the truth when the truth is too heavy to hold or tell too fashionably.

TEN DAYS THE WORLD STAYED AWAKE

I did not wake up the next morning.

Or, the next.

I was in a coma for ten days.

Ten days where machines breathed for me. Ten days where my body lay still while my life hovered.

Ten days where time moved everywhere else but not for me. I don't remember those days.

But I know their cost.

My mother didn't sleep.

My boys didn't sleep.

My sister didn't sleep

My friends didn't sleep.

Hospital corridors at night. Phones checked constantly. Waiting rooms holding breath. For years, I had believed my needs disturbed the night. Now my absence did.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Only this time, it wasn't an accusation.

It was reality.

THE NEAR-DEATH SPLIT — WHEN I LEFT

This part resists language. Because it wasn't a dream. And it wasn't a hallucination. It was separation.

My body was on the bed. But I was not fully in it. I felt myself drifting — light, unanchored, as though something essential had loosened its grip. There was no fear. Only calm.

A soft silence that felt vast and enveloping. I felt held —by my Dad, a presence that felt unmistakably substantial.

And for a moment I cannot measure, I felt myself leaving. Not dying. Leaving. A gentle movement away from effort, pain, and responsibility. A pull toward something warm and still.

Something that felt like **rest** for the first time in my adult life.

BORROWED LIFE

When awareness returned, I wasn't breathing. A machine was breathing for me. A tube in my throat.

Noise in my ears. Lines everywhere. I couldn't speak. I couldn't move. I couldn't cry.

I existed between breaths that were not mine. People talk about ventilators clinically.

They don't talk about the existential truth:

A ventilator is borrowed life.

And I was borrowing it.

WHAT SURVIVAL DEMANDS

When I finally returned fully to myself, there was no cinematic gratitude.

Only shock.

Fear.

And the knowledge that my body had crossed a boundary I could never pretend away again.

For years, I had lived on borrowed sleep, borrowed breath, borrowed strength. I had been praised for endurance. Rewarded for silence. Valued for how much I could carry. My body refused that bargain.

It stopped asking. It took. This collapse wasn't a failure. It was a reckoning.

And it left me with a truth I could no longer ignore:

Survival that requires self-erasure is not survival at all.

CHAPTER TEN

THE AFTERMATH

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU COME BACK FROM WHERE YOU WERE NEVER MEANT TO RETURN FROM WAKING UP TO A WORLD THAT HADN'T SLEPT

People think waking up is the ending. As if survival arrives with relief. As if opening your eyes closes the story.

It doesn't. When I came back to consciousness, I stepped into a world that had not slept. While my body lay still, everyone else had lived inside the night. Hospital corridors after visiting hours. Phones kept on loud.

Messages checked in the dark, again and again. Time didn't move normally for them.

It stretched.

It stalled.

It refused to resolve.

I would later understand that while I was unconscious, the people who loved me had been holding their breath for days.

MY CHILDREN AND THE NIGHTS THAT CHANGED THEM

The hardest truth to carry was this:

I ruined my boys' sleep.

Not because I shouted.

Not because I argued.

Not because I chose myself.

But because I almost left. They didn't sleep deeply. They slept lightly, if at all. They woke repeatedly, listening for phones, for footsteps, for news. Children don't have language for medical crises. They have imagination.

And imagination fills silence with terror. They went to bed not knowing if their mother would still exist in the morning. That knowledge landed in my body like a blow. For years, I had lived under a sentence — spoken, implied, internalised:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

You've ruined the sleep.

I had believed it meant:

you're too much,

you're disruptive,

you disturb the peace.

Now it meant something else entirely. My survival had come at the cost of their innocence. And the guilt of that — raw, maternal, unforgiving — wrapped itself around my chest at night and refused to let me rest.

MY MOTHER'S VIGIL

My mother did not sleep. Not in the way sleep restores you. She lay praying. Listening to the silence between updates. Holding fear without language. This was not the first time she had lost sleep because of me but it was the first time sleep was replaced by the thought that she might lose her daughter. She did not dramatise it. She did not speak it loudly. She carried it the way women of her generation do:

through ritual, through faith, through eyes that hollow quietly.

When I saw her after I woke, something in me collapsed. Because suddenly the sentence I had lived under my whole life returned with unbearable weight:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Only now it wasn't judgement.

It was grief.

MY SISTER HOLDING THE NIGHT TOGETHER

If my mother carried fear inward, my sister carried it outward. She answered the phone at impossible hours.

Held information others couldn't bear. Absorbed panic so it wouldn't spill everywhere. She stayed awake not out of choice, but necessity. Later, she told me how her phone never left her hand. How every vibration made her heart race. How sleep became something she circled but never reached. I had always been the strong one. The one who carried. Now she was carrying me. And the guilt of that — of what she held so quietly —

settled deep. Because love doesn't announce itself. It stays awake.

THE SENTENCE THAT TURNED ON ME

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

For most of my life, that sentence trained me. It taught me to endure quietly. To absorb discomfort before it reached anyone else. To manage pain discreetly, efficiently, invisibly. To keep going so others could rest.

It was never just a phrase. It was an instruction. A warning. A boundary.

A reminder that my existence must be small enough not to shake the room.

But after the coma, the sentence didn't come from outside.

It turned inward.

Now it wasn't something said to me. It was something I said to myself.

I ruined their sleep.

I frightened my children.

I aged my mother.

I exhausted my sister.

I scared the people who love me.

My body almost left this world and yet all I could think about was the emotional burden it placed on everyone else. That is the tragedy of daughters like me: Even when we nearly die, we apologise for the inconvenience.

We survive something catastrophic and then feel guilty that people cried. We come back from death and still worry we've made life harder for others. We wake up in hospital and think:

I've disturbed their peace again.

Because the conditioning runs that deep. The sentence became a mirror I couldn't escape:

“You've disturbed the sleep.”

Not just their rest — their expectations, their image of me, their belief that I would always absorb and never collapse. And here is the truth I was forced to confront:

It wasn't my coma that shook them.

It was that I finally broke down in a way they couldn't ignore.

A way that couldn't be tidied, silenced, or explained away.

A way that showed the cost of all the years I stayed quiet.

For the first time, they saw the price of my endurance.

And I saw it too. This is what women like me do, we survive something unthinkable and then apologise for the impact. We apologise for scaring the people who love us, even when the fear came from everything we had held inside for far too long.

Even when the burden was never ours to carry alone.

Even when the collapse was the only thing that finally told the truth.

Because the real sentence, the one no one says out loud — is this:

You didn't disturb their sleep.

Your suffering finally woke them up.

THE MOMENT MY SON WAS ASKED ABOUT MY WILL

When I learned a doctor had asked my son about my will, my body reacted before my mind could intervene.

Heat. Nausea. A grief so sharp it felt physical. Not because of the paperwork. Because of the child.

My child. A boy who should have been worrying about usual things — work, friends, what came next.

Instead, he was being asked to imagine a world without his mother. I wasn't there to hear it. I wasn't there to protect him. Sleep did not return after that. Not from fear of dying but from the ache of knowing how close my children had come to a future I was never meant to leave them with.

COMING HOME TO A BODY THAT DIDN'T TRUST THE DARK

When I came home, people spoke softly. As if sound itself could undo me. "You're safe now." "You're home."

"It's over." My body didn't believe them. Night became the hardest. Darkness brought sensation, not memory. The pinched breath. The slipping. The letting go. I lay awake listening to the house breathe, checking my own chest repeatedly, counting breaths without intending to.

For twelve years, I had lost sleep holding life together. Now I have lost sleep because I was lost. Because my body didn't know how to exist without crisis as its organising principle. Once again, sleep became the battleground.

THE TURNING

This is where the chapter turns. Not into gratitude. Not into inspiration. Into truth.

I finally understood something that changed everything:

I did not ruin anyone's sleep by existing.

I did not fail by collapsing.

I did not harm my children by surviving.

What harmed us all was a lifetime of me believing I had to disappear quietly so others could rest.

My body had gone to the edge to end that belief. For the first time in my life, no one wanted me to be strong.

They wanted me to stay.

And slowly albeit painfully, the sentence began to loosen its grip.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

No.

I had nearly lost myself trying to protect everyone else's peace. This chapter ends here, with the beginning of a different truth:

That my presence is not a disturbance.

That my rest is not selfish.

That my survival is not an apology.

And, that learning to sleep again would be one of the bravest things I would ever do.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE THINGS PEOPLE DIDN'T SEE

The blast radius of recovery got to me...It didn't announce itself. It didn't rise cleanly. It looked like sitting on the edge of the bathtub, breathless after a shower, wondering how something so mundane became so hard.

It looks like realising you can't dress yourself, not properly at least. Buttoning-up feels impossible. Your arms don't lift the way you expect them to. Your body no longer obeys instructions you've given it your entire life.

It looks like needing help to eat. Food going cold while you work up the strength to lift up the fork. Hunger competing with exhaustion. Pride dissolving one small request at a time. It looks like crying in the kitchen because your body won't cooperate with the day you had planned and realising there is no plan anymore, only capacity. It looks like fear climbing your throat every time you lie down to sleep — because sleep still feels like surrender. Because last time you let go, your body stopped. It looks like waking at 3 a.m. just to check that your chest is still rising. Placing a hand there, counting breaths, bargaining silently with your own lungs. It looks like flinching at the sound of a cough in a quiet room. Like scanning your body constantly, waiting for the next thing to go wrong. Like living inside a question mark.

It looks like standing in front of the mirror and seeing exhaustion before you see yourself.

Not vanity, just assessment.

Is this normal?

Is this dangerous?

Is this how it starts again?

It looks like pretending you're better because everyone around you needs reassurance — and you've been trained your whole life to manage other people's fear before your own. I smiled through moments I should have cried in. I joked through moments I should have paused in. I reassured people when I was the one still drowning. Because old habits don't disappear just because you nearly die. They return first.

Survival mode doesn't switch off. It seeps.

And somewhere inside that seepage, the old sentence tried to reclaim me:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Don't worry them.

Don't upset anyone.

Don't make this harder than it already is.

So I tried to recover quietly. Politely. Gratefully. As if even now — especially now — my healing needed to be small enough not to disturb anyone else's rest.

FRIENDS WHO SAW, FRIEND WHO DIDN'T

Illness has a way of sorting people without your permission. Some people moved closer. They checked on me. Fed me. Sat quietly beside my bed when words felt too heavy to hold. They didn't ask me to be positive.

They didn't ask me to be brave. They just stayed. Others drifted away. Not because they were cruel but because proximity to death makes people uncomfortable. Because fragility disrupts the roles we

assign each other. Because some people only know how to love you when you are upright, capable, holding it all together. While I was unconscious, things happened that I would only learn about later. Friends quietly offered to pay my mortgage. No announcements. No speeches. No expectation of recognition.

Just practical love, offered in the absence of certainty. That kind of care rearranges you. My near-death experience revealed something sharp and sobering: People love you loudly when you are visible. But they love quietly, or disappear, when you are fragile. I learned who could sit with uncertainty. Who didn't need me to reassure them. Who could hold my vulnerability without trying to fix it, rush it, or explain it away.

And I learned who only knew how to love the strong version of me; the woman who stayed awake so others could rest. This time, I didn't have to be her.

THE SLOW, UNEVEN RETURN

Recovery was not linear. Some days I felt powerful. Other days, I couldn't climb the stairs without stopping.

Some days, I showed up online. Other days. I disappeared without explanation. Some days, I felt reborn.

Other days, I felt broken. And then there was the night I went out for the first time. On paper, it was a small victory. A milestone. Proof that I was "back." I dressed carefully. Smiled politely. Sat in familiar spaces with familiar people, doing things I used to love. And when I came home, I cried. Not from exhaustion.

Not from fear. But from recognition. I didn't know who I was anymore. The music didn't land the same.

The conversations felt distant. The version of me I expected to find waiting there simply wasn't.

I realised then that recovery wasn't about returning to who I had been. That woman didn't exist anymore.

And grief arrived — quiet, sharp, unexpected for the self I had lost along the way. But slowly, painfully slowly and parts of me did return. My humour. My sharpness. My intuition. My clarity. My voice. Not the old voice. A deeper one. A voice shaped by survival, grief, motherhood, and truth. A voice that had stood at the edge and been pulled back — not by obligation, not by expectation, not by guilt — but by something that wanted me here. Fully. Awake. Alive.

THE REALISATION THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

One evening, months after the collapse, I sat quietly and looked at my reflection.

Not at the bruise.

Not at the tiredness.

Not at the anxiety.

At *me*.

And something finally landed with clarity. I didn't survive to return to the woman who almost died.

That woman was extraordinary but she carried too much. She said yes too often. She stayed awake too long. She listened more than she spoke. She helped more than she healed. She was needed by everyone and nourished by no one. I loved her. But I could not become her again. Because that version of me lived under a rule that nearly killed her:

Rest must be earned.

Sleep must be justified.

Stillness must not disturb anyone else.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

And suddenly I saw it — clearly, finally:

I had been living a life that required me to be unwell in order to stop.

That life was over.

THE PROMISE

I made a vow.

Not dramatic.

Not poetic.

Honest.

I will not abandon myself again.

Not for work.

Not for expectation.

Not for culture.

Not for survival.

Not for strength.

Not for anyone's comfort.

If I had been given a second chance,

I would not waste it recreating the patterns that nearly killed me.

This time, my life would be built on truth, not endurance.

On rest — not apology.

On presence — not performance.

And with that vow, something shifted.

For the first time,

I let myself sleep without guilt.

This chapter ends here, not with recovery completed, but with a promise kept and that promise marks the beginning of the next chapter:

FINAL CHAPTER

THE WOMAN I BECAME

Not a conclusion. A homecoming.

I STOPPED RETURNING TO THE WOMAN WHO NEARLY DIED.

“For years, I asked, ‘If I disturb their sleep, do I still get to keep my life?’

Now, I finally understood the truth:

I never had a life until I was brave enough to disturb the silence.”

People talk about rebirth as if it’s instant. As if one moment changes everything. Mine didn’t.

My rebirth came quietly. In decisions, no one applauded. In boundaries, no one celebrated. In saying no when the old version of me would have explained herself into exhaustion. I didn’t rise dramatically.

I rose consistently. I stopped returning to the woman who nearly died trying to hold everything together.

I became someone else instead.

A BODY THAT NO LONGER NEGOTIATES

After the near-death experience, my body refused old contracts. It would not push. It would not override.

It would not survive at its expense anymore. And for the first time in my life, I *listened*. When my chest tightened, I stopped. When

exhaustion whispered, I rested. When my nervous system flinched, I honoured it.

This wasn't a weakness. This was wisdom arriving late, but arriving fully. For the first time since childhood, I lived *with* my body instead of against it. And in that partnership, something sacred returned:

Trust.

Presence.

Intuition.

Not intuition shaped by fear.

Intuition shaped by truth.

PURPOSE WITHOUT PERFORMANCE

Earlier, my purpose had urgency stitched to it. Over-functioning. Availability. Proving. After the collapse, the purpose returned clearer than ever. I asked different questions:

What do I want to build?

What do I no longer tolerate?

What is mine to carry and what never was?

Women didn't come to me because I had answers.

They came because I had language. I had survived marriage. Divorce. Cultural judgment. Legal war. And death's edge. I wasn't teaching survival anymore. I was teaching **how to stop disappearing**.

The divorce party made me visible.

Almost dying made me responsible.

MOTHERHOOD, REWRITTEN

Motherhood changed forever. I stopped parenting from depletion. I began parenting from awareness.

I named my emotions. I modelled rest. I let my boys see me pause—not because I was weak, but because I was wise. They didn’t learn fear from my survival. They learned empathy. I wasn’t just their protector anymore. I became their example.

THE SOFT REBELLION

For most of my life, I lived under one rule:

Don’t disturb the night.

Don’t need too much.

Don’t make anyone lose sleep.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

That sentence shaped everything. In 2025, I committed my quiet rebellion. Rest without guilt. Not collapse.

Not recovery. Choice. I cancelled plans. I slowed down. I slept. I stopped earning my right to stop. Softness didn’t weaken me. It consolidated my power.

WHAT I KNOW NOW

These truths live in my bones:

- The body tells the truth long before the mind listens.
- Silence is not peace; it is often self-erasure.
- Endurance is not love. Love does not require disappearance.
- Survival is not the goal. Living is.
- Joy is not indulgence. It is medicine.
- Boundaries are not selfish. They are oxygen.
- Starting again is not failure. It is evolution.
- Returning to yourself is the real homecoming.

THE REAL ENDING

For a long time, I thought my story was about what I survived. That was only the middle. The real story is this:

I rebuilt myself into the woman I needed decades ago. The woman my sons need now. The woman other women see and think, *if she lived through all of that, maybe I can too*. I didn't write this book to be brave.

I wrote it because silence nearly killed me, and I refuse to participate in that kind of erasure ever again.

My life is not defined by the battles I fought. It is defined by the woman I became after them. And that woman— the one writing these words— no longer survives.

She lives.

For the first time in my life, I sleep knowing no one can say to me,

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

A Letter to My Sons

My beautiful boys,

If you ever wonder why and how could I muster the courage to tell this story; why I laid bare parts of my life that were painful, messy, and deeply personal, it is because of you. This book is not an explanation. It is not an apology. It is not a justification.

It is a record of how love and truth sometimes require courage that doesn't look brave at all.

I want you to know, first and always, that you were never the reason things broke. You were the reason I stayed as long as I did. And you were the reason I eventually had to leave. There is a difference.

For a long time, I believed that protecting you meant enduring everything, quietly. I thought if I could just hold it all together — the tension, the unhappiness, the exhaustion — then you would be spared. I thought strength meant absorbing pain, so it didn't let it spill onto you.

I was wrong. What I learned, slowly and painfully, is that children don't need perfect stability. They need the truth. They need safety. They need parents who are alive — not just present, but well enough to be present. Mikhal, you were old enough to see more than I ever wanted you to. You felt shifts in energy. You sensed fear even when no one named it. And when I nearly died, you were asked questions no child should ever have to answer — questions about wills, about what would happen if I didn't come back. I need you to know this with absolute clarity: That moment did not happen because I was weak. It happened because I was too strong for too long.

And when you said, "I'm not doing this again," you were not being dramatic. You were practicing your autonomy. You were drawing a

boundary I had never learned how to draw for myself. Shay, you were there too. Always there. Close enough to feel the absence, the fear, the waiting — but protected from seeing me like that. You didn't see the machines. You didn't see the tubes. But your body knew something wasn't right. Children always know. I want you both to understand something I didn't learn early enough: Love should not require you to disappear. Strength should not cost you your health. And responsibility should never mean abandoning yourself. There will be moments in your lives — in relationships, in work, where expectations will most pertinently be placed upon you — where you will feel pressured to endure something that is slowly withering you apart. You may be told to push through. To be strong. To cope. To sacrifice.

Please hear me when I say this: **There is a difference between perseverance and self-betrayal.**

Choose the kind of strength that allows you to thrive in your own life. I didn't leave because I stopped loving. I left because I needed to live. And living differently was the bravest thing I ever did — even when it didn't look brave from the outside.

If you take anything from my story, let it be this: You do not have to earn love by suffering. You do not have to prove worth by exhaustion. You do not have to stay loyal to anything that costs you your sense of self. Love should feel safe. Home should feel breathable. And your body should not have to scream to be heard. I hope you grow into men who can sit with discomfort without silencing it.

Who can love without control. Who can walk away without shame. Who can rest without guilt. I hope you choose partners who meet you in honesty, not fear. Who celebrates your wholeness, not your compliance.

Who does not mistake endurance for devotion. And if you ever find yourselves at a crossroad— unsure whether to stay or leave, whether

to hold on or let go — I hope you remember this: Your life is allowed to change. Your truth is allowed to evolve. And choosing yourself does not mean abandoning others.

I am not proud of every decision I made. But I am proud that I learned. I am proud that I listened when my body finally spoke. I am proud that I survived — and then chose to live differently.

Most of all, I am proud to be your mother.

Everything I became, I became with you watching.

Everything I reclaimed, I reclaimed so you would never confuse love with pain or strength with silence.

This book ends here.

But my promise to you does not.

I will keep choosing honesty.

I will keep choosing health.

I will keep choosing a life where love does not come at the cost of self.

Always.

- Mum

A Letter to the Woman Still Awake

Let me say this first — quietly, clearly, without drama: If parts of this book unsettled you, if something tightened in your chest, if you paused more than once, if you recognised moments, you have never said out loud — that is not a coincidence.

That is your body recognising itself. Because this story is not only mine. It belongs to the woman who learned early how to read rooms. The woman who carries everyone else's emotional weather.

The woman who smooths things over, so no one has to sit with discomfort. The woman who keeps going because stopping feels dangerous.

The woman who lies awake at night — not because she cannot sleep, but because she cannot rest.

In our culture, we don't always name this. We praise endurance. We reward silence. We call coping "strength." We confuse survival with virtue. And we pass down a rule so deeply embedded it feels like morality:

Don't disturb the peace.

Don't make things harder.

Don't be the reason someone loses sleep.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Sometimes it is said aloud.

More often, it is absorbed.

It becomes the reason you stay.

The reason you soften the truth.

The reason you swallow your needs.

The reason your body stays alert long after the house is quiet.

And here is the truth I wish someone had said to me sooner:

A life built on endurance will eventually demand your body as proof.

What This Book Is Really About

This is not a book about divorce.

It is not a book about near-death.

It is not even a book about survival.

It is a book about what happens when a woman disappears politely for too long.

About what happens when strength becomes her only identity.

When rest feels unsafe.

When peace is something she manages for others, not something she inhabits.

My body stopped before my voice could.

That was not a weakness.

That was wisdom arriving late.

If you are still in the long middle, please hear this without fear:

Your exhaustion is not a failure.

Your longing is not betrayal.

Your body is not malfunctioning.

It is communicating.

A Pause — Not a Plan

I am not asking you to leave your marriage.

I am not asking you to confront your family.

I am not asking you to be brave before you are ready.

I am asking you to pause.

Just long enough to notice:

- Where are you tolerating what you no longer feel safe carrying?
- Where have you confused being needed with being loved?
- Where has rest become something you earn instead of something you deserve?
- Whose peace are you protecting at the cost of your own?
- What is your body asking for that your mouth has not learned how to say yet?

You do not need answers today.

You do not need solutions.

You need honesty — gentle, private, yours.

Where the Work Continues

I did not write this book to close a chapter.

I wrote it because silence almost killed me — and I know how many women are still living inside it.

If this book has given you language, or courage, or even just permission to stop pretending you are fine —

then it has already begun doing its work.

And one day — whether through courage, collapse, clarity, or necessity — something in you will refuse to stay quiet any longer. Not loudly. Not violently.

But firmly.

Because the deepest rebellion is not leaving. It is returning to yourself. And when you finally lay your head down — in a life that

fits, in a body that feels safe, in a truth that no longer asks permission

you will know:

For the first time, no one can say to you,

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

And neither can you.

Guided Reflections — For the Woman Still Awake

This section is not something to rush.

There are no right answers.

There is no finish line.

You don't need to do all of this at once.

You don't even need to write anything down if that feels like too much.

Just be honest — even if that honesty stays private.

1. Where Am I Still Staying Quiet to Protect Someone Else's Peace?

Take a moment.

Don't justify. Don't explain. Don't soften it.

Just notice.

- Where do you hold back your truth because it feels “easier”?
- Where have you learned that being calm matters more than being honest?
- Who benefits from your silence — and who pays the price?

If you've grown up believing *Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di* is the worst thing a woman can do, ask yourself gently:

What has it cost me to make sure everyone else sleeps?

2. What Has My Body Been Trying to Tell Me?

Your body is not dramatic.

It is not weak.

It is not betraying you.

It is communicating.

- Where do you feel tension most often?
- When do you feel most exhausted — even after rest?
- What symptoms have you normalised because “this is just life”?

Ask yourself, without fear:

If my body could speak without interruption, what would it say?

You don’t need to fix anything yet.

Listening is enough for now.

3. When did Rest Become Something I Had to Earn?

Be honest here — this one matters.

- Do you only rest when you are ill, overwhelmed, or breaking?
- Do you apologise for slowing down?
- Do you feel guilty when you do nothing?

Ask yourself:

Who taught me that my worth is measured by endurance?

And then, quietly:

What would it look like to rest without collapse?

4. What Version of Me Am I Afraid to Become?

Sometimes we don’t stay because we are weak.

We stay because leaving — or changing — would require becoming unfamiliar.

Ask yourself:

- Who might I disappoint if I chose myself?
- Who might I upset if I told the truth?
- What labels am I afraid of carrying?

And then ask the harder question:

What am I afraid I might lose — and what have I already lost by staying the same?

5. What Does “Peace” Actually Mean to Me?

Not peace as performance.

Not peace as quiet.

Not peace as keeping things together.

Your peace.

- Does your current life allow you to exhale?
- Do you feel emotionally safe where you are?
- Can you be fully yourself without editing?

Ask yourself gently:

Is this peace — or is this just silence I’ve learned to live with?

6. If I Knew I Would Not Be Judged, What Would I Admit?

This question is for you alone.

No consequences.

No explanations.

No one is watching.

Finish this sentence — even if only in your mind:

If I were completely honest, I would admit that...

Whatever comes up is valid.

Even if it scares you.

Even if it contradicts the life you're living.

Truth doesn't demand action immediately.

It asks only to be acknowledged.

7. One Small Act of Self-Loyalty

This book is not asking you to burn your life down.

It is asking for one thing:

One small act of loyalty to yourself.

That could be:

- Saying no without explaining.
- Going to bed earlier.
- Telling someone how you really feel.
- Asking for help.
- Cancelling something you don't have the energy for.
- Choosing rest without justification.

Ask yourself:

What is one thing I can do this week that honours me — not the version of me others expect?

Before You Close This Book

If you take nothing else with you, take this:

You are not difficult.

You are not dramatic.

You are not too much.

You are tired because you have been carrying more than one life should hold.

And you are allowed — fully, unapologetically allowed — to build a life where no one can look at you and say:

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di

Because for the first time,
your rest matters too.

One Last Truth — And Then I'll Let You Go

You were never meant to earn your right to rest.

You were never meant to suffer quietly to be loved.

You were never meant to stay awake so everyone else could sleep.

Your presence is not a disturbance. Your truth is not a disruption.

Your needs are not a burden.

You are allowed to live a life that does not cost you your body.

And if this book did nothing else but help you exhale — even once — then it has become something more than a story.

It has become a beginning.

About the Author

Sonia Gupta is a writer, speaker, and mentor whose work explores self-worth, identity, and survival within culturally conditioned lives.

Raised in a South Asian household where endurance was praised, and silence was expected, Sonia spent years navigating systems that required her to hold everything together — marriage, motherhood, reputation, family peace — often at the expense of her own well-being. Her journey includes a twelve-year divorce process, prolonged emotional and cultural pressure, years of severe sleep deprivation, and a near-death medical collapse that forces a reckoning with how much a woman can carry before the body intervenes.

In 2021, Sonia's decision to publicly celebrate her divorce went viral, igniting global conversations about shame, freedom, and what Indian women are expected to survive quietly. What followed was not attention for its own sake, but responsibility. Women began reaching out — privately and urgently — recognising their own lives in her truth.

Through her platform, *It's a Sonia Thing*, Sonia now speaks and writes about self-worth in relationships, maternal guilt, nervous-system burnout, cultural silence, and the invisible labour women perform to protect everyone else's peace — and sleep.

Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di is her first book.

It is written not from theory, but from lived experience — from years without rest, choices made without permission, and the moment she stopped believing that disturbing the system was worse than disappearing inside it. Sonia lives in the UK and is the mother of two sons.

Today, she sleeps — knowing no one can say to her, *Tune Neend Kharab Kar Di*