

Three Roads One Sky

*Friendships that survive childhood,
distance, responsibilities, and time*

Rahul Mishra



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Dedication

To my little son,

Viraj (Vayu)

At two and a half years old, you won't remember the days when this book was written, but I always will. Your laughter filled our home, your tiny footsteps followed me everywhere, and your smile made even the longest days brighter.

This book is because of you, my greatest joy, and my brightest star.

With love,

Daddy

Acknowledgement

Writing this book has been a journey filled with imagination, memories, and emotions. This story would not have been possible without the inspiration drawn from the simple yet powerful bonds of friendship that enrich our lives.

First and foremost, i bow down in gratitude to **Hanuman Ji**, whose blessings, strength and guidance have inspired me throughout this journey. I offer my sincere prayers and will always be thankful for his protection.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my wife, **Pratigya**, whose love, patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in me have been the foundation upon which this book was written. I still remember telling her stories till 2 am at night, and she has heard each and every one of them with utmost enthusiasm.

A special thanks goes to all **readers** who believe in stories that celebrate kindness, friendship, family, and hope. Your love for meaningful stories motivates writers like me to keep creating worlds and characters that remain in the heart long.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has ever shared a memory, a dream, a lesson, or a moment of friendship. This book is, in many ways, a tribute to all of you.

Rahul Mishra

Preface

Every person carries a few special memories that never truly leave them. They may fade around the edges, but they remain somewhere in the heart, waiting to be revisited. For many of us, those memories are tied to childhood friendships, old school days, shared dreams, and places that once felt like the center of our world.

Three Roads, One Sky was born from that feeling.

This is not a story about heroes or extraordinary people. It is about ordinary lives lived with extraordinary friendship. It follows the life of three friends as they grow from carefree children into adults with careers, responsibilities, families, and dreams of their own. Along the way, they experience success and failure, joy and heartbreak, beginnings and endings, just like all of us do.

At the heart of the story stands an old mango tree, which watches friendships grow, seasons change, and years pass by. While the world around the characters changes constantly, the tree remains a silent reminder of where it all began.

While writing this story, I often found myself thinking about how quickly life moves. One day we are children making promises about the future, and before we know it, we are looking back at those same promises with a smile. Yet some things never change. The people who truly matter stay with us, not always in distance, but in memory, love, and friendship.

If this story reminds you of an old friend, a childhood memory, a familiar place, or a moment you wish you could visit again, then it has achieved its purpose.

After all, we may travel different roads, live under different roofs, and follow different dreams, but in the end, we all share the same sky.

Rahul Mishra

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Chapter 1

Under the Mango Tree

The summer of 1975 arrived carrying warm winds and golden evenings into the small town of Ram Nagar, located in the heart of Himachal Pradesh, in the Himalayan ranges. The pine and deodar covered hills stood tall around the town like silent guardians, while the narrow roads echoed with the laughter of children enjoying their time.

The town was small enough that everyone knew everyone, yet large enough to hold hundreds of stories.

At the center of Ram Nagar stood an old school, St. Convent's. In its playground stood a giant mango tree. Its branches stretched wide like protective arms over the dusty ground below.

During summer, its leaves formed a cool green canopy where children escaped the afternoon heat. Fallen mangoes often became prizes in friendly competitions, and its sturdy roots served as makeshift benches for tired students.

The tree had witnessed many children grow up, carrying their laughter, secrets, dreams, and promises within its

silent embrace. Beneath its shade, friendships were formed, arguments were forgotten, dreams were shared, and the foundations of a lifelong bond were quietly laid.

Every evening children gathered there.

That day, three boys met for the first time.

Bhairav sat alone drawing strange flying machines in a notebook.

Nearby, Kunal chased a football and accidentally kicked it straight toward Bhairav.

The ball struck the notebook.

Bhairav looked up.

Kunal froze,

"Oh no...I'm sorry!"

Bhairav stared,

Then he smiled,

"That's okay."

Before either could speak again, another boy walked over carrying a water bottle and neatly stacked books.

"You dropped your pencil," said Bhairav.

The boy handed it over,

"My name is Vidhaan."

Kunal grinned,

"I'm Kunal."

"Bhairav."

Then, Kunal said: "Want to play?"

Without waiting for an answer, he ran.

Bhairav and Vidhaan looked at each other, then laughed, and ran after him.

None of them knew that chasing a football would become a friendship lasting forever.

At that moment, they were simply three boys running across a dusty playground.

The afternoon sun shone brightly overhead, and the sounds of children playing resonated across the school grounds. The football bounced unevenly over stones and patches of dry grass while Kunal ran after it as if he were playing in a FIFA World Cup final.

"Pass the ball!" Bhairav shouted.

"I'm trying!" Kunal yelled back.

(he considered himself as the best football player in school...or even, in Ram Nagar)

"You've been trying for five minutes!"

Vidhaan burst out laughing.

Within seconds all three were running, shouting, and competing as though the fate of those boys depended on that football.

Eventually, Kunal tripped over a tree root and landed flat on the ground. The football rolled away.

For a moment there was silence.

Bhairav laughed, Vidhaan laughed too.

A second later, even Kunal was laughing.

The three boys then, sat on the ground beneath the giant mango tree, covered in dust and completely exhausted.

It was the first time they had ever spoken properly.

Kunal pointed towards Bhairav, "You're the one who kicked the ball."

Bhairav nodded, "and you're the one who chased it."

Kunal pointed towards Vidhaan, "and you just followed us."

Vidhaan shrugged, "seemed interesting."

For some reason, that answer made all three laugh again.

The bell eventually rang, signaling the end of recess. Students hurried back to their classrooms.

The three boys stood up slowly. None of them wanted to leave, not because they knew each other well, but because something felt strangely comfortable, as if they had known each other longer than a single afternoon.

Tomorrow?" Kunal asked casually.

Bhairav nodded, "sure."

Vidhaan adjusted his school bag, "same place."

The next day they met again beneath the mango tree, then the day after that, and the day after that.

Soon it became a routine.

Every recess, every lunch break, every afternoon after school, the tree became their headquarters. Its roots became benches. Its branches became a roof, and its shade became their own little world.

They shared lunch boxes, played football, finished homework, and occasionally copied homework there, mostly Kunal's idea.

Whenever one of them got into trouble, the other two somehow ended up in trouble as well.

When Bhairav forgot his notebook, Vidhaan shared his.

When Vidhaan struggled during sports period, Kunal dragged him onto the football field anyway.

When Kunal received punishment for talking too much in class, Bhairav and Vidhaan usually received punishment for laughing.

Teachers soon learned something important. Separating them was impossible.

As the days passed, school bags became heavier, subjects became harder. But every day still ended beneath the shade of the same old tree.

The mango tree watched them collect report cards, celebrate victories, recover from failures, and share dreams about the future.

Sometimes they talked about becoming successful, sometimes they argued about which superhero was the strongest, sometimes they simply sat together watching clouds drift across the sky.

Those moments seemed ordinary then, but they didn't realize they were creating memories that would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

The truth was simple.

Friendship rarely begins with grand speeches or life-changing moments, sometimes it begins with a football rolling across a playground, a shared laugh beneath a tree, and three boys deciding, without ever saying it aloud, that life was simply better together.

Days turned into weeks, weeks became months, and the mango tree had become their official headquarters.

One afternoon, they scratched their initials into the tree bark:

B + K + V

Kunal announced dramatically: "Now even trees know we are brothers."

Vidhaan rolled his eyes.

Bhairav smiled quietly.

Sometimes life begins with grand events. Sometimes it begins with a football accident.

School brought adventures every day.

Kunal constantly got punished for talking.

Bhairav filled notebooks with stories.

Vidhaan topped every exam.

Teachers often separated them in class. It never worked, as

Friendship always found a way...

One Monday morning, their class teacher had finally had enough.

Kunal talked too much.

Bhairav passed tiny drawings during lessons, and Vidhaan, although innocent most of the time, could never stop smiling whenever the other two created trouble.

"That's it!" the teacher announced. The classroom fell silent.

Today, Bhairav would sit in the first row.

Kunal would move to the last bench.

Vidhaan would sit by the window near the girls row.

The boys looked at one another in shock.

For them, this felt like a punishment bigger than any homework.

Kunal dramatically placed his hand over his heart.

"This is the end," he whispered.

Bhairav tried not to laugh.

Vidhaan simply shook his head.

For ten whole minutes, everything stayed quiet.

Then Kunal folded a paper airplane. Across the room it flew, straight towards Bhairav.

Missed. Hit the blackboard.

The class burst into laughter, and the teacher turned around slowly.

Kunal looked down at his notebook.

Vidhaan stared out the window.

Bhairav suddenly became very interested in his pencil box.

Five minutes later, Bhairav sent a tiny note toward Vidhaan:

"Operation Reunion begins now."

By lunchtime, they somehow ended up sitting together again.

Teachers often separated them in class, but it never worked, as again

Friendship always found a way...

Days passed, and the classroom war continued.

The teachers had unknowingly started a challenge. Every morning, the three friends were placed in different corners of the room. Every afternoon, somehow, they reunited.

No one understood how.

Not the teachers, not the students, not even the principal.

One day, during mathematics class, Bhairav quietly opened his notebook and began sketching superheroes.

His superheroes looked suspiciously familiar.

One had Kunal's messy hair and giant grin.

Another had Vidhaan's glasses and serious expression.

Kunal's superhero name was **Captain Havoc**.

Vidhaan became **Doctor Prime**.

Bhairav called himself **Vision Phantom**.

Kunal saw the drawings from across the room and immediately started laughing.

Unfortunately, he laughed very loudly.

The teacher stopped writing on the board.

Slowly, she turned around.

"Kunal."

(silence)

"What is so funny?"

Kunal stood up nervously. For a moment nobody spoke.

Then Bhairav accidentally looked at the drawing.

Vidhaan looked too.

Within seconds all three began laughing.

Now the entire class stared at them.

The teacher folded her arms.

"Wonderful."

That single word never meant anything good.

"Since you three enjoy each other's company so much, tomorrow you will organize the school notice board together."

The boys looked at one another.

Punishment? Not exactly.

The next afternoon they gathered beside the empty notice board carrying colored papers, scissors, glue, and markers.

Kunal made giant uneven stars.

Bhairav designed banners and tiny cartoon characters.

Vidhaan arranged everything neatly.

Hours passed, arguments happened, and glue spilled.

Kunal somehow got paint on his face.

Bhairav laughed so hard he dropped an entire box of sketch pens.

Vidhaan kept repeating: "please act normally for five minutes."

By the end of afternoon, the notice board was finished.

At the center they wrote: **Friendship makes every day brighter.**

The principal stopped to see it.

Teachers gathered around. Students smiled looking at it.

For the first time, instead of separating them, the school praised them.

Walking home beneath orange evening skies, Kunal stretched his arms and grinned.

"See? Trouble always works out."

Vidhaan sighed.

"No, friendship works out."

Bhairav looked towards the mango tree waiting near the playground.

Something told him that these ordinary days would someday become the memories they missed the most.

He did not know it yet, but bigger adventures were coming.

Soon, the school festival season would arrive, bringing a wave of excitement. The usually quite school ground would transform into a colourful celebration.

Chapter 2

The Festival Before the Storm

Students were already whispering about the events they hoped to join, while teachers worked busily behind the scenes.

The festival became the only topic of discussion.

During mathematics lessons, students discussed dance performances. During science class, they debated competition winners. Even during lunch breaks, everyone seemed busy making plans.

Kunal had signed up for hosting the event.

When Bhairav discovered this, he stared in disbelief.

"Have you signed up for hosting?"

"Talent," said Kunal.

"Impractical," said Vidhaan.

One afternoon, the principal gathered students in the assembly ground.

"I know everyone is excited. I know everyone is nervous."

Students laughed.

"But remember something important."

The playground became quiet.

"The festival is not about winning. It is about participation, teamwork, and creating memories. Let's make this festival legendary."

And so, the annual school festival filled the grounds with music, excitement, and colorful decorations.

Bhairav wrote stories for competitions.

Kunal made everyone laugh, as always.

Vidhaan quietly organized everything.

For weeks, excitement had spread through the school hallways. Bright paper decorations hung from classroom doors. Students practiced dances after classes.

Teachers rushed around carrying lists and schedules. Even the playground looked transformed with colorful banners fluttering in the wind.

For the three friends, the school festival felt bigger than a celebration.

It felt like an adventure.

Kunal had somehow convinced the teachers that he was the perfect host.

Whether they actually agreed or simply got tired of his endless requests remained a mystery.

Standing on the stage with a microphone in hand, Kunal behaved as if he were hosting the biggest show in the world.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen!" he announced dramatically while practicing.

The empty chairs stared back.

Bhairav and Vidhaan sat in the audience pretending to clap wildly.

Kunal bowed,

"Thank you, thank you."

Vidhaan sighed,

"You are practicing in front of empty chairs."

Kunal pointed proudly,

"Every great star starts somewhere."

Later that day, Bhairav sat beneath the mango tree after school, writing for the storytelling competition.

Ideas filled his notebook. Stories about magical cities, hidden treasures, adventures, friendship, and super heroes.

Somewhere inside every story, without realizing it, he always wrote characters that looked a lot like Kunal and Vidhaan.

Nearby, Vidhaan carried charts, schedules, and event lists.

Teachers trusted him because he never forgot anything.

Kunal forgot everything.

Bhairav forgot time itself while writing.

But Vidhaan remembered everything.

Three days before the festival, catastrophe arrived.

A heavy evening storm rolled across Ram Nagar. Strong winds shook the school grounds. Rain poured through the night.

The next morning students entered school and stopped in shock.

Decorations had fallen, colorful banners lay soaked on the ground, several competition displays were damaged, and the festival stage looked like a battlefield.

Teachers panicked.

Students whispered nervously, "the festival may be cancelled."

The words spread quickly.

Cancelled?

For a moment, absolute silence surrounded the three friends.

Kunal looked at the damaged decorations.

Bhairav looked at the stage.

Vidhaan looked at the clock.

Then Vidhaan spoke quietly, "we still have two days."

Kunal blinked,

"So?"

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

"So we fix it."

Bhairav slowly smiled.

Kunal grinned.

Within minutes, the three boys were running across school grounds gathering students.

Soon classrooms turned into repair stations. Some students painted banners, others fixed decorations.

Teachers joined them too, while still feeling discouraged.

Students who rarely spoke to one another suddenly worked side by side. Even the principal rolled up his sleeves and helped fix damaged displays.

Kunal encouraged everyone loudly.

Bhairav made colorful signs.

Vidhaan organized teams.

For two days the school worked together.

The festival no longer belonged to a few organizers. It belonged to the entire school.

Vidhaan immediately took charge, not because he wanted to. But because nobody else knew where anything was supposed to go.

He carried a clipboard almost everywhere.

"Banner Team, move those decorations to the main gate."

"Art Team, finish the stage backdrop first."

For the first time, even teachers were asking him questions.

Kunal found this hilarious. Every ten minutes he saluted dramatically,

"Good afternoon, Event Commander."

Vidhaan mostly ignored him, feeling proud within.

Meanwhile, Bhairav helped redesign the damaged storytelling display.

Several posters had been ruined by the storm. Instead of complaining, he gathered a group of students beneath the mango tree.

For hours they painted new posters, colorful castles appeared, mountains rose from paper, dragons flew across banners, and hidden treasures sparkled in drawings.

One student looked at Bhairav's work and said, "you should become a writer someday."

Bhairav smiled mutely. For some reason, those words stayed with him.

Kunal's contribution was different.

Nobody trusted him with paint. Nobody trusted him with measurements. Nobody trusted him with anything fragile. So Kunal did what Kunal did best.

He kept everyone motivated.

Whenever students looked tired, he cracked jokes. Whenever someone became frustrated, he made them laugh. Whenever silence appeared, Kunal destroyed it immediately.

By the end of the first day, even the teachers were smiling.

One teacher shook her head and said, "I don't know if he's helping or distracting everyone."

Another teacher laughed, "Somehow both."

Late on the second evening, the three friends stood in the middle of the school grounds.

The transformation was unbelievable. Colorful lights hung across walkways. Fresh banners fluttered in the wind. The repaired stage stood proudly at the center of the playground.

Everything looked ready, and beautiful.

For a moment, nobody spoke. Then Kunal placed his hands on his hips,

"We saved the festival."

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses,

"The entire school saved the festival."

Kunal pointed at himself,

"I was emotionally important."

Bhairav laughed, Vidhaan laughed too. Some things never changed.

On festival morning, everything stood ready again. The decorations shined brighter than before.

As students entered the school gates, cheers filled the air.

That evening, under golden lights and music, Kunal stood on stage smiling.

Bhairav won second prize in storytelling.

Still wondering, as coming second in storytelling was not acceptable.

First prize went to a girl, whom only Bhairav had spoken to, from the entire class. But now, after losing the competition, he decided not to speak to her further, but still showing signs of confusion....

"Never Expected"

Vidhaan received appreciation for organizing the event.

Later, sitting beneath the mango tree, none of them talked about prizes.

Kunal looked toward the stars.

Bhairav looked at the school building.

Vidhaan smiled quietly.

Sometimes the best part of a memory isn't winning. It's building something together...

Festival season ended, but its memories stayed alive for weeks.

Students still talked about Kunal's dramatic hosting.

Teachers still praised Vidhaan's organization.

Bhairav's story notebook had suddenly become popular because everyone wanted to read what he wrote. But he still could not digest the fact that he came "SECOND" in the competition.

Life slowly returned to normal.

Morning assembly, homework, lunch breaks, football after school, everything felt familiar again.

Until one morning, their class teacher entered with a sudden announcement.

Instantly, the class became quiet.

No student liked sudden announcements. Especially, when teachers smiled before announcing them.

She wrote one word on the blackboard:
EXAMINATIONS

A collective sigh escaped the classroom.

Kunal looked personally betrayed.

"No," he whispered.

Bhairav stared at the board as if it had delivered terrible news.

Vidhaan, however, calmly opened his notebook.

Kunal turned towards him, "why do you look happy?"

"I'm not happy."

"Then why are you opening your notebook?"

"It's because panicking changes nothing."

Kunal leaned back dramatically.

"I think I should start preparing for failure."

Vidhaan shook his head.

"No. You should start preparing for exams."

Soon the entire school changed. Playgrounds became emptier, and library seats filled quickly. Students revised notes in corridors.

Even the mango tree headquarters became a study spot.

For the first time in years, the three friends sat beneath it quietly.

No football. No races. No adventures. Only books, and silence.

Well...

Mostly silence.

Ten minutes later, Kunal closed his book.

"I have an important question."

Vidhaan looked up apprehensively.

"What?"

Kunal pointed towards Bhairav.

"Why is Bhairav smiling while studying history?"

Bhairav quickly closed his notebook.

"Nothing."

Kunal grabbed it before he could stop him.

Inside were pages filled with drawings.

Kings had superhero capes. Historical figures carried laser swords. Ancient battles looked like scenes from science-fiction movies.

Kunal burst into laughter.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses, and started smiling.

Bhairav crossed his arms,

"I study better this way."

Kunal nodded seriously,

"Of course."

He pointed at one drawing.

"King Hyper Singh versus Invaders."

Bhairav snatched the notebook back.

"Give it!"

Soon books were forgotten.

A chase began around the mango tree, and laughter replaced exam stress.

From a distance, an elderly gardener watched them and smiled, because some things never changed.

No matter how serious life became, friendship always found a way...

But none of them knew that these exams would bring something unexpected. Something that would create the first real misunderstanding between the three friends.

Until then, friendship had always felt easy.

They studied together, played together, got into trouble together, and somehow managed to come out of every situation together.

But as the examinations approached, things began to change.

Slowly at first, almost unnoticed, but change was there.

Teachers spoke constantly about marks, parents discussed future career options, coaching classes appeared, timetables filled walls, and every conversation

seemed to begin and end with the same question: *"How much have you studied?"*

For the first time, marks had started feeling more important than football, more important than afternoons beneath the Mango tree.

The headquarters slowly became quieter.

Instead of laughing and sharing stories, the boys sat with textbooks spread across their laps.

Even Kunal seemed serious, a rare and slightly frightening sight.

One afternoon he looked up from his science book,

"I miss being stupid."

Bhairav laughed.

Vidhaan didn't even look up.

"Focus."

Kunal sighed dramatically,

"See? This is exactly what I mean."

But despite the jokes, the pressure was real.

Every student in school felt it, every teacher added extra assignments, every parent offered extra advice, every day felt shorter than the last, and somewhere beneath all that pressure, small cracks began to appear.

Chapter 3

We'll Still Be Us

The first problem arrived while organising a group study session. The boys had agreed to meet beneath the mango tree after school.

Kunal arrived first, followed by Bhairav.

Vidhaan never came.

An hour passed, then another, and finally a message arrived.

Vidhaan: Sorry, extra coaching class.

Kunal frowned.

That was the third time that week.

"He's becoming boring."

Bhairav smiled, "he's just busy studying." But even he sounded uncertain.

Exam season brought anxiety and sleepless nights.

The next few weeks became even stranger.

Vidhaan spent more and more time studying.

Sometimes he left immediately after school, sometimes he skipped football, sometimes he forgot their evening meetings entirely.

Whenever Kunal complained, Vidhaan gave the same answer, "exams are important."

Kunal rolled his eyes, "we know."

"No," Vidhaan replied.

"You don't."

The words hung in the air. He hadn't meant them to sound harsh, but they did.

For the first time, nobody knew what to say.

A couple of days later another misunderstanding appeared.

Bhairav had written an article for the school magazine. When the results were announced, he won the first prize.

He was proud of it.

Teachers congratulated him, students applauded, even the principal praised him during assembly. Everyone felt happy.

Everyone...except Kunal...

Not because he wasn't proud of Bhairav, he certainly was. But he felt a little different, a little insecure, a little uncertain.

Everyone was succeeding.

Everyone seemed to know exactly what they wanted, but pressure had created silence among the friends. Marks and grades began to matter more than games.

The playground that once echoed with laughter became quieter.

The mango tree stood alone most evenings. The football remained untouched, and

story notebooks stayed closed.

Even Kunal had stopped making jokes every five minutes. Almost every five minutes.

Teachers constantly reminded students: "these exams are important."

"Your future begins now."

"Work harder."

Slowly, the words settled into everyone's minds, including theirs.

Bhairav spent long evenings at his study table, books stacked around him like walls. His parents had started speaking more seriously about studies.

"You write wonderful stories," his mother said gently one evening, "but marks are important too."

For the first time, Bhairav felt something unfamiliar. Pressure.

Meanwhile, Vidhaan followed a strict timetable.

Study.

Break.

Revise.

Sleep.

Repeat.

He looked calm from outside, but even he felt nervous.

And Kunal, pretended everything was fine.

But late at night, when the house grew quiet, he stared at his books and wondered if everyone else was moving ahead while he struggled to catch up.

Days passed.

Then one afternoon, Bhairav noticed something strange.

No one called anyone. No one complained. No one asked why, and somehow, that silence felt heavier than arguments.

One evening, Bhairav finally walked to Kunal's house.

Kunal opened the door holding a mathematics book.

A mathematics book?

Bhairav stared in shock.

Kunal looked offended,

"What?"

"You are studying willingly?"

Kunal crossed his arms,

"People can change."

For a second they simply looked at each other, then they laughed. Not loudly, not like before, just a little.

But before Bhairav could say anything else, Kunal suddenly asked,

"Have you and Vidhaan been studying together?"

Bhairav blinked,

"What?"

Kunal looked away.

"I saw you two talking after school."

(silence)

Bhairav remembered, Vidhaan had only returned a notebook he had forgotten. Nothing more.

But suddenly, he understood Kunal's insecurity.

Kunal thought they had left him behind.

Bhairav frowned, "what are you saying?"

Kunal shrugged, "nothing." But it didn't sound like nothing.

The next day school felt strange.

Kunal sat quietly.

Vidhaan remained busy with notes.

Bhairav kept looking between them.

Again, something felt wrong, and neither of them knew that a tiny misunderstanding had just begun growing into their first real fight.

A small misunderstanding slowly grew larger. The misunderstanding grew quietly.

Not with shouting, not with anger. Just with silence.

Sometimes, silence hurts more.

For the next few days, things felt different.

Kunal no longer waited after school.

Vidhaan stayed busy helping teachers and studying.

Bhairav tried talking to both of them, but every conversation felt shorter than before.

Under the mango tree, only dry leaves moved in the evening wind.

One afternoon the teacher announced: "Tomorrow your exam seating arrangement will be displayed."

Instantly, nervous whispers filled the classroom.

Students rushed toward the notice board during lunch break.

Kunal squeezed through the crowd.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses and searched carefully.

Bhairav stood beside them.

Then Kunal suddenly froze, as his name appeared in Room 2.

Bhairav and Vidhaan were together in Room 3.

For a moment nobody spoke.

Kunal forced a smile, "Nice."

Just one word, NICE.

Bhairav noticed.

Vidhaan noticed too.

Kunal turned away quickly, "I'll go check something."

Before they could stop him, he disappeared into the crowd.

That evening rain clouds covered Ram Nagar.

Bhairav found Kunal sitting alone beneath the school staircase.

Bhairav sat beside him.

For several minutes neither spoke.

Finally Kunal laughed softly, not a happy laugh.

(the kind people use when hiding sadness)

"You know what I think?"

Bhairav looked at him.

Kunal stared at the rain outside.

"I think everyone is growing up."

(silence)

"Maybe I'm getting left behind."

Bhairav frowned immediately,

"What?"

Kunal shrugged,

"You and Vidhaan study together now."

"No."

"You both understand everything."

"No."

"You both .."

"No, Stop."

Bhairav interrupted him, firmly this time.

Rain tapped softly against windows. For a moment only the sound of falling water filled the silence.

Then Bhairav looked at Kunal and said quietly, "you remember the football?"

Kunal blinked, "the football?"

"The first day we met."

Kunal looked confused.

Bhairav smiled,

"You kicked it into my notebook."

Kunal slowly nodded,

"Then Vidhaan returned my pencil."

"We became friends before marks, before classrooms,
before exams, before everything."

Kunal looked down.

Bhairav continued,

"If these exams can break us...then we were never really
friends."

The words hung in the air.

Kunal looked outside.

Rain still fell heavily. Then suddenly footsteps
approached, and both boys turned.

Vidhaan stood there.

Completely soaked, hair dripping, glasses covered with
rain drops, breathing heavily.

Kunal stared.

Bhairav stared.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses, "I have been looking for
you two everywhere."

Then he pulled something from his bag.

Three folded papers. Timetables, and study schedules.

One for Bhairav.

One for Kunal.

One for himself.

Kunal looked confused.

Vidhaan frowned, "I made these three days ago, for all of us."

Kunal blinked, "...all of us?"

Vidhaan looked annoyed, "obviously."

Nobody spoke.

Then slowly Kunal stood up.

For exactly three seconds he looked serious.

Then he dramatically hugged both of them at once.

All three nearly fell over.

"YOU IDIOTS!" Kunal shouted.

Students passing nearby stared.

Vidhaan protested immediately,

"Why are we idiots?"

Kunal grinned,

"Friendship should come with instruction manuals."

For the first time in weeks, they laughed, really laughed.

Outside, the rain slowly began to stop, but bigger changes were still coming, because exams would end, and teenage years were waiting...

Exams finally ended.

The last answer sheets were collected. Pens dropped onto desks.

Suddenly, after weeks of stress, the entire classroom felt lighter.

For a second there was complete silence. Then,

CHEERS.

Students shouted.

Some laughed, some looked as if they had escaped prison, and Kunal stood up dramatically and raised both hands toward the ceiling.

"FREEDOM!"

The class burst into laughter.

Even the teacher smiled.

Walking out of school that afternoon felt different.

The air felt lighter, the sky looked brighter, and the three friends walked together beneath rows of trees, school bags hanging loosely from their shoulders.

After ages, nobody talked about marks. Nobody mentioned exams. Nobody discussed timetables.

Kunal stretched his arms.

"I have decided something important."

Vidhaan sighed immediately.

"Why does that sentence always create problems?"

Kunal ignored him,

"We deserve a celebration."

Bhairav smiled,

"What kind?"

Kunal pointed dramatically towards the distance,

"The summer fair."

Then Bhairav's eyes widened,

"The one near the lake?"

Kunal grinned,

"Exactly."

Even Vidhaan looked interested.

Every year, during vacations, Ram Nagar held a giant fair beside the lake.

There were colorful lights, food stalls, games, music, ferris wheels, magic shows, and rumors of the world's scariest haunted house.

For children, it felt like another universe.

For years, they had waited for it.

Now vacations had finally arrived.

Few evenings later, as the sun painted the sky orange, the three friends reached the fair entrance.

Their eyes widened instantly.

Lights glowed everywhere, music floated through the air, children ran around carrying balloons, and the smell of popcorn and sweets filled the evening breeze.

Kunal looked ready to explode from excitement.

"We start with rides."

Vidhaan pointed elsewhere,

"Food first."

Bhairav looked toward a small book stall,

"Books."

Kunal stared at him.

Vidhaan stared at him.

Bhairav slowly looked back,

"...what?"

Kunal placed a hand on his shoulder,

"You are impossible."

Minutes later they stood near the giant ferris wheel.

Kunal suddenly looked less confident, very less confident.

Bhairav narrowed his eyes,

"Kunal."

"No."

"Kunal."

"No."

Vidhaan looked confused.

Bhairav smiled slowly,

"Are you scared?"

Kunal immediately stood straighter,

"Scared? Me? Never."

(five minutes later)

Kunal screamed louder than anyone on the ferris wheel.

People below actually looked up.

Bhairav laughed so hard he nearly fell sideways.

Even Vidhaan couldn't stop smiling.

Later that evening they sat beside the lake eating ice cream while colorful lights reflected on the water.

For a while nobody spoke.

Then Bhairav quietly said, "do you think things will always stay like this?"

Kunal looked up.

Vidhaan looked towards him too.

Bhairav watched families walking past, children laughing, teenagers talking, and adults discussing life.

Everything suddenly felt different.

Somewhere deep inside, a strange feeling had appeared.

Slowly, childhood was beginning to slip away.

Kunal looked at both of them, then smiled.

"We'll still be us."

Vidhaan nodded,

"Always."

The three friends sat there watching lights dance across the lake.

None of them knew it yet, but teenage years were closer than they imagined, and teenage years had a way of changing everything.

Chapter 4

The New Girl

Teenage years arrived carrying confusion, dreams, and pride. The boys who once raced under a mango tree were beginning to become young men.

The change happened slowly. So slowly that none of them noticed at first.

Their school uniforms became smaller, and their voices began changing.

The Adolescence years had arrived.

Conversations shifted from comic books and superhero drawings to dreams about the future.

Suddenly, everyone around them seemed to keep asking the same question: "What do you want to become?"

Teachers asked, parents asked, relatives definitely asked.

Kunal claimed he had heard it at least a thousand times.

One afternoon the three friends sat beneath the mango tree after school.

Sunlight slipped through branches overhead while warm winds carried the smell of summer.

Kunal lay flat on the grass.
Bhairav sat with his notebook.
Vidhaan leaned against the tree reading.
For several minutes nobody spoke.
Then Kunal suddenly sat up,
"I know."
Bhairav looked up.
Vidhaan lowered his book.
Kunal pointed proudly at himself,
"I know what I will become."
"What?" Bhairav asked.
Kunal spread his arms dramatically.
"A superstar."
Vidhaan blinked.
"A superstar?"
Kunal nodded seriously.
"People will see me and scream."
Bhairav tried not to laugh.
"Scream because they are excited?"
Kunal grinned.
"Exactly."

Vidhaan looked thoughtful.

"Or frightened."

Bhairav burst into laughter.

Kunal looked affronted.

"You two have no vision."

They laughed for several minutes.

Kunal looked at Vidhaan,

"What about you?"

Vidhaan closed his book slowly,

"I think... engineering."

Kunal nodded.

That sounded exactly like Vidhaan. Stable, organized, and practical.

Then both looked towards Bhairav. He stared at his notebook.

"What about you?"

For a moment he said nothing.

Wind rustled leaves overhead, and children played football nearby.

Finally Bhairav spoke quietly: "I want to write."

(silence)

"I want to write stories."

No one laughed, no one smiled.

Kunal and Vidhaan simply looked at him.

They realized, Bhairav wasn't joking. He looked serious.
Really serious.

Kunal stood up, walked toward him, and placed a hand
on his shoulder.

"Then write."

Bhairav looked up.

Kunal grinned,

"One day I'll become famous."

Vidhaan nodded,

"I will build things."

Kunal pointed dramatically,

"And you will write books about us."

Bhairav smiled. A small smile.

But before anyone spoke again, voices echoed from
nearby.

Several older boys from senior classes walked past.

One of them laughed.

"Stories?"

Another smirked.

"Writers don't usually become successful."

The boys continued walking, and silence followed.

Bhairav looked down.

Very quietly, Vidhaan closed his book.

Kunal crossed his arms.

For the first time that afternoon, none of them smiled, because teenage years didn't only bring dreams. Sometimes they brought doubt too.

Days passed after that afternoon beneath the mango tree.

Bhairav kept remembering the words of the older boys.

"Writers don't become successful."

The sentence followed him everywhere.

During classes, during walks home, even while writing stories at night.

Doubt had entered his mind.

Meanwhile, Kunal remained... Kunal.

Loud, dramatic, completely impossible.

And according to Vidhaan, "physically unable to stay serious for more than thirty seconds."

School life was going on, and one Monday morning the classroom buzzed with excitement.

Students whispered, teachers moved in and out. Something unusual was happening.

Their class teacher entered with a smile. Behind her stood a girl carrying books.

Instantly, everyone became curious.

The teacher spoke: "Class, we have a new student."

The girl looked around nervously.

"My name is Tanya."

(silence)

Whispers exploded across the room. New students always attracted attention.

Kunal leaned towards Bhairav.

"Prediction: by lunch everyone will know her favorite color."

Vidhaan sighed,

"Please don't start."

The teacher looked around. Only one empty seat remained, right beside Kunal.

Kunal's smile disappeared slowly, very slowly.

"No," he whispered.

Bhairav looked at him.

"What happened?"

Kunal looked strangely nervous.

"I don't know how to talk to new people."

Bhairav stared.

Vidhaan stared.

Kunal looked back.

Then both burst into laughter.

"You?" Bhairav said.

"You talk to strangers in shops!" Vidhaan added.

"You talk to dogs!"

"You once talked to a statue!"

Kunal looked offended.

"That statue looked friendly."

Meanwhile, Tanya walked towards the empty seat.

Kunal suddenly sat perfectly straight.

Notebook ready. Pencil ready.

For the first time in history, Kunal looked disciplined.

Bhairav immediately noticed.

Vidhaan noticed too.

"Interesting"

Class began.

Ten minutes later, Kunal accidentally dropped his pen. Actually, he dropped all his pens, then his notebook, then somehow his ruler.

Bhairav covered his face.

Vidhaan stared into the distance.

This was painful to watch.

Tanya picked up a pen and smiled.

"You okay?"

Kunal blinked.

"...yes."

(silence, absolute silence for thirty seconds)

Then Kunal, the boy who never stopped talking, said
"...thank you."

Just two words.

Bhairav nearly fell off his chair.

Vidhaan looked shocked.

Kunal looked shocked too.

After school, beneath the mango tree, Bhairav and
Vidhaan stood waiting.

Kunal arrived.

Very quietly. Very suspiciously quietly.

Nobody spoke.

Five seconds. Ten seconds. Twenty seconds.

Finally Bhairav smiled.

"So..."

Vidhaan folded his arms.

"So..."

Kunal looked confused.

"So what?"

Bhairav grinned wider.

"What was her name again?"

Kunal froze.

Vidhaan looked away immediately because he had started smiling.

Kunal crossed his arms.

"Absolutely not."

Bhairav raised an eyebrow.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

Beneath the mango tree, for the first time in many weeks, the old laughter returned.

But none of them knew it yet, this wasn't just a new student entering school. This was the beginning of a completely new chapter in Kunal's life.

The next morning, Kunal reached school unusually early.

So unusual that Bhairav and Vidhaan stopped near the classroom door and stared at him.

Kunal was arranging books. Yes....arranging books, that too....voluntarily.

Vidhaan narrowed his eyes.

"I don't trust this."

Bhairav nodded seriously.

"Something is definitely wrong."

Kunal looked up.

"What?"

Bhairav pointed dramatically.

"You came early."

"So?"

Vidhaan folded his arms.

"You arranged books."

Kunal blinked.

"...people organize things."

Bhairav and Vidhaan exchanged looks.

No.

Something was happening. Something fishy.

A few moments later, the classroom door opened, and
Tanya walked in.

Instantly Kunal sat straighter, much straighter.

Bhairav slowly turned toward Vidhaan.

Vidhaan slowly looked back.

Mystery solved.

Tanya smiled politely at everyone and sat beside Kunal.

Unlike Kunal, she seemed completely comfortable.

Within days, everyone knew Tanya.

She loved reading mystery novels, and was too good at debates.

Somehow she could answer difficult questions without even looking nervous.

But what surprised Bhairav most was this:

Kunal had become quieter around her.

Not completely quiet. That would be impossible. But quieter.

One afternoon during English class, the teacher announced: "Next week we will have a pair storytelling competition."

Excited whispers filled the room.

The teacher continued: "I will choose partners."

Kunal looked relaxed, very relaxed.

Then, "Kunal and Tanya."

(silence...absolute silence...the kind when you want something to happen, and it actually happens)

Bhairav looked at Vidhaan.

Vidhaan looked at Bhairav.

Slowly, very slowly, both turned towards Kunal.

Kunal had frozen. Completely frozen.

Even the pencil in his hand stopped moving.

Tanya smiled.

"Looks like we're partners."

Kunal opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again.

"...yes."

One word. One tiny word.

Bhairav stared in disbelief.

Later, the interrogation began immediately.

Kunal stood with crossed arms.

Bhairav sat on a branch grinning.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

"So..." Bhairav began.

"So..." Vidhaan continued.

Kunal sighed.

"No."

"No what?"

"No to whatever both of you are thinking."

Bhairav smiled wider.

"We didn't say anything."

Kunal pointed accusingly.

"You were about to."

Vidhaan looked innocent. Very fake innocent.

Kunal groaned dramatically.

The sun slowly lowered beyond the playground while laughter returned beneath the mango tree.

But later that evening, alone in his room, Kunal looked at the storytelling project sheet again.

For some strange reason, he smiled.

For the first time in his life, Kunal suddenly felt nervous about something that wasn't an exam.

The week of the storytelling competition arrived faster than Kunal expected.

For three straight days, Tanya and Kunal stayed after school preparing their presentation in the library.

At first, it was awkward.

Kunal suddenly forgot how conversations worked.

The boy who could speak endlessly during lunch breaks somehow struggled to say complete sentences.

Meanwhile, Tanya calmly flipped through pages of books.

After several minutes of silence, she looked up.

"So."

Kunal looked nervous.

"So?"

Tanya smiled.

"You really talk this little?"

Kunal blinked.

"...what?"

Tanya laughed.

"I've been in class for a month."

Kunal stared.

Tanya continued: "Everyone says you're the loudest person in school."

From somewhere between the bookshelves, Bhairav and Vidhaan nearly choked trying not to laugh.

Kunal's eyes widened. He looked toward the shelves.

Nothing. Tanya raised an eyebrow.

"What happened?"

"Nothing"

Kunal narrowed his eyes toward the bookshelf. Absolutely nothing suspicious was happening there.

Definitely not two best friends secretly spying. Not at all.

Later, much later, after Tanya had left, Kunal marched toward the hidden corner of the library.

Bhairav and Vidhaan immediately stood up.

Kunal folded his arms.

"Were you spying?"

"No."

"Absolutely not."

Kunal stared.

Vidhaan looked away.

Bhairav looked at the ceiling.

Kunal pointed dramatically.

"You two are terrible spies."

Bhairav grinned.

"So how was library time?"

Kunal narrowed his eyes.

"No."

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

"No what?"

Kunal pointed at both of them.

"I know where this conversation is going."

The next day after school, the storytelling competition finally began.

Students gathered in the auditorium.

Colorful lights shone above the stage. Teachers sat in the front rows. Names were called one by one. Teams performed. Stories filled with adventure, mystery, and comedy echoed through the hall.

Then, "Kunal and Tanya."

Kunal stood. Extremely confidently.

Exactly three steps, then he tripped slightly on the stairs. Not enough to fall.

Just enough for Bhairav and Vidhaan to notice. Unfortunately.

Both immediately started laughing.

Kunal turned around and glared.

Tanya covered a smile.

Together they walked onto the stage.

Bright lights filled the room. Rows of faces stared back.

Kunal suddenly felt nervous.

For one second he forgot every line, every word, everything.

Tanya quietly whispered: "You'll be fine."

Just four words. Simple words. But somehow they worked.

Kunal looked at her, then smiled.

For the next ten minutes, the entire auditorium laughed, listened, and applauded as their story came alive.

When they finished, the room erupted into cheers.

Backstage, Bhairav grinned.

Vidhaan folded his arms.

Kunal tried acting normal.

Beneath all the jokes and laughter, something new had entered Kunal's world.

Somewhere deep inside, he knew Tanya was becoming more than just a classmate.

Weeks turned into months. Months into years.

Without realizing it, the three friends had reached their final year of school.

The hallways that once felt enormous now seemed smaller.

Classrooms that had once felt unfamiliar had become a second home.

Even the old mango tree looked different somehow. Or maybe, they had changed.

Teenage years had slowly shaped them.

Bhairav's notebooks were now filled with stories, ideas, and dreams of becoming a writer.

Vidhaan had become one of the brightest students in school, admired by teachers and trusted by everyone.

And Kunal...

Kunal still made people laugh.

Still spoke too much.

Still turned ordinary days into adventures.

But now there was one small difference.

Whenever Tanya walked into a room, Kunal somehow noticed immediately.

Of course, Bhairav and Vidhaan noticed too, and they never let him forget it.

One afternoon beneath the mango tree, Kunal arrived carrying snacks, for everyone.

Vidhaan narrowed his eyes.

"Why are you being nice?"

Kunal looked offended.

"I am always nice."

Bhairav raised an eyebrow.

"No."

Kunal ignored him.

Tanya appeared walking towards them carrying library books.

Kunal instantly sat straighter.

Tanya smiled.

"Hi."

"Hi," Kunal replied immediately.

Bhairav looked down to hide his smile.

Vidhaan suddenly found tree branches extremely interesting.

Tanya sat nearby and opened a book.

For a while nobody spoke.

The warm evening breeze moved softly through the playground.

Sunlight slipped through leaves.

Everything felt strangely peaceful.

Then Tanya spoke quietly: "Next month is farewell."

(silence)

Nobody answered, because farewell meant only one thing.

School was ending.

For the first time, the reality felt real.

No more morning assemblies. No more classrooms. No more teachers shouting at Kunal. No more racing to the mango tree after school. No more ordinary days together.

Bhairav looked towards the school building.

Suddenly memories rushed through his mind,

The football accident, paper airplanes, school festivals, exams, laughter, arguments, friendship, and years of moments.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses quietly.

Kunal looked unusually earnest.

Even Tanya stared toward the school gates.

Nobody joked. Nobody laughed, because somewhere inside all of them, a difficult truth had arrived.

Childhood was ending.

Chapter 5

Journey Beyond Ram Nagar

Farewell day arrived faster than anyone expected.

The school auditorium glowed with lights and decorations. Students wore beautiful clothes instead of uniforms.

For years, they had seen each other in white shirts, school ties, and polished shoes. Seeing everyone dressed differently felt strange, almost as if an entirely new group of people had appeared overnight.

Teachers smiled more than usual. Music echoed through the halls.

And everywhere, people took photographs. Hundreds of photographs, as if everyone wanted to stop time.

Kunal stood near the entrance adjusting his tie nervously.

Bhairav stared.

Vidhaan stared.

Kunal looked back,

"...what?"

Bhairav crossed his arms.

"You fixed your hair."

Vidhaan nodded slowly,

"Twice."

Kunal looked horrified.

"You two notice everything."

Then Tanya walked inside.

For a moment, Kunal forgot how speaking worked.

Tanya wore a red dress and carried the same calm confidence she always had.

"Hi, Kunal," she said.

"Hi," Kunal replied instantly.

Bhairav nearly burst into laughter.

Vidhaan looked away immediately towards the ceiling.

The evening moved forward like a dream.

Speeches happened, awards were given, teachers shared memories, students laughed, some cried.

For a few hours everyone pretended that nothing was ending.

But every smile carried a little sadness, and every laugh carried a little goodbye.

The auditorium slowly became quiet.

Then, near the end of the evening, their class teacher called them forward.

Bhairav.

Kunal.

Vidhaan.

The three boys stood beside one another.

The teacher smiled.

"You three spent years creating noise, trouble, and unforgettable memories."

The auditorium laughed, as students remembered the memories created by them.

Then she continued softly: "and I hope life never separates you."

The auditorium remained completely silent. Then applause slowly filled the room.

Suddenly, nobody wanted the evening to end.

After the speeches ended, students began collecting signatures in farewell books.

Promises appeared everywhere.

"Stay in touch, never change, see you soon, don't forget me."

Kunal wrote the same message in nearly every book: "Please remember that I was your favorite classmate."

Most people crossed it out immediately.

After the farewell ended and the lights inside the auditorium dimmed, four figures slowly walked toward the old mango tree.

Bhairav, Kunal, Vidhaan, and Tanya.

The school building stood quiet under the night sky. The school grounds looked different at night. Only the tree remained exactly the same.

Kunal looked upwards,

"Do you think graduation life will be different?"

Vidhaan smiled slightly,

"Definitely."

Bhairav looked toward the stars.

Tanya looked at all three of them.

Somewhere in the silence, they all wondered the same thing: Would life pull them apart? Or was their biggest adventure only beginning?

Far away, beyond Ram Nagar, new cities, new dreams, and graduation days were waiting.

The first day of college felt strange.

No familiar school gates, no morning assembly, no giant mango tree waiting after classes, no classrooms filled with years of memories. Everything was just too new.

Bhairav had received admission to a university in Jaipur to study literature and writing. It felt like a dream beginning.

Vidhaan joined an engineering college in Delhi, exactly where everyone expected him to go.

Kunal, after weeks of confusion, changing forms, and endless discussions, joined a media program in Mumbai.

Three cities. Three different futures.

For the first time in years, they would not walk to school together.

The night before leaving Ram Nagar, they met beneath the mango tree.

Their place, their headquarters, their childhood.

The evening sky glowed orange as silence sat between them.

Kunal looked around dramatically.

"This tree is looking emotional."

Vidhaan sighed,

"Trees don't become emotional."

Kunal crossed his arms,

"How do you know?"

Bhairav smiled quietly.

Nothing had changed. Somehow, everything had changed.

Nearby, Tanya walked towards them carrying four cups of tea.

Yes, Four. Not three.

Without saying anything, she sat beside them.

Nobody spoke for a while.

Wind rustled through branches overhead.

Then Tanya finally asked: "Scared?"

Kunal looked down.

Bhairav stared ahead.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

Then Bhairav spoke softly: "a little."

Kunal nodded,

"More than a little."

Vidhaan looked towards the sunset,

"Same."

Beneath excitement, dreams, and ambition, another feeling existed.

Fear. Fear of distance, fear of change, fear of falling apart. Fear that life might slowly separate them.

Tanya smiled gently,

"My grandmother says something."

They looked towards her.

She continued: **"Real friendships don't become smaller because of distance. They become stronger because people choose to keep them."**

(silence followed)

Kunal looked towards Tanya.

For once, he had no joke, no dramatic answer, nothing. Only a smile.

The next morning arrived far too quickly.

Ram Nagar railway station buzzed with people carrying bags and shouting goodbyes.

Parents gave advice. Children cried. Announcements echoed overhead.

Bhairav looked at his ticket.

Vidhaan checked the time.

Kunal pretended to act brave. Just pretended, as he was the one who was scared the most.

Suddenly, Kunal hugged both of them, without warning, without explanations.

"Don't become boring people," he said quietly.

Vidhaan hugged him back.

Bhairav smiled.

Their trains arrived. Doors opened, and slowly, the three friends walked towards separate roads.

Different dreams. Different cities. Different futures.

Bhairav looked outside his train window as Ram Nagar slowly disappeared.

He saw the station becoming smaller, buildings becoming distant, memories becoming heavier.

For a long time, Bhairav sat quietly beside the train window. His thoughts remained in Ram Nagar.

The football field, the school building, Kunal's endless nonsense, and Vidhaan's impossible schedules.

Everything felt farther away with every passing minute.

Then his phone vibrated.

One message.

Kunal:

Group Name: Brothers Forever

Second message:

Rule Number One: Nobody disappears.

Third message from Vidhaan: Agreed.

Bhairav smiled.

Outside, life moved forward. Inside, something stayed the same.

Sometimes friendships don't end when roads separate.
That is where a new chapter begins.

In cities far away, college life was already waiting. New
friends, new challenges, new dreams.

But for Kunal, someone unexpected would soon return
to his story.

Chapter 6

Degrees and Dreams

College life arrived with excitement, confusion, and a strange kind of loneliness.

Everything felt larger.

Larger campuses, larger classrooms, larger crowds, and somehow, larger distances.

Bhairav's university in Jaipur looked like a world from one of his stories. Ancient buildings stood beside green lawns. Students sat under trees discussing books, dreams, and futures.

His literature classes felt like home. He was surrounded by people who loved stories as much as he did.

Writers, poets, dreamers, people who could spend hours arguing about books.

His notebook slowly filled with ideas, characters, plots, fragrant of stories.

For the first few days, Bhairav felt excited. Then slowly, he felt something else.

He missed home.

He missed Ram Nagar.

He missed the mango tree.

Most of all, he missed his friends.

One evening, after classes ended, Bhairav sat alone in the classroom.

Students laughed nearby, some discussed assignments, others planned weekend trips. But Bhairav wasn't listening.

His notebook lay open in front of him.

Usually words came easily. But today, they didn't.

Instead, he found himself drawing something.

A tree, and three small figures beneath it. He kept staring at the sketch and smiled sadly.

"Missing home?," one of his classmates asked.

"A little," replied Bhairav.

"Everyone says that during the first month," said the classmate.

Maybe he was right, but Bhairav knew he wasn't only missing a place. He was missing his people.

Meanwhile in Delhi, Vidhaan's engineering college was a different world entirely.

Projects arrived before he finished previous projects, assignments appeared endlessly, and exams seemed to exist every other week.

Yet somehow he enjoyed it.

The challenge pushed him forward, every achievement felt earned, and every success felt satisfying.

He had already created a timetable for college life.

Wake up.

Classes.

Assignments.

Study.

Sleep.

Repeat.

Though whenever his friends called, Vidhaan secretly enjoyed hearing about their chaos far more than discussing engineering.

Some things never changed.

His roommates found him extremely organized.

One evening they asked: "Do you ever do anything fun?"

Vidhaan thought seriously.

Then replied: "...sometimes."

Instead he suddenly remembered Kunal screaming during football matches. The memory made him smile.

One roommate noticed,

"What happened?"

"Nothing," said Vidhaan.

But it wasn't nothing. He actually realized how quiet life felt without his two friends creating chaos around him.

Back in Mumbai, Kunal stood in the middle of his giant college campus looking completely lost.

He was struggling. Not academically, but socially.

Mumbai was loud. Louder than anything Kunal had ever experienced. The city never seemed to stop moving.

Cars filled the roads, trains rushed past every few minutes. people walked so fast that Kunal often wondered if everyone was late for something.

Everyone seemed to arrive with ready-made confidence. Groups formed quickly, and friendships appeared overnight.

Kunal knew how to talk. That wasn't the problem. The problem was something else.

He didn't have Bhairav and Vidhaan beside him.

The familiar comfort was missing, and he hated admitting that.

For the first few weeks, college felt exciting. Then, overwhelming, then exciting again.

Every day brought new faces, new lectures, and new challenges.

Every evening ended the same way, with a message in Brothers Forever group.

"No matter how busy life becomes, nobody disappears."

Rule Number One remained unbroken.

One fine day, Kunal looked left, then right, then left again.

"...I have made a mistake," he whispered dramatically.

Suddenly, someone bumped into him.

Books slipped from someone's hands. Papers scattered across the ground.

Kunal quickly bent down.

"I'm so sorry"

Then he froze.

The girl looked up.

Kunal blinked.

No. Impossible.

"Tanya?"

Tanya stared.

Then her eyes widened.

"Kunal?"

For ten whole seconds neither spoke.

Out of thousands of colleges, lakhs of students, hundreds of cities, life had somehow done something unbelievable.

Tanya laughed first.

"You joined this college?"

Kunal looked shocked.

"YOU joined this college!"

Students walked around them while both simply stared.

Kunal pointed dramatically,

"This is skeptical."

Tanya folded her arms,

"What is skeptical?"

Kunal looked towards the sky,

"I think life is spying on me."

Tanya laughed again.

Kunal noticed something strange.

For weeks, college had felt unfamiliar, lonely, and heavy.
But suddenly, it felt a little like home.

That evening Bhairav's phone vibrated.

Brothers Forever

Kunal: EMERGENCY

Vidhaan: What happened?

Bhairav: Are you alive?

Three dots appeared...

Kunal: Guess who is in my college.

Vidhaan: Who?

Kunal: Tanya.

No messages appeared.

Five seconds. Ten seconds. Then,

Bhairav: WHAT?

Vidhaan: Impossible.

Kunal smiled at his screen.

For the first time since leaving Ram Nagar, he actually laughed.

Maybe life had separated roads, but sometimes, it also brought people back.

Somewhere far away, another chapter had quietly begun.

Days turned into weeks, weeks slowly became months.

College life finally began feeling real.

Classes grew harder, assignments multiplied, and sleep schedules became irrelevant.

Somehow, every professor seemed to believe their subject was the only subject in existence.

The Brothers Forever group remained alive. Mostly because Kunal refused to let it become quiet.

Every morning:

Kunal: Good morning, future legends.

Every afternoon:

Kunal: I survived class. Barely.

Every night:

Kunal: Important question: Why does college give homework as if students don't require sleep?

Vidhaan replied only when necessary.

Bhairav replied whenever he remembered.

Tanya, somehow had slowly become part of their conversations too.

Not officially, but naturally. Like she had always been there.

Mumbai changed Kunal. Slowly, and unexpectedly.

He still laughed loudly, still created chaos, still turned ordinary days into adventures. But now there were evenings when he sat quietly with Tanya near the college courtyard.

They talked about classes, dreams, school memories, teachers, Ram Nagar, and sometimes, about things they never spoke about before.

One evening after classes, rain clouds gathered above the campus.

Students hurried across pathways carrying bags over their heads.

Kunal and Tanya sat beneath a small covered cafe area.

Rain tapped softly against the roof.

For several minutes they watched people running through the rain.

Then Tanya smiled, and said.

"You miss them."

Kunal looked towards her.

"Who? Bhairav and Vidhaan."

Kunal looked outside again. Rain continued falling. Then slowly, he smiled.

"A little."

Tanya raised an eyebrow.

"A little?"

Kunal laughed quietly.

"Fine."

He looked down.

"A lot."

For a moment neither spoke.

Then Tanya said softly: "You know... school felt smaller."

Kunal looked at her.

She stared at the rain.

"In school you know everyone, you know where to sit, you know who your people are."

But college...she smiled faintly. College makes you start again.

Kunal looked at her carefully.

For once, she looked nervous. Not Tanya, the confident debater. Not Tanya, the smart student. Just Tanya.

Suddenly Kunal grinned, dangerously very slowly.

Tanya narrowed her eyes.

"What?"

Kunal pointed dramatically.

"You know what this means."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

Kunal stood up.

"It means,"

Tanya already looked worried.

Kunal spread his arms.

"WE ARE OFFICIALLY CONFUSED TOGETHER."

(absolute silence followed for ten seconds)

Two students nearby turned around.

Tanya stared at him, then covered her face.

"...I cannot believe I know you."

Kunal looked proud, extremely proud.

Tanya laughed so hard she almost spilled her coffee.

Far away in Jaipur, Bhairav sat beneath a tree on campus writing in his notebook.

Not stories. Not ideas. Memories.

Pages filled with Ram Nagar, school days, the mango tree, Kunal's nonsense, Vidhaan's seriousness, and Tanya.

Somewhere deep down, he had begun realizing something.

Life was changing quickly, just too quickly.

Someday, these ordinary days would become stories worth remembering.

He looked at the page and wrote: **"Sometimes people leave home to find themselves."**

Then after a pause, **"and sometimes they find pieces of home in unexpected people."**

In Delhi, Vidhaan stared at his phone.

One new message:

Kunal: Emergency meeting tonight. Video call.

Bhairav: Why?

Kunal: Life changing situation.

Vidhaan: Should we be worried?

Three dots appeared...

Kunal: I think Tanya called me mature today.

Bhairav: Wrong person. Must be another Kunal.

Vidhaan: Scientifically impossible.

Kunal: Please don't involve Science in our conversations.

Vidhaan: Yeah, whatever!

Alone in three different cities, three friends laughed again. Miles apart, still together.

None of them knew that college had more waiting.

New friendships, new heartbreaks, new dreams, and choices that would test them more than ever before.

The years that once looked endless suddenly began moving too fast.

First year became second, second became third.

Assignments turned into internships, and class projects became final presentations.

Somewhere between crowded cafeterias, late night study sessions, and endless cups of coffee, college had quietly become home.

Bhairav's notebooks were no longer filled only with stories. Now they carried drafts of novels, articles, and ideas he dreamed of publishing someday.

Professors had started noticing him.

One teacher even told him: "You don't write words, Bhairav. You create worlds."

He never forgot that sentence.

Vidhaan had become one of the most respected students in his engineering college.

Students came to him before exams. Teachers trusted him with projects.

Even though he still followed impossible schedules and color-coded notes.

Some things truly never changed.

Meanwhile in Mumbai, Kunal had somehow become... responsible.

Well, partially responsible.

He led presentations confidently, organized college events, and created campaigns people actually admired.

Strangely enough, people listened when he spoke.

One evening after classes, Kunal and Tanya sat near the college amphitheatre watching the sunset. Students laughed nearby. Music floated through the evening air.

Tanya smiled.

"Graduation is in two months."

Kunal stared ahead, "Two months, eight weeks, sixty days."

"No."

Tanya laughed.

"Kunal"

"No."

"You cannot reject time."

Kunal crossed his arms.

"I disagree."

Tanya shook her head smiling.

For the first few days after that conversation, Kunal simply refused to think about it.

Whenever someone mentioned graduation, he changed the subject.

Whenever professors discussed final projects, he became mysteriously interested in something else.

Whenever Tanya mentioned job applications, he suddenly developed an urgent need for coffee.

Unfortunately, reality remained extremely stubborn.

The closer graduation came, the faster time seemed to move.

One evening Bhairav called. The Brothers Forever video call connected.

Kunal immediately pointed at Bhairav.

"You look tired."

"I am a literature student. Tired is our natural state," said Bhairav.

"Technically accurate, said Vidhaan."

Kunal pointed at Vidhaan,

"and you look like a spreadsheet."

"That sentence makes no sense, sighed Vidhaan."

"It doesn't need to, said Kunal."

For an hour they talked exactly the way they always had. But eventually the conversation became quieter.

Because everyone knew what was coming. Another chapter was ending.

But before ending the call, all three spoke together: "Nobody disappears."

The call ended. But somehow everyone felt a little better.

The final month disappeared almost instantly. Then the final week. Then the final day.

Graduation day came dressed in black robes, photographs, and hidden sadness. Campuses buzzed with excitement. Students clicked pictures endlessly. Parents smiled proudly.

Friends promised impossible things:

"We'll meet every week, nothing will change, we'll always stay close."

Promises everyone made. Promises life often tested.

Bhairav stood with classmates in Jaipur holding his degree.

Vidhaan stood in Delhi beside professors.

Kunal stood in Mumbai, fixing his graduation cap for the fifth time.

Tanya laughed.

"You know that's not helping."

Kunal sighed dramatically.

"This cap is against me."

Tanya looked towards him.

For once, she looked serious.

"Kunal..."

He looked up.

"What happens now?"

(real silence)

For years school and college had always provided the next step. Next class, next semester, next year.

But now? Nothing waited. Only choices, and the life ahead.

Kunal looked towards the sky.

Then smiled softly.

"I don't know."

For the first time, he truly meant it.

That night, the Brothers Forever group video called again.

Kunal smiled.

"So."

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

"I have news."

Bhairav leaned towards the camera.

"So do I."

"Why am I always late?," said Kunal.

Bhairav laughed.

Vidhaan laughed harder.

Then Kunal asked quietly, "Who's going first?"

One by one, life answered.

Bhairav had received an opportunity at a publishing company in Jaipur.

A small beginning, but a beginning.

Vidhaan was offered a position of a project manager at a major engineering firm in Delhi. Exactly where years of hard work had led him.

Kunal received an offer from a fast-growing media company in Mumbai.

The same city where his biggest adventures had begun.

Different careers. Different roads. Again.

Life was doing what life always did. Moving forward.

But before ending the call, Kunal suddenly smiled.

"Rule Number One."

Bhairav looked up.

Vidhaan smiled slightly.

Together they said, again: "Nobody disappears."

Screens went dark. Cities slept.

But somewhere far away, beneath moonlight, an old mango tree still stood waiting.

Adulthood had finally arrived, and with it came careers, responsibilities, success, love, and challenges none of them could imagine.

Chapter 7

What the Rain Revealed

Adulthood arrived quietly. Not with grand music. Not with dramatic speeches. Just alarm clocks. Morning meetings. Deadlines. Bills.

Messages saying: "Sorry, busy today."

Life had changed again.

Bhairav moved deeper into the world of writing and publishing. Days became filled with manuscripts, editing meetings, and endless ideas scribbled in notebooks.

At first he edited other people's stories, but late at night, after work ended, he still wrote his own stories filled with friendship, love, betrayal, revenge, and many more genres.

Also, memories filled with three boys beneath a mango tree.

One winter evening in Jaipur, Bhairav sat alone in his apartment.

A half-finished manuscript lay open on his desk. For several minutes he stared at a page.

The chapter wasn't working, as something felt missing.

In Delhi, Vidhaan's engineering career grew steadily. His work impressed seniors quickly.

Projects became larger. Responsibilities increased. Promotions followed.

Slowly, very slowly, the boy who once organized school festivals became the man people trusted with entire teams.

One morning a junior employee nervously entered his office.

"Sir, how do you stay calm during deadlines?"

Vidhaan thought for a moment, then smiled unexpectedly.

"I had friends who never allowed me to panic."

The employee looked confused. Vidhaan didn't explain.

Some stories required too much context.

Kunal entered the media life exactly the way everyone expected, dramatically.

On his first day at the media company in Mumbai, he accidentally entered the wrong meeting room and confidently introduced himself to complete strangers.

For ten minutes. Ten whole minutes.

Before realizing, he was attending a finance department meeting.

The story spread through the office within days.

Kunal became famous immediately.

Not exactly in the way he planned. But famous.

Some things truly never changed.

Tanya had also begun building her career in Mumbai. She joined a publishing and communications company. Her confidence and intelligence quickly made people notice her.

Months had passed, and...

Life became faster, meetings replaced classes, calendars replaced timetables, and free time slowly became rare.

But despite everything, Kunal and Tanya kept meeting. Coffee after work, walks near the sea, birthday celebrations, random evening calls, ordinary moments, simple moments, but important moments. Though neither of them realized how important.

One rainy evening Mumbai looked painted in silver.

Rain tapped softly against windows while traffic lights reflected across wet streets.

The day had been exhausting. Meetings, deadlines, emails, phone calls.

The kind of day that made both of them question why adulthood had seemed so exciting when they were younger.

The roads glistened beneath streetlights, and people hurried through the evening carrying umbrellas.

Kunal stood outside his office building, staring at the sky.

His bike had broken down, his phone battery was dead, and rain was falling harder every minute.

"Perfect"

A familiar voice appeared from behind.

"You say that every time something goes wrong."

Kunal turned.

Tanya stood there holding an umbrella.

"Are you stalking me?"

Tanya rolled her eyes, laughed, and together they began walking towards a cafe nearby.

The rain showed no signs of stopping.

Hours passed, coffee became dinner, dinner became conversations, conversations became memories, and before they realized it, the cafe had nearly emptied.

Outside, rain continued tapping softly against the windows. Inside, the world felt strangely quiet.

Comfortable, and safe, but for a strange moment, everything felt quiet.

Kunal looked towards Tanya.

Not as school Tanya, not as college Tanya, not as his friend, but something felt different, very different.

Suddenly he started noticing things he had somehow missed for years.

How she smiled before laughing, how she pushed wet hair behind her ear while thinking, how she always looked directly at people while listening.

Simple, but tiny things.

Suddenly, his heart felt strangely nervous.

Tanya looked at him.

"What?"

Kunal blinked, "What what?"

"You are staring."

(immediate silence)

Kunal looked away so quickly it almost looked painful.

"I'm not staring."

"You are."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

Tanya smiled slowly, very precariously slowly.

Then she said: "Kunal..."

"What?"

Very softly she asked: "When did you become quiet around me?"

Years ago, school Kunal became quiet around Tanya. College Kunal became comfortable around Tanya. But now, grown up Kunal suddenly didn't know what to say.

But somewhere deep inside Tanya, a realization quietly arrived too, because when she imagined difficult days, she called Kunal. When something wonderful happened, she called Kunal. When life felt confusing, she looked for Kunal.

Tanya continued: "You make difficult days easier"

The words stayed between them. Simple, honest, and totally unexpected.

This was Tanya.

The girl who had known him for years. The girl who knew every embarrassing story from school. The girl who still reminded everyone about the time he got stuck climbing the mango tree.

Yet somehow, their hearts had started behaving differently.

The following weeks only made things worse, or better, depending on how one looked at it.

Every conversation mattered more. Every message brought a smile. Every meeting became something he looked forward to.

For years, they thought it was habit. Friendship, and routine. But standing beneath rain and city lights, she wondered: What if it was something more?

Far away, Bhairav and Vidhaan's phone suddenly buzzed.

Brothers Forever

Kunal: Emergency.

Bhairav instantly replied: Alive?

Vidhaan: Hospital?

Three dots appeared...

(long pause, longer pause)

Kunal: I think something is wrong.

Bhairav: What happened??

Kunal: I think... My brain stops working when I'm with Tanya.

(five seconds, ten seconds)

Bhairav: Finally.

Vidhaan: Took only seven years. Probably eight.

In three different cities, old laughter returned once again, because sometimes love doesn't arrive suddenly.

Sometimes, it quietly grows beside friendship for years, until one rainy evening...you finally notice it.

Meanwhile Tanya faced her own problem.

Every time something good happened, she wanted to tell Kunal first.

When work became difficult, she called him.

When something funny happened, she messaged him.

When she achieved something important, he was the first person she thought of.

At first she ignored it, then she noticed it, then she couldn't stop noticing it.

One evening Tanya sat alone in her apartment after a long day at work.

The city lights flickered outside her window while traffic hummed far below.

Her phone rested beside her. Without thinking, she picked it up, then paused, because she had already opened Kunal's chat, again.

A smile appeared, and that was becoming a problem, or perhaps not a problem at all.

She looked back through years of messages.

School jokes, college memories, random photographs, birthday wishes, voice notes, late night conversations.

Some people enter your life dramatically. Kunal never had. He had simply stayed.

And somehow that felt more important.

The next few weeks brought no answers, but only more questions.

Whenever they met, Tanya found herself looking forward to the conversation before it even began.

Whenever her phone buzzed, she hoped it was him. Whenever something funny happened, she imagined telling him. Whenever something difficult happened, she wanted his opinion.

The realization arrived slowly, then all at once.

One evening she stood outside her office building watching rain fall across Mumbai.

The city looked blurred beneath silver clouds, and suddenly she remembered something her grandmother once said: "Pay attention to the people you look for when life feels heavy."

Tanya smiled softly, because she already knew exactly who that person was.

Meanwhile, Kunal's situation wasn't improving. In fact, it was getting worse.

Every message from Tanya made him smile. Every phone call brightened his day. Every meeting somehow became the best part of his week.

Two evenings later Tanya sent a message.

Tanya: Free tonight?

Kunal stared at the screen. His heart immediately forgot how to function.

Kunal: Yes.

When they met, the waves rolled against the shore. The wind moved gently through the night, and standing beside the sea, they both realized something simple, something beautiful.

Home was never only Ram Nagar. Home was never only a place. Sometimes home became a friendship, sometimes home became a memory.

And sometimes...

Home became a person, and for the first time, neither of them was afraid to admit it.

Chapter 8

Finding Home

Days passed after the rainy evening, but something had changed.

Not loudly, not dramatically, just quietly, like a song playing softly in the background.

Kunal noticed it. Or rather, Kunal noticed that he noticed things.

He noticed when Tanya looked tired after long meetings. He noticed when she skipped lunch because of work. He noticed when she smiled at messages before replying.

Strangely, he wanted to be the reason for those smiles, which was a problem, a very big problem.

Kunal, the boy who could speak in front of hundreds of people without fear, suddenly became nervous around one person.

One Saturday evening, Bhairav and Vidhaan arrived in Mumbai for a reunion.

Years had passed since college, but some traditions never disappeared.

No matter how busy life became, they met.

Rule Number One: Nobody disappears.

The three friends sat in a cafe near the sea. Kunal looked unusually distracted.

Bhairav narrowed his eyes.

Vidhaan noticed too.

Kunal stirred his coffee. Stirred it again. And again.

Finally Bhairav leaned forward,

"What happened?"

"Nothing."

Vidhaan folded his arms.

"You have stirred that coffee for three minutes."

Kunal stared, "...you counted?"

"I am an Engineer", said Vidhaan.

Then Bhairav slowly smiled,

"Tanya."

Kunal froze.

Bhairav grinned wider.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

Mystery solved.

Kunal sighed dramatically.

"I hate both of you."

"No, you don't," Bhairav said.

Quietly, very quietly, Kunal looked towards the sea.

"I think something is wrong."

Bhairav smiled.

Vidhaan already looked amused.

Kunal continued: "When something funny happens.....I want to tell Tanya first."

(long silence)

"When something good happens.....I want to tell Tanya first."

(longer silence)

"And when something bad happens (*Kunal looking down*).....I still want to tell Tanya first."

Nobody joked. Nobody laughed.

Both realized, suddenly, this wasn't school Kunal, or college Kunal. This was real.

Bhairav looked towards Vidhaan.

Vidhaan looked back.

Together, like they had planned it years ago, they smiled.

Bhairav leaned forward,

"Kunal, I think you already know."

One Rainy afternoon in Mumbai, Tanya texted, again,

"Free tonight?"

Kunal stared at his phone, then read it again, and again, as if words might change.

Kunal: Yes, again.

Later that evening they met again and walked beside the sea.

Mumbai glittered around them. Street lights reflected on waves. Cool wind moved through the night air.

For a while they simply walked. Comfortable silence.

(the kind that only happens after years)

Then Tanya spoke: "Do you remember school?"

Kunal smiled.

"The storytelling competition?"

Tanya laughed.

"You were terrified."

"I was not terrified."

"You forgot your lines."

"Temporary memory problem."

Tanya looked towards him. Very softly she said: "You've always been there."

Kunal looked up.

"For school, for college, for life."

The wind suddenly felt colder, or maybe Kunal simply felt nervous.

Tanya smiled faintly.

"When things become difficult.....I still look for you first."

(now this was something real for Kunal)

Years ago Kunal had said the same thing to Bhairav and Vidhaan.

But now, someone else was saying this to him.

Slowly, Tanya looked towards the sea.

Then whispered: "I think home became people... not places."

Kunal stared at her. No joke came, no dramatic line appeared, nothing.

For once, his heart understood something before his mind did.

Standing beside city lights and endless waves, Kunal realized something terrifying, something wonderful, something impossible to ignore.

He wasn't falling in love. He had fallen long ago. He had simply arrived late to the realization.

Beside him, Tanya smiled quietly, because perhaps, she had realized it too.

The waves rolled gently against the shore.

Mumbai sparkled around them.

Cars moved in the distance, people walked past, but for Kunal, everything suddenly felt strangely quiet, because Tanya's words kept repeating in his mind:

"I think home became people... not places."

Silence sat between them. Not uncomfortable silence (*the kind that happens when two people have known each other for years*).

Kunal looked towards the sea, then towards Tanya, then back towards the sea, then towards Tanya again.

Tanya noticed, and a familiar smile appeared.

"The famous Kunal Mehta has no words?"

Kunal looked at her immediately. "I have many words."

"...they are temporarily unavailable."

Tanya laughed, Kunal smiled too.

There it was again, that feeling. That feeling where somehow everything felt easier around her.

For years they had crossed school hallways together, college campuses, busy city roads, work schedules, life itself, and somehow, they kept finding their way back to each other.

Kunal looked at her quietly.

"Tanya."

She looked up.

For once, he didn't joke. Didn't hide behind humor.
Didn't act dramatic.

Very softly he said: "I think somewhere between
school... college... and all these years..."

He completely stopped.

Tanya waited.

Kunal looked nervous.

Then finally: "...you became my favorite person."

(real silence).

Tanya stared at him.

The wind moved softly around them.

Then she smiled. Not her usual laughing smile, a
smaller one, warmer.

Very gently she reached for his hand.

"I was wondering how long it would take."

Kunal blinked.

"What?"

Tanya smiled quietly.

"Kunal..."

She looked at him.

"You think I didn't notice?"

(Kunal Mehta.. speechless.. a historical event)

They stood there smiling like two people who had finally solved a puzzle years in the making. A little later they sat on a nearby bench facing the sea.

For the first time, they spoke about the future. Real future. Not school dreams, not college plans, but life.

Tanya looked toward the waves.

"Where do you see yourself in ten years?"

Kunal thought seriously.

"A house."

Tanya smiled. "Okay."

Kunal continued: "Lots of noise."

Tanya laughed. "Expected."

"and friends visiting constantly."

"also expected."

Then Kunal looked toward her,

"and... people I love around me."

Tanya looked at him quietly, "I want that too."

The waves rolled gently against the shore.

Mumbai glittered beneath the night sky while soft wind carried the smell of rain and the sea.

Kunal and Tanya sat quietly on the bench. No jokes. No teasing. No pretending.

Just two people who had known each other for years. For once, neither wanted to rush the moment.

Tanya looked towards the water.

"Do you remember the first day we met?"

Kunal smiled immediately.

"You sat beside me."

Tanya laughed,

"and you dropped every pen you owned."

Kunal looked offended.

"That happened once."

Tanya raised an eyebrow.

"Twice. Possibly, three times."

Kunal sighed dramatically.

"Details are unnecessary."

They laughed, and suddenly school memories returned: Classrooms, story competitions, the mango tree, exams, college, distance, reunions, years of moments, years of growing up together.

Tanya looked at him quietly.

"You know something?"

Kunal looked up.

"You've changed."

Kunal blinked.

Immediately questioning.

"What does that mean?"

Tanya smiled.

"You still make terrible jokes."

Kunal looked proud.

"Thank you."

"But..." she continued softly, "...you grew up too."

Those words somehow mattered more than Kunal expected.

For years people called him funny, loud, and carefree. But Tanya had noticed something deeper. The person beneath all of that.

Kunal looked down and smiled quietly.

Then very gently, Tanya moved closer and rested her head against his shoulder.

Simple, comfortable, natural, like she had done it a thousand times before.

Kunal looked at the city lights ahead, then smiled.

Suddenly he realized something: For years, home had been Ram Nagar. Then school, then friendships, then memories, and now, somehow, home had become this moment too.

After a while Tanya looked up at him.

Very softly she asked: "So... what happens next?"

Kunal looked towards her, then smiled,

"The future."

Tanya laughed.

"Very specific."

Kunal grinned.

"I try."

In that quiet moment, they shared a small, gentle kiss, but a kiss that lasted long. The sea witnessed every moment.

A simple moment that felt less like a beginning and more like finally arriving somewhere they had been walking toward for years.

No fireworks, and no dramatic music. Just happiness.

The kind that felt calm. The kind that felt right.

Later they sat together talking about plans.

Dreams, homes, careers, travel, and family.

Beneath moonlight in Ram Nagar, an old mango tree stood silently, still watching over the story it had started years ago.

Far away,

Bhairav's phone buzzed.

Kunal: Emergency solved.

Vidhaan: Explain.

(long pause)

Kunal: I think the future just became interesting.

Chapter 9

Friendship Becomes Forever

Through office meetings, promotions, birthdays, late night phone calls, and reunions that never seemed to happen often enough, Bhairav's writing career had finally begun rising exactly the way he once dreamed beneath the mango tree.

His first novel had become successful, and every time someone asked where his inspiration came from, he smiled.

He never gave the full answer, because some stories were too personal.

At book launches, interviews, and literary events, people often asked the same question.

"Who inspired your characters?"

"Are these friendships based on actual experiences?"

Bhairav always smiled, and sometimes, he answered vaguely.

How could he explain that some of his best characters came from a boy who once kicked a football into his notebook?

Or another boy who could organize an entire school festival?

How could he explain that every story about loyalty somehow contained pieces of Kunal and Vidhaan?

Some things belonged only to memory.

One afternoon, while signing copies of his latest book, a young reader approached nervously.

"Sir?"

"Yes," Bhairav looked up.

The teenager held a worn copy of his first novel.

"I wish I had friends like the ones in your books."

For a moment, Bhairav didn't answer. Then he smiled,

"I hope you do."

The reader looked confused.

Bhairav continued, "real friendships aren't perfect."

They argue, they misunderstand each other, they disappear sometimes. But the right people always find their way back.

The teenager nodded thoughtfully before walking away.

Bhairav watched him leave, with a slight smile.

Vidhaan had become one of the youngest project leaders in his company. Calm, dependable, and

thoughtful, exactly the person everyone expected him to become.

His team respected him, his seniors trusted him.

And somehow, despite handling deadlines, meetings, and impossible schedules, he still managed to remain the same person his friends had always known.

One Monday morning, Vidhaan stood in a conference room in Delhi, presenting a major project to company executives.

Charts filled the screen behind him. Managers listened carefully, and questions came quickly.

Vidhaan answered each one calmly.

By the time the meeting ended, the room erupted into applause, as his project had been approved.

His work had finally paid off.

Outside the conference room, one of his colleagues smiled, and said: "Congratulations, Vidhaan."

Another added, "You deserve this."

Vidhaan felt proud.

Kunal, somehow became successful while still creating complete chaos around him.

Some things truly never changed, but now there was one difference.

Every major moment in Kunal's life somehow included Tanya.

Work celebrations, bad days, random coffee breaks, dreams, plans, life.

One warm evening in Mumbai, Kunal and Tanya sat on a rooftop restaurant overlooking the city lights.

(soft music played nearby)

The sky glowed orange as sunset slowly disappeared.

Tanya smiled,

"You've been strangely quiet today."

Kunal blinked,

"What does strangely quiet mean?"

Tanya folded her arms.

"It means you haven't said anything ridiculous in seven minutes."

(silence)

Kunal looked offended.

Then suddenly, he stood up.

Tanya blinked,

"Kunal!"

No answer.

Kunal reached into his pocket.

Tanya's eyes widened.

"No."

Kunal looked nervous.

The kind of nervous he hadn't felt since school storytelling competitions.

Very softly he said: "Tanya..."

The city lights shimmered below. Traffic moved like tiny rivers of light.

For a moment everything else disappeared.

Kunal smiled, and said: "You've been beside me through school, college, confusion, distance, life.

Honestly...I don't want any future where you aren't there too.

Tanya stared. Completely still.

Kunal took a breath, then smiled nervously.

"So..."

He opened a small box, with a ring inside, "...will you marry me?"

(dead quiet, pin drop silence)

Tanya covered her face. Not because she was sad, because she was crying. Happy tears.

Kunal immediately panicked. Instant panic.

"WAIT..WHY ARE YOU CRYING?"

Tanya laughed through tears.

Then shook her head, and whispered: "Yes."

Kunal blinked.

"...yes?"

Tanya smiled wider.

"Yes, Kunal."

For exactly three seconds, Kunal stared.

"YESSSSS!!!!!!!!!"

Several people turned around. One waiter nearly dropped plates.

Tanya laughed so hard she couldn't speak, and Kunal, hugged her so quickly she nearly lost balance.

"Careful!" she protested between laughs.

Kunal: "You said Yesssss"

Tanya: "Let me complete first. I didn't actually say Yesssss. I said Yes."

Kunal: "Same thing"

Tanya: "Not the same thing"

Kunal: "So now we're discussing technicalities?"

Tanya shook her head, and literally laughed.

Some things never changed, even when they were discussing love.

The reality of what had just happened slowly settled between them.

Years of friendship, years of conversations, years of memories, and now this.

Tanya smiled softly, and said: "You know, everybody else figured it out before we did."

Kunal: "Tanya, we're not so intelligent when it comes to love."

She stared at him. He stared back. Then both burst out laughing.

Far away: Brothers Forever

Kunal: EMERGENCY.

Vidhaan: No.

Bhairav: What exploded?

(pause)

Kunal: I'M GETTING MARRIED.

(hush, absolute wordlessness)

Bhairav: WHAT?

Vidhaan: ...WHAT?

Kunal smiled at his phone.

Another message:

Kunal: Come home.

Weeks later, Ram Nagar looked different.

Colorful lights hung across streets. Music floated through evening air. Homes buzzed with excitement.

After years, everyone had returned.

Bhairav stepped out of a car and stared at the school building, the streets, the old tea stall.

Memories rushed back instantly.

Nearby, Vidhaan smiled quietly.

"OI!"

Both turned.

Kunal ran towards them. Actually ran, like school days, like nothing had changed.

For one second they stared.

Years of distance, years of growing up, years of life.

Then all three hugged.

No words.

No jokes.

No explanations.

Some reunions don't need them.

Behind them Tanya smiled quietly, because she suddenly understood something:

Kunal had never exaggerated. These weren't friends. They were family.

That evening the three walked towards one place first.

Not home, not wedding preparations, not celebrations.

"The mango tree," still standing, still waiting.

The carved initials remained:

B + K + V

Kunal smiled softly,

"We're back."

Bhairav looked upward.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses,

"as always"

Beneath the same tree where everything had begun, three childhood friends stood together again.

Only now, their biggest celebration was waiting. The news of Kunal and Tanya's wedding.

Wedding week arrived like a festival. Not a normal festival. "A Kunal festival," which meant chaos, complete chaos.

The Mehta house in Ram Nagar overflowed with relatives, decorations, music, laughter, and people giving opinions nobody asked for.

Colorful lights covered walls, flowers hung from doorways, children ran through hallways, and somewhere in the middle of all this, Kunal had disappeared. Again.

Bhairav stood with crossed arms. He knew Kunal too well.

Vidhaan didn't look worried, as he knew Kunal too well too.

Tanya looked worried,

"Where is he?"

From upstairs,

"HELP!"

All three looked up.

Kunal stood on the balcony. Stuck.

Bhairav blinked.

Vidhaan blinked.

Tanya covered her face.

"...how?"

Kunal looked offended,

"The important question is not how."

"THE IMPORTANT QUESTION IS WHY NOBODY IS HELPING ME."

Some things truly never changed.

Bhairav: It's because watching you panic is entertaining.

Vidhaan: also educational.

Kunal: I hate both of you.

Tanya: I don't.

Kunal: Thank you.

These days became some of the happiest and busiest in Kunal's life.

Dreams became bigger, as there was someone to share it with.

Someone who understood the journey. Someone who had been there since the beginning.

The wedding day arrived beneath golden lights and music.

Ram Nagar looked magical. Guests filled the venue. Music echoed through the evening air. Flowers covered everything.

Beneath endless decorations stood Kunal, wearing a cream sherwani and looking surprisingly calm.

Bhairav narrowed his eyes.

Vidhaan looked concerned.

"This is not normal."

Kunal smiled proudly.

"I have matured."

Then Kunal tripped while turning around.

Vidhaan nodded.

"There he is."

Bhairav laughed immediately.

Nearby Tanya entered wearing a beautiful pink bridal outfit.

For one moment, everything became quiet.

Kunal looked up, and forgot to breathe completely.

Bhairav looked at Vidhaan.

Vidhaan looked back.

Both smiled, because suddenly, they remembered school.

Story competitions, college, rainy evenings, the sea, everything.

Years of moments had led here.

Kunal smiled softly.

Tanya smiled back.

The celebrations brought both families together.

Laughter filled homes, photographs were taken, stories were shared, old memories returned.

Every conversation somehow included an embarrassing story about Kunal.

Usually told by Bhairav, sometimes supported by Vidhaan.

Somewhere in the crowd, three lives quietly celebrated far more than a wedding.

They celebrated time.

And beneath the same sky that had watched them since childhood, surrounded by family, friends, and the people they loved most, a new chapter was ready to begin.

Chapter 10

The Unplanned Phase

Months became years. Years moved quickly. Homes changed. Careers grew, and life continued.

Kunal and Tanya had moved into a home in Mumbai. Not huge, not perfect, but theirs.

Kunal called it: "Headquarters 2.0"

Tanya strongly disagreed.

Then one evening Tanya stood holding a small envelope.

Very quietly she smiled.

Kunal looked confused.

"What happened?"

Tanya handed him something.

Kunal looked down.

Read, blink, read again, blink again.

"...WHAT?!"

Tanya laughed immediately.

Kunal stared. Then stared again. Then:

"WE ARE HAVING A BABY?!"

For exactly five minutes he forgot how chairs worked, or walking. or basic human behavior.

Far away: Brothers Forever

Kunal: EMERGENCY

Vidhaan: Hospital?

Bhairav: Fire?

Kunal: I'M GOING TO BE A FATHER

(long silence)

Bhairav: WHAT?!

Vidhaan: Impossible.

Kunal: WHY IMPOSSIBLE??

Vidhaan: Emotionally impossible. I still remember paper airplanes.

Bhairav: I still remember him getting stuck in the mango tree.

Kunal: WHY DOES EVERY MAJOR LIFE EVENT BECOME A HISTORY LESSON?

Vidhaan: because you are impossible.

The news spread quickly.

Parents cried happy tears, families celebrated, phone calls arrived from every corner of the country, and Kunal?

Kunal panicked completely, thoroughly, spectacularly.

One moment he was excited, the next moment he was searching things online like: "How to hold a baby properly?", "what if babies don't like me?", can babies sense fear?"

Tanya discovered these searches. She laughed for ten straight minutes.

As the months passed, life began preparing them for a new chapter.

The small apartment that once felt spacious suddenly seemed too small. A spare room became a nursery, tiny clothes appeared, tiny shoes appeared, tiny blankets appeared, everything suddenly became tiny.

Kunal stood in the middle of the nursery one evening. A small crib sat beside the window.

Soft toys lined the shelves. The walls were freshly painted.

For several moments he simply stared,

"This is real."

Tanya smiled,

"It is."

Kunal looked around again,

"A small human is actually going to live here."

Tanya laughed.

"That's generally how babies work."

Meanwhile, the Brothers Forever group remained active.

Bhairav: Have you chosen names?

Kunal: We have ideas.

Vidhaan: Good.

Kunal: Why?

Vidhaan: Because if you name your child after a superhero, I'm intervening.

Kunal: You act like that's unreasonable.

Bhairav: It is unreasonable.

As Tanya's due date approached, Kunal became increasingly protective, and increasingly nervous.

He called her repeatedly throughout the day.

He reminded her to rest.

He reminded her to drink water.

He reminded her to remember things she had already remembered.

Eventually Tanya said: "Kunal."

"Yes?"

"I am the pregnant one."

"Oh."

"Please relax."

"I am relaxed."

He was absolutely not relaxed.

One evening, a few weeks before the baby's arrival, Kunal returned to Ram Nagar for a short visit.

As always, his feet carried him toward the mango tree.

The playground was quiet, the branches swayed gently in the evening breeze.

For a while he sat beneath the tree alone.

Thinking, remembering. It felt impossible.

Not long ago he had been racing across this playground with Bhairav and Vidhaan.

Now he was about to become a father.

Life had moved so quickly.

The wind rustled through the leaves overhead, and for a moment he smiled, because somehow the tree made everything feel connected.

The boy he had been, the man he had become, and the father he was about to be.

Then one night, everything changed.

Kunal was halfway through watching television when Tanya suddenly looked at him.

"Kunal."

He looked up.

"Yes?"

"I think it's time."

(silence)

His brain stopped working completely.

"Time?"

Tanya nodded.

"Time."

For five seconds Kunal remained frozen. Then chaos erupted.

He grabbed his keys, dropped his keys, found his keys, lost his phone, found his phone, forgot his wallet, found his wallet, eventually, somehow, they reached the hospital.

Hours felt like years.

The hospital corridor seemed endless.

Kunal paced, sat down, stood up again, paced more, called Bhairav, called Vidhaan, called them again.

Neither slept that night, neither wanted to, because some moments are too important, even from far away.

Finally, just before sunrise, a doctor emerged.

Then smile on her face said everything.

"Kunal!"

"Yes"

"Congratulations"

The world seemed to pause, for one beautiful moment.

"A baby girl arrived".

Tiny hands, tiny feet, tiny smiles.

Kunal looked at her and immediately forgot every important thought in existence.

He held her carefully and whispered: "Hello."

"I have absolutely no idea what I am doing."

Tanya laughed.

Life quietly changed again.

Far away, two phones buzzed simultaneously.

Kunal: She's here.

A photo followed.

Several seconds passed.

Then:

Bhairav: Welcome to the world, little one.

Vidhaan: Congratulations, Dad.

(long pause)

Vidhaan: Still emotionally impossible.

Bhairav: Agreed.

Kunal: I hate both of you.

Somewhere beneath the endless morning sky, another generation quietly began its story.

Meanwhile Bhairav's career had grown beautifully.

Books succeeded. Readers loved his stories. Awards arrived. Interviews followed.

Everything looked perfect.

Until one afternoon, everything changed.

Bhairav received a letter. Not email. Not message.

A real handwritten letter.

Very Strange.

Slowly he opened it, then froze.

Written at the bottom, beneath careful handwriting, stood a name he had not heard in years: Aarushi...

School memories rushed back instantly.

The quiet girl from the class, years ago.

The girl who loved reading his stories.

The girl who had moved away suddenly before graduation, and...

the girl who beat Bhairav in the school competition.

Memories of that second prize was still in his head.

His hands shook slightly.

Vidhaan called.

Kunal called.

But Bhairav stared only at one line: **"I read your books. I think you finally became the writer you promised you would become, and maybe... after all these years... we still have a conversation left unfinished."**

The noise around disappeared, and the conversations around him faded.

For a few moments, the world became very quiet.

He read the line again, and then again. His fingers tightened around the letter,

because he knew exactly who had written it, Aarushi.

Years earlier, before school had ended, Aarushi had entered his life quietly.

She had been one of the first people to read his stories.

One of the few who understood why he spent hours staring at blank pages.

One of the few who believed his dream was possible.

But life had moved quickly, careers had begun, cities had changed, and priorities had shifted.

And somewhere between deadlines and distance, life slowly separated them.

Now, years later, a single letter had reopened a door he thought was permanently closed.

Bhairav leaned back in his chair.

Outside, Jaipur moved through another ordinary afternoon. Memories were returning, and one unfinished conversation.

For the next few days, he carried the letter everywhere.

Not physically, but emotionally.

He found himself rereading it before sleeping, thinking about it during meetings, wondering what would happen if he replied, wondering what would happen if he didn't.

The uncertainty frustrated him.

Bhairav was usually good with words. Now he couldn't find any.

Next day, Kunal's phone buzzed.

Bhairav: Emergency.

Vidhaan: Something is definitely wrong.

Bhairav: What?

Kunal: You haven't replied to any messages properly.
And?

Bhairav: And what?

Vidhaan: And Kunal says you're thinking.

Bhairav: But that's normal.

Kunal: No

Vidhaan: Kunal says this is serious thinking.

Bhairav: What's the difference?

Vidhaan: He says normal thinking lasts ten minutes.
Serious thinking lasts three days.

Bhairav couldn't argue this time, as Kunal was correct.

Somewhere, life smiled quietly, again.

Bhairav stared at the letter for a long time, then read it
again and again.

Some names carry memories with them. Years
disappeared in an instant.

School corridors, library corners, and old smiles.

For a moment, life felt strangely paused.

Then his phone rang.

Kunal calling.

Bhairav answered,

"Kunal, HOW DO YOU ALWAYS CALL AT THE WRONG TIME?"

Kunal blinked,

"...good evening to you too."

"Why do you sound dramatic?"

Bhairav immediately regretted answering.

Five minutes later, Kunal knew everything.

Ten minutes later, Vidhaan knew too.

Fifteen minutes later, both had officially become impossible.

Bhairav had told them everything.

The letter, the message, the unfinished conversation, the memories, and ofcourse, the uncertainty.

When he finished, silence filled the group. Then,

Vidhaan: Do you want to meet her?

Simple, direct, and honest. Just like Vidhaan.

After a long pause,

Bhairav: I think I do.

(almost instantly)

Kunal: Then go.

Vidhaan: Agreed.

Kunal: Life is too short for unfinished conversations.

For once, nobody joked.

Nobody teased, and nobody changed the subject.

Because beneath all the laughter and nonsense, that was what Brothers Forever had always been.

Three people helping each other find the courage to take the next step.

A few weeks later Bhairav finally met Aarushi.

Not dramatically, not beneath rain, and not under music.

Just coffee. Simple coffee.

After years, conversations felt slightly awkward at first.

Then easier, then familiar, like reopening an old book.

A small chapter quietly restarted.

Nothing rushed. Nothing dramatic.

Life simply smiled and moved forward.

That night, Bhairav returned home feeling lighter than he had in years.

His phone immediately buzzed.

One message, then another, then another.

The Brothers Forever group was waiting.

Kunal: Report.

Vidhaan: Detailed report.

Kunal: Minimum 500 words.

Vidhaan: With supporting evidence.

Bhairav smiled, then typed: Coffee was good.

Kunal: That's it?

Vidhaan: Unacceptable.

Kunal: We trained you better than this.

For several seconds, Bhairav watched the messages appear.

Then he typed one final reply, one that made both of them immediately understand.

Bhairav: I think the story isn't over yet.

For once, neither Kunal nor Vidhaan joked, neither teased, neither demanded details.

Because sometimes friendship means recognizing a happy ending when you see one.

Or perhaps, the beginning of another beautiful part.

Meanwhile, Kunal's life had become beautifully chaotic.

His daughter had officially transformed their home.

Tiny footsteps, tiny toys, tiny socks appearing in impossible places.

Somehow, tiny humans created giant chaos.

One evening Kunal entered the living room carrying office files.

He froze.

Tanya sat on the floor. His daughter sat beside her.

Both had colorful crayons.

Kunal slowly looked around.

Walls colored, sofa colored, floor colored.

Tanya looked up.

"...surprise?"

Kunal blinked, then looked at his daughter. She looked back proudly, and raised both tiny hands.

Covered in crayon.

"Papa!"

Kunal looked at Tanya. Tanya looked at Kunal.

Then suddenly, Kunal sat beside her, picked up a crayon, and started drawing too.

Tanya stared.

"What are you doing?"

Kunal looked shocked.

"Our daughter is creating modern art, and she needs support."

Tanya covered her face, because after all these years, Kunal still remained Kunal.

Months later everyone reunited in Ram Nagar again.

A tradition now. No matter what happened, they returned.

The mango tree still stood there. Older, wider, stronger, just like them.

Now children ran beneath it, and laughter filled the air again.

Kunal's daughter raced around the tree.

Kunal chased behind dramatically.

Vidhaan shook his head.

Bhairav smiled quietly.

Then she suddenly stopped and pointed.

"What are those?"

Everyone looked. Carved into the bark:

B + K + V

Kunal smiled softly. "That's us."

She looked confused.

"You guys used to do this as children?"

Then Bhairav laughed first.

Vidhaan smiled.

Kunal looked deeply offended.

"Excuse me."

"You?"

Everyone burst into laughter, because years had changed everything, careers, homes, families, dreams, but somehow beneath the mango tree...they were still those three boys racing through childhood.

Years moved differently now. Faster somehow.

Birthdays arrived too quickly, festivals came and went, school admissions turned into parent teacher meetings, tiny shoes became larger shoes.

One day, without warning, everyone realized the children were growing up.

Kunal's daughter was no longer the tiny girl with crayons.

Now she wore a school bag larger than herself and asked endless questions.

One evening she sat beside Kunal doing homework.

Kunal looked suspicious. Extremely suspicious.

Silence from his daughter usually meant trouble.

Then suddenly: "Papa?"

Kunal looked up. "Yes?"

She frowned at her notebook.

"What do you want me to become when I grow up?"

Kunal blinked. Then smiled. Very softly. Years disappeared instantly.

Suddenly he remembered sunlight beneath the mango tree.

Teenage dreams. Future plans. Questions. The exact same question.

Kunal looked at his daughter, and said: "Happy."

She looked confused.

"Happy?"

Kunal nodded.

"Doctor, teacher, artist, scientist..."

He smiled.

"...anything."

Then gently touched her head.

"But first be happy."

Nearby Tanya looked towards him quietly, and smiled.

Somewhere along the way, Kunal had truly grown up.

Far away, Vidhaan's son had inherited something unfortunate.

Vidhaan's timetable habits.

The child planned everything. Even football matches.

Kunal strongly blamed Vidhaan.

Vidhaan strongly denied responsibility.

The argument had now lasted two years. Possibly three. Nobody was keeping track, except Vidhaan's son, who, unfortunately, kept track of everything.

Meanwhile Bhairav's life had grown quieter and fuller.

Aarushi had entered his life gently. Without drama, and grand speeches.

Like peace arriving after noise.

Together they built a life filled with books, conversations, and warmth.

Their home in Jaipur reflected them perfectly.

Bookshelves covered entire walls, plants occupied every available corner, and half finished manuscripts rested on tables. Coffee cups appeared in mysterious locations and somehow multiplied overnight.

Aarushi strongly blamed Bhairav.

One rainy evening, Bhairav sat near the window working on a manuscript.

After a while, Aarushi looked up, "You're smiling."

"What?"

"You've been smiling at the same page for five minutes."

He looked down. The page wasn't part of the novel he was editing. It was an old notebook. One from Ram Nagar.

Aarushi smiled knowingly, "the tree again?"

"The tree again," replied Bhairav, softly.

Not every story needed fireworks. Some stories simply felt right.

Chapter 11

When Time Began to Whisper

Another change soon arrived. A quieter one, but a difficult one.

Not because something bad happened, not because life suddenly became cruel, but because middle age arrived the way it always does, quietly.

Without permission, and without warning.

Children who once needed help tying shoelaces suddenly started carrying school bags on their own.

Tiny hands had become bigger hands. Tiny voices had become opinions.

Somehow, time had moved forward again.

Kunal's daughter was no longer the little girl who colored walls with crayons.

Now she had become a teenager.

She argued, negotiated, questioned everything. Very enthusiastically, questioned everything.

One evening Kunal knocked her room.

(no answer)

He opened the door slightly. His daughter sat near the window wearing headphones, staring outside. Quiet.

Kunal immediately looked worried, because silence from her still felt dangerous.

He sat beside her. For a while nobody spoke.

Then softly: "What happened?"

"Nothing."

Kunal blinked.

Then finally she whispered: "Papa..."

Kunal looked towards her.

"What if I don't know what I want to become?"

Suddenly Kunal saw himself again.

Teenage years, school uniforms, the mango tree, dreams, questions, and fear. The exact same confusion.

He smiled softly, then said:

"When I was your age.....I wanted to become a superstar."

"What?"

Kunal nodded seriously,

"Very serious dream."

She stared towards him, then burst into laughter.

Kunal looked proud. Mission successful.

Then very gently he continued, "You don't have to know everything today."

"You grow."

"You learn."

"You change."

"and sometimes..."

He smiled,

"...life surprises you."

She looked at him quietly, and smiled.

In a parallel world, Vidhaan had become the father everyone expected.

Calm, patient, and organized.

His son had now reached college and somehow inherited two things: Vidhaan's discipline, and Kunal's ability to create accidental chaos.

An impossible, but a deadly combination.

He maintained schedules, colour coded notes, weekly and monthly goals. Unfortunately, he also possessed that unique talent, just like his father.

Meanwhile Bhairav had become a respected writer whose books filled shelves across cities. Success had not changed him more than what people expected.

Even now, he still carried a notebook, still wrote observations, still turned ordinary moments into stories.

He wrote in airports, he wrote in cafes, he wrote while waiting for trains.

He even wrote during family gatherings when nobody was paying attention.

According to Kunal, this was a serious problem.

According to Bhairav, it was called being a writer.

Bhairav continued writing books that touched thousands of readers.

The years rolled onward, birthdays arrived, promotions arrived, new homes were built, new responsibilities appeared, and the Brothers Forever group remained active through it all.

Though, the messages had evolved.

Once they had discussed homework, then college, then careers, then love.

Now they discussed things like school admissions, home repairs, blood pressure reports, and whether any of them still understood modern technology.

A fact Kunal strongly denied, usually while asking Vidhaan for technical help.

One evening, after a particularly exhausting week, Kunal sent a message.

Kunal: Emergency.

Vidhaan: *(immediately)* What happened?

Bhairav: Is everyone okay?

Kunal: I miss Ram Nagar.

Vidhaan: Me too.

Bhairav: Same.

For a while nobody typed anything, because they all knew what he meant.

Not just the town, but everything it represented.

The slower days, the simpler worries, the mango tree, and the beginning.

A few days later, Kunal sent another message, this one being much shorter.

Kunal: Reunion?

(three dots appeared instantly)

Vidhaan: Yes.

Bhairav: Absolutely.

No discussion, no debate, no scheduling complications.

For once, everyone agreed immediately.

And so, several weeks later, three families began traveling toward Ram Nagar.

One evening all three families reunited in Ram Nagar.

Kunal arrived first, mostly because he had started planning the reunion six months earlier.

His daughter stepped out of the car and looked around curiously.

"So this is where all your stories happened?"

Kunal smiled,

"Most of them."

"It looks normal."

Kunal laughed,

"That's because the magic is hidden."

A few hours later, Vidhaan arrived with his family.

The moment he stepped out of the car, Kunal wrapped him in a hug.

"No speeches."

Vidhaan immediately warned,

"I wasn't going to give a speech."

"You absolutely were."

Kunal smiled.

Then came Bhairav, the final arrival, the final piece.

The moment he stepped out of the vehicle, years seemed to disappear.

The smiles appeared instantly, the laughter returned immediately.

And for a brief moment, they weren't successful professionals, they weren't husbands, they weren't fathers. They were simply three friends seeing each other again, exactly as they always had.

Children laughed nearby. Tea cups rested on tables.

The old mango tree stood taller than ever. Older. Wiser. Like all of them.

Kunal looked around quietly.

At Bhairav, at Vidhaan, at Tanya, at their children, at years of memories.

Then smiled softly,

"Funny."

Bhairav looked up.

"What?"

Kunal stared towards the sunset,

"We spent childhood wanting to grow up, then adulthood wishing life would slow down."

(long silence followed), because everyone understood.

Years taught them many things: Success felt good, dreams mattered, careers mattered. But life's most important moments were often the ordinary ones.

Evenings together, shared laughter, people who stayed.

Beneath the same mango tree, another lesson quietly arrived:

Life never really becomes easier. You simply become stronger,

with the right people beside you.

Years continued moving. Steadily, quietly, almost unfairly fast.

Calendars changed, hair turned grayer, children grew taller, and one morning Kunal looked into a mirror and froze.

Tanya looked up with tea in her hand.

"What happened?"

Kunal stared at himself, then pointed dramatically.

"There."

Tanya looked.

"...where?"

Kunal leaned closer toward the mirror.

"My hair."

"My hair has betrayed me."

Tanya looked carefully, and smiled.

"...Kunal."

"That's one gray hair."

Kunal looked horrified.

"One becomes Two."

"Two becomes Ten."

"THIS IS HOW IT STARTS."

Tanya laughed so hard she nearly dropped her cup.
Some things truly never change.

Meanwhile life had become calmer, less rushing, less proving, and less chasing. Children had begun building lives of their own now.

Kunal's daughter had entered university.

Vidhaan's son had started his career.

Homes had become quieter.

One evening the Brothers Forever group suddenly became active again.

Kunal: Emergency.

Vidhaan: No.

Bhairav: Explain.

Kunal: Important discussion.

Vidhaan: Hospital?

Kunal: Worse.

Bhairav: What is worse than hospital?

Three dots appeared.

Kunal: Retirement.

(absolute silence)

Vidhaan: We are not that old.

Kunal: Says the perfectionist, the man with no flaws.

Vidhaan: Unnecessary attack.

Bhairav: Continue.

Kunal smiled at his screen, then typed: meet in Ram Nagar, again.

Days later, they returned.

Somewhat every important phase of life always brought them back.

Ram Nagar looked both familiar and different.

New shops, new roads, new houses...time had changed the town too.

But one thing remained exactly where it always had, "the mango tree".

Still standing, waiting, watching.

Silence filled the air as they walked toward it slowly, not because they were emotional, mostly because knees had started negotiating with stairs now.

Kunal looked offended.

"I saw that."

Bhairav smiled.

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

Nothing had changed, but everything had changed.

Beneath the tree they sat quietly.

The evening sky glowed orange, wind moved softly through branches overhead.

Children once raced here. Teenagers once dreamed here. Young men once promised impossible things here, and now, older versions of those same boys sat beneath the same shade.

Kunal looked upwards.

"Do you remember?"

Bhairav smiled softly.

"The football."

Vidhaan nodded.

"The school festival."

Kunal laughed.

"The storytelling competition."

Bhairav looked towards him.

"Tanya."

Kunal looked offended.

Nearby Tanya laughed immediately.

After a while silence returned, a comfortable silence.

Then Bhairav spoke quietly: "You know what I learned?"

They looked toward him.

He smiled, **"When we were young... we thought life was about reaching somewhere."**

"School, college, jobs, success"

But maybe life was never about arriving.

Wind moved through branches. Leaves rustled overhead.

Bhairav smiled,

"Maybe it was always about who walked beside you."

Suddenly they understood.

Life lessons had arrived slowly: Dreams matter, success matters, love matters, but people, they matter most.

Kunal looked upward towards the branches.

The same branches that had watched little boys become fathers, friends become family, time become memory.

Then quietly he smiled,

"Retirement plan?"

Vidhaan looked leery.

Kunal spread his arms dramatically.

We buy chairs, place them here, become old people under this tree.

Bhairav laughed.

Vidhaan laughed.

Tanya laughed.

Beneath the old mango tree, the laughter of three boys returned once again.

Some places don't simply hold memories, they hold pieces of your life.

As sunset painted Ram Nagar gold, the mango tree stood silently overhead.

Still watching, waiting, protecting the story it had begun years ago.

Chapter 12

One Sky Forever

Winter arrived softly in Ram Nagar. The town had changed over the decades.

The old tea stall now had bright lights and digital payments.

The school building carried fresh paint.

Children walked roads carrying phones instead of marbles.

But beyond all the changes, one thing still stood exactly where it always had.

"The mango tree"

Older now, its branches wider, its bark rougher. Yet somehow stronger than ever, like memory itself.

The evening sky glowed orange and silver as Kunal slowly walked towards the tree carrying three folding chairs. Yesss...folding chairs.

Behind him Vidhaan shook his head.

"You actually bought them."

Kunal looked peeved.

"I make promises seriously."

Bhairav laughed quietly.

Tanya followed behind smiling while some children raced ahead through the grass.

Time had moved far.

One little child climbed around the roots of the tree while the other chased falling leaves nearby. Their laughter echoed exactly the way another laughter once had decades ago.

For a moment, it felt like time had folded into itself.

Kunal placed the chairs proudly beneath the tree.

"There."

He stepped back dramatically.

"Headquarters 3.0."

Vidhaan sighed,

"Still terrible at naming things."

"Jealousy is unhealthy."

Bhairav sat down smiling softly.

The evening breeze moved through the branches overhead. Leaves rustled gently, almost like whispers.

For a long while nobody spoke. Strangely, nobody needed to. Some silences become peaceful after years.

They simply sat there. Three friends, three lives. three journeys that had begun beneath a tree many years ago.

The world around them had changed beyond recognition.

School had become memories, college had become stories, and dreams had become reality.

Yet somehow, this moment felt familiar, comfortable, and home.

The sky slowly turned golden. Children played football in a nearby field. Their laughter drifted through the evening air.

For a second, all three looked toward the sound, and suddenly, they saw themselves.

Three boys racing through dusty streets. A football flying in the wrong direction. A notebook getting destroyed. A pencil being returned, and a friendship beginning.

Kunal smiled, and looked upward towards the sky visible through the branches.

"So this is it."

Vidhaan raised an eyebrow.

"What is?"

Kunal smiled faintly.

"The part of life where young people think we know everything."

Then Bhairav laughed.

Tanya shook her head smiling.

But Kunal continued quietly: "When we were children, we wanted freedom." "When we were teenagers, we wanted success." "When we were adults, we wanted time."

"Now..."

He looked around at everyone.

"...I think we just wanted moments like this, and we've lived them too."

The wind moved gently again. Children laughed beneath the same tree where three boys once raced after a football.

Life had changed shapes. But somehow, the feeling remained.

As sunset slowly disappeared, Bhairav reached into his old leather bag and removed something carefully.

A notebook, worn, faded, old.

Kunal blinked,

"No way."

Vidhaan adjusted his glasses.

Bhairav smiled,

"The first notebook, the very first one."

The notebook that once carried childish stories beneath this same tree.

Pages yellowed with time, corners folded, memories trapped between ink and paper.

Kunal laughed softly,

"You still kept it?"

Bhairav looked towards the tree,

"Some things should never be thrown away."

Slowly he opened the notebook. Inside, messy handwriting filled old pages, dreams, ideas.

Tiny stories written by a boy who once believed friendship could last forever.

Kunal smiled quietly,

"We were so small."

Vidhaan nodded,

"And very stupid."

"Mostly Kunal," Tanya added.

Immediate betrayal. Kunal looked shocked.

The children laughed without fully understanding. Somehow, that made the moment even more beautiful.

Night slowly covered Ram Nagar. One by one stars appeared overhead.

The same stars that had watched them through every chapter.

School days, college nights, love, careers, failures, success, children, growing older, everything.

Kunal looked towards the sky and whispered: "Funny."

"We spent our whole lives under different roofs.....but always beneath the same sky."

Nobody answered immediately. The truth settled softly between them.

Bhairav closed the notebook gently.

Vidhaan leaned back in his chair.

Tanya rested her head against Kunal's shoulder.

Above them, the old mango tree stood silently guarding decades of memories. Then one child suddenly pointed upward.

"Look!"

Everyone looked toward the sky.

A shooting star crossed the darkness briefly, bright and fleeting.

The children gasped excitedly.

Kunal smiled.

"Make a wish."

The children closed their eyes immediately.

But the adults didn't, because after all these years, they realized they already had everything they once wished for.

Long lasting friendship, love, a wonderful family, time, and people who stayed.

The wind moved softly through the branches one final time.

Beneath the mango tree, where three boys once became friends, three old friends sat together beneath one endless sky.

Their hair had turned silver, and hands carried wrinkles.

Kunal smiled, "We grew old."

Vidhaan looked towards the sunset, and said: "We grew lucky."

Bhairav looked at the initials on the tree.

Still there...

B + K + V

Years had passed, storms had come and gone, summers had burnt hot, winters had covered Ram Nagar in mist. Yet somehow, those three unueven letters remained, like a small piece of childhood refusing to disappear.

Kunal stepped closer to the tree and ran a hand gently across the old carving.

"You know," he said softly, when we carved this, I genuinely thought we'd become superheroes."

Vidhaan smiled, "You also thought you could teach a goat to play football."

Bhairav laughed quietly.

The evening breeze moved through the branches above them. For a moment, nobody spoke.

Then Bhairav said, "I used to think success would feel bigger."

Kunal looked at him, and said, "What do you mean?"

Bhairav stared at the fading sunlight,

"The books, the awards, the things we spent years chasing."

He paused, "they mattered, but not as much as i thought they would."

Vidhaan nodded slowly, because he understood.

Promotions came, projects ended, achievements arrived, then simply life continued.

"I think," Kunal said quietly, "the best things were never the things we planned."

Bhairav and Vidhaan looked at him. The words settled softly between them.

Bhairav looked at the initials once more.

B + K + V

Then, very carefully, he took a pen from his pocket. The same habit he had carried since school, as the writer in him couldn't resist.

Beneath the initials, on a small stone near the roots, he wrote four simple words:

"We did not disappear."

Together, the three old children began walking, simply looking at each other, as they had made it...what they call it as life.

Together, their hearts whispered:

Some friendships do not end. They simply grow old with us.

Epilogue

Years later, the Mango Tree still stood at the edge of Ram Nagar. Its roots had grown deeper. Its branches had grown wider. Its shade had welcomed generations. Children had become parents. Parents had become grandparents, and time had quietly written its story across every face. Yet the tree remained. Steady, patient, and faithful, just as it always had.

One pleasant evening, as the sun painted the sky in shades of gold and crimson, laughter once again echoed beneath its branches. Not the laughter of three boys, but the laughter of their grandchildren. Little feet raced around the trunk. Games were invented. Arguments began and ended within minutes. Friendships were formed. The cycle was beginning again.

Kunal sat in his folding chair, watching the children with a smile that seemed permanently attached to his face. Tanya sat beside him, occasionally reminding him not to give the children too much sugar. As always, he ignored her. As always, she knew he would.

Nearby, Bhairav held his old notebook in his hands. Its pages were fragile now, filled with dreams written by a boy who had once sat beneath this very tree imagining

stories. Many of those dreams had come true. Some had changed. Some had disappeared. But the most important one had survived, which was friendship.

Vidhaan sat quietly beside them, observing everything as he always had. Decades had passed, yet the three friends could still understand one another without speaking. Some bonds never required words. The evening slowly settled into night. One by one, stars appeared above them. The same stars that had watched over school days, first loves, farewell tears, weddings, children, successes, failures, and reunions. A lifetime had passed beneath those stars.

Kunal looked upward and smiled, "Do you think the tree remembers us?" Bhairav laughed softly, "I think it remembers everything".

Vidhaan nodded, "The football, the exams, the promises, the weddings, the children, the chairs."

Kunal smiled, "and all my brilliant ideas."

Everyone laughed.

Even after all these years, some jokes never improved. The grandchildren eventually gathered beneath the tree and asked for stories. Stories about school, friendship, adventures, stories about a boy who talked too much. The children pointed at Kunal immediately. Nobody argued.

As the stories flowed, the moon climbed higher into the sky. The old mango tree listened quietly, just as it had listened for decades. Somewhere in the gentle rustling of its leaves, it seemed to whisper a simple truth: Life moves forward, people grow older, seasons change, but love, friendship, and memories never truly leave. They live on in stories. They live on in families. They live on in the hearts of those who remember.

Beneath one old mango tree and under one endless sky, three friends sat together, grateful for the roads they had travelled, the people they had loved, and the lives they had built. Their story was not ending. It was simply being passed on, to children, to grandchildren, to memories.

Above them, stretching endlessly beyond the stars, was the same sky that had watched over them from the very beginning. One sky, One friendship, Forever.

THE END

Summary

Three friends, Kunal, Bhairav, and Vidhaan start their journey from their childhood days beneath an old mango tree in Ram Nagar to adulthood, careers, marriage, parenthood, and old age. Despite distance, changing cities, and life's challenges, their bond remains unbroken. Filled with memories, laughter, reunions, and life lessons, the novel celebrates the enduring power of friendship, family, and the people who make every chapter of life meaningful.

As the three friends grow, they face school pressures, teenage misunderstandings, college separations, and the uncertainties of adulthood. Kunal discovers love with Tanya, Bhairav pursues his dream of becoming a writer, and Vidhaan builds a successful career through hard work and determination. Through weddings, children, successes, failures, and emotional reunions, they learn that true friendship is not measured by distance or time. The story reminds us that while life may take people down different roads, some bonds remain forever connected beneath one sky.