

BEYOND LOVE:

A Life Rewritten

Dhananjay Sharma



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Beyond Love: A Life Rewritten

is not just a love story—it is a journey of self-discovery, transformation, and silent gratitude. It is about "d", a boy lost in the shadows, and JAY, the person who unknowingly became the light that guided him toward becoming more than he ever thought he could be.

Fate brought JAY into my life twice, each time leaving an imprint that shaped my path. She never dismissed me, never questioned my silent admiration, and in doing so, she unknowingly pushed me to evolve. I was not the best student, not the most confident, not the one people noticed—but when she chose to see me, it made me want to see myself too.

I changed—not for validation, not to prove anything to her or anyone else, but because, for the first time, I wanted to. Each day, I worked harder, learned more, and slowly became someone I could respect. She never told me to change, yet she was the reason behind it.

Ultimately, I understood that JAY was never mine to have, but she was always mine to learn from. She was the chapter that changed my story, but I had to write the rest of the book myself. And so, I did.

The name dJAY is not just a name—it is the story itself. d, who found himself through JAY, carrying forward a piece of her influence, forever shaping the person he became.

This is the summary of "dJAY"

PREFACE

This book is for those who have ever felt like a shadow, a whisper in the back of the room. For those who have watched others excel while feeling trapped in a cycle of academic and personal stagnation. For those who, like me, once believed they were destined to be nothing more than a footnote in their own lives.

I was that boy. The one who drifted through classrooms, notebooks incomplete, dreams unformed. Education was a foreign language, and confidence, an unreachable star. I existed, but I didn't truly live. I was the embodiment of "backward," a label that seemed to define my every move.

Then, she arrived.

*This book is, in essence, a letter to her. A letter I
could never write in person, a confession I could
never voice.*

*It's a testament to the power of a single presence,
a single moment, a single person to indirectly
rewrite the very fabric of a life. Simply her being
there, in my world, sparked a change within me.
It wasn't a direct intervention, but rather the
quiet, undeniable influence of her existence that
set me on a new path.*

*Through these pages, I want to show you how a
life can be rewritten through the subtle yet
powerful force of someone's presence. How the
mere act of observing another person can ignite a
transformation you didn't even know you needed.
But most importantly, I want to show you that the
real change, the lasting change, comes from
looking within. It's about finding that spark
inside yourself, that hidden potential that you
might not even know exists.*

*It's about recognising that you are valuable, that
you are capable, and that you have the power to
redefine your own narrative, regardless of how
undervalued you may feel. This is not just my
story; it's a story for anyone who has ever felt
lost, for anyone who has yearned for a change they
thought was impossible.*

*This is for the readers who feel like they are
behind.*

*This is for the person whose presence changed my
life. This is for you.*



PROLOGUE

THE UNLIT EMBER AND THE UNSEEN DAWN

I didn't know her name that first time she dragged me from the edge—didn't even sense I was teetering there, a heartbeat from the abyss.

Back then, I was just "d"—a lowercase nothing, a quivering mote, a faint scar scratched onto the vast, roaring scroll of a world too bold, too deafening to spare me a nod. I was a phantom in my own flesh, a silhouette devoured by the tumult, a boy who hadn't yet felt the heft of his own shade. She wasn't loud—not in the brash, clamorous way the world craved.

JAY didn't swagger or bellow for attention; she simply was—a sun that doesn't grovel for your gaze, doesn't

*beckon or beg, just blazes with a quiet,
unyielding brilliance that seeps into your
sinew whether you face it or turn away. Her
presence bent the air like a law carved in
stone, and I felt its warmth coil around me
before I ever grasped its origin.*

*Twice she glided into the orbit of my days;
twice she slipped beyond my reach—oblivious
to the quakes she'd unleashed within me.*

*She didn't know—couldn't know—the fault
lines she'd etched through the bedrock of my
soul, the tremors that rippled beneath my skin.
I'm sure she never glimpsed the murk I stewed
in—those choking depths where I'd taught
myself to shrink, to dissolve, to let the world's
din swallow me whole.*

*But she saw me—not the smear I'd scrawled
myself as, not the shell I'd huddled within, not
the silence I'd draped like a cloak.*

*She pierced through to the ember smoldering
beneath, the faint pulse no one else deigned to
seek. That lone act—her*

gaze, steady, unbidden—struck flint against the dark, a jolt so fierce it rattled the bars I'd welded around my spirit.

It was enough—enough to spark a yearning, a restless itch to claw at the tale I'd murmured to myself in the gloom.

A story where I was no hero, no name worth noting, not even a whisper worth tracing in the margins. She didn't hand me a script or preach a path—she didn't stoop to such trifles. Her essence—raw, uncharted, a tide rolling free—stirred a gnawing hunger in me, an ache to be, to wrench myself from the epitaph of nothing I'd etched in my own hand.

This isn't your sugar-spun love song—not the frail waltz of hearts and petals you've leafed through repeatedly.

No, this is the forging of "dJAY"—a name I carry like a murmured oath, a shard of her radiance I've smelted into the muscle and steel of the man I've hewn myself into. She wasn't a chapter to bind and shelve—she was the hinge, the silent fulcrum, the cataclysm that split my

*world and forced me to stride through.
She was the dawn I never saw cresting, the
spark that didn't pause to claim its toll.*

*The rest—the ink, the sweat, the fire that
fueled this saga—was mine to wield and
carve into the void she'd pierced. I didn't
chase her shadow to hoard it; I chased it to
seize my own—to wrestle it from the dust and
make it stand.*

*Her first crossing brushed past in a whirl of
grit and innocence—a fleeting graze I didn't
yet know would root so deep.*

*The second etched its mark in a storm of
chaos and clarity, a moment that knotted
every frayed thread of my becoming. She
never felt their weight—how could she? —
those brief collisions that echoed like thunder
through a canyon, resounding across the years
I've since woven together.*

*JAY didn't shape me with her hands or
murmur me into form—she wasn't some
architect plotting my ascent.*

*She simply shone, a light unasked for, and
in its glare, I glimpsed a silhouette worth
forging—a self-worth bleeding for. From
that trembling "d"—that fragile, faltering
wisp—I began to hammer out "dJAY," letter
by letter, a name that bears her echo not as
a chain, but as a quiet salute to the flame
she unknowingly kindled.*

*This is no dirge for what might've been, no
keening for words I left buried.*

*It's the chronicle of a rising—a slow,
deliberate burn from ember to inferno,
sparked by a soul who never sought the
laurels. She was the unseen hand that tipped
the hourglass, the breath that roused the
ash.*

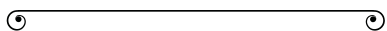
*The rest, I forged alone—step by smoldering
step—into a tale I now claim as mine.*

*From the dust of that lowercase nothing,
through the heat of her distant glow, I rose
—not hers, but my own, a fire I stoked with
my own scarred hands.*

DEDICATION

TO JAY,

*Like a gentle breeze stirring
hidden seeds, your presence
sparked a transformation
within me. An unseen force, a
quiet catalyst, you illuminated
a path I could not have found
alone, a mirror that turned my
gaze inward, revealing the
landscape of my potential.
Your presence, a silent guide,
led me to discover the voice I
never knew I possessed. This
book is a testament to the
profound power of your silent
influence and to the journey
you inspired.*



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*I want to extend my heartfelt
thanks to everyone at BlueRose
Publishers.*

*You didn't just publish a book;
you believed in a story, in a
voice, and a journey.*

*For that, I am eternally
grateful.*



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CHAPTER 1

FURNITURE—THE UNSEEN
GRAIN

I didn't know why I trudged to school each day—didn't have a reason carved out in my head, didn't need one. Everyone else did it, so I fell in line, a shadow trailing their certainty. Every morning unfolded the same: I'd knot my shoelaces with mechanical fingers, sling my threadbare bag over a slumped shoulder, and shuffle down the dusty, sun-scorched road to the classroom.

I was always on time—not out of some burning zeal, not because the lessons sang to me, but because it was simpler that way. Punctuality was a shield, a quiet armor. No one batted an eye if I slipped in with the bell, but vanish entirely, and the whispers might stir—questions might coil like smoke, and I had no taste for their weight. I wasn't there to be seen; I was there to fade.

The room roared with chaos—a cacophony of shrill voices, a battlefield of scrappy kids hurling wads of crumpled paper, kicking at desks with scuffed shoes, their laughter ricocheting off the cracked walls. I claimed my perch in the back, a corner where the shadows pooled thickest, my head bowed like a penitent, my pencil tracing aimless, jagged lines along the frayed edges of my notebook. The teacher's voice droned—a distant hum, a wasp trapped in glass—words I didn't catch, didn't chase. I didn't speak—not to her, with her chalk-dusted hands and weary sighs; not to the boys who scrapped over a battered rubber ball at break, their shouts a language I didn't know; not to a single soul. To open my mouth was to invite eyes, to risk a gaze I couldn't predict. What would they see? A blur?

A void? I didn't dare look myself—didn't know what stared back from the splintered mirror of my own mind.

I dubbed me "d"—lowercase, diminutive, a whisper of a name that clung like damp cloth. I didn't bristle, didn't fight it. It suited me, that smallness, that insignificance. I was furniture—a chair shoved against the wall, a desk scarred with initials not my own—something you brushed past without a second thought, a fixture blending into the grain of the room. In second standard, though, a crack split the haze. I started watching—not just existing, not just drifting, but seeing. There was a girl—not JAY, not yet, not the storm she'd become—who laughed louder than the rest, a sound that sliced through the din like a bell through fog. Her joy wasn't mine, wasn't meant for me, but it pierced the veil anyway. I didn't know why it snagged my attention, why it lodged in the silt of my thoughts like a stone in a streambed. But I saw her—bright, unyielding, a flare against the gray. And maybe, just maybe, that was the first time I saw anything at all—the first time the world sharpened, if only for a breath, and hinted at something beyond the dust I'd settled into.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOUND OF HER—THE ECHO THAT STIRRED

JAY was the sun, blazing and inevitable, while I was a shadow, a smudge cowering beneath a desk's splintered edge.

She'd been there since first standard, I think—a fixture in the chaos, a silhouette I couldn't unsee. Always the one with her hand piercing the air, always the one the teachers bathed in weary, approving smiles. By fourth standard, she'd claimed her throne again—class monitor, her name a hymn on every tongue.

I didn't talk to her.

Didn't talk to anyone, really—my voice a stranger even to me. But I saw her, a thief stealing glances from the dark. She burned too bright for me to look away, too vivid for the dull haze I'd wrapped myself in.

She was beautiful—impossibly so, a jewel glinting in the grit of a dusty classroom with walls fissured like old skin.

Her hair spilled dark and fluid, a cascade that shimmered like water even when she bound it tight for dance practice. Her eyes—vast, luminous, twin beacons—seemed to pierce through every veil I'd draped over myself, seeing what I buried deep.

She moved like the world bent to her will—her spine straight as an arrow, her steps quick and sure, a general marshaling us in rigid lines to assembly.

No falter, no doubt—just grace carved into motion. The teachers crowned her “our star,” their voices thick with pride. The other kids chanted JAY like it was a battle cry, a cheer that rang through the corridors. One day, those eyes—sharp as sunlight through broken glass—landed on me.

I’d forgotten my homework again, a habit etched into my bones, and there she stood—arms crossed, a sentinel by my desk. “‘d’, you’re smarter than this,” she said, her voice a blade, honed but not cruel.

I stared at my hands, knuckles pale, my face a furnace of shame.

No one else gave a damn if I slipped—teachers droned past me, classmates didn’t blink. But she cared. Her anger wasn’t a lash aimed at me; it was a spark flung at the nothing I’d let myself become.

*I didn't know why it mattered to her—didn't know
why her words lodged in my chest like embers.*

*They smoldered there, stirring something I couldn't
name, a ripple in the still waters of my apathy. Why
did she see? Why did it start to gnaw at me, too?*

*Then I saw her dance—at the annual function,
beneath lights that flickered like they trembled in her
presence.*

*She spun, her skirt flaring like a flame caught in the
wind, her face alight with a force I couldn't pin down
—joy, power, something wild and untouchable. The
whole school erupted, hands crashing together in
applause.*

*I just sat there, palms slick with sweat, my breath
snagged in my throat.*

*She was a star too distant to grasp, a galaxy spinning
beyond my reach.*

And yet—she'd seen me. JAY, the sun, had turned her gaze on the shadow I was, and that alone cracked something open I didn't know I'd sealed shut.

CHAPTER 3

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN— THE EMBER IN THE DUST

The year was 2003, and I was a ghost in 4th standard. A quiet boy, unnoticed, drifting through the days with no real shape. I had no friends, no voice to call my own. The classroom was a blur of faces—teachers who never looked my way, classmates who never cared to. I blended into the wooden desks, the cracked walls, the hum of lessons I didn't grasp. I went to school because it's what you did—tied my shoes, walked the path, sat in my seat on time.

That was my one discipline. Beyond that, I was nothing special. Not to anyone.

At home, it was the same. In a joint family buzzing with chatter and charm, every child had their spark—the mischievous one who made the uncles laugh, the bright one who earned nods of pride. I wasn't them. I was the shadow in the corner, existing without ripples. No one asked me what I thought, and I didn't have much

to say anyway. I didn't know what jealousy felt like—I had nothing to measure myself against. School, homework, home. That was the cycle, and I never wondered why.

I wasn't useless, though. Running was my one thing. During games, my legs moved fast, cutting through the air like they knew something I didn't. It was the only time I felt capable, the only time my chest didn't feel so tight. But even that didn't make me stand out—not like her.

JAY was the opposite of me, a light I couldn't look away from. Beautiful, intelligent, confident—she was the class monitor, the one everyone adored. Teachers beamed when she spoke; students followed her like she was the sun. She wasn't just good—she was unforgettable. Debates, cultural programs, sports, dance—she was everywhere, excelling at everything with an ease I couldn't fathom. Her handwriting alone was a work of art, every letter sharp and perfect, like she'd been born holding a pen. I'd watch her from my corner, intimidated by how much she was, how little I felt next to her.

She scared me—not because she was cruel, but because she was everything I wasn't. Her presence filled the room; her voice carried weight. She led, she shined, she belonged. And me? I was afraid to even meet her eyes. But I couldn't stop looking. Not in the way boys in stories talk about girls—I didn't know what love was at nine years old. It was simpler than that. When she was there, something in me paused, shifted, like waking up without knowing you'd been asleep.

We didn't speak—not until I found the courage to ask

about her handwriting. I'd stared at it for weeks, those neat lines in her notebook, wondering how someone could make words look so alive. One day, I couldn't hold it in. "How do you write like that?" I whispered, barely loud enough to hear myself. "How do you hold your pen?"

She turned, surprised, her bright eyes catching mine for a second. Then she smiled—not a big smile, just a small, gentle one. "You should do this," she said, holding her pen up to show me. Her fingers moved with a grace I didn't have. I nodded, fumbling to copy her, until I saw she was left-handed and I was right. It threw me off, and the words I wanted to say tangled up inside me. That was it—our first moment. Short, clumsy, but burned into me forever.

Then there was the Safeda tree. I'd get to school early, before the bell, before the chaos. Under that tall eucalyptus, I'd find these glass-like pieces scattered in the dirt—shiny, uneven, and strange. I didn't know what they were, but I'd pocket them, running my fingers over their edges. It was something to do, something mine. One morning, I got an idea. I knelt in the dust and spelled out "4th A" with them, Roman letters glinting in the sun. It wasn't for anyone—just a quiet game.

JAY saw it. She crouched down, picking up a piece, turning it in her hand. "Did you make this?" she asked, her voice steady, curious.

I nodded; my throat too tight to speak. She smiled again—brighter this time—and took it, saying, "Thanks." As class monitor, she could claim it for us, and I didn't mind. I didn't need credit. I just watched her walk away with it, my heart thudding with a mix of pride and nerves. She'd seen me again. Twice now.

That year, I learned our birthdays were one day apart. Hers, January 1st; mine, January 2nd. It felt like a secret gift, a thread tying us together. I imagined telling her, pictured her laughing at the coincidence. But I never did. The courage wasn't there. Those two moments—her pen, her smile under the tree—were all we had in 4th standard.

Then came the end. One afternoon, my parents said it

casually over dinner: “Next year, you’re changing schools.” Simple words, but they hit me like a stone. That evening, I sat outside, staring at the sky as it turned orange, then gray. Leaving school hadn’t meant anything to me before—not the teachers, not the games, not the routine. But now it did.

It wasn’t the school I’d miss. It was her.

For the first time, I felt something heavy, something I couldn’t name. Not friendship, not a crush—just a pull. JAY had given my days a shape I hadn’t noticed until it was slipping away. I didn’t know what she’d done to me, not then. But years later, looking back, I see it clear as day: she was the first imprint on a life I hadn’t even started writing yet.

CHAPTER 4

THE AWAKENING

The news of my school transfer didn't sink in right away. It was just words at first—casual, tossed across the dinner table like they meant nothing. But that night, lying in bed, staring at the cracked ceiling, they grew heavy. For the first time in my nine years, I felt something press against my chest, a weight I didn't have a name for. I'd drifted through life until then—school, home, repeat—never asking why, never caring much. But now, I cared. And it wasn't the school I'd miss, or the routine, or the dusty playground.

It was her.

JAY.

She didn't know me—not really. We'd barely spoken, just those fleeting moments about her handwriting and the glass pieces under the Safeda tree. But she'd done something no one else had:

she'd made me feel like I existed. Not with words or grand gestures, but with the way she was—so bright, so alive. I didn't know what it meant, this pull she had on me. It wasn't love—I was too young to understand that word. It was simpler, deeper. She was the first person who made time feel different, who made my heart stutter for no reason I could pin down. And now, I was about to vanish from her world as quietly as I'd lived in it.

Before that night, I'd just been there—moving through days with no purpose, no spark. No one expected anything from me, and I didn't expect anything from myself. But the news shook me awake. It carved out a hollow space inside me, and in that space, I saw her. JAY wasn't mine—not a friend, not even a memory she'd keep—but losing the chance to see her

every day felt like losing something I hadn't known I'd had. For the first time, I wanted to be more than a name scratched on the attendance sheet.

The days after blurred together, but they were sharper somehow. I started looking—at the classroom with its chipped desks, the chalkboard smudged with half-erased lessons, the playground where I'd run faster than anyone cared to notice. And at her. I watched JAY from my corner, tracing the way she moved—confident, effortless, like the world bent to fit her. She led the class, laughed with friends, danced in rehearsals I'd never dare join. I memorized her, not because I thought I'd forget, but because I knew I'd never see her like this again.

Something shifted in me, slow and quiet like the first light of dawn. I was shy, sure—too shy to speak most days—but did that mean I had to be invisible? I wasn't smart, not like her, but did that mean no one would ever notice me? I wasn't brave, but did that mean I couldn't try? The questions crept in, and with them came a flicker of wanting—not to be her, but to be something. To live, not just exist.

One morning, I got to school early, like always. The air was cool, the yard empty. I wandered to the Safeda tree, its branches swaying soft and familiar. The glass pieces glittered in the dirt—those odd, shiny bits I'd gathered for no reason but my own. They weren't just things anymore; they were a bridge to her; a moment she'd seen me. I picked up a few, running my thumb over their edges, and wished I could stop time—keep this place, this feeling, just a little longer.

As the last days ticked down, a question gnawed at me: Should I tell her? Should I say I am leaving? Would she even care? The thought of facing her twisted my stomach into knots, but the idea of slipping away without a word felt worse. I rehearsed it in my head—'JAY, I'm going to a new school'—but the words stuck every time. She was still her—brilliant, untouchable—and I was still me, the boy who barely spoke.

Then came our birthdays. Hers on January 1st, mine on the 2nd—a secret thread I'd never dared pull. This time, I wanted it to mean something. I wanted to give her a gift. But I had

nothing—no pocket money, no way to ask my parents without them wondering why. For five days, I wrestled with it, guilt clawing at me as an idea took root. In the end, I stole small coins from my father's pockets, a rupee from my mother's purse, bits scraped together from wherever I could. It felt wrong, but wanting to reach her felt stronger.

I didn't buy it near home—too risky. I went far, to a shop I'd never been to, scanning shelves until I found it: a tiny glass dome, a couple inside, pink sparkles swirling in water when you shook it. Fifty rupees—a fortune for me. I handed over my stolen hoard, wrapped it in paper, and hid it in my bag the day before school started again after winter break. January 3rd would be the day. I'd walk up, say, "This is for you," and leave it at that.

That morning, I walked into school with my heart hammering, the gift a weight in my hands. I'd rehearsed it a hundred times. But she wasn't there—not in the classroom, not at her desk. Someone said she was rehearsing for the school program. I swallowed hard, gathered every shred of courage, and went to find her.

She was dancing. Not alone—Sanjay was with her, bold and loud, the kind of boy I'd never be. They moved together, her steps light and sure, his grin wide. She laughed, spinning under the lights, and the sound hit me like a stone. I stood there, frozen, the gift clutched tight. She didn't see me. She didn't need to. In that moment, I saw it clearly: I was nothing in her world, a shadow too small to cast a mark.

The courage I'd built shattered. I couldn't do it. I turned back, stuffed the gift deep into my bag, and let it stay there, wrapped and unspoken. That was the end of me and JAY.

A few days later, the transfer was done. I left without a goodbye, without a word. She'd never know I'd been there, never know what she'd meant. I took nothing with me but silence—and a memory that would grow heavier with time, shaping me in ways I couldn't see yet.

CHAPTER 5

FADING INTO THE PAST— THE DUST THAT SETTLED

Life has a cruel knack for sanding down the edges that once drew blood.

The jagged sting of abandoning my old school, the hollow ache of JAY's absence, the restless questions that had jolted me from sleep—they didn't shatter and scatter in a single blow. They eroded, grain by grain, day bleeding into day, until they softened into a distant haze, a murmur I could barely trace.

The boy who'd borne that weight, who'd dared to reach for something beyond the dark—he slipped back into the shadows of his own tale.

I let him go, released him like a breath held too long. It was easier that way—surrendering the flicker, letting the quiet reclaim its throne. I didn't fight to keep him alive; I didn't have the strength to mourn his retreat.

The new school was a husk to me—nothing but another shell of brick and mortar, another grid of desks worn smooth by indifference.

Roll call droned on, my name a faint ripple in the air, barely stirring the surface. I sank back into the mold I'd always fit—the silent one, the unseen one, a specter drifting through the hours.

I wasn't sharper here, or bolder, or louder—not a spark of what I'd glimpsed in myself before.

No friends clustered around me, their laughter a wall I didn't breach; no teachers summoned me with hope in their eyes. I gave them no cause to linger, no hint to peer closer. I arrived each day, punctual as a clock's tick—my one thin thread of order—but that was the sum of it.

I didn't vie for notice, didn't lift my hand, didn't strain against the tide.

I melted into the walls, a wraith cloaked in plaster and dust, and I didn't chafe at it. Being furniture again—unnoticed, unremarked—felt like slipping into an old coat, worn and familiar. I didn't mind the fit. JAY faded too, her brilliance dimming in the corridors of my mind.

Her name, her face, the crisp edge of her voice—they blurred like ink smeared by a storm, a sketch left to dissolve in the rain. Those fragments—her handwriting curling across a page, the glass pieces glinting under the Safeda tree, the gift I'd buried in my bag—they grew foreign, less mine with every month that trudged past.

I didn't clutch at them, didn't wrestle to keep their outlines crisp.

They drifted, sinking into some shadowed nook of my memory, a vault I didn't bother to unlock. She wasn't a beacon anymore—not the sun I'd once orbited. She was a relic, a whisper I barely brushed with my fingertips.

Time stretched on, relentless and unyielding—days piling into months, months hardening into years.

Fifth standard, sixth, seventh—they flowed through me like water through a sieve, leaving no imprint, no residue. Wake up, trudge to school, shuffle home. Repeat. A rhythm as dull as a heartbeat, steady but lifeless.

I had no dreams to hunt, no ember to coax into flame.

I wasn't joyful—not in any way that mattered—but I wasn't broken either. I simply was—existing, not

living, tethered to the same gray rhythm I'd known before she'd ever stirred me to notice the world beyond. Looking back, I see it now: I chose to let her fade.

Not because I craved her gone, but because clinging to her—to that fragile pulse of wanting—demanded a fire I couldn't muster. It was simpler to let the questions dissolve, to pretend that night beneath the ceiling beams, staring into the dark, had never carved itself into me.

Simpler to play the boy who didn't care, who didn't reach.

So, I did. I sealed the door on JAY, on the glass dome festering in my bag, on the sliver of me that had almost cracked open. And for a while, it held—my surrender a quiet fortress, impenetrable and still. Years later, I'd convince myself she was nothing—a fleeting wisp from a childhood too small to carry weight.

A girl I'd conjured into more than she was, then let slip through my fingers like sand. I told myself her mark

had worn away, washed clean by time's steady tide—that she hadn't shifted me, hadn't left a trace. But fate's a stubborn craftsman, and it doesn't release its threads so easily.

Though I didn't sense it then, buried in my self-made dusk, JAY wasn't finished with me. Her echo lingered, a chisel poised above the stone, waiting to strike again.

CHAPTER 6

THE RETURN OF A MEMORY

My new school wasn't just different—it was a world apart. Aadarsh Vidya Mandir, a Sanskrit-medium fortress of tradition, swallowed me whole. Prayers echoed in ancient tones, rules carved in stone, teachers draped in authority—Acharya Ji, they were called, not Sir or Madam. And I was nothing to them. A dull boy, a lost cause, too quiet to matter. They didn't see potential; they saw failure, and their answer was discipline—harsh, unrelenting. Beatings were routine, a rhythm of slaps and scolding meant to mold me into something I wasn't. At home, they'd visit, sipping tea with my parents, welcomed like sages while I stood in the corner, fair game for their wrath. It didn't change me.

I stayed the same—silent, invisible, drifting through.

Life pulled me along, a current I didn't fight. The old school JAY, that flicker of something more—they faded into a distant hum, locked away somewhere I didn't look. I was back to who I'd been before: a shadow in the classroom, a name on a list, showing up every day but never really there. No friends, no spark, no reason to try. I wasn't living—just existing, caught in a loop of waking, walking, waiting. Years passed—fifth standard, sixth, seventh—and I let them blur, let her blur, until she was just a name, I barely whispered to myself.

But fate doesn't let you forget forever.

It was 2008, four years since I'd last seen her. Our city was small—paths crossed if you stayed long enough—but she'd been a ghost until that day. I was in the market, weaving through the crowd, the air thick with dust and voices, when I saw her. Time stopped. She was there, steps away, unchanged yet sharpened by the years—older, taller, her grace still cutting through the chaos.

My chest tightened, and I ducked behind a stall, heart hammering. I don't know why I hid—maybe I wasn't ready to face her or what she'd once meant. I watched, breath shallow, as she moved past, oblivious. She didn't see me, but I saw her, and the flood of it—memory, longing, fear—hit me harder than I'd expected.

I told myself it was nothing, a fluke. Days later, I'd half-convinced myself she was gone again. Then I saw her a second time. In the same market, under the same sun, our eyes met. Before I could turn away, she smiled—a small, simple curve of her lips, no words, no wave. Just that. My mind blanked. My pulse raced, drowning out the noise around me. That smile—was its recognition? Kindness? It didn't matter. It was everything. For a moment, the dull gray of my life lit up, and I felt alive again, like I hadn't in years.

After that, I went back to the market too often, lingering in the streets, hoping for another glimpse, another spark. But she never came. Time swept her away again, leaving me with nothing but that smile—a fleeting flare that dimmed as fast as it had burned.

Then fate pulled harder. One afternoon, my uncle handed me a tiffin to deliver to his daughter at my old school. The words twisted something inside me. I didn't want to go back. That place held too much—memories I'd buried, feelings I'd outrun. But I couldn't say no. The walk there felt heavy, each step dragging me closer to a past I wasn't ready for. When I reached the gate, it hit me—the smell of dust and eucalyptus, the chatter spilling from classrooms, the stool where I'd once sat waiting. It was the same, yet I wasn't.

The bell rang for break, and I prayed my cousin would hurry out. I kept my head down, hands sweaty, willing myself invisible. Then they came—old classmates, their eyes catching on me like I was a stranger in their story. They stared, whispered, and I shrank under it, my pulse a frantic thud. I wanted to run. And then she appeared.

JAY.

She stepped into the yard, surrounded by that same effortless glow—older now, but still her, still the girl who'd made me feel small and seen all at once. Our eyes locked, just for a breath. Panic clawed up my throat. Before she could move, before she could speak, I turned and bolted. Legs pumping, heart slamming, I ran like the shy boy I'd always been, away from her, away from everything she stirred up.

I didn't stop until I was far from the gate, gasping, hands on my knees. It wasn't just fear that chased me that day—not just the old shyness or the weight of her gaze. It was deeper, sharper. JAY wasn't just a memory anymore. She was a mirror, reflecting a boy I'd tried to forget—the one who'd wanted, who'd felt, who'd almost dared. Running didn't bury her this time. It dug her up.

After that, I stayed away from the school and told myself it was nothing, just nerves. But I couldn't lie to the ache inside me. Something had shifted again, cracked open. JAY had come back—not just to my eyes, but to the part of me I'd silenced.

Time marched on, as relentless as ever, but the past wouldn't fade anymore. It had found me, and this time, it wouldn't let go.

CHAPTER 7

A NEW WORLD, THE SAME ME

In 2007, my parents decided I needed a better school. Another change I didn't ask for, another uprooting I couldn't stop. They pinned their hopes on an English-medium education as if a new language could rewrite who I was. But I was terrified. Change had always been a shadow looming over me, and this one loomed larger than ever. I wasn't smart, I had no dreams to chase, and now I'd have to face a world where even the words felt foreign. Mohta Public School was the name—a place that promised progress, but to me, it was just another cage.

It wasn't like the schools I'd known. No Sanskrit chants, no Acharya Ji with their stern hands. Here, the principal stood out—a man with crisp English and a modern air, a flicker of something different. But the rest? It drowned me. The students strode with confidence, their voices sharp and sure, their books thick with lessons I couldn't follow. The syllabus towered over me; a mountain I had no tools to climb. I didn't belong here—I was an imposter, a boy from a dusty past pretending he could keep up. But I couldn't. I was still me—silent, hesitant, lost.

Everything felt out of reach, except for math. Numbers didn't care if I stumbled over English or shrank in my seat. They were steady, logical, a quiet corner I could hold onto. While others groaned at equations, I found peace in them. Hindi too—it was mine, familiar, a thread from the life I'd known. But beyond that, I was nothing. My notebooks stayed half-empty, my homework a ghost that never showed. Teachers glanced past me, their eyes fixed on the bright ones, the ones who mattered. I gave them no reason to linger.

I stood out in one way, though—my height, or lack of it. While my classmates stretched taller, broader, their voices deepening with every year, I stayed small.

A runt in a room of giants, a body that wouldn't catch up. It was another mark of my difference, another reason I didn't fit. I shrank into myself, unseen, unimportant, just another face in the crowd.

With no drive to prove myself, I found a way to survive—cheating. It wasn't pride or mischief; it was necessity. Studying felt like climbing a wall with no footholds, so I leaned on others—copying answers, sneaking glances, piecing together just enough to pass. I wasn't good at it, but I got by. No one noticed, or if they did, they didn't care. The teachers had their stars—the ambitious, the gifted—and I wasn't one of them. They'd given up on me, and I'd given up on trying to change that.

Time dragged on—eighth standard, ninth—and I drifted through it, same as always. Unremarkable, unmotivated, a shadow in a school that shone too bright for me. JAY was a distant echo by then, a name I hadn't spoken in years, a memory I'd let fade. Life was a flat line, and I was fine with that. Until 2009-10, when a question broke the silence.

Abhishek Goswami—tallest guy in the class, a tower next to my stunted frame—caught me off guard one day. We weren't friends, just two bodies in the same room. But he turned to me, casual as anything, and asked, "Who do you like? Who do you love?"

I froze. The question hung there, simple but heavy, peeling back years I'd buried. I could've brushed it off, stayed quiet like always. But something cracked open, and I spilled it all. JAY. Her name tumbled out, clumsy and raw, and with it came the story—the girl who'd lit up my world, the smile I'd chased, the memory I'd run from. I told him about the old school, the glass pieces, the gift I never gave. He listened, head tilted, like it was a tale worth hearing.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

I didn't know. She'd vanished after that day by the school gate—gone from my sight, my city, my life. The truth stung, but I didn't say it. Instead, I lied. "She'll be coming here next year," I said, voice steady despite the shake inside.

"You'll see."

I don't know why I said it. Maybe I wanted it to be true, wanted her to step back into my story and make it mean something again. Maybe I needed to believe I hadn't lost her for good. It was a reckless wish, thrown out like a coin into a well. But that day, I think the universe heard me. Something—God, fate, whatever you call it—listened. And what came next was beyond anything I could've dreamed.

The stage was set. The world was about to turn again. But that's a story for another day.

CHAPTER 8

THE CHOICE THAT CHOSE ME—THE FORK IN THE DUST

Looking back, it's strange how certain I was. I always pictured myself as a scientist; it was just something I knew. Science was my thing, always on my mind, and I was sure I'd be a scientist. Deep down, I always had this scientist's dream, it was a constant thought, a quiet hum in the background of my life. It wasn't just a fleeting idea; the desire to become a scientist was a constant, unwavering presence in my mind. Being a scientist was the only career I could imagine, it was perpetually on my mind.

My mind was consumed with the idea of being a scientist, it was a constant, internal dialogue. But, as life often does, it took a turn I never saw coming. Though my mind was once filled with dreams of scientific discovery, that path has shifted. I once held a singular vision of myself as a scientist, a vision that has since evolved. Before everything changed, I was certain I'd become a scientist; it was my constant inner thought.

(And then, I was just the opposite. Everything I thought I knew, every path I envisioned, simply dissolved. The certainty I held so tightly became a distant memory, replaced by a reality I could never have predicted.)

The year 2009-10 slipped through my fingers like sand, and with it loomed a shadow every student at Mohta Public School knew too well: the choice.

Science, Commerce, or Arts—three doors dangled before us, stark and unyielding, a trinity of paths etched into the air. They called it freedom, but the lie was plain. Arts flickered like a ghost's whisper—a refuge for the aimless, the drifters, the ones too weary to fight.

No one spoke its name with gravity; it was a jest, a footnote. Science and Commerce stood taller, twin titans bearing the weight of futures we were told to crave.

I'd grown up with 'Science' pounding in my ears—a relentless drumbeat of engineering, medicine, and the gilded highways to honor.

My father's stethoscope hung in our home like a silent talisman, its curve a badge I'd traced with my eyes since I could remember. Some shard of me—unquestioned, unformed—had always assumed I'd chase its echo. Not a blueprint, not a vow, just a vague silhouette lurking in the corners of my mind, a path I'd never thought to challenge.

But when the moment crashed down, when the forms sprawled across the desk and the teachers' gazes pressed like weights, I froze.

Not with insight or rebellion—just a stillness, a deep, practiced quiet I'd honed through years of floating through life. My pen hovered, a trembling sentinel caught in the chasm between expectation and the void.

*I didn't know what to feel—didn't know how to choose
when choosing felt like waking from a dream I'd never
had.*

*It wasn't a decision carved with care—no grand
council of pros and cons, no visions of who I'd become.*

*I didn't ponder late into the night and didn't sketch
dreams of white coats or ledger books. I just turned
my head, slow as rust, and watched. The 'good'
students—the ones with easy grins, straight spines, a
sureness stitched into their steps—they were flocking
to Commerce. Not all, but enough to tilt the scales.*

*They glowed with a certainty I couldn't touch, a
lightness that made the path seem warm, paved, safe.*

*Science reared like a jagged peak—steep, frigid,
bristling with equations I could wrestle but riddles I
couldn't face. Commerce whispered softer, less
solitary, a current I could drift in without drowning.
So, I leaned into it—not a leap, not a charge, just a tilt
toward the tide.*

No fire fueled it, no blazing epiphany lit the way.

I didn't mull over careers—accounts, business, terms that floated past me like smoke—or map a college spire on the horizon. Five years ahead? A blank slate I didn't dare ink. It was simpler, rawer than that. In that brittle moment, Commerce felt right—not because I grasped it, not because it called my name, but because it didn't look like a specter.

It was a crowd I could melt into, a shadow I could cloak myself beneath.

That was enough—enough to steady my breath, enough to dodge the chill of standing apart. I didn't choose it for glory or gain; I chose it for the quiet it promised, the ease of blending into the throng.

Looking back, I see the blindness stitched into that day, the threads I couldn't fathom.

It wasn't just a subject I marked with a trembling check—it was a filament, fine and unseen, tugging me toward a tapestry I couldn't yet glimpse. But then? It was a box ticked, a sigh exhaled, a fleeting relief at not being the stray sheep in the herd.

*I didn't know I was stepping into a riverbed; its
currents coiled to twist and surge beyond my sight.*

*I chose Commerce—or perhaps it chose me, a silent
pact sealed without fanfare. Without a murmur of
why, without a spark of intent, I wandered into a
world that would bend and weave me toward shores
I'd never dared to chart.*

CHAPTER 9

THE ARRIVAL THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Today, I look at myself and see someone I never thought I'd be. Mathematics lights up my mind, science fuels my curiosity, and I run a student awareness program with a purpose I didn't know I could have. But how did I get here? How did a boy who drifted through life, who hid in shadows and cheated to survive, become this? The answer is one word, one person: JAY. She walked into my school—into my life—and turned everything I knew upside down. Back then, I didn't see it coming.

Now, looking back, I know her arrival was the hinge my story swung on.

In 2009-10, something had already started shifting inside me. Not in grades or goals—my notebooks were still a mess, my teachers still looked past me—but in the way I felt. My thoughts stretched wider, my heart beat heavier, though I couldn't name why. The year before, I'd tossed out a lie to Abhishek Goswami, the tallest guy in the class, when he'd asked who I loved. "JAY," I'd said, then added, "She'll be here next year. You'll see." It was nothing—a

reckless wish, a dodge to keep him from digging deeper. I had no proof, no hope it'd come true. Abhishek left Mohta Public School not long after, and I figured that was the end of it. But the universe, it seems, had other plans.

It was 2010-11, early in the new term, when she arrived. I'll never forget that day—the way the classroom door creaked open, the way the chatter of eleventh standard dulled to a hum in my ears. She stepped in, and time slowed. JAY. Here. Real. Her hair caught the light, longer now but still hers, her stride steady with that same grace I'd memorized years ago.

The air shifted, or maybe it was just me—my chest tightening, my pulse thudding loud enough to drown out everything else. She was back, like a dream I'd spoken into being, and I couldn't breathe through the weight of it.

I'd pictured this a hundred times after that lie—her walking in, me saying something clever, her smiling like she remembered. But the reality hit harder. My mind spun, a tangle of noise. Should I talk to her? Wave? Pretend I didn't care? What if she'd forgotten me—the quiet boy with the glass pieces, the one who ran? What if she hadn't? I sat there, hands clenched under my desk, staring at my half-scribbled Commerce notes like they'd save me. She didn't see me right away, and I was glad for it. Those few seconds let me pull myself together—or try to. I slouched and faked calm, but inside, I was unraveling.

She wasn't just a memory crashing back. She was a spark, a jolt, the start of something I didn't understand yet. Her being here, in this school, in this classroom, wasn't a reunion—it was a rewriting. I didn't know it then,

but that day cracked open the shell I'd built, the one I'd hidden in for years. The details of what came next—her first words, her unknowing push—deserve their telling. Because from that moment, nothing was the same.

CHAPTER 10

THE MOMENT SHE SPOKE

When JAY stepped back into my world, everything stopped. The hum of the classroom, the scratch of pens, the drone of the Commerce lecture—it all faded. I sat in the last row, my usual spot, pinned there by habit and the quiet rejection of everyone else. My mind snapped back to that day with Abhishek, the tallest shadow in the room, when I'd spun a lie out of thin air: "She'll be here next year." A reckless throwaway, a wish I'd never dared to believe. And now, in 2010-11, eleventh standard, she was here. Standing in my classroom. Destiny didn't just knock—it kicked the door down.

I wanted to tell him, to shove it in his face, that I wasn't a liar anymore. But Abhishek was gone, off to some other school, and phones were still a rich kid's toy—I had no way to reach him. So, I

sat there, alone with it, my thoughts a storm. She was real, not a ghost I'd conjured. The universe had heard me, bent to my words, and I didn't know whether to laugh or run.

A month into the term, she walked in—late to the year, flanked by a couple of friends, her presence cutting through the room like it always had. I didn't choose the back—it's where I'd landed, where no one bothered to sit with me. I'd made peace with it or stopped caring. But then her eyes swept the rows, searching, and they found me. She saw me. And she remembered.

I couldn't look straight at her. My hands shot up, shielding my face, pretending to adjust my hair or scratch an itch—anything to hide the heat climbing my neck. I stole glances through my fingers, quick and shaky,

afraid she'd catch me staring, afraid she'd see the mess I was inside. She was older now, sharper somehow, but still JAY—still the girl who'd lit up my fourth-standard days with a smile and a handful of glass.

Then she moved. Straight toward me. My pulse roared, a drumbeat I couldn't quiet. She stopped by my desk, and I braced myself, eyes locked on the scribbles in my notebook like they'd save me. And then she spoke.

"Hello," she said, her voice clear, warm, edged with that smile I'd never forgotten. "I know you. You're Dhananjay, right? We were in the same school before."

My heart slammed against my ribs, loud enough I swore she'd hear it. Dhananjay. She'd said my name—my full name, not just "d," not some half-remembered blur. I opened my mouth, scrambling for something smart, something worth her time, but nothing came. Silence swallowed me whole. She didn't wait for it, though—she kept going, filling the gap I couldn't.

"I don't know anyone here," she said, a flicker of shyness softening her confidence. "I missed the first month, and I need help catching up. Can you help me understand what's been covered so far?"

Help her. Me. The words hit like a jolt, knocking the air out of me. She was JAY—brilliant, bold, the girl who'd never lagged—and she was asking me. The boy in the back, the one no one noticed, the one who cheated his way through half-finished homework. She could've asked anyone—the sharp girls up front, the ones who traded notes like currency. But she didn't. She chose me.

The room shifted. Eyes turned, heads tilted—every classmate watching, their stares prickling my skin. The new girl, beautiful and sure, talking to me? I could feel it, the question humming through them: Why him? Why the quiet one? But it didn't matter. Because she was looking at me, waiting, and for the first time in years, I wasn't invisible.

One of the girls piped up, all eager smiles. “I can help you catch up!” JAY shook her head, firm but kind. “No, thanks. I have an old friend—Dhananjay.”

Old friend. The words rang in my skull, loud and bright, drowning out everything else. The girl blinked, stunned— “Old friend?!”—and I barely heard her. Old friend. JAY had picked me. Over everyone. My chest swelled, my head spun, a rush so sharp I forgot to breathe. I wasn’t even thinking about how I’d help—my Commerce notes were a mess, my grasp on the term shaky at best. None of that mattered. She’d chosen me. Just me.

In that moment, something broke open. The world tilted, and I knew—right then, with her standing there, smiling down at me—that everything was about to change again. This time, I wouldn’t let it slip through my fingers.

CHAPTER 11

A SHIFT IN THE UNIVERSE

I'd always been a half-finished sketch—notebooks incomplete, lessons half-learned, a boy who drifted through school like a ghost. Teachers had tried to carve me into something better, and my family had shuffled me through schools like a piece on a board, but nothing stuck. I stayed the same—unseen, unmade. Until she chose me. When JAY walked back into my life and spoke my name, the universe tilted. Everything I was, everything I'd been, started to shift—not because I willed it, but because she did.

She'd come a month late to eleventh standard, a stranger in a room full of strangers, and somehow, I was the only face she knew. Me—the boy in the back, the one no one picked. It wasn't chance; it was bigger than that. Every step, every school change, every quiet day I'd spent fading away—it had all led here, to this. The universe had been waiting, threading our paths together, and her arrival snapped it all into place.

She came to me that Saturday, her voice steady as ever. "I need a notebook to complete the work I missed."

My heart slammed against my ribs, a frantic beat I couldn't quiet. "I'll give it to you on Monday," I managed, the words tumbling out before I could think. Thank God it was the weekend—two days to pull off a miracle. Two days to become someone I'd never been. I nodded like I had it under control, but inside, I was scrambling. My notebooks were a mess—scattered scribbles, gaps where lessons should've been. I had nothing to give her, nothing worthy of her trust.

So, I turned to Naveen. He was everything I wasn't—sharp, disciplined, the kind of student teachers pointed to and said,

"Be like him." His notes were perfect, every page a testament to a mind I couldn't match. I found him after class, my voice tight. "I need all your notebooks."

He blinked, thrown. "You've never asked for this before. Why now?"

I didn't have an answer, not one I could say out loud. "I just need it," I said, firm enough to dodge the question. He shrugged and handed them over, confusion creasing his brow. And then I went home and did something I'd never done: I worked. Two days, a full month's worth of Commerce—accounts, economics, dates, and definitions—copied out in a frantic rush. My handwriting wobbled, my understanding thinner than the paper, but it didn't matter. All I could think was her—her needing this, her counting on me. That was enough.

Monday came, and I gave her the notebook, my palms sweaty, my chest tight. She took it with a nod, a small "thanks," and I watched her flip through it, praying it held up. It wasn't just notes I'd handed over—it was a

piece of me, a proof I could be more than nothing. For the first time, I had a reason, a pull stronger than apathy. Her.

She started coming to me after that—questions about the syllabus, doubts I barely grasped myself. I didn't know the answers, not really. But I found them. I'd take her words, run to Naveen or whoever else had the smarts, untangle the solutions, and bring them back like they were mine. Day after day, I built a bridge between her questions and their answers, a shaky one I crossed for her. She saw it—the effort, the scramble—and she didn't turn away.

Every time I got it right, she'd smile. That smile—small, bright, a flash of light in my gray world. It was worth every late night, every borrowed page, every doubt I pushed through. It wasn't about the work, not really. It was about her seeing me, about me seeing myself through her.

I changed after that. My notebooks filled up, not out of some grand ambition, but because I had to be ready. She could ask me anything, any day, and I couldn't let her down. I listened in class—really listened—catching the threads of lessons I'd

ignored before. When I stumbled, I hunted down answers—Naveen, the front-row kids, anyone who knew. Not to shine, not to win—just to keep up with her. She was my reason, my rhythm, the only passion I'd ever felt.

The universe had moved, and I moved with it. She'd chosen me, and in that choice, I started choosing myself.

CHAPTER 12

AN UNSEEN RIVALRY

Once JAY found her footing, she bloomed. The classroom bent toward her like flowers to the sun, her steps through the corridors tracing a new constellation. The “new girl” tag peeled away, replaced by something solid, woven deep into eleventh standard’s fabric. She was everywhere—laughing with friends, answering questions with that steady grace—and I watched, still tethered to her orbit by the notes I’d scrambled to make hers. But as she settled, a shadow crept in a boy named

Himanshu who'd change everything I'd started to build.

It began with him finding me in the back row, where I'd always sat alone. "You don't need to sit by yourself anymore," he said, his voice bright with a confidence I'd never touched. "From now on, you'll sit with me."

The words hit like a lifeline. Himanshu was a storm—tall, loud, a whirlwind of charm that pulled everyone in. Teachers nodded at his answers, girls lingered on his grins, his every word landing with weight. To be picked by him, to step out of my quiet corner and into his glow, felt like waking up. For a moment, I wasn't just the short kid with messy notes—I belonged. I let myself believe it, let myself breathe in that flicker of being seen.

But it wasn't real. Himanshu didn't want me—he wanted her. I was a bridge, a pawn in a game I didn't see until it was too late. He'd mapped it out with a cold precision: sit with me, get to her. And it worked. They talked constantly—her voice mixing with his in a hum I couldn't break into. When she came to me with a question, he'd appear, sliding into our space like

he'd always been there. When we spoke, he'd turn it into a show, his laugh drowning out my stumbles. He was a thief of moments, chipping away at the thread between us, and I didn't know how to stop it.

I didn't fight. I couldn't. I was happy just to see her, even if it was through the bars of his shadow. She'd smile at me sometimes—small, fleeting—and it was enough to keep me there, tethered, content to stay small. I knew who I was: short, slow, a kid who'd never outgrow his own edges. I had nothing to offer her, no claim to stake. I'd accepted it, or told myself I had, burying what I felt under layers of quiet.

Then, he struck the final blow. One day, in the middle of class, his voice cut through the chatter like a blade. "We're together," he said, eyes sweeping the room, bold and sure. "Jay and I."

The air thickened, the words sinking in slow and heavy.

Heads turned; whispers rippled—people believed him. Why wouldn't they? Himanshu was a story weaver, spinning half-truths and swagger into something solid. His charm made it real; his confidence sealed it shut. "Jay and I"—like it was gospel, like she'd nodded along. I froze, breath caught, a bystander in a scene I'd never scripted. I hadn't said a word about her, hadn't dared voice the ache I carried. And now, he'd taken it—rewritten it—before I'd even found the courage to speak.

I didn't challenge him. How could I? I was nothing next to him—a ghost in short pants, a shadow with no spine. I had no proof, no fight, no right to say he was wrong. The truth was mine alone, a silent pulse I'd never let out, and he'd swept in with a lie louder than I'd ever be. All I could do was stand there, watching, as he claimed what I'd never dared to dream. The threads I'd held—fragile, unspoken—snapped under the weight of his words, leaving me with nothing but the echo of a chance I'd never taken.

CHAPTER 13

SILENT BATTLES

The days dragged on, heavy and slow, each one pressing a bruise deeper into my chest. JAY and Himanshu moved together like a song I couldn't unhear—her laughter weaving with his, a sound that cut through me every time. I watched from the edges, a stranger to my own heart, nursing a pain I had no right to feel. I'd never spoken it, never let the words slip past my teeth. They stayed locked inside, burning, and I told myself I deserved this—deserved to ache for something I'd never claimed.

Himanshu was a paradox, a gift and a curse. He'd pulled me from my lonely corner, sat me beside him, made me visible for the first time.

But it wasn't for me. He'd taken that light—JAY, the quiet space I'd held for her—and turned it into his stage. Now I was a bystander, haunting my own story, watching him fill the air I'd once breathed with her. Their voices bounced off the classroom walls, a hum I couldn't touch, and I sat there, a ghost caught between belonging and losing.

I'd always taken what came—solitude, silence, the way people's eyes slid past me. It was my rhythm, my shield. But this was different. This was her. And for the first time, being powerless didn't just sit quietly—it hurt. Sharp, real, a twist in my gut I couldn't ignore. I tried to build a lie, a fragile wall of "I'm fine"—fine with her happiness, fine with her nearness, even if it was his arm she leaned into. But it crumbled every time I saw them, every time his grin claimed what I couldn't. I wasn't fine. I was trapped, choking on feelings I'd never let out.

Something stirred then, a quiet push against the weight. I couldn't have her—I knew that, had always known it—but I could be more than this. I started listening in class, pencil moving, ears open, not for grades or glory, but for something to hold onto. I studied—not to shine, but to matter. If I couldn't reach her heart, I'd earn her nod, her "thanks," a

scrap of her respect. I refused to stay nothing, a blur in the back row. Not anymore.

And then there was the gift. That small glass dome from 2004—pink sparkles swirling around a tiny couple—a piece of me I'd stolen coins for, wrapped, and never given. It had sat in my bag, then my drawer, for seven years, a secret I'd carried through schools and silences. This year, 2011, I decided it was time. January 5th, after winter break, I'd give it to her, tell her the story—how I'd picked it for her birthday, how it'd waited all this time. I tucked it into my bag that morning, my hands steady with a resolve I hadn't felt before.

But Himanshu was there, always there. Eleventh standard stretched out in desks and whispers, and he stuck to her like a shadow. I needed her alone—just a minute, a breath—but it never came. Half-leave rolled around, the room thinning out, and I sat there, the gift a weight against my spine, waiting. She laughed with him across the room, her voice bright, his louder. I stared at my desk, tracing old scratches, willing him to leave. He didn't. He stayed, planted, like he knew—like he could smell the hope I'd packed in my bag.

The bell rang, the day ended, and I walked home with it still hidden, untouched, unsaid.

It's still with me now, tucked away in my house—a relic of a moment I couldn't make real. I'd edge toward speaking, feel the words rise, taste them on my tongue— "JAY, I've kept this for you"—and then freeze. What if she laughed? What if she turned away? What if I lost even the thin thread of her friendship, the only piece I had? Fear clamped down, every time, and I stayed silent, guarding a secret too heavy to carry, too fragile to share.

A war started then, quiet and fierce, inside me. Not against Himanshu—he'd already won—but against myself. Against the boy who shrank, who hid, who let love sit unspoken until it soured. I fought my own doubts, my own smallness, the terror of her rejection. The gift stayed in its box, the words stayed in my throat, but the battle raged on—a silent storm, carving out a space where "d" might become something more.

CHAPTER 14

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HER AND THE REST –THE LIGHT THAT CUT THROUGH

A question hums in the hollows of my mind, soft as a pulse, persistent as a tide: What was it about her?

What carved JAY into a filament of light, threading through the fabric of my days with such quiet force that even now, years unfurled like worn pages, I bear her name with a reverence I can't shake? She wasn't just a figure in my orbit—she was the exception, the seam where my story split wide. Had anyone else stood in her stead, the tale would've dulled—thinner, grayer, a flicker snuffed out before it caught.

She was beautiful—stunning, a radiance that could've hardened into frost, could've sharpened into a blade of disdain.

Someone like her, cloaked in that glow, could've swept past me without a flicker of notice—me, a nothing in the room's dim corners. I was no sight to linger on—shy, stunted, a wisp of a boy ripe for the barbs and sneers that rained down like ash. Kids flung names at me, their eyes skimming over my frame like I was a smear on their path.

I swallowed it, head bowed, my silence a shield worn thin by habit.

But JAY? She never joined the chorus. She didn't glide past me like I was air, didn't lend her voice to the subtle venom that coiled around me. Her gaze never slid through me—she anchored it, steady and sure, seeing what they refused to.

It wasn't just that she held back from their cruelty—it was more, a quiet fortress she raised around me.

When the taunts flew, her eyes would shift—not with thunder, not with a shout, but with a gleam, a spark of something fierce and unyielding. A wall forged in silence, one no one dared scale.

I remember Himanshu once, his voice slick with swagger, tossing a dart my way.

"Why do you even bother with him?" he sneered, his grin a hook baiting the room to bite. She didn't flinch. She turned—slow, deliberate, her stare slicing through his bravado like a shard of glass through silk. No words—just that fire, that unspoken enough.

His laugh withered, a flame doused in her shadow, and the air bent beneath her will.

He faltered, the room stilled, and I felt it—a shift, a breath where I wasn't the jest. She didn't need to speak to shield me; her presence was a blade all its own, wielded without fanfare.

*And her smile—God, that smile, a dawn breaking
across her face every time she caught my eye.*

*It bloomed warm and true—not a flicker of pity, not a
taunt’s cruel edge, but a kindness so pure it disarmed
me. A nod that whispered I was there, I counted. She
must’ve known—sensed the weight I carried for her,
the tide of feeling I buried beneath every stolen
glance.*

*Anyone else might’ve smirked, might’ve walled me off,
might’ve cast me out with a shrug.*

*Not her. She let me linger, let me harbor what I felt,
never shrinking it into something trivial or laughable.
She didn’t push me away; didn’t judge the quiet storm
I nursed. She simply was—steady as stone, open as
sky, a grace I’d never tasted before.*

*Voices hounded me to tell her—classmates, cousins,
well-meaning echoes pressing like thorns.*

“Confess,” they urged, as if it were a game, as if baring my soul wouldn’t fracture the only tether I clung to. To me, she was celestial—too radiant, too vast. Chasing her love was like grasping at the heavens—foolish, perilous.

What if I lost her? What if I snapped this fragile thread, this gift of her nearness?

I couldn’t gamble that light. So, I didn’t reach for her heart—I reached to mirror her, to earn the respect she offered when no one else bothered. Not to claim her, but to stand worthy of the way she saw me. That’s what marked her apart—not just her beauty, her brilliance, though those gleamed bright enough.

Plenty wore those crowns, but they didn’t carry her weight. It was her—the way she held space for me, never whittling me down to less. Had it been anyone else, I’d have stayed a ghost—unseen, un forged. But JAY was different, a spark that kindled something in me I couldn’t ignore.

So, I decided, in eleventh standard’s waning months, with my parents’ murmurs of another school switch humming low, that this would be the year. Time was slipping, a clock ticking toward dusk.

*I'd do something—something tangible—to show her
what she'd wrought, to thank her for the rift she'd
torn in my small, shadowed world.*

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HER AND THE REST –THE LIGHT THAT CUT
THROUGH

CHAPTER 15

THE SHATTERED MIRROR, THE REBORN SELF –THE FORGE IGNITES

My twelfth year didn't nudge me—it tore me apart, a chasm ripped wide, jagged as broken stone.

No gentle push, no tender unraveling—this was a reckoning, a savage unmasking that clawed through the brittle lies I'd swaddled myself in. I turned the blade inward, cold steel against my soul, slicing with a brutal, unblinking truth. Who was I? What festering husk had I let myself rot into? And always, looping like a hawk in the wind: what was it about her—what burned in JAY that no other flame could rival?

She was the lightning that split my darkness—a bolt of searing light against my shroud of shadow.

Her kindness wasn't just a shield flung over me—it was a mirror, fractured and merciless, hurling back every warped contour I'd let fester. She didn't echo the taunts, didn't curl her lip at my smallness—her silence was a guillotine, severing the jeers with a glance, a quiet fire that needed no voice to roar.

That refusal, that unshakable respect, didn't just guard me—it stripped me bare.

It laid open the hollow boy I'd worn like a skin—the driftwood I'd settled for—and beneath it, glinting in the ruin, an ember pulsed, alive, starved, waiting to catch. She didn't just save me from them. She forced me to see myself.

Her smile struck deeper than any shout, a flare that scorched through my marrow.

No trace of pity, no sly barb—just a radiance, fierce and true, that pinned me where I stood. It whispered I was there; I was enough—a verdict that sank into my bones like molten iron, a truth I couldn't dodge. That respect—wordless, granite-steady—lit a fuse I didn't know I carried.

I wasn't condemned to fade, to skulk in the margins like a ghost. I could burn. I could blaze. Her light didn't just warm me—it ignited something feral, something I'd buried too long.

The world prodded—confess, chase her, cage her—but they missed the mark by miles.

It was never her love I hungered for—it was my own, a flame I'd starved, smothered behind bars I'd hammered shut. My shortness, my slowness, my silence—those weren't walls thrust upon me; they were shackles I'd forged, rusted and clawing at my flesh.

I swore then, in eleventh standard's twilight, as the days bled out, to shatter them.

No more cowering, no more drifting—I'd rip those cages open, claw my way free with bloodied hands if I had to. This wasn't a whim. It was a vow etched into the marrow of me.

I moved like a beast unchained, a hunger gnashing in my gut I hadn't known slept there.

Sports turned into my anvil—I ran until my lungs screamed, pushed until my muscles burned, hammered my frame into something solid, something mine. Sweat was my ink, effort my forge—I wasn't just shaping a body; I was smelting a will.

My mind snarled awake, ravenous, tearing into books, numbers, and ideas like a wolf on the prey.

Not for marks, not for nods from above—but for the meat of it, the raw, pulsing thrill of knowing. I devoured math, science, the sprawl of thought—gulping down the chaos, the beauty, the endless stretch of it all.

I watched the world now—people, rhythms, the gears grinding beneath the surface.

Hunting, gleaning, stitching it together with a predator's eye. I wasn't just a student anymore, a drone in a desk—I was a seeker, a stalker of truth, a mind unshackled and prowling free.

Intelligence wasn't a trinket handed to me—it was a beast I unearthed, claws bared, dripping with grit.

Sharp as a blade, wild as a storm, it roared past Commerce, past any narrow rut. Math locked into place like a skeleton key; science unfurled like a map to the infinite—Pi, untamed and sprawling, mirrored me, mirrored what I could claw into being.

This remaking was no gentle craft—it was a grinding, a scouring, a fire I fed with my own ragged hands.

Every step scraped, every breath stoked the blaze—I torched the old me, the quiet wraith, the shadow-kid, and rose from the cinders. Not her puppet, not her prize—she didn't mold this self and set it at my feet. She held the mirror, struck the spark, and I built the inferno.

*Observer, thinker, fighter, maker—I forged “dJAY,”
not to kneel at her altar, but because of her—because
she showed me the raw ore, I could smelt into
something fierce, something mine.*

CHAPTER 16

THE PERSON WHO MADE ME "ME"—THE HINGE OF MY FORGE

Life's a sly sculptor, twisting us down paths we don't chart, chiseling us in shadows and glimmers we can't foresee.

It bends us, molds us, with hands we don't feel until the shape's set. JAY wasn't just a passerby on my crooked road—she was the tempest that sundered it, a quiet fury that broke the earth beneath me. She didn't merely tread my world; she carved a trench, deep and enduring, a sigil no stretch of years, no expanse of miles, no veil of silence could erode.

I never told her—not a whisper, not a breath crossed that line.

Not because my tongue faltered or the words withered in my throat, but because the risk loomed too vast—I couldn't bear to lose what she was to me. To speak might've splintered her, might've dimmed the muse into a brittle memory too frail to hold.

What I felt wasn't love as the world paints it—not a thing to grasp or proclaim.

It stretched beyond possession, beyond the clamor of confessions—it was reverence, a hushed awe that trembled in my chest, a bond she didn't need to christen to render eternal. She wasn't mine to claim; she was mine to marvel at.

Looking back, it gleams like cut glass: JAY wasn't a chapter—she was the hinge, the iron spine that swung my story wide.

She flung the gate open with no fanfare, no guiding hand—just the weight of her being pushing me through. Because of her, I reached—not with timid fingers, but with a hunger I hadn't known slept in me. Past Commerce notes scratched in a weekend's frantic haze, past the classrooms where I'd dissolved into the walls.

It wasn't just school—it was life itself, raw and sprawling.

I wanted to rise, to stand taller—not to win her gaze, not to bask in her light, but to mirror the respect she'd cast my way, to forge it into my steel. She struck the spark; I fed the flames, stoking them high with my ragged breath.

She was the verse that turned the leaf, but the rest—the ink, the strokes, the epic—I etched alone.

And I did—oh, how I did. Sports honed my edges, a blade tempered in sweat and grit; math unraveled my mind, threads of logic snapping into a lattice I could climb; science fed a hunger I hadn't known gnawed at my core.

I built something—a program, a voice, a self—not for her nod, but for the mirror I held to my own face.

She didn't hand me "dJAY" like a gift wrapped in ribbon. She scattered the fragments—sharp, glinting, unpolished—and I gathered them, pieced them into a mosaic of my own making, a testament to the worth she'd glimpsed when I couldn't.

We all bear souls who reshape us—some linger like echoes, some drift like mist, and some root into the marrow of who we are.

JAY was that for me—not a treasure I clutched in desperation, but a keystone I carry, steady and timeless, polished by the years' quiet hands. Standing here, on this perch I've clawed to, I don't ache for what never bloomed.

Love doesn't demand a curtain call to hold meaning; its power lies in the journey, the forging.

*She was my silent muse, my north star blazing
through the void, the reason I hauled myself from the
dark—not with her hands, but with the light she cast.
She didn't pull me free; she showed me the chains,
and I broke them.*

*Maybe she was never meant to stay, never destined to
clasp my hand or drink the words I swallowed.*

*But she was meant to cross my path—in fourth
standard's gritty haze, in eleventh standard's tangled
snarl, in every constellation I've traced since. That's
enough—more than enough.*

*My strides, my growth, they weren't a tribute laid at
her feet—they were mine, forged from a respect that
deepened as I mapped her imprint across my years.*

*She didn't claim me as hers with a conqueror's mark.
She gifted me the tools—the spark, the mirror—and I
carved myself into "dJAY," a self I claimed, a man I
made mine.*

CHAPTER 17

DAWN OF dJAY – A TITAN RISES FROM THE FORGE

*Life's a rogue cartographer, a trickster with a quill,
sketching bends and breaks you'd never dare map,
twisting you into forms you'd mock in the rear view's
haze.*

*It's a relentless hand, drafting chaos into your bones.
JAY wasn't just a silhouette flickering through my tale
—she was the gale that ripped it asunder, silent as a
dagger's edge, fierce as a wildfire unleashed, searing
me with a brand no tick of time, no stretch of miles,
no tectonic shift could scour away.*

She didn't knead me like some pliant clay, soft and yielding under her palms.

She jolted me awake—a thunderclap to my slumber—thrusting the chisel into my trembling grip, daring me to carve. I took it, hacked at the stone of myself with ragged, relentless swings, and sculpted the rest from the rubble she left smoldering.

I never breathed a word to her—not a syllable, not a whisper dared escape my lips.

Not from a spine too frail to bear the weight, but from a gut-twisting dread of losing what she was—a beacon piercing my dusk, a looking glass flashing my worth, a force I thirsted for more than I ached to clasp. To speak risked snapping that fragile filament, dulling her radiance into something brittle, something less than the titan she towered as in my marrow.

This wasn't love you trap in a snare, a prize to net and cage.

It was quieter, deeper—vaster than the shallow songs of possession. Reverence pulsed in my veins, awe shuddered through my ribs—a bond she didn't need to

*forged in iron to make unbreakable, a tether I carried
without chains.*

*She was the fracture, the fulcrum—the goddamn
hinge that wrenched my world ajar.*

*Back in eleventh grade, her kindness—those half-
smiles glinting like dawn through fog, those silences
that slit taunts mid-flight—struck a spark I didn't
know slumbered in my core. I didn't chase her heart
like some moonstruck fool, baying for a touch.*

*I hunted the worth she saw when the world deemed
me a blank slate, a void not worth inking.*

*She was the match, fierce and fleeting; I stoked the
blaze, fanning it high with every scrap of grit I clawed
from the dirt. Through Commerce notes cobbled in
frantic bursts, through every inch of soil I tore open,
she'd lit the wick—and I swore to make it thunder.*

*And thunder it did—I torched the old script and
scrawled a new one in fire and blood.*

*From that runt—stumpy, dim-witted, coasting on
borrowed scraps—I razed the husk and forged anew.*

Sports hammered my edges, a blade tempered in sweat and strain; math sparked my synapses, igniting trails of logic; science fed a gnawing hunger I hadn't known lurked in my gut.

I built something—a code, a voice, a roar—not for her cheers, but for the steel she'd mirrored back without a whisper.

She didn't pen "dJAY" with her own hand, didn't gift it wrapped in praise. She flung me the quill—raw, unsharpened—and I scratched out a manifesto, inked in the sweat of my brow and the pulse of my veins.

Then 2016 roared in, and the ground didn't just tremble—it cracked wide open.

No trifling school swap this time—it was me, sundered to the core. I turned the lens inward, made a brutal game of grappling my own soul—Who was I? What could I smelt from this clay? I didn't just peer into the abyss—I shifted, brick by searing brick, dawn by grueling dawn.

No trumpets blared, no haste spurred me—just a steady, unyielding beat: see yourself, shatter yourself, rise.

That's how I clawed into this—razor-edged, electric, a mind that refuses to rust. Drastic? Damn right. But slow-brewed, a beast rising from the ash heap, step by smoldering, deliberate step.

We've all got that soul that rewrites our bones—some hover like moths, some fade like dusk, some root into the sinew of who we become.

JAY's mine—not a bauble I clutch in trembling fists, but a blade I wield, honed sharp and sure. Standing here, I don't mourn the words I buried deep. Love's not a laurel to parade—it's the grind, the forging, the sweat of the climb.

She was my shove, my ember, the jolt that hauled me from the pit—not to bind her to me but to wrest myself free.

Maybe she was never meant to stay, never destined to linger in my orbit—just to blaze through, a comet streaking from 2003’s grit to 2011’s snarl to 2016’s crystalline edge. And that’s plenty—more than I’d dared ask.

My strides, my ascent—they weren’t a show for her eyes but a fire for mine, kindled from a respect that thickened as I traced every ember she’d flung my way.

She didn’t claim me as her prize, didn’t crown me with her mark. She birthed “dJAY”—a molten entity, shifting and sharpening, rewriting its own legend with every defiant dawn.

“I hope these pages carry my voice to that initial spark, and to those who see their own story in mine.”

A NOTE FROM BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

At BlueRose Publishers, we believe that every book is more than just words on a page; it's a reflection of the author's soul, a journey shared with the reader. When we encountered "dJAY," we weren't just captivated by the compelling narrative; we were drawn to the profound authenticity of its author, Dhananjay.

As we stand in 2025, bringing this deeply personal story to you, we recognize that 'dJAY' is not merely a recounting of past events. It's a testament to the transformative power of human connection, a chronicle of growth and self-discovery. We've had the privilege of getting to know Dhananjay to witness the man shaped by the very experiences he shares within these pages. Through his words, we've glimpsed the resilience, the vulnerability, and the unwavering spirit that define him.

We don't publish books in isolation. We seek to

understand the heart behind the story, to connect our readers with the author's essence. This book is Dhananjay's story, a journey he invites you to join. As you turn these pages, you'll discover not only the narrative of "dJAY" but also the profound meaning it holds for the man who lived it. We are honored to present this beautiful, heartfelt work, and we hope it resonates with you as deeply as it has with us.

A Word from dJAY

The boy who once tied his shoes and walked a dusty road to nowhere is gone—erased, rewritten, reborn. Today, in 2025, as these pages find their way into hands I'll never know, I stand as dJAY—not a name, but a pulse, a rhythm, a constant stretching toward what lies beyond. JAY was the spark, the quiet storm that broke me open, but the fire? That's mine. I built it, stoked it, let it rage until it consumed the smallness I'd once worn like a second skin. This is the story rewritten—not just hers, not just ours, but mine alone, endless as the digits of 'PI'.

I used to be a duffer, a smudge in the classroom's margins, unnoticed even by myself. Now, I top lists—not with answers, but with questions. Pursuing my CS professional exams, I became the sharpest in the room, not by reciting but by challenging, digging, pulling truth from the front-end minds, from experts, from the air itself. I observe everything—always have, always will. A street's rhythm, a stranger's glance, the hum of a machine—I see it, I ask why, I chase the reason until it's mine. No limit, no boundary, just a hunger that feeds on knowing.

Football forged me where your brittle books couldn't even scratch the surface. The pitch is my crucible—every thunderous kick, every blistering sprint, a sledgehammer smashing the quivering shadow of the boy I buried. I stalk Ronaldo's inferno, his savage roar seeping into my marrow, while you Messi worshippers fawn over your dainty little whisperer. This isn't just a game—it's my unrelenting mirror, flashing a man who stares down the abyss without a flinch. My height? Once your petty jeer, now a colossus looming over your mediocre middling. I've shed the stunted shell you still grovel in. Confidence surges like wildfire where fear once cowered—now I bellow, I dominate, I ascend.

Oh, I won't spit on your precious Messi—he's fine, a tidy trickster—but Ronaldo's the titan whose spark scorches through me, a blaze Messi's gentle breeze could never ignite. Now I hurl motivation like lightning bolts, electrifying the forgotten, the overlooked, kindling infernos in them as JAY once did in me—catch me if you dare, you're still choking on my dust.

Business is my canvas now—an investment consultant carving paths through numbers and risk, a mind that sees patterns others miss. But I'm more than that. Music hums in my hands—guitar strings bending to my will, my voice rising, my feet moving to a beat I've claimed. In my kitchen, I'm a chef, crafting flavors like I craft my days. Design is my art—interiors, offices, and homes shaped by my hands, woven with a care for the earth that breathes around us. Space, tech, autos, IT—I devour it all, a geek with no ceiling, endlessly reaching.

She didn't make me this. JAY held the mirror, struck the flint, and I ran with it—past her, past love, into something bigger. Beyond love, there's this: a life rewritten daily, a story with no final page. I call myself "pi" because I am endless—not

finished, not fixed, but forever unfolding. My acts, my growth, they're not for her anymore—they're for me, for the world I shape, for the horizon I'll never stop chasing. This is dJAY in 2025: entrepreneur, observer, player, builder, seeker and an author now—a new entity, endlessly mine.

