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VIDA DE UN ADOLESCENTE

BY TANISHQ

ABOUT THE BOOK

Vida De Un Adolescente is a collection of stories that dive deep into the highs and lows of teenage life, exploring the complexities of growing up in a world that often feels chaotic, unpredictable, and out of control. This book captures the real, raw, and sometimes painful experiences that shape our journey from adolescence to adulthood.

Each chapter tells a different story, with unique characters facing challenges that are all too familiar to anyone who has ever been a teenager. From navigating the pressures of social media to dealing with anxiety, love, friendships, and identity, these stories touch on themes that resonate deeply with anyone who's ever struggled with the uncertainty of growing up.

Through ten chapters, I explore the inner worlds of my characters, from those who feel lost in a sea of expectations to those who find themselves trapped between reality and the worlds they escape into. Whether it's dealing with mental health issues,

experiencing the rush of first love, or grappling with the question of who they truly are, my characters reflect the complexities and contradictions of being a teenager in today's world.

Vida De Un Adolescente isn't just for teenagers. It's for anyone who has ever been young and felt misunderstood, or for anyone who has ever looked back at their own teenage years and wondered how they made it through. Each story offers a glimpse into a different facet of adolescence, reminding us all that, no matter how alone we may feel, we are not the only ones walking through this journey.

This book is an exploration of self, a reflection on the stories we tell ourselves, and a celebration of the resilience of youth. With every page, I hope to bring out the voices of the silent, the misunderstood, and the ones who are still figuring it all out.

In a world where life often feels like it's being written for us, *Vida De Un Adolescente* is a reminder that we all have the power to write our own story.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Vida De Un Adolescente*—a book that dives deep into the heart of what it means to be a teenager. I've tried to capture the essence of that journey—one that is filled with dreams, struggles, fears, and, most importantly, growth.

This book isn't just for teenagers. It's for anyone who remembers what it felt like to be young, to feel misunderstood, to question your place in the world, and to wonder what's next. These stories are my way of expressing the emotions, challenges, and transformations that come with growing up—moments that shape us into who we're meant to be.

Vida De Un Adolescente is a reflection of the silent struggles we all face, and a celebration of the resilience that comes with navigating them. I hope that through these pages, you find something that resonates with you, whether it's a memory, a feeling, or a reminder that you are not alone in your journey.

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Chapter 1- Chalk, Dust and Dreams

Riaan Desai was five when he first stepped into St. Mark's School, a tiny figure clinging tightly to his mother's saree. "I don't want to go!" he cried, his voice breaking. Each morning became a battlefield at home. Mrs Desai would kneel beside him, brushing away his tears.

"You'll love it someday," she promised.

"Never," Riaan whispered back.

The gates of St. Mark's School stood like a fortress to little minds — towering, cold, and overwhelmingly silent in the mornings. The campus had a rhythm of its own: the clang of the bell, the soft thud of polished black shoes on tiled corridors, the chorus of children reciting morning prayers in practiced unison. To Riaan, everything felt far too large — the benches too long, the walls too high, the ceiling fans spinning too

fast as if trying to fly away from the gloom of classrooms. His first classroom had cracked green boards that hadn't seen fresh paint in years, and a window that opened into the world but somehow never brought in light. The teachers walked with purpose, their voices echoing commands rather than comfort. The playground, though, held a different kind of magic. It wasn't silent — it was chaos. Yet, it was the kind of chaos that made sense to children. But Riaan often sat on the edge of it all — watching, not playing. For a school that was full of life, Riaan always felt like an outsider wandering through a movie where he wasn't cast. In a place built for dreams and discipline, he carried neither — just a quiet hope that maybe, someday, he would belong to the bell's rhythm and not just fear its sound.

Years passed, and yet his heart never settled. Riaan wasn't the brightest in class — not bad, but never remarkable. He felt invisible, like a background character in someone

else's story. His only solace came from scribbling poems in his worn-out notebook — words only he would read. Writing became his escape — a way to process his feelings when he struggled to understand them. This term is described as a 'coping mechanism' — a subconscious attempt to control emotional turmoil by channelling it creatively. For Riaan, poetry was his quiet rebellion against the noise of the world.

His father, Mr. Desai, believed in discipline over comfort. "Stop wasting your time writing nonsense," he'd snap, shaking his head at Riaan's poems. "Focus on your studies. Mrs Desai, on the other hand, would smile and whisper, "Keep writing. One day, you'll understand why."

The poems used to keep Riaan distracted from the world as Riaan didn't struggle with people because he didn't like them — he struggled because he didn't know how to fit into their puzzles. His classmates already

had groups, inside jokes, shared stories from kindergarten. They moved like units, tight-knit and synchronized. And Riaan? He hovered at the edges of benches, unsure whether his hello would be welcomed or overlooked. Break times were the hardest — those short minutes when the class scattered into pockets of laughter and energy, while he quietly opened his tiffin and pretended not to notice the silence around him. The worst part wasn't the loneliness — it was the overthinking that came with it. Should I speak first? What if they laugh? What if I'm not funny enough? He often rehearsed conversations in his head that never made it out of his mouth. And when he did try — a shy compliment, a borrowed pencil, an awkward smile — it was usually met with polite nods that faded quickly into forgetfulness. For a child full of thoughts, he felt muted in the noise of school life. No one ever bullied him, but no one remembered him either — and sometimes, that invisible pain felt louder than being teased.

Then came Digvijay. Loud, confident, and somehow always smiling. "You look like you're dying," Digvijay said one day, plopping into the empty seat beside Riaan. "Want to suffer together?" That joke became a bond. Digvijay made school bearable — dragging Riaan into jokes, pushing him to try sports, and teaching him how to laugh at things that once hurt.

"See? School's not so bad," Digvijay grinned.

"I still hate it," Riaan muttered — but he smiled when he said it.

The day Digvijay plopped into the seat beside Riaan, something shifted. It wasn't instant magic, but it was the first time silence didn't feel so lonely. Digvijay had this easy charm — the kind of boy who laughed loudly at his own jokes, never cared about being the smartest, and somehow always found humour in life's smallest messes. After that first sarcastic comment — "You look like you're dying... want to

suffer together?” — Riaan didn’t know whether to be offended or relieved. But Digvijay didn’t wait for approval; he just kept talking, pulling Riaan into conversations he didn’t even know he needed. Over time, they built something quietly powerful — a friendship born out of contrast. Digvijay brought chaos; Riaan brought calm. Digvijay talked in bursts; Riaan listened in patience. But slowly, Riaan started speaking more. Saying yes to things he once avoided. Whether it was bunking a PT period to sit on the staircase or staying back after class just to talk about silly crushes, their bond grew in unspoken ways. Digvijay never forced Riaan to change, but somehow, he made Riaan want to. And perhaps that’s the purest form of friendship — not the one that demands change, but the one that inspires it.

Over time, Riaan’s confidence grew. This phase reflects 'social reinforcement' — positive interactions that build self-esteem. Through Digvijay, Riaan learned that

bonding with people meant embracing vulnerability.

But things became tangled when Vihaan entered the picture. Vihaan wasn't a bully — not the obvious kind. He was sharp, always scheming, always finding ways to make Riaan uncomfortable. Vihaan wasn't the villain of the story — not at first glance. He didn't throw punches or shout insults across the classroom. No, Vihaan was smarter than that. He operated in whispers, smirks, and casual cruelty disguised as conversation. He walked like he owned the hallways, with his shirt slightly tucked and that smug look that said he'd already figured out the system. Teachers liked him — he knew exactly when to answer questions and when to flash his fake sincerity. Students followed him — not out of love, but out of fear of being his next subject. He never teased Riaan outright. He didn't have to. A well-placed comment, a shared glance with others, a sudden shift in tone — it was enough to unsettle. “Why do you hang with Digvijay? You're not even

his type,” he once said with a smile so innocent it felt crueler than a punch. That was Vihaan’s specialty — words that sounded harmless but stayed with you for weeks. And slowly, those words began to burrow into Riaan’s self-worth. Vihaan never broke anyone loudly — he simply loosened the screws until they came apart on their own.

Then there was Myra — the calm yet captivating girl Riaan secretly adored. She had a presence that seemed effortless, like the world danced to her rhythm. Unable to speak to her, Riaan turned his feelings into words — page after page of poetry that never left his notebook. This behavior aligned with 'creative catharsis' — using art to process suppressed emotions.

One afternoon, while Riaan had gone to fetch his lunch, Vihaan — the class clown — found that notebook. By the time Riaan returned, Vihaan was already reading aloud:

"Her smile's like sunlight, her eyes brighter than stars,

In her silence, my heart softly scars."

The class roared with laughter. Riaan froze in the doorway, his face burning. Myra sat in the middle, eyebrows furrowed in confusion — she didn't know the poem was about her. Worse still, Vihaan smirked in the back, relishing the humiliation.

For days, Riaan couldn't meet anyone's gaze. His poems stopped. His mind spiraled — restless nights, endless regrets. "I shouldn't have written those," he told Digvijay. "I'm done with writing."

This phase showed signs of 'emotional shutdown' — a state where fear overrides creativity. Riaan began to believe that his words had no value.

But fate, as unpredictable as it is, had other plans.

Myra, tired of Vihaan's constant arrogance, decided to strike back. When Vihaan

secretly filmed himself mimicking Mr Pratik, their English teacher, Myra knew it was her chance. She recorded Vihaan's video and handed it to Mr Pratik — ending Vihaan's false pride.

"Serves him right," Digvijay laughed.

What Riaan didn't know was that Myra had also shown Mr Pratik his poems. One afternoon, Mr Pratik called Riaan aside. "These poems... they're remarkable," he said, holding the notebook.

"I don't want to talk about them," Riaan muttered.

"You're wasting a gift," Mr Pratik said gently. "Use this pain, turn it into something powerful."

Riaan hesitated. Memories of the classroom's laughter haunted him, but somewhere inside, those words still mattered. Days turned into weeks as he picked up his pen again. His words no longer whispered of heartbreak alone —

they spoke of finding strength in scars, of childhood fears, of friendships that anchored him through storms.

The first poem Riaan ever wrote wasn't for anyone to read. It was a scribbled mess, hidden between math notes and doodles, written during a free period when his thoughts felt louder than the classroom noise. He didn't even know it was poetry — just lines that rhymed with his confusion. But something about putting emotions into words felt like control — like naming his fears made them less scary. Over time, those scribbles turned into verses, verses into pages, and the notebook that once held equations now held confessions. He wrote about rejection, joy, dreams, heartbreak, the smell of new books, the pain of being forgotten. Each poem was a mirror to emotions he couldn't say aloud. And though no one read them, Riaan felt lighter with every piece he wrote. It wasn't fame he chased — it was understood. He began to learn the weight of words, how silence could

scream and a single metaphor could heal. Poetry became his secret friend — the one that listened, never judged, and always gave something back. His pen became his voice when his mouth failed him. And that, perhaps, was the beginning of his transformation — from a boy who wanted to disappear to a poet who wanted to be heard

The day of the poetry competition arrived. Riaan's hands trembled as he stood before the crowd. His voice shook as he read his final piece:

"I once cried at the school gate,
Wishing I could run, escape my fate.
But here I stand, with lessons learned,
For friends, for love, my heart has burned."

The auditorium erupted in applause, yet Riaan hardly noticed. His heart felt light — no longer burdened by fear. The school looked different on the last day — quieter, slower, like time had decided to stretch a little longer before letting go. The corridors

that once echoed with footsteps and laughter now held a strange kind of stillness. Riaan walked past the notice board where his poem had once been pinned, the bench where he and Digvijay shared secrets, the library table where he silently admired Myra from afar. Everything felt soaked in memory. The walls weren't just walls anymore — they were archives of growth, grief, and quiet victories. As he stood near the classroom door for the final time, he ran his fingers over the scratched desk that had been his companion for years. There was something about endings that made every ordinary thing feel sacred. The farewell speeches were over, the confetti swept away, but the ache hadn't left. Riaan knew this moment wasn't about leaving school — it was about leaving the version of himself who was once scared, invisible, and unsure. Just as he turned to leave, he saw her — Myra — standing alone near the window, the same place where she used to sit, bathed in sunlight. And before he spoke, his heart whispered, Say it. Not for her, but for you.

What followed wasn't a declaration, but a release. Because sometimes, the greatest closure doesn't come from what you hear — it comes from what you finally say.

As school ended, Riaan found himself in the empty classroom, staring at the worn desk where he'd spent years scribbling poems. Myra walked in quietly. "I showed your poems to Mr Pratik," she confessed. "I thought... you deserved to be heard." Riaan paused. "I... I never told you, but those poems... they were about you. Myra blinked in surprise, and then smiled softly. "I think I knew," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Riaan didn't know what her smile meant, but it didn't matter. He had found himself — and his words had finally made him stronger.

He closed his notebook for the last time and said "The child, who was crying and was scared to be fool, never knew that he will cry while bidding a farewell to the school."

Chapter 2- Chasing the Algorithm

“Ira Kapoor wasn’t always obsessed with social media.” Before the filters and the fame, Ira Kapoor was a quiet observer of the world around her. Raised in a modest household in Pune, she grew up watching her parents juggle long work hours and emotional distance. Her father, a corporate executive, often encouraged her to think logically, while her mother, a school counsellor, taught her the importance of empathy. Ira found herself walking the line between both worlds — emotionally intuitive but deeply analytical. In college, she pursued psychology with a focus on emotional intelligence, drawn to the complexities of human behaviour. Her professors often praised her ability to dissect complicated emotions with simplicity and compassion. She wasn’t loud, but she had a voice — calm, structured, and often full of clarity. Friends often came to her for advice,

which she gave freely, never realizing it would one day become her identity. The desire to help others wasn't a career choice; it was instinct. She used to write in journals frequently, pouring her thoughts into neatly crafted words that made even heartbreak sound manageable. Ira's confidence didn't come from crowds or compliments — it came from knowing that, in someone's chaos, she could offer peace. That's the version of Ira most people never knew — the girl who understood pain before she ever became the one to cause it.

Once upon a time, she was just a psychology student with a passion for helping people. Her instagram page started as a side project — small videos where she gave advice about understanding emotions, handling heartbreaks, and navigating tricky relationships. At first, it was just her sharing thoughts from her textbooks, but soon people started listening. What began as casual evening uploads soon morphed into a daily ritual. Ira would return from her

psychology classes, sit by her window with a cup of tea, and record short videos about trust, emotional trauma, breakups, and healing. Her soft voice, combined with her empathetic delivery, felt like a balm to many lost in emotional whirlpools. The turning point came when one of her videos on “recognizing emotional gaslighting” went viral. Overnight, her DMs flooded with strangers thanking her, telling their stories, and begging for more. That one video reached across borders and sparked something bigger than she imagined. She adapted quickly — upgrading her gear, studying algorithm trends, and even hiring a junior editor. With each video, she fine-tuned the emotional pulse of her content. It wasn’t just about healing anymore — it was about impact. She posted infographics, shared anonymous stories, and even began weekend live sessions that often pulled thousands of viewers. People started viewing her not just as a creator, but as a guide — a modern-day therapist in their pocket. Her follower count didn’t just grow

— it exploded. But with popularity came responsibility. And Ira, unknowingly, began shaping not just narratives — but expectations she never signed up for. They found comfort in her calm words and practical advice. Comments flooded in — "You saved my relationship", "I wish I'd found your page sooner", "You're amazing."

The praise became her fuel. What started as a hobby turned into a career. Ira built her brand carefully — stylish outfits, perfect lighting, and captions that sounded personal but were carefully curated to make her audience feel connected. Brands reached out, collaborations poured in and her follower count shot up. People called her "the relationship whisperer."

But things began to tangle when Kiaan entered the scene. He wasn't just good — he was magnetic. While Ira relied on polished content, Kiaan's charm lay in his authenticity. He filmed himself casually — messy hair, unfiltered opinions — yet people adored him. Worse still, Kiaan's

advice wasn't only helpful, but it was often better. His raw, honest style felt more real than Ira's rehearsed words.

"Look at him," Ira muttered to herself, scrolling through his latest post. "Perfect captions, flawless delivery... and twice my followers."

The pressure gnawed at her. Numbers controlled her life — likes, comments, followers. She spent her nights refreshing her page, watching her stats barely move while Kiaan's skyrocketed. Every morning felt heavier than the last, her pride shrinking as Kiaan's popularity bloomed.

Desperate to reclaim her place, Ira turned to something new — AI software designed to generate content ideas and manipulate algorithms. But she soon found another feature — one that could create fake accounts, post fabricated comments, and even generate twisted videos that could ruin someone's image.

"Just one push," Ira whispered. "I just need to slow him down."

At first, her efforts were small. Then she started creating fake comments under Kiaan's posts, accusing him of promoting toxic advice. Then AI-generated screenshots of him sending manipulative messages began surfacing. The rumours spread like wildfire. The online world erupted. Instagram reels, Twitter spaces, YouTube breakdowns — everyone had an opinion. Fans who once adored Kiaan began questioning him. "How could someone who speaks about healing be so manipulative?" one viral post asked. The AI-generated screenshots looked real, the allegations believable enough to stir doubt. Influencer watchdog pages picked it up, sharing dramatic headlines like 'Kiaan Caught Red-Handed?' and 'From Inspiration to Accusation'. Meanwhile, some of Kiaan's loyal fans held firm. "This doesn't feel like him," they argued, digging into timestamps and inconsistencies. The digital world turned

into a courtroom, and Kiaan had no proper defence. Brands that once partnered with him released vague statements distancing themselves.

He lost sponsorships, speaking opportunities, and soon, his presence dwindled. Amid all this, Ira's following soared. Ironically, her videos on "staying strong in chaos" and "dealing with negativity" gained traction — followers applauded her for her calm amidst controversy, never realizing she was the one who ignited it. The internet had chosen its villain, and Ira quietly stood outside the fire, untouched. She watched it unfold with a cocktail of guilt and satisfaction. But the thing about digital fame is — it burns fast, and it scars deep. Kiaan's audience turned against him. Brands pulled away.

The rivalry between Ira and Kiaan quickly became the internet's favourite drama. Though neither of them publicly acknowledged the tension, their subtle jabs were impossible to miss. Ira posted a reel

titled “Authenticity or Arrogance?” the same week Kiaan uploaded a raw video about self-love that trended instantly. Their followers turned the comment sections into battlegrounds — #TeamIra vs. #TeamKiaan. Debates flooded Twitter threads and Reddit forums, comparing their advice, tone, and delivery. What made it worse was how visibly rattled Ira became. Each time Kiaan posted, her response came soon after — more polished, more researched, and somehow colder. She started changing her aesthetic, mirroring Kiaan’s casual approach, hoping it would draw in his crowd. But it backfired. People noticed the shift and called her out for being inauthentic. “She’s trying too hard,” one user commented. “Kiaan is just being himself.” Despite her best efforts, the gap widened. The internet began building a narrative of its own — the over-polished creator being dethroned by the underdog. What once was a personal journey of healing turned into a war for relevance. And Ira, consumed by fear of fading out, began looking for a way

to tilt the scale, even if it meant crossing ethical lines she once swore by. He denied everything, yet the damage refused to fade.

"Are you sure about this?" Ira's close friend Meera asked one evening. "I mean... this doesn't feel right."

"He's better than me," Ira snapped. "I had no choice."

Meera's expression darkened. "There's always a choice" she whispered. Meera wasn't just Ira's friend — she was her mirror. They had met during the first semester of psychology, instantly clicking over their shared love for poetry and their mutual dislike of performative people. Where Ira was calculated and strategic, Meera was impulsive, guided by her gut. Their friendship was rooted in honesty, often brutally so. As Ira's fame grew, Meera stayed grounded — helping her plan content but also reminding her to stay human. She had been there during Ira's all-nighters, brand calls, anxiety spirals, and moments of

burnout. And she had been the first to notice the shift — the jealousy, the obsession, the bitterness that started clouding Ira's vision. When Ira first showed her the AI-generated rumours, Meera's heart sank. "This isn't you," she'd said quietly. "You're becoming the person you once warned people about." But Ira, trapped in the illusion of competition, brushed it off. Meera didn't walk away, though. She stayed, trying to be a voice of reason in the storm, hoping Ira would snap out of it before it was too late. She wasn't just a character in the story — she was the last thread of morality holding Ira together. And once ignored, that thread began to fray because she knew that Ira is becoming someone she never was. The social media numbers has hacked her mind and now she is controlled by the algorithm. The negative influence has taken over her mind and now there is no coming back. Ira did something that was never expected from her and because of her, Kiaan's life turned into hell while he was spreading positivity.

The dark side of social media is they can never see someone rising from their own talent and each other is trying to bring one down to keep them alive. One night, as Ira scrolled through the chaos she had created, she felt a flicker of guilt — brief, yet unsettling. But she shook it off. "He'll bounce back," she told herself. She said this to keep the guilt off her mind and stop overthinking about Kiaan because she knew what she did.

But Kiaan didn't bounce back. His silence online turned into absence. His fans speculated — depression, withdrawal, maybe even quitting for good. Ira should have felt victorious, but instead, anxiety crept in. Something felt... wrong.

Days later, news broke — Kiaan was gone. Found alone in his apartment, his social media page left untouched. The whispers online became a roar — "He couldn't handle the pressure."

Ira's heart pounded as she stared at her phone. Guilt knocked louder now, but she refused to open the door. She never admitted her role in it — not to her audience, not to herself. Instead, she buried herself in her content, crafting posts about healing and moving forward. Her follower count surged, her influence doubled, but her mind remained restless.

Weeks later, Ira received a link from an anonymous email. It was a video — Kiaan's last, never posted. In it, Kiaan looked tired, his voice quieter than usual.

"People think influencers have it easy," he said, forcing a weak smile. "But sometimes... sometimes you're drowning and no one sees it. They only see the smiles, the highlights... never the nights you stare at your screen wondering if you're good enough." This shows that the people hates to see any other on top and wait to destroy them and drag them down. In this world, people enjoy other's downfall more than their success.

Ira paused the video, her breath catching. She couldn't watch the rest. She didn't need to. The weight of what she'd done crushed her chest.

The silence in Ira's room that night felt louder than any applause she'd ever received. Her phone buzzed with likes, comments, collaboration requests — all praising her wisdom, her strength. But none of it reached her heart. The weight in her chest had grown heavier, pressing down like a truth she could no longer hide from. She sat with the video Kiaan had never posted — the only part of him she had left — and stared at the reflection of herself on the black screen. Who had she become? Was this the same girl who once whispered gentle truths into her phone, hoping to heal someone's heart? Or was she now a by-product of an algorithm — driven by numbers, moulded by comparison, destroyed by envy? That night, Ira didn't post. She didn't plan. She didn't scroll. She just cried — not for Kiaan, but for the girl she used to

be. The climb to the top had cost her everything: her values, her peace, and a soul that once believed in doing better. And as her tears blurred the screen, Ira finally admitted to herself what she had done. It wouldn't bring Kiaan back. It wouldn't erase the damage. But it was a start — a tiny crack in the armour of denial. The first honest moment she faced in a long time.

In chasing numbers, she forgot the cost — and when she finally looked back, it was too late to fix what she'd destroyed.

Chapter 3- Red Flags, Green Paths

Veer Walia, a simple person — or at least that's what he told himself. But deep down, he knew better. He had always been self-centered; someone who believed that caring for others was a weakness. He dressed sharp, spoke with confidence, and played life like a game where emotions were nothing but distractions. Veer believed in power — the power of control, of being untouchable. After all, trusting people had only burned him before. Veer hadn't always been this way. There was a time when he was the kid who waited for his father's approval after every school exam, who wrote silly poetry for his mother's birthday, who believed friends would stick around forever. But those softer edges were slowly chipped away. His father's constant criticisms, masked as "motivation," made Veer believe that emotions were signs of weakness. His mother, once a pillar of

warmth, grew distant over the years, buried under responsibilities and disappointments. And friends? They came and went — the ones he trusted most often betrayed or used him. The final blow was during high school, when a close friend humiliated him in front of the entire class just to impress others. That day, something shifted in Veer. He decided it was better to be feared than forgotten. He built walls, sharp and high, telling himself that he didn't need anyone — that strength was about never being vulnerable. Slowly, he crafted an identity that felt safe: confident, unbothered, untouchable. But deep down, under the layers of ego and pride, lived a boy still waiting for someone to see the good in him.

His toxic relationship with Anaya had left deep scars. At first, she seemed perfect — funny, charming, and just as intense as he was. But things had spiralled. Arguments turned into screaming matches. Veer's ego refused to back down, and Anaya's temper matched his. Their relationship was fire

meeting fire — destructive, passionate, and impossible to stop. They met at a college fest — Veer with his quiet intensity, Anaya with her infectious laughter and sharp wit. At first, they were magnetic. She challenged him, refused to be controlled, and called him out on his pride without hesitation. Veer was drawn to her fire — the way she walked into a room like she owned it, the way her eyes dared the world to cross her. They spent long nights on the phone, discussing life, trauma, and dreams they never told anyone else. But as the months passed, their passion became poison. Anaya wanted emotional honesty; Veer offered deflection. She craved communication; he shut down. What started as playful banter turned into emotional war. One moment they were kissing in the rain; the next, they were hurling accusations across crowded cafés. They both hated losing — and neither wanted to bend. Veer couldn't stand feeling out of control, and Anaya couldn't tolerate emotional distance. They loved hard, fought harder, and slowly broke each other in the process. The day she

walked away for good, Veer didn't stop her. His pride wouldn't let him. But as the door closed behind her, something inside him shattered — and he promised never to let anyone get that close again. When it ended, Veer's heart hardened. He decided then and there that no one could hurt him again if he stopped caring altogether. Trust, he believed, was for fools.

Veer's selfishness stretched into every part of his life. He ignored his parents' concerns, dismissed Rishi's attempts to reason with him, and laughed off anyone who tried to point out his flaws. He skipped college assignments, ignored deadlines, and refused to believe anyone's advice was better than his own.

Every morning, Veer boarded the metro with his earphones plugged in, drowning out the world with music. His routine became predictable — wakes up, get dressed, metro ride, college, repeat. Life was autopilot, and Veer liked it that way. No risks. No attachments. No one to disappoint him.

But soon, the people he ignored started to leave impressions — small cracks in his otherwise impenetrable walls.

On a rainy Sunday morning, Veer sat scrolling through his phone in the metro. He barely noticed Ishika at first — a quiet girl with oversized glasses and a book always tucked under her arm. But one morning, her book fell, scattering papers across the train floor. Veer scoffed and turned away — not his problem. But when no one moved to help her, something shifted in him. Reluctantly, he bent down and helped her gather the papers.

“Thanks,” she mumbled with a small smile.

He shrugged and returned to his phone. But something about her calm presence stayed with him. Over time, he noticed how she always carried herself with quiet strength. She never asked for attention yet seemed more composed than anyone Veer knew. Without realizing it, Veer started observing

her patience, her focus — and it made him question his own restless nature.

The next Sunday, on the same route metro, Veer noticed Dev — a cheerful college student with an infectious smile. Dev greeted strangers like they were old friends, offered his seat to the elderly, and helped tourists navigate the metro routes.

One afternoon, Veer overheard Dev talking to his friend about his family. Despite juggling college and two part-time jobs to support his younger siblings, Dev still found time to make people smile. Veer couldn't understand it. "Why bother?" Veer asked him one day.

"Because people deserve kindness," Dev answered simply.

That night, Veer lay awake thinking about Dev's words. Somewhere inside him, a memory stirred — of Rishi always being there for him, offering advice Veer never listened to. Was loyalty really a weakness? Or had he been wrong this whole time?

On the next weekend, in the metro Veer watched Sara stand up to a group of guys harassing a woman on the metro. While others pretended not to notice, Sara stormed forward, fearless and unwavering. Her voice cut through the train car like thunder.

“You think that’s funny?” she snapped. “Try doing it again.”

The group backed down, clearly shocked by her boldness. Veer watched in awe. Sara’s courage was unlike anything he’d seen. She reminded him of Anaya — bold and unafraid — yet Sara’s strength came from a place of integrity, not anger.

Veer started questioning his own attitude. Had his pride been hiding his cowardice all along?

On the last Sunday, Veer met Viren — a reserved man in his late twenties. They ended up sitting beside each other, and Viren, sensing Veer’s frustration, casually started a conversation.

“You seem... heavy,” Viren said quietly.
“Something’s eating you up.”

Veer scoffed. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t have to be,” Viren said. “We all carry things — but eventually, if you don’t unpack it, it eats you alive.”

For some reason, those words clung to Veer like a splinter. Viren’s calm voice had pierced through years of stubbornness. Veer knew Viren was right — his bitterness, his selfishness — it was suffocating him.

Each person Veer met on those metro rides held up a mirror to a different flaw within him. Ishika showed him the strength of silence — how dignity could exist without shouting for attention. Her calm aura made Veer notice the chaos in his own mind. Dev revealed that kindness didn’t require wealth or comfort — just a willing heart. His ability to give without expecting anything in return made Veer reflect on how little he had ever offered anyone. Then came Sara — fearless and furious for the right reasons. She taught

him that bravery wasn't about dominance, but about standing up for those who can't. Her voice reminded him of the kind of power that uplifts, not controls. And finally, Viren — with his quiet wisdom — didn't preach but listened. In just a few words, Viren made Veer realize he'd been carrying wounds he never acknowledged. Together, these strangers dismantled Veer's illusion of strength. Each interaction was a gentle knock on the door he had locked tight. And with every knock, something inside him stirred — not guilt, but the long-forgotten desire to be better.

One evening, Veer found Rishi waiting outside his apartment. "You're better than this," Rishi said. "I'm tired of watching you push everyone away. You're not invincible, Veer."

For the first time, Veer didn't argue. Rishi's frustration mirrored the ache in his own chest. The people he met — Ishika's calmness, Dev's kindness, Sara's bravery, Viren's wisdom — they all chipped away at

his toxic shell. He had spent so long trying to prove he didn't need anyone that he forgot what it felt like to be human.

Veer started small. He apologized to Rishi — awkwardly, but sincerely. He texted his parents without sarcasm for once. He even helped a lost tourist at the metro station, thinking of Dev's unwavering kindness. Slowly, he found himself caring again — and it terrified him. But it also felt right.

Change didn't come to Veer like a thunderclap; it arrived like morning light — slowly, almost imperceptibly. He stopped seeing people as threats and started recognizing them as stories, each carrying their own burdens. When he missed a metro and a stranger cursed him for blocking the door, he didn't snap back. Instead, he paused, took a breath, and let it go. When his professor called him out for incomplete work, he didn't argue or make excuses. He stayed after class, apologized, and asked for a second chance. It was uncomfortable — shedding ego always is. But Veer began to

notice something new in people's eyes: respect. Not fear, not admiration for his confidence, but respect for his effort to change. He didn't suddenly become a saint — the habit of brushing off emotions didn't vanish overnight. But for the first time, he was aware of the impact of his words. Aware that being right wasn't more important than being kind. And that awareness changed everything.

The following weekend, Veer walked past Ishika in the metro and quietly handed her a bookmark — something he had seen her lose before. She smiled wider this time. When he saw Dev, Veer gave up his seat to an elderly man. Dev noticed and grinned, offering a small nod. Veer stood up to a pushy college senior — remembering Sara's courage — and felt a strange sense of pride afterward. And when life overwhelmed him again, he remembered Viren's words: "You don't have to be fine."

In the end, Veer knew he couldn't erase his mistakes, nor could he undo the hurt he'd

caused. But what mattered was that he wasn't the same anymore. Each person had shown him something vital — the strength to be calm, the power of kindness, the courage to stand up, and the wisdom to let go of ego.

As he stood at the metro station, Veer realized the truth — he had spent years building walls, only to realize strength comes from learning to tear them down. He silently realised “To grow in life, he has to keep his ego aside and move ahead while building relationships with people. Being an arrogant person will give nothing but being nice will increase his confidence and will lead him to better paths in life.” Veer's journey was not one of perfection — it was one of progress. He didn't become a flawless person, but he learned how to be a better one. And that's what truly matters. His story serves as a reminder that ego isn't strength — empathy is. That shutting people out may protect you from hurt, but it also isolates you from growth. Veer proved that

you don't have to be born with kindness, patience, or vulnerability — you can learn it, one step at a time. It takes courage to look in the mirror and accept that you've been the problem. It takes more to do something about it. Through small, consistent changes, Veer redefined what it meant to be strong — not by dominance, but by humility. Not by pushing people away, but by letting them in. His past didn't vanish, but it no longer controlled him. And in learning to let go, he found freedom. Veer's story isn't just his own — it's a reflection of every teenager navigating through pride, pain, and transformation. And maybe, just maybe, it reminds us that it's never too late to start becoming who you were meant to be.

Chapter 4- Silent Screams

The story of an introvert which only the author listened-

I always wondered why silence felt so heavy. There's something haunting about the early hours of the morning. Before the birds start chirping and the first light leaks through the curtains, there's a strange peace—almost eerie. That's when silence isn't just silence. It becomes a companion, a mirror, and sometimes a prison. I used to lie awake in those moments, staring at the ceiling, my mind louder than any street outside. It was during these hours that I felt most like myself—raw, unmasked, and real. But it was also during these hours that I felt the most unseen. The world was asleep, and so was its judgment, but so too was its attention. Silence, to me, wasn't blank space. It was crowded with thoughts I never dared to speak aloud—memories, regrets, and questions. It wrapped itself around me like a thick fog, muting everything I wanted

to say but didn't know how. And so, silence wasn't peaceful. It was weighty, like wearing a winter coat in summer.

Unbearable, but familiar. It was never just the absence of sound; it was the weight of words unspoken, of thoughts left unheard. My world had always been quieter than most. Not by choice, not exactly. But because I never knew how to fill the gaps with my voice as the world never gave me the space.

I am an introvert. And for as long as I can remember, I have felt like an observer of life rather than an active participant. The hallways of my school were filled with laughter, casual conversations, and people moving in and out of friendships like the changing seasons. But I was different. I was the one who sat at the farthest desk, who hesitated before raising my hand in class, whose words lived more in my mind than on my tongue.

Home was never truly home for me; it was a place where I existed rather than belonged.

After navigating through a school day filled with side glances and silence, I'd return home hoping, maybe today, I'd feel something different. Maybe today, home would feel like comfort. But it rarely did. The transition from public invisibility to private isolation was seamless. I moved from one world of unspoken words to another—just with different walls.

I would drop my bag, sit at the dining table, and listen to the clinking of cutlery more than any conversation. My parents didn't know how to ask the right questions, and I didn't know how to answer the wrong ones. It wasn't their fault, not entirely. They came from a different world—a world that celebrated loud success, not silent effort.

In school, I was a ghost among peers. At home, I was a muted echo. And the worst part was, I couldn't blame anyone. Because how do you explain that it's not what they did, but what they didn't see? My parents, though well-meaning, never quite understood me. "Why are you so quiet?"

they would ask, as if silence was something unnatural, something broken that needed fixing. I wasn't rebelling, nor was I indifferent—I simply struggled to express myself. My thoughts ran in endless circles, ideas forming in intricate patterns, yet every time I opened my mouth to speak, the words tangled and lost meaning before they could escape.

Psychologically, introverts process information differently. Our brains take longer to absorb and analyse, making us more contemplative, but also hesitant. We don't speak just to fill the air; we speak when we truly have something to say. But in a world that rewards the loud, the bold, the extroverted, my silence was mistaken for weakness.

School was another battlefield. I remember once during a class activity, we had to create a presentation in teams. I had spent the previous evening researching and designing slides—every detail neat, visuals thoughtful, even the facts double-checked. When the

time came, my group took the stage, and I stood slightly behind, hoping someone would offer me the chance to present the part I had prepared. But no one did.

They began talking—fumbling through points I knew better, skipping key details, and misrepresenting the core message. I stood there, helpless, heart pounding, wanting to interrupt but unable to find the courage. My contribution was erased in real time, not by malice, but by sheer disregard.

When we returned to our seats, the teacher praised the group and nodded at the “leaders” who had spoken. I got no mention. Not even a glance.

That day, I realized something that stuck with me: not being hated isn’t the same as being seen. And sometimes, invisibility hurts more than judgment. I wasn’t bullied in the traditional sense—not physically, not directly. But I was ignored, overlooked and forgotten. To some, this might have been a blessing, but to me, it was suffocating.

There's a particular kind of loneliness that comes from being surrounded by people who don't see you. I was like a ghost, drifting through the halls, my presence acknowledged only when necessary.

Group projects were my worst nightmare. Not because I lacked ideas, but because I lacked the confidence to assert them. "Just speak up more," teachers would advise, as if confidence were a switch I could flick on at will. But the fear of judgment, of stumbling over my words, of being dismissed, always held me back. My thoughts stayed locked inside, brilliant yet unseen.

I was good at painting. No, I was great at painting. In the quiet of my room, away from the noise of the world, art flowed effortlessly onto paper. I drew sceneries, landscapes and mountains so deep that they could drown a soul. But when it came to sharing, to displaying my work in front of everybody, my throat tightened. The fear of exposure paralyzed me.

Psychologists call this “performance anxiety.” For introverts, the pressure to perform, to be publicly recognized, is suffocating. It’s not that we lack ability—it’s that the stage, the audience, the attention—it’s overwhelming. So, my work remained hidden, my talent buried under layers of self-doubt and fear.

Like any teenager, I had my share of crushes. But approaching them? Impossible. My heart raced at the mere thought of initiating a conversation. I watched from a distance as my peers casually flirted, exchanged numbers, went on dates. Meanwhile, I crafted imaginary scenarios in my head, conversations that never left the walls of my mind. There was one time—I remember it vividly—when I almost said something. Her name was Aisha. She sat in front of me during history class, always tying her hair in a way that left a few strands falling over her cheek. She once turned and asked if I had a pen, and I nodded too quickly, almost dropping it in the process.

That moment stayed with me longer than it should have. I'd planned to write her a note. Nothing dramatic—just a short compliment and maybe a small sketch, something I knew I was good at. I folded it neatly, tucked it into my notebook, and carried it for two weeks straight. But every time I thought of giving it to her, my chest tightened. What if she laughed? What if she showed her friends? What if she didn't care?

One day, I saw her laughing with another guy—confident, funny, effortless. I quietly slipped the note into the back of my drawer and never looked at it again.

That's what silence does—it makes you miss moments you'll never get back

This is the paradox of introverts in love—we feel deeply, but we struggle to express it. Our affections are subtle, hidden in small gestures, in the way we remember details, in the way we listen. But in a world that equates love with grand romantic gestures,

we often go unnoticed. And so, we love in silence. And we hurt in silence.

I got hurt, just like everyone else. Friendships faded, opportunities slipped through my fingers, people misunderstood me. But unlike others, I didn't vent, I didn't cry in front of anyone, I didn't seek comfort. I healed alone. I sat in my room, replaying conversations, overanalysing moments, carrying my pain quietly. The world thought I was fine because I didn't show my wounds.

The studies suggest that introverts are more prone to internalizing their emotions, which often leads to anxiety and overthinking. We don't externalize pain; we absorb it. And when healing is a solitary process, it takes longer. But it also makes us resilient.

Despite our ability to be alone, we introverts need one person. Just one among everyone. Someone who sees us, who understands that silence doesn't mean indifference, that our hesitations are not rejections. Someone who

makes the effort to draw us out, not by forcing us to change, but by making us feel safe enough to open up.

The right person—be it a friend, a mentor, a lover—can make all the difference. When we trust, we trust deeply. When we love, we love completely. And when we are given space to be ourselves, we shine in ways no one expects. The irony is that while we are often invisible, we see everything. While we may not speak often, when we do, our words carry weight. While we struggle to fit in, we possess a depth that few can match. The world may not always appreciate the quiet ones, but that does not mean we are lesser. It simply means we are different. And different is not broken. Different is beautiful.

So, to every introvert out there— If you're reading this and you've ever felt like you don't belong, I want you to know you're not alone. Your thoughts have depth. Your emotions have gravity. You see things that others overlook—not because you're slow,

but because you observe. That's not weakness; it's brilliance in its quietest form. You might not be the loudest in the room, but that doesn't make your voice any less important. You might not wear your heart on your sleeve, but that doesn't mean your love isn't real. And you might feel like the world is built for extroverts, but trust me, it needs introverts just as much—maybe more. You don't have to become someone you're not. You just have to embrace who you already are. And in doing that, you'll discover your own version of courage—one that doesn't roar, but still echoes. don't let the world convince you that you need to be louder to matter. Your silence is your strength. Your depth is your gift. And somewhere, someone is waiting to truly hear you.

Chapter 5- Clash, Crash and Connect

People in this world enjoy the crispy connections between them and their partner. That first feeling of seeing them, adoring them throughout the day and waiting them to come so that they could make a connection with them. One of the engaging troupes of love is being lovers from enemies, on which this story is based on. The two competitors who turned into lovers- Anish and Piya.

Anish and Piya were not just opposites in personality; they were contradictions wrapped in ambition. Anish, a football lover, a singer, and someone with big dreams of becoming a media influencer, had always been confident. But it wasn't the boastful, arrogant type of confidence—no, his was quieter, more introspective, shaped by years of navigating through life on his own terms. He was an ambivert, a person

who enjoyed both the limelight of the football field and the peace of his own company. He didn't crave the attention of crowds, yet he carried an aura that made people respect him without him having to demand it. He didn't care much about having a lot of friends, but the few he had, they were genuine and loyal. But what he did care about, above all, was the word love. It was a word he adored, and ironically, it was also the one word that terrified him.

On the other hand, there was Piya—outgoing, vivacious, and a natural extrovert. Piya was the life of every room she entered. She was the girl everyone knew, the one who seemed to have the world at her fingertips. She was brilliant, a chess player, a topper in her class, and a guitarist with skills that could mesmerize anyone who listened. Her dream was to become a journalist, but secretly, she longed for something more than the bright spotlight she was always under. She was also an escapist, someone who ran away from her own

emotions and buried herself in things that didn't challenge her. She sought the comfort of others but remained alone, always surrounded by friends but never truly connected to them. Yet, despite her facade, Piya was full of contradictions herself—afraid of true love, but constantly chasing it.

Their paths first crossed in college, and neither was prepared for the storm that was about to unfold between them. Anish, with his quiet confidence, saw in Piya someone who had everything figured out. She was the type who could get by with her charm and brilliance, while he had to work harder to prove himself. He didn't like her, didn't trust her, and certainly didn't expect any friendship to come out of their rivalry. But Piya didn't like Anish either. She thought he was arrogant, full of himself, and too wrapped up in his own world to notice anything beyond his little bubble. Their first interaction had been filled with sharp words, but there was something in the air—something electric that neither of them could

deny. They didn't know it yet, but their destinies were about to collide in a way neither had ever anticipated.

Their paths first crossed in college, where both were vying for the same position in the university's prestigious student council.

Anish, with his love for sports and influencer aspirations, was there to represent the voice of the student-athletes and the artistic side of the college. Piya, on the other hand, was there to represent the academic excellence and creativity that came with her chess skills and her ambition to become a journalist. From the first moment they met, they clashed like two forces of nature.

“You really think you can represent the college?” Piya had said with an air of superiority when Anish expressed his views on how the council should focus on the holistic development of students, rather than just academics and sports.

“Are you questioning me, Piya?” Anish's voice had been calm but sharp. “Because if

you are, you might want to get ready for a battle you can't win.”

Piya smirked. “Oh, I’m sure you’re all talk. But you know what? I’m more of a strategist. I think you’re going to find out that I’m not someone you can easily defeat.” She raised an eyebrow, looking at him like a puzzle she couldn’t solve.

The tension was thick, and from that moment on, the two of them became rivals—each trying to outdo the other. Whether it was presenting speeches in front of the class, leading team projects, or even just passing by each other in the hallways, their every encounter was charged with animosity. Every word spoken to each other seemed laced with irritation, each dismissing the other’s dreams and ambitions with harsh, cutting remarks.

But despite all the hate, there was something electric about it. They both felt it, but neither of them was ready to admit it.

Over time, the rivalry between Anish and Piya became less about competition and more about teasing and playful banter. They couldn't avoid each other, not when they were paired up for projects, forced to work together in group discussions, or stuck in long meetings.

One evening, as they worked on a college project that would determine their positions in the student council, Piya couldn't resist teasing him.

“You know, for someone who's always so full of himself, you're actually not terrible to work with,” she said, her voice playful.

Anish looked at her, a grin forming on his face. “You mean I'm actually better than you thought? I knew you'd come around.”

She rolled her eyes. “Oh, don't flatter yourself. It's just that you're actually less annoying than most people I know.”

Anish leaned in slightly, his voice low and teasing. “So, are you admitting I'm

charming, or are you just too stubborn to admit it?”

Piya scoffed, trying to hide her smile. “Keep dreaming, Anish. I’m just here because we have to work together.”

“Well, I’m sure you love working with me,” he said, leaning back in his chair, arms crossed. “You’re secretly grateful for my brilliance.”

Piya’s eyes twinkled with mischief. “Oh, please. I can do this on my own. You’re just a distraction.”

A beat of silence passed between them. For a moment, it felt like the world had stopped, and the electricity between them was undeniable.

“Don’t pretend you’re not enjoying it,” Anish said softly, his tone shifting from teasing to something more sincere.

Piya looked at him, their gazes locking for just a second longer than usual. “I’m not. Trust me.”

But even as the words left her lips, she couldn't help the faint blush that coloured her cheeks.

As much as their chemistry grew, so did the tension rooted in their deeper values. It wasn't a photo or social media drama that broke them—it was their fundamentally different outlooks on life. During a major student council debate regarding how the college budget should be allocated—Anish advocated for increased funding in sports, arts, and student mental health initiatives, areas he believed were long neglected. Piya, however, supported channeling funds towards academics, research labs, and career counseling programs. To both, it wasn't just a discussion; it was personal.

The final debate turned into an emotional warzone. "This college needs to start treating creative talents with respect. Not everyone wants to become an engineer or a doctor," Anish had said, his voice firm, eyes scanning the crowd.

Piya shot back, “But academics are the backbone. Without structure, all this creativity you're fighting for will collapse. We need to prioritize what gives students actual careers.”

The audience clapped, but Anish’s eyes were only on her. “So, students who don’t fit into your definition of success aren’t worth investing in?”

Piya's face fell for a second, but she quickly recovered. “That’s not what I meant.”

“But that’s what it sounded like.”

It wasn’t about winning or losing anymore—it was about who they were, deep down. After the debate, words were exchanged—sharp, pointed, painful. Not insults, but truths that stung more. She called him naive. He called her cold. Both left with their hearts heavier than they'd ever felt before. There was no dramatic shouting or betrayal. Just two people standing on opposite ends of a bridge, unable to meet halfway.

From that day forward, silence replaced their banter. And unlike before, neither of them fought it. Days turned into weeks, and their rivalry seemed to have reached an irreparable point. Anish buried himself in football, determined to forget the feeling of betrayal. Piya threw herself into her studies and spent even more time with her friends, putting on a brave face for the world.

But despite their efforts to move on, they both felt an emptiness. The truth was, neither of them could forget the intense connection they once shared. And no matter how much they tried to deny it, they couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing.

But neither of them was willing to admit it.

Months passed since their separation, and both Anish and Piya had moved on with their lives, at least on the surface. They were both busy with their respective passions—Anish pouring himself into football and his social media career, while Piya focused on

her studies and her growing circle of friends. Yet, there was a strange emptiness that lingered. They were successful in their own right, but something was missing. Something that neither of them had truly acknowledged yet—the bond they had once shared.

It was a quiet Monday morning when the news broke—Anish had withdrawn from college due to unforeseen family circumstances. He had to go away because his family needed him more than anyone because his brother passed away. He didn't tell anyone in person, not even his closest friends. But for Piya, he left behind something else—a letter.

She found it inside her locker, folded neatly with her name written on the front in his unmistakable handwriting.

"Dear Piya,

The first time I saw you, I thought you were chaos wrapped in beauty. You walked into that debate room like you owned the place—

and maybe you did. I remember thinking, ‘She’s going to be a problem.’ And you were but the best kind. You challenged me in ways no one else did. You didn’t let me hide, you didn’t let me settle—and for that, I think I started falling for you way earlier than I realized. Your spectacles and your wrongly arranged teeth attracted me more than your talent, and I am not kidding!

That fight we had—God, it hurt. Not because you disagreed with me. But because it felt like we were looking at two different futures. And I was scared... scared that mine didn’t have you in it.

I tried to hate you, tried to forget everything. But you don’t just forget someone who made your heart beat faster and your days feel brighter. I was sad. I was angry. Mostly, I was lost.

But today, I’m writing to say thank you. For the laughs, for the arguments, for the moments where I thought the world stopped

because you smiled. Your smile used to keep me alive when I felt lonely.

Life's messy, Piya. And I wish I had the courage to tell you all this face to face. But maybe... maybe this letter is better. It's honest. It's mine.

I love you. I always have and always will!

And maybe in another universe—where time, fears, and ambitions don't stand between us—you'll be mine.

– Anish"

As Piya read the letter, her hands trembled, eyes brimming with unshed tears. She looked around the campus that once felt so full... and now felt hollow. He was gone. But his words stayed—etched in her memory, written in ink, but felt in soul.

Chapter 6- Strings Unattached

We live in a time where love is fleeting, yet everyone craves it. We scroll endlessly, double-tap on pictures, reply with emojis, and mistake attention for affection. We claim we want something deep, yet we panic at the first sign of attachment. Commitment has become an anchor rather than a foundation—something that weighs people down instead of giving them stability. The fear of commitment isn't just a personal issue; it's a generational epidemic. We want love, but we fear the responsibility that comes with it. We want the warmth of companionship but without the weight of expectations. And so, we run. We run from people who care too much, who ask too many questions, who remind us that love isn't just about the highs but also about showing up when things get rough.

But why are we like this? Why has commitment become such a terrifying concept? It's not that we don't feel love—it's that we've been conditioned to be sceptical of it. We've seen relationships crumble, watched our idols cheat, and read a thousand tweets about how being vulnerable means being weak. We've been told that investing in someone is a risk that love is a gamble, and that independence is the ultimate goal. We live in a paradox—we crave intimacy but fear dependence, desire loyalty but resist labelling relationships, and long for stability but refuse to be tied down.

Influence of Past Trauma

Commitment issues often stem from past wounds—heartbreak, betrayal, childhood experiences, or broken family dynamics. Many of us have seen love fail before it even had a chance to thrive. Some watched their parents' marriage crumble; others experienced relationships where love was

conditional, manipulative, or absent. When love has been a source of pain in the past, it's only natural to fear repeating the same patterns. The mind learns to associate vulnerability with danger, trust with disappointment, and attachment with suffering.

As a result, many develop an avoidant approach to relationships. Instead of embracing love, they keep their walls up, never fully letting anyone in. They sabotage relationships before they can grow, fearing that the deeper the connection, the harder the heartbreak. The fear of repeating past mistakes stops them from seeing that every love is different, and healing is only possible when one stops running from what could be beautiful.

Illusion of Endless Options

Modern dating creates the illusion that love is limitless. Dating apps, social media, and global connectivity have made it seem like

there's always someone better just around the corner. We swipe, match, talk, lose interest, and repeat. Instead of valuing the person in front of us, we are constantly looking past them, searching for perfection. The paradox of choice makes it harder to commit—when there are too many options, we fear making the wrong one.

This mindset prevents people from investing in real connections. Instead of deepening bonds, they keep searching, fearing that settling means missing out. The more options we have, the less satisfied we become. Even when we find something good, we second-guess it, wondering if something better is waiting elsewhere. The endless pursuit of perfection makes us blind to what's already special, making love feel disposable rather than sacred.

Reel Life vs Real Life

Social media has created unrealistic relationship expectations. We see curated,

highlight-reel versions of love—perfect couples, extravagant gestures, grand vacations—but we never see the struggles, fights, or silent compromises behind those moments. This distorted portrayal of love makes real relationships feel inadequate. When things get difficult, instead of resolving them, people assume they're with the wrong person and move on.

Moreover, social media has made relationships more about validation than connection. Many people stay in relationships not for love, but for aesthetic appeal, likes, and online approval. Instead of cherishing intimacy, they perform it for an audience. The more we chase this idealized version of love, the less satisfied we become with reality, making it harder to stay committed when the fantasy fades.

**Needs Perfection and Changes
Everywhere**

There is a contradiction in how people view relationships today. They demand a perfect partner—someone emotionally mature, financially stable, attractive, and deeply loving—but at the same time, they crave change. They romanticize the idea of finding someone who is already flawless yet complain about boredom once the honeymoon phase fades. This creates an exhausting cycle of dissatisfaction.

People abandon relationships at the first sign of stagnation, mistaking comfort for monotony. They want excitement, unpredictability, and constant newness, failing to understand that deep love is built on familiarity, patience, and stability. The problem isn't the person they're with; it's their unrealistic expectations of what love should feel like every moment. True love is not about constant thrills—it's about choosing someone even on the quiet, ordinary days. But when people prioritize novelty over depth, they remain in a loop of

chasing new beginnings and never reaching fulfilling endings.

Fear of Losing Independence

The modern world glorifies independence. We are told to put ourselves first, focus on personal growth, and never lose ourselves in a relationship. While self-love is essential, it has also led to an extreme aversion to dependence. People fear that committing to someone means giving up their individuality, freedom, and ambitions. They see love as a cage rather than a partnership.

However, this fear is based on a flawed perception. True love doesn't take away independence—it enhances it. A healthy relationship provides support, not restriction. But in a culture that celebrates self-sufficiency to the point of isolation, people avoid deep connections, fearing they will have to sacrifice too much. Instead of finding someone to grow with, they reject love to preserve a sense of control, never

realizing that the right love doesn't require losing oneself—it requires sharing oneself without fear.

Irony of choosing wrong one after such tantrums!

Another tragic reality of this generation is the attraction to toxicity. People chase what harms them, mistaking chaos for passion and mistreatment for excitement. The media has romanticized toxic relationships, portraying possessiveness, jealousy, and drama as signs of deep love. Many are drawn to emotionally unavailable partners, believing they can change them, while they ignore the ones who would treat them with care and respect.

This creates a cycle of heartbreak and frustration. People claim they want stability, yet they find it boring. They reject those who bring peace and gravitate toward those who bring pain. They complain about being hurt, yet they repeatedly choose those who

do the hurting. The irony is heart-breaking—what they crave is love, yet they keep chasing destruction, not realizing that love was waiting in the places they never looked.

The Inevitable Irony of This Generation

The biggest tragedy of modern love is that we are simultaneously the most connected and the loneliest generation. We have infinite ways to meet people, yet relationships have never felt more fragile. We have more relationship knowledge than ever before, yet our relationships crumble faster than those of past generations. We run from love, sabotage happiness, and choose comfort over depth, yet we crave the kind of love that feels like home. We live in a world where people say they want something real, yet they fear the effort it requires.

In the end, love isn't dying—it's being abandoned. Not because it isn't beautiful, but because we are too afraid to nurture it.

We glorify self-sufficiency to the point of loneliness, chase perfection at the cost of depth, and reject vulnerability while longing for intimacy. The tragedy isn't that love is impossible—it's that we have made it impossible for ourselves. And until we change the way we see love, we will keep searching for something that was never lost in the first place.

Chapter 7- Loops of Love and Lies

The city of Mumbai, a place that never sleeps, held a maze of emotions within its neon-lit streets and corporate high-rises. In this chaos of ambition and fleeting desires, four individuals—Samar, Rayn, Ericka, and Tara—found their lives entangled in a web of love, betrayal, and self-destruction. Each of them carried their own baggage, their own silent wars, and their own twisted perceptions of love.

Samar hailed from Delhi, a calculated, ambitious young man who believed emotions were mere distractions. He had climbed the corporate ladder with ruthless determination, leaving behind a trail of broken friendships and hollow romances. Meanwhile his love interest Ericka was a perfectionist, born and raised in Mumbai, a woman who had always been in control—until love dismantled her carefully built

walls. She worked as a financial analyst, wielding numbers like weapons but falling prey to her own heart's contradictions.

Rayn, on the other hand, was a stark contrast—a free-spirited musician from Bangalore, living life one performance at a time, deeply passionate yet dangerously impulsive and his attachment Tara, the enigmatic one, was a fashion designer from Kolkata, hiding her broken past behind layers of confidence and charm. She had never been in a stable relationship—commitment felt like a cage to her, yet she found herself craving it from the wrong people.

They met in the most unexpected way—through a mutual friend's extravagant corporate party. The four used to work in different corporates which had a collaborated party on the New Year's Eve. Ericka and Samar clicked instantly. Over the span of several months, what began as friendly glances and playful banter slowly deepened into something tenderer. Their

story wasn't rushed; it was built over time—late-night calls turned into whispered promises. Both, unknowingly, were falling in love.

They didn't know how deep they were into each other until the strings of emotions got tangled. Their story wasn't just about love; it was about vulnerability, trust, and healing. Samar was that guy every girl dreams of—green flag, caring, patient, loyal, mature, emotionally available. He was all in, every bit the partner Ericka needed.

While Ericka and Samar's story unfolded gently, another story was quietly brewing in the shadows. Rayn and Tara weren't born of the same warmth—but of chaos, mutual trauma, and a hunger to feel something, anything, real. Their connection wasn't soft or predictable—it was fierce, unpredictable, like fire and ice meeting mid-air.

Tara was the epitome of a red flag—manipulative, egoistic, possessive, toxic, and attention-seeking. She couldn't bear seeing

someone else happy, especially not Samar. Even though she was with Rayn, her eyes never left Samar. Her twisted affection made her a silent observer and an active destroyer.

Rayn, though calm and reserved, found his peace in Tara, unaware of the storm she carried. He gave her love, but she fed on destruction. He knew she had scars, but he didn't see the knife she held behind her back.

Ericka and Samar, oblivious to the brewing storm, spent two beautiful years together. It was the kind of love that poets romanticize—real, raw, and rare. But rare things often scare people. Only thing that was wrong in the relationship was that Samar needed control which Ericka didn't give.

Tara, made a plan and one day called Samar at her home and said “You don't get to walk away from me, Samar,” she hissed one evening, her nails digging into his wrist. “You think she's better than me? Let's see

how she handles betrayal.” The night was thick with tension, the kind that pulled at every strand of self-control Samar thought he had left. Tara’s fingers traced the outline of his jaw, her touch like fire, both teasing and demanding. “You wanted control, Samar,” she whispered, her voice laced with a challenge, a dare. “I think it’s time you learned what happens when you let go of it.” Samar’s breath hitched as she leaned closer, her lips brushing against his ear. “You think you can break me?” he murmured, his voice barely audible over the rapid beating of his heart. But his lips were already betraying him, seeking hers out with a hunger he hadn’t known he was capable of.

“I don’t want to break you,” Tara purred, her breath warm on his skin. “I want to make you feel every damn thing you’ve been running from. You like it real, don’t you? Let me show you what it feels like to lose it.”

Her hands slid down his chest, every movement slow, deliberate, as if she were

savoring the effect she was having on him. Samar's body responded before his mind did, a mixture of lust and anger that he couldn't seem to untangle. He reached for her, his lips crashing onto hers, pulling her closer, his fingers sliding through her hair.

"Is this what you want, Samar?" Tara's voice was a breathy tease. "To have everything you think you've controlled ripped away from you? To feel the chaos, the passion, the guilt... everything at once?"

Samar couldn't answer. His thoughts were clouded, his body a prisoner to the flames Tara had ignited within him. She was right—he was losing control. But, somewhere beneath the surface, he knew this was a mistake. The consequences were lurking, but in the heat of the moment, neither of them cared. Samar fell into the trap Tara made, and they spent the night naked with each other.

And then it began—the game, the chase, the destruction.

Few days later somehow that Rayn and Ericka, drawn together by the absence of what they sought in their partners felt betrayed but didn't wanted to drag that issue in their personal lives because they both were really good friends.

By the time the dust settled, all four were caught in a storm of deceit. Love had turned into a weapon, and no one knew who was wielding it better. Cheating isn't just an act—it's a reflection of something deeper, something broken that cannot be fixed in a moment of fleeting passion. It's an escape, a temporary relief from the pain of an unhappy relationship, but it never truly addresses the root of the issue. When we cheat, we betray not just the person we claim to love, but ourselves. We prove to ourselves that we are unwilling to face the truth, unwilling to confront the uncomfortable reality that a relationship may have reached its end.

It's easier, in the moment, to hide behind the lie of infidelity—because it offers a quick

release from the suffocating weight of unspoken words and unmet needs. But it also feeds into a cycle of self-deception, where we tell ourselves that the affair is justifiable, that it's the solution, which an escape from something we can't fix. But the truth is that cheating doesn't solve anything; it only prolongs the agony.

The real solution to a broken relationship is honesty. It's communication, even when it hurts, even when it's easier to turn away. It's the courage to face the uncomfortable truth—whether it's a need for space, a change in direction, or simply the fact that love has faded. Cheating is a coward's way out, a way to run without looking back. It doesn't allow us to face the consequences of our actions or the impact they have on the ones we've hurt.

True closure doesn't come from the rush of forbidden touches or the thrill of secrecy—it comes from facing the reality of a situation and making the difficult decision to walk away, if necessary. In the end, cheating isn't

a solution. It's a betrayal. And no matter how good it feels in the moment, it leaves scars that time can never erase

Rayn, upon discovering the betrayal, didn't react with anger—he reacted with silence. “You're not worth my rage,” he told Tara, his voice void of emotion. But that emptiness cut deeper than any shouted accusation.

Samar, guilt-ridden, tried to fix things, but Ericka's revenge wasn't over yet. She leaked personal conversations, manipulated situations to paint Samar as the villain. “You played me,” she whispered, smiling as she hit ‘send’ on a message that would ruin his reputation.

Each of them paid a price. Samar's job career suffered as allegations of emotional manipulation surfaced. Tara lost credibility in her workplace when Rayn, in his cold retaliation, ensured she was transferred out of her dream project. Ericka, despite her vengeance, found herself lonelier than ever.

And Samar? He realized that power meant nothing when the emptiness inside consumed him whole.

One by one, they all fell apart.

The thunderstorm outside mirrored the chaos that had erupted within each of them. The streets of Mumbai, usually bustling with life, now lay silent beneath the roar of the heavens. And somewhere, amidst the rain and the broken pieces of love, the truth settled in—the truth that none of them were the same anymore.

Love, they realized too late, wasn't a game. It wasn't about power, control, or validation. It wasn't about proving to others that you could win, or about holding onto someone until you had squeezed every ounce of affection out of them. Love wasn't something you could manipulate, like a chess piece in a game of emotional strategy. It wasn't something you could take from someone else to make yourself feel better.

No, love was the hardest thing to understand. It was messy. It was vulnerable. It was about showing up, not only when things were good, but especially when things were bad. It was about growth, about allowing someone to see the parts of you that were broken, and trusting them not to tear you apart.

Relationships, too, were not meant to be possessed. They were meant to be shared—built together, not used as stepping stones to prove some point about dominance or independence. But in their pursuit of something more, something better, they had all forgotten this truth. And now, the echoes of their actions hung heavy in the air, the price of their mistakes too high to ignore.

The thunder roared louder, as if the universe itself was trying to remind them of something they had lost—the beauty of love, and the ugliness of what they had allowed it to become. The lies they told themselves, the games they played, the hearts they shattered—these things didn't make them

stronger. They only made them weaker, hollower.

But there was a lesson in the storm. A lesson that even after the most violent tempests, there is a chance to rebuild. There is always a chance to heal, to understand, to grow. They had each been part of the destruction, but that didn't mean they couldn't be part of the rebuilding, too.

Perhaps, in the end, the only thing that truly mattered was learning how to love—not with manipulation, not with games, but with truth. And if they were lucky, they might just find redemption in that love. Maybe they could, one day, look back and say they learned. Because in love, as in life, it's not the mistakes that define us—it's the courage to raise from them that does.

It took months for the wounds to stop bleeding, but the scars remained. Rayn sought therapy, confronting his impulsiveness and the way he had sought love in all the wrong places. Ericka, forced

to rebuild her career from scratch, learned that being in control didn't mean never falling—it meant knowing how to rise after the fall.

Samar, for the first time, questioned his idea of power. Was it truly strength if it left him with nothing but silence? And Tara—wild, unpredictable Tara—realized that she had been running from something she had never truly understood: herself.

One by one, they sought redemption.

Few years later Rayn and Tara, again met in that same party that were hosted every year. And started to converse awkwardly, in these years she realised her mistake, but she did to Rayn was very unethical. Rayn being matured told her- “He would have done anything she wanted but she still chose toxicity and cheating over him, he ignored her red flags many times but betrayal- Never”. Rayn said this and left the party immediately and ran towards his car shouting that he finally got the closure he

needed in those years which ends his story here. Meanwhile Tara who turned to be a villain because of her past traumas is left lonely all around in the end. This is what karma makes you do.

And Ericka and Samar? They met again, years later, at a music festival. This time, there were no games. Just an understanding—of pain, of growth, of what they could have been. They knew that they haven't moved on yet. Samar apologized to her softly and “Friends?” Samar asked, offering her hand.

Ericka although smiled, shook the hands and said “Friends, but at one cost, we will never fall for each other again and forget the word love between us”.

Samar responded “As you say” while blinking his right eye towards the unseen camera of his life.

And just like that, the cycle broke and teaches us that love, when real, doesn't destroy—it builds. But when tainted with

ego, desire, or revenge, it becomes a weapon. This story isn't just about betrayal. It's about how even good people fall, how healing isn't always together, and how sometimes the hardest thing is forgiving yourself. So love deeply—but wisely. Don't let red flags blind you to green souls. And most of all—be the kind of love you seek.

Chapter 8- My Path, My Rules

In today's fast-paced world, teenagers are constantly bombarded with expectations from all sides: family, friends, social media, and society in general. It seems like everyone wants something from you—whether it's your time, your attention, or your conformity. We're told who we should be, what we should like, and how we should live our lives. Amid this, it becomes all too easy to forget one of the most important aspects of life- Ourselves.

Self-prioritization is not selfish. In fact, it's one of the most powerful acts of self-care you can perform. It involves taking time to focus on your own well-being, setting boundaries, and determining the direction of your life without constantly looking for validation or approval from others. It's about being in control of your own narrative

and not letting external pressures dictate your happiness.

In this chapter, we'll explore why it's crucial for teenagers to prioritize themselves. We'll discuss the dangers of living for others, the importance of self-care, and why running away from hate and negativity is not only beneficial but essential for mental health and growth. Prioritizing yourself is the key to living authentically, feeling fulfilled, and discovering your true potential.

One of the first steps in self-prioritization is learning how to say no. This might sound simple, but for many teenagers, saying no can be difficult. Whether it's agreeing to go out with friends when you're exhausted, committing to extracurricular activities you don't enjoy, or simply letting someone overstep your boundaries, saying no is a powerful tool for protecting your time and energy.

The pressure to please others is deeply ingrained in many of us. Society often

teaches us that we must be accommodating and agreeable to fit in. However, constantly saying yes, even when we don't want to, drains us emotionally and mentally. It can lead to feelings of resentment, burnout, and loss of self-worth.

When you start saying no to things that don't serve your growth or make you happy, you're choosing yourself. You're recognizing that your time, energy, and mental health are valuable, and they deserve to be protected. Saying no is an act of self-respect. It's a signal to others—and yourself—that you value your boundaries and well-being more than societal expectations or fear of judgment.

Learning to say no might be uncomfortable at first, but it gets easier over time. Start small: turn down an invitation to something you don't feel like doing, or tell someone when you're not in the mood to talk. As you practice setting boundaries, you'll gain confidence and clarity about what truly matters to you.

In the end, saying no helps you focus on the things that add value to your life, from the relationships that nurture you to the activities that align with your passions. It's about giving yourself permission to prioritize your needs over others' demands. And in doing so, you'll find more peace and purpose. We all encounter negative influences in our lives, whether it's toxic people, environments, or situations. But one of the hardest things to do as a teenager is to identify these negative influences and take action to remove them. Toxicity can come in many forms: people who constantly criticize, people who drain your energy, or people who spread negativity wherever they go.

It can be tough to let go of relationships, especially if they've been part of your life for a long time. But staying in toxic relationships—whether friendships, romantic relationships, or family dynamics—only harms your mental and emotional health. These relationships can

undermine your confidence, fuel insecurities, and leave you feeling trapped in negativity.

When you prioritize yourself, you begin to understand the importance of surrounding yourself with positive, supportive people who encourage your growth. You realize that it's okay to walk away from anyone who brings you down, regardless of how close they may be. Staying in toxic environments only keeps you stagnant, and it becomes harder to focus on your own well-being when you're constantly battling negative energy.

Removing toxicity doesn't always mean cutting people off completely, but it does mean setting healthy boundaries. If someone consistently drains you, it's time to limit your exposure to them. If a situation is making you unhappy, it's time to walk away, even if it feels difficult. Taking charge of your mental health means protecting yourself from negativity and

surrounding yourself with people who uplift and inspire you.

When you take this step, it can be incredibly freeing. As you distance yourself from toxic influences, you'll feel lighter and more focused on the things that truly matter. Your relationships will become more meaningful, your energy will be better spent, and your mental health will improve.

At the core of self-prioritization is the idea of building self-worth. For many teenagers, self-esteem can fluctuate based on external factors like grades, social media validation, or the approval of peers and parents. The truth is, though, that true self-worth comes from within. It's not based on what others think of you or what you achieve, but on how you see and treat yourself.

When you prioritize yourself, you begin to shift your focus from seeking external validation to nurturing your internal sense of value. This shift can take time, and it requires work. It means letting go of the

need to constantly compare yourself to others and embracing who you are—flaws, strengths, and all. It means not seeking approval from people who don't have your best interests at heart and instead recognizing that your worth is inherent and independent of others' opinions.

Building self-worth isn't always easy, especially in a world that constantly tells you to be something you're not. But it starts with self-acceptance. It starts with forgiving yourself for past mistakes, acknowledging your growth, and celebrating the small wins along the way. When you recognize your value, you create space for inner peace. You stop letting the opinions of others dictate how you feel about yourself, and instead, you trust in your own judgment and abilities.

Inner peace comes when you stop striving for perfection and accept that you are enough as you are. It's when you learn to silence the external noise and find tranquillity within. With self-worth and inner peace as your foundation, you'll be

able to weather the storms of life without losing yourself.

In today's social media-driven world, comparisons are inevitable. Whether it's scrolling through Instagram and seeing others' curated highlight reels or comparing yourself to your friends or classmates, it's easy to fall into the trap of measuring your worth based on what others have or do. However, the more you compare yourself to others, the more likely you are to feel inadequate or dissatisfied with your own life. Social media amplifies this issue by creating a false narrative of perfection. People post only their best moments, leaving out the struggles, failures, and imperfections that everyone faces. This creates a distorted view of reality, making you think that everyone else has it all together while you're struggling to keep up.

The truth is, everyone's journey is unique. No one's life is perfect, no matter how it might seem on the surface. When you stop comparing yourself to others, you free

yourself from the constant cycle of self-doubt and insecurity. You begin to see your own life for what it is—valuable, rich with experiences, and full of potential.

Focusing on your own path and progress instead of measuring yourself against others allows you to appreciate what you have. It helps you realize that your worth is not dependent on anyone else's success or achievements. When you focus inward, you can take pride in your journey and growth without feeling the need to compete with the world. One of the most empowering decisions you can make when prioritizing yourself is to run away from people who pull you down. This is not just about cutting off toxic people, but about refusing to let anyone with negative energy or bad intentions hold you back.

These people might be friends who secretly envy you, colleagues who undermine your success, or even family members who criticize your choices. They might not always be malicious, but their negativity

seeps into your life and makes it harder to focus on your own well-being. When you prioritize yourself, you recognize that your peace of mind and happiness are more important than holding on to relationships that are detrimental to your growth.

Running away from people who pull you down is about setting boundaries and protecting your mental health. It's about deciding that you're not going to let anyone drag you into their negativity or force you into a box that doesn't fit you. When you take this step, you start to reclaim control over your life and move toward a space where only supportive and positive people have a place.

It's easy to get lost in the noise—the endless opinions, judgments, and expectations that seem to follow you everywhere. But the truth is, the only person whose opinion matters most is your own. You're the one who has to live your life, not anyone else. So, why not live it on your own terms? Take back your power. It's time to stop letting

others decide what your worth is or how you should live your life. Stop waiting for validation, for the perfect moment, or for permission. You have everything you need within you already.

It's okay to not have everything figured out. Life isn't a linear path, and sometimes the detours lead to the most rewarding destinations. Don't fear the uncertainty of charting your own course. Instead, embrace it. Your journey may be different from everyone else's, but that's what makes it uniquely yours.

There will be challenges—people who try to drag you down, situations that feel impossible to navigate, and moments when you question if you're on the right path. But remember, every step you take in the direction of your own happiness is worth it. Every time you say no to something that doesn't serve you, you're affirming your worth. Every time you walk away from negativity, you're making space for something greater. And each time you stand

up for your dreams, even when no one else believes in them, you're strengthening the foundation of your self-worth.

The world will try to mold you into something you're not, but you don't have to let it. The only expectations you need to meet are your own. You have the power to choose your path, to prioritize yourself, and to create a life that aligns with who you truly are. It won't always be easy, but it will be worth it. So, step forward with confidence. The world may not always understand you, but that's okay—your path is yours, and that's all that matters.

You deserve to live authentically, to chase your dreams unapologetically, and to choose yourself first. So, go ahead, make that choice today. Take control of your life, and watch as you transform not just your world, but your future.

In the end, self-prioritization is the most powerful gift you can give yourself. It's not about being selfish; it's about

acknowledging your worth, setting boundaries, and choosing to live a life that aligns with your values. When you focus on your own well-being, you open up the space to build healthier relationships, find inner peace, and achieve personal growth.

It's time to take the power back. Stop living for others and start living for yourself. Prioritize your happiness, your health, and your dreams, and watch how your life transforms in ways you never thought possible. When you run away from hate and negativity, you make room for the beauty and love that life has to offer.

Chapter 9- Fading into Fiction

Nazia had always been different. Not in the loud, attention-grabbing way, but in the quiet, unnoticed manner of someone who existed more in her thoughts than in the world around her. She was sixteen, a student in an elite but suffocating private school in Mumbai. Her world was structured, dictated by the ticking hands of the school bell, the weight of textbooks, and the unspoken pressure of expectations. Yet, she found solace in stories—pages filled with lives more thrilling, emotions more intense, and worlds far more forgiving than her own.

She was not particularly close to anyone. Not that she hated people—she simply didn't see the need for their presence. She had her books, her journals, and the vast universe inside her mind. In school, she did what was expected—completed assignments, nodded when spoken to, and

never stirred unnecessary trouble. But no one really knew her. Not her teachers, not her classmates, not even her family.

Her mother often asked why she spent so much time locked in her room, why she didn't join her cousins during family gatherings. Her father, a man of few words, only observed her from a distance, never quite knowing what to say. But Nazia was fine with it. She had her books, and through them, she traveled to places that didn't demand explanations from her.

Her parents were busy professionals, often too engrossed in their work to notice the subtle changes in their daughter. They provided everything she needed—clothes, food, an education—but there was always something missing. Conversations at the dinner table were brief, filled with obligatory questions about grades rather than genuine interest in her world. Friendships at school were shallow, interactions limited to group projects and polite nods in the hallway. To everyone else,

she was just an average girl who liked to read.

But Nazia wasn't average. She was slipping—slowly, unconsciously—into a world that existed only in her mind.

It started as a choice. Whenever reality became too suffocating, she would retreat into the safety of fiction. But what began as a conscious escape soon turned into something more dangerous—something that took over before she even realized it.

She didn't remember when it happened exactly. Maybe it was the day she sat through an entire lunch period with her head buried in a novel while the world around her buzzed with conversations she wasn't a part of. Maybe it was the night she dreamed in full chapters, waking up with the taste of a fictional world still lingering on her tongue. Or maybe it was the afternoon when she stared at herself in the mirror and felt more like a character than a person.

Books were no longer just an escape; they were home. Real life, on the other hand, felt like an inconvenience—an obligation she had to endure before she could return to where she truly belonged.

At first, the shift was subtle. She found herself struggling to differentiate between a memory and a scene from a book she had read. She would reference events in conversation only to realize they had never actually happened—not to her, at least. She started rewriting her own life in her mind, turning simple interactions into dramatic storylines, crafting people around her into characters who fit neatly into a narrative.

Her English teacher, Mrs Mehra, noticed it first.

“Nazia, your essays have been... different lately,” she said one afternoon, flipping through the pages of an assignment. “They don’t feel like reflections anymore. They felt like... fiction.”

Nazia forced a smile. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

Mrs Mehra hesitated before responding. “It is. But I need you to remember that your life is not a novel. You don’t have to write yourself into someone else’s story.”

The words unsettled her, but she brushed them off. Mrs Mehra didn’t understand. No one did.

The world she had built inside her head was so much more beautiful than the one outside it. In her mind, she was a heroine—strong, important, the center of a grand adventure. People adored her, understood her without needing explanations. There was no fear of rejection, no loneliness. But the deeper she fell into this world, the harder it became to function in reality.

Conversations became exhausting. She struggled to react naturally, her responses feeling scripted, as if she were playing a role instead of simply existing. She started skipping classes, preferring to sit in the

library where she could lose herself in someone else's words. Her grades dropped, but she didn't care. None of it felt real anyway.

Her friend, Ayesha, tried to reach out.

“Nazia, you've been acting weird lately. You never text back. You never even look at me when we talk.”

“I've just been busy,” she lied.

Ayesha frowned. “Busy with what?”

Nazia had no answer. How could she explain that she had been too caught up in a world that didn't exist?

The blurring between fiction and reality became worse. She would walk home, fully expecting a plot twist to happen at any moment—a stranger revealing themselves as a long-lost mentor, a sudden confession of love from someone she had never noticed before. But the only thing waiting for her was the dull silence of an empty house.

Then one day, something shifted. She woke up, but the world around her felt... wrong. As if it wasn't real. As if she wasn't real.

She pressed her hands against her desk, trying to ground herself. This was her room. Those were her books. But something was off. The walls felt like cardboard sets, her reflection in the mirror like a poorly drawn sketch. She blinked hard, trying to shake the feeling.

"Nazia, get a grip," she whispered to herself. "You're fine."

But she wasn't.

Her thoughts grew louder, intrusive. Was she just a character in someone else's book? Had she imagined her entire life? What if none of this was real? What if she was nothing more than words on a page, waiting for someone to turn to the next chapter?

She started losing time. She would arrive at school with no memory of how she got there. She would hold conversations and

forget those moments later. People's faces blurred, their voices distant. Reality was slipping through her fingers like sand.

In the haze of her fractured reality, Nazia often found herself wondering if she had ever truly existed outside the world she had created in her mind. Her room, her books, the people around her—they all seemed like mere constructs, fleeting shadows, unable to hold her in place. She couldn't remember the last time she had genuinely felt present in the world. It was as if each moment slipped through her fingers, only to be replaced by a story she wasn't sure she'd written. The boundary between the real world and the one she had woven from pages was dissolving. Sometimes, she would catch a glimpse of herself in a reflection and not recognize the person staring back. Was this the same girl who had once sat in classrooms, laughed with friends, and dreamed of a future? Or was this someone else, a figment of the imagination, trapped in a world of make-believe? The more she tried

to force herself into the constraints of reality, the more it slipped away from her like a dream she couldn't remember fully upon waking.

Her teachers, her classmates, they all felt distant—characters in a story she could no longer follow. There were days when she couldn't recall if she had spoken to someone or if the conversation had merely played out in her mind. She would find herself in the middle of the school hallway, with people walking past her, their faces blurred and their voices muffled, as if they were nothing more than background noise to the narrative unfolding inside her head. The world around her felt like a set of scenes waiting to be written, each one shifting as she struggled to find her place. There were moments when she felt as though her life was a draft, incomplete, and the final chapter yet to be written—but she didn't know how to finish it.

Was it a tragedy that her sense of self had become so entwined with fiction? Or was it

something deeper, a longing for a world that made more sense than the one she inhabited? Either way, Nazia was unsure if she would ever truly escape this tangled web of real and imagined. All she knew was that she was no longer sure which world was hers.

One evening, she stood on her balcony, staring at the city below. The lights flickered like fireflies, the world stretched endlessly before her. She could end this story right now, she thought. Close the book. Stop turning the pages.

But something stopped her. A whisper. A thought.

What if there was another chapter waiting for her?

The next day, she walked into Mrs Mehra's office.

"I think I need help," she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper.

Mrs Mehra looked at her, eyes filled with something Nazia had never noticed before—understanding. “I’m glad you’re here.”

It wasn’t a resolution. It wasn’t a perfect ending. But it was something.

And for now, that was enough.

The story ended ambiguously, as Nazia continued walking the line between reality and fiction. The tragedy wasn’t in her downfall—it was in the fact that she never truly knew which world she belonged to.

And maybe, just maybe, she never would.

Chapter 10- The Invisible Puppet

It all began in Alangar. A city veiled in a mist of secrecy, where its beauty could never be fully appreciated due to the darkness that haunted every corner. Located in the heart of South India, this city was both a gem and a nightmare. Its streets were bathed in neon lights, offering a false sense of life, while its back alleys were home to sins so twisted that even the bravest of hearts could not survive it. Here, the lines between reality and illusion blurred, and the night concealed far more than it revealed.

In Alangar, the youth found themselves lost—addicted to an illusion of control and power, driven by desires and motives that were as shallow as they were dangerous. The very heart of this city beat in rhythms of deceit, obsession, and murder. There were those who played the game, and there were those who simply became pawns. Among

them, six people were bound by a fate they never chose, their lives intertwined in a way that would eventually lead to bloodshed, broken hearts, and secrets that would never be revealed.

The six sins of the chapter were- Aryan was the investigative journalist everyone knew about but no one really understood. His charisma was magnetic, yet he carried with him a burden that few could fathom. Aryan had ties to the underground world of Alangar—he wasn't just a journalist, but a man who dabbled in secrets too dark to publish. His pen had inked stories that crushed lives, but it was his ability to move undetected in the shadows that made him dangerous. He had a way with words that could seduce or destroy, a talent that made him an invaluable player in this deadly game. Raghav, the soft-spoken software engineer, was far from the quiet, harmless guy people thought him to be. On the surface, he was just another coder in the city's growing tech sector, but in the depths

of the dark web, he was a hacker with a passion for causing chaos. His ability to manipulate systems was rivalled only by his talent for keeping secrets. Yet beneath the quiet exterior, Raghav had a past that threatened to devour him—an affiliation with criminal organizations that he couldn't escape, no matter how far he ran. Varun, the tortured artist, was both a creation and a destroyer. His art was beautiful, but the demons that drove it were darker than any of the creations he'd ever painted. His past was marred by a connection to Alangar's underground crime syndicates—an inheritance he never asked for but could never outrun. His need for validation, coupled with his penchant for self-destruction, made him a perfect fit for this twisted circle of friends. His art became his escape, but also his prison, a constant reminder of the pain he could never forget. Karan, the rich playboy, was the type of man who lived for the thrill of the chase. His political connections made him untouchable, his wealth made him irresistible, and his

charm was lethal. But Karan's true nature was far more sinister. He was a man who reveled in power, who broke hearts without a second thought, and whose presence sent a chill down the spine of anyone who got too close. Beneath the perfect smile and expensive suits lay a monster—one who had more skeletons in his closet than anyone would ever dare to imagine. Sanya, the rising model, was the city's darling. Her beauty was undeniable, and her popularity was unparalleled. But behind the glamour, Sanya had secrets that even she couldn't escape. She was an escapist, always running from something she didn't want to face. Her relationships were as toxic as the city itself, and her connection to Karan was a reflection of the chaos she thrived in. She was drawn to darkness, yet terrified of it, a contradiction that made her both captivating and dangerous. Chaya, the brilliant lawyer, was known for her uncanny ability to win impossible cases. But her victories came with a cost, often paid in blood. She was sharp, calculating, and always several steps

ahead. Chaya had a connection to each of the others, but her role in this twisted game remained a mystery. She had no qualms about bending the law to her will, using whatever—or whoever—she needed to achieve her goals. She was the one who understood the game better than anyone, and the one who would eventually be forced to confront her darkest secrets.

It all began with Raghav. His death was as cryptic as it was chilling. Found in his apartment, the scene appeared to be a suicide. The body was positioned carefully, almost as if he had staged his own death. A single note was left behind: “The game has begun.” The police quickly labeled it as a suicide, but those closest to Raghav knew better. Something wasn’t right.

Chaya was the first to speak out. Her voice, always composed, had a sharp edge when she declared, “This isn’t a suicide. It’s a warning.” It was the first time any of them had seen her shaken, and that alone made

the others question everything they thought they knew about Raghav's death.

Varun was visibly disturbed, clenching his fists. "Then who's playing this game?"

They had always been close, but now, in the face of Raghav's death, they were forced to trust one another. For the first time, they realized they could no longer hide behind their secrets. The city of Alangar had claimed one of their own, and none of them knew who would be next.

Under the neon glow of Alangar's nightlife, love was never pure. It was a weapon, a tool for manipulation, control, and obsession. Sanya and Karan's relationship was proof of this. They had a chemistry that burned like fire—wild, unpredictable, and destructive. Sanya was drawn to Karan's power and chaos, while Karan was intoxicated by her beauty and vulnerability. Their relationship was toxic, a game of dominance and submission that was impossible to escape.

Their love was dark, bruising, and ultimately self-destructive. Karan was the kind of man who left marks in places no one could see, while Sanya allowed herself to be marked, unable to break free. Their love was a slow poison, and neither of them knew how to stop it.

Aryan, on the other hand, had always been drawn to Chaya. Their connection was different—it wasn't love, but something darker. Their nights together were a battle, a warzone of passion and pain. Fingers wrapped around throats, nails digging into backs, whispered threats that made their hearts race. Their relationship was a twisted form of intimacy, a reflection of the darkness that consumed them both. But just like Karan and Sanya, it was a love that would eventually implode.

The group soon realized that Raghav's death was only the beginning. More deaths followed, each more brutal and cryptic than the last. Messages were left behind at each

crime scene, each one a puzzle piece in a game they didn't understand.

“The puppet never dances alone.”

“Truth is only a lie waiting to be exposed.”

“No one is innocent.”

The city itself seemed to conspire against them. The shadows grew longer, the whispers louder, and the paranoia thicker. Varun, once the reliable artist, began to unravel. He vanished for days, reappearing with bruises and bloodshot eyes. Sanya withdrew from public life, her once flawless skin now tainted with stress. Karan, who had always been arrogant and confident, became silent—a silence that was more terrifying than anything he'd ever said.

And then, Aryan received the video.

A masked figure stood over a tied-up man, a knife glinting under dim light. The distorted voice echoed in Aryan's mind, sending chills down his spine. “You think you know

the truth? The real villain is the one closest to you.”

The game had taken a new turn. It was no longer about surviving the city—it was about surviving one another.

It all culminated in the final night. A massacre at an abandoned warehouse, where the group had gathered to confront the truth. Blood coated the floors as one by one, they fell. Varun was the first to go, a bullet between his eyes. Karan followed shortly after, choking on his own blood as a knife was buried deep in his chest. Sanya ran, but the shadows swallowed her whole, leaving nothing behind but silence.

In the end, only Aryan and Chaya remained. Bloodied and broken, they stood facing each other, their hands trembling. The truth had evaded them, but now, at the end, it didn't matter. They were the last ones standing, but the game was over.

“Was it you?” Chaya asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Was it you?” Aryan echoed, his grip tightening on his gun. Neither of them pulled the trigger. The sirens wailed in the distance, and the final message appeared on Aryan’s phone screen:

“The real villain was never meant to be found.” The puppet show had ended, and the puppeteer remained unseen. The city of Alangar had claimed them all, and no one would ever know who was truly responsible.

Some believed Aryan had orchestrated it all, driven by his twisted journalistic thrill. Others whispered that Chaya, with her legal expertise, had been the mastermind. Some even speculated that Raghav had never truly died, that he faked his own murder to torment them all. And there were those who believed that the city itself was cursed, that Alangar had always been a place where souls went to die. In the end, the truth was a lie, and the puppet master remained a ghost in the shadows.

FROM THE AUTHOR'S DIARY

Hi, I'm Tanishq Chawla, and I'm 18 years old. My journey into writing began when I started writing poems as a way to express the feelings I couldn't put into words otherwise. Little did I know that what started as a form of personal expression would turn into a love for literature and storytelling. The world of words has always been my refuge, and through it, I've come to understand the power stories have in connecting us to ourselves and to each other.

When I was younger, I was fascinated by the stories of teenagers—their struggles, their triumphs, their quiet battles, and their undeniable growth. I wanted to write about those raw, unspoken experiences that defined so many of us. *Vida De Un Adolescente* is a culmination of those thoughts, the struggles of youth, and the ways in which we navigate the often turbulent, unpredictable path of adolescence.

Teenage years are a time of transformation, when the foundation of who we are starts to take shape. It's a period filled with ups and

downs, confusion, self-doubt, and moments of clarity. Writing about teenagers, their conflicts, and how they face the world is something I'm deeply passionate about. It's not just about their struggles, but about how they find strength within themselves to face them.

This is just the beginning of my journey as a writer. I hope to write many more novels that dive deeper into the complexities of life, relationships, and self-discovery. The teenage years will always be at the heart of my stories because that's where I see so much of life happening—the messy, complicated, yet beautiful part of growing up.

Thank you for reading *Vida De Un Adolescente*. It means the world to me. I hope these stories have touched you in some way, as they have been a part of me for so long.