

DR. CHERISHMA DEVARAKONDA

A JOURNEY OF REBIRTH AND UNBREAKABLE SPIRIT

# PHOENIX

*Rising*



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Stories Matter  
New Delhi • London

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## **Preface: From Ashes to Author**

I never imagined I would write a book—let alone four.

But some stories don't ask to be written.

They demand it.

They crawl out from the corners of your silence, from the moments you cried in bathrooms, smiled during breakdowns, and showed up when your heart had given up.

Each story in this book was born from a different wound, a different war.

Some were emotional. Some were physical.

But all of them... were real.

I didn't write these stories to impress anyone.

I wrote them because I survived them.

And sometimes, survival is enough reason to speak.

For the girl who stayed strong in hospitals while her own heart bled...

For the woman who loved deeply but was never chosen...

For the mother who smiled when her world was falling apart...

This book is for you.

I am not a bestselling author. I am not perfect.

But I am honest. And I am fire.  
And fire doesn't stay quiet forever.  
This is my fire.  
These are my stories.  
This... is my rise.

– Dr. Cherishma Devarakonda

# **Phoenix Rising: Four Stories of Fire and Healing**

By Dr. Cherishma Devarakonda

## **Part I – He Didn’t Ask, But He Knew**

Not my own story, but one born from the quiet pain  
I’ve witnessed in others—and perhaps, a little in  
myself too.

It’s a gentle reflection of what many hearts feel but  
never speak.

The kind that never demanded space, but always made  
room.

This story is inspired by the ache of silent love.

**Author Note**

*She was fire. And fire doesn't apologize.*

## **Part II – The Quiet Alpha**

She reminds us that power doesn't need to shout.

Her ambition, her silence, her strength... are stitched together from truths I've admired in so many.

Inspired by the fierce women I've seen around me—those who balance healing others with healing themselves.

Tara's story is fictional, but her fire is real.

### **Author Note**



*Worshipped and ruined. Still, she rose.*

## **Part III – All Eyes on Him**

It's not a lived story, but it reflects emotions we all juggle—distance, desire, and the quiet craving to be seen for who we are.

I wanted to explore what love might look like when fame meets fear, and passion meets practicality.

This one is inspired by contrast—spotlight and solitude, glamour and grounding.

### **Author Note**

*Some women walk through storms like  
it's a warm summer rain.*

## **Part IV – Waves Between Us**

To the women who quietly endure, who rebuild after loss, and who love even when it hurts.

It's a tribute to emotional survival.

Inspired by stories I've heard, patients I've seen, friends I've held through heartbreak.

This was the hardest to write and the deepest to feel.

**Author Note**

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# **He Didn't Ask, But He Knew**

By Cherishma

## Chapter 1: Warm Things

The cafeteria buzzed with background noise—trays clattering, exhausted laughter, machines humming somewhere down the hall.

She sat alone at the last table, half-slouched, staring into a cracked phone screen. Hair undone. Scrubs tired. A half-eaten biscuit on a napkin she didn't touch.

He walked in—tall, composed, in black formals with his ID tucked carelessly in his coat pocket. And she knew who he was. Of course, she knew.

Dr. Aryan Mehra. Medical Director. The speaker at last year's Emergency Medicine conference. The one who answered every question with calm precision—and looked like he belonged in a movie scene, not under hospital fluorescents.

They'd met. Twice, maybe thrice. Quick greetings. A nod in a corridor. He had probably forgotten.

But she hadn't.

Back then, she admired from a distance—his presence, his silence, the way he didn't try too hard. She allowed herself a two-second crush. Then buried it under night shifts and diaper changes.

So when he walked toward her table now, she lifted her chin but didn't react. Didn't flinch. Didn't speak.

He placed a cup of coffee in front of her.

Her eyebrows raised, guarded. "I didn't order—"

He interrupted, voice low, steady:

“You look like someone who forgot she deserves warm things.”

She almost replied, “You think I forgot? Or you just remembered me?” But instead, she just nodded slowly.

And for the first time in weeks, she didn’t feel invisible.

(Continued — The ache behind the eyes)

He sat across from her—just like that.

No permission asked. No words wasted.

He leaned back in the chair like he’d done it before. Like he belonged there.

She stirred the coffee slowly, not drinking it.

Her eyes didn’t meet his, not fully.

Not because she didn’t want to.

But because she already knew who he was.

Dr. Aryan Mehra.

Famous orthopedic and trauma surgeon.

The one whose surgical precision made rounds in journals.

The one everyone spoke about with that mix of awe and envy.

And yet, here he was.

No title. No arrogance.

Just... here. Quiet. Calm. Noticing her in a way no one had in a long time.

She acted like she didn't know him.

"Do we know each other?" she asked, forcing her voice to stay even.

He smiled slightly, that unreadable half-smile. "We've crossed paths."

She nodded. Looked away.

Don't lean in, she told herself.

Don't smile too much. Don't let the way he looks at you make you forget.

Because for a moment—just a breath—she did forget.

She liked the way he saw her. Like she wasn't worn out. Like she wasn't someone's leftover. Like she was still... someone.

But the moment flickered.

Reality came back, sharp as glass.

She thought of her child sleeping back home.

The unpaid electricity bill.

Her exhausted body. The stretch marks. The emotional bruises no one ever saw.

And suddenly, she couldn't meet his eyes anymore.

"Guys like him don't stay with women like me."

So she reached for her stethoscope, stood up, and said politely, "Thanks for the coffee, Dr. Mehra. I have rounds."

And just like that, she walked away—heart pounding, fingers trembling—but with her mask firmly back on. She never saw the way he looked after her.

## Chapter 2: The Smile She Swallowed

The hallway was colder than usual.

Or maybe it was just her skin remembering the warmth of his gaze.

She walked fast. Too fast.

Rounds weren't urgent. But she needed to move—because if she stopped, the ache in her chest would catch up.

In the elevator mirror, she caught her reflection.

Messy bun. Sleepless eyes. The faint smudge of kajal she forgot to wipe last night.

And suddenly, she hated herself for walking away.

> Why didn't I smile?

Why didn't I just say something?

Why couldn't I give myself that moment?

She should've said, "Hi. I'm Meera."

She should've laughed softly, like she used to, before life got so heavy.

She should've let herself feel beautiful—even for five minutes.

But instead, she wore her armor. Again.

Because that's what she knew.

She knew how to survive disappointment.

She didn't know how to handle kindness from someone she admired.

Especially someone like him.

> He must be taken.

He probably has a wife who doesn't forget to smile.

He must go home to someone soft and warm, someone who hasn't been broken into pieces.

The elevator doors opened. She stepped out like a ghost.

All she could think of was the way he looked at her—not with pity, not with flirtation, but with... recognition.

Like he saw through the silence she had wrapped around herself for years.

And she?

She walked away.

> "Maybe next time," she whispered.

Even though she knew...

Men like him don't usually offer warm things twice.

## Chapter 3: The Lioness in Scrubs

The emergency room pulsed with noise.

Monitors beeped. Slippers squeaked against the floor.

A stretcher rolled in—blood-soaked, moaning.

Polytrauma.

Meera's voice cut through the chaos like a scalpel.

> “Airway secure. Saturation stable. Repeat hemoglobin. Shift for CT thorax, abdomen. FAST positive. Alert blood bank for two units O negative. Prepare consent. Inform ortho.”

No panic. No hesitation.

Her words were calm but sharp. Every staff member moved like clockwork around her.

This was her battlefield—and she was the commander.

She wiped her forehead with her gloved wrist and picked up the intercom.

> “Get me Dr. Aryan Mehra. Ortho consult needed. Polytrauma.”

Fifteen minutes later, he walked in—his coat crisp, his presence calm.

Their eyes met across the room.

No coffee between them this time.

No quiet corners.

Just blood, urgency, and adrenaline.



She didn't wait for him to ask.

> "Pelvis stable, no obvious deformities. X-rays done—left femur fracture, closed. CT shows no spinal injury. Vitals stable post-fluid bolus. Patient's son informed, consent taken. Surgery prep started."

He blinked.

Looked around.

The team stood already executing what he usually had to direct.

The file was complete. The scans were ready. The relatives were briefed.

He was used to doing all of this himself.

But today, he walked into a war that was already won.

And she?

She stood at the center of it—messy bun, sleeves folded, blood on her apron, fire in her eyes.

He didn't say a word. Not then.

Just nodded.

Took the file from her hands and turned toward the OT.

But inside?

He was stunned.

She wasn't just the woman from the cafeteria.

She was a force.

> “She’s the kind of woman who doesn’t wait to be rescued,” he thought.

“She builds her own goddamn army.”

And as he scrubbed in for surgery, he caught himself smiling behind his mask.

For the first time in years, he was intrigued.

Not by the case.

But by her.

## Chapter 4: After the Storm

The OT door clicked shut behind him. It was nearly 11 PM. The ER had quieted, the chaos melted into low murmurs and beeping monitors.

He walked past the nurse station and saw her—half-sitting, half-slouching on the bench outside. Still in scrubs. Still glowing from the adrenaline. One shoe off. Cold coffee beside her. A surgical mask dangling from one ear.

She was scrolling through her phone, laughing softly—at her own joke, apparently.

He walked up and leaned slightly against the wall beside her. No rush. No announcement.

She looked up, casually. “Dr. Mehra.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Still pretending you don’t know me?”

She smirked, the exhaustion finally softening in her cheeks. “Fine. Guilty. I knew who you were. You’ve got a bit of a reputation.”

“Oh?” he folded his arms, amused. “Do tell.”

She rolled her eyes. “The trauma guy. The perfectionist. Orthopedics ka Amitabh Bachchan. You know.”

He chuckled. “And what about you, Dr. Meera?”

She hesitated for just a second.

Then said, “MBBS from Vizag. MD Emergency. Single mom. Life degree in multitasking and sarcasm.”

His smile faded gently—not from disinterest, but from quiet awe.

“You handled that case like you’ve done it a hundred times.”

“I have,” she replied, stretching her legs out. “People bleed. I patch. Then I forget to eat.”

He pointed at the untouched sandwich next to her. “That looks like forgetting.”

She shrugged. “I’m on a diet.”

He looked unconvinced.

“Okay fine,” she admitted, grinning. “I love food. Desperately. But I also want to look like someone who doesn’t eat at 2 AM in the doctor’s lounge.”

He laughed, finally—freely, with the kind of ease that made her forget he was once intimidating.

They talked about the case again—briefly, clinically. But their words kept drifting. From textbooks to traffic. From hospitals to favorite biryanis.

She spoke with her hands, animated and bright. She didn’t even realize when she became comfortable. She wasn’t worried about being too loud, too casual, too open.

She never stopped to wonder if he was comfortable with her energy.

Because for the first time in a long time— She was just... herself.

And he?

He watched every word she said like it was the first time he'd heard someone speak with such fire.

## Chapter 5: Food, Fatigue, and a Familiar Voice

The ER was on fire.

Not literally—but with patients flooding in, nurses scrambling, and monitors screaming for attention, it may as well have been.

Meera hadn't eaten since 4 PM.

It was past midnight.

Her head pounded, stomach twisted, and the cramps in her lower back felt like tiny monsters dancing on nerves.

First day of her period. Great timing, universe.

She sipped water. Again.

Thought about ordering food. Opened Zomato. Closed it.

Nothing felt right.

She was too tired to decide. Too moody to care.

Her phone rang.

Dr Aryan.

"Hey," he said casually, "Any ortho emergencies?"

"None so far," she replied, trying to sound upbeat.

But he heard it.

That tiny fracture in her voice.

That dullness behind her usual fire.

“You okay?” he asked.

She paused a beat too long.

“Yeah... just a long shift.”

“Hmm,” he said softly. “Okay. Goodnight, Dr. Meera.”

She hung up and didn’t think much of it.

Until—

Exactly 30 minutes later, her phone buzzed again.

> “I’m outside. Parking lot. Come for a minute.”

She blinked at the message.

Still in her blood-stained scrubs, she tied her hair again and walked out with low expectations.

And there he was.

Sitting in his car. Window down. Smiling.

He waved her over.

“Get in,” he said simply.

She opened the door and sat beside him—confused, tired, and freezing from the hospital AC.

Without a word, he opened a large brown paper bag and handed her one item after another:

Chocolate brownie with ice cream

Crispy chicken wings

Chicken sandwich

Chocolate thickshake

Her eyes widened. She blinked.

> “Aryan... what is this?”

He shrugged, a little sheepish. “Didn’t know what you liked. So... I got everything.”

She stared at the food. Then at him.

And for a moment...

All the pain in her body dissolved.

Because someone had thought of her.

Not because she asked.

Not because she cried.

But because... he saw her.

She smiled—full, real, and vulnerable.

“You want a bite?” she asked, breaking off a wing.

He shook his head, grinning. “Nope. Just wanted to feed the warrior tonight.”

She stepped out after a few minutes, carrying the bag like it was gold.

Turned back and said, “Thank you. Seriously.”

He nodded, still watching her.

She walked in.

He drove off.

A few minutes later, her phone rang again.

His name lit up the screen.

She picked up.



> “You okay now?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she whispered.

> “Cool. I don’t need anything. Just... wanted to hear your voice.”

She didn’t reply.

Didn’t need to.

Because that silence?

That smile on her lips?

It said everything.

## Chapter 6: The Conversation That Changed the Silence

She sat in the dim on-call room, the half-eaten brownie still warm in its box. Her shift had slowed. Patients were stable. Lights were low.

And her phone buzzed again.

Aryan.

“Hey,” he said softly. “Did I wake you?”

“No,” she replied, voice a little raw. “Just sitting. Breathing.”

He didn’t fill the silence.

He let her breathe.

“Tough day?” he asked gently.

There was a long pause before she replied.

“First day of my periods. Shift was crazy. I didn’t eat. And somewhere in the middle, I forgot I exist.”

He said nothing. But she heard the quiet inhale on the other end.

“I’ve gotten used to being invisible,” she whispered.

That was the sentence that made everything shift.

He leaned back in his car, still parked outside his house.

“You’re not invisible to me.”

Her eyes stung. But she didn’t cry.

“I have a son,” she blurted.

The words hung there. Vulnerable. Exposed.

He didn’t gasp. Didn’t ask “how” or “when” or “where’s the father?”

He just asked,

“What’s his name?”

She smiled.

“Ved.”

“Beautiful,” he said.

She laughed softly. “He’s five. Eats like a monster, dances like nobody’s watching, and thinks I’m a superhero.”

“You are,” Aryan replied.

She paused. Took a breath that felt like exhaling ten years of ache.

“I raise him alone. There’s no fairytale. Just... real life. Duty. Milk bottles. Sleepless nights. Hospital shifts. Fights with my mom. Judgments. Guilt. Repeat.”

He listened. Every word. Like each one mattered.

“I’ve never said all this out loud,” she admitted.

“I’m honored you chose me,” he said simply.

There was another long silence.

But this time, it was safe.

Then he asked,

“What does peace look like to you, Meera?”

Her voice dropped.

“A window with yellow curtains. A small house. A warm kitchen. My son sleeping in the next room. And... maybe... someone to share silence with. That’s all.”

He closed his eyes.

And whispered, “That doesn’t sound small at all. That sounds... perfect.”

## Chapter 7: The Day They Met

It was supposed to be just a casual Sunday.

No plans. Just her and Ved at the mall—picking a few essentials, letting the boy run wild in the play zone, and maybe stealing a few peaceful sips of cold coffee while he chased plastic balls.

But life, as always, had other ideas.

She was just helping Ved choose between a red T-shirt and a superhero hoodie when she heard that voice behind her.

“Both are great. But I’d vote for Spiderman.”

She turned. And smiled.

Aryan.

Wearing jeans, a simple tee, holding a Starbucks cup like it belonged in his hand, just casually existing like he hadn’t just made her heartbeat stumble.

“Hey...” she managed.

Before anything else, Ved popped his head out from behind her legs and eyed Ryan curiously.

“This your little hero?” Aryan asked.

She nodded. “Ved, this is... uncle Ryan.”

Aryan bent a little, extended his hand. “Hi, Champion.”

Ved blinked, tilted his head, and asked, “Why She turned Aryan grinned. “Because only champions make their moms smile like you just did.”

Ved beamed. And in that moment, a bond snapped into place.

They ended up walking together for a bit. Ved insisted Aryan push the cart. Ved demanded Aryan pick out snacks. Ved laughed louder than usual. And when Meera tried to stop him from running, it was Ryan he listened to.

“Come here, Champion.”

And he came. Just like that.

Meera watched in awe.

This boy, who never listens to her without a full tantrum, was suddenly obedient, happy, calm.

It was like he knew. Like something inside Ved had whispered—this man is safe. Trust him.

They parted ways an hour later. Aryan waved goodbye, ruffled Ved’s hair, and walked away without saying much else.

But that night...

She couldn’t stop replaying it in her mind.

Ved’s laughter. Aryan’s ease. The strange, aching rightness of the three of them just existing in the same frame.

“I wish...” she whispered to herself, running fingers through Ved’s soft hair as he fell asleep.

“I wish someone like him was there when I needed strength. I wish someone like him helped me raise this boy. I wish... I didn’t have to be everything alone.”

Ved stirred, nestled into her arm.

She kissed his forehead.

And stared into the ceiling, silent tears welling.

“I know I can survive alone. But today... for a few minutes... I didn’t want to.”

## Chapter 8: The Message That Wasn't Just a Message

It started with harmless check-ins.

> “Did Ved eat?”

“Got any trauma cases today?”

“Did you eat? Or still punishing yourself with that fake diet?”

Aryan texted at odd hours — never too long, never too frequent, but just enough for Meera’s heart to flutter when her phone buzzed.

She didn’t tell anyone. Except Nivya, her closest friend in the hospital.

And Nivya, ever the mischief-maker, only grinned.

> “Girl, if I had a man like Aryan texting me at 1 AM... I wouldn’t even need coffee.”

But Meera didn’t overthink it.

Or tried not to.

They were just talking.

Two doctors. Two lives. Two people trying to be human.

Only... it didn’t stay that simple.

---

One night, after a long shift, Meera found herself pouring her heart out.



About her son.

About the delivery.

The betrayal.

The loneliness.

The times she'd sat on the bathroom floor, holding her tears like fragile glass.

She typed like the screen was her diary.

And Aryan? He didn't reply immediately. But when he did, it wasn't pity.

> "I don't know how you're still standing, Meera. But damn... you glow like a wildfire."

She smiled at that.

---

In contrast, he spoke little of himself.

He'd mention his dog. His surgeries. His mom.

But never her—the one who broke his heart long ago.

Meera noticed the way he changed the subject.

The way he'd leave messages "seen" when emotions got too heavy.

But she didn't push.

Not much.

Not unless she felt brave.

One night, curled next to Ved as he snored softly, Meera typed:

> "Why don't you let anyone in?"

It stayed unread for hours.

Then came the reply:

> “Because the last time I did, I broke into pieces. Some I never found again.”

She didn’t respond.

She just let her fingers rest on his name on the screen.

Not replying was an answer too.

---

In the hospital, they were professionals. Cold. Clinical.

No one guessed anything.

Except Nivya, who saw the way Meera smiled at her phone.

And whispered during rounds, “Babe... maybe this is your story’s plot twist.”

---

One evening, Aryan messaged something different.

> “I’m not used to people knowing so much about me.

But... with you, it doesn’t feel like exposure.

It feels like... breathing.”

She read it ten times.

Then locked her phone.

And hugged her son tighter.

Because somehow, in hiding from the world...

They were both being seen for the first time.

## Chapter 9: The Night They Almost Said Everything

It was a Friday night. Rain tapping on the windows. The world had slowed to a hush, but inside Meera's chest, something loud was brewing.

Ved had fallen asleep early. The house was still. Meera poured herself a cup of black coffee and opened her window just enough to let the storm breeze in.

Her phone lit up.

Aryan:

"Rain where you are too?"

She smiled.

"Yes. It feels like the world's finally exhaling."

Then came the call.

No text. No warning. Just his name glowing on her screen.

She answered.

"Didn't expect you to call..."

"Didn't expect to need to hear your voice," he replied.

There was a pause. Not uncomfortable. Not awkward. Just full.

"Rough day?" she asked.

“No. Just... empty. I attended a wedding. Everyone smiling. Felt like a damn movie set. Fake. Loud. Then I drove back home alone.”

She chuckled softly. “Weddings are just expensive ways of lying to yourself.”

He laughed too. “You always say things others only dare to think.”

They talked for hours.

About Ved’s new obsession with dinosaurs. About Aryan’s dog who refused to eat unless fed by hand. About their favorite books, movies, surgeries gone wrong, meals skipped, fears tucked away.

Time blurred.

Then... he said it.

“I sometimes wonder... how your life would’ve been... if I’d met you earlier.”

Her breath hitched. Not at the words, but at the tenderness in them.

She didn’t speak.

So he continued.

“I see the way you carry the weight. And I wish someone had helped lighten it sooner.”

Still silence.

Then finally, she whispered,

“Maybe... I wouldn’t have learned to fly this hard if I had help.”

He exhaled.

“You shouldn’t have had to.”

There it was. That unsaid ache between them.

Neither said “I wish I loved you.” Neither said “I’m falling.”

But it hung in the air. Like a secret too raw to name.

“Aryan...”

“Hmm?”

“If I fall again... don’t promise to catch me. Just... don’t walk away.”

He didn’t reply.

But he didn’t hang up either.

They stayed on the line. Listening to each other’s breaths. Two broken souls resting—not in words—but in presence.

## Chapter 10: The Moment Everything Changed, Quietly

The days blurred.

Duty.

Motherhood.

Bills.

Shifts.

And then—her mother's sudden collapse.

One moment her Amma was holding Ved and telling him a bedtime story.

The next, she was on a hospital bed, barely breathing.  
ICU monitors blinking.

Oxygen hissing.

Fear settling into Meera's bones like a storm that wouldn't pass.

She ran on autopilot.

Admitted her mother.

Filed forms.

Took Ved home.

Returned for rounds.

Juggled it all—alone.

Her eyes hadn't closed in 48 hours.

Her hands were shaking.

Her soul... cracking.

People around her offered sympathy.

Nobody offered help.

Except... she thought of him.

Aryan.

Her fingers hovered over the phone.

She wasn't sure if she had the right to ask.

But then she typed:

> "Amma's in ICU. I'm breaking."

Just that.

No drama. No details.

He read it.

Didn't reply.

But twenty-five minutes later, he was standing beside her in the hospital corridor.

No questions. No hesitation.

Only presence.

He placed a water bottle in her hand.

Held her shoulder.

Looked into her teary eyes and said—

> "You're not alone. Not today."

---

He helped her talk to the doctors.

Pulled strings to get the best intensivist.  
Paid the first round of bills without blinking.  
Ved clung to him like he'd always known him.  
And Amma, even in her weakened state, smiled faintly  
when he leaned over and said softly—  
> “You’ll be fine, Aunt. We’ve got her.”

—

That night, Meera watched him from the edge of the  
hospital bed where Ved had finally fallen asleep.  
Aryan stood near the window. Silent. Composed.  
Moonlight brushing his face.  
> “Why did you come?” she asked, voice raw.  
He didn’t turn. Just said—  
> “Because I knew you wouldn’t call unless you had no  
one else.”  
> “But what if... what if people find out?”  
He turned now.  
> “Let them. I didn’t come here for them.”  
He paused.  
> “I came for you.”  
And that’s when it happened.  
Her heart, already softened by struggle, melted.  
A love that had tiptoed around her for months...  
Now took full shape inside her chest.



She loved him.

Quietly.

Entirely.

Without saying a single word.

And she knew she may never tell him.

Because this man—her Aryan—

Had once promised never to love again.

Never to marry.

Never to belong.

And she...

She was a single mother with storms still raging.

But still—

> “Just be here,” she whispered under her breath.

“That’s all I’ll ever ask.”

## Chapter 11: Loving Him Silently, Living Loudly

After that night, something shifted inside Meera.

Not between them—no. They were still “just friends.” Still no labels. No expectations. Still secret.

But inside her heart... A garden had started to grow.

Every time Aryan texted, her tired eyes sparkled. Every time he sent food during her night shifts, her heart whispered,

“This is what care looks like.”

She never told him she loved him. She couldn’t. She shouldn’t.

He had made it clear—he didn’t believe in love anymore. Didn’t want a wife. A family. A life tangled in emotional threads.

So she said nothing. But in her silence, she built something beautiful.

She started smiling more. Laughing again. Dressing better. Eating on time.

Her staff noticed. Patients noticed.

Even Ved once said—

“Amma, you’re like a sun these days.”

She wanted to reply—

“That’s because someone decided to stand beside me while I was shivering.”

But instead, she just kissed his forehead.

Her career soared.

She applied for leadership roles in the hospital. Presented her emergency care protocol at a medical conference. Started mentoring juniors.

Aryan helped her prepare. Mock interviews. Case discussions. Confidence boosts.

And never once tried to take credit.

When she got selected as the youngest Emergency In-Charge, he simply texted:

“I knew you’d do it. You’ve always had fire in your bones.”

She stared at that message for hours. Not because of what he said— But because he saw her.

The real her.

Not the exhausted mother. Not the woman with scars. Not the chaos.

Just... her.

She still cooked for Ved. Still struggled with finances. Still juggled everything.

But now, there was a softness in her hustle. Because someone had her back—even if he didn’t belong to her.

One night, Nivya said softly—

“You’re in love with him, aren’t you?”

She didn't answer. Just smiled sadly.

Because yes—she was. But love doesn't always ask for permission. And not every love story ends with two people holding hands.

Sometimes, it ends with one person standing alone...  
Smiling anyway.

## Chapter 12: The Night She Couldn't Hide It Anymore

It was past midnight.

The hospital was unusually quiet—just a low buzz of machines and soft footsteps echoing in the corridors. Meera had just finished her second back-to-back emergency case. Her hair was messy, her kurti stained with adrenaline and blood, her body aching for rest.

But something else ached more—her heart.

Ved was running a fever at home. Her mother, still recovering, was worried sick. And despite holding up the whole damn world all day—tonight, she felt... small.

As she sat on the steel bench near the ambulance bay, head in her hands, her phone buzzed.

Aryan.

> “Still up?”

She didn't reply.

A few minutes later, headlights flashed. His car rolled into the parking lot. She looked up, surprised.

> “I knew you wouldn't eat if I didn't show up,” he said, stepping out.

He handed her a cup of her favorite hot chocolate and a paper bag.

She smiled weakly. “You always bring the good kind.”

> “Only for you.”

They sat in silence for a while.

Then she said it—softly, like peeling her soul open thread by thread.

> “You know... I never thought anyone would ever show up for me like this. I’m usually the one who stays. Who fights. Who waits.”

He turned to her, eyes gentle.

> “Maybe it’s time someone stayed for you.”

Her throat tightened.

She looked away.

> “I don’t expect anything from you, Aryan. I swear I don’t. I know your past. I know your choices. I know you don’t want a family or... complicated things.”

> “Meera...”

> “No, let me say it. Just this once.”

She met his gaze.

Her voice wavered.

> “I don’t want promises. I don’t even need love in the conventional way. But if—if you ever feel like staying... like choosing something real... I want you to know that I’d choose you.”

He didn’t move.

Didn’t interrupt.

Just... looked at her. Deeply. Fully.

And then he reached out—

Not for her hand.

But for her forehead.

He gently brushed back her hair and placed the softest  
kiss there.

Not rushed.

Not possessive.

Just honest.

> “You don’t even have to ask,” he whispered.

“I’m already here.”

She closed her eyes.

Not crying.

Just... breathing.

And for the first time in years—

She didn’t feel alone.

## Chapter 13: A Life in the In-Betweens

The Emergency Room had never seen so much chemistry.

Meera and Aryan were still “nothing” officially.

No labels. No declarations.

But their glances?

Their timing?

The way their energies matched and collided?

It was impossible to ignore.

Even the nurses whispered.

> “Are they...?”

“No way. He’s too composed.”

“And she’s too serious.”

“Still... did you see how he looked at her during the fracture case?”

They didn’t care.

They were in their own world.

A world of half-smiles, inside jokes, and silent loyalty.

---

One evening, Aryan walked into the resuscitation room mid-shift.

Meera was in the middle of scolding a junior doctor.

> “Why was this patient left unattended? Even Ved can monitor better than this!”



Aryan leaned on the doorframe, arms crossed, smirking.

> “Poor guy. First your medical wrath, then the Ved comparison? Harsh.”

She turned, threw a pen at him—missed.

> “You want to monitor this zone?”

> “I’d rather monitor you.”

She rolled her eyes, cheeks heating up.

---

In the OPD room later that day, it was quiet.

They had just finished a minor procedure together.

The patient had left.

Door still closed.

Curtains drawn.

Meera was documenting on the system.

Aryan was standing behind her, close—too close.

She could feel his breath near her neck.

She didn’t move.

> “Your handwriting’s terrible,” he murmured.

> “Shut up.”

> “You always tell me to shut up... but never mean it.”

She turned to reply—

And that’s when it happened.

The closeness.

The moment.

The stillness.

And slowly...

He leaned in.

No rush.

Just... intention.

Their lips met—soft, slow, almost unsure.

But once it started, it deepened.

Her hands gripped the edge of the table.

His rested on her waist, firm but trembling.

When they pulled back, she didn't open her eyes.

> "We shouldn't..." she whispered.

> "We already did," he replied, voice low.

They both laughed.

She turned away, cheeks burning.

> "Back to duty?"

> "You go first. I'll recover."

—

And that was them.

No labels.

No promises.

Just heat, heart, and a thousand quiet moments in the in-betweens.

## Chapter 14: The Almost Confession

It was a Sunday afternoon.

Rare. Quiet. Warm.

The hospital was calm for once.

Aryan had no surgeries.

Meera had finished her shift early.

They sat on the terrace behind the hospital building—a little known space, hidden between stairwells and old oxygen cylinders. The wind was soft. Their coffee cups warm. And the city buzzed below like it belonged to someone else.

She was talking about Ved—how he'd stubbornly refused to nap, then cried because he was tired. She laughed at the absurdity of motherhood, wiping a drop of laughter-tear from her cheek.

Aryan watched her. Really watched.

That loose tendril of hair across her forehead.

The way she hugged her knees to her chest.

The way she loved fiercely, without asking for anything back.

> “You’re too strong,” he said suddenly.

She blinked, surprised.

> “Is that... a compliment?”

> “It’s terrifying.”

She tilted her head.

> “You’ve seen people bleed to death in trauma rooms, Aryan. I terrify you?”

He looked away for a second. Then back at her.

> “You terrify me because... I feel safe with you.”

The air shifted.

She stared at him, heartbeat racing.

> “Aryan...”

He opened his mouth. Then paused.

His hand was inches from hers.

His eyes—so full of something she’d never seen before.

And just as he took a breath to say the words—

Her phone rang.

She flinched.

It was the ward nurse.

A pediatric head injury.

Ved’s classmate.

She had to go.

---

Later that night, she messaged him.

> “You were going to say something today.”

He replied:

> “Yeah. I still might.”

She stared at that message for a long time.

Not a promise.

Not a declaration.

But maybe... just maybe...

A beginning.

## Chapter 15: Her Breaking Point

It started like any other day—

Too many patients.

Too little time.

Too much to carry.

Ved was down with a viral fever.

Her mother was frustrated and cranky.

The ward was overflowing.

And Aryan?

He had cancelled their evening coffee because of an impromptu surgery.

She didn't blame him.

But she was tired.

Tired of being the strong one.

The responsible one.

The one who smiled even when her soul trembled.

That night, when she finally got a chance to sit, she texted him.

> “Don't worry, I'm fine.”

But she wasn't.

---

Hours later, while sitting in the nurse's station staring blankly at a vitals chart, she felt a hand slide a warm packet into hers.

She looked up—Aryan.

> “I didn’t ask if you wanted food,” he said gently.

“I just brought it. You don’t get to starve on my watch.”

She tried to smile.

Failed.

And that’s when it happened.

She broke.

Right there, in that too-bright room smelling of Dettol and despair, she cried.

Not loud. Not dramatic.

Just... raw.

Her forehead dropped to his shoulder, and for the first time since they started this silent, undefined bond—

She didn’t hold back.

> “I can’t keep doing everything,” she whispered.

“I want to be soft again. I want someone to carry me for once.”

He didn’t say anything.

He just wrapped his arm around her, pressed a kiss to her temple, and whispered:

> “You don’t have to be strong all the time. You have me now.”

---

From that night on, something shifted.

She started letting him in—

Really in.

She told him about her favorite childhood shows.

About the scar on her ankle from her hostel days.

About the first time Ved called her “Amma” in the middle of the night and how she cried for an hour after.

She laughed more.

Slept better.

Texted him when she had random thoughts at 2AM.

He always replied—even if it was just a “Tell me more.”

And even when they fought—over work, over timing, over silly things—

They always circled back.

Always came home to each other.

Emotionally. Silently. Surely.

She didn’t even realize how much she’d started depending on him.

Until one day she found herself thinking,

> “I don’t know how I survived before he came.”



## Chapter 16: The Night She Said It Without Saying It

It wasn't planned.

Like most real things, it just... happened.

They were sitting in his car after a long shift. Rain tapping the windshield. The city lights blurry and soft. Ved was at home, asleep with her mother. For the first time in weeks, there was no noise. No emergencies. No rush.

Just them.

She was tired.

Emotionally stripped.

But peaceful—because he was there.

She looked at him, this man who had been her calm, her quiet, her home, in so many ways.

And softly, like a whisper she'd been holding in for months, she said:

> "I don't need anything big, Aryan.

No label, no promises.

Just don't walk away from me and Ved."

He turned his head.

Looked at her for a long second.

Then said nothing.

He nodded—once. Slowly.  
And she... smiled, a little sadly.  
Because in her heart, she knew she had just confessed.  
And he hadn't.

---

The next few weeks were hard.  
He didn't pull away.  
But he didn't come closer either.  
He was kind.  
Present.  
But careful.  
And it hurt.  
Until one day—he broke.

---

She was laughing in the ER.  
A joke shared with a new anesthetist.  
Light, innocent, healing.  
Aryan had just walked in.  
He didn't say a word.  
Just watched her.  
Face unreadable.  
Later that night, she got a text:  
> "Come outside. I'm in the parking."

She thought maybe something had happened.

She rushed.

He was leaning against his car, hands in pockets, jaw tight.

> “Why him?” he asked.

She blinked.

> “What?”

> “Why were you laughing like that with him?”

She stared at him.

Then smiled. Bitterly.

> “You’re jealous?”

He didn’t answer. Just walked forward.

His voice low. Rough.

> “Do you even know how much I think about you?

How I look for your voice in crowded rooms?

How I check my phone every damn night for a message from you?”

She was still. Frozen.

> “I didn’t say anything that night because I didn’t think I deserved you.

Or Ved.

Or this love that snuck up on me when I wasn’t ready.”

Then he paused.

> “But now... I know.

I want you.

Both of you.

In my life.

Not just in the quiet hours, not just in secret.

Fully. Openly. Fiercely.”

She felt it in her bones.

That slow-burning hope.

Finally catching fire.

> “It took you long enough,” she whispered, eyes shining.

He smiled.

> “You’re worth the time.”

And for the first time...

She didn’t cry out of pain.

She cried because she had finally been chosen.

## Chapter 17: All In, All Ours

It was a Sunday she'd never forget.

Nothing extravagant. No fancy resorts. Just the three of them—Meera, Aryan, and Ved—wandering through a local amusement park, sticky ice cream fingers, sun-kissed laughter, and hearts full of quiet miracles.

Ved sat on Aryan's shoulders, screaming with joy as he pointed at the spinning Ferris wheel.

"Amma! He's taller than the wheel!" Ved shouted.

She laughed. So did Aryan. They looked at each other—and in that second, it didn't feel like pretend. It felt like family.

Later, as they sat on a grassy hill watching the sunset, Ved curled up between them, exhausted and happy.

Aryan reached out and gently took her hand.

No words. Just fingers lacing. As natural as breath.

"You still scared?" he asked.

She shook her head, tears slipping down with a smile.

"I'm not waiting to be abandoned anymore."

"Good," he said softly. "Because I'm not going anywhere."

That night, in her tiny kitchen, she made his favorite food. Ved helped stir the curry. Aryan washed dishes.

There was music playing. There was laughter. There was peace.

And for the first time in years... She didn't feel like she was performing survival.

She was living.

She stood at the balcony later, watching the moon. Aryan came behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist.

"Remember the night I brought you chicken wings and brownie?" he murmured into her hair.

She giggled.

"You fed my hunger that day. And ever since... you've been feeding my soul."

He turned her around, looked into her eyes.

"You don't need to be strong all the time anymore. We're strong together now."

And in that moment— She let go of the pain she had clung to like a second skin.

No more chasing love that didn't want her. No more sleeping in tears. No more carrying the world alone.

Just this: Love. Laughter. Ved.

And him.

Epilogue: She published her second book. Aryan read every draft. Ved drew the cover page.

The dedication read:

“To the man who fed me brownie when my soul was starving... And to the little boy who made me believe love was real again.”

# **The Quiet Alpha**

by Dr Cherishma Devarakonda



*Dedicated to all the lone wolves  
who are silently fighting to win their lives.*

*She saved lives. She built empires. But who saved her from herself?*

*\*The Quiet Alpha\* is the stormy, romantic, and powerful journey of Dr. Tara — a trauma surgeon who doesn't believe in love but conquers everything else.*

*Set against hospital chaos, pharmaceutical power games, and a love that dares to stay — this is a story of money, ambition, emotional scars, and second chances.*

*For every woman who rises strong, even with broken pieces — this is your anthem.*

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 1

**Tara walked in ten minutes late.**

Not because she was careless. But because her hands had still been inside someone's chest five minutes ago.

Her blue scrubs had faint blood spots. Her bun was undone at the sides, and the rubber of her gloves had left angry pink marks across her wrists. But her eyes were sharp. Focused. Unapologetic.

She didn't greet anyone. Just slipped into the chair near the back and crossed her arms.

Aarav watched her enter.

He wasn't supposed to be here.

The CTO of his company had prepared for this review for weeks. But an unexpected illness that morning had thrown everything off.

So here he was—CEO of a rising health-tech company, now standing in a dusty hospital meeting room with a slideshow he hadn't rehearsed.

He expected the usual expressions. Bored. Distracted. Disinterested.

But Tara?

She looked like she had just fought death—and won.

When he began speaking, his voice steady despite the lack of prep:

“We’re here to optimize trauma workflows—specifically triage, documentation, and delay points...”

She didn’t let him finish.

“What’s the door-to-decision delay with your model?”

The tone was calm. Clinical. But it cut through the room like a scalpel.

“Right now... 3.2 minutes average,” he replied, not defensive—just honest.

“Still too slow.”

She didn’t say it to provoke. She said it like it was oxygen—necessary, not negotiable.

He held her gaze. For the first time that day, he wasn’t thinking about his company or his pitch. He was thinking about her.

A woman who didn’t flinch, didn’t flatter, and didn’t try to soften the truth.

And Tara? She registered his stillness. His lack of ego. How he didn’t argue, just said:

“We’ll fix that first.”

For a woman who didn’t trust words... That one sentence stayed.

The meeting wrapped with slow claps and fast chatter.

Tara didn’t move. She stood only after the projector clicked off, her arms still crossed, unreadable.

Aarav was talking to someone—but his eyes flicked toward her.

Just once. But it was enough.

And Tara? She looked up too. Not by mistake. Not by accident.

She met his eyes like it was part of her job—direct, calm, no reaction. But her gaze didn't drop.

Two seconds. Three. Four.

And it was his assistant, Niyati, standing just to the side, who noticed first.

Niyati glanced at Aarav, then at Tara. Her brows lifted—not in teasing, but in quiet observation. She'd known Aarav for seven years. She'd never seen him hold eye contact with a stranger this long.

Especially not someone who looked like she could slice through an earthquake with a scalpel and still not take her gloves off.

When Tara finally turned and walked out, she didn't look back.

Aarav followed the motion of her leaving. His voice didn't waver when he resumed conversation—but Niyati leaned toward him quietly and said:

"You're staring."

He blinked. Looked back at her, lips twitching slightly.

"Was I?"

"You were," she said, matter-of-fact. "Should I reschedule your next five meetings?"

He smiled—but it didn't reach his eyes.

“No need. She won’t remember me.”

Niyati chuckled under her breath.

“She already does.”

Tara was sipping black coffee—her usual ritual. One hand scrolling through lab reports, the other resting on her thigh, still sore from yesterday's 10-hour shift.

Her phone buzzed.

Subject: Request for Clinical Review Input –  
TriageUX Prototype v3.1

The sender? Aarav Mehta | Founder, Kronis  
HealthTech

She frowned.

Not that it was strange—she’d expected someone from the company to follow up. But him?

Opening the email:

Dear Dr. Tara,

Following yesterday’s review, we’ve integrated some of your concerns into a new UX prototype for trauma triage. We’d value your feedback—particularly around urgency mapping and physician interface time.

If available, we’d appreciate 10 minutes of your time this week.

Regards,

Aarav Mehta

Short. Polite. Straightforward. Exactly like his voice.

She closed the phone. Didn't reply. But didn't delete it either.

She was walking out of the blood bank when she nearly collided with someone near the stairwell.

Him.

No lab coat. Navy shirt rolled at the sleeves. Laptop bag slung across one shoulder, phone in hand, eyes focused on the screen until—

“Dr. Tara.”

He stopped. She did too.

For a moment, the hospital noise blurred. Machines beeped, trolleys rolled, but her pulse was all she heard.

“I hope the email wasn't too forward,” he said.

Tara blinked.

“It was fine. Just... unexpected.”

He smiled. “You left before I could properly thank you yesterday. That delay metric? We're rewriting the entire model around it.”

She nodded, measured. Her voice didn't soften.

“You didn't need to email me directly.”

“I know,” he said. “But I wanted to.”

Something about that sentence—it wasn't cocky. It wasn't even warm. It was just... present. Honest. Unapologetic.

She looked away first.

“I’ll review it. Can’t promise a reply soon.”

“Take your time,” he said, stepping aside.

As she walked past him, she felt it. The pull.

Not romantic. Not even emotional.

Just that rare sense that someone had seen her—and didn’t flinch.

The night was quiet except for the dull hum of her refrigerator. She was in a loose black tee, hair messy, eyes tired. But she opened the email thread anyway.

Typed:

Aarav,

The interface looked cleaner in this version. I still see lag between field input and data confirmation—especially in high-adrenaline scenarios.

I added a few suggestions below.

Regards,

Tara

She hovered her fingers over the send button.

Paused.

And then... Added:

P.S. The “fix it” line from the meeting wasn’t necessary. But it stayed.

Sent.

Closed the laptop. Leaned back.

For the first time in weeks, she fell asleep before 3 AM.



## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 2

### Chapter 2: Echoes from Another Time

Tara wasn't always like this.

There was a time she laughed too loud in class, her hands covered in ink, and her eyes wide with dreams she hadn't yet defined. She was the kind of girl who could charm the strictest teacher with a single sentence—talkative, expressive, impossible to ignore.

She was never the topper. Just... average. Average marks. Average clothes. Average ambitions. But there was something about her—maybe the way she asked questions in class, or how she made even silence feel like it had meaning.

And yet, even in that lively chaos of school, the cracks had begun forming.

She was old enough to notice her father hesitating before handing her a hundred rupees. Old enough to see her mother stretch the grocery list to the last decimal. Old enough to hear the unspoken conversations between bills and broken dreams.

If she asked for a hundred, she'd be handed twenty.

If she wanted a book, it came with a compromise.

It wasn't neglect. It was survival.

Her family tried. They loved. But love didn't pay school fees or fund birthday gifts or fill up crushed lunchboxes with what her friends carried so easily.

So slowly, Tara learned something dangerous.  
Something sharp.

\*\*“Don’t depend. Earn.”\*\*

It started small—cutting out extras, walking instead of taking autos, saving coins. But it grew. Into a hunger. A resolve. Money wouldn’t just be a tool for her—it would be a weapon. A shield. A throne.

By the time she reached college, her marks soared. Average became excellent. She didn’t do it for pride. She did it for power.

The power to never ask again.

But fate, cruel as it was, had other lessons too.

Love.

Or rather, the illusion of it.

Her first relationship lasted three months. The next, barely two. Each time, they came close with compliments and left with pieces of her. Not all at once. But slowly. Like a withdrawal.

\*\*Used. Left. Forgotten.\*\*

They’d say sweet things. Make promises. Pretend to see her.

And then they’d vanish—ghosts wearing smiles.

By the fourth heartbreak, she stopped counting.

By the fifth, she stopped trusting.

And somewhere along the way, \*\*she stopped touching\*\*.

It wasn't just emotional. It was physical.

She wore gloves all the time. Not just in surgery—but as a metaphor. As armor.

Touch became an invasion. Closeness felt like risk.

OCD, they called it. But for Tara, it was just self-defense.

Social gatherings gave her anxiety. Crowds made her sweat. Not because she feared people—but because she feared \*\*what they might know about her\*\*.

Her past. Her stories. Her cracks.

So she built a fortress. Not of walls. But of precision.

She became the trauma surgeon people whispered about. The one who could fix shattered bones but never hugged anyone. The one who smiled without warmth. The one who never lost a patient—but lost herself a little, every day.

In the hospital, she was iron.

Outside, she was ash.

But none of them knew.

None of them saw the girl who once asked for a hundred rupees and learned to earn millions instead.

None of them saw the girl who once believed in love and now wore gloves to avoid even a brush.

Only Tara knew.

And she was okay with that.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 3

### Chapter 3: The Still Flame

Aarav Mehta walked into a room like he didn't notice the world pause for him.

But it did.

Women noticed first. Always did.

Something about the way he carried silence like it was power. Something about the way his eyes—those deep, unreadable eyes—held yours a second longer than necessary.

He wasn't the type to flirt. He wasn't even the type to smile much.

But when he did, it felt like a secret being shared.

Aarav had grown used to the attention, but never leaned into it. He was the kind of man who knew his effect and still chose restraint. It wasn't strategy. It was his nature.

He was quiet. Intense. Watchful.

Raised in a home where love was discipline and praise was rare, he learned early that presence mattered more than performance.

His mother was an academic—a woman of sharp wit and delicate hands who taught him the power of words. His father, an ex-army colonel, taught him the value of

stillness. That silence, when held long enough, makes people reveal their truths.

Aarav absorbed both.

He built Kronis HealthTech from a rented flat, coding through caffeine and grief after losing a friend to an emergency room delay. The pain didn't come with rage. It came with direction.

Now, his company powered triage systems across over fifty hospitals.

But Aarav didn't care for applause.

He cared for precision.

For systems that worked. For lives quietly saved.

And in his personal life? He was even more guarded.

Relationships had always been... difficult.

He wasn't cold. He just didn't know how to be \*loud\* with emotions. He showed affection in ways people often missed—remembering little things, showing up unasked, fixing things silently.

Most women he met wanted more noise. More chaos. More obvious declarations.

Aarav wasn't built that way.

And so, he remained unattached.

Until Tara.

It wasn't love at first sight. It wasn't even attraction.

It was \*recognition.\*

The way she asked a clinical question without softening it. The way her presence didn't need validation. The way she looked at him like she wasn't impressed—just assessing.

That intrigued him.

He didn't want to possess her.

He wanted to \*witness\* her.

Now, sitting in his office after their brief encounter, Aarav scrolled through the security footage from the ER. Not because he needed data—but because he wanted to understand how she moved.

She didn't waste motion.

Didn't explain unnecessarily.

She trusted her instincts more than any machine.

He paused the video. Tara's face in mid-command, one gloved hand pointing, the other adjusting a mask.

Aarav leaned back, fingers steepled near his lips.

"She doesn't even know what she's made of," he murmured.

Niyati walked in just then.

"She replied," she said, placing a tablet in front of him.

His eyes scanned the screen. Tara's email. Crisp. Efficient. With a single line at the end:

**\*\*P.S. The 'fix it' line wasn't necessary. But it stayed.\*\***

He read it twice.

Smiled—just slightly.

“Make sure she’s part of the next day cycle,” he said.

“You sure she wants to be?” Niyati asked.

Aarav didn’t answer. Just looked out the window.

“She may not want to. But she needs to.”

He didn’t say it aloud, but part of him knew—\*he\* needed her too.

Not to fix him. Not to complete him.

Just to remind him that silence can meet silence—and still spark a fire.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 4

### Chapter 4: The Night Between Them

Tara didn't expect the night to feel like this.

The restaurant buzzed with laughter and soft jazz—exactly the kind of place she usually avoided. But she had promised her colleague she'd show up. One soda and thirty minutes. That was her deal with herself.

Then she heard it.

That voice.

“Didn't expect to see you here.”

She turned. And there he was.

Aarav, without the tech jacket, without the hospital ID, without the weight of systems and protocols. Just him. Clean lines. Casual clothes. And that gaze that never apologized for its depth.

“You don't seem like the soft jazz type,” she said.

“You don't seem like the dinner party type either.”

They shared a half-smile, a silent agreement of how misplaced they both felt in rooms like these.

He was here on a client meeting. She, for a birthday dinner. Both would've preferred to be somewhere else.

“Want to trade fake emergencies and escape?” he offered.



She laughed—a real laugh that surprised her.  
“Tempting. But I might stay.”

A few minutes later, they moved to the lounge. Talked.  
Not like colleagues. Not even like potential anything.  
Just two people pulling their masks off, for a while.

She told him about the worst 3 AM surgery she ever had.

He told her about the friend he lost—how it shaped the core of his company.

No flirting. No pretenses. Just fragments of truth wrapped in steady conversation.

“You’re different outside the ER,” he observed.

“So are you.”

And it stayed there. Hanging. Soft. Safe.

---

When they stepped outside, the sky was a promise of rain.

As the first drops fell, he didn’t wait. Took off his blazer, held it above her head.

“I don’t have a car,” she admitted, a little embarrassed.  
“Been planning to learn driving for years. Never got around to it.”

“I’ll drop you,” he said simply.

“I don’t usually accept rides.”

“I don’t usually offer them.”

She got in.

The car smelled faintly of cedar and rain. The music was low. Comfortably quiet.

“You’re surprisingly calming,” she said.

He smiled. “And you’re surprisingly human.”

That smile stayed with her long after she closed her apartment door.

---

Later that night, her phone buzzed.

**\*\*Aarav:\*\*** You seemed like you needed a moment to just exist. No gloves. No orders.

She stared at it.

**\*\*Tara:\*\*** You saw that?

**\*\*Aarav:\*\*** I see you. Even when you don’t want to be seen.

Her fingers hovered over the screen.

**\*\*Tara:\*\*** That scares me.

A pause.

**\*\*Aarav:\*\*** I won’t use it against you. Ever.

She didn’t reply.

But she left the message open.

And for the first time in months, Tara fell asleep without overthinking everything she said.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 5

### Chapter 5: Fractures and Fire

The shift started like any other. Calm. Predictable. Deceptively slow.

Tara was reviewing patient charts in the trauma bay, sipping black coffee, when the call came in.

Mass casualty. Bus accident. Ten victims. Multiple injuries.

She didn't flinch. She never did.

Within seconds, the trauma unit turned into organized chaos. Nurses prepped, interns scattered, and the hum of controlled urgency filled the air.

And Aarav was there.

He hadn't planned to be. He was onsite to finalize a tech integration, shadowing the ER workflow.

But when the chaos hit, he didn't leave. He stood by. Watching. Learning.

And watching \*her\*.

Tara transformed in emergencies. Her voice cut through panic like a scalpel. Sharp. Precise.

"Swap the line—don't waste time on a collapsed vein."

"Get ortho down, now. Not in ten. Now."

"Call radiology. I need a portable chest X-ray. Five minutes max."

A nurse hesitated for a moment—wrong gauge in hand.

Tara's tone sharpened instantly.

"I said 16 gauge. This isn't the time to guess."

The nurse flushed, nodded, and corrected it. Tara didn't pause to comfort. But thirty minutes later, once that patient was stabilized, she walked up quietly and handed the same nurse a bottle of water.

"Good work under pressure," she said. "But you've got to stay alert. Lives depend on you."

The nurse smiled. They always did.

Because Tara was fair.

Fierce—but fair.

She yelled when needed. But she explained afterward. Sometimes, she even brought samosas to the night shift, just to remind them she saw them.

Aarav saw all of it.

And for a moment, he forgot he was there to observe systems.

He was observing \*her.\*

Three hours later, as the final patient was wheeled to the OR, Tara leaned against the wall and exhaled.

Aarav walked over, two black coffees in hand.

She looked at him, tired but still in control. "Not bad for a quiet day."

He handed her a cup. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen leadership like that. You don’t just run the unit—you hold it together.”

She sipped. “Someone has to.”

There was a pause. A different kind of silence.

And then she said it. The words that slipped through her guard.

“But it doesn’t last. People leave. They always do.”

He didn’t answer right away.

Because she wasn’t talking about nurses or interns.

She was talking about \*him.\*

He looked at her, carefully.

“I’m not here for temporary, Tara.”

She met his eyes, searching for cracks. For the lie. For the usual false promise.

But it wasn’t there.

Still, doubt tugged at her.

“You live in another state. You have a whole company to run. This...” she gestured vaguely around them, “...this won’t make sense after a few months.”

He didn’t argue.

He just said, “Let’s not decide the ending before we’ve written the middle.”

And somehow, in that moment, she let herself believe him. Just a little.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 6

### Chapter 6: Closer Than They Should Be

It started small.

A second longer glance. A casual brush of hands.

Laughter that lingered too long in empty corridors.

Tara didn't notice it first. Or maybe she pretended not to.

Aarav was always around lately—meetings, tech rounds, system trials. He wasn't overstepping. Just... present. In that quiet, persistent way that felt impossible to ignore.

She found herself waiting for his voice. Looking for his name in her inbox. Smiling when he messaged something absurd late at night.

> "What's your ER survival food?"

> "Dosa. Double egg. One spoon chutney."

> "You're a woman of strong convictions."

> "You have no idea."

Sometimes she'd type out a reply and delete it.

Other times, she'd send a full paragraph without thinking.

They weren't lovers. Not yet.

But they had slipped into something more dangerous—\*comfort.\*

It scared her.

---

One evening, after a brutally long shift, Aarav waited for her outside the hospital.

> “Walk?” he asked.

She nodded. They walked through the empty parking lot, under half-lit street lamps.

> “You’re hard to read,” he said.

> “I’m not a book.”

> “No, you’re a locked room with steel walls.”

She stopped walking.

> “I don’t know what you want from me, Aarav.”

> “I don’t want anything. I just... like being around you.”

> “Don’t,” she whispered.

> “Don’t what?”

> “Don’t make this harder than it already is.”

He looked at her then, truly looked.

> “I’m not here to hurt you, Tara.”

But she stepped back.

> “People always say that. Until they do.”

And she walked away.

---

The next few days were quiet.

Cold nods in hallways. Short emails. No messages.

But the hospital wasn't quiet.

Whispers traveled faster than patient vitals.

> “Did you see them talking last night?”

> “Isn't he the tech guy?”

> “She's too ambitious for all that.”

Tara ignored it. She always did.

But deep inside, it chipped something away.

Not because she cared what they thought.

But because it reminded her—this was exactly why she never let anyone close.

You give people one soft corner, and they talk about it like it's weakness.

---

That night, Aarav sent her one line:

> “Still waiting for your full paragraph.”

She stared at it for hours.

And then replied:

> “You shouldn't wait.”

He didn't respond.

But she knew he saw it.

And in that silence, something inside her cracked.

Not from heartbreak.

But from wanting not to be broken again.



## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 7

### Chapter 7: The Storm We Didn't Stop

It wasn't supposed to be a date.

Aarav had asked casually. Dinner, nothing fancy. "Just food, no drama," he'd said.

But the way Tara showed up—simple black kurta, wet hair tied loosely—made something shift in the air around them.

They talked like old friends. Laughed more than they should have. Their plates half-touched, drinks forgotten.

Aarav looked at her across the table and said, "You scare me."

She raised an eyebrow. "Because I yell at people in trauma bay?"

"No. Because you make me want to stay."

She looked away. That line was too sharp. Too close to her own fear.

---

Back in his room, it was quiet. Rain kissed the windows. The city outside disappeared in the mist.

She was about to leave—bag on shoulder, hand on doorknob—when he said it.

"You don't have to go."

And she didn't.

She let the bag fall. Let the silence hold. Let her guard drop.

They didn't rush.

They didn't speak much.

But in the quiet undressing of their walls, there was something sacred.

His hand on her shoulder.

Her breath on his neck.

The way their hearts found rhythm before their bodies did.

It wasn't about lust. It wasn't even about love.

It was about \*being seen\*—and \*still being chosen\*.

Afterward, she lay beside him, staring at the ceiling.

> "I don't do this," she whispered.

> "Neither do I," he replied.

---

The next morning, sunlight didn't feel cruel. But reality did.

Aarav had three more days in the city. His project was done. His life was elsewhere.

She knew it. He knew it. They didn't say it.

But the silence between them had changed.

They walked on the hospital rooftop that evening, side by side. Nothing dramatic. No tears. Just the weight of knowing.

> “Will you come back?” she asked.

> “If I do, it won’t be for work.”

She didn’t answer. Because she didn’t want hope. Not again.

---

The morning he left, he found a note under his coffee mug.

\*Thank you for seeing me.

- T.\*

And when she returned to her department later that day, everyone noticed the shift. Not because she smiled more, but because her silence felt \*less heavy.\*

That night, she sat on her balcony, letting the wind tangle her hair, watching the rain hit the ground.

“This city gave me you,” she whispered into the dark.

“And now it’s taking you back.”

It wasn’t heartbreak.

It was something softer. Something she’d carry, like a secret only she and the rain would understand.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 8

### Chapter 8: Still Ours, Just Distant

The hospital buzzed, as always. Monitors beeped, stretchers rolled, and lives were saved.

But Tara moved through it like a shadow of herself.

She laughed at the right times. Led rounds with the usual fire.

But when the noise faded, the silence inside her roared.

Aarav was gone. Not forever. But gone enough to leave a space.

They messaged. They called. Voice notes, photos of coffee mugs, selfies from hospital corridors.

But it wasn't the same.

Late one night, after her shift, Tara sat on her apartment floor, her back against the wall, phone in hand. The city was quiet. Her heart wasn't.

She video-called him. He answered instantly.

> "Hey," he said softly.

> "Hey..." she exhaled, eyes already glossy.

> "Rough day?"

> "Every day is rough without you."

A pause. A silence filled with unspoken truths.

> "I miss you," she whispered.

> “I know.”

She looked down. Picked at the hem of her kurta.

> “You did something to me, Aarav. Before you, I couldn’t touch people without gloves. I didn’t even touch my patients unless I had to. You know that, right?”

> “I remember.”

> “Now... I don’t even notice when I’m barehanded. You made me trust touch again.”

He didn’t speak for a moment. Just watched her, chest rising with emotion.

> “You made me human again,” she added.

> “Tara...”

> “No, let me say this. You healed something I thought was permanent. And now—now you’re not here.”

Tears finally slid down her cheeks.

> “I hate this distance.”

> “Then don’t stay in it,” he said.

> “Come visit. I already booked your flight. I want to show you my world.”

She looked up, stunned. A mix of surprise and relief.

> “You what?”

> “This weekend. You need a break, and I need you. No pressure. Just us.”

She didn't answer. Just cried a little more—softer this time.

---

The next day, she wore her white coat and no gloves. She held her patients' hands. She stood taller.

And when she told her head nurse, "I'll be off this weekend," the woman blinked in surprise.

> "A vacation?"

> "A beginning," Tara replied.

She boarded the flight on Saturday with a small bag and a big, fluttering heart.

He met her at the gate, coffee in hand.

> "Ready?" he asked.

She smiled.

> "I already am."

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 9

### Chapter 9: The Silence That Screamed

Tara returned to her city like nothing had changed.

Her hands stitched wounds, her mind ran triage codes, her feet moved in perfect rhythm.

But her heart had changed.

Aarav was now part of her rhythm too.

They were in touch—calls, messages, small visits. A weekend here, a surprise coffee drop there.

And in between, love began to bloom. Quiet, careful, but real.

---

But something else began to bloom too—\*resistance.\*

At home, her family noticed her sharpness, her boundaries, her confidence.

“What happened to the soft girl you were?” her mother once said.

“You don’t even listen anymore,” her brother added.

No one seemed to understand—this wasn’t rebellion. This was Tara becoming who she always was.

She wanted to share it all with Aarav. But he didn’t pick up. Not that night, not the next.

“Board meetings,” he texted eventually. “Bit of a mess here. I’ll call soon.”

Soon didn't come.

She sent voice notes. "Just missing you..."

She left messages. "Want to talk... something's heavy."

But the double ticks never turned blue.

---

Days passed. Her face stayed still.

But the silence screamed louder.

Then came the visit.

Aarav had called her to his city for a weekend break. They were supposed to unwind, reconnect.

The first evening was perfect—dinner, laughter, arms around each other on the couch.

Until she noticed the photo.

A printed snapshot, pinned near his desk. Aarav with a woman—pretty, sharp-eyed.

Nimisha.

Their shoulders were touching. A heart emoji scribbled under it in blue ink.

Something inside Tara snapped.

> "What is this?"

Aarav blinked. "What?"

> "This photo."

> "That's Nimisha. We've been friends since undergrad. That was just a joke."



> “Looks romantic for a joke.”

> “You know what this is, Tara. Don’t do this.”

She didn’t yell. She didn’t throw things.

She just said, “Okay.”

And walked to the other room.

---

She didn’t sleep that night.

She sat on the floor, hugging her knees, tears falling silently.

It wasn’t about Nimisha.

It was about how easily she could be replaced.

About how trust, for her, wasn’t automatic—it was a war.

> “He’ll leave too,” her mind whispered.

> “Just like the others. Just like always.”

Aarav knocked gently at her door, later. She said nothing.

When she finally emerged in the morning, her smile was polite. Distant.

> “We’re good,” she told him.

But her heart was already packing up pieces.

---

Back in her city, she returned to her shifts. Her smile to patients didn’t falter. Her records were spotless.

But every night, she cried for a few minutes before sleeping.

For herself.

For the love she wanted to believe in.

For the silence that still hadn't been filled.

Because sometimes, the strongest women break too.

They just do it quietly.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 10

The emergency room buzzed with the usual chaos—alarms, footsteps, shouted orders.

Tara was charting a case near the nursing station when someone called her name.

She turned, slightly irritated. “Yes?”

Aarav was standing there.

In formals. Holding a small velvet box.

She froze. So did the room.

Someone gasped. Another nurse dropped a chart.

Aarav smiled, just a little nervous. “I couldn’t wait.”

> “What are you doing?” she whispered.

> “What I should’ve done long ago.”

He knelt down—right there, in the middle of her battleground.

Her eyes welled up. Her heart raced.

He opened the box.

> “Tara. You are my wildest calm. My softest storm. My forever. Will you marry me?”

Tara, who hadn’t touched love without gloves in years, said nothing for a moment.

Then: “Yes. Yes, you idiot. Get up!”

Laughter and cheers broke around them. Her team clapped, some tearing up.

Tara had never felt more seen. More loved.

She signed her log and took off for the day.

The day unraveled in slow, beautiful moments.

They ate from the same plate. Watched silly videos.

Danced in the kitchen.

And when the night dimmed, they made love like they were memorizing each other.

Wrapped in sheets and silence, Tara spoke.

> “I want to join a pharma company.”

Aarav stiffened slightly. “What?”

> “Yeah. Not now. But someday. I want to build something big. Make money. Real money.”

> “Pharma?” he repeated.

> “I know you hate it. But it’s not all bad. I want to do it my way.”

He didn’t reply immediately. Just nodded, once.

And kissed her forehead.

The next morning, they walked to get coffee.

She tried again.

> “I mean it, Aarav. I want you to understand. This dream—this empire—it matters.”

He looked at her, smile tight.

> “We’ll talk about it later, okay? Let’s just live this morning.”

She sensed it. That slight drift. That quiet resistance.

> “Okay,” she said.

He left that afternoon.

No fight. No final word.

Just a man with a silent question in his eyes.

And a woman holding a ring with a storm in her heart.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 11

Tara had been waiting. Waiting for calls. For emails. For replies that never came.

She had sent her CV to over a dozen pharma companies. Bold cover letters. Big dreams.

But the silence was louder than rejection.

Until that flight.

She was flying out to see Aarav after two weeks apart. Her pulse already a little high, her mind spinning with emotions—half longing, half unfinished conversations.

She took her window seat. Minutes later, a well-dressed man in his late forties slid into the aisle seat beside her.

“Dr. Tara, right?” he asked, glancing at her hospital tag still clipped to her bag.

She blinked. “Yes...?”

“I’m Mahesh Rao. CEO, NovaMed Pharmaceuticals.”

Her breath caught.

They spoke through most of the flight. About medicine. About ethics. About systems and dreams.

Tara didn’t hold back. She spoke with fire, precision, and clarity.

By the end, he was smiling. “I want you to come to our office. Next week. Let’s talk properly.”

She nodded, heart thudding with something between disbelief and joy.

—

Aarav picked her up at the airport.

She was glowing.

> “You won’t believe who sat next to me,” she said.

> “NovaMed’s CEO. He wants me to visit their office.”

His expression flickered.

> “Already?” he said, quietly. “Didn’t think it’d move this fast.”

> “I didn’t plan it. It just... happened.”

The car ride was quiet.

So was the evening.

He didn’t argue. But something in him had retreated. That old discomfort with pharma still lingered.

She didn’t press. She knew this look.

The one where he wrestled with pride and fear at the same time.

—

On the final morning of the trip, she found him waiting with the car keys.

> “Come on,” he said. “We’re going to NovaMed.”

> “What?”

> “You’ve waited long enough. Let’s go.”

Her eyes filled.

The building was sleek. Glass and steel. Sharp.

As they walked into the lobby, a voice called out, “Aarav?”

Mahesh Rao was already there, smiling wide.

They hugged. Old classmates. Instant warmth.

> “You didn’t tell me you knew Tara!” Mahesh laughed.

> “Didn’t know you two were hiring her,” Aarav shot back.

> “We’re not. We’re chasing her now.”

They all laughed.

Tara looked at Aarav—his hand on her back, his eyes calm.

And for the first time, she knew he wasn’t just her love.

He was her \*wings\*.



## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 12

Tara felt different.

Not because something had changed overnight, but because she finally let something shift inside her.

After the visit to NovaMed, Aarav and she spent a weekend like never before—walking, laughing, dreaming.

No pressure. No fear. Just two souls slowly stitching together their futures.

By the time she got back to her hospital, she was certain.

She walked into her department, head high, and handed over her resignation letter.

There was a pause in the air, like the building itself had to take a breath.

Dr. Tara? Leaving?

The staff gathered by the evening. Nurses, junior doctors, even the usually grumpy admin head.

A quiet send-off began to unfold. Not grand. But full of emotion.

Someone brought cupcakes. Another handed her a bouquet made of surgical gloves and pens.

The nurse who once cried after Tara's scolding hugged her tightly, whispering,

> “You always made us better. That’s why it hurt.”

Tara smiled, eyes damp. She had tried so hard to stay strong for everyone.

Now they were holding her, even if just for a moment.

—

At home, the real war began.

> “A pharma company?” her brother said, eyebrows up.

> “You’re leaving medicine for that?” her father added.

> “I’m not leaving medicine,” she said calmly. “I’m expanding how I serve it.”

They didn’t clap. But they didn’t stop her either.

It was enough.

—

That evening, Aarav sent her a message.

> “Did you tell them?”

> “Yes.”

> “Proud of you.”

—

The next morning, Tara did something she had been postponing for years.

She walked into a driving school.

Signed the form.

Sat behind the wheel.

The instructor adjusted her seat.

> “Ready, ma’am?”

She wasn't. Not fully.

But she looked at the road ahead and whispered,

> "Let's go."

She had exactly one month to tie up her life here.

One month to become unstoppable.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 13

Tara wanted time.

Not meetings. Not calls. Not preparations.

Just time—with him.

Before she stepped into a new world, she needed to breathe in the old one—one that still had just the two of them.

So they escaped.

Aarav booked a quiet resort tucked in the hills. Green all around, mist in the morning, and a silence that wrapped itself around their laughter.

—

Day One.

They held hands in the car like teenagers. She kept changing the song. He kept teasing her about her playlist.

> “Why do you have sad songs for someone so dangerous?” he asked.

> “Because dangerous girls cry in private,” she winked.

That night, they sat by the fire pit. She rested her head on his shoulder.

He wrapped her fingers in his and whispered,

> “You’re more than I ever deserved.”

She looked up. “You’re exactly what I prayed for.”

—

Day Two.

They missed breakfast.

And lunch.

They stayed in bed, wrapped in cotton sheets and each other's skin.

There were no declarations. Just hands finding places they knew by heart.

Lips tracing old promises and new beginnings.

Later, she laughed into his chest. "We're going to be late for nothing."

> "Then let's be late forever," he murmured.

—

Day Three.

She was quieter. A little slower with her smiles.

> "What's wrong?" he asked, brushing a strand of hair off her cheek.

> "I'm scared," she said. "Of starting something that might fall apart."

He kissed her forehead.

> "Tara, you're not starting something. You're becoming something."

And that was it.

The trip ended with laughter over coffee, hugs that lasted too long, and a kiss by the car that promised more than words ever could.

—

By the time they reached home, she was ready.

To join the company.

To begin again.

But more than that, to choose love—\*herself included.\*

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 14

Tara stepped into her new office with a silent pride.

The desk was sleek, her nameplate polished, and an assistant who waited with a notebook already open.

This wasn't a hospital ward anymore—this was the world she once imagined during long, exhausted nights in the ER.

And now it was hers.

NovaMed welcomed her with respect. The CEO nodded at her ideas. Colleagues followed her lead.

For the first time, she wasn't just part of a system—she *was* the system.

Her paycheck was more than numbers. It was validation.

And freedom.

—

Outside work, change flowed like wine.

She and Aarav moved into a villa that echoed their style—minimalistic, elegant, sharp.

Black couches. Glass walls. A kitchen she barely used.

Two cars. Staff who adored them.

And a circle of friends who found their calm in Tara's quiet and Aarav's charm.

One evening, Aarav leaned against the door of their walk-in closet.

> “Babe, can I ask you something?”

> “Hmm?” Tara was flipping through her wardrobe, full of carefully arranged blacks.

> “Why is every outfit you wear... black?” he teased.

She smirked. “Because it’s the only color that doesn’t pretend to be something else.”

> “Fair. But also... why Swiggy every night? Why not come to company parties with me?”

> “Because I’d rather eat biryani in bed than stand in heels and pretend to enjoy tiny bites.”

> “You order your clothes online. You haven’t stepped into a mall in six months.”

> “And still look hotter than anyone else in the room,” she winked.

They both laughed.

Then he softened.

> “You’re happy now. But sometimes, I feel like there’s a part of you still hiding.”

Tara paused.

She walked up to him, wrapped her arms around his waist, and rested her head on his chest.

> “I’m not hiding, Aarav. I just... don’t like noise. Black isn’t sadness. It’s silence. It’s control. It’s me.”

He kissed her hair.



> “Then may your soul stay black. And bold. Always.”

And just like that, the night stretched between them—  
warm, slow, wrapped in unspoken understanding.

Even in luxury, even in laughter, Tara remained...  
\*herself.\*

Unshaken.

Unapologetic.

Unforgettable.

## The Quiet Alpha – Chapter 15

When Tara first saw the two pink lines, she didn't believe it.

She stared. Blinked. Stared again.

And then, she cried.

Aarav was out on a call when she ran into his arms, trembling, eyes shining.

"We're going to have a baby," she whispered.

For a second, he froze. Then he lifted her in joy, spun her around the room, and said,

"You've given me the universe."

That night, they didn't sleep.

They lay on the couch, hands on her belly, planning names, dreaming of lullabies and little feet running through their villa.

—

The next nine months were nothing short of magic.

Aarav turned into the softest version of himself.

He tracked every trimester milestone, went to every scan, and even canceled meetings just to be beside her during mood swings.

"You're carrying a galaxy. The least I can do is bring you your mango pickle at 3 AM," he'd say with a grin.

He massaged her feet, played music to her belly, and spoke to their baby every night.

Tara, who was once iron-willed and unshakable, melted in his care.

She was pampered.

Protected.

Adored.

—

Even during work, he made sure she took breaks.

“You’re a queen now,” he’d say. “And queens don’t lift anything heavier than a pen.”

They documented every moment—cravings, kicks, even her tears on hard days.

They turned pregnancy into a celebration of life, love, and shared purpose.

And when the time came for her C-section, Aarav held her hand like it was the first time all over again.

He never left her side.

Because she wasn’t just the mother of his child—she was still his alpha, his miracle, his forever.

—

The news spread across NovaMed like wildfire. Whispers, excitement, and then worry—would they lose their most dynamic leader?

But Tara stayed unbothered.

She worked harder, managed projects, mentored teams—all while carrying life inside her.

There were meetings where her baby kicked.

There were days her ankles swelled, and she still didn't cancel a single session.

She didn't pause.

Until one morning, during a review meeting, she winced.

Oligohydramnios. Emergency C-section.

Hours later, she held her son—tiny, fierce-eyed, and already holding her finger like he owned her world.

—

Most assumed she'd take months off.

She took one week.

And walked back into NovaMed—with her baby in one arm and a laptop in the other.

"You're not serious," one colleague gasped.

"Deadly serious," she smiled, eyes sharper than ever.

Boardrooms watched in awe.

Presentations began with baby coos in the background.

But the brilliance didn't fade. If anything, she became more unstoppable.

—

Within months, Tara's name was everywhere.

She won two national awards for innovation in clinical-pharma integration.

Magazines called her “The Woman Who Didn’t Stop.”

One cover read:

“She closed more deals than maternity leave days.”

---

Their home was no longer just a dream—it was lived in, loud with joy.

Aarav handled night feeds.

Tara trained new leads.

The baby slept beside spreadsheets and startup blueprints.

---

On a quiet evening, Tara stood at their villa balcony, baby asleep in her arms.

Aarav came behind her, wrapping his arms around both of them.

“Happy?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Free,” she whispered.

Love. Wealth. Success. Peace.

She didn’t just have it all.

She earned it.

# **All Eyes on Him**

Dr. Cherishma Devarakonda

## **Dedication**

To every heart that dared to love fiercely and dream  
fearlessly.

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## Chapter 1: The First Glance

Parvathi didn't build her empire with loud promises or viral hashtags.

She built it in silence. With stained hands and sleepless nights. With one table, two products, and a dream no one but her believed in.

Now, her brand—Saanvi Earth—was finally on the cusp of becoming more than just a boutique name. It was time to scale up, go national, maybe global.

Her team buzzed with excitement in the conference room, throwing out names for a new brand ambassador. Young actors, popular influencers, athletes.

Then someone said it.

“What about Shiv Aryan?”

The name hung in the air like a challenge.

Cricket's golden boy. Charismatic, unstoppable, undefeated. A walking headline with a smile that broke the internet. Parvathi knew the numbers he pulled. The kind of attention he commanded.

She hesitated. Then nodded.

“Fix a meeting.”

---

The Meeting

He walked in wearing grey joggers and a black hoodie, fresh off practice, towel slung casually around his neck. Hair messy. Confidence effortless.

Parvathi sat poised, her saree crisp, her notes minimal. She spoke with elegance, offering clarity and conviction—her brand's purpose, its growth, the campaign vision.

He listened. Leaned back. And then, with a tone that was calm but final, said:

“It’s a solid concept. But I’m not doing small launches anymore. Got back-to-back tours. No time for anything less than top-tier.”

No arrogance. Just cold truth.

Parvathi nodded, her smile never slipping.

“Thank you for your time.”

That was it. Fifteen minutes. One rejection. And a quiet storm brewing in her chest.

---

## The Fallout

Back at the office, her team apologized for aiming too high.

She shook her head.

“One day, we won’t be asking one cricketer. We’ll choose three. From the top.”

They stared at her like she was crazy.

She didn’t care.

---

That night, alone in her villa, she curled up on the couch with green tea and switched on the TV. A sports channel played highlights of Shiv's recent match. He was laughing in the post-match interview, wiping sweat off his brow, speaking about pressure and passion like he was born for the stage.

Parvathi watched quietly.

"Cocky jerk," she muttered.

But she didn't change the channel.

Because beneath all that charm... was a story she respected. A struggle she knew too well.

And that night, even though she hated it—she started thinking about him.

## Chapter 2: Clink

The Mumbai skyline glittered like spilled champagne. From the rooftop of one of the city's most exclusive clubs, the city's elite gathered under fairy lights and soft jazz—the perfect blend of gloss and gossip.

It was a celebration of power. Of headlines made, empires built, games won.

Parvathi stood near the open bar, a vision of elegance in a slate grey saree. Her hair was pulled into a clean bun, a single diamond glinting on her ear. No entourage. No fuss. Just presence.

Every few minutes, someone walked up to congratulate her.

“The ad is everywhere.” “You’ve arrived.” “That movie star was lucky to stand next to your brand.”

She smiled graciously, but her mind was elsewhere. Or maybe, nowhere at all.

Until he walked in.

Shiv Aryan—late, of course. Fresh from a match-winning performance. He wore a tailored black suit, open collar, tousled hair still damp from a rushed shower. Applause followed him like a loyal shadow.

And when he spotted her?

The crowd faded.

---

He found her standing alone by the railing, sipping water, watching the city breathe below.

Shiv: “Didn’t expect to see your brand trending before mine this month.”

She turned, cool and composed.

Parvathi: “Didn’t expect you to remember the name of a ‘small launch’ brand.”

A pause. A smile. Sharp enough to sting.

Shiv: (tilting his head) “I didn’t say you wouldn’t make it. I said I couldn’t join then.”

Parvathi: “And I didn’t wait for anyone.”

Silence stretched between them. Not awkward. Not hostile. Just... full.

He lifted his glass.

Shiv: “To people who don’t wait.”

She raised hers in return.

Parvathi: “To people who don’t look back.”

The glasses clinked.

Five seconds of unbroken eye contact.

And just like that, it ended.

Someone called his name. A hand tapped her shoulder.

They both turned away.

But as the party swirled around them, both Parvathi and Shiv knew—

Those five minutes? Would echo louder than most conversations ever would.

---

The laughter of the party faded behind her.

Parvathi stepped out of the car, heels clicking against the marble driveway of her secluded villa. The air was cooler here, quieter. The moon hung low, like a secret watching from above.

She walked in alone, the soft chime of the security system greeting her. Dropped her clutch on the console. Slipped off her heels. Still not speaking.

She moved to the floor-to-ceiling window that framed the distant hills. City lights blinked far below. Her reflection stared back—poised, unreadable.

But her thoughts were anything but.

Five minutes.

That's all it took.

Five minutes, and she couldn't stop thinking about his voice. The casual confidence. The slight tilt of his head. The way he looked at her—not like she was someone to impress, but someone who already mattered.

She hated that it affected her.

But she couldn't deny it.

His charm? Lethal.

“Parvathi, don’t be a fool,” she whispered to her reflection. “You don’t fall for smiles. You build empires.”

She had a business to run. Targets to hit. Stories to write with her name on them.

But deep down, beneath the steel and silence, something had already shifted.

She turned off the lights.

And in the quiet darkness of her villa, she smiled—for the first time in days.

## Chapter 3: Crossed Paths

In the weeks that followed, life pulled them back into their own worlds.

Parvathi buried herself in numbers, strategy meetings, and early morning presentations. Her latest campaign had gone viral, and now her team was buzzing with something bigger—stock market entry.

“We’ll need a brand valuation audit,” someone said.

“You’ll need to host an investor’s roundtable,” another added.

She nodded through it all, unfazed. This was the next leap. And she was ready.

But somewhere between the spreadsheets and studio lights, she saw his name again.

A glossy magazine on her assistant’s desk.

“Shiv Aryan’s Secret Evenings with Co-Star?”

A blurry photo. Half a smile. Her hand brushing his arm.

Parvathi paused for half a second, then turned the page.

“Common in their world,” she murmured. “Nothing new.”

She didn’t ask questions. She didn’t let herself care.

And yet, that night, her phone screen stayed blank longer than usual. No new notifications. No Shiv buzz.



He was busy, too. The international tour was brutal. Three matches. Three losses. Fans turned cold. Reporters harsher. The buzz around him was growing—and not in a good way.

And then—he was benched.

An old ankle injury flared up. He left before the final game.

In a clipped press statement, he denied the dating rumors.

“My focus is the game. That’s all it’s ever been.”

---

A Week Later

Same hospital. Different reasons.

Parvathi was there with her father—routine check-up. She walked the quiet corridor of the private wing, answering work emails on her phone, her saree perfectly pleated, her face unreadable.

Then, just ahead—she saw him.

Shiv, sitting alone in the waiting area, ankle lightly wrapped, headphones resting around his neck. He looked tired. Not broken. But quieter.

He looked up.

Their eyes met.

A flicker of recognition. A heartbeat of silence.

He stood up—slowly.

She stopped walking—briefly.

No words yet. Just that same charged silence from the rooftop party... except this time, no suits, no glass clinks.

Just a hospital corridor. White walls. Real lives.

“Hi,” he said simply.

“Hi,” she replied.

For a moment, they were just two people again.

Not a cricketer and a businesswoman.

Not a missed partnership or a headline.

Just Shiv and Parvathi.

## Chapter 4: Shadows of the Past

Hardik Desai walked into her life the way ambition did—loud, passionate, impossible to ignore.

They had built the first leg of Parvathi's business journey together—long nights, shared dreams, heated debates. But as the brand grew, so did their differences. He wanted speed, she wanted sustainability. He chased global investors, she built local roots. Somewhere along the way, love got tangled in power plays.

They ended the relationship before it could ruin the friendship. Now, years later, he remained one of her closest allies.

But Shiv didn't know that.

---

Meanwhile, Shiv had slipped into a slower rhythm.

His ankle injury kept him off the pitch and inside clinics. The physio sessions were long, painful, and humbling. His only real company during those hours?

Parvathi's father.

The older man had started coming to the same hospital for knee rehabilitation. What began as polite nods in the waiting room turned into warm chats over chai in the lounge.

"You should've seen my daughter's face when I told her I'd bumped into Shiv Aryan," he chuckled one day.

“She hides it, but I think she follows cricket more than she admits.”

Shiv laughed too, but said nothing.

He didn’t ask questions.

But he listened—very carefully.

---

A Week Later

One afternoon, as Shiv arrived for his session, he saw something that made him pause mid-step.

Parvathi.

And beside her—Hardik.

She wore a powder blue kurta, no makeup, phone in hand. He had one arm casually around her father, helping him into the lobby. Hardik carried the old man’s reports, laughing at something Parvathi said.

From a distance, they looked close. Familiar. Like people with history.

Shiv stood still for a second. Something uncomfortable twisted in his chest.

Jealousy?

No. He didn’t do jealousy.

Still... he walked past them with a polite nod. Parvathi met his eyes for a moment—calm, unreadable as ever. Hardik didn’t even notice.

---

## Two Days Later

Shiv was sipping tea with Parvathi's father again when he casually brought it up.

"Your daughter seems close to that guy. The one with the glasses?"

The old man burst into a laugh.

"Hardik? Oh, don't worry about him. He's history. They dated once. Young blood, big dreams, no patience. It didn't last."

Shiv sipped his tea, expression unchanged.

But inside?

Something quiet shifted.

She had a past. She had loved. She had lost.

And she had moved on—with grace.

Now, he found himself watching her more. Listening more.

Wanting to know what shaped her, what hurt her, what healed her.

He had never met a woman like Parvathi.

And suddenly... he wanted to learn her story.

## Chapter 5: Jalebis and Jitters

Parvathi's father had always been a quiet observer.

But lately, he noticed something unusual.

Every time he mentioned Parvathi during his hospital chats with Shiv, the cricketer's face would soften—just slightly. A spark in his eyes. A shift in tone.

The man known for smashing sixes and dodging cameras seemed genuinely... interested.

And Parvathi? She wouldn't admit it, but he'd caught her rewatching Shiv's interviews—twice.

So, he decided to help fate along.

---

### The Setup

One afternoon at the rehab center, after his session with the physiotherapist, Parvathi's father stepped aside and made a dramatic phone call within earshot of Shiv.

"What? Now? Okay, okay—I'm coming. Just wait there!"

He hung up with a sigh.

"My friend's stuck. I have to go help him. Parvathi will come pick me up."

Then he turned to Shiv, with a perfectly casual smile.

"Mind staying here for a bit? She'll be here soon."

And with that, he left.

---

### The Surprise

Shiv waited, adjusting his hoodie, casually checking his phone, trying not to overthink.

He had planned a little surprise. Just a small thing.

A paper box rested beside him. Inside? Fresh jalebis—golden, warm, perfect.

Her father once told him: “Parvathi’s weakness? Jalebis. But she pretends she’s over them. Don’t believe her.”

So, Shiv got them. Just in case.

But when the door opened... he wasn’t ready for what he saw.

Parvathi.

And beside her—Hardik.

Shiv stood, polite smile forced into place.

They talked briefly—clinic formalities, small pleasantries. Then, trying to lighten the moment, Shiv reached for the box.

“I got these. Thought your dad might enjoy them... maybe you too?”

Parvathi’s eyes lit up, just a little. She reached for one—fingertips almost touching gold.

Then—

“Jalebi?” Hardik raised an eyebrow. “You’re still on your strict sugar detox, right?”

Parvathi hesitated. Her hand dropped.

“Right. I forgot.”

Her face fell. Just a flicker. But Shiv saw it.

The smile on his lips stayed.

But inside, he wanted to throw the jalebis in Hardik’s face.

Or worse.

---

That Night

Parvathi returned home to find her father and his “emergency” friend lounging on the balcony—drinking wine, eating leftovers, and laughing like teenagers.

“So the plan failed?” the friend joked.

She froze.

“You planned that fake emergency?” she asked, voice sharp.

They looked at each other. Caught. Guilty. Amused.

She shook her head, grabbed her car keys, and walked out before they could explain.

“We need a better plan,” her father sighed, sipping his wine.



“Invite him home,” his friend said. “She won’t walk away then.”

And the next chapter of chaos? Already writing itself.

## Chapter 6: The Gesture

The dinner was meant to be casual.

Just a quiet evening with a few family guests, one of whom happened to be the man the country couldn't stop talking about—Shiv Aryan.

Parvathi hadn't known he'd be invited. Her father simply said, "He's been good company at the hospital," with that knowing smile he always wore when plotting something bigger.

She greeted Shiv politely. He returned her warmth with ease, moving through the evening like he was born to belong. He spoke to her uncle about cricket from the '80s, complimented her aunt's homemade pickles, and offered to help clear dishes.

He didn't just charm the room. He respected it.

Parvathi found herself quietly impressed.

---

After the dinner, while others settled into gossip and tea, Shiv stepped outside to the lawn. Parvathi followed with a cup in hand.

They sat on opposite ends of the garden bench, silence stretching like a calm between storms.

"I didn't expect you here," she finally said.

"I wasn't sure I'd be welcome," he replied.

She smiled. He leaned forward, elbows on knees.

“You know... I’m curious,” he said. “Do you ever stop planning?”

“Not really. The world doesn’t slow down for women like me.”

They talked.

About ambition. About pressure. About being tired without showing it. The layers behind their curated lives slowly peeled away. It wasn’t dramatic—it was gentle, like peeling an orange under sunlight.

Shiv watched her closely. Every sentence, every flick of her fingers. Then—

“Come for coffee with me tomorrow.”

Parvathi hesitated.

“Shiv... you’re not just anyone. If we’re seen together, there’s a price. I’ve worked hard to build my name. I don’t need headlines ruining that.”

“So that’s a no?”

“That’s a no.”

He nodded, stood up... and smirked.

“So tomorrow at 5 then? Great. I’ll text you where.”

She blinked.

“Did you even hear me say no?”

“No, I heard you ask if we’re meeting at a quiet place. Don’t worry, I’ll pick one.”

She shook her head, laughing despite herself.

---

### The Next Day

Parvathi's day was packed—meetings, investor calls, endless emails. She didn't check her phone much.

At 5 PM sharp, Shiv stood outside her office, leaned against his car, phone in hand.

"You coming, or should I tell the chef to cancel the jalebi order?"

She blinked.

"You did not—"

"I absolutely did."

---

### The Coffee Date

They sat in a cozy café tucked into a quiet corner of the city. Shiv ordered black coffee to match hers—then immediately gagged after the first sip.

"Who drinks this voluntarily?"

"People who enjoy not spiking their insulin."

"People who enjoy sadness," he muttered.

She laughed, really laughed.

He teased her about her 99% dark chocolate addiction, then sweetly asked the chef if he could get jalebis just for her.

"I figured... redemption for yesterday's disaster."

And just like that, he earned another smile. A real one.

Their hands brushed when reaching for the sugar packet. Neither pulled away immediately.

Fire. Quiet and unmistakable.

---

As they got up to leave, he asked:

“What’s tomorrow like for you?”

“It’s Sunday. I visit Baba Mandir. It’s my thing.”

“You believe in all that?”

“I do. You don’t?”

“Not really,” he said, shrugging. “But I like people who believe in something.”

He dropped her home and left with a simple wave.

---

## The Temple

The next morning, when Parvathi stepped out in her soft cotton saree and silver bangles, Shiv was there. Waiting.

“You said you believe. I figured I’d come see what that looks like.”

He took her to the temple. Waited in line. Folded hands even though he didn’t know how to pray.

She didn’t say anything. But her heart softened in places she didn’t know were still guarded.

---

## The Aftermath

By afternoon, their picture at the café had gone viral.

By evening, the temple visit had headlines.

“Power Couple?” “Spiritual Sundays with Shiv and Parvathi” “She builds brands, he breaks records.”

Her brand’s page blew up. Orders. Emails. Interviews.

Parvathi panicked slightly. Shiv calmed her down.

“Use it. Ride it. Let them talk—while you build.”

And so she did.

One week later, she got an invite to present her brand in Paris.

“I’m going,” she told him. “One week.”

“You should,” he said, smiling.

And for the first time, she felt someone meant it—not because it was polite.

But because he believed in her.

## Chapter 7: Midnight in Paris

Paris was everything her schedule didn't allow her to enjoy.

Parvathi moved between boardrooms and boutique expos, media panels and investor dinners. Her team followed her rhythm without missing a beat, and Hardik was unusually focused—breaking down financial pitches, negotiating brand placements, and pushing her toward one goal:

“We make this a success, and we're set for stock market entry.”

He said it often. Always with intensity.

But when he brought up ownership again—asking for a stake in the brand—Parvathi gave him the same calm answer she always did:

“You get paid well. But this brand? It's mine. I won't be a puppet, not in this life.”

Hardik nodded. Didn't push further. But the air between them held that silent line.

---

### The Surprise

One evening, after a long meeting that stretched into night, she stepped out of the black car—exhausted, clutching her laptop bag—and froze.

Shiv.

Standing outside her hotel, hands in his coat pocket, waiting like he'd always been there.

"How...?" she whispered, eyes wide.

"I missed you."

No dramatic speeches. No warning.

Just him. And that look in his eyes that said everything.

She dropped her bag. He stepped forward. They hugged—tight, real, necessary.

No words. Just breath. Just warmth.

---

## The Room

She followed him upstairs, still speechless.

When he unlocked the room and let her in, she stopped in her tracks.

On the bed: a black silk dress, heels, matching jewelry.

Her favorite shade. Her exact style. Everything she'd never asked for—but had always loved.

"What is this?" she asked softly.

"Why are you doing all this?"

"You'll know soon," he smiled.

She went to shower, hands still trembling. And when she stepped out in a towel, he stood there—calm, focused. He helped her dress. Slid the straps over her shoulders. Fixed the necklace. Held her hand steady as she stepped into the heels.



When he knelt to fasten the buckle, his fingers grazed her ankle.

“What’s happening between us?” she finally asked.

“You’ll see,” he murmured, brushing his lips over the inside of her wrist.

---

### The Dinner

He took her to a rooftop restaurant glowing in amber lights. Waiters spoke in soft French. She ordered in fluent accents.

“I didn’t know you speak French,” he said, eyebrows raised.

“Second language in school,” she replied, sipping wine.

“Don’t take my jokes the wrong way,” he added.

“I don’t,” she said, smiling. “Making jokes and giving gifts—that’s your love language.”

That silenced him for a moment.

Then, slowly, he reached for her hand.

---

### The Kiss. The Night.

They kissed in the car.

Soft. Then hungry. Then desperate.

They made it back to his room without a word.

Clothes hit the floor slowly.

He touched her like she was made of both fire and prayer.

It was raining outside—the kind that made the world blur into silence.

Parvathi stood by the window, her silhouette glowing in soft yellow light, loose hair clinging to her skin, her breath a little uneven.

Shiv stepped closer, not saying a word. His fingertips traced the curve of her waist like he was memorizing it.

No cameras. No people. Just her. Just them.

“You’re not supposed to be here,” she whispered, eyes fluttering shut.

“I couldn’t stay away,” he breathed against her shoulder.

“You have no idea how long I’ve waited to touch you like this... without guilt. Without fear. Just us.”

His lips found the hollow of her neck, slow... reverent...

And when he finally laid her down, every inch of him said what words never could.

That night, they didn’t just make love.

He worshipped her.

Then ruined her.

And held every broken, beautiful piece.

All at once.

---

## The Morning After

She woke in his arms, tangled in hotel sheets and sunlight.

He was watching her. Not with lust, not with pride—but with love.

“I want the world to know,” he said.

“Me too.”

And just like that, they chose to stop hiding.

No press release. No drama.

Just two people, finally done pretending.

## Chapter 8: Miles in Between

Paris felt like a dream she almost didn't want to wake from.

But reality came fast—calls, contracts, flights, and deadlines.

Parvathi's schedule pulled her in one direction. Shiv's in another.

Their goodbye at the airport was short.

No tears. No drama.

Just one long hug. One whispered "Call me when you land."

And then... silence.

---

The Distance

Back in India, Parvathi returned to her villa and straight into meetings.

Investors were impressed, media was calling, and her brand's valuation had surged post-Paris.

But the nights?

They stretched.

She scrolled through her gallery at 2 AM.

Read old messages.

Watched their coffee date reel that had gone viral.

Yet, she never texted first.

---

Shiv's Side

Shiv buried himself in prep for the Australia tour.

Practice. Strategy. Pressure.

And he \*delivered\*.

Three consecutive matches. Three wins.

He shone like a star reborn.

Every news channel, every sports anchor—praising  
\*the comeback\*.

But behind those dazzling performances...

he missed her.

He shared it once—with a teammate, in the silence of  
the locker room.

> “She’s fire. Sharp. Growing. Making waves with  
every breath.

And I’m here... wondering if I’ll be enough for her.”

---

The Unsaid

They still spoke—occasionally.

Calls that lasted five minutes.

Texts that ended in “Talk soon.”

The passion hadn’t died.

But the silence between their words had grown louder.

---

## The Reminder

One night, alone in her office, Parvathi found a letter on her desk—one her mentor had left years ago.

> “The loneliest place is success when you have no one to share it with.

Don’t forget to feel while you build.”

She stared at the words for a long time.

And just like that, she picked up her phone.

But before she could dial—

it rang.

Shiv.

> “Hey...”

“Hey,” she breathed. Silence filled the space between them, soft and electric.

> “I couldn’t stop thinking about you,” he said finally.

“Same,” she whispered. “It’s like... the closer we got, the further everything else pulled us.”

“I know. I hate it.”

A pause.

> “Come over,” she said.

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“I’m five minutes away.”

---

## Reunion

The doorbell rang.

She opened the door to find him there—wind-tousled, breathless, eyes fixed on her like she was the only thing that mattered.

They didn't speak.

They just hugged.

Held each other like something fragile would break if they let go too soon.

---

## The Talk

They sat on her balcony, two mugs of black coffee in hand, the city asleep beneath them.

> "I got selected," he said quietly. "Australia tour. Big one. I need to perform. No other way to stay on top."

She nodded, proud but cautious.

> "I'm happy for you," she said. "My brand's doing well too. Post-Paris boom."

But all I want... is independence. To choose. To lead. To decide... without being smothered by love."

He looked at her—really looked.

> "And all I want... is for you to keep me safe," he said, his hand sliding into hers.

"Because I swear... I'll make you wild."

They laughed softly. No fear. No control. Just them.

---

### The Twist

As he got up to leave, she walked him to the door.

He dropped his passport while pulling on his hoodie.  
She bent to pick it up.

Her eyes scanned the details—and froze.

> “Shiv... you’re three years younger than me?”

He smirked.

> “Problem?”

“You’re just a baby,” she teased.

“Then take care of me, mama,” he winked.

And just like that—he was gone.

Off to Australia.

Off to chase greatness again.

---

### The Trouble

Early next morning, Shiv tried to sneak out unnoticed.

But the flashbulbs caught him.

> \*Headline next day:\*

\*\*“Shiv Aryan’s Secret Exit from Villa Sparks Dating  
Rumors with Business Mogul Parvathi Nair!”\*\*

By breakfast, social media exploded.

Parvathi woke up to hundreds of notifications.



Calls. Emails. Investors raising eyebrows.

She was \*furious\*. Not at Shiv—but at the invasion.

> “Why can’t two successful people fall in love without the world losing its mind?”

---

The Forum

A few days later, Parvathi attended an international business forum.

Her keynote stunned the audience. Fierce. Focused. Flawless.

Then a reporter stood up, grinning.

> “One question before we end—what’s your take on Shiv Aryan’s form lately?”

The crowd chuckled.

She smiled—caught off guard for a second.

Then—cool, blushing, unreadable—

> “Next question.”

---

But her eyes?

They told a different story.

And somewhere in Australia...

he was watching that clip on loop.

## Chapter 9: The Cracks Under the Spotlight

Shiv was back in India.

And with him, came a warmth Parvathi didn't know she'd been missing.

They spent stolen mornings in each other's arms, lazy evenings wrapped in silence, and late nights whispering dreams on her balcony.

Their families met over home-cooked meals and laughter. Her father and his mother bonded instantly, trading parenting woes like old friends.

Then one day, over lunch, her father casually said—

"You both need a place of your own. You're not children. Build your home now."

Parvathi blinked.

It wasn't a bad idea.

It just felt... fast.

She wasn't ready to become someone's wife.

She was still becoming herself.

## The Offer

In the business world, things were moving faster.

A major movie superstar—Arjun Khanna—had just come on board as the face of her brand. And not just that. He wanted to invest.

Big numbers. Big reach. Big pressure.

Parvathi brought it up during a quiet dinner with Shiv.

"He's offering equity," she said, stirring her drink.

"Wants a seat on the board."

Shiv nodded, slowly.

"Do you trust him?"

"Professionally, yes."

"Then it's your call."

But his voice lacked the usual spark.

His eyes didn't quite meet hers.

Something was off.

She leaned back, eyes scanning the contract again.

"You know," she said slowly, "I've always built this alone. Brick by brick. I've never needed someone to hold my hand—not even now."

He turned slightly, gaze sharp.

"So you don't need me now?"

She looked at him, surprised.

"I didn't say that. I just... don't want to depend on anyone. Ever."

His voice dropped to a whisper.

"You're not. But I thought we'd build something together."

Silence.

The kind that doesn't need fixing... but still hurts a little.

She reached across, placed her hand on his.

"I want us to be strong without fear. You and me. No debts. No doubts."

## The Interview

A week later, Shiv's candid interview aired on prime time.

He spoke about pressure. Fame. His journey.

And then—

"Your first heartbreak?"

He smiled, a little too long.

"Nimisha. We were kids. First everything. I don't talk to her much anymore... but I'll always respect what we had."

Parvathi's face stiffened as she watched.

The camera cut to the host smirking.

"She's still around, isn't she? There are rumours."

"She wants to stay in touch. But I've kept it clear. I'm in a relationship now."

## The Aftermath

She waited until he got home.

Didn't even let him change.

"Why didn't you tell me you were still talking to her?"

"I'm not! She messages. I ignore most. I didn't think it mattered."

"It does matter. You looked like you were reminiscing."

"Parvathi—don't do this. Don't let a TV clip erase what we are."

But something inside her had shifted.

She wasn't jealous.

She was unsettled.

To her, exes were ghosts—unwelcome echoes that didn't belong in present-day love.

Because while she was building empires brick by brick...

...Shiv was still carrying ghosts.

And for the first time, she wondered—

Could love and ambition truly grow in the same soil?

## Chapter 10: The Breakup Heard Around the Nation

It started with a silence. Not the kind that brings peace—but the kind that slowly swallows everything whole.

Parvathi and Shiv were still in love.

Still dreaming.

Still hurting.

But their egos? Louder than love.

It began when Parvathi decided to go ahead with Arjun's proposal—making the movie star a formal investor and voice of her brand.

"It's business, Shiv," she said. "Nothing more."

He clenched his jaw. "You say it's business, but it feels like erasing me."

"You were never a prop, Shiv. But you don't run this. I do."

They didn't yell.

They didn't cry.

They just... stopped.

He flew off for a new series.

She buried herself in expansion strategy.

And the world noticed.

## **The Media Frenzy**

TV anchors debated it like a national scandal.

Social media turned into a circus.

"Power couple no more?"

"Did fame kill the fire?"

"This is India's version of a royal split."

Hashtags trended.

Clips from old interviews played on loop.

#ParShivBreakup took over.

## **The Silence That Hurt**

Every night, Parvathi lay in bed staring at the ceiling, remembering the way he said her name, the way he teased her coffee orders, how he'd bring jalebis just to watch her smile.

She wanted to call. Message. Anything.

But she didn't.

Her pride sat heavy on her chest.

Her ego whispered, "He should come to you."

And in Australia, Shiv rewound their old voice notes just to hear her laugh. He scrolled past photos, paused over her black-and-white saree still saved in his gallery.

She was rent-free in his mind.

But he didn't reach out either.

Because his ego screamed, "She should've chosen you."



Both waited.

Neither moved.

### **Whispers Between Families**

Parvathi's father spoke to Shiv's mother in hushed tones.

At dinners, glances were exchanged.

"They were good together," her father said once.

"They still are," his mother replied.

But neither dared to speak to their children about it.

Because the fire between them? Still burned too close to the surface.

### **The Final Blow**

After scoring a stunning century, Shiv was hailed as the hero of the match.

In the post-match interview, a reporter asked:

"Anyone special you want to dedicate this win to?"

He looked at the camera, lips twitching.

"No. No one comes to mind."

And miles away, Parvathi watched the clip.

In silence.

Her hand trembled.

But her heart?

Still refused to text.

## Chapter 11: The 4AM Confession

### **Earlier That Evening – Parvathi’s Breaking Point**

Parvathi sat at her vanity, dim lights casting soft shadows across her face. The day had been long—events, interviews, handshakes, smiles.

But now, as she unfastened her earrings one by one, silence crept in.

She picked up her phone, scrolling through old videos. A reel popped up—her and Shiv, laughing at a café, his hand brushing hers over a plate of jalebis.

Her breath caught.

She locked the phone and stared at her reflection, voice barely a whisper:

"Why aren't you calling me?"

Her mascara smudged as a tear fell.

### **Same Time – Shiv’s Breakdown**

The team dinner buzzed with energy, but Shiv sat distant.

Reporters still dropped Parvathi’s name during interviews. A teammate nudged him, teasing, “Still brooding over your CEO girlfriend?”

He forced a smile, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

Back in the hotel lobby, he saw a business magazine—Parvathi on the cover. Elegant. Powerful. Distant.

In his room, he typed: "Hey..."

Then deleted it.

He threw his phone on the bed and whispered to the ceiling:

"Screw it. I can't breathe."

## **Family Pressure**

Shiv's mother called that night. Her voice soft but sharp with concern:

"You're shining on the field, beta. But your eyes... they're empty."

He didn't respond.

Parvathi's father knocked gently on her door, holding a plate of her favorite dinner.

"You know, maybe the world was wrong," he said.

"Maybe he *\*was\** the right choice."

She didn't respond. Just took the plate. But her heart screamed.

## **The World Notices**

A fan went viral on live TV:

"If Shiv and Parvathi broke up, what's the point of love at all?"

Parvathi saw the clip on Twitter at 2 AM.

She didn't cry.

She didn't speak.

But her heart cracked open—wide enough to feel every word she refused to say.

### **4AM – The Message**

Her phone buzzed.

A single message:

"Come out. I'm waiting."

She froze.

Then ran.

Messy bun, swollen eyes, red nose. But when she saw his headlights in the dark street—she slowed.

She walked up like she was stepping back into something sacred.

And got into the car.

### **The Drive**

He didn't speak.

Just drove.

Through silence, through breath, through heartbeats.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Somewhere you can breathe."

"I have meetings, Shiv—"

"Cancel them. Just today."

She pulled out her phone.

Called her PA.

Cancelled everything.

## **The Resort**

Sunlight kissed the edges of the resort's hilltops as they arrived.

He led her to a small cottage by a lake.

Turned to her.

Held her hands.

And finally spoke:

"I love you. I can't go another second without you. You can throw tantrums, yell, act like a boss witch—I'll still be the idiot who says sorry first after every fight."

She didn't say a word.

She just cried and laughed at the same time.

He hugged her so tight, like she'd slip through his fingers otherwise.

Then, a whisper against her hair:

"Marry me. Please. Let's do this for real."

## Chapter 12: The Beginning of Always

The golden morning light spilled into the resort suite. Parvathi stood on the balcony, silent, watching the breeze stir the hills. Shiv walked up behind her, arms circling her waist.

“Still want to marry me?” she asked playfully.

“Even if you show up in your boss-witch mode and yell at the priest,” he whispered, “I’m not letting you go.”

She leaned into him, smiling.

“Let’s do this.”



### Telling the Families

Parvathi’s father let out a mock sigh.

“I always knew this day would come. I just didn’t know it would take this much drama.”

Shiv’s mom cried—then immediately called the wedding planner.

“Golds, creams, and reds! And a kundan set for Parvathi—my daughter now!”



### Media & Press Buzz

As soon as photos from the resort leaked, the nation went into total meltdown.

“THE Shiv Aryan getting married?!”

“Boss Lady Parvathi Nair tames the Cricket King!”

“India’s hottest power couple says YES!”

Fashion influencers went wild:

“Her saree styling is elegance personified!”

“Shiv in ivory silk? Instant trend alert.”

Parvathi gave a press statement:

“Yes, I said yes. But I’m still the CEO. I don’t need rescuing. I found a partner.”

### The Wedding Festivities

#### Day 1: Haldi – Messy, Mad & Magical

- A beachside haldi, drenched in laughter and colour.
- Shiv was chased down by his cousins, doused in turmeric from head to toe.
- Parvathi wore a simple white crop-top saree with yellow mogras, dancing barefoot in the sand.
- They smeared each other with haldi, danced to dhols, and laughed till their stomachs hurt.

#### Day 2: Sangeet – The Dance Floor Burned

- Parvathi wore a dark wine lehenga with mirror work.
- Shiv in a black-on-black Indo-western.
- They performed a couple’s routine that broke the internet—passionate, playful, powerful.
- Their friends teased them: “From boardrooms to ballrooms—who are you two!?”
- Shiv’s mom joined a flash mob. Parvathi’s dad rapped in Malayalam. It was chaotic perfection.

### 🕉 Day 3: Wedding – Sacred & Soft

- Held in a Kerala temple by the backwaters.
- Parvathi wore a white kasavu saree with antique gold temple jewelry, bare feet, jasmine in her braid.
- Shiv, in a cream mundu and gold angavastram, couldn't take his eyes off her.
- As the priest chanted, Shiv's mom wiped her tears.
- Parvathi's father turned away for a moment, eyes red.  
"It's not letting go... it's watching her become more."
- Shiv tied the thaali with trembling fingers.  
"You're my calm. My fire. My forever."

### 👑 Reception – Royal, Glamorous, Unapologetic

- Back in Mumbai, the reception was held in a palace-style venue. Chandeliers, velvet drapes, gold-rimmed everything.
- Parvathi wore emerald green with a diamond choker, subtle makeup, and sleek hair.
- Shiv stunned in a charcoal tux with emerald cufflinks.
- Paparazzi flooded the scene. Every TV channel, blog, and reel was about "The Wedding of the Year."
- Fashion shows dissected every look.
- Their friends raised toasts, roasted them on stage:  
"They fought like enemies, danced like lovers, and now they're married. God help the world."



As the music softened and the night slowed, Shiv whispered in her ear:

“From now on, let them all keep their eyes on me...  
Because mine will never leave you.”

## Chapter 13: Stolen Days

The world had watched them vow forever.

Now, they just wanted a few days of nothing but each other.

Shiv and Parvathi slipped away to a secret coastal town—far from flashbulbs, press, and public eyes. Just salt in the air, sun on their skin, and the freedom to breathe.

They checked into a quiet cliffside resort, the sea stretching endlessly in every direction.

The moment the door closed behind them, Parvathi kicked off her heels and fell onto the bed, arms wide open.

“No emails. No calls. No planners. Just us,” she sighed.

“Finally,” Shiv murmured, dropping his duffle and walking toward her. “Wife.”

Her lips curled into a smirk.

“Say that again.”

“Wife,” he whispered, crawling over her.

She laughed, pulling him down into a kiss that tasted like liberation.

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## Day 1: Barefoot Hearts

Parvathi roamed the suite in Shiv's black tee, brushing her teeth while humming a Tamil song.

Shiv watched from the doorway, arms crossed.

"You realize you're ruining me, right?" he said.

"Why?"

"Because now all I want is to wake up to this... every day... forever."

They spent the morning walking along the beach, hands locked, toes sinking into the wet sand. A kid mistook them for movie stars and asked for a selfie.

They obliged, laughing.

At lunch, they fed each other street-style fried prawns and sticky jalebis from a beach shack. Parvathi wiped a sugar smear from Shiv's cheek with her finger. He caught her hand, kissed it.

"You know I'd pause the world for you, right?" he whispered.

She didn't answer. Just smiled—and that said enough.

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## Day 2: Inside Jokes & Intimate Looks

Back in their room, they watched their wedding reels on mute.

"My lehenga was 17 kilos," she groaned.

"And I carried you during the sangeet lift. So technically, I'm the strongest man alive."

They broke into a fit of laughter.

Later that evening, wrapped in a blanket, they sat on the balcony watching the waves crash in rhythm.

“There was a moment... during our fight,” Shiv said quietly. “I thought I’d lost you for good.”

Parvathi turned toward him, eyes soft.

“Even when I was mad at you, I loved you.”

“Even when I wanted to scream, I missed you,” he whispered.

“Even when I didn’t call... you were still home,” she said.

Their kiss that night was slow. Reverent. Full of forgiveness and fire.

And when they finally made love, it wasn’t passion—it was poetry.

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Day 3: Promises in the Silence

On their last day, they watched sunrise from bed, her head on his chest.

She didn’t say a word. Neither did he.

Because some silences speak louder than love songs.

As they packed to leave, Parvathi stood by the window, gaze locked on the ocean. Shiv came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist.

“Let’s promise something,” he said softly.

“Hmm?”

“No matter how wild the world gets... we steal time for each other. Like this. Always.”

She turned to face him.

“Deal.”

Their fingers intertwined. Hearts steady.

Because even when the spotlight found them again—these stolen days would remain only theirs.

## Chapter 14: Storm Before Glory

Years passed like chapters in a perfectly paced novel.

Parvathi's brand, Saanvi Earth, wasn't just a household name anymore—it had become a global empire. Her influence now shaped campaigns across continents, and with bold moves in clean beauty, fashion, and health-tech, she was featured in Forbes, Vogue, and business panels worldwide.

But her proudest moment? Becoming a major sponsor for the Indian cricket team—the same team her husband now captained.

Shiv Aryan—the firebrand who once chased sixes for applause—was now known for his strategic brilliance, humility, and leadership. Under his captaincy, India had seen one of its finest streaks in the decade.

They were a power couple the world adored.

But at home?

They were still Parvathi and Shiv.

The couple who made weekend temple visits, held hands during moonlit walks, and whispered dreams over sleepy coffee mugs.

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### Temple Stillness

One morning, they visited a quiet Shiva temple hidden in the hills.

Shiv tied a thread around the banyan tree and looked at her, smiling.

“Didn’t believe in all this once.”

Parvathi raised an eyebrow.

“You didn’t believe in love either... until me.”

He laughed softly, kissed her forehead, and whispered:

“You’re my belief system now.”

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### The Fight Begins

Just weeks before the Champions Trophy, Shiv clashed with the head coach.

The issue? The coach wanted to drop two young, underperforming players who Shiv believed in.

“They need support, not replacement,” Shiv had said during their closed-door meeting.

But the conversation grew tense—voices raised, walls thin.

Someone leaked the audio.

The headlines that followed were brutal:

“Captain Shiv’s Arrogance Sparks Team Rift”

“Trouble in Paradise Before Champions Trophy”

“Is Shiv Aryan Too Big to Follow Rules?”

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### Tension at Home

At home, Shiv sat on the balcony, shirtless, a towel around his neck. His phone vibrated endlessly beside him—calls from media houses, ex-teammates, BCCI officials.

He ignored them all.

Parvathi stepped out, placing a glass of cold water beside him. She didn't speak. Just sat beside him in silence.

Finally, he broke.

"What if this ruins everything?"

"Then we rebuild," she said softly.

"At this stage?"

"At any stage. I watched you build from nothing once. You'll do it again. But not alone."

He looked at her, eyes rimmed red.

"I didn't do anything wrong. I just stood up for my team."

She cupped his face.

"Then hold your head high. You're not here to be liked. You're here to lead."

She picked up his buzzing phone and switched it off.

"Enough for today. Come to bed. Tomorrow, we rise again."



## Chapter 15: The Final Over

The stadium was a cauldron of sound, nerves, and restless energy. Wankhede. Champions Trophy Final. India vs Australia.

The target? 212 in 20 overs.

But what started as hope quickly turned into horror.

India was 34 for 4 within the first 5 overs.

Commentators fell silent. Fans in the stands covered their faces. The crowd watching on TVs at home across the country was breathless, biting nails, and praying.

Shiv Aryan walked onto the field with the weight of a billion expectations on his shoulders.

“If anyone can do it, it’s Shiv,” one commentator whispered.

Parvathi sat frozen in the VIP box. Her hands clasped tight, heart drumming in her ears. Next to her, other dignitaries muttered prayers.

People in living rooms, chai shops, college canteens—every eye was on him.

Shiv played like a man possessed. Every shot was calculated. Every run, fought for.

Youngster Rahul, barely 22, supported him beautifully. They built a partnership. The crowd slowly found their voice again.

100 for 4. Then 150.

Australia tightened their field.

Wickets fell.

Again, silence.

Now? 206 for 8.

One over left. 6 runs to win. Shiv on strike. The entire stadium held its breath.

Ball 1 – dot.

The bowler fired a scorching yorker. Shiv defended. No run. The crowd groaned.

Ball 2 – dot.

Another missile. This time a slower one. Shiv swung and missed. Hands went to heads. Hope thinned.

Ball 3 – single.

He tapped and ran. Now 207 for 9. Rahul on strike.

Ball 4 – WICKET!

Rahul went big. Straight to deep cover. Gone. The entire country gasped in collective despair.

Ball 5 – dot.

New batsman came in, survived the delivery... But no run.

Now? One ball left. 6 runs to win. Shiv back on strike.

The world paused.

Parvathi's hands trembled on the railing. Her brand's logo flashed on screens around the stadium, but she saw none of it. Only him.

The bowler ran in. Shiv stood firm.

CRACK.

The bat met the ball with brutal precision. It flew. High. Fast. Soaring over deep mid-wicket.

Six.

Fireworks exploded. The crowd roared like thunder.

Shiv fell to his knees. Teammates mobbed him. Flags waved. Tears flowed freely.

Commentators screamed into mics, "INDIA WINS! SHIV ARYAN, THE LEGEND!"

Amid the chaos, he turned. Searching. Always searching.

There she was.

Parvathi, already descending the steps toward him, her saree flowing, her eyes locked on his.

Their hug on the field became the photo of the decade.

Cameras zoomed in.

A reporter shouted, "Captain Shiv! Do you want to share something else? Parvathi's been glowing... and sources say your visits to the gynecologist have been rather frequent."

The crowd laughed.

Shiv, still panting, smiled and shouted into the mic: “Yes. We’re having a baby!”

Cheers erupted. A second wave of joy surged through the stadium.

Months Later

Soft white hospital lights. Peaceful silence.

Shiv sat on the edge of the bed, cradling his newborn son in his arms.

The baby blinked up at him, with a stare far too serious for someone minutes old.

Shiv chuckled. “This one’s not hitting sixes. He’s got Parvathi’s eyes. He’s going to run the world like his mother.”

Parvathi laughed softly, exhausted but radiant. “Let’s just raise him right. The rest will follow.”

Shiv kissed her forehead, then looked down at their son. “You’ll have our fire... and our name.”

Outside, fans gathered with posters and sweets.

Inside, all was still.

The match was won. The legacy—just beginning.

## Epilogue: Quiet Legacy

A year later...

Parvathi stood on the balcony of their new home, sunlight dancing across the garden below. Shiv was barefoot on the grass, tossing a soft cloth ball toward their toddler son, who giggled wildly as he missed and ran in circles.

The world still called Shiv Aryan a legend.

The world still called Parvathi Iyer a mogul.

But at home?

They were just two souls who had loved, fought, broken, and rebuilt.

She sipped her coffee, watching the two pieces of her heart play under a golden sky.

Not every love story is built in silence.

Some are built in boardrooms and stadiums. In miscommunications and moonlit apologies. In black coffee and rain-soaked reunions. In ego and forgiveness. In distance and devotion.

Some shine.

Some burn.

And some—like theirs—become legacy.

# **Waves Between Us**

By Dr. Cherishma Devarakonda

## **Chapter 1: The Arrival**

Waves Between Us

### **Chapter 1: The Arrival**

Maya sat in the backseat of the cab, forehead resting against the glass, watching the coastline unfurl like a forgotten dream. The sea was wild and free—just like she longed to be. Her fingers tapped against her thigh nervously, the rolling waves somehow calming her anxious thoughts. This was her first time in this coastal city. A new chapter, a new life, and maybe... a way to forget everything she had buried in her heart.

She was here to join as a neurosurgeon, having accepted a post at the city's government hospital. The car turned down a quiet road leading to the hospital, the name etched in bold on the main gate. She submitted her joining letter with a blank expression, nodded politely through the brief hospital tour, and mechanically noted the location of the emergency room, operating theaters, and wards.

Her new apartment was just ten minutes away—small, minimal, and quiet. As she walked in, suitcase in one hand, keys jingling in the other, she breathed in the silence. It felt different. No mother to question her decisions. No friends to analyze her life. No one.

She slumped onto the bed, letting her body sink into the mattress. The cool air brushed against her skin. That's when her phone buzzed.

It was from \*him\*-her mentor.

"Reached?"

Just one word. It shouldn't have mattered. But her heart clenched anyway.

She typed back: "Yes. Settled."

No more. No less.

They hadn't been anything for years now. But once, long ago, they were everything. Even after all the pain, the betrayal, and the nights she couldn't breathe, he still checked on her-just enough to remind her of the ache.

She locked the phone and closed her eyes. The waves echoed in her ears, but so did the past. She pulled the blanket over her chest, not for warmth, but for the illusion of protection.

Tonight, she would rest. Tomorrow, she would meet a new world-one that didn't know her story.

And hopefully, one that wouldn't ask.



## Chapter 2: Collision Course

### Chapter 2: Collision Course

Maya started her rounds early, her coat fluttering as she briskly walked through the hospital corridors. The day had barely begun, yet the ER was already flooded. A major accident had taken place on the outskirts of the coastal city—a head-on collision between two buses. Multiple trauma cases were being rushed in.

Nurses scrambled, stretchers wheeled in with bloodied patients, and voices echoed urgent commands. Amidst the chaos, Maya remained calm, methodical, in control. Her years of experience kicked in like a reflex.

While attending to a severely injured young woman with a skull fracture, her eyes caught something peculiar. A man—lean, tall, sharp-eyed—was helping lift patients from ambulances. He had a light trail of blood running from his ear. Yet, he was more focused on assisting others than seeking help.

She stormed toward him. "You, yes you! Why aren't you in a bed yet? That's ear bleed. It could mean a base of skull fracture!"

He turned, surprised. "I'm fine. Others need more help."

She frowned. "This isn't a suggestion. CT scan. Now."

For a moment, their eyes locked. His were unreadable—dark, intense. But he obeyed.

As he was wheeled away for the scan, Maya continued her rounds.

Later, in the corridor, he was seen talking to the hospital chief. His stance was authoritative yet composed. As it turned out, he wasn't just anyone—he was Dev Raichand, a renowned crime journalist who had been living in the city for a year, documenting unsolved disappearances and suspicious medical cases.

Dev asked about the situation with calm curiosity, not panic. He wasn't rattled by blood or tragedy. He had seen darker things.

And that brief confrontation with Maya? It intrigued him more than he admitted.

She had no idea who he was.

But he remembered her name.

## **Chapter 3: The Man with the Storm Behind His Eyes**

### **Chapter 3: The Man with the Storm Behind His Eyes**

Dev Raichand sat in his dimly lit apartment, fingers moving lazily over the keyboard. Screens filled with headlines, photographs, and half-written articles flickered across his workspace. On one side, a corkboard cluttered with strings and pins mapped out stories only he knew the full depth of. The recent bus accident had given him enough material, but it wasn't the story that occupied his mind.

It was her.

The neurosurgeon with fire in her eyes and steel in her voice.

He wasn't used to being spoken to like that. And certainly not in front of others. Yet something about the way she demanded he get a CT scan before helping others made him stop. Think. Listen.

He shook his head and stood, running his hand through his hair. The memory of her voice had a strange hold over him.

---

Maya walked into the beachside cafe that evening, hoping for some quiet. The day had been long, emotionally draining. The coastal city buzzed

differently-it was both raw and alive. She needed to anchor herself.

The place was modest. Wooden interiors, the scent of salt in the air, and soft music playing in the background. She looked around. Only one table was empty, but it was a shared one. And he was sitting there.

Dev looked up from his phone and gave a half-smile.

"Town's small," she muttered.

"Or maybe it has a way of making people meet," he replied, gesturing to the chair. "You can sit. I won't bite."

Maya raised an eyebrow but took the seat. She ordered a black coffee. Dev watched her, amused.

"Adrenaline not enough for you, Doc?"

She glanced at him. "You still haven't taken rest after that accident."

"I had a mild concussion. I've had worse hangovers."

"And yet, you were bleeding from the ear."

"I like that you noticed."

She smirked. "I notice everything. Occupational hazard."

There was a pause.

"Where are you staying?" he asked casually.

She hesitated but replied. "Sea Breeze Residency. Temporary. I'll look for a proper place soon."

Dev nodded. "Good place. Close to the supermarket. There's a decent South Indian place around the corner. If you're into seafood, 'Spice Waves' is five minutes away."

She sipped her coffee. "Thanks. I haven't figured out anything here yet."

"And if you want strong filter coffee and some perspective, visit Intruder Café. The owner's weird, but the stories he tells? Worth it."

She chuckled genuinely.

"You're strangely helpful for a man with stormy eyes."

He laughed. "You said you're new here. And small towns have their perks. Like people actually remembering names."

"Speaking of names..."

"Dev," he said, extending his hand. "Dev Raichand. Crime journalist, occasionally annoying human."

She shook his hand. "Maya. Neurosurgeon, perpetually exhausted."

They exchanged numbers, more out of necessity than trust. But something felt easier after that.

As she walked back to her apartment later that night, Maya opened her journal and wrote:

"Small towns make you feel known too quickly. But today, I didn't mind."

---

Later that evening, Maya stepped out after a long shift. The coastal breeze tangled her hair as she walked through the quiet, dimly lit streets. It was a small town, almost sleepy, but had its own rhythm. Dev had texted her earlier-just a simple, "Try Intruder Café, their black coffee is criminally good."

She found it tucked into a narrow lane, fairy lights wound around the windows, the smell of roasted beans pulling her in.

Behind the counter stood Neel, the café owner-mid-30s, sharp humor, sleeves rolled up, with a disarming smile that instantly made her feel like she belonged.

"New face," he said, handing her the menu. "You're not here for the coffee, are you?"

Maya raised an eyebrow. "And what else would I be here for?"

"The peace. The silence. Maybe the cheesecake. People come here for all sorts of escapes."

She smiled, taking the coffee he handed her. "I'm here for all three."

Neel gestured toward a corner table. "That one's Dev's favorite. Broods there all day when he's not chasing crime."

Just then, Dev walked in, casual in a sweatshirt, a slight bruise still visible near his temple. He raised a hand in greeting.

"Told you it was the best," he said, sitting across from her without asking.

Maya stared at him. "And you clearly don't rest."

"I did. For an entire 3 hours."

They started talking-about the accident, the chaos, and slowly, about the city itself. Dev told her about a local market that stayed open till midnight, the best pani puri stall near the lighthouse, and warned her about the crabby pharmacist who gave wrong meds once if you were rude.

She made mental notes. Every detail he gave felt like a thread weaving her into this new place.

"You'll settle in fine," Dev said, his voice softer now.

"You don't look like someone who breaks easily."

"And you don't look like someone who listens."

They both laughed-just a second too long.

Neel watched from the counter, a knowing smile playing on his lips.

## Chapter 4: Echoes in the Corridors

### Chapter 4: Echoes in the Corridors

Maya had been at the hospital for just over two weeks now. The initial adjustment had been smoother than expected. Her calm, no-nonsense attitude and razor-sharp surgical skills had earned her both respect and whispers.

Her name started floating through corridors, among nurses, residents, and even a few senior consultants. "The new neurosurgeon," they said. "Takes no shortcuts. And rarely loses a case."

But not everyone was entirely thrilled.

Dr. Alka Mehra, the current Head of Neurosurgery, found Maya's presence both a relief and a threat. Talented young doctors were essential-but ones that drew too much attention? Dangerous. Dr. Mehra would offer subtle critiques after surgeries-"You were a little fast on the dura split," or "Next time, don't go that deep on your first move." Nothing harsh. Just enough to keep Maya in check.

Maya, for her part, nodded and moved on. She didn't care about office politics. She had come here for a reason. To disappear. To rebuild.

Her days were packed with rounds, surgeries, and occasional cafeteria coffee. But every time the hospital staff invited her to post-shift parties or beach bonfires, she politely declined.



"It's just not my thing," she'd say.

The truth was—those kinds of gatherings reminded her too much of him. Her mentor. The one she had tried so hard to forget.

Back then, during her residency, he was the star. Brilliant, bold, and married. They had never named what they had, but it had consumed her. The stolen coffee breaks, lingering touches over case discussions, late-night OT shifts that became something more. It had taken every ounce of strength to walk away. To leave. To start over in this quiet coastal town.

One evening, as she changed into scrubs, her phone buzzed.

**\*\*Him:\*\*** \_ "Have you adjusted in the new place?" \_

She stared at the screen, thumb hovering.

**\*\*Maya:\*\*** \_ "Yes." \_

A pause.

**\*\*Him:\*\*** \_ "Met anyone in particular?" \_

She replied the same way she had once ended everything.

**\*\*Maya:\*\*** \_ "Yes." \_

No name. No emotion. Just closure.

She put the phone away and walked into the OR.

---

Dev leaned against a pillar near the emergency bay, sipping bad coffee, watching her from a distance.

There was something about the way she moved—composed, determined, like she carried scars no one could see.

He had looked her up. Briefly. Just enough to know she was excellent at what she did. But what intrigued him wasn't on paper. It was in the way her eyes flinched when someone touched her shoulder. The way she seemed always alert, as if waiting for something to go wrong.

That night, he received a strange envelope at his door. No sender. Inside was a blurry photograph of a man shaking hands with a known pharmaceutical mafia boss. No note. No context.

He lit a cigarette, staring at the photo, then at the faint glow in Maya's apartment across the street. She was on the balcony, nursing a coffee, lost in thought.

---

Inside, Maya scribbled in her journal:

\*"Everyone says I'm healing. But some wounds just wear better masks."\*

---

The next morning, they met at the coffee machine outside the OR.

"You look like hell," she said, eyeing the dark circles under his eyes.

"Thanks," Dev replied. "You always this charming before brain surgery?"

"Only with crime journalists who brood too much."

They sipped in silence.

Somehow, the silence felt loud. Familiar. Safe.

## Chapter 5: Beneath the Surface

### Chapter 5: Beneath the Surface

Dev Raichand's apartment wasn't messy-it was controlled chaos. Walls lined with newspaper clippings, post-it notes scribbled in shorthand, maps with pins, and a huge corkboard full of red strings connecting names, dates, and locations. To a stranger, it looked like the lair of someone obsessed. To Dev, it was just Monday.

He had moved to the coastal city a year ago, escaping Delhi's noise and notoriety. What people didn't know was that he wasn't just here for peace. He was here for answers.

The incident that haunted him-the missing girl, a political cover-up, and a trail that had run cold-had one last possible lead here. So he kept digging. Disguising his investigation as freelance work, he wrote articles, gained trust, and slowly peeled the layers of the town's secrets.

But lately, something was peeling his layers instead-Maya.

She hadn't meant to show up. It was a delivery boy's confusion, a wrong package addressed to her but dropped at his door. And curiosity.

Maya knocked. No answer. The door was ajar.

"Dev?" she called, hesitating.

No response.

She stepped in.

The apartment hit her senses all at once. Paper. Ink. Dust. And truth.

Her eyes scanned the corkboard. A girl's photo. Multiple articles. A file marked 'Aarvi Singh - Last Seen: 2022'. Maya stepped closer. A knot twisted in her chest.

She was about to turn when he entered.

"What are you doing here?"

"I-The courier boy. He-" she stammered.

He didn't yell. Didn't panic. Just quietly closed the door behind him.

"I'm sorry," she said, voice lower now. "Who was she?"

Dev sat down, sighing.

"She wasn't just a colleague-Aarvi Singh was my anchor. A firecracker in every newsroom we worked in. Wicked sense of humor, unmatched sarcasm, and a laugh that could light up even the darkest stories."

Maya listened intently, sitting beside him now.

"She called me 'Mr. Storm Cloud,'" he said with a faint smile. "And I called her 'Sunshine with a taser.' We had a sibling bond-stronger than blood. She was the only one who saw through my silence. She made me eat when I forgot. Made me feel... human."

He looked down. "Her death was called an accident. Chasing a lead. But I knew better. I saw her last messages. Scattered, scared, still making jokes. Mentions of girls vanishing. Of a secret party. And then-nothing."

Maya's fingers tightened around the file.

"There's a trafficking network, Maya. Hidden behind the parties, the glamour. Politicians, mafia, even some cops. All tangled in it. But one officer... one brave soul is sending me scraps. Anonymous tips, grainy photos."

He exhaled. "That's why I'm here. Not to write. To expose. To make someone pay."

Maya reached out, placing a gentle hand on his.

"I'm glad you didn't stop."

He looked at her, eyes softer. "And I'm glad you came today."

They didn't speak much after that. She helped him organize files. He made tea. The silence between them wasn't awkward-it was healing.

As she left that night, Maya felt the weight of secrets. But she also felt something else.

Trust.

And maybe, a new beginning.

## **Chapter 6: When the Storm Settled**

### **Chapter 6: When the Storm Settled**

It rained the next morning. A lazy, stubborn drizzle that refused to let the sun through. Maya opened her eyes to the unfamiliar ceiling above her, the scent of coffee wafting through the small apartment, and the distant sound of a kettle whistling.

For a moment, she didn't move. She just let herself feel it—the comfort, the stillness, the warmth beside her. Dev was already up, moving quietly in the kitchen, his hair still tousled from sleep, wearing one of his old sweatshirts and track pants.

She sat up, the blanket falling around her waist. He turned around and smiled.

"Coffee, Doctor?"

She nodded, stretching like a cat. "You remembered how I like it?"

"Strong, no sugar. With a pinch of cardamom," he said, placing the mug beside her on the nightstand. "I listen."

She blinked at him, surprised by the softness in his tone.

"I didn't know men like you existed," she murmured.

"What kind of man is that?"

"The kind who's rough around the edges, but makes perfect coffee and pleats my hair like he's done it all his life."

Dev chuckled and walked over, crouching beside the bed. He took a rubber band from the table and began pleating her hair. Slowly. Gently.

Maya closed her eyes. No words. Just touch. Just quiet.

---

The night before had been everything she wasn't expecting.

They didn't rush. There was no desperation. Just a build-up of emotions—quiet understanding, respect, desire, and something else neither of them dared name.

When he touched her, it wasn't possession. It was reverence.

When she responded, it wasn't escape. It was surrender.

And after, when their bodies were tangled and breath was even, she had whispered, "I like you. All of you."

To which he had replied, "Even the dark parts?"

"Especially the dark parts."

---

Later that day, the roads were still blocked. The monsoon had taken over the city, and Dev's apartment felt like a safe island in the middle of the storm.



They cooked-well, he cooked while she tried not to burn the onions.

They argued over which movie to watch.

They kissed during the boring parts.

At night, he showed her the progress on his case. The map, the notes, the encrypted messages from the anonymous police officer. Maya listened, wide-eyed, as if every word he said carried the weight of the world.

"You're too close to this," she whispered, placing her hand on his.

"I know," he said. "But I can't stop."

"And I won't let you fall alone," she said simply.

---

Two days passed in the cocoon of that apartment. No past. No future. Just now.

And when the sun finally came out, and the roads cleared, and Maya returned to her world of scrubs and scalpels, she left behind something more than a toothbrush.

She left behind a part of her that didn't believe in love anymore.

Because now, maybe... she did.

## Chapter 7: Borrowed Heaven

Maya's past wasn't a scar-it was a slow, silent ache that lived beneath her skin. She didn't talk about it. Not even to herself. But sometimes, on nights like these-when the city slept and Dev's breath warmed her bare shoulder-the past knocked anyway.

She had met Prof. Vedant Mehra during her second year of post-graduation. Sharp-minded, fiercely kind, and effortlessly graceful, he was the kind of man who made you want to be better just by standing next to him.

He noticed her long before she allowed herself to notice him.

"Dr. Maya, you breathe like someone who forgets she exists," he once said quietly during a night shift.

She had blinked, stunned that someone had read her so clearly.

He didn't flirt. He didn't step beyond. He just saw her. And that was enough to ruin her.

She wasn't chasing love then. She was chasing silence-an end to the constant hum of inadequacy and loneliness. But Vedant? He gave her safety. A name for her chaos. He praised her when she got things right, covered for her when exhaustion made her miss a detail. He left notes on her files. Brought her hot tea

without asking. Sat beside her during long shifts just to keep her company.

Their bond was never loud.

It was built in glances, in unspoken words. In the way his hand brushed against hers during sutures. In the time he waited outside the operation theatre when she performed her first independent craniotomy.

And sometimes, in poetry.

He once texted her at 3 AM:

> "Some storms don't need thunder. They bloom in silence."

She had replied:

> "And some women learn to find shelter in eyes that don't belong to them."

They never had a physical affair. But what they shared was more intimate than touch. It was a relationship built in stolen time, wrapped in boundaries they never crossed-but always hovered near.

He was married. A father. A man too honorable to shatter what he'd built.

She knew it. And still, she stayed.

They remained in touch, even after she moved to the coastal town. No blocked numbers. No burned bridges. He messaged her when he saw a case she would have handled better. She replied when something reminded her of him. It was distant. Safe. Controlled. And painfully present.

Just last week, he had messaged:

> "Have you adjusted there?"

She replied: "Yes."

Then another:

> "Met anyone interesting?"

She didn't lie. "Yes."

No more questions followed.

She lay in Dev's arms now, trying not to compare. But she couldn't help it. Dev was raw, rugged, unfiltered. Vedant was moonlight-soft, still, unreachable.

And yet, both had touched her in ways she would never undo.

Maybe that's what life was—a collection of impossible loves that still somehow made you whole.

## **Chapter 8: Drift and Undertow**

### **Waves Between Us**

#### **Chapter 8: Drift and Undertow**

The monsoon lingered longer than expected. Clouds hung low, and so did the silence between them.

Dev had grown quieter-not cold, just... distant. His phone was always in his pocket, face down. He'd leave the room to answer calls. His laptop screen would close when she entered. And though his fingers still brushed her skin with tenderness, there was weight behind every touch, like a storm waiting to hit the shore.

Maya felt it all.

But she didn't ask.

Because asking meant hearing truths she wasn't sure she was ready for.

That evening, she returned to her apartment after rounds-wet hair clinging to her neck, the air thick with salt and rain. A soggy envelope sat at her doorstep, the handwriting unfamiliar. She opened it, breath catching in her throat.

A photo.

Of a girl smiling-a snapshot from years ago. Aarvi Singh.

On the back, a chilling message scrawled in black ink:

"You're next."

Her hands trembled.

She didn't cry. She grabbed her umbrella and walked through the storm straight to Dev's apartment.

---

He was there, seated with files spread around him, eyes rimmed red from lack of sleep. When he looked up, she didn't wait for him to speak. She placed the photo in front of him.

"You said you'd keep me out of it," she whispered.

Dev stood, jaw clenched. "Where did you get this?"

"It was outside my door."

He ran his hands through his hair, frustration spilling out in silence. Maya's voice cracked, barely above a whisper.

"You either let me in, or I walk away, Dev. Not because I don't care... but because it will break me if you keep shutting me out like this."

His eyes softened. The tension broke.

He took a slow step toward her, rested his forehead against hers, his voice hoarse. "I'm scared too, Maya."

She let her eyes close. Just for a second, she leaned into him, both of them wrapped in something heavier than words.

---

Later that night, they worked side by side.

Dev pulled up maps, screenshots, and coded messages. Maya helped cross-check time stamps, analyzed medical records of the victims, and noticed things he had missed. Her sharp mind paired with his relentlessness—they were a storm and a scalpel, a force that cut through noise.

Amidst the scattered papers and the hum of a single table lamp, she realized something.

They weren't just surviving this together. They were becoming each other's lifelines.

---

As she prepared to leave the next morning, her phone buzzed.

A message from her mentor. After weeks of silence.

"You still write in your journals?"

She stared at the words for a long time.

Then, slowly, she opened a fresh page in her notebook.

"There's a man who carries storms inside him. But when I'm near, the winds slow down. I think... I think I'm starting to matter."

## Chapter 9: Echoes in the Silence

### Chapter 9: Echoes in the Silence

The days passed, but something had shifted. The distance between Maya and Dev wasn't marked by silence-it was marked by too many words left unsaid.

Dev noticed it first. The way Maya smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. The way she responded to texts, but never initiated. The way she always said, "I'm okay," when clearly, she wasn't.

One evening, during their usual walk along the coast, Dev stopped mid-sentence and looked at her.

"You sure you're okay?" he asked.

She nodded, avoiding his gaze. "Just tired. Long surgery."

He didn't press. Not then.

---

The following week, Maya visited him at his place. She looked through a stack of magazines on the coffee table, and underneath, she found a photo.

Dev and a woman. Their heads close, arms around each other, a small heart doodled in the corner.

Her name was written on the back-Nimisha.

Maya didn't say anything immediately. But the next morning, as they sipped coffee on the balcony, she asked, "Who's Nimisha?"



Dev froze for a second, then leaned back in his chair. "She was... my college classmate. We were together for four years."

Maya nodded slowly. "What happened?"

"Her family didn't approve. She got married and moved to Mangalore. Two kids now."

Silence.

"I didn't expect you to find that photo," he said, quietly.

"I wasn't searching for anything," she replied.

He looked at her, deeply. "I haven't spoken to her in years. I don't even know why I kept that picture."

Maya shrugged. "We all keep pieces of our past. Some sharper than others."

Dev reached for her hand. "You're my present, Maya. And my priority. I care about you. Only you."

Her eyes softened, but the ache inside didn't disappear completely.

---

That night, as he held her in his arms, Maya whispered, "I just don't want to be someone's second chance."

"You're not," he said. "You're the only real thing I've known in a long time."

The waves outside crashed harder than usual, as if echoing her heartbeats.

And for the first time in days, Maya let herself believe him.

## Chapter 10: A Whisper in the Dark

### Chapter 10: A Whisper in the Dark

Maya's hands were still damp from her last surgery when her phone buzzed. She glanced at the screen, expecting a message from the lab.

Instead, it was a strange number. No name. Just a single line.

"You're being watched. Tell him to stop digging."

She froze.

At first, she thought it was a prank. But something about the phrasing-sharp, deliberate, cold-sent a chill up her spine. The message wasn't meant for her. It was meant for Dev.

She immediately dialed his number.

No answer.

She called again.

Still nothing.

By the third ring, she was already grabbing her bag, hurrying down the corridor, her surgical shoes squeaking against the tiles.

Dev was sitting on his balcony, half-lit by the glow of his laptop screen, headphones in. Music blared to drown out the voices in his head. The past few days had been a blur of paranoia and instinct-files gone missing,

contacts not responding, his encrypted thread with the anonymous police informant had gone dark.

Then he heard the banging.

Maya stood at his door, breathless, her phone shaking in her hand.

"You need to see this," she said, holding it out.

He read the message once. Then again.

And again.

Silence stretched between them.

Dev's jaw clenched. "They're getting bolder."

"Who's they, Dev?" she demanded. "You've never told me everything. I need to know now."

He sighed, guiding her inside. For the first time, he looked... afraid.

He began to talk.

About Aarvi Singh. About her laughter, her sass, how she used to steal his snacks during deadline nights. How she chased a story about disappearing girls, and then vanished herself. The police called it an accident.

Dev knew better.

"She called me the night before," he said quietly. "Said she had evidence. Said someone in uniform was involved. She was scared."

Maya sat quietly beside him, her hand resting near his.

"She wasn't just a friend," he added. "She was family."

Then he opened his drawer and pulled out a thin folder. Maya flipped through the pages-photographs, notes, screenshots of cryptic messages.

One line stood out, circled in red ink: "Moonlight Gala. No cameras. Only invitations. She was there."

Just as she looked up, her phone pinged again.

A photo this time. Grainy. From a distance.

Her-standing in the hospital parking lot that morning.

No message. No number.

Just proof.

They were being watched.

Maya's fingers trembled as she locked her phone. "They know what I look like, Dev. They know I'm connected to you."

Dev's expression hardened. "This isn't just about me anymore."

He walked over to the board on his wall-the one Maya had seen before. But now, he shifted the pinned papers aside to reveal a separate envelope, sealed in black.

"I wasn't going to open this unless things got worse," he said. "It's from my source. He left it in a drop box weeks ago. Said it had directions to the next event."

He opened it.

Inside was a simple card-elegant and black with silver embossing.

Moonlight Gala - By Invitation Only

Location: Coordinates Only

Dress Code: Discretion

And scribbled on the back in hurried writing: "Don't go alone."

Dev exhaled. "This is where it all leads. This is where she went. If I want to find out what really happened to Aarvi... I have to be there."

Maya looked at the invitation, then back at Dev.

"Then you won't go alone."

He stared at her. "No. You're not doing this. This isn't your fight."

She stepped forward, her voice unwavering. "You dragged me into it the day you let me see who you really are. And maybe I needed to see this too. To remember what real fear looks like. Because I've spent too long hiding from mine."

He didn't argue.

He just nodded.

The next evening, preparations began.

Maya stood before her closet-ironic, considering how little she cared for clothes. Dev had handed her a bag earlier, saying, "I asked Neel for help. Said it had to be elegant but not too loud."

Inside was a deep navy saree, minimalist, with a low back and a subtle shimmer under light. Alongside it-a small velvet box.

A hairpin.

Shaped like a crescent moon.

She smiled, almost tearfully.

That night, they drove together in silence through narrow roads toward the outskirts of the coastal city. The GPS flickered with uncertainty as they reached the coordinates. A large colonial-style bungalow stood behind tall gates, security dressed like waiters, scanning guests casually.

The Gala had begun.

Music. Laughter. Crystal chandeliers. Faces both familiar and unknown.

Maya walked in with Dev on her arm. They blended in-two strangers playing their parts.

But her heart thudded in her chest. Because somewhere in this glamorous chaos, something wicked lurked.

And as Dev whispered, "Remember every face, every exit," she nodded-knowing well that tonight was not about being seen.

It was about seeing.

End of Chapter 10

## Chapter 11: Smoke in the Mirror

### Chapter 11: Smoke in the Mirror

Maya hadn't slept since the Gala.

Her mind ran in loops-over the flickering chandeliers, the echo of laughter masking dread, the quiet girl with the silver anklet... and the cold eyes of a man who noticed her noticing too much.

She stood by Dev's window, coffee untouched, when he walked in holding an envelope.

No stamps. No return address.

Just her name-Dr. Maya Raghavan-scrawled in red ink.

He opened it carefully. Inside was a single photograph.

A candid shot. Grainy. Blurry.

But unmistakable.

Maya, in her navy saree, mid-step at the Gala-her eyes looking directly at the camera. And beside her-Dev, partially turned away.

No caption. No threat. But the message was clear.

They knew.

She sat down slowly, her hands going cold.

Dev grabbed his phone, checking for trackers, surveillance breaches, anything. But nothing showed up.

"We were careful," Maya whispered.

"Not careful enough," Dev muttered.

Then his phone buzzed again. An anonymous number.  
A single voice note.

He played it.

"Stop chasing ghosts, Raichand. The last woman who did isn't around to tell the tale."

The room felt smaller. Heavy.

Maya looked at him. "That voice... he's with the mafia?"

Dev nodded. "Or worse-he's one of the politicians Aarvi suspected."

They sat in silence for a long moment.

Then Maya said, "What about Kaushik?"

Dev's eyes narrowed. "You said he spoke to you on the flight, asked questions?"

"Yes. A lot of questions. He was polite. Charming even. But his interest in my background... it didn't feel casual."

Dev walked to his board, pulling out a file. Inside was a printed photo of a donation receipt.

Kaushik Pharmaceuticals - listed as a sponsor for The Moonlight Foundation, a front NGO linked to the Gala.

He showed it to her. "This is how they fund it. The shell foundations, the fake charity drives, the



sponsored medical camps. They traffic under the pretense of 'rehabilitation.'"

Maya shook her head. "And now I'm in their line of sight."

Dev placed a hand on her shoulder. "We're in it together now."

She looked up at him. For once, the fear wasn't just for herself. It was for him too.

They didn't speak again that night. They just sat there—two storm-battered souls with too many secrets and one common purpose.

To finish what Aarvi started.

And bring the rot to light.

## Chapter 12: Before the Storm Hits

### Chapter 12: Before the Storm Hits

Maya stirred restlessly, the faint light of dawn cutting through the sheer curtains. Her eyes landed on the photograph still lying on the table—the one from the Moonlight Gala. Her own face, captured in grainy precision, framed by strangers and danger. No caption. No sender. Just a message loud enough in silence.

Dev hadn't slept either. He stood by the window, arms folded, gaze locked on the coastal skyline. His jaw was tight, his eyes darker than usual.

"It had to be someone inside," he muttered. "Someone who knew we were there, who had access."

Maya sat up, wrapping the bedsheet around her. "You think it's someone from the hospital?"

He nodded slowly. "Or someone close enough to get in."

She stood, walked to him, her voice firm. "If they want to scare me, they picked the wrong woman."

Back at the hospital, tension clung to the air like humidity before a storm. Her senior, Dr. Renu, barely met her eyes during rounds. There were clipped words, unfinished sentences, and a final remark that made Maya freeze.

"Maybe you should take a short break, Maya. Too much intensity can cloud judgment."

Later, a young nurse pulled Maya aside. "Someone from the board was here. Asked about your... associations."

That evening, Maya returned to the resident lounge to find her locker slightly ajar. One file was missing—discharge summaries from a medical camp conducted two months ago, sponsored by Kaushik Pharma. It had the names of underprivileged girls brought in for check-ups.

That night, Dev replayed a new voice note from his anonymous source. The distorted voice was tense.

"Check the camp lists. Girls registered—never discharged. Check the port logs. They're moving them through the docks."

Dev stared at the wall, his instincts roaring. This wasn't just another dark story. This was the missing piece.

He called Maya. "I need those camp records. Official and otherwise. Think you can get the hard copies?"

She didn't hesitate. "I'm already ahead of you. I'll bring them tonight."

That night, Maya stayed at Dev's apartment again. The silence wasn't awkward—it was heavy, expectant. He cooked something simple. She changed into one of his oversized shirts and curled on the sofa, her hair still damp from a quick shower.

As she walked across the room, barefoot and lost in thought, Dev watched her—his gaze softer than usual.

"You walk like the storm doesn't scare you," he said quietly.

She looked back with a faint smile. "Because I've survived worse than thunder."

He pulled her into his arms. This kiss wasn't rushed. It was rooted. A declaration, a tether, a truth they weren't ready to speak aloud-but both understood.

Outside, the sky threatened rain again. But inside, there was warmth, and the quiet beginning of something more dangerous than love-trust.

## Chapter 13: Closer Than Ever

### Chapter 13: Closer Than Ever

The storm had passed, but the tension hadn't. That night, the sea roared louder than usual, as if echoing the whirlwind within Dev and Maya.

The Gala had changed everything. Not just the direction of the investigation—but something unspoken between them.

---

Maya sat on the kitchen counter of Dev's apartment, her damp hair tied in a bun, wearing his oversized t-shirt. Dev stood across her, making coffee. She watched him in silence—the way his fingers moved, how focused he looked. Everything about him made her feel like she belonged.

"You never smile when you cook," she teased softly.

He looked up, eyes warm. "That's because I'm afraid you'll say I burnt the coffee again."

She giggled. "It was just once."

He walked over, standing between her knees. "You smell like the sea."

"I walked to the shore this morning."

He cupped her face gently. "You're becoming a part of this place."

"I already am," she whispered.

He kissed her, slow and deep. This time, it wasn't desperate or hurried. It was grounding, healing.

And that night, their bodies moved with the same rhythm as their hearts-fierce, honest, vulnerable.

The bed creaked, laughter broke in between kisses, and in a rare moment of clumsy passion-they broke the headboard.

They stared at each other, stunned.

"Did we just..." Maya started.

Dev burst out laughing. "We broke the damn bed."

She hid her face in the pillow, half-laughing, half-mortified.

"You're not allowed to leave now," he said, grinning. "We're bonded by furniture damage."

She playfully hit him. "Idiot."

But her heart was full.

---

Later, as they sipped coffee on the balcony, Maya leaned into him.

"What's next?" she asked.

Dev's expression turned serious. "We're close, Maya. The files from the Gala-one of the guest names matched the shipping records Aarvi had been tracking."

She straightened. "You're sure?"

He nodded. "It's a pharmaceutical front. Kaushik's name appears too. There's a trail of funds leading to off-shore accounts. We need to connect it to the missing girls."

She inhaled deeply. "And then?"

"We expose them. Every single one."

A shadow passed over her features. "And if they come for us?"

"They already did." He showed her another message—this time a blurry photo of the two of them entering his apartment.

Her fingers trembled. "They're getting bolder."

He took her hand. "Let them. We're not alone anymore."

She looked at him, eyes filled with love and defiance. "We end this. Together."

And in the silence that followed, the waves crashed against the shore like a war drum—loud, relentless, and ready.

## Chapter 14: Shadows and Storms

### Chapter 14: Shadows and Storms

The days after the Gala moved like tides—calm on the surface, but dangerous underneath.

Dev sat at his desk, staring at the encrypted files they had copied from the Gala's private server. Beside him, Maya was on a video call with a forensic analyst from another city—a trusted friend who owed her a favor.

"They used the pharma company's logistics to move girls across borders," the analyst said, voice low. "It's clean on paper. But hidden in medical supply containers, the timelines match the disappearances."

Maya's blood ran cold. She muted the call for a moment and looked at Dev. "They're not just trafficking girls. They're smuggling them like cargo."

---

That evening, Dev and Maya met Neel at Intruder Café after closing hours. He looked nervous, pacing.

"I heard something," Neel whispered. "There's going to be a cleansing. Someone's cleaning up evidence-files, people, everything."

"Who?" Dev asked.

"I don't know. But I heard a name—Vashisht. It's coming from the top."



Maya tensed. That name meant power. Old power. Political dynasty level.

"They know we're close," she whispered.

---

Back at home, Maya sat on the edge of the bed, holding an old gift-Vedant's bracelet. She hadn't worn it in years, but she never let it go.

Dev walked in and sat beside her.

"Thinking of him?" he asked, gently.

"I am. But not because I miss him. Just... I finally know what real love feels like. He was a chapter. You're the story."

Dev didn't say anything. He just kissed the top of her head and held her close.

---

Maya receives an email. No subject. No message.

Just a video.

She opens it. It's a clip-blurry footage from a hospital corridor.

A girl. Crying. Dragged into a room by two men in lab coats.

The timestamp?

Tomorrow. 4 PM.

And the location?

Her hospital.

## Chapter 15: The Ties That Burn

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The safe house was supposed to be their last quiet corner before hell broke loose—a fishing cottage nestled between jagged cliffs and the roaring Arabian Sea. But safety was only ever a pause, not a promise.

The Ambush

It began with a knock.

Soft. Calculated.

Dev paused, holding his breath. Maya was in the bedroom, transferring encrypted files from Aarvi's drive to a secure cloud. They were just minutes away from publishing everything.

Another knock.

Dev moved quickly, fingers wrapping around the metal rod hidden behind the door. He mouthed a silent warning toward Maya.

Then—bang—the wooden door blasted open.

Three masked men stormed in with pipes and knives. Their silence was more terrifying than shouting.

Dev didn't hesitate.

He swung the rod into the first attacker's jaw, sending him crashing into the bookshelf. The second one slashed toward Dev's side—blade catching skin—but Dev

gritted through the sting and landed a knee into the man's gut.

The third raised a gun.

But before he could aim, a crack rang out.

Maya stood there. Breathless. Determined. Holding the marble Buddha statue from the shelf like a warrior.

The man dropped like deadweight.

She didn't speak. Just grabbed Dev's wrist and pulled him toward the back exit.

"You okay?" she whispered, her voice shaking.

"Better now," he said.

Escape Into the Storm

Outside, the world had turned hostile. Monsoon winds howled like angry spirits. Dev's shirt clung to his bleeding side. Maya threw his arm around her shoulder and helped him down the muddy cliffside.

"Tell me you still have the drive," she yelled through the wind.

Dev patted his pocket. "Waterproof pouch. We're good."

"I knew you'd hide it somewhere weird."

They reached the bike-parked under a tarpaulin. Dev climbed on, wincing. Maya hopped behind him, arms around his waist.

"Ready?"

"No. Drive."

## Sanctuary Beneath the Intruder Café

Neel's café was closed, lights off, but Dev knew the code to the basement. The moment they entered, Neel locked the door behind them, his face pale.

"What the hell happened?"

"They found us," Maya said, breathless. "We need five minutes. Just five."

Dev collapsed onto a stool while Neel disinfected his wound. Maya connected the drive to Neel's laptop, transferring everything into a journalist collective's server that Aarvi once trusted.

Photos. Bank transfers. Guest lists. Voice notes. GPS logs of missing girls.

Then came Aarvi's voice:

"If you're hearing this... Dev... that means I'm gone. But I knew you'd never stop. Just promise me you'll finish what I couldn't. And maybe... don't be so alone anymore."

Maya's eyes shimmered.

Dev closed his, breathing through the ache in his chest.

"I'm not alone," he said quietly. "Not anymore."

## The World Reacts

Hours later, the storm outside was nothing compared to the one online.

The expose blew up: Human trafficking ring linked to pharma CEO and ministerial allies.

Kaushik's name. Vikram Thakur's political clout. Offshore accounts. Gala attendees. Everything was out there.

Arrests started.

Kaushik disappeared.

But Vikram? Still in hiding.

Dev stood at the balcony of the café basement, watching the first light of dawn. Maya joined him, a blanket around her shoulders, holding two steaming mugs.

"We did it," she whispered.

"No," he said. "You stood beside me when no one else would."

She looked at him, eyes soft.

"We're not done yet," she said. "The head of the snake is still breathing."

He nodded, gently brushing her damp hair away from her face.

"We'll finish this. Then maybe... we can finally breathe."

And below them, the sea raged on. But for the first time in weeks, Dev and Maya didn't feel afraid.

They felt ready.

## Chapter 16: Home in the Ruins

### Chapter 16: Home in the Ruins

The fire had died down, but the scars it left would remain forever.

Maya sat beside Dev, both wrapped in blankets on the steps of the coastal police station. The raid on the safe house had been successful-Kaushik and his associates were arrested, the trafficking network finally exposed. Dev's article had already gone live and was being shared across national platforms. Aarvi's story was no longer buried. It was screaming from headlines.

Justice had been served.

But peace? That was still a work in progress.

---

Flashbacks flickered in both their minds-Maya stitching Dev's wounds in the dim light of a basement hideout... Dev pulling her out of a burning safe house, coughing but refusing to let go of her hand... and later, standing side by side as the officers read out names of the rescued girls.

They had been through war. Together.

---

A few days later, Maya sat at Intruder Café, sipping her usual black coffee. Neel slid her a piece of cheesecake without a word.

Dev walked in, clean-shaven, wearing a fresh shirt-his stormy aura still present, but softer now.

He joined her. "You look like someone who's slept for three straight days."

She smiled. "I did. And dreamed of peace for once."

He took her hand. "Maya, after everything we've been through... what now?"

She looked out at the sea. "Now, we live."

---

Months later

A small ceremony. No grand stage. Just Maya, Dev, Neel, a few close friends, and the sea as witness. Maya wore a simple saree. Dev wore a quiet smile.

They didn't exchange rings. Just promises.

To fight. To protect. To heal. To write. To live.

---

Later that night...

Maya was asleep on the couch, curled under a throw, the sea breeze drifting through the half-open window.

Dev stepped out to check the mailbox, expecting nothing more than a few letters and junk flyers.

But there it was.

A plain, cream-colored postcard.

No stamp. No return address.

Just his name handwritten in bold strokes:

Dev Raichand

On the back, a single sentence:

"This town was just the beginning. Ready for the next one?"

And below it-

A red circle around a place he hadn't thought about in years: Varanasi.

He stood frozen, staring at it.

The wind picked up slightly. From inside, Maya stirred.

He walked back in, card tucked inside his pocket.

Maya blinked at him sleepily. "Everything okay?"

Dev leaned down, kissed her forehead, and whispered,

"Yeah. Just a storm on the horizon."

She smiled faintly and fell back asleep.

Dev looked out at the ocean one last time that night, knowing the waves would come again.

But this time-they'd face them together.

Afterword: She Didn't Burn, She Bloomed

I didn't write these stories to be saved.

I wrote them because I already did the saving—

Quietly, daily, stubbornly.

These pages hold fiction, yes. But beneath the characters, between the plotlines—there's truth.



Truth about heartbreak.

Truth about ambition.

Truth about the messy, beautiful, brutal magic of being  
a woman who keeps going.

Every woman has her own fire.

Some burn in silence. Some scream into the void.

Some write.

If even one page made you feel seen, held, or  
stronger—I've done my job.

Because we don't rise like the world expects us to.

We rise like phoenixes.

From ashes. From pain. From love.

And we don't ask for permission.

Thank you for reading my rise.

Now go live yours.

– Dr. Cherishma Devarakonda

## **Meet the Author**

Dr. Cherishma Devarakonda is a doctor, mother, and storyteller who finds power in silence and strength in survival. Through these stories, she hopes to give voice to the fierce, flawed, and fiery women who choose to rise.

## **Behind the Stories**

Each story in this collection was born out of fragments—of memories, pain, longing, and survival. From hospital corridors to quiet bedrooms, the characters came alive with whispers of real emotions and unspoken truths.

## **Until We Meet Again**

She didn't rise from the ashes.

She was the fire.