

The Heart Now I Live With

Based on a true story
of a Second life

ANUJ RATHORE



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

New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

Copyright © Anuj Rathore 2026

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

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



BlueRoseONE[®]
Stories Matter
New Delhi • London

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

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS
www.BlueRoseONE.com
info@bluerosepublishers.com
+91 8882 898 898
+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7825-717-9

Cover Design: Deepak Katheria
Typesetting: Manisha Rawat

First Edition: May 2026

Dedication

To those who survived storms the world never saw,
to those who kept breathing when it hurt to even exist,
and to those who rebuilt themselves quietly,
one small courage at a time.

This book is for the hearts that kept beating,
slowly, bravely, beautifully,
even when life forgot to be kind.

Acknowledgement

This book is not just a story; it is a journey shaped by countless moments, seen and unseen.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who, in ways big or small, became a part of this path. To those who stood beside me in difficult times, offered strength when it was needed the most, and believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself—thank you.

I am deeply thankful for the experiences that shaped me, the challenges that taught me resilience, and the quiet moments that helped me understand the true meaning of life, hope, and healing.

A gentle thankyou to the **Universe**, for every unanswered prayer that later made sense, for every delay that carried wisdom, and for every unexpected blessing that guided me forward.

A special sense of gratitude to every soul who chooses kindness, listens without judgement, and reminds others that they are not alone.

And finally, to every reader—

Thank you for giving this story your time, your patience, and your heart.

With all my heart,

— Anuj Rathore

About the Author

Anuj Rathore, lovingly known as Anuj, is an artist, thinker, and dreamer with a deep love for nature, space, and the power of stories. A believer in simplicity and truth, he has a journey from quiet thoughts to published words that is not just personal — it's a gift to everyone who has ever felt unseen.

Though he comes from the world of business and technology, his heart has always belonged to creativity and connection. He has previously penned real-life short stories and heartfelt poems, drawn from his own experiences and emotional reflections. Each piece was a window into his soul — honest, unfiltered, and human.

“The Heart Now I Live With” ... is his debut full-length novel.

When he isn't writing, he expresses himself through art, explores new ideas, and continues to grow both personally and professionally. He believes that life is not about having all the answers, but about finding meaning in the journey.

With this book, he hopes to leave behind not just a story, but a feeling — one that stays with the reader long after the last page is turned.

Prologue

The Beat That Faded

There are moments in life when the world doesn't shatter in an instant—it slowly unravels. One heartbeat at a time.

For Atharv Dalvi, it wasn't a sudden collapse. It was a slow suffocation. A body that began to betray him silently, one breath, one beat, one restriction after another. In the prime of his youth, when most chase careers or love stories, he was chasing oxygen, hope, and a few millilitres of water a day.

His heart was failing. Not emotionally—biologically.

He had always believed in possibilities. But in 2014, when the doctors told him that his heart was no longer capable of pumping blood effectively, something inside him broke. Not just valves or chambers—but dreams. Water intake was measured in spoons. He counted every drop, every breath, like borrowed time. His world shrank to bedsheets, tubes, and silent prayers.

But this isn't a story about death.

This is a story about **rebirth**.

Because when hope feels impossible, miracles are born. And when the world turns its back, strangers come forward. When science meets compassion—life begins again.

This is not fiction. This is not made-up drama.

This is the real, aching, inspiring journey of a man who literally got a new heart—and with it, a new life.

This is Atharv's story.

And it deserves to be heard.

Contents

Chapter 1

The Heart That Waited 1

Chapter 2

The Boy with the Sketchbook 7

Chapter 3

The First Wound – Bone Marrow and the Battle Within 13

Chapter 4

Back to Normal - Or Something Like It..... 20

Chapter 5

Back to Life - I 27

Chapter 6

Back to Life - II 30

Chapter 7

The Waiting Room of Life 34

Chapter 8

The Turning Point..... 40

Chapter 9

Silent Battles, Loud Scars..... 46

Chapter 10

A Different Kind of Courage..... 53

Chapter 11

The Art of Beginning Again..... 60

Chapter 12

Borrowed Beats, Boundless Spirit..... 67

Chapter 13

The Artist Who Refused to Fade 73

Chapter 14	
The Life After Life	81
Chapter 15	
The Visitor's Chair	88
Chapter 16	
The Day He Remember	95
Chapter 17	
The World Outside the Window.....	101
Chapter 18	
The Heart That Spoke - I	106
Chapter 19	
The Heart That Spoke - II	112
Chapter 20	
The Heart That Spoke - III.....	124
Chapter 21	
The Heart That Spoke - IV	131
Chapter 22	
The Heart That Spoke - Final Part.....	136
Chapter 23	
The Surgery	143
Chapter 24	
Rebirth – Where Hope Learns a New Name.....	149
Chapter 25	
The New Heart Learns to Breathe	155
Chapter 26	
The Girl Who Stayed	166
Chapter 27	
The Daydreams Found Direction.....	173
Chapter 28	
The Life They Were Building.....	182

Chapter 29

Books, Paintings & Becoming..... 189

Chapter 30

The Heart Opens Slowly 196

Chapter 31

The Future He Chose..... 202

Epilogue

Zindagi... Phir Bhi Pyaari Hai 210

Chapter 1

The Heart That Waited

December 2014 — Mumbai.

Mumbai's winter never brought snow, but that December, it carried something colder — uncertainty.

In the crowded cardiac ICU of a well-known hospital, Atharv lay still on the stiff white bed. The air-conditioning hummed overhead, blending with the rhythmic beeping of machines — a soundtrack that had slowly replaced the sound of his life. For the world, December meant weddings, vacations, and warm laughter.

For him, it was a countdown — not to a new year, but possibly to his final one.

He was just twenty-seven.

An age where dreams take flight, careers find direction, and relationships deepen. But Atharv's life was unraveling thread by thread. Every sunrise felt like a question. Every night felt like a test he might not pass.

The diagnosis was unforgiving — end-stage heart failure.

His heart, once a steady drummer of youth, had turned fragile. It wasn't just tired; it was surrendering. Long before doctors confirmed it, his body had begun giving him signs — a few stairs felt like a climb, crossing a room felt like a marathon, and the simplest human desire — a glass of water — had turned into a forbidden luxury.

He had once whispered to his mother, voice trembling,
“Aai... bas ek glass paani peena hai.”

She didn't reply.

She simply held his hand, kissed his forehead, and wiped away
a tear he hadn't realized had fallen.

She knew the truth he was forced to forget — even water was
dangerous now. A few sips too many, and his lungs could flood.
His failing heart wouldn't manage the extra load. He could
drown — not in rain or sea, but in his own body.

So, he drank water in spoons.

Spoons.

Every millilitre counted.

His life had shrunk into numbers:

- 30 ml of water at a time
- 400 steps a day
- 12 tablets from morning to night
- 0 immunity
- 1 failing heart

Smiles were forced. Laughter had gone silent. Tears appeared
often — quietly, behind the thin hospital curtain.

But the worst battles weren't physical.

The real weight was fear.

He feared sleep — *What if he didn't wake up?*

He feared people — every visitor was a threat; a small cold
could become deadly.

He feared the future — because now doctors spoke a single
word repeatedly: Transplant.

And with that word came another: Cost.

Thirty lakhs.

It wasn't just the surgery. It was months of hospitalization, ICU stays, and lifelong medication. For a middle-class family already drowning in debt, it felt impossible.

His father tried to look strong.

His mother tried to hide her fear in the folds of her dupatta.

But Atharv could see through them.

Often, he found them sitting outside the ICU — quiet, defeated, clinging to faith because nothing else was left.

Some nights, he wondered, *“Is this really my story? Is this how it ends? At twenty-seven? Half a life lived, half a breath left, and a heart giving up.”*

And just when hope was barely breathing... a ripple came.

Vinod— a childhood friend who hadn't stayed in touch but had quietly followed his struggle — stepped in. He believed in something rare: the kindness of strangers.

He started a fundraiser on Milaap.

The target was bold — ₹30 lakhs.

No one expected a miracle.

But sometimes miracles walk in wearing ordinary clothes.

Within fifteen days, the impossible happened.

Thirty lakhs — raised rupee by rupee.

From students, homemakers, professionals, retirees, NRIs, and even anonymous well-wishers.

Some donated ₹100.

Some ₹10,000.

A little girl gave her pocket money.

A teacher contributed silently.

Each donation carried a story, a blessing:

“You don’t know me, but I believe in your fight.”

“You have to live for your parents.”

“I lost my brother to a heart condition. I hope you survive.”

Atharv’s phone, once filled with hospital updates, now flickered with hope.

It wasn’t just money — it was love.

Unseen, unmeasured, but deeply felt.

And then came 28th December 2015.

A date that would divide his life into *Before* and *After*.

He was wheeled into the operating theatre — eyes half-open, heart barely beating. Prayers surrounded him like a final blanket. The last thing he heard before the anaesthesia took over was his mother’s trembling voice:

“Jeet kar aana, beta...”

Hours later.

He opened his eyes.

At first, everything was blurry — white walls, bright lights, a nurse’s voice guiding him back to consciousness.

“Nurse...” he whispered, voice scraping out,

“Can I... have some water?”

She paused,

smiled,

and walked over.

This time, instead of a spoon...

She handed him a full glass of water.

Atharv stared at it. His fingers trembled.

“How much can I drink?” he asked, unsure, afraid.

Her reply was soft — but it ended a thousand days of fear.

“All of it.”

He sipped.

Then gulped.

And in that moment — that simple, ordinary act of drinking a full glass of water — he was reborn.

It wasn't just hydration.

It was freedom.

It was life.

The first taste of a second chance.

*“When life gives you a second chance,
embrace it with courage & win.”*

Chapter 2

The Boy with the Sketchbook

Before the machines.

Before the medications.

Before the tubes.

Before the heart that wasn't his — there was just a boy.

A quiet boy named Atharv.

He belonged to a humble, middle-class Maharashtrian family nestled in the heart of Mumbai, the city of dreams. Their flat was small but full — full of warmth, full of fragrance, full of faith.

Sunday mornings carried the smell of fresh poha and mustard seeds crackling in hot oil. Evenings arrived with his mother's soft prayers and the distant honking of local trains rushing past.

Atharv wasn't loud.

He didn't shout to be noticed, nor did he fight for attention.

He simply observed.

And inside that quiet boy lived a storm of colours and dreams.

While other children rushed outside chasing cricket balls, Atharv stayed by the window — sketchbook on his lap, eyes far away. His world was paper. His escape was the pencil.

Scenes flowed out of him like memories he hadn't lived — floating cities, talking trees, flying elephants, mothers with magical hands. Sometimes they came from things he had seen; most times, they rose from feelings he couldn't yet name.

His sketches weren't perfect.
But they were real.
Realer than words.

His mother, Rekha, was the first to notice.

"Tu toh bada artist banega," she would say while stirring morning chai, her hands scented with turmeric and masalas.

Once, Atharv drew her hair exactly like that, tied in a loose bun, one eyebrow slightly raised, dupatta neatly folded. He slid the sketch under her pillow without telling her. She cried the night she found it.

His father, Vinayak, was stricter, practical — a government clerk bound by rules and numbers. He rarely praised, but he often lingered behind Atharv's chair, quietly watching him draw.

What Atharv didn't know was that inside Vinayak's work files, among forms and ledgers, were tucked some of his earliest doodles — silent tokens of a pride never spoken but deeply felt.

One evening, when Atharv was around nine, he watched *Finding Nemo* on a borrowed DVD. His eyes sparkled.

"Main Pixar mein kaam karunga," he whispered.

His father frowned. *"Yeh Pixar kya karta hai?"*

"They bring drawings to life," Atharv said — eyes wide, heart full.

That night, he dreamt of oceans and talking fish — of stories that could breathe.

He wasn't a topper.
Nor was he naughty.
He existed in the middle — never punished, rarely praised.
But teachers admired his sincerity.
But give him a blank page, and he shone.
His school notebooks had more sketches than notes. Teachers scolded him, sometimes tore pages.
Once, during art class, he drew the school building with such detail
that the teacher stopped speaking mid-sentence and whispered,
"Atharv... yeh tumne banaya?"
That picture stayed pinned on the board for months.
But in Class 6, during the annual-day poster competition,
Atharv drew children riding open books like magic carpets
across the sky.
The principal was so moved that she framed it and hung it in the hallway.
For the first time, Atharv felt seen.

Teenage years arrived slowly.
His best friend Vinod was everything Atharv wasn't — loud, fearless, funny.
"Tu kya Buddha hai? Thoda toh masti karle!" Ganga mein paap dhoyega ya kacche, he'd tease.
Vinod walked into trouble like it was a festival.
He argued with teachers for Atharv, waited outside tuition classes with hot vada pav, and dreamed big dreams with him.
Together, they imagined starting a creative agency — Atharv would sketch, Vinod would pitch.
They felt unstoppable.

Atharv wasn't always indoors.

On Sundays, once homework was done, he'd run downstairs to join the boys at the playground.

He wasn't the strongest.

He wasn't the fastest.

But he was the only one who played cricket like he understood art— carefully, sincerely, with intention.

He bowled slow...but straight.

He batted steadily...and somehow always managed a boundary.

But that didn't protect him from childhood disasters.

One afternoon, under the scorching sun,

Vinod shouted, *"Gola aa raha hai! Hat jaa, Buddhe!"*

Atharv turned a second too late.

The leather ball smacked his shoulder with a thud.

He yelped.

The boys winced in collective pain.

Vinod ran to him dramatically: *"Arre hero! Lag gaya kya? Chal, main Baba Ramdev wala treatment karta hoon!"*

His "treatment" included:

blowing air on the shoulder

tapping it twice and announcing, *"Theek ho gaya!"* ...which, of course, fixed nothing. That was childhood full of bruises, full of laughter, full of moments that left small invisible marks on life.

"Atharv felt ready for life.

He had dreams in his hands, a partner by his side, and a future that seemed wide open.

He didn't know then... "that same shoulder — once lost in endless Sunday cricket — would soon become the doorway to the first storm of his life."

“Trust your intuitions- if it says you’re not done yet, then you are not done.”

Chapter 3

The First Wound – Bone Marrow and the Battle Within

School life is supposed to be carefree.

For most children, it's about friends, homework, playful fights, and stolen moments of laughter between classes.

And for Atharv too, it began just like that — simple, innocent, full of dreams.

He was like any other boy: curious, cheerful, brimming with energy.

He loved drawing, playing cricket in the streets, and imitating his favourite superheroes.

He wasn't the top student in class, but he was sincere enough to be noticed, respectful enough to be liked, and creative enough to be remembered.

Atharv's world was filled with cricket in the building compound, sketching during boring classes, and running to the shop outside school for a 2-rupee orange candy.

He wasn't the loudest boy, but he wasn't invisible either. Just... comfortable.

One monsoon afternoon, during an inter-class cricket match, everything changed.

A high catch came flying toward him.

He jumped, stretched his arm—and felt something snap.

A sharp, ripping pain shot through his left shoulder.

He dropped the ball.
Dropped to his knees.
And before anyone understood, his shoulder had *dislocated*.
“Breathe, beta... breathe,” his PT teacher kept saying as he cried silently, biting his lip to hide the pain.
That was the first time life touched him with something sharp.
21 days of rest followed.
Physiotherapy.
Heat pads.
Restricted movement.
His friends played cricket outside—he watched from the balcony, arm in a sling.
When he finally recovered and returned to the field, it happened again.
A light throw.
A light jump.
And again—
The shoulder slipped out.
This time, the fear stayed longer than the pain.
At home, everyone assumed:
“Kuch nahi, shoulder weak hoga... time ke saath theek ho jayega.”
But it didn’t.
Slowly, the discomfort grew.
Pain while writing.
Pain while sleeping.
Pain while sketching.
But this wasn’t the kind of pain that fades overnight.
It grew sharper, deeper, spreading like a silent shadow.

Atharv didn't have the words to explain it, but his eyes said everything.

School days blurred.

He'd return home early, clutching his shoulder, wincing with every movement.

Some days, he pretended everything was fine — he didn't want to worry anyone. But some discomforts can't be hidden for long.

A visit to the local clinic turned into multiple visits to bigger hospitals.

Tests.

Referrals.

Whispers in hospital corridors.

And then, a word that made even adults uneasy — Biopsy.

It was the first time Atharv had heard it.

He didn't know what it meant, but the fear on his father's face told him it wasn't good.

The scans showed an abnormality in the shoulder bone. Doctors suspected a bone marrow disorder — possibly malignant.

Cancer wasn't spoken aloud, but it hovered in the air like a ghost.

Atharv was barely in his teens.

Yet here he was — in hospital rooms, with nurses inserting needles into his veins and machines clicking images of his bones.

The sterile smell of disinfectant blurred into the cold air of uncertainty.

Childhood — running, shouting, laughing — was being peeled away one painful layer at a time.

The biopsy was done under anaesthesia.

A small piece of bone marrow was removed for testing.

But sometimes, the wait hurts more than the wound.

Each day stretched like a rubber band ready to snap.

His father tried to stay calm.

He smiled, cracked jokes, brought Atharv's favourite ice cream — but fear always sat quietly behind his eyes.

Finally, the results came.

It wasn't cancer.

Relief swept through the room like a quiet storm.

But the report wasn't clean either.

The bone marrow showed abnormalities — early signs of a condition that could become dangerous.

Doctors explained it in technical terms meant for adults.

Atharv only understood that a surgery was needed.

It was scheduled quickly.

During the procedure, doctors made a difficult call — a portion of his right arm bone near the shoulder had to be removed and replaced with a surgical rod to stabilise it.

It was rare for someone so young, but necessary.

Atharv didn't ask many questions.

Maybe he didn't know what to ask.

Or maybe he was just tired.

When they wheeled him into the operating theatre, his small fingers gripped the stretcher tightly, eyes searching the ceiling for comfort.

When he woke up, his shoulder was wrapped in bandages — stiff, sore.

The room spun.

His vision blurred.
His throat was dry.

“Main theek hoon na?” he whispered.

His mother held his hand.
“Haan beta, bilkul theek ho.”

The days that followed were hard.
Painkillers dulled the ache but never erased it.
He wore a sling for weeks.
Cricket was impossible.
Even sketching hurt.

For a boy who created worlds with a pencil, it felt like
someone had taken away his voice.

He missed school for nearly a month.
Friends visited with cards, chocolates, and silly jokes.
But something in Atharv had changed.
He didn't laugh the same.
Didn't speak the same.

He had seen something that made him grow up faster than
others.

Sketching was difficult with a sling, but he didn't let go of it.
He sat for hours, pencil gripped with determination, letting
pain flow onto paper.

His lines were no longer playful doodles —
They carried weight.
Emotion.
Silence.

Even with trembling hands, his heart never stopped drawing.

Atharv learned something early — the body can betray.
Pain arrives uninvited.
Life changes without warning.

A scar remained on his shoulder long after the wound healed.
Small, uneven — yet to Atharv, it was more.
A reminder of a battle fought and survived.
A quiet badge of strength.

His sketchbook, once filled with cartoons and comic heroes,
now reflected something deeper.

He drew shadows.

He drew silence.

He drew pain — and sometimes, hope.

His art changed because he had changed.

But while Atharv slowly moved forward, the fear at home
stayed.

His mother barely slept.

Any complaint of pain made her alert.

Every fever became a cause for worry.

Because once life shakes you, you never quite stand the same
way again.

Those months left a lasting imprint — not just on Atharv's
shoulder, but on his soul.

And as life resumed — friends, school & assignments — Atharv
carried a quiet truth: *"Pain doesn't always knock"*.
And even the smallest wound can begin a much bigger story.

*“No pain stands a chance against
your inner strength.”*

Chapter 4

Back to Normal – Or Something Like It

Recovery doesn't arrive all at once.

It comes quietly... in small, almost forgettable moments.

The day Atharv removed his sling for the first time.

The first time, he lifted his arm without wincing.

The first night, he slept without waking up from pain.

Life wasn't the same.

But it was... moving again.

The Slow Return

After weeks of rest, medicines, and careful movements, Atharv slowly began stepping back into his routine.

School resumed.

Books reopened.

Uniforms ironed again.

But everything felt slightly different.

He walked a little slower.

He thought a little more.

And somewhere inside, a part of him had grown up too soon.

Teachers were kinder now.

Friends were curious.

“Dikha na scar!” someone would say.

He’d smile awkwardly and change the topic.

Because some things weren’t meant to be shown...
only carried.

Vinod — The Constant Noise

If there was one thing that hadn’t changed, it was Vinod.

“*Doctor ne bola hai rest kar... iska matlab yeh nahi ki tu boring ban ja!*” he said one afternoon, barging into Atharv’s house without knocking.

From that day on, Vinod became a routine.

He showed up almost every evening.

Sometimes with vada pav.

Sometimes with cricket gossip.

Sometimes with absolutely no reason.

But always... with noise.

Homework, Laughter, and Little Wins

Atharv struggled to keep up with schoolwork at first.

Writing for long hours hurts.

Sitting straight felt uncomfortable.

But Vinod took it upon himself like a mission.

“*Tu bas bol, main likhta hoon,*” he said, opening the notebook.

Assignments were completed together.

Projects were finished on time.

And in between...

There were jokes.
Mimicking teachers.
Laughing at nothing.

“Kal match mein kya hua pata hai?” Vinod would begin, acting out every single moment like live commentary.

“Aur phir na, Ramesh ne catch chhoda... pura ground chillaya!”

Atharv laughed.

Not loudly.
But genuinely.

For the first time in weeks.

The Ground He Missed

Some evenings, Vinod would drag him downstairs.

“Bas dekhne aa... khelna nahi.”

Atharv would sit on the compound wall, watching the boys play.

The sound of the bat hitting the ball.
Appeals. Arguments.
That familiar chaos.

For a moment, he felt normal again.

His fingers would twitch slightly—
as if they remembered the grip of the bat.

“Next month tu bhi khelega,” Vinod said confidently.

Atharv didn’t reply.

But he hoped.

Physiotherapy and Patience

Recovery wasn't just emotional.

It was physical. Painful. Repetitive.

Every morning, he followed his physiotherapy routine.

Slow arm lifts.

Controlled rotations.

Stretch... hold... release.

Some days it felt pointless.

Some days it hurts more than before.

“Yeh sab karne se theek hoga na?” he once asked.

Vinod, sitting beside him, replied casually,

“Tu kar... main count karta hoon. Doctor ko prove karenge ki patient smart hai.”

They both laughed.

But Atharv continued.

Because somewhere, he knew— this was his way back.

The Sketchbook Returns

For a long time, his sketchbook had remained closed.

Not because he didn't want to draw...

But because he wasn't sure if he could.

One evening, while Vinod was busy explaining a cricket match for the hundredth time, Atharv quietly picked up his pencil.

He drew slowly.

Carefully.

A simple scene— a boy sitting on a wall, watching others play.

It wasn't perfect.

But it was honest.

Vinod noticed.

"Abey... tu wapas aa gaya," he said with a grin.

Atharv looked at the page... and smiled.

Maybe he had.

Almost Normal

Days turned into weeks.

Pain reduced.

Movement improved.

Life settled into a new rhythm.

It wasn't the old life.

But it wasn't broken either.

Just... different.

And in that difference,

Atharv was learning something important— Healing doesn't mean going back. Sometimes, it means moving forward...with everything you've been through.

Ending Note

On a quiet Sunday evening, sitting by the window with his sketchbook, Atharv looked outside at the boys playing cricket.

For the first time in a long while, he didn't feel left out.

He felt... patient.

Because deep down,
he believed— this was just a pause.

Not the end of his game.

*“Time takes its time—but
it heals everything.”*

Chapter 5

Back to Life - I

Atharv recovered fully from his shoulder surgery.

The sling was gone.

The physiotherapy sessions had ended.

Pain slowly faded into memory.

And life — real life — finally returned to him.

For the first time in months, mornings didn't begin with hospitals.

Afternoons weren't measured in medicines.

Evenings weren't overshadowed by fear.

He was back.

Back to college.

Back to assignments.

Back to long chai breaks with Vinod, who refused to let any day feel dull.

Vinod helped him finish his pending work, cracked jokes through his physio exercises, and narrated every silly thing that happened on the playground as if Atharv had missed a blockbuster.

Life felt lighter.

Normal.

Almost perfect.

He began sketching again — more colours, more life, more emotion.

His confidence slowly returned.

Dreams restarted.

And then came Priya.

She had recently moved into the same building.

Their first meeting was in the elevator.

Second over coffee.

By the third, they were sharing playlists and inside jokes.

She called him “silent volcano.”

He sketched her once during lunch at a restaurant — half-asleep, hair messy.

She laughed and kept that sketch in her wallet.

She was chaos.

He was calm.

Together, they felt complete.

They met after classes, went on long walks, exchanged dreams and fears, shared street food, fought over silly things, and reconciled with laughter.

Life felt aligned.

For once, the universe seemed to be smiling at him.

He was working.

Creating.

Loving.

Living.

Everything was finally settling.

Everything was finally making sense.

Everything was... okay.

Until the day it wasn't.

“Nurture relationships that continue to bear fruit for a lifetime.”

*“Nurture relationships that continue to
bear fruit for a lifetime.”*

Chapter 6

Back to Life – II

One winter afternoon, in the middle of a routine creative pitch, Atharv collapsed.

Everything blurred — voices, faces, time.

Emergency.

Panic.

Tests.

Diagnosis: Dilated Cardiomyopathy.

His heart was failing.

The news hit like a wrecking ball.

At twenty-two, Atharv's heart was functioning like a man in his seventies.

Doctors spoke gently.

Priya held his hand tightly.

His father stared into nothing.

His mother... her bangles stopped jingling.

Work stopped.

Life paused.

Dreams froze.

Priya stayed... for a while.

But eventually, the weight of it all broke her.

She tried.

But she left — not out of betrayal, but fear.

In those days, his mother never left his side.

Atharv didn't know then that life wasn't testing just his body — it was preparing him for a loss deeper than illness.

His worsening health and the crushing financial burden began wearing her down.

The fear of losing her son, the helplessness of watching him suffer, and the knowledge that even Priya — the girl he loved — had walked away... something inside her cracked quietly.

She had grown quieter — not just from fear, but from an exhaustion no one saw.

Hospital corridors swallowed her strength.

Worry gnawed at her breath.

Before anyone realised how deep her pain had sunk, her own health began to crumble.

Atharv clung to her presence, unaware that long before his failing heart would be replaced...

He would lose the strongest heartbeat he had ever known — hers.

Machines now surrounded him.

Monitors beeped.

Oxygen hissed.

His sketchbook lay untouched — dust gathering where dreams once lived.

One night, a nurse found a drawing under his pillow — his mother, standing outside the ICU, hands folded in silent prayer.

The lines were weak.

The emotion... raw.

He whispered once, voice barely audible,
“Yeh dil kitna chalega aur?”
No one had an answer.

Eventually, the words came:
“Only a transplant can save him.”

The cost? Unimaginable.
The waitlist? Endless.
The hope? Fragile.

But inside the boy who once fought bone disease with a
sketch, who dreamed of Pixar, who lost love and nearly lost
life — something still burned.

A small flame.

He waited.
Not because he had to.
But because somewhere within him, a voice whispered:
“You’re not done yet.”
Not yet.

*“No matter how hard life gets, always bounce
back with a high spirit.”*

Chapter 7

The Waiting Room of Life

There are phases in life when time doesn't pass — it stretches. For Atharv and his family, the months leading up to the transplant were exactly that: a painfully long stretch of waiting, uncertainty, and quiet suffering. Hope and fear walked side by side, neither winning, both lingering. Every heartbeat felt borrowed. Every breath felt like a question.

His heart — once the rhythm of childhood mischief, school matches, and laughter-filled evenings — had now become a ticking time bomb. A fragile muscle holding on with thinning threads. It wasn't just failing; it was giving up. Slowly. Painfully. Unmistakably.

Even the smallest effort drained him.
A few steps to the bathroom.
Standing under the sun for a minute.
Climbing two stairs.
All became mountains he could no longer climb.

He often lay motionless, skin pale, fingertips tinged blue, gasping for breath while the world outside moved on as if nothing had changed. His lips cracked. His feet swelled. Food lost all meaning — even his favourite vada pav sat untouched.

He stopped complaining. Because even words took energy, and he had none to spare.

At night, he would press his palm to his chest — just to feel it. *The beat*. That quiet rhythm between life and death. When it

faltered, even slightly, he would stare at the ceiling fan and wonder: *Is this the night? Is this how it ends?*

But the real pain wasn't just physical.

It was the quiet sounds in the house that haunted him. The soft weeping of his sister behind the closed bathroom door. The clicking of his father's calculator late into the night, trying to stretch savings that had already run out. The silence of his brother, who had stopped talking about his college, his friends, or anything really. Everyone was holding their breath.

Every phone call felt like walking a tightrope — could this be the call that changed everything?

But miracles, Atharv learned, are complicated.

For him to receive a heart, someone else had to lose theirs.

That contradiction sat like a silent ghost in the house. They prayed for life, knowing it could only come through someone else's loss. Cruel, but real.

They stayed in constant touch with transplant coordinators.

The waiting list was long.

The matching process unpredictable.

His condition is worsening.

Hospital files grew thicker.

His body grew thinner.

Yet hope remained — a flickering candle refusing to die.

Funds became an impossible mountain.

Hospitals don't run on hope.

And compassion doesn't pay for ICU beds.

Friends stepped in. A few colleagues contributed.

And then strangers joined after a crowdfunding campaign was posted on Milaap.

A short video of Atharv — pale, breathless but hopeful —

travelled online.

His voice was soft, but his eyes held stories. Stories of survival. Of quiet courage.

People responded.

Some sent money.

Some prayers.

One woman from Chennai wrote:

“Your son reminds me of my brother. Keep believing.”

Visitors came with stories from the outside world — weddings, traffic jams, movies, cricket scores — trying to bring normalcy. But Atharv saw through their smiles. Behind every cheerful story was fear. They were preparing to lose him, even if they didn’t say it aloud.

And yet, he never broke down in front of them.

In the privacy of his hospital bed, he scribbled. Someone had gifted him a diary. What began as scattered notes turned into poetry, letters, and silent screams. He wrote of hallway smells, monitor beeps, and the tremble in his mother’s hand as she fed him soup. Pain became ink.

Ink became a mirror.

And somewhere between those pages, he made a decision:

“If I survive, I’ll make this life count.”

One night, unable to sleep, suffocated by the walls around him, he asked Nurse Nandita — his favourite — to wheel him to the rooftop. It wasn’t allowed. His oxygen levels were unstable.

But she agreed.

Wrapped in blankets, Atharv stared at the stars.

The sky didn’t feel far anymore.

“I’m not afraid to go,” he whispered.

“I’m just afraid they won’t be okay after I’m gone.”

Nandita placed a hand on his shoulder.

“You’ve got the most stubborn heart I’ve seen. It’s like it knows something good is coming.”

He smiled faintly.

“Maybe it’s waiting for someone else to believe too.”

That night, he made a promise to the sky — if he survived, he wouldn’t just exist. He would live with purpose.

Then, one day, the call came.

A heart was available.

The donor: a young Tamil man, declared brain-dead after a tragic accident in Chennai.

The match was perfect.

Miraculous.

Terrifying.

Within hours, he was airlifted from Mumbai to Chennai.

Everything moved — ambulances, ICU teams, green corridors, surgical prep.

His father trembled.

His sister stayed silent.

And Atharv?

He was calm.

For the first time in months, the uncertainty ended.

The wait was over.

It was time to fight — not just to survive, but to live.

The surgery lasted hours — complicated, risky, unpredictable.

Doctors later said, “He almost slipped twice.”

But he didn't.
He came back.
With a new heart.
And when he opened his eyes, bruised and weak, he
whispered: "I'm still here."

As he healed, humour found a way back into his circle. One
that brought laughter in place of tears.
His friends teased, "*Arre bhai, tu toh half Tamil, half
Maharashtrian ho gaya!*"
Atharv would laugh, "*Sahi pakde hain! Tamil blood, Marathi
spice. Full combo!*"
That laughter healed more than any medicine. It was a bridge
between life before and after. Proof that he hadn't just
survived—he had returned to life, to laughter.

But the weight of the donor's gift never left him.
He wrote letters — to the donor's family, to the heart beating in
his chest, to the world. "*I carry not just a heart, but a story. A
dream that ended too soon, now living in me.*"
The waiting room of life hadn't just been a phase; it had been
a rebirth chamber.
Pain sculpted purpose.
Sorrow built strength.
Atharv entered it as a patient.
He emerged as a warrior.
And the battle?
It was far from over.
But now, he had a heart that knew how to fight.

*“Battles are first won or lost within, long
before they’re fought outside.”*

Chapter 8

The Turning Point

The days after Atharv's transplant were a strange blur — neither light nor dark, not quite pain and not yet peace. Every heartbeat felt borrowed, every breath a reminder that life had made a strange trade: one soul gone, so another could stay.

But survival wasn't simple.

He lay in a sterile room where everything was white — walls, bedsheets, silence. It wasn't a peaceful silence; it was piercing. The ceiling tiles above him became familiar companions, their neat alignment both comforting and maddening. He counted them — 1, 2, 3...17 — then started again, just to feel like time was moving.

The rhythmic beeping of machines was the only music in this new world. Nurses came and went, offering soft smiles, adjusting IVs, checking monitors — but none could touch what was truly broken.

The wound wasn't just in his chest.

It was in his memories, his losses, his silences.

This wasn't just surgery.

It was a rebirth.

And like all births, it came with pain, mess, and a lingering scream that had no voice.

When the doctors told him he had made it — that his body had accepted the heart — there was relief, but also a dull ache. Not in his stitches, but somewhere deeper.

Because while everyone celebrated his second life, no one understood what it meant to wake up with someone else's heartbeat.

Who was he now?

Was he still Atharv?

Or was he a collage of two lives stitched together — his and the anonymous donor's?

The thought haunted him.

Later, when friends joked, "*Tu toh ab half-Tamil, half-Maharashtrian ho gaya hai!*" he would smile, but a shadow crossed his eyes.

Because that Tamil boy, whose heart now beat inside him, had died.

And Atharv had lived.

He survived.

But at what cost?

The guilt was relentless.

It crept in during the quietest hours — when painkillers faded and reality returned. A young man had died. Somewhere, a mother had cried over a still body. A family had lit incense, whispered prayers, and said goodbye.

And here he was — alive — because of that goodbye.

People called it fate.

Some called it science.

But to Atharv, it felt like a weight pressing on his chest, heavier than any scar.

Yet guilt wasn't the only ghost in that room.

The absence of his mother was louder than the machines, deeper than any wound.

She should have been there — smiling, wiping his forehead, scolding him gently for not finishing his soup. She should've been the first face he saw when he opened his eyes after surgery. She always had been, all his life.

Until life decided she wouldn't be.

He remembered her last hug, the way she held him too tightly. Her warmth. Her scent. Her love. He could still hear her voice: *“Tula kahi nahi honar re, Atharva. Tu majha shivraay rahanar.”*

And then... she was gone.

The heart inside him had changed, but the hole left by her never did.

As if one heartbreak wasn't enough, another followed — quieter, but just as cruel.

His girlfriend had promised to stay. But promises don't always survive pressure. Slowly, she drifted away — from daily calls to weekly texts, to silence.

No goodbye.

No confrontation.

Just absence.

She couldn't handle the uncertainty.

Couldn't live with the fear.

Couldn't love a man whose tomorrow was never guaranteed.

Atharv didn't blame her.

But it still broke him.

Pain teaches you this: even those who swear they'll never leave... sometimes do.

For days, grief swallowed him.
His body was healing, yes — but his spirit wasn't.

Then something shifted.
Not suddenly. Not dramatically.
But gently, like the first breeze after a suffocating summer.

It began with a scribble on a hospital tray — a few words, then a line, then a page.

Atharv started journaling.

His pain, his fears, his memories.
He wasn't writing to be understood —
He was writing to understand himself.

He started talking to other patients — those waiting for transplants, those recovering. In their stories, he found pieces of his own. Their fear mirrored his. Their hope mirrored his. And their strength... quietly inspired him.

For the first time, he didn't feel alone.

Then came that golden afternoon when sunlight poured through the hospital window, warm and forgiving. Atharv stood — his legs trembling — and walked slowly towards it.

He looked outside.

Not at buildings or traffic.
But in life.

Children playing.
Birds slicing through the sky.
Clouds drifting like they had somewhere to be.

The world hadn't changed.
But he had.

And in that moment, Atharv made a vow —
not to his doctors,
not to his father,
not even to the donor whose heart beat inside him,
but to himself: *"I will not waste this life."*

He may have been stitched together — inside and out —
but every scar told a story.

He was ready to write the next chapter.
Not as a victim.
Not just as a survivor.
But as a warrior.

A man who had lost almost everything yet stood tall.
A man who chose to live, love, and give — despite the pain.
A man whose heart was borrowed — but whose courage was
entirely his own.

This was his turning point.
A moment when life was no longer about what he had lost...
But about everything he could become.

Atharv.
The boy who died.
And the man who chose to live.

*“You can’t truly enjoy the Victory until you
have tasted the defeat.”*

Chapter 9

Silent Battles, Loud Scars

The world only sees the scars that are visible.
But the deepest ones? They hide in silence — in glances that linger too long, in smiles that never reach the eyes, in a heartbeat that stumbles when a memory returns.

Atharv's chest bore a long, curved scar — stitched meticulously after the transplant. It lay right over his heart, where life had been restored. But beneath that fresh skin, beneath the muscle and bone, were wounds no scalpel could stitch, and no doctor could name.

Wounds of loss.
Of love that left.
Of silence that screamed louder than words could ever manage.

He was alive — but sometimes, he wasn't sure what that truly meant anymore.

Flashback: A Mother's Goodbye

Just weeks before the transplant, Atharv had already lost the biggest part of his world — his mother.

She wasn't just his caregiver or emotional support — she was home.

That soft, steady “Beta, sab theek ho jaayega,” had been his anchor through countless sleepless nights. She sat beside him during chemo cycles, held his hand during bone marrow

procedures, and stroked his hair whenever he trembled. She'd watched him break down — but never let him stay broken.

And then, one day... she was gone.

It wasn't just emotional. It was painfully real.

Her chair now sat quietly in a corner of the living room, undisturbed, untouched — as if time itself didn't dare occupy it. Her slippers were still resting neatly by the door. Her perfume lingered faintly in the folds of a half-washed dupatta.

Coming home from the hospital had become harder than staying inside it.

Because in the ward, pain was expected.

But at home? The silence was unbearable.

He would pause outside the door, key trembling in his hand... still hoping to hear her voice again.

The Girl Who Left Before the Storm

As if fate hadn't taken enough, life tested his strength once more.

A few months before the transplant, the girl Atharv loved... left.

No warning. No farewell.

"She said she couldn't take it anymore," he had told a friend, his voice flat.

Not angry. Not bitter. Just... tired.

"She was done with the uncertainty. Maybe the surgeries scared her. Maybe... I did."

It wasn't a breakup.

It was abandonment in the middle of a war.

He didn't blame her.

But something inside him shifted that day.
He stopped expecting people to stay.

Recovery Isn't Always Healing

The transplant was declared successful.
Doctors were pleased.
Charts showed progress.
But who was measuring the bruises inside his heart?
At night, he lay awake watching the fan spin overhead, trying
to sync its rhythm with the beat of his new heart — a heart that
once belonged to a Tamilian man who never got a second
chance.

Now that the heart lived inside Atharv.

And sometimes, in rare moments of humour, his friends teased
him:

“Arre tu ab half-Tamilian ban gaya re! Dil kisi aur ka hai, body
teri!”

“Officially bilingual ho gaya — one-part idli, one-part vada
pav!”

He smiled... not because it was funny, but because laughter was
easier than tears.

The Nights Were the Hardest

Healing in silence is brutal.

There was no one to text at 2 AM.

No hand to hold when anxiety crept in like a thief.

He missed the warmth of his mother's hand, the comfort of a girlfriend's hug, even the quiet companionship of someone who understood without asking.

Medicines took care of the body.

But what about the soul?

He journaled.

Mornings began with notes — timings of medication, heartbeat observations, fragments of dreams. Some days the pages stayed blank — not because nothing happened, but because too much did.

Purpose in the Pain

One morning, sitting by his window, he scribbled something that would stay with him for years: "If I've survived death... I have no right to waste life."

That was the turning point.

He began showing up — not just for hospital appointments, but for people.

He spoke to younger patients.

Sometimes softly.

Sometimes with humour.

"Mujhe toh do baar zindagi mili hai — ek aai se, aur ek, ek anjaan donor se."

The line caught on. He was invited to speak at schools, medical camps, even organ-donation awareness drives.

And every time he stood in front of a crowd, he imagined his mother in the front row... smiling, clapping.

A Monologue with the Universe

One night, alone under the stars, Atharv whispered:

"Na jaane kahan le jaayegi yeh zindagi..."

Bebasi ka doosra naam ban gayi hai zindagi.

Waqt ke dharon mein beh-te chale aaye hai is mod tak.

Kahan se chala tha... kahan le aayi hai zindagi.

Kuch tamannayien, kuch khwaishein,

Kuch khatti-meethi yaadein, kuch bhuli bisari baatein.

Guzarte waqt ke saath ulajh gayi hai zindagi.

Inhi uljhe hue silsilon ka naam ban gayi hai zindagi.

Kuch adhure raste, Kuch adhure Sapne,

Kuch adhure rishte, Kuch tute hue sapne,

*Tamannayein puri karne ki Kashish, In adhuri baton ka naam
hai zindagi.*

Badal gaye humsafar, Jo kabhi carvan ke saathi the,

Waqt ki ret bhi baha le gayi, sab nishaan jo baki the,

Kabhi koi mile toh, kabhi koi bichade,

Inhi shikayaton ka naam hai zindagi.

Ab tuhi bataa, aye khuda, Is haal-e-dil ka kya hoga?

Jahan tere sajde mein maangi thi dua,

Aaj kis mod per le aayi hai yeh Zindagi?

Kahan se chala tha, Aur kahan le aayi hai yeh Zindagi

A Scar that Speaks

Eventually, Atharv stopped hiding his scar.

It became a part of his identity—not as a symbol of pain, but of survival.

He would wear T-shirts without worrying if the mark showed. Because that scar?

It had a story. And that story... had the power to heal others.

He didn't forget the pain. He learned to carry it with dignity.

He wasn't whole.

But he was *real*.

And in a world obsessed with perfection, Atharv's brokenness made him a beautiful human.

Scars - “Warriors wear them as medals; the weak see them as defeat.”

Chapter 10

A Different Kind of Courage

Some people wear bravery on their sleeves.
Some shout it from rooftops.
But Atharv?

He wore his courage in silence—stitched deep into the seams of his broken body, hidden in the sterile corridors of hospitals and in those long, sleepless nights that didn’t end with dawn. After everything he’d already faced—the bone marrow diagnosis, the transplant, the scars on his body and mind, he still found the strength to stand. Because life had tested him repeatedly, yet he kept choosing courage over collapse, and hope over surrender.

He no longer looked at his past with fear. He looked at it to remember what he had already survived.

Because every wound had taught him something:
He wasn’t fragile — he was forged.

The Day Time Froze

He still remembered that sticky, humid July afternoon. It was the day everything inside him had gone still.

His father’s voice had trembled on the phone.

“Beta... mummy...”

And then—silence.

A silence that didn’t echo; it simply fell.

A silence that wrapped around his chest like a steel chain,
pulling him inward.

He never knew whether he had dropped the phone or if it had
slipped from his hand on its own.

But he remembered his knees weakening—
not because of illness,
but because of grief.

The woman who had given him life was gone.

She hadn't waited.

She couldn't.

Life never pauses, not even for those who once paused
everything for you.

The woman who had whispered,

"Tu thak gaya hoga... main tujhe thoda hasaa doon?"

The woman who had sat by his hospital bed every night,
guarding him like a silent warrior—was now just a memory.

And that... that had broken him more deeply than any scalpel,
any scar, any suffering ever had.

Yet, in that same silence, something shifted.

He didn't collapse; he steadied himself.

Because if life was willing to test him this fiercely,
he had to be willing to rise just as fiercely.

And in facing this loss, Atharv didn't find weakness— he
found the courage to keep moving, and the purpose to make
every heartbeat count.

Grief Has No Manual

Hospitals teach you how to survive.

But they never teach you how to grieve.

That night, Atharv sat alone on the terrace.
The sky above him was still, unaware. Unbothered.

He didn't scream.
He didn't break things.
He didn't cry out loud.
He simply existed - In pain.

People said, "*Strong rehna padega. Ab papa ke liye bhi tu hi sahara hai.*"

He nodded.
Because he understood what they meant, even if his heart wasn't ready.
Inside him, something had shifted, not a collapse, but a quiet breaking that only loss can bring. A boy who had just lost the only person who made the darkest nights feel less terrifying.

He had lost not just a mother—
He had lost his anchor.
His compass.
His safe place.
And yet... the clock didn't stop.
Nor did life.

The Girl Who Walked Away

Grief has a way of testing your foundation.
And sometimes, it shows you who was never part of it to begin with.
Just weeks after the funeral, her message arrived.
No calls.
No goodbyes.
Just a few lines: "*I can't do this anymore. It's too heavy... I'm*

sorry."

That was it.

She couldn't bear the hospitals, the breakdowns, the uncertainty.

The future they once dreamed of—gone in a notification.

Atharv stared at the screen.

For a long time.

And then... he smiled.

A bitter, tired, knowing smile.

He didn't curse her.

He didn't hate her.

How could he?

Everyone has their limits.

And not everyone is built to stay in the fire.

But being left in your weakest moment?

That's a wound deeper than most.

Not loud. Not bloody.

Just... haunting.

But He Chose to Live

And yet...

Atharv woke up the next morning.

And then next.

And then next.

He brushed his teeth.

He limped around the garden with unsure legs.

He helped his father with small chores.

He looked at his mother's sketches and whispered, "*Miss you, Aai.*"

He blocked her number.

Not out of hatred.
But for survival.
Because somewhere deep inside, a promise echoed:
*“If I’ve been given a second chance...
Then I will make it count.”*

Courage Is in the Quiet Things

Atharv’s courage was not a headline.
It didn’t make a noise.
It lived in the way he replied, “I’m okay,” even when he
wasn’t.
It lived in every small smile he offered to a nurse or a stranger.
It lived in showing up — every single day — when nothing
made sense.
And slowly, he began giving back.
He volunteered at the same hospital where he had once lain
unconscious.
He didn’t come with advice.
He didn’t come with sympathy.
He came with presence.
With hope.
Because now he knew— real healing doesn’t always come
from IV drips or surgery.
Sometimes, it comes from being heard.
Being seen.
Being held by simple words that say,
“You’re not alone.”

A Different Kind of Hero

He wasn't on the news.

He didn't have awards or medals.

But for every night spent motherless, every message that went unanswered, and every day he chose to stand despite heartbreak—

Atharv became a different kind of hero.

Not because he conquered the world,
but because he didn't let the world conquer him.

He turned grief into growth.
Pain into purpose.

And now, he doesn't live just for himself.
He lives for everyone who is still trapped in the dark,
waiting for a reason to believe in light again.

*“Courage isn’t fighting; it’s standing your
ground when life gets hard.”*

Chapter 11

The Art of Beginning Again

There's a strange silence after you've faced death — a pause not just around you, but within.

For Atharv, this silence wasn't peaceful.

It was deafening.

His body had a new heart, but his soul still carried old wounds — the kind no surgeon could stitch, no donor could replace.

Months had passed since the transplant.

Outside, life raced ahead. But for Atharv, time whispered.

Each morning, he woke to the unfamiliar rhythm of someone else's heartbeat in his chest.

A heart that had lived another life.

A heart that wasn't his...

And yet, now it was.

The Mirror Moment

One morning, shirtless before the mirror, he traced the thick, red scar running down his chest —
a line dividing everything he once was from everything he now had to become.

"Am I still me?"

That question haunted him more than pain ever had.

The scar wasn't skin-deep.

It carried the weight of his mother's absence.

The ache of being left by the girl who once held his dreams.
The survivor's guilt of living when someone else did not.

He had been the boy with the sketchbook — the one who
dreamt in colours.

But now, even holding a pencil felt foreign.

His hands trembled — not just from weakness, but from
doubt.

Could he ever create again? Could he ever feel whole again?

Therapy of the Soul

Recovery wasn't just pills and progress reports.

It was about confronting the shadows no X-ray could see.

His doctors recommended therapy.

But the real therapy came unexpectedly.

One quiet afternoon, Atharv sat alone and opened his old
sketchbook.

The pages were yellowed, fragile.

And without thinking, he began to draw — not a face, not a
scene.

Just... a heart.

Not a perfect one.

But a broken one — patched, stitched, bandaged.

Raw. Real. Resilient.

He titled it:

“The Heart I Now Live With.”

He posted it anonymously in a closed group for transplant
survivors.

Within hours, messages flooded in:

*"You drew what I feel."
"This gave me strength."
"I thought I was alone until now."*

For the first time since his surgery, Atharv didn't feel like a patient.

He felt like a voice.

The Lost and the Left Behind

Grief is unpredictable. It doesn't knock. It seeps in — through a scent, a song, an empty chair.

Some nights, Atharv found himself staring at his phone.
Waiting for a message from the girl who once said, *"I'll always be there."*

But she never came back.

He didn't hate her. He understood fear.

He even forgave her.

But her silence...

That became another kind of death.

Still, it was his mother he missed the most.

Some days, he'd have traded every breath for one hug. One word.

But pain, when processed, can evolve.

And Atharv was beginning to see that perhaps... he had been spared for a reason.

That night, he opened his diary.

Outside — dark.

Inside — darker.

But in that stillness, memories stirred.
And in those memories, a poem bled onto paper:

Aaj Phir Usse...

*Aaj phir usse gale lagane ka jee karta hai.
Aaj phir usse dil lagane ka jee karta hai.
Tamam guzri baaton ko abhi yaad karta hu.
Usse pehli mulaqaat ki woh shaam yaad karta hu.
Ek baar phir ussi manzar pe jaane ka jee karta hai.
Aaj phir usse gale lagane ka ji karta hai.*

*Milne ka woh silsila accha hi tha.
Uske saath guzra hua waqt accha hi tha.
Roothne-manane ke kisson ko yaad karta hu.
Usse manane ka din ab bhi yaad karta hu.
Aaj phir ussi mod pe jaane ka ji karta hai.
Aaj bhi usse gale lagane ka ji karta hai.*

*Uske jaane ke din ko ab bhi yaad karta hu.
Us akeli suni sadak ko ab bhi yaad karta hu.
Ab bhi dil uske intezaar mein khoya rehta hai.
Ab bhi uske paas jaane ki fariyaad karta hai.
Aaj phir usse gale lagane ka ji karta hai.
Aaj phir usse dil lagane ka ji karta hai.
Aaj bhi, aaj bhi, aaj bhi...*

Finding Purpose

Atharv began volunteering at the same hospital where he once lay between life and death.
He sat beside the kids waiting for transplants.
Held the hands of nervous parents.
Sketched cartoons for children too scared to smile.

He became a quiet source of strength.
Soon, he was speaking at awareness events — sharing his story, advocating for organ donation, and reminding people what a second chance truly meant.
He wasn't just surviving.
He was living with purpose.

The Power of Small Steps

Healing isn't always dramatic.
Sometimes it's in the smallest victories:
— Taking stairs instead of elevators.
— Finishing a plate of food.
— Sketching a sunflower after months of grey doodles.
— Laughing at a silly movie... and not feeling guilty.
He began journaling again, writing truths that felt like poems:
“This heart doesn't beat the same... but it still dreams.”
“My scar is my crown.”
“I am not a warrior. I'm a canvas — painted by pain, hope, and survival.”

The Return of the Boy with the Sketchbook

Months later, Atharv hosted his first art exhibition since the transplant.
He titled it: “*Reborn in Lines.*”
Each frame told a story — of pain, survival, emptiness, light.
People cried. Some hugged him.
Others just stared in silence at the centerpiece:
The heart. Patched. Beating. Alive.
That night, standing under the soft lights, surrounded by his sketches and strangers moved by them, Atharv didn't feel broken.

He wasn't a patient.
He wasn't a survivor.
He was an artist again.
He whispered to himself—
“You began again.
You didn't give up.”

*“Those who refuse to give up are
the ones who win.”*

Chapter 12

Borrowed Beats, Boundless Spirit

“Kabhi socha nahi tha ki ek din kisi aur ka dil mere andar dhadkega...

Aur ab uss dil ke saath apni zindagi dobara likh raha hoon.”

There’s a strange silence that comes after surviving death — a pause not just around you, but inside you.

For Atharv, this silence wasn’t peaceful.

It was loud. Heavy. Awake.

Even months after the transplant, his mornings still began with the same realisation — *a heart that wasn’t his... was keeping him alive.*

A heart that had lived another life, loved another life, and ended another life,
yet now beat steadily inside him.

Sometimes he placed a hand over his chest, still trying to understand how something so foreign could feel so personal.

A Memory That Never Fades: The Morning After

Even now, he could recall the first morning after the surgery — not in sequence, but in sensations.

Waking up half-conscious.

Throat dry.

Tubes like quiet battle scars.
Machines humming like a second heartbeat.
An ache in his chest that didn't belong to him.

That ache was life itself.
A reminder that he had survived a night that not everyone
does.

He didn't cry when doctors said his own heart was failing.
But when he realised he was alive because someone else
wasn't... he broke down.

It was the first grief he had processed after his mother's death.

A Gift Wrapped in Silence

He often thought of the donor.

Not with fear.
With reverence.

Someone had died so that he could live.
A family had chosen hope in the middle of despair.
A mother somewhere had whispered her final goodbye.

There was no photo.

No name.

No last memory.

Just an organ — silent, sacred, selfless.

And Atharv decided that day: This heart will not be wasted.

Recovery — The Part No One Talks About

Looking back, recovery felt like walking through fog.

Some days he couldn't sit up.

Some days the medicines tasted like metal.

Sometimes his mind drifted into dreams where his body felt borrowed —

because in many ways, it was.

There was anger.

There was guilt.

There was gratitude so sharp it hurt.

No doctor ever prepares you for the emotional side of survival.

His body had healed with stitches.

But his soul had healed in slow, uneven breaths.

The First Steps — A Memory That Still Makes Him Smile

He remembered the day he stood up for the first time.

Nurses clapped softly.

Not dramatically — but the way people clap when they see someone choose courage.

His father stood beside him, silent, steady.

Each step felt like dragging a mountain.

But he walked.

Not for himself alone.

He walked for the donor.

For the grieving family.

For those waiting for their own impossible miracles.

Talking to the Heart Inside Him

Some nights, he whispered to his chest:

“Kaun the tum?”

“Kya tumne kisi se pyaar kiya tha?”

“Main tumhara pyaar carry karta hoon... unknowingly.”

It wasn't poetry.
It was survival.
He couldn't know the donor's story —but he could honour it.

The Echo of a Missing Mother

Healing made him miss his mother the most.
She was the one who would've kissed his forehead and called him "Sher."
The one who always stood like a shield between him and suffering.
Each heartbeat reminded him of her silence.
Grief didn't lessen.
He just learned how to carry it.

From ICU Memories to a Life with Purpose

Weeks turned into months.
Machines gave way to mirrors.
He learned to shower alone.
To breathe without equipment.
To smile at nurses who had become family.
The scar across his chest — long, thick, angry —became a symbol, not of pain, but of resurrection.
He wasn't a patient anymore.
He was a messenger.
*"Main zinda hoon kisi aur ki wajah se...
Lekin main jee raha hoon sabke liye."*
He joined NGOs.
Spoke to students.

Became a voice for families waiting outside ICUs — the same way he once waited.

His pain had found a purpose.

This Chapter Doesn't End — It Beats On

His journey isn't finished.

The medicines continue.

The check-ups continue.

The occasional fear visits.

Nightmares return and fade.

But louder than all of it, is hope.

Every morning when he feels that borrowed heart beating inside him, he whispers: “*Main sirf zinda nahi hoon...Main jee raha hoon....*”

“Hope heals faster than the medicine.”

Chapter 13

The Artist Who Refused to Fade

Atharv wasn't just surviving—he was creating.
And in that creation, he found life.
After the transplant—once the stitches faded into lines on his skin and the hospital corridors stopped echoing his name—a strange silence awaited him at home. The kind of silence where even the ticking of a wall clock feels deafening. The kind that follows survival, but not peace.
Many believe the surgery is the hardest part.
But Atharv had learned otherwise.
Healing after survival was the real mountain.
And yet, in that silence, something stirred.
He reached for a canvas.
Blank. Quiet. Wide like the unknown life ahead.
No plan. No sketch. Just colours—wild, chaotic, and unfiltered.
Red for rage.
Blue for calm.
Black for grief.
Yellow for fragile hope.
He didn't paint what was pretty.
He painted what was true.
Organs in motion.
Lungs like broken wings.
A heart—his borrowed heart—like a burning sun.
Life in disarray.
Life is learning to heal.
His first painting post-surgery was titled:

“Borrowed Heart, Beating Still.”

It went viral.

The Colours of Pain and Hope

What the world didn't know was that his art wasn't just for galleries.

It was his therapy.

Every stroke was a scream he never voiced.

Every brush an act of choosing to breathe again.

People around him had moved on—friends got married, shifted cities, had babies, built careers.

But Atharv?

He was still waking up each morning measuring time in pills, fevers, check-ups...

and the quiet miracle of waking up at all.

And yet—on social media—he chose to show light.

Instagram. Facebook. Twitter.

His pages weren't filtered illusions.

They were raw. Reflective. Real.

A blend of honesty and hope.

“I didn't just get a new heart. I got a second chance.

And I will not waste it.”

That was his pinned tweet.

It didn't just trend.

It moved people.

Not a Survivor, A Warrior, A Voice, An Artist.

Soon, Atharv became more than “the guy with a transplant.”
He became a symbol of endurance, courage, and unapologetic creativity.

A fighter—yes.

But also a voice that broke silence.

His inbox filled with stories:

“Your story saved me.”

“My mum agreed to donate my brother’s organs after seeing your post.”

“I never understood organ donation until I read your words.”

“Thank you for being real.”

He never set out to be a hero.

He simply shared because he couldn’t stay quiet.

His paintings found walls in galleries.

Hospitals printed his quotes in newsletters.

NGO’s invited him to speak to grieving families.

Transplant centres used his posts to prepare patients for the wait.

Once, a mother who had lost her teenage son in a road accident wrote to him:

Thank you for giving his death a purpose.

His heart beats in someone else now—maybe someone like you.

I don’t know who you are... but you are his echo.”

Atharv cried.

Not from sadness—

but from responsibility.

His life was no longer just his own.

He carried the weight of borrowed time— with grace.

Photography: Framing the Unseen

Painting helped him scream.
Photography helped him whisper.
With a camera gifted by his sister, he began capturing what words couldn't say.
A laughing child playing with pigeons.
The faded vermilion of old temple flags swaying in the wind.
A wrinkled hand resting gently on another.
A mirror reflecting the tired face of a warrior... who had survived again.
He'd often caption his photos:
"I survived to see this."
"This sky is worth every scar."
"Pain makes even ordinary things beautiful."
Each picture was a thank-you note to life.
Each photo is a celebration of breath.
On Sundays, he'd take long walks with a cloth mask on, cap shielding his sensitive skin, camera slung across his shoulder like a soldier's weapon.
His energy was low.
But his will? Untouchable.

Organ Donation: His Mission. His Voice.

Social media wasn't just his gallery.
It became his loudspeaker.
Not for fame.
For awareness.
He partnered with transplant centers.
Busted myths.
Posted explainer reels.
Showed his scars unapologetically.
Every like on his post meant someone paused.

Every share could mean a life saved.
We are not just bodies.
We are legacies.
If my borrowed heart can beat this passionately,
imagine how many lives we can save with just one “yes.”
He became a guest speaker at schools, colleges, and even
TEDx.
On stage, with his art beside him and his story inside him, he’d
say:
“Don’t let death be the end.
Let it be someone else’s beginning.”
And he meant it.

Loneliness: The Hidden Brushstroke

Behind all the applause, there was silence.
Again, Nights when sleep refused to come.
Nights when he woke up breathless, hand pressed to his chest,
terrified that this heart—this gift—might stop without
warning.

Nights when he missed his mother’s voice more than he
missed his own strength.

Nights when he scrolled through old photos of the girl who
had walked away before the transplant, wondering:

Why didn’t she stay?
Was he too broken to love?
Was survival... not enough?

On those nights, he painted again.
But these canvases were darker.
“Unfinished Goodbyes.”
“You Left Before My New Life Began.”
“Heartbeat with No Home.”

These paintings weren't for exhibitions.

They weren't for Instagram.

They were for the corners of his soul that still whispered pain.

They stayed stacked behind other artworks— hidden, quiet,
slowly healing him from the inside.

But Still, He Painted. Still, He Lived.

Atharv's story was never meant to be a fairytale.

It was a battlefield.

A journal soaked in ink and blood.

A poem written in scar tissue.

But it was real.

And he chose to live it out loud.

For himself.

For the donor.

For his mother.

For anyone who ever believed pain was the end.

As he once wrote:

Uthaa Kadam Khud Ko Pehchaan

*Jo kal tak thaa khud se anjaan, Uthaa kadam,
khud ko pehchaan.*

Taqdeer teri tu khud bana, Apne raah tu khud sajaa.

*Hai mutthi mein teri kismat, Haath kholkar usse banaa,
Na saath tere koi insaan, Uthaa kadam, khud ko pehchaan.*

Na darr ke jeena hai tujhe, Na marr ke jeena hai tujhe.

Mushkiley teri tu khud hata, Raah khud apni tu banaa.

Milenge raaste mein kai, Lene tera imtehaan.

Apni manzil ko pehchaan, Uthaa kadam, khud ko pehchaan.

Gir ke bhi sambhalna hai tujhe, Kaanton pe chalna hai tujhe.

Honsley apne tu khud badhaa, Namumkin ko mumkin banaa.

Phir aayenge kai aur bhi, Jahaan chhodega tu nishaan.

*Bana khud ki alag pehchaan, Uthaa kadam,
khud ko pehchaan.*

A New Canvas

As this chapter of his journey unfolded, one truth became clear—

Atharv wasn't just an artist.

He was art itself.

Formed by pain.

Coloured by resilience.

Framed by survival.

And the world...

was only beginning to see the masterpiece he had become.

*“The beginning of great things starts with
small thoughts and smaller steps.”*

Chapter 14

The Life After Life

When survival becomes a beginning, not an ending.

The sun filtered softly into Atharv's room—a room that had stopped being just a room and had slowly become the centre of his second life. Months had passed since the transplant. The stitches had faded into pale lines, but the healing within him was still raw, unsettled... ongoing.

Every morning began the same way—not with affirmations or meditation, but with the ritual that ruled his new existence:

8:00 AM – Tacrolimus

8:30 AM – Mycophenolate

9:00 AM – Omeprazole

12:00 PM – Prednisolone

3 PM, 6 PM, 9 PM, midnight... more tablets.

His phone alarms had become the soundtrack of his days. The pills kept him alive, but they also came with a price—acidity, insomnia, tremors, mood swings, weight changes, and a fragile immune system. Some days he felt like a puzzle held together by medicines and sheer will.

But he never complained.

Because this was the reality of survival—steady, disciplined, exhausting.

And yet, beneath all the chemicals and caution, something quietly pulsed: *Hope*.

He had promised himself,
“If I’ve been given a second life, I will live it with meaning.”
Meaning, however, wasn’t always easy to find.

Loneliness in a Crowded World

Life outside the hospital had resumed its usual pace, but inside him... time moved differently. Crowds felt heavier now, conversations felt distant, and laughter around him echoed as if it belonged to another world.

Some nights, he woke up with a silent gasp, his hand gripping his chest—not out of fear of dying, but fear of living another day carrying so much unseen weight.

Only eight people had visited him post-surgery.

Eight chairs filled in months.

And out of those—the ones who stayed long enough to really ask if he was okay were even fewer.

Strangely, the quietest corners taught him the loudest truths.

Half Tamil, Half Maharashtrian — Fully Alive

To lighten the heaviness, his friends often joked with Atharv,
“*Tu ab half Tamil ho gaya hai.*”

The heart inside him had belonged to a Tamilian. A man whose name he didn’t know, but whose gift now sustained him.

It became their shared humour—

Half Maharashtrian, half Tamilian, fully alive.

A reminder that healing didn’t always come from tears.

Sometimes it came from laughter.

The Empty Chair by the Window

There was a chair by the window, he called “*Aai ki chair.*” His mother once loved sitting there, watching the rain. Now it was his sanctuary—his place to think, to breathe, to feel.

Sometimes he imagined her sitting there still... smiling at him...

as if saying, “*I knew you’d make it.*”

The chair held her absence, but it also held her presence. A quiet reminder that love doesn’t disappear. It just changes seats.

Becoming a Voice for Others

He replied to strangers’ messages late at night—people waiting for transplants, parents of sick children, patients battling fear.

His answers were not dramatic—only honest.

“*Yes, the scar itches.*”

“*Yes, some days feel impossible.*”

“*And yes—life is still worth living.*”

He didn’t want applause.

He wanted nobody to feel alone the way he once had.

A Pocket Full of Pills

His medicines travelled everywhere with him—pockets, bags, bedside drawers. Some protected him. Some harmed him in new ways. But he took them all.

Because the alternative wasn’t an option.

He sometimes joked,
“I’m 20% medicines, 80% stubbornness.”
And somehow, that math kept him alive.

The Girl Who Left

There were nights he thought of her—the girl who couldn’t stay
when things got harder than either of them expected.

“I don’t know how to love someone who might not stay,” she
had said.

He didn’t blame her.

But that goodbye had carved a wound no surgeon could stitch.

Still, when he looked at her old photos now, he didn’t feel
anger.

Just a soft ache.

Just a quiet acceptance.

Some goodbyes hurt you.

Some goodbyes grow you.

Hers did both.

Life Documented in Captions

Slowly, he started posting photos again:

A cup of coffee: “*Alive tastes different now.*”

A sunset: “*Borrowed heart, borrowed light.*”

A mirror selfie with his scar: “*Proof of return.*”

People didn’t follow him for aesthetics.

They followed him for honesty.

He wasn’t an influencer—he was a reminder.

A reminder that survival can be art.

Side Effects No One Sees

Some days, his hands trembled too much to hold a brush.
Some nights, sleep stayed miles away.
His skin changed. His appetite vanished. His moods swung.
His fears grew louder than the clock on his wall.

What if I get an infection?

What if one day I can't afford the medicines?

What if I become a burden?

Survival had its own shadows.
But even through those shadows, he moved.

Not perfectly.
Not fearlessly.
But persistently.

A Memory That Still Brings Light

One night, loneliness felt too heavy.
The room seemed darker, the silence sharper.

And suddenly, a memory surfaced —from the hospital, weeks before he was discharged.

He remembered how Nurse Nandita, during a late-night shift, had sat beside his bed when the pain and fear had been unbearable.

She didn't ask questions.
She didn't offer empty comfort.

Instead, she quietly showed him a funny video of a cat trying — and hilariously failing — to jump across a sofa.

He had laughed.
Just for a second.
But it mattered.

“You smiled,” she had whispered.

Today, even at home, that memory warmed him.

A reminder that kindness sometimes arrives from unexpected places.

The Inner Promise

Later that night, he traced the scar down his chest—long, jagged, fierce—and whispered:

“You’re not broken.

You’re reborn.”

For the first time, the scar didn’t feel like a reminder of what he lost.

It felt like a reminder of what he survived.

Chapter Reflection

This chapter isn’t about medicines or diagnoses.

It’s about the man behind the statistics.

A boy who once feared dying...

now learning how to live again.

Atharv Dalvi wasn’t just surviving.

He was transforming into a warrior, an artist, a voice, and a quiet light for others walking the same dark path.

His life was borrowed, yes—but every day he painted it with presence,

with resilience, with purpose.

And sometimes, a new life doesn’t begin with a miracle.

Sometimes it begins with a quiet breath that chooses to stay.

*“One who stands steady through every storm
of life is a real fighter.”*

Chapter 15

The Visitor's Chair

The chair by the window wasn't just furniture—it was a witness.

To pain.

To hope.

To everything in between.

Every hospital room had one. A cold, metallic chair—meant for visitors, family, or a friend who might drop by.

For Atharv, that chair remained mostly empty.

He would often glance at it without meaning to. It became a habit. A silent expectation. Like someone waiting for a miracle who keeps looking toward the sky.

Sometimes, the nurses would sit there for a few minutes during their rounds—chatting lightly, asking if he needed water, or just flashing a smile to lift his spirits. But they had other patients to attend to, other rooms waiting. Soon, the chair would go back to being just... a chair.

He remembered once, months ago, when that chair had been occupied for a full hour. A distant cousin had come, made small talk, clicked a few pictures with him, and left saying, “Bhai, main photos upload karke awareness failaunga!” That awareness never came. But the echo of his fading footsteps did. The chair hadn't felt warm since.

Two days later, on a grey Wednesday afternoon, the door creaked open.

He expected another nurse. Or maybe one of the doctors was doing routine rounds.

But the voice that came next didn't belong to either.

"Tu toh wahi hai na... pencil ke peeche pagal hone wala artist?"

Atharv looked up, confused. His brain took a few seconds to match the voice with a memory.

It was Rishi, his school friend. One of the few who had seen him before life became complicated. Back when Atharv was just a kid who doodled superheroes in the last pages of his notebooks and carved dreams into the margins of life.

"Rishi?" Atharv whispered, blinking in disbelief.

"Zinda hai tu?" Rishi grinned, pulling the chair closer.

"Instagram pe dekha tu kisi hospital mein hai... toh socha mil hi loon. Waise bhi sab log toh busy hain, na?"

That last line had weight.

Rishi didn't ask the usual questions. He didn't fumble or tiptoe around Atharv's tubes or pretend to be concerned.

He sat like old times—legs crossed, arms behind his head, talking as if they were still in the school canteen, gossiping about teachers.

"I remember how you once sketched a full comic book and passed it around the class," Rishi said.

"Tu sabse zyada padhai mein weak tha... lekin art mein topper. Sab tujhe 'Dilwale Doodle Kumar' kehte the."

Atharv smiled—genuinely, this time.

"I still draw," he said softly. "Just not as much now..."

Rishi looked around the room and then at the chair he was sitting on.

"Yeh kursi toh royal hai bhai. VIP zone. Mujhe toh feeling aa"

rahi hai ki yahan baith ke main bhi thoda deep sochne lagunga.”

They both laughed.

But once the laughter settled, silence took over. That honest, heavy silence that follows all reunions.

And then Rishi said something he hadn't prepared for:

“Mujhe maaf karna.”

Atharv looked at him, surprised.

“School ke baad tu bohot baar mujhe call karta tha. Text karta tha. Main busy hota gaya... fir zindagi chalti gayi... aur main bhoolta gaya. Lekin jab tune transplant ke liye fundraiser dala, toh hila diya mujhe.”

Rishi's voice choked a little.

“Tu toh hamesha sabka dost tha... aur jab tujhe sabse zyada zarurat thi, main nahi tha.”

Atharv didn't speak for a long moment. Then, finally, said:

“Main kisi se gila nahi rakhta, Rishi. Life ne sabko alag raaste diye. Main bhi shayad har kisi ko chhod ke aage badh gaya hota... agar mere dil ne saath diya hota.”

They both smiled again—this time with a slight gloss in their eyes.

Rishi stayed for over an hour. They talked about cricket, school, teachers, silly crushes, lost classmates, and the time Atharv had climbed the school gate just to retrieve a paper plane.

When he got up to leave, Rishi said,

“Agle hafte fir aaunga. Aur tere liye sketchbook launga. Tere haath fir se kaam karne chahiye bhai. Tera art zinda rehna chahiye.”

And with that, he placed something on the visitor's chair—a

worn-out, folded note.

Atharv opened it after Rishi left.

It read:

“To the boy who never stopped creating beauty, even when life got ugly — I’m proud of you.”

That night, the chair didn’t feel like furniture anymore.

It felt like a diary.

A witness to pain, joy, regret, healing—and now, hope.

That night, Atharv kept looking at the visitor’s chair.

Kursi wahi thi — steel ka frame, thoda purana, thoda chhila hua paint.

Lekin ab usmein sirf loha nahi tha.

Usmein yaadein thi.

Usmein woh log the jo aaye... aur jo chale gaye.

Usmein khamoshiyaan thi... aur jawab bhi.

He slowly took out his phone and began scrolling through old photos.

Sketches. Paintings. Faces of strangers he had drawn in cafés.

Beaches. His mom was holding a flower in her palm.

And suddenly, one photo stopped him.

A canvas — half finished.

A face — almost complete.

But the eyes... blank.

He remembered.

That was the last painting he had tried before his transplant.

He had told himself, “I’ll finish this when I get better.”

But he never had.

Until now.

The next morning, when the nurse walked in, she was surprised.

Atharv was sitting up, holding a blank sketchpad, a pencil between his fingers.

His IV lines dangled to the side, but his hand was moving—slow, deliberate strokes.

“Yeh aapne kab se start kiya?” she asked with a smile.

“Bas abhi,” he said. *“Laga... waqt ho gaya hai.”*

That day, he didn't draw something perfect.

He didn't need to.

He drew what he felt.

A chair — surrounded by the shadows of people. Some clear.

Some blurred. Some were just outlines.

But the chair was full of presence.

Because in every person who sat there—friend, family, stranger—he had found a piece of himself again.

As evening fell, his sister walked in quietly and stood by the window.

She watched him sketch.

Her eyes filled with tears — but she didn't say anything.

She just placed something beside him, on the table.

It was his mother's diary.

The one she used to write poems in. Carefully preserved.

Atharv didn't say a word.

He took the diary in his hands, held it to his chest... and smiled.

And that night, for the first time in weeks, he didn't cry.
Not because he wasn't hurting.
But because he was healing.
The visitor's chair had done its job.
It had become more than furniture.
It had become a bridge between past and present, pain and art,
loss and rediscovery.

“Memories travel faster than light, bringing back pain, love & strength to move forward.”

Chapter 16

The Day He Remember

There are dates one celebrates...

And then there are dates one survives.

For Atharv, *28th December* was neither a festival nor a birthday— it was something deeper.

It was the day he paused.

The day he breathed differently.

The day gratitude became prayer.

Not for himself.

But for the people who had carried him through the storm.

He wasn't a social-media person.

He didn't post affirmations, aesthetic coffee shots, or daily routines.

But every year, on this one day, his fingers hovered over the keyboard with purpose.

A simple message.

A reminder.

A thank you that came from somewhere far deeper than words.

Because survival meant nothing without remembering the hands that held you up.

A Heart That Wasn't Won Alone

Recovery had been a battlefield, yes, but even battles have soldiers.

Some donated.

Some prayed.

Some shared his fundraiser link a hundred times until it reached strangers who had never heard his name.

Some visited once and left quietly.

Others stayed longer without saying much.

He remembered all of them.

Not as a list.

But as feeling.

He carried their faces, their gestures, their messages, like invisible threads stitched into his new heart.

“People didn’t just give me money,” he once said.

“They gave me time. They gave me a voice. They gave me life.”

That was the part the world didn’t see.

The Annual Post

Every year on 28th December, he wrote the same message—not copied, not reused, but *reborn* with new meaning:

“Thank you.

For helping me breathe.

For helping me stay.

For making my life possible.”

Some people called it emotional.

Some said it was unnecessary.

Some didn’t even notice.

But Atharv knew why he posted it.

He posted it to stay grounded.

To never forget where he once was—

a boy on a stretcher, fighting for a single beat.

And where he now stood—

on the other side of the storm.

He didn't thank people for formality.

He thanked them because gratitude was the only way to

honour the miracle that lived in his chest.

Life Between Two Worlds

Post-surgery life was not glamorous.

It was pills.

It was precautions.

It was navigating the strange gap between “alive” and
“living.”

Some days, he felt strong enough to paint for hours.

Some days, even lifting a pencil made his hands tremble.

Some mornings, he felt hopeful.

Some afternoons, he felt hollow.

But on every 28th December, he felt something else—
clarity.

A moment where pain and progress held hands.

“It's not just my life,” he once wrote.

“It's everyone's effort beating inside me.”

And that truth shaped his entire year.

The Weight of Gratitude

Gratitude, he realised, isn't light.

It is heavy.

It demands memory.

It demands acknowledgement.

It demands responsibility.

People had invested in his breath, how could he waste it?

This annual message wasn't for applause.

It wasn't for sympathy.

It wasn't for likes.

It was a reminder to himself:

You survived.

Now earn it."

A Second Life, A Second Purpose

Every year, the post triggered messages:

"I remember donating."

"Your story changed my view on organ donation."

"My brother's heart went to someone years ago—your posts help me heal."

"You are proof that good things still happen."

He responded to every message—slowly, but sincerely.

Because he knew people didn't message him to chat.

They messaged because *they, too, were trying to survive something.*

And if he could ease even a fraction of that weight, then his new life was worth it.

A Quiet Promise

Later that night, he would sit by the window—the same place where his mother once sat—and whisper,

*“Thank you for keeping me alive.
I hope I’m doing justice to this gift.”*

And in that moment, surrounded by silence, scars, memories, and borrowed strength, Atharv felt something rare: *Peace*.

Not perfect.

Not permanent.

But real.

The kind that comes when a man knows he is living a life he once almost lost.

A Date on the Calendar. A Landmark in His Soul.

For most people, 28th December was just another winter day.
For Atharv, it was sacred.

The day life said,

“You stayed.”

“You fought.”

“You were loved.”

“You were saved.”

And year after year, he honoured it—not with celebrations, but with gratitude.

Because miracles don’t need confetti.

Sometimes, they just need to be remembered.

“True integrity is reflected in humility and a heart full of gratitude.”

Chapter 17

The World Outside the Window

The evenings at home were quiet—not peaceful...
just quiet enough to hear every thought he was trying to
outrun.

Atharv often sat on the balcony, watching the sunset carve
golden cracks across the sky.
He never counted sunsets before.
Now he did.
Each one felt like a reminder—
“You’re still here.”

Inside the house, life moved in whispers—
his father’s soft footsteps,
the hum of the ceiling fan,
the clink of medicine bottles.

Sometimes, he overheard his father saying on late-night calls:
*“Usko dekho mat... usko samajh lo. Bahar se theek lagta hai,
par andar se bohot kuch chal raha hai.”*

Those words stayed with him long after the call ended.
Because for the first time, someone acknowledged
the invisible battle.

The Window to the World

His body healed slowly.
His mind—much slower.

From his room window, he watched life outside continue
effortlessly: children chasing a cricket ball,
vendors calling out for customers,
rickshaws weaving through traffic,
neighbours arguing over nothing important.

A normal world.

A familiar world.

But not *his* world—not yet.

He would rest his forehead against the cool windowpane and
wonder:

How do you return to life after almost leaving it?

Where do you start?

How do you belong again?

There was no guide.

No grand welcome.

Just a blank page waiting for his story.

The Storm Inside

Loneliness didn't shout.

It whispered.

His friends had moved ahead—
marriages, promotions, new houses, children.

Their timelines stretched forward.

His had paused, rewound, and restarted from scratch.

He didn't blame them.

Life moves.

People move.

But it hurt—

that no one really understood the weight of survival.

He missed
chai tapri evenings,
pointless jokes,
the version of himself who didn't live cautiously.

He missed her too— the girl who had once promised to stay.
And then there was his mother.

Her memory was the softest wound.

Some nights he could almost hear her whisper—

"Tu ruk kyun gaya, mera bachcha? Chal, thoda aur jeele."

That whisper alone was enough to keep him fighting.

The Art That Saved Him

The world outside the window felt overwhelming.

But the world inside his canvas felt safe.

He picked up his paintbrush again— hesitant, trembling,
unsure.

But the colours...they remembered him.

Red for fear.

Blue for quiet.

Yellow for hope.

Black for the nights he never talked about.

He posted one painting online.

Just one.

And messages poured in:

"You gave me strength."

"Your story made me believe again."

"I never understood organ donation until your art."

It wasn't validation.

It was connection.

It was purpose.

The Step Forward

One evening, as a soft glow filled his room, he whispered:

“Maybe I’m not behind the world...maybe I’m just starting differently.”

He didn’t suddenly feel whole.

He didn’t suddenly stop hurting.

But something shifted.

A small breath of possibility.

The world outside the window was still loud,
still fast,
still intimidating.

But now, for the first time in months,
he felt it wasn’t running away from him.

It was waiting.

And slowly, gently— he took a step back toward it.

*“Life keeps moving, Time never stops,
so neither should you.”*

Chapter 18

The Heart That Spoke – I

Atharv had written stories all his life— on canvas, in diaries, in margins of old notebooks.

But the day he finally wrote about his transplant publicly...his hands trembled in a way they never had before.

Not from fear.

Not from shame.

Not even from the weight of memories.

But because, for the first time, he was allowing the world to step inside a wound he had carried alone for far too long.

He stared at the screen for several seconds before hitting *Post*.

The message wasn't dramatic.

It wasn't poetic.

It was simply the truth.

"I got a new heart.

And every beat reminds me that I'm carrying two lives now."

He didn't wait for likes.

He didn't check who saw it.

He just locked the phone and breathed out—as if releasing years of silence.

What he didn't expect...

was how many people would hear him.

A Flood of Unseen Voices

By evening, his inbox was full.

Not of comments.

But of confessions.

People wrote things they had never dared to tell their closest friends:

"My brother is waiting for a donor.

Your post gave us hope."

"I lost my mother. Thank you for reminding me that her donation saved someone like you."

"I'm 26 and scared of the surgery I need.

But seeing you... I feel less alone."

Strangers spoke to him like he was family.

And Atharv, who once felt invisible even in crowds, found himself becoming a quiet anchor for hundreds who were drifting.

He replied to as many messages as he could.

Not with motivational quotes.

Not with rehearsed lines.

Just with honesty.

"I've felt that fear."

"It's okay to be tired."

"You're stronger than you think."

And in giving them comfort, he found a new kind of healing for himself.

The World Begins to Listen

Within weeks, requests started arriving.

A school in Pune.

A local college.

A small NGO run by donor families.

All with one message:

“Can you share your story with our students?”

“Could you speak to our patients?”

“Would you join a small awareness meet?”

Atharv wasn't a speaker.

He wasn't a doctor or a counsellor.

He was just a boy who had survived.

But when he walked onto those small stages for the first time—shy, unsure, voice trembling—something unexpected happened.

People listened.

Deeply.

Silently.

Without blinking.

Maybe because he wasn't preaching.

He wasn't glorifying pain.

He was just telling the truth that so many lived but never said out loud.

He spoke of waking up after the transplant, confused but grateful.

He spoke of missing his mother's voice.

Of scrolling through photos of the girl who left.

Of counting medicines for more than an hours.

Of learning to breathe without fear.

But most of all, he spoke about *gratitude*.

And the line he repeated at every event became his signature:

“I don’t know the name of the person whose heart beats inside me.

But every day, I thank them by living fully.”

People often stood up after he finished.

Not loudly.

Not dramatically.

Just with the quiet respect one gives to truth.

A Voice He Never Knew He Had

Within months, the world around him changed.

People tagged him in donation drives.

Hospitals invited him to support families waiting for miracles.

Transplant survivors reached out just to talk—sometimes at 2 AM, sometimes at dawn.

Atharv responded to all of them.

Not because he had answers.

But because he understood silence.

He had lived inside it once.

Now, his words were becoming windows.

His scars were becoming bridges.

His journey—once a private battle—had become a map for others walking through the same darkness.

Atharv didn’t plan for this.

He didn’t chase it.

He didn’t dream of being a “symbol” or a “speaker”.

But sometimes, life chooses people who never asked.

People who've suffered quietly.
People who've risen slowly.
People whose hearts have learned to speak.

And Atharv...
was one of them now.

*“A heart that uplifts, motivates & inspires
others is the highest form of art.”*

Chapter 19

The Heart That Spoke - II

Atharv had always seen the world through a different lens.

But now...

Every frame carried new meaning.

A leaf dancing in the wind,
a mother holding her child's hand at a zebra crossing,
an old man feeding birds with wrinkled hands—
They weren't just moments anymore.

They were miracles.

Moments he once thought he'd never see again.

After everything his body had endured, after everything his
soul had survived... the world felt like poetry. Raw, unfiltered,
imperfect—but real.

His camera became his voice again, not just a tool for
aesthetics or technique, but for truth.

And this time, his art wasn't chasing perfection.

It was chasing authenticity.

Emotion.

Presence.

Life.

He captured a scarred tree bent from storms—but still
standing.

A fading flower still reaching for sunlight.

A child with a prosthetic leg running in a local football game.

A man offering food to stray dogs while limping.

Each frame was a silent sermon.

A reminder that scars don't make us ugly. They make us *human*.

And the captions he wrote—brief, honest—often touched more than essays could.

“Still standing.”

“Bent, but not broken.”

“She lost a leg. Not her spirit.”

People started sharing them.

Some cried.

Some found hope.

Some found themselves.

He didn't chase followers, but they came.

Not because he was loud— But because his *silence* spoke volumes.

With time, the weight of visibility grew.

And so did the responsibility.

Atharv wasn't just a survivor now.

He was becoming a *voice*.

That's when the idea of *Heart Spoken* was born.

A digital sanctuary.

A safe space.

Not for likes, not for claps— But for *truth*.

Heart Spoken wasn't about Atharv. It was about *them*.

Transplant warriors.

Waiting patients.

Donor families.

Those who lived with gratitude, grief, fear, and sometimes all of it in the same breath.

People shared anonymously:

A 17-year-old girl wrote about her fear of scars.

A middle-aged man shared how he hadn't hugged his son in months for fear of infection.

A mother who lost her son wrote a letter to the recipient she'd never meet.

And every night, sometimes at 1 AM, sometimes at 3, Atharv would sit in the soft glow of his desk lamp, replying.

He didn't offer clichés.

He didn't say, "It'll all be okay."

He said,

"I see you."

"You're not alone."

"Even pain has purpose."

One night, he received a message from a nurse in Hyderabad:

"We have a young patient who just received a donor heart. She's scared to even breathe. I showed her your page. She smiled for the first time in days. Thank you."

He sat there for a while... quietly.

Tears didn't fall. But something heavier did— a mix of gratitude... and grief.

He didn't know that girl.

But he *knew* her fear.

He had lived that fear.

But even heroes have hollow days.

Even messengers get tired.

And despite all the applause, recognition, DMs, events, and collaborations—

There were moments when he felt like a hollow shell.

Especially on days that reminded him of *her*.

That one person who wasn't in the crowd to see this version of him.

The girl who once held his hand like it was the last lifeline.

She didn't walk away because she stopped loving him.

She walked away because she was tired of loving someone who might not survive.

And now, even though he lived...

She wasn't part of the after-story.

There were times when he sat on his balcony, camera beside him, staring at a pink-orange sky, remembering Marine Drive.

That one evening.

That shared laugh.

That wind in her hair.

That small moment of forever.

And it hurt.

A familiar scent in a café.

A love song is playing in the background of a random reel.

A couple holding hands across a hospital corridor.

It all brought *her* back— only to remind him that she wasn't *here*.

But this time...

He didn't run from it.

He honoured it.

He *painted* that pain.
He *wrote* it into stories.
He *whispered* it into late-night talks with strangers who were
also grieving someone who never came back.
He *channelled* it into Heart Spoken.

Each photo.
Each story.
Each conversation, became a way to tell her,
“*I lived.*”
“*And I turned our silence into something beautiful.*”

One evening, he was invited to speak at a college youth
summit.

The auditorium was full—over 500 students.
Bright faces. Curious eyes. Some are recording on their
phones.

He didn’t carry a script.
Just a single line on a slide:
“*Pain doesn’t break you. It sculpts you.*”

He spoke.
Softly, honestly, without drama.

He talked about waiting for a heart.
About waking up post-surgery with tubes and machines.
About seeing the ceiling fan above his bed and wondering if
he’d ever walk again.
About everyone who.
The gratitude he carried for a family he’d never met.
And he ended with:

“*If I can live through this... maybe, just maybe, you can too.*”

The hall stood in silence.
No claps. No cheers.
Just stillness.
The kind that happens when something touches *deep*.
Then came the applause. Long. Real. Earned.

Weeks later, one of those students wrote to him:

"I was battling depression. Your story didn't fix me. But it reminded me to try again. Thank you."

And that was it.
That was the point of it all.
Not to be a saviour.
Not to be a star.
But to be a mirror.

For someone, somewhere, struggling quietly.
To look and say— *"Me too."*

Atharv was still healing.
Still learning.
Still figuring out what to do with this second chance.
But one thing was clear:

His *heart*—the one borrowed from a stranger—
wasn't just beating.

The world began to hear Atharv's voice— but his camera
heard it before anyone else did.

Long before the talks, the DMs, the invitations, there was a
lens.
A simple tool.
A quiet companion.

And through it, he began to rediscover the world—
not as a survivor,
not as a patient,
but as a man who had returned from the edge.

A World Reborn in Light

Every frame he captured carried a heartbeat.

A scarred tree still standing after storms.

A child with a prosthetic leg scoring a goal.

An elderly woman feeding birds with trembling hands.

A stray dog limping but wagging its tail.

A lotus blooming in muddy Powai Lake, rising anyway.

These weren't just photos.

These were mirrors—to resilience, to truth, to life refusing to bow.

His captions were simple, but they struck deep:

"Still standing."

"Bent, not broken."

"We bloom anyway."

People didn't just like them—they felt them.

Because somewhere in each picture, they recognised a fragment of their own battles.

The Birth of Heart Spoken

As his posts grew, the messages multiplied.

Not just from survivors—

but from families, doctors, nurses, grieving parents, and waiting patients.

Atharv realised something profound:

People weren't looking for perfection.

They were looking for permission— permission to be vulnerable, to admit fear, to feel seen. And so, *Heart Spoken* was born.

Not as a brand.

Not as a campaign.

Not even as a project.

But as a sanctuary.

A digital space where people could share their truths without judgement.

Stories of waiting.

Stories of loss.

Stories of hope.

Stories of faith so fragile, yet so fierce.

A 17-year-old girl is afraid of her scars.

A mother who wrote to the son she lost.

A boy who said he couldn't sleep because he feared he wouldn't wake up.

A donor's wife who had never spoken about her grief until that night.

Atharv replied to every message he could—

sometimes at midnight, sometimes half-asleep, sometimes with tears on his shirt.

He never offered false hope.

He offered presence.

"I see you."

"I've felt that too."

"We'll get through this—one breath at a time."

The Responsibility of Being Seen

With visibility came weight.

People looked up to him now.

Some called him an inspiration.

Others called him a miracle.

And yet... There were evenings when Atharv sat on his balcony, camera beside him, staring at a sky painted in pink and gold— and felt hollow.

Pain didn't disappear just because people applauded.

Healing didn't speed up just because he inspired someone.

And loneliness...

loneliness remained the most loyal shadow.

Especially when old memories knocked.

But instead of burying the ache, he began to honour it.

He painted it.

He photographed it.

He whispered it to strangers going through their own heartbreaks.

He alchemised pain into purpose.

A Stage, a Spotlight, and a Silent Fear

Months later, his inbox chimed with an unexpected email.

A TEDx organiser had written:

"Your story isn't just inspiring—it's life-saving.

We want you to share it on our stage."

Atharv froze.

Him?

On a TED stage?

He wasn't a speaker.

He wasn't a professional storyteller.

But he was something rarer— authentic.

He looked at himself in the mirror that night.

Not at the scar.

Not at the hollow eyes.

Not at the tired shoulders.

But at the boy who had survived everything life threw at him.

And he whispered— *“Someone out there needs this. Do it for them.”*

He scribbled thoughts.

Memories.

Moments he thought he had forgotten.

He practised in front of his sister.

Then, in front of his mother's photo.

Sometimes he broke down mid-sentence.

Sometimes he stopped and laughed at himself.

But every time he grew afraid, he whispered— *“Aai, guide me.”*

That night, Atharv didn't post anything.

He simply sat on his bed, looked up at the ceiling,
and whispered:

*“No matter what, you are always your own
strongest companion.”*

O My Loving Mother

*O my loving mother,
my strength, my guiding light,
With you beside me,
Everything felt right.*

*In your arms I found
a world so safe and warm,
You held me through sunshine
and every storm.*

*You taught me to walk,
to speak, to be strong,
To know what is right
and stand against wrong.*

*You shaped who I am,
with love so true,
Whatever I've become
is all because of you.*

*Without you, life
would be hard to survive,
But your lessons still guide me
through every strive.*

*O my loving mother,
words can never say—
Thank you for everything,
in every single way.*

Chapter 20

The Heart That Spoke - III

It was a regular Tuesday afternoon.

Atharv sat by the window, editing a photograph he had taken earlier that week at Powai Lake. The image was of a blooming lotus—half-submerged in the muddy waters, yet reaching toward the sky with unapologetic grace. There was something poetic about it. Something symbolic.

That flower reminded him of himself.

Damaged, yet not defeated. Bruised, but blooming.

As he adjusted the brightness on the image, his phone buzzed with a soft ding.

A mail notification.

He almost dismissed it—probably another marketing pitch or a generic social media promotion request.

But something made him glance at the subject line.

“TEDx Talk Invitation: We Want Your Story.”

His fingers paused mid-scroll.

A strange stillness followed.

At first, he thought it was spam. A prank. Or just one of those automated mass invites that float around for events.

But curiosity got the better of him. He clicked it open.

As he read, his eyes widened with disbelief.

It was real.

A reputed TEDx chapter based in Mumbai had reached out. They had come across his artwork online, had read a health blog that featured his transplant journey, and watched one of his emotional Instagram Lives on organ donation.

The mail said:

“Your story is not just inspiring—it’s life-saving. We believe the world needs to hear how a borrowed heart became the voice of hope for thousands.”

His eyes lingered on one phrase.

Borrowed heart.

Something shifted within.

That line did something to him. It echoed in places he thought were long silent.

He had never imagined that his pain, his scars, his brokenness... would one day become his strength.

But maybe, just maybe, life had been preparing him all along.

Without overthinking, he shut his laptop, walked to the mirror, and looked at himself.

No arrogance in those eyes. No pride.

Only quiet courage.

A silent question passed through his mind:

“Can I really do this?”

“What if I freeze on stage?”

“What if I break down?”

But then another voice—softer, deeper, more honest—answered:

“What if someone out there needs to hear this... to survive their own story?”

He picked up a pen.

And just like that, he began.

Not a speech—just raw thoughts. Honest memories.

Fragments of his journey, bleeding onto paper.

He scribbled about the hospital ceiling he stared at for eight hours a day.

About the time, he lay there counting the dots on the tiles because sleep felt too risky.

In the morning, he took 18 tablets, his hands trembling like a leaf in a storm.

He wrote about the girl who had once promised to wait for him—and left when things got hard.

About the way his father silently stood by the door every night, pretending not to cry.

And then... he wrote about his mother.

The final voice message she left—just a soft whisper of strength.

He ended that page with a sentence:

“I’m still here... and maybe that’s enough.”

The weeks leading up to the TEDx talk were a blur of anxiety, rehearsals, and introspection.

Atharv practiced in front of his closest friends.

Then, in front of the mirror.

Then, alone in his room, in front of his mother’s photograph.

Sometimes, he'd break down mid-sentence.

Other times, he'd stop and laugh at himself for being too serious.

But every time he felt afraid, he'd whisper:

“Aai, I don't know if I'll make you proud... but I'll speak my truth.”

The day finally arrived.

It was cloudy. Monsoon clouds lingered low, just like the nervousness clinging to his chest.

He chose a simple white shirt.

No designer outfit, no shiny shoes.

Just himself—and the scar that peeked from beneath his collar.

He didn't hide it.

Not anymore.

That scar had once defined his pain.

Now it defined his survival.

The auditorium was packed.

The lights dimmed. The energy was electric.

When his name was called, Atharv stood up slowly.

His palms were cold. His heartbeat is erratic.

But his steps were steady.

The red circle on stage—the one every TED speaker stands on—felt larger than life.

And yet, as he walked into it, something inside him settled.

He looked up at the audience. At the eyes watching him. At the silence waiting to be filled.

And then... he smiled.

Not because he was confident.

But because he had nothing to lose anymore.

He took a deep breath.

And began.

“My name is Atharv Dalvi. I died once.

But I live today... because someone else didn't.

And this heart... this borrowed heart... is my second chance at being human.”

The silence was intense.

Not a cough. Not a shuffle.

Just stillness. Attention. Emotion.

Over the next 16 minutes, he poured himself into every word.

He didn't memorize lines.

He spoke of memories.

He didn't perform.

He revealed.

Each sentence was carved out of his scars.

Each pause carried the weight of grief, of survival, of love.

He talked about the night he prayed—not to live, but to stop suffering.

About the guilt of receiving a heart that meant someone else had to die.

About finding meaning in pain. About finding art in silence.

About learning that the worst moments of your life can sometimes lead to your most meaningful ones.

And then, he ended.

“If you’ve ever felt broken, unworthy, alone— Just know this... you’re still breathing.

And as long as you are...

There’s still a page left to write.”

The audience stood.

First, a few. Then all.

A standing ovation.

Tears. Applause. Whispers of “thank you.”

Hugs from strangers who said things like:

“I had lost all hope... until I heard you.”

“You spoke what I never could.”

“You reminded me that pain has a purpose.”

That night, Atharv didn’t cry.

He didn’t post a story or count the likes.

He sat on his bed, lights off, and stared at the ceiling.

And whispered...

“Thank you, life... for not giving up on me.”

He wasn’t a speaker.

He wasn’t a hero.

He was just a boy who lived... and chose to tell his story.

And sometimes, that’s more than enough.

*“Believe in yourself - If you believe, you can;
if you don't, you won't.”*

Chapter 21

The Heart That Spoke - IV

The hospital's cardiac wing always smelled the same— a mix of antiseptic, warm steam from the steriliser, and the quiet fear that lingered in every corridor.

Atharv knew that smell too well.

Even months after his own transplant, he returned here regularly for check-ups—blood tests, echo scans, immunosuppressant reviews. These walls had once held his nightmares; now they held the echoes of his second life.

That Tuesday afternoon, as he waited outside the OPD room, scrolling through comforting messages on *Heart Spoken*, a nurse approached him hesitantly.

“Atharv... *ek minute milega?*”

Her tone wasn't casual.

“Sure,” he nodded.

She lowered her voice.

“There's a boy. Nineteen. His name is Saurabh. Newly diagnosed, very critical. He hasn't spoken to anyone—not to doctors, not even his parents. Can you... Talk to him?”

There was no hesitation.

Just a quiet nod.

His heart already knew its direction.

The Boy on the Bed

Room 307.

The same number Atharv once prayed through, bled through, survived through.

He stepped in gently.

Saurabh lay curled on his side, staring at the ceiling with eyes that didn't blink as often as they should. His fingers twitched, as if clinging to the bedsheet for courage he didn't have.

Atharv pulled a chair closer—no introductions, no speech.

Just presence.

After a minute of silence, he said softly,

“Darr lag raha hai?”

Saurabh didn't turn, but his trembling shoulders answered.

Atharv exhaled, then lifted the edge of his T-shirt just enough to reveal the scar— that long, quiet lightning bolt across his chest.

“This?” he said gently.

“Yeh darr ka nishaan nahi. Yeh jeet ka proof hai.”

For the first time, Saurabh turned his head.

A broken whisper escaped his lips:

“Kya...main mar jaaunga?”

Atharv reached out, placing a steadying hand on his trembling fingers.

“Nahin. Tum jeetoge. Dheere dheere... par jeetoge.”

A pause.

“Main bhi yahin se fight kiya tha. Tum akela nahi ho.”

Saurabh clutched his hand.

Tight.

As if holding onto life itself.

“Bhaiya... mujhe jeena hai.”

Atharv smiled—warm, real.

“Toh chalo. Milke jeete hain.”

That night, Atharv sat by his mother’s photograph—her gentle smile frozen in time, yet alive in every breath he took. He closed his eyes and whispered:

“Aai... dekh na... aaj main kisi aur ke liye bhi jeeya.”

And in that quiet moment, the heaviness inside him softened.

He felt something lift—

not entirely, not suddenly— but enough.

Enough to breathe without breaking.

Enough to hope without trembling.

Enough to forgive the past without forgetting it.

Atharv finally understood:

Pain doesn’t leave.

It finds a place.

And once it finds its place... it stops hurting.

He reached for the diary beside him, opened a blank page, and wrote softly:

“Some stories are meant to be carried.

Not buried.”

Then, with a deep breath, he let the poem inside him spill out— the same poem he had held close for years.

Bhool Ja Jo Hua So Hua

*Bhool ja jo hua so hua,
Ke ab nayi zindagi aage hai;
Baitha hai humsafar intezaar mein;
Tasveer nayi zindagi ki lekar: purani baton ko chhod.
Bhool ja jo hua so hua
Ke ab nayi khushi saath hai;
Naya saathi saath hai;
Ki phir na lautega guzra hua waqt yeh kabhi.
So bhool ja jo hua so hua
Aaj phir savera hua hai,
Waqt ke saath aage bhi jaana hai;
So de kar naa routhy hue ko manaa.
Bhool ja jo hua so hua
Jab dekhe ga tu palat ke kabhi,
Shikwey na honge, aur na hoga gila;
Maaf kiya jinko tune, wahi karenge dua,
lekar nikal labon pe hasi, purani baton ko chhod.
Aur bhool ja jo hua so hua*

Tomorrow waited—not for a perfect man,
But for a boy who had fought every impossible war, and still
stood, heart beating, eyes open. And that, perhaps, was the
true victory.

*Sometimes you must leave the luggage of
memories behind to set yourself free.”*

Chapter 22

The Heart That Spoke - Final Part

The Night the Heart Found Its Voice

The terrace of the hospital was almost empty, except for Atharv— a silhouette against the quiet Mumbai sky.

It wasn't the same terrace where he once cried into the wind.
This night felt different.

Lighter.

Steadier.

As if life had finally stopped dragging him... and started standing beside him.

Below, the hospital buzzed with soft murmurs—stretchers rolling, nurses switching shifts, a distant beeping of monitors.
Above, the sky was scattered with tired clouds, letting the moon peek through like an old friend checking in.

Atharv sat with his sketchbook in his lap—
the same one that had followed him through corridors, ICUs,
lonely winters, and hopeful mornings.

But tonight...

He wasn't sketching pain.

He wasn't hiding emotions in lines and shades.

He simply stared at the blank page, sensing something new.

A beginning.

For years, his life had been about holding on.
Holding on to breath.
Holding on to hope.
Holding on to the memories of his mother, to the whispers of doctors, to the possibility of seeing one more sunrise.

But tonight, for the first time,
he didn't feel like someone who had *held on*.
He felt like someone who had *arrived*.

He took a deep breath, opened a fresh page, and wrote slowly:

*"This scar isn't a reminder of what I survived.
It's a reminder of who I became."*

He stared at the words.
They didn't shake him.
They grounded him.

This wasn't closure.
This was clarity.

A New Kind of Gratitude

His phone buzzed beside him.

It was a message from a transplant survivor in the UK—a woman who had received a liver transplant in 2011 and now ran marathons to raise awareness.

"Your last post made me cry," she wrote.
"Different organs, same war. Keep shining, brother."

Another message came from Brazil—
a boy who had received a kidney at age 14 and now painted murals on hospital walls.

"You remind me that pain can be turned into art," he said.

A girl from Japan.
A man from South Africa.
A mother from Chennai.
A donor family from Kerala.

Stories travelled across continents and screens—
all different...
and yet, all the same.

And Atharv realised something gently:

*He wasn't just a part of this world.
He was connected to a global family of borrowed heartbeats.*

People who had died and lived again.
People who had faced nights darker than ink.
People who now carried light wherever they walked.

And his story—
this soft, quiet Indian boy's journey—
was now woven into theirs.

The Post That Became a Promise

Without filters, without rewrites, without hesitation— he took
a picture of himself.

Not a glossy, perfect portrait.
Not a flattering angle.

Just a raw, honest image.

His scar visible.
Eyes tired but alive.

A faint smile that came not from joy, but from acceptance.

He typed:

“This is me.

Still healing.

Still learning.

Still living.

Thank you to the one whose heart beats inside me.
And thank you to the ones who stayed when my world
stopped.”

#HeartTransplantJourney

#Gratitude

#StillHere

He pressed *Post*.

And for the first time,
he didn't wait for likes.
He didn't refresh the screen.

Because the post wasn't for validation.
It was his declaration.

A quiet announcement to life: *“I'm ready.”*

The Shift

As the breeze brushed his face, something softened inside him.
Not everything was perfect.
Not everything was complete.
He still missed people.
He still felt absences.
He still carried shadows.
But the shadows no longer felt like enemies.
They felt like parts of him that had earned their place.
For the first time in years, Atharv felt...*free*.

Not from pain.

Not from memories.

But from fear.

Fear of the future.

Fear of being fragile.

Fear of what might break.

Fear of being alone.

Tonight, he wasn't alone.

He had himself.

He had his journey.

He had his borrowed heartbeat that had matured into his companion.

And he had a purpose.

When Purpose Finds You

He looked at the skyline— Mumbai glittering like a restless heartbeat of its own.

He whispered softly,
not to his mother,
not to the donor,
not even to the sky—

But to himself: *"I survived, now it's my turn to live."*

He didn't know that in the years to come,
this vow would lead him towards something incredible—
towards mentoring patients, creating digital communities,
counselling families, and inspiring countless strangers.

He didn't know that in 2025,
he would start his own company with his best friend— a
dream born not from ambition, but from purpose.

He didn't know how far he would go.

But he knew this— for the first time...

He was no longer just the boy who survived.

He was the man who would begin.

The Heart That Finally Spoke

As he closed the sketchbook and stood to leave, his chest felt warm.

Not painful.

Not heavy.

Just warm— as if the heart inside him had whispered: *"I am yours now.*

Let's live."

And in that quiet hospital night, under a sky full of imperfect stars,

Atharv walked back inside—

not as a survivor,

not as a symbol, but as someone finally ready to live his second life, on his own terms.

*“A man who lives by his own principles earns
respect and dignity.”*

Chapter 23

The Surgery

Recovery was not a line.

*It was a circle he had to walk every day—barefoot, bruised,
and learning again where hope lived.*

When Atharv returned home after the surgery, nothing looked unfamiliar... and yet, everything felt changed. The gate still creaked the way it always had. The old tree still leaned slightly to the right. His window still caught the afternoon sun just right.

But inside, home had turned into something else.
Not a sanctuary— but a survival room.

The bed was made with sterile white sheets.
The air smelled of antiseptic instead of old books and paint.
The curtains had been replaced with washable blinds.
An air purifier hummed in the corner like a tired guardian.

His sketchbooks were sealed in plastic.
His canvases were packed into cardboard boxes.
His life was rearranged—not by choice, but by necessity.

There were no balloons.
No “Welcome Home”.
No laughter.

Only careful footsteps and hushed voices from people scared
of breaking him.

His brother tried to smile.
His sister tried to be brave.
But in the quiet of his room, Atharv realised—

*This wasn't the end of a battle.
This was the beginning of a new one.*

The New Rules of Being Alive

His days no longer belonged to him.

An army of medicines stood in a straight line on his table—
small, big, chalky, bitter. Some shaped like hope. Others
shaped like a warning.

Immunosuppressants.

Anti-rejection tablets.

Anti-infection pills.

Kidney and liver support.

Mood stabilisers.

Pain relievers.

A chemical orchestra that played morning, afternoon, evening,
and night.

And each pill carried a cost—trembling hands, nightmares,
sudden sweating,

blurred vision, metallic taste in the mouth, unpredictable
exhaustion

He wasn't "living normally".

He was learning how to stay alive.

Across the world, he had read countless stories like his:

*A British teen who said her medicines made her feel like she
had "aged sixty years overnight".*

*A Canadian boy whose hands shook so much that he couldn't
hold a fork.*

*A woman in Sydney who wore gloves at home for months
because even dust scared her.*

It comforted him—this knowledge that he wasn't alone.
And it terrified him—because he knew exactly how they felt.

Every sneeze felt dangerous.

Every cough felt suspicious.

Every fever meant hospital admission.

Even joy came with rules.

He couldn't laugh too hard.

Couldn't cry too deeply.

Couldn't hug someone without calculating the risk.

He lived inside a bubble.

Safe.

Sterile.

Suffocating.

The Loneliness No One Saw

When friends messaged,

"Bhai, milne aa jayen?"

He typed,

"Abhi nahi, yaar."

But what he wanted to say was—

"Aa jao... mujhe bhi zinda mehsoos karna hai."

He missed noise.

He missed touch.

He missed having someone sit next to him without a mask.

Sometimes his father stood outside his room late at night,
thinking Atharv had fallen asleep.

He heard those quiet sniffles through the door.

His sister pretended to cook loudly so he wouldn't hear her crying.

But he did.

Because silence is the loudest sound in a house recovering from fear.

Many transplant survivors abroad wrote the same thing online:

“The surgery healed my body.

But the loneliness... that's a different illness.”

Atharv felt that truth in his bones.

The First Photograph After Surgery

One morning, fatigue dragged him down, but something soft pulled him up.

A flower on his windowsill— blooming despite the heat.

He lifted his camera.

Not to perform.

Not for content.

But to check if the world still had beauty in it.

When he clicked that picture, something shifted.

As though the lens reminded him that he was still capable of seeing life, not just surviving it.

He posted it.

Not with filters.

Not with hashtags.

Just with honesty:

Still here.

Still learning to live.

Thank you, donor.

I carry your tomorrow in my today.”

And that day, his inbox wasn’t just notifications— it was a river of quiet confessions.

“My son is waiting for a kidney. Your post gave us hope.”

“I registered as a donor today.”

“Your courage reminds me to fight again.”

Slowly, Atharv understood— his survival wasn’t just his story anymore.

It was a spark for others still stuck in darkness.

But Behind the Light... a Shadow

He still woke up breathless some nights.

Still paused mid-laugh when dizziness hit.

Still looked at his mother’s photograph like it was a lifeline.

He still asked himself:

“Will I ever be normal again?”

“Will I ever fall in love?”

“Will someone ever see me... beyond the scar?”

He didn’t have the answers.

But he had a new heart—and it beat like it wanted to find them.

And that was enough.

For now.

*“Accept, embrace, and rise with
whatever life brings.”*

Chapter 24

Rebirth – Where Hope Learns a New Name

The years after Atharv's transplant had not made him invincible.

But they had made him intentional.

His life was no longer a fight for survival.

It had become a responsibility.

A purpose.

A quiet oath he carried in every heartbeat that wasn't originally his.

He had become a speaker now—

traveling to colleges, NGOs, small-town community halls—
telling people why organ donation wasn't just medical science,
but a human legacy.

And somewhere along the way... people began listening.

Messages poured in. Invitations grew.

His social media became a lighthouse for those drowning in fear.

But even with all this, he carried a loneliness he didn't admit.

The kind that comes when life gives you a second chance but takes away the familiar world you once belonged to.

"Zinda hoon... par pehle wala nahi,"

he had once said.

And even now, on some nights, the line returned to him like an echo.

The Event That Changed Everything

It was just another awareness seminar.

Nothing extraordinary on the schedule.

A small auditorium, warm lights, and about a hundred students.

Atharv spoke the way he always did— honestly, gently, without drama.

But that day, one face didn't blink while watching him.

One pair of eyes didn't wander,

didn't check a phone,

didn't shift in the chair.

Her name is *Ashvini*.

Seated in the third row.

Calm posture, hair tied loosely, a notebook on her lap.

She didn't look at him like he was a hero.

She looked at him like she was *studying a human story*.

When the talk ended, people lined up for pictures and questions.

She didn't come forward.

Not until the very end— when the hall was almost empty.

She approached him slowly, with a gentleness that felt... familiar.

“Hi... I just wanted to tell you,” She said, “the way you speak about life... it doesn't sound like a speech.

It sounds like you're teaching the heart how to breathe again.”

Atharv froze.

People complimented him often—
“You’re inspiring,”
“You’re brave,”
“You’re a miracle”, but no one had ever said something like
this.

Her voice had sincerity.
Her eyes had understanding.
And her presence had an ease he hadn’t felt around anyone in
a long time.

Maybe it was nothing.
Maybe it was everything.

The Photograph She Carried

She held out her phone.

“I took this during your talk... Hope you don’t mind.”
He looked at the picture.
It wasn’t the usual speaker photo.
It wasn’t staged.
It wasn’t edited.

It was a quiet moment—
Atharv holding the mic, eyes lowered,
saying something that felt more like a prayer than a message.

The caption she had typed was still unsent:

*“Some hearts break.
Some hearts heal.
And some hearts... teach others how to live.”*

Something stirred inside him.
A soft shift.
A warm ache.

Nothing romantic.
Just human.
A recognition.

Why Her Presence Mattered

For the first time in years, Atharv felt seen—
not as a survivor,
not as a story,
not as a social media figure...
but as a person. Ashvini didn't ask about his scar.
Didn't ask about the surgery.
Didn't ask about the past.
She asked only one thing: "What do *you* want your life to look like now?"
Nobody had asked him that in a long time.

Not since the ICU.
Not since the first breath after surgery.
Not since he realised life had restarted without instructions.

"I... don't know yet," he said honestly.

She smiled. "Good.
It means your story is still being written."

A Beginning That Doesn't Announce Itself

They exchanged numbers—
not with forced excitement,
not with hesitation—

just naturally.
Effortlessly.
Like two pages of a book aligning.

That night, when Atharv returned home,
he placed his hand on his chest.
The heartbeat felt... steady.
Different.
Calm.

"Kahin zindagi phir se muskurayi hai?"
He whispered.

He didn't know what Ashvini would become in his life.
A friend?
A gentle presence?
A bridge from the past to a better future?

He didn't need to know today.

Some stories begin quietly.
Some beginnings feel like a healing.
And some people enter not to complete you, but to remind you
that you were never incomplete.

Closing Note of the Chapter

That night, for the first time in a long time,
Atharv didn't feel like a lone survivor.

He felt like someone standing at the start of a new chapter—
heart steady,
mind open,
and life... softly shifting.
A rebirth was already happening.
He just hadn't realised it had a name now— *Ashvini*.

Aaj maine ek jhalak zindagi ko dekha...

*Aaj maine ek jhalak zindagi ko dekha; woh meri raah mein
gun guna rahi thi.*

*Maine dekha usse idhar udhar; woh aankh michol kar
muskaraa rahi thi.*

*Ek arse ke baad aaya mujhe karaar; woh sehla kar mujhe sula
rahi thi.*

*Hum dono kyun khafaa ek dusre se; main usse; woh mujhse
batta rahi thi.*

*Maine usse puchha tune mujhe yeh dukh kyun diye;
Usne kahaa main zindagi hoon tujhe jeena sikha rahi thi.*

Chapter 25

The New Heart Learns to Breathe

Life had returned to him...

But learning how to live again was still a journey.

The auditorium lights had dimmed hours ago, yet something inside Atharv had switched on— a spark he hadn't felt in years.

The event had ended, people had left, the banners were being taken down...

But his mind replayed only one moment: *Ashvini*.

Her quiet gaze.

The honest way she had listened— not like the world listens to a survivor,

but like someone listening to a story, they genuinely want to know.

Her soft “I’m proud of you” had stayed with him long after she walked away. Life doesn’t change in one grand moment.

It changes in hundreds of quiet ones.

A Different Kind of Morning

Next morning, Atharv woke up... lighter.

Not because the medicines were fewer.

Not because the scars had stopped aching.

But because for the first time in a long while, his first thought wasn't fear.

It was a memory—
of someone who had looked at him
not with sympathy...
but with warmth.

Instinctively, he checked his phone.
And there it was—
the very first notification of his day:

“Today’s reel was beautiful.
Aapne jo kaha... ‘Life returns one breath at a time’ — that
stayed with me.”
— *Ashvini*

He smiled... and to his surprise, he blushed.
A small, shy, involuntary warmth.

Standing before the mirror, he whispered,
“Strange... healing feels different today.”

He knew her vaguely from social media—
someone who didn’t react out of pity,
but with sincerity.

Their conversations began casually:

a reply,
a thought,
a question about art,
a message about courage...

But very quickly, she stopped being just another message in
the inbox.

Her words lingered long after the screen dimmed.
And most importantly— she listened.
Truly listened.

Not to the celebrated survivor the world saw.
But to the man who still felt fragile in hidden places.

For the first time since heartbreak,
Atharv found himself letting someone gently step into the
corners of him he usually kept locked.

The Message That Started Something

At 10:14 a.m., his phone buzzed.

Ashvini: “You spoke beautifully yesterday.
I didn’t get to say everything I wanted to.
Hope you’re resting today.”

He read it twice.

His fingers hovered over the keyboard longer than usual.
Finally, he replied:

“I’m trying to.

Thank you... for staying back yesterday.”

From there, something soft began— not dramatic,
not forced...
just two people exchanging small truths in simple sentences.

She asked about his art.

He asked about her writing.

She complained about her terrible handwriting.

He sent a picture of his messy paint palette.

Their conversation didn’t feel heavy
like most conversations do after trauma.

It felt—Normal,

Easy,

Safe.

A quiet beginning.

Healing in New Colours

That evening, Atharv returned to his sketchbook.
This time without trembling hands.
Without the fear that his fingers might betray him.

He painted freely—
bright strokes,
fluid movements,
warm, hopeful shades.

He didn't realise the shift,
but the paper did.

His father watched from the doorway.
“You're using brighter colours now?” he asked gently.

Atharv paused.
“Am I?”

He genuinely hadn't noticed.

His father smiled—
“Beta... sometimes people heal on paper before they heal in life.”

And strangely, Atharv felt that Ashvini's words from the event
were somewhere behind this courage. too.

A Voice on Social Media

In the days that followed, his social media changed.
No filters.
No forced positivity.
Just honesty.

He shared short reels, tiny reflections,
small truths about recovery.

One line he wrote went viral:

“I’m breathing today... because someone chose to give.”

Thousands read it.

But Ashvini’s quiet reaction meant the most:

“This touched me today.”

One reader messaged him:

*“After reading your post, we donated my brother’s organs.
You helped us see light in our darkest moment.”*

Atharv shared it with a photo of his mother.

“You’re not here, Aai...

But because of you, someone else found hope today.”

He felt lighter.

More alive.

As if gratitude was finally louder than guilt.

A Walk with New Thoughts

During his evening walk,
life felt different again.

Children laughing.

Dogs chasing leaves.

An old man is reading the newspaper.

A teenage girl practising dance steps in the corner.

He hadn’t noticed these things in months.

He placed a hand on his chest.

Steady heartbeat.

Strong.

Present.

As he headed home, his phone buzzed.

Ashvini: "Walk kar rahe ho? Fresh air helps. Go slow."

A small smile grew on his face.

Somehow, her thoughtfulness made the air feel lighter.

A Call That Changed the Night

That night at 8:52 p.m, his phone rang.

It was her.

Her voice was gentle, familiar... comforting.

"Atharv? I hope I didn't disturb you."

"No... you're the best part of today."

They talked for almost an hour—

about art,

about poetry,

about the event,

about the things they never said out loud.

At one point, she whispered, *"You don't sound like someone who's broken."*

He froze.

No one had ever said that before.

She added softly: "You sound like someone who rebuilt himself beautifully."

For the first time in a very long time,

Atharv felt seen—

not as a patient,

not as a survivor,

But as a person.

A Small Shift, A Real One

Something changed after that call.

Not loudly.

Not dramatically.

Just a gentle shift.

He found himself looking forward to her messages—

her “Good morning, fighter,”

her “Show me your new sketch,”

her “Eat on time... okay?”

He sent her sunset pictures.

She sent him lines from her poems.

Nothing labelled.

Nothing rushed.

Just a soft presence in each other’s days.

A quiet companionship.

A beginning.

A Heart Finding Its Rhythm Again

One night, while painting a heart blooming into wildflowers,
he paused and looked at his phone.

A message from her: “*You make people believe again.*”

He whispered to himself: “*Maybe life is giving me a new
colour...*”

Not to replace the old ones.

Just to add light where darkness once lived.

A Circle of Support

His father organised his medicines.

His sister tracked his vitals.

Small milestones became celebrations:

- 1 km walk — Done
- No fever
- Mood: 7/10 😊

These weren't grand victories, but they were victories.

And somewhere in that circle,

Ashvini had unofficially become a part of it—

checking in,

encouraging him,

celebrating every tiny progress.

But the most important shift

was the friendship he rebuilt with himself.

Every morning he whispered to the mirror:

"You are not weak.

You're a warrior.

Someone gave you life—now give life a purpose."

From Survival to Purpose

He joined the Second Life Foundation— an NGO spreading awareness about organ donation.

He spoke at schools and colleges.

He painted with a new intention— colours bolder, louder, truer.

One of his artworks showed a heart rooted like a tree, branches labelled: Hope. Love. Life.

Caption: "The heart stopped... but the story didn't."

It travelled to hospitals, medical seminars, small towns, and big cities.

And every time Ashvini shared his work, she wrote one simple line:

“Proud of you.”

It meant more than applause.

From Guilt to Grace

Some nights, he still wondered
who his donor was.

“Did they dream?”

“Did they laugh?”

“Were they afraid?”

He once wrote a letter—just for himself:

Dear Donor,
Your heart beats inside me.
Your leaving gave me a tomorrow.
I carry your courage in every breath
and every colour I paint.
You live on through me.

—**Atharv**

Sometimes healing is not about forgetting.
It’s about honouring.

A New Dawn

One crisp morning,
Atharv stood on the terrace
with warm sunlight on his face and chai in his hand.

He opened his diary and wrote:

*“Life gave me a second chance.
This time, I’m meeting it halfway.”*

He smiled—

not as someone who had “moved on”...

But as someone who had moved forward.

That afternoon,

he found himself pausing—

not to look back,

but to finally let go.

And somewhere between acceptance and hope, a quiet courage took root within him.

And just like that— the next chapter of his life had quietly begun.

*“Life teaches in its own way—embrace it,
understand it, and live happily.”*

Chapter 26

The Girl Who Stayed

That night, long after the lights were off, Atharv found himself smiling at the smallest things — her laugh, the way she tucked her hair behind her ear, the way she had listened without interrupting, without pity, without treating him like someone fragile.

It had been years since someone made him feel... seen.

Not as a patient.

Not as a survivor.

Just Atharv.

When he finally lay down, a message lit up his phone.

Ashvini: “Reached home. Thank you for the talk today. It meant a lot.”

He read it twice.

His thumb hovered over the screen, the kind of hesitation that comes only when something matters.

Atharv: “It meant a lot to me, too. Thank you... for staying back.”

A simple exchange.

But something warm settled in his chest — the kind of warmth that doesn’t ask for permission before entering your life.

The Day That Felt Different

The next morning arrived quietly, sunlight slipping through his curtains.

But something was different.

Atharv woke up lighter — not because his body hurt less, but because his heart felt... full.

He checked his phone without even realising it.

One new message.

Ashvini: *“Good morning, Atharv. Aaj ka din accha hoga — trust me.”*

He didn't blush often, but this time... he did.

There was no drama, no rush.

Just a simple message that made the world feel softer.

His day moved differently after that — colours looked brighter, breakfast tasted better, and even his walk felt more alive.

Healing had always been slow...

But today, it felt gentle.

A Conversation That Didn't Feel Like One

Throughout the day, their chats continued — not in paragraphs, not in deep confessions, but in threads of small, meaningful moments.

She sent him a picture of her morning coffee.

He sent her a half-done sketch.

She wrote,

“Why does every line you draw look like a story?”

He replied,

“Maybe because you're reading it.”

They weren't flirting.
They weren't defining anything.
Just two people letting their walls soften in each other's
presence.
For Atharv, this was new territory — the kind that didn't hurt,
didn't suffocate, didn't demand.
It simply existed... gently.

The Girl Who Understood Without Trying

Over the next few days, something rare unfolded.
Ashvini didn't ask him about hospitals.
She didn't ask about medicines or scars.
She didn't force conversations about survival or pain.
Instead, she asked:

“What's your favourite place in the city?”
“Which colour do you paint with the most?”
“Tell me about your dream exhibition.”

She made space for the parts of him people often forgot — the
artist, the dreamer, the man who still wanted to live a life
beyond hospital walls.

Atharv found himself telling her things he hadn't told anyone
— about wanting to travel across the country,
about wishing to open an art studio,
about his unfinished book,
about the farmhouse he dreamt of retiring in one day.

And she listened — really listened — with the kind of
attention that makes a person believe they're worth listening
to.

When Time Started Flowing Again

Their conversations stretched from minutes to hours.

Late-night voice notes.

Early morning texts.

Long calls where neither noticed the clock.

Ashvini would laugh and say,

“Why does talking to you feel so easy?”

And Atharv would answer softly,

“Maybe because I don’t have to pretend.”

Sometimes she surprised him — a poem she wrote for him, a small sketchbook she couriered, a voice note saying she was proud of his progress.

She wasn’t demanding.

She wasn’t dramatic.

She was just... there.

Steady, warm, constant.

And for a man who had lost more than most, this new presence felt like breath after drowning.

The Evening That Changed Everything

One evening, after a long conversation about art and life dreams, she said softly:

“Atharv... you’re doing so well. I hope you can see that.”

For a moment, he couldn’t speak.

No one had said that to him in years.

“Thank you,” he whispered,

“for seeing me the way you do.”

There was a pause.

A comfortable one.

The kind only two connected hearts share.

“Atharv... *kal free ho?*” she asked.

“I was thinking... coffee? Maybe a long drive? *Jo tumhara mann ho.*”

His heart skipped — not the dangerous kind, not the painful kind —

the kind people write poems about.

“*Kal?*” he replied.

“Yes. *Kal.*”

A smile spread across his face, slow and certain.

“Let’s do it,” he said.

And he meant it.

That night, as he kept his phone beside his pillow, Atharv realised something:

Healing wasn’t just hospitals, medicines, or milestones.

Sometimes healing came as a person —

a gentle presence,

a steady voice,

a soft smile...

A girl who stayed.

And tomorrow,

for the first time in a long time, he wasn’t nervous about the day ahead.

He was excited.

*“Love lies in your heart, isn’t there to stay;
love isn’t love until you give it away”*

Love Is a Wonderful Thing

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

Take your heart and make it sing,

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

It is what makes honey taste sweet,

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

It is what brings a smile to your face,

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

It is what makes your life feel complete,

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

I will say it all again,

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

I will say it again & again,

Love is a wonderful thing; Love is a wonderful thing,

Chapter 27

The Daydreams Found Direction

Mumbai's noon sun lay gently on the city when Atharv and Ashvini stepped out of the cab at Fort.

The old stone buildings, the echo of footsteps, the smell of books and pavement tea — everything felt new to him today.

Because she was beside him.

“Ready?” she asked, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

Atharv nodded, a small smile escaping him.

“Bohot dino baad... kisi jagah aaya hoon with excitement.”

Long Drives and Longer Conversations

They began their day with a long drive across Atal Setu.

Wind is rushing through the half-open window.

Soft music hums in the background.

Mumbai shimmering on both sides.

Atharv hadn't felt this alive in years.

As the wind rushed past them on Atal Setu, Atharv whispered, almost to himself:

“Zindagi ruk gayi thi... jab sab bhaag rahe the. But now... I want to do everything. Paint, Write, Travel, Work. Build a life. Make up for lost time.”

Ashvini smiled at him — not out of sympathy, but pride.

“Toh chalo karte hain,” she said softly.
“One dream at a time. Ek saath, ek pace mein.
Tum bhaagna chaho... main tumhare saath bhaagungi.
Tum rukna chaho... main wahin tumhare paas baith jaungi.”

He glanced at her, amazed.
Some people entered your life like a storm.
But she entered like a promise.

Ashvini rested her hand on the window frame, sunlight
catching her hair.

“Kahan jaana hai?” she asked.
“Colaba,” he said. “Café Mondegar.”
“Perfect.”

Café Mondegar

At Café Mondegar, old rock music played as they ordered cold
coffee and fries.

Ashvini laughed at his stories from school; he admired the
way her eyes lit up when she talked about books.

They didn't flirt.
They didn't force anything.
They simply... fit.

Jehangir Art Gallery

After the café, they walked towards the Jehangir Art Gallery
— a place every artist in the city dreams about.

Inside, the gallery was quiet.
White walls.
Bright frames.
Stories captured in colours.

Atharv stood still for a moment.

“Ashvini... ek din,” he whispered, “yahan meri paintings bhi hongi.”

She turned to him instantly — not with surprise, not with doubt — but with that steady belief she always carried.

“Karenge na milke saath mein,” she said softly.

“I am with you, Atharv. You will have your exhibition... yahan bhi, aur Kala Ghoda mein bhi.”

He swallowed.

The way she said *we* instead of *you* did something to him.

“To keep an exhibition,” he explained, “I’ll need a proper theme. Frames, canvas, colours... kaafi expense hota hai. And time — bohot saara time. At least fifty to eighty paintings chahiye hote hain.”

Ashvini nodded like she was taking notes for her own dream.

“So, we start slow,” she replied.

“Ek theme decide karte hain. And baaki sab, hum milke sab manage kar lenge”

He looked at her — really looked.

This girl wasn’t motivating him out of politeness.

She genuinely, wholeheartedly believed in him.

“I also want to publish a book,” he said quietly.

“Paintings aur poems saath mein... ek hi book mein.”

Ashvini’s eyes softened.

“That’s beautiful. And hum karenge. I’ll help you organise everything — sequence, printing, drafts... jo tum chaho.”

He chuckled.

“When did you become my manager?”

She shrugged with a playful smile.
“*Jab tum mere favourite artist bane.*”

As they stepped out of the gallery, a strange tightness settled in Atharv’s chest.

Years ago, he could’ve filled a place like this with his own work.

But illness had taken time away — years that would never come back.

He looked at his hands, then at the sunlight on the pavement.

“Ashvini... *kabhi kabhi lagta hai main bohot peeche reh gaya hoon,*” he said quietly. “*Saare mere age wale log careers mein aage badh gaye... aur main hospitals mein phasa raha.*” I want to run fast now. Catch up with everything I lost.”

She didn’t interrupt.

She didn’t rush to correct his pain.

She simply held his gaze and said, with the gentleness that was becoming her identity:

“*Atharv... tum peeche nahi ho. Tum bas alag raaste se aaye ho.*

Aur jo log toot kar khud ko dobara jodte hain... woh sabse aage hote hain.”

Then she added her favourite line — the one that seemed to stitch something inside him every time: “*Karenge na milke? Jo sapne tumhare hain, unmein main bhi hoon.* I’m with you, Atharv. Always.”

And for a moment, the burden on his shoulders didn’t feel so heavy.

Coastal Road Drive

Their next drive was on the new Coastal Road, smooth as silk. City lights danced on the water. She leaned her head slightly towards the breeze.

“Aaj bohot achha laga,” she said.

“Mujhe bhi,” he replied.

Bandra–Worli Sea Link

From there, the day drifted towards the Bandra-Worli Sea Link.

Looking at the waves crashing below, Atharv said:

“Time doesn’t wait... but I’m tired of being scared of it.”

Ashvini replied, *“Time wapas nahi aata... lekin tumhari strength, tumhara talent, tumhari kahani — kahin nahi jaa rahi.* You’ll achieve everything you dream of.

Bas apne aap ko ek mauka do... the same way the world got another chance at having you.”

For the first time, he believed her.

“I want a farmhouse someday,” he said suddenly.

“An art space... jahan main paintings bana sakun. A quiet life after retirement.”

She didn’t blink.

Didn’t laugh.

Didn’t call it impossible.

Instead: *“Main wahan tumhe chai bana kar dungi. Tum paint karna... main poems likhungi.* It’ll be peaceful.”

Atharv felt something move inside him — something soft, something warm, something he thought he had lost forever.

She glanced at him with that same gentle, steady expression.

“You know, Atharv... sometimes a single day can say what months cannot.”

He nodded, smiling faintly.

“Like today.”

When Ashvini dropped him home off at home, she said her usual line — the one that had become her signature:

“Jo sapne tumhare hain... woh mere bhi hain now. We’ll build them. Saath mein.”

That night, standing at his gate, Atharv realised something powerful:

Yes, he had lost time.

Yes, life had been unfair.

Yes, the world had raced ahead.

But he wasn’t running alone anymore.

He had someone who didn’t push him,
who didn’t pity him,
who didn’t question his pace — someone who simply walked beside him and said: *“Saath mein karenge.”*

For the first time in years, he wasn’t just surviving.

He was dreaming.

Growing.

Becoming.

Because life had finally given him someone who didn’t just walk beside him...

She stayed.
She believed.
She held his dreams as gently as she held her own.
Tomorrow, everything will feel different again.
Tomorrow, life will feel possible.
And sometimes... that was enough to restart a life.

*“Strong bonds turn relationships into a
feeling of togetherness.”*

Aashayein

*Hazar Rang Pankhon mein liye, Main neel gagan ke paar chala,
Indradhanush ke Rango per, Main duniya ke us paar chala,
Parvat ki oonchi choti per chad, Main aasman ki ore chala
Ek raah pakad kar nikla main, Apni manzil ki ore chala
Hazar Rang Pankhon mein liye, Main neel gagan ke paar chala...*

*Bijali ki gati pairon mein liye, Brahmand ko karne paar chala,
Shukr, Shani, Budh, Mangal ko, Choone ko har ik baar chala,
Ik nayi tarang mann mein liye, Apni manzil ki ore chala,
Hazar Rang Pankhon mein liye, Main neel gagan ke paar chala...*

*Pankh Jaga kar pairon mein, Main saath samandar paar chala,
Bhoot bhavishh ke sapno ko, Sach karne ki main-raah chala,
Mann mein liye ik nayi-umang, Sapno-ko-saakar karne-chala,
Hazar Rang Pankhon mein liye, Main neel gagan ke paar chala*

Chapter 28

The Life They Were Building

*Zindagi ne dono ko ek hi mod par laakar khada kar diya tha—
alagh kahaniyon ke do musafir... jo ab ek hi raaste par chalne
lage the.*

Atharv didn't realise when it happened.

Maybe it was the late-night calls.

Maybe her soft “Good morning, fighter” messages.

Or maybe it was the quiet way she showed up in his life—
not loudly, not dramatically...

but with presence.

With warmth.

With patience.

Whatever it was, the truth was simple:

Ashvini had become the gentlest part of his days.

Everyday togetherness

Their days began to fall into a rhythm that felt almost like
healing had taken a physical form and started walking beside
them.

On some mornings, she would send him a line from a book
she was reading.

On others, he would reply with a photograph of the sunrise
from his balcony—

orange, soft, still waking... exactly like him.

In the evenings, she'd call and ask,
"Painting ki aaj?"
"Thoda," he would smile.
She'd always answer the same way:
"Karengi na... milke saath mein?" He never said it, but those
four words stitched something inside him.

The book that brought them closer

Atharv's dream of writing his life story had existed for
years— but now, it felt possible.

He would read a chapter to her on the phone, his voice
sometimes trembling, sometimes pausing when memories
became too heavy.

She never interrupted.

Never rushed him.

Her silences were soft, reassuring—
like someone standing beside a candle, making sure the wind
doesn't blow it out.

At night, she would edit small lines, correct grammar, suggest
a stronger word here, a softer word there.

"Tum likho," she would say.

"Main hoon na, baaki sab dekh lungi."

For someone who had lost so much...

Atharv didn't know what he had done to deserve this kind of
care.

The world of colours

Painting slowly became their shared world.

She helped him look for frame makers, canvas suppliers,
printing shops—
almost as if *his* dreams were slowly becoming *their* project.

When he took his first commission work, she celebrated it
more than he did.

When he gifted paintings to friends and relatives, she would
tease him,
*“Artist saab, ek mujhe bhi gift karoge... ya exhibition ke baad
hi milega?”*

He would laugh.
But deep inside, the fear remained—
What if she leaves as the last person did?
What if he loses again?

So, he never said too much.
Never confessed.
Never asked for anything.
And she... understood without needing an explanation.

The surprise books

Every month, at least one parcel arrives at his door.
Books.
Sometimes novels.
Sometimes poetry.
Sometimes, biographies of artists he admired.
He once told her, *“Please mat bheja karo... bahut ho raha
hai.”*

She had simply replied,
“*Tum padte ho... mujhe khushi hoti hai. Aur kya chahiye?*”

No demand.

No expectation.

Just quiet affection.

Something he had never received earlier.

Two dreams walking together.

Long drives across the Atal Setu...

Coffee at Mondegar...

Sitting by the sea at Worli...

Talking about life, art, failures, dreams...

Both of them are healing each other in ways neither openly acknowledged.

He told her about his wish to open an art studio someday.

A small place with huge windows where morning light would pour in.

Where he could paint without fear, without deadlines, without hospitals.

She listened like someone collecting pieces of a man's heart and keeping them safe.

“*Karenge,*” she whispered.

“*Milke karenge.*”

He believed her.

Fear and comfort

There were nights he pulled back— fear tightening inside him like an old scar.

What if she left?
What if he shattered again?
What if loving meant losing?

But every time he distanced himself,
She didn't complain.
She didn't question.
She simply stayed.

Her presence—soft, consistent—became the bridge between
his past and his future.

In her patience, he found safety.
In her laughter, he found light.
In her belief, he found courage.

And without realising it...
Atharv began to build a life again.

Not alone.
With her.

Quiet realization

One evening, while they sat on Marine Drive, watching the
lights shimmer on the waves, Ashvini leaned her head slightly
towards him and said,

“Atharv... tum jaise ho, waise hi perfect ho.”

He didn't answer.
Couldn't answer.

But in that silence...
something inside him shifted— slowly, gently, beautifully.

He wasn't ready to call it love.
She wasn't asking for it.

But the truth sat quietly between them, glowing as the Bandra-Worli lights reflected in the water: Sometimes, the best relationships begin without labels, just two hearts learning to breathe together.

And for the first time in years, he didn't fear tomorrow.

Because somewhere in that quiet moment, he knew— his future finally had a companion.

A moment so pure that later that night, when he was alone, he picked up his diary and wrote....

*Jeevan ki koi raah nahi thi; Jeevan ki koi chaah nahi thi;
Ek akela chalta rehta; Mann mein ho toh rukta chalta;
Per jabse tumko dekha hai; Dil bhi ab yeh kehta hai;
Tum bin jeevan soona hai, Tum bin jeevan soona hai*

*Har pal tumko sochu main; Har pal tumko chahu main.
Khwabon mein tum basti ho; Yaadon mein tum rehti ho;
Per jabse tumko dekha hai; Dil bhi ab yeh kehta hai;
Tum bin jeevan soona hai, Tum bin jeevan soona hai*

Chapter 29

Books, Paintings & Becoming

Life had stopped feeling like recovery.

It had started feeling like... becoming.

Not suddenly.

Not dramatically.

But the way dawn creeps in— soft, shy, gentle, unnoticed until everything is brighter.

A big part of that slow sunrise was her.

Ashvini.

A presence so steady that even Atharv's new heart seemed to beat differently around her— not faster, but calmer.

The Book That Was Slowly Turning Into Their Book

Atharv began writing again—properly, consistently—his autobiography taking shape one honest page at a time.

Late at night, he would send her a draft.

A paragraph.

Sometimes just a line.

And she responded with the kind of care only a true companion can give—

“Tone yahan thoda soft kar do.”

“Yeh memory bahut powerful hai, isko alag highlight karo.”

“Atharv... this line is poetry. Keep it.”

She wasn't editing a book.

She was holding his past gently...

and helping him translate it without breaking him again.

Sometimes, when memories grew heavy, he would stop writing mid-sentence. She sensed it instantly, even over text.

"Take a break," she'd message.

"Main hoon na. Hum saath likhenge."

And just like that, the weight he carried alone for years became something two hands could hold.

A Studio Built in Conversations

His art, once paused by pain and hospitals, had returned with a different energy.

He spent evenings mixing colours—
not because he needed a distraction,
but because now he wanted to create.

One night, while walking, he pointed at a small art studio tucked between two cafés.

"Someday... I want my own space like this," Atharv said quietly.

Ashvini's eyes lit up as if someone had whispered a dream meant for her.

"And you will," she said.

"Bas theme decide karlo. We'll plan everything."

Frames.

Canvas suppliers.

Printer contacts.

Exhibition options at Kala Ghoda, Jehangir Art Gallery, or at any art gallery.

She wasn't just encouraging him— she was organising his dreams like they were logistics for their shared future.

Paintings With Purpose

His first commissioned artwork came unexpectedly.

Then the second.

Then, a wall-painting request from a café owner who'd seen his sketches online.

Each time, Ashvini reacted like someone celebrating the success of her favourite person on earth.

She clicked pictures, made reels, sent captions, handled queries, and reminded him of deadlines.

“Artist saab,” she'd tease,

“Ab toh aapko manager hire karna padega.

Main hi ban jaun kya?”

Atharv laughed, but the truth stung sweetly— he wanted her there.

In every part of his journey.

He gifted paintings to colleagues, neighbours, cousins— and every time, he wondered if generosity was a flaw.

“Nahi,” she told him softly.

“You give because your heart remembers pain.

And healed hearts always give more.”

He didn't reply, but inside him something warm shifted— recognition, maybe, or gratitude.

Two Dreams Running Parallel, Yet Together

While Atharv built his world of colours and pages,
his digital marketing startup quietly took shape in the
background.

Late evenings, he worked on pitches
while she sat on call, giving honest feedback—
not to impress him,
but to build with him. She wasn't just supporting him.
She was investing in his life.

In return, he supported hers—
cheering her writing, giving feedback, encouraging her job
goals, and celebrating her smallest wins.

They were becoming each other's strength— two lights
shining separately,
yet somehow illuminating the same path.

Commitment's Soft Fear

There were nights Atharv looked at her name on his screen
and felt an ache—
not of pain, but of longing mixed with fear.

He had loved before.
And lost everything.

This time, he couldn't afford to break.
He couldn't afford to trust blindly.
He couldn't afford another scar—
emotional or otherwise.

So, he held himself back.
Just a little.

And she... sensed it.

Always.

But she never pushed.

Never demanded answers.

Never asked, "What are we?"

Instead, she gave him something rarer—time.

"Jab tum ready ho," she had once whispered on the call,

"tab bolna. Main yahin hoon."

That was all he needed to hear.

A Heart Becoming Brave Again

Through organ-donation talks, hospital visits, motivational sessions—

Atharv kept giving back.

She joined him at many events, quietly cheering from the last row.

When he stood on stage, she looked at him with a kind of pride he had only ever seen in his mother's eyes.

And when he stepped down, she'd say softly,

"You're making this world better... ek-ek heartbeat ke saath."

His chest would tighten—

not with fear this time,

but with a feeling that tasted suspiciously like hope.

Not borrowed.

Not fragile.

Not foreign.

A feeling that felt... his own.

Becoming

One late evening, while they sat in his room surrounded by scattered canvases, book drafts, and colour-stained brushes, Ashvini picked up his latest painting—a heart blooming into wildflowers.

“Yeh tum ho,” she said gently.

“Aur main... yeh flowers nahi.

Main bas woh mitti hoon jisme yeh phool ugte hain.”

Atharv couldn't speak.

He just looked at her—

the girl who had walked into his life quietly...

and somehow healed the parts even medicine couldn't reach.

In that quiet moment, he realised something:

Healing wasn't just about recovering.

It was about becoming someone new...

with someone who saw the best in you, even on your worst days.

And slowly,

softly,

beautifully—

He was becoming.

*“If you consistently follow your passion, you
will succeed sooner or later.”*

Chapter 30

The Heart Opens Slowly

Love didn't arrive like a story.

It arrived like breath— quiet, constant, unnoticed...

until he realised he couldn't imagine a day without her.

Atharv had known intensity before— the kind that burned quickly and left smoke behind.

But what he felt now... was different.

It wasn't fire.

It was warmth.

Not chaos.

Comfort.

Not a rush.

A slow unfolding— as if his stitched heart was cautiously learning to trust its own beat again.

Unspoken Words, Unshaken Presence

They never said, "I love you."

Not in words.

But in everything else.

In the way she reminded him of his medicines without sounding like a nurse.

In the way he saved the last piece of chocolate for her without thinking.

In the way their conversations drifted past midnight— sometimes deep,

sometimes silly,
always peaceful.

She listened to him wholly—
not as a survivor,
not as a patient,
But as a man she genuinely cared for.

And he responded the only way he knew— by letting her into
the rooms of his mind he kept locked from the world:
the fears,
the insecurities,
the nights that still hurt.

“Tum sun leti ho...” he admitted once.

She smiled.

“Tum bolte ho isliye.”

Simple.

Soft.

Enough.

A Heart Learning to Trust Again

Her name on his phone felt like sunrise—
quiet but certain.

Every message loosened a little of the weight he carried:
the betrayal,
the silence,
the abandonment.

But with that comfort came fear.

Fear of losing her.

Fear of misreading hope.

Fear that his heart—half borrowed, half bruised—wasn't
ready.

She sensed it.

One evening by the promenade, she said,

"You don't have to be scared of me."

"I am not scared..." he whispered.

"Bas... past."

She didn't touch his hand.

Didn't offer clichés.

She simply said:

"I'm not here to replace anyone.

I'm just here."

Those three words settled inside him like peace.

Love in New Moments

Their days weren't dramatic.

They were gentle.

Not the same cafés, not the same drives—
new memories, small but meaningful.

A rainy afternoon in a bookstore,
where she read poetry aloud in a whisper and he pretended to
judge her pronunciation.

A quiet breakfast at a tiny Bandra café,
where he taught her how to sketch a leaf and she ended up
drawing a mango by mistake.

A visit to a small art fair,
where she excitedly dragged him toward handmade journals
and he bought one instantly
just because she liked it.

Evenings when she helped him mix colours, her fingers
stained with blue,
his with red, their laughter blending like new shades on the
palette.

These weren't the moments people wrote movies about.
But they were the ones who stitched him back to life.

A Thought He Didn't Say Aloud

Once, while she talked animatedly about a poem she loved,
he watched her—really watched her—
the way her eyes softened while reading,
the way she tucked her hair behind her ear unconsciously,
the way her voice warmed when she said his name.

And the thought came quietly:
"I want to see this face in all my tomorrows."

He didn't say it.
Instead, he whispered,
"Ruko... thodi der aur."

She smiled, unaware of how deeply that smile settled inside
him.

The Moment His Heart Finally Let Go

One calm evening,
they sat together on his balcony— music low, city lights
shimmering,
a soft wind brushing past them.

Ashvini rested her head gently on his shoulder.
No hesitation.

No question.

Just trust.

Atharv didn't freeze.

Didn't pull back.

Didn't fear breaking again.

Something inside him... opened.

Unlocked.

He took a slow breath— the kind that feels like healing.

In that moment, for the first time in years, his heart didn't feel borrowed.

Or scared.

Or fragile.

It felt his.

Fully.

Finally.

He looked at the sky and whispered silently—

to his donor,

to his mother,

to the universe:

“Thank you... for letting me feel all this again.”

And that night,

for the first time since his transplant,

his heart beat not for survival—

but for life.

And for love.

*“Carry a heart that holds kindness, affection,
and gratitude, for that is where humanity lies.”*

Chapter 31

The Future He Chose

The future didn't arrive with fireworks.
It came quietly—
in her voice,
in her presence,
In the way life began feeling like something he could trust
again.

For months now, Atharv had been running—
towards work,
towards dreams,
towards the man he was trying to become.

But that evening, sitting beside Ashvini near the glowing sea,
He realised something unexpected:
He wasn't running alone anymore.

The Days That Changed Without Announcing Themselves

Their relationship still had no label.
And yet, their lives were slowly intertwining like colours
merging on a canvas.

She knew when his energy dipped during editing.
He knew when she needed chai to think straight.
They worked in comfortable silence, laughed over typos,
argued over chapter titles, and always ended up sitting closer
than they intended.

She wasn't demanding, dramatic, or loud.
She simply *showed up*— every day, in ways big and small.

When he struggled to find the right word,
she'd take the laptop gently from him and whisper,
“Try again... this feeling deserves better.”

And he listened to her.
He trusted her.
More than he expected to.

Dreams They Built Side by Side

His book was no longer “his” project.
It had quietly become *theirs*.

Publishers, printers, and frame makers— she helped with everything.
She read every revised chapter, gave honest opinions, and celebrated each tiny win as if it were her own.
“Your story will reach people,” she insisted.
“You’re not just writing... you’re healing someone who hasn’t even read you yet.”

Her words filled him with a confidence his scarred past had once stolen from him.

And when they visited art galleries together, the dreams grew bigger.
Brighter.

“*Kabhi apni exhibition yahan rakhna,*” she said at Jehangir Art Gallery,
her eyes shining more than the lights on the paintings.
“*Kabhi...*” he murmured.

“*Nahin,*” she corrected softly,
“*Jabhi bhi.*”

He looked at her then, really looked, and felt the ground under his feet shift.

The Fear He Never Spoke Aloud

He didn't fear failure anymore.
He had survived too much to be shaken by that.

His fear was different.
Quieter.
Buried.

“What if I lose someone again?”

Every time his heartbeat was too fast, every time her message made him smile more than he intended, the fear whispered in his chest:

“Don't love too much...
You won't survive another loss.”

He never said it aloud.
But she sensed it.
She sensed everything.

So, she stayed steady.
Consistent.
Gentle.

Not pushing.
Not claiming.
Just being there—
like warmth he could slowly grow used to.

The Moment His Heart Let Go

That night by the seashore, the world felt softer.

Waves whispered against the shore.

The city lights stretched like a necklace along the water.

And Ashvini sat beside him, hair swaying with the breeze,
looking out at the sea as if she was listening to something only
she could hear.

“Ashvini...” he said softly.

She turned.

“Hmmm?”

For a second, the words caught in his throat.

The fear.

The longing.

The relief of finally not being alone.

“I’m scared,” he whispered.

“Of what?” she asked gently.

Of... feeling this again.

Of allowing someone...

of losing someone...

of breaking again.”

She didn’t interrupt.

Didn’t try to fix it.

Didn’t tell him she wouldn’t leave.

Instead, she reached out slowly and placed her hand over his.

Warm,

Steady,

Certain.

“Atharv...” she said quietly,

“pichli baar tum toot gaye the... because you were alone.”

Her thumb brushed lightly over his fingers.

“Is baar... tum akele nahi ho.”

Something in him softened.

Sank.

Released.

Not because she promised forever.

But because she promised *now*—
and meant it.

He closed his eyes.

For the first time, the fear didn't tighten.

It loosened.

The Beginning He Didn't Expect

As Atharv drove back home after dropping her,
the city lights blurred into soft lines on the windshield.

But his thoughts were sharp.

Clear.

Certain.

He parked the car, stepped onto the terrace, and looked up at
the night sky. This same sky had watched him break, bleed,
beg for one more breath.

Tonight, it watched him breathe easily.

Willingly.

Hopefully.

He took out his phone.

The last message was hers.

“See you tomorrow... goodnight, Atharv.”

He typed slowly, smiling without realising it:

“Goodnight, Ashvini.

And... thank you.

For bringing colour back into my life.”

He didn’t send it.

Not yet.

He just held the phone against his chest, feeling the borrowed heartbeat steady and strong.

For years, he had thought survival was the end of the story.

But tonight, standing under the quiet sky, he finally understood that this is the beginning of a life he once thought he’d never reach.

A life filled with art, books, long drives, purpose—and a girl who didn’t just arrive... she stayed.

A new chapter neither of them had named...but both had already begun to feel.

“This time... I choose to live with my whole heart.”

A new beginning.

At last.

He closed the diary and looked up at the sky.

The stars didn’t twinkle any brighter.

The wind didn’t whisper a secret.

But something inside him shifted—quiet, unshakable.

This time, it wasn’t about fighting death.

It was about learning how to live.

And maybe that’s the real story after all.

*“Rise with a hope every morning, even if
things don’t work, never lose hope.”*

Hopes

*Let my hopes rise with the morning breeze,
Like whispers of sunlight dancing on leaves.
Let them soar beyond the greyest skies,
Unbroken, unbent, refusing to die.*

*Even when the nights speak only in tears,
I will hold on, beyond my fears.
In the silence where no voices remain,
I'll find my strength through every pain.*

*For every ending carves a start anew,
And every shadow carries a brighter hue.
So let my dreams ignite the air—
A thousand flames, fierce and fair.*

*And if I stumble, if I fall,
I'll rise again... and dream through it all.*

Epilogue

Zindagi... Phir Bhi Pyaari Hai

Ten years later, Atharv sat by the window of a quiet café — the kind where sunlight feels warm enough to remember, but soft enough not to distract.

A cup of ginger tea steamed in front of him.

Ashvini always ordered it for him... even before he asked.

His digital marketing company was growing — a dream once whispered from a hospital bed.

His art hung in cafés and offices.

His poems had become pages people underlined.

And in all of it... there was her. Ashvini.

The woman who never tried to fix him— only walked beside him while he fixed himself

Who always simply said: *“I’m here.”*

And together—

step by step—

They walked into a future

That wasn’t borrowed anymore.

He held her hand and asked, “Toh phir Chalein.”

She Nodded, “Chalo.”

And finally—
Atharv believed it. *Zindagi...*
phir bhi pyaari hai