

written by Shivam Kumar

THE FORGOTTEN PLAYLIST





The Forgotten Playlist

© 2025 SHIVAM KUMAR

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

For permissions, inquiries, or feedback, contact:
hindustanisinger0@gmail.com

First Edition: 2025



Dedicated to

My family—my foundation, my strength.

For every word of encouragement, every lesson, and every
moment of unwavering support.

And to the one who reminds me that life is more than just
routine—

That laughter, warmth, and love are the melodies that make our
stories worth telling.



Acknowledgment

Writing this book was a journey of emotions, discovery, and self-reflection. I couldn't have done it alone.

I want to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support, for believing in this story even when I doubted myself. Your encouragement meant everything.

A special thanks to my readers—those who find pieces of themselves in these pages. This story is for you.

And lastly, to music—the silent narrator of our lives. Thank you for making even the quietest moments feel alive.



Preface

Music has the power to connect us to memories, to people, to emotions we may not even realize we have. "The Forgotten Playlist" is a story about love, loss, and the strange ways fate brings us the lessons we need the most.

Aarav's journey is one of loneliness, self-discovery, and transformation. Through Saanvi's voice, he learns to live, to love, and to find meaning in the moments he once ignored. This book explores the beauty of connection and how sometimes, the people we never truly meet can change us forever.

I hope this story resonates with you. May you, like Aarav, find your own playlist—one that reminds you that life is meant to be lived.

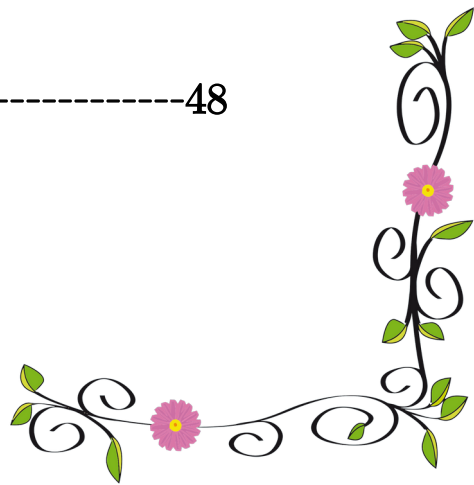
Happy reading.

SHIVAM KUMAR



Table of Contents

1.TheLost Soundtrack-----	7
2.The Girl in the Music-----	12
3.Pieces of the Past-----	17
4.Echoes of A Stranger-----	24
5.A Letter Never Sent-----	31
6.The Girl in the Photograph---	37
7.The Final Message-----	44
8.The Last Note-----	48





1

The Lost Soundtrack

Aarav never understood the appeal of people.

They moved through life with such **certainty**, such **effortless ease**, as if the world belonged to them. They laughed, they talked, they connected—while he watched from a distance, wrapped in a bubble of silence.

It wasn't that he hated people.

He just... **didn't fit in**.

And after years of being the quiet one in the corner, the invisible figure who slipped through the cracks of conversations, he had stopped trying.

His world was simple.

Routine.

Predictable.

College. Library. Classes. Hostel.

Every day, the same cycle.

He liked it that way.

Until the day he found **her** MP3 player.



The Library Where It All Began

It had been an ordinary afternoon.

The library, his usual sanctuary, was as silent as ever—just the way he liked it. Rows of old wooden bookshelves stood like silent guardians, filled with stories he never bothered to read.

Aarav wasn't here for books.

He was here because it was the only place where he could exist without expectations.

No one asked him why he was always alone.
No one tried to force him into conversation.

He could simply **be**.

His fingers trailed over the desk as he walked toward his usual spot by the window—a secluded corner, far away from the world. But just as he pulled out his chair, something **caught his eye**.

A small, black MP3 player.

It lay abandoned on the wooden surface, its earphones tangled in a careless mess. The screen was scratched, but the device was still working, its tiny screen glowing faintly.

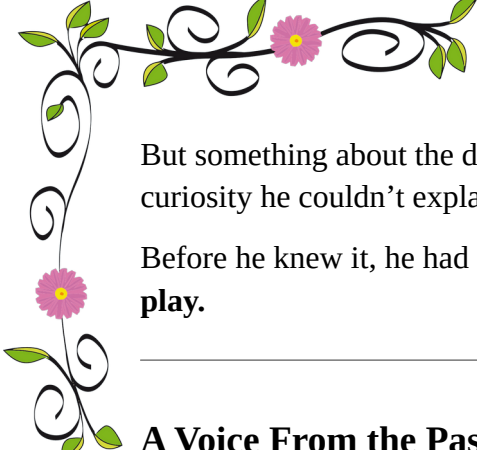
Aarav frowned.

No one else sat here. No one ever did.

Had someone forgotten it?

He hesitated for a moment.

The rational thing to do was to leave it at the librarian's desk.



But something about the device **called to him**—a strange curiosity he couldn't explain.

Before he knew it, he had slipped the earphones in and pressed **play**.

A Voice From the Past

The first note played, soft and haunting.

A slow piano melody, delicate and full of longing, filled his ears.

And then—

"Hi."

Aarav froze.

It wasn't just a song.

It was a **voice recording**.

"I don't know who's listening to this. Maybe you found this by accident. Maybe you were meant to. Either way... hi. My name is Saanvi."

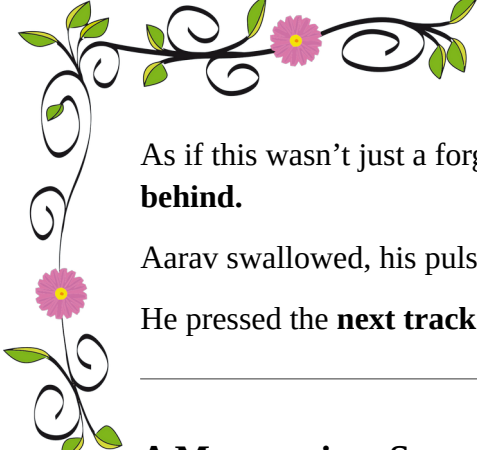
The voice was **alive**—bright, full of warmth, carrying an easy kind of joy that Aarav had never understood.

"This isn't just music. This is a story. My story. And if you're listening, that means you're part of it now."

A chill ran down his spine.

The girl—Saanvi—spoke as if she knew him.

As if she had **expected** someone to find this.



As if this wasn't just a forgotten playlist... but a **message left behind**.

Aarav swallowed, his pulse quickening.

He pressed the **next track**.

A Memory in a Song

This time, the melody was different—soft guitar strings, strumming lazily, as if playing in the background of a distant memory.

"Do you believe in fate?"

Saanvi's voice returned, light and teasing.

*"I used to think everything in life was just random. That we're all just wandering, colliding into each other by chance. But then... I met **you**."*

Aarav's breath caught.

"You don't remember, do you?"

His fingers tightened around the MP3 player.

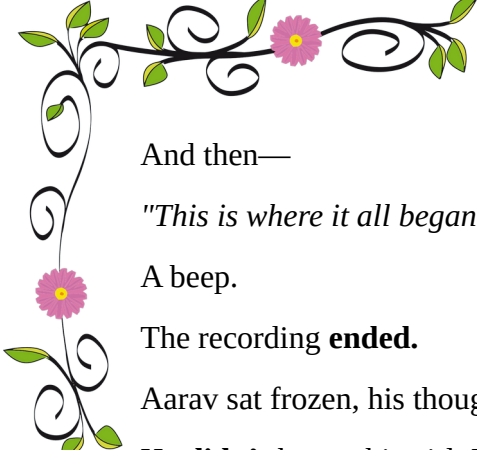
*"That's okay. I wouldn't expect you to. But I remember **you**."*

A shiver ran down his spine.

Who **was** she?

Why did she sound like she knew him?

The song swelled, fading into silence.



And then—

"This is where it all began."

A beep.

The recording **ended**.

Aarav sat frozen, his thoughts racing.

He **didn't** know this girl. He was sure of it.

And yet...

Something about her voice felt **familiar**.

Like a song he had once heard but forgotten.

His fingers hovered over the MP3 player.

There were more recordings.

More **memories**.

More **clues**.

Aarav swallowed.

And then, despite every part of him screaming that this was a mistake—

He pressed **play** again.

And Saanvi's voice came back to life. Waiting for him.



2

The Girl in the Music

Aarav had never been superstitious.

He didn't believe in **fate**, in **destiny**, or in the idea that some moments were meant to change lives.

But as he sat there, gripping the MP3 player, heart pounding against his ribs, he couldn't ignore the weight of the words he had just heard.

"I remember you."

The voice—**Saanvi's voice**—lingered in his ears like an echo from another life.

Who was she?

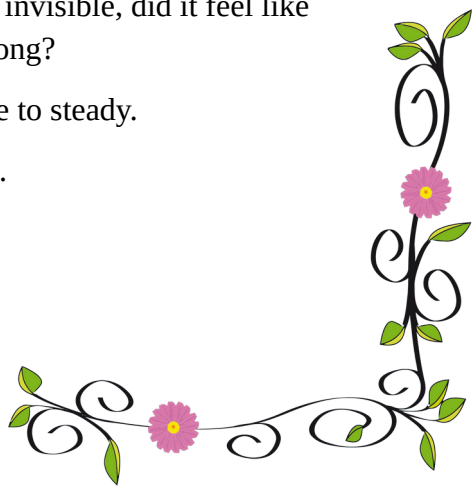
Why did she speak as if she knew him?

And why, after all these years of being invisible, did it feel like someone had been watching him all along?

Aarav exhaled slowly, forcing his pulse to steady.

There had to be a **rational** explanation.

Maybe this was a mistake.





Maybe Saanvi had recorded this for someone else.

Maybe he was just—

No.

The way she spoke... the familiarity in her tone... it wasn't meant for a **stranger**.

It was personal.

And something inside him whispered that this wasn't a mistake.

He was **meant** to find this.

The Second Track – A Forgotten Place

His fingers trembled as he scrolled to the **next recording**.

The moment he pressed **play**, a soft melody filled his ears—light piano notes dancing like raindrops against glass.

And then—

"You're still here."

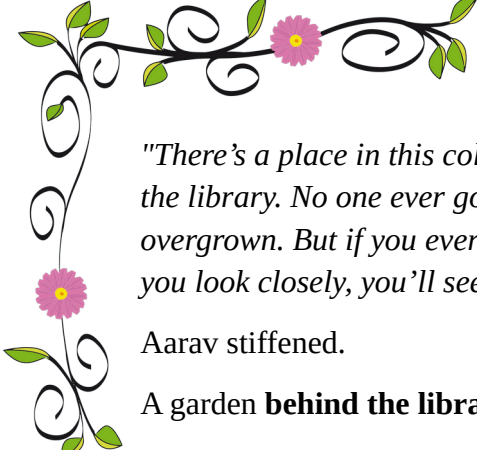
Saanvi's voice returned, playful and teasing.

"That's a good sign. It means you're curious. Or maybe you're just as lost as I was."

Aarav swallowed, feeling a strange **tightness** in his chest.

"I want to tell you a story."

The piano faded, replaced by the faint sound of **wind**.



"There's a place in this college—a tiny, forgotten garden behind the library. No one ever goes there. It's too hidden, too overgrown. But if you ever find it... you'll see a bench. And if you look closely, you'll see my name carved into the wood."

Aarav stiffened.

A garden **behind the library**?

He had been coming here for months, but he had never noticed anything like that.

"That's where we first met."

His breath hitched.

"You didn't talk to me, of course." Saanvi chuckled softly. "You never did. But you were there. Sitting under that tree, lost in your own little world. And for some reason... I always noticed you."

Aarav felt a chill run down his spine.

This wasn't just some story.

This was **real**.

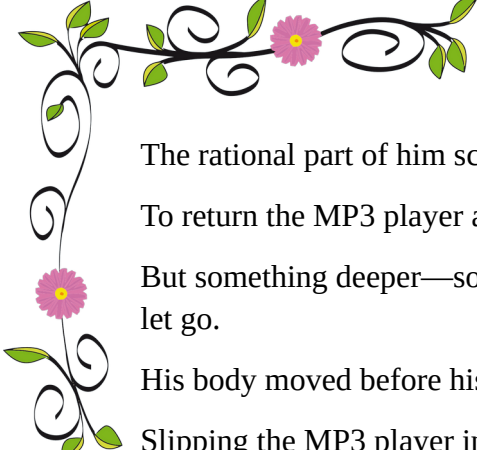
Somewhere in this college, there was a forgotten **place** where a girl named Saanvi had once watched him from afar.

A girl he didn't even remember.

The recording ended with a quiet beep.

Silence.

Aarav sat there, gripping the MP3 player like it was the only thing tethering him to reality.



The rational part of him screamed to stop.

To return the MP3 player and forget this ever happened.

But something deeper—something raw and **restless**—refused to let go.

His body moved before his mind could catch up.

Slipping the MP3 player into his pocket, Aarav rose from his seat and walked toward the library doors.

He had to see it for himself.

The Hidden Garden

It took him **twenty minutes** to find it.

The library's backside was mostly abandoned, lined with old walls and overgrown bushes. He pushed past tangled vines, brushing away leaves, until—

There it was.

A tiny clearing.

A **bench**, barely visible beneath a layer of dust and fallen leaves.

And when Aarav stepped closer, his heart stopped.

Because there, carved into the wooden surface—

Saanvi.

His breath hitched.

She wasn't lying.



She had been **real**.

Aarav slowly sat down, his mind spinning.

The bench was worn from time, the carvings faded, but the name was still **there**.

She had been here.

And at some point... so had he.

He exhaled shakily, pulling out the MP3 player.

There were still more recordings.

More **memories**.

And suddenly, Aarav wasn't afraid anymore.

He pressed **play**.

And Saanvi's voice came back to life.



3

Pieces of the Past

Aarav sat on the **weathered bench**, staring at the name carved into the wood.

The cool evening air wrapped around him, rustling the leaves of the forgotten garden.

Saanvi.

She had been here.

She had noticed him.

And somehow, she had known that he would one day find this place.

Aarav's fingers hovered over the **MP3 player**.

There were still more tracks left—more memories waiting to be uncovered.

He hesitated, his pulse quickening.

Did he want to know more?

Something about this felt **unreal**, as if he had stepped into someone else's story.

But wasn't that his life, anyway?

Always an **observer**. Never the one actually **living**.



Aarav clenched his jaw.

Not this time.

Slowly, he scrolled to the **third track** and pressed **play**.

The Third Track – The Cafe by the Lake

"You made it."

Saanvi's voice was bright, tinged with excitement.

"I was worried you'd stop listening. But you didn't. That means you're curious. Or maybe..." she paused, a teasing lilt in her voice, *"you just miss my voice."*

Aarav's fingers curled around the MP3 player.

He **did** miss her voice.

It was strange—how a girl he had never met could make him feel this... connected.

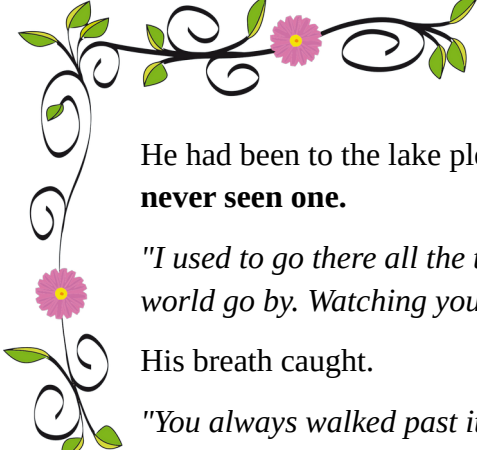
"Okay, listen."

The sound of **laughter** and **clinking cups** filled the background.

"There's a little café near the lake, remember? The one tucked between the old bookstore and that rundown stationery shop. You probably never noticed it because you never notice anything."

Aarav frowned.

A café near the lake?



He had been to the lake plenty of times, but a café? No, he had **never seen one**.

"I used to go there all the time. Sat by the window, watching the world go by. Watching you go by."

His breath caught.

"You always walked past it, headphones on, lost in your own world. And every time, I wondered—what was he thinking about? What kind of music does he listen to? What makes him smile?"

Silence stretched between them.

Or maybe it was just **his silence**.

Because Saanvi was gone.

And yet, here she was, asking him questions he never knew anyone cared about.

"I guess I'll never know."

Her voice softened.

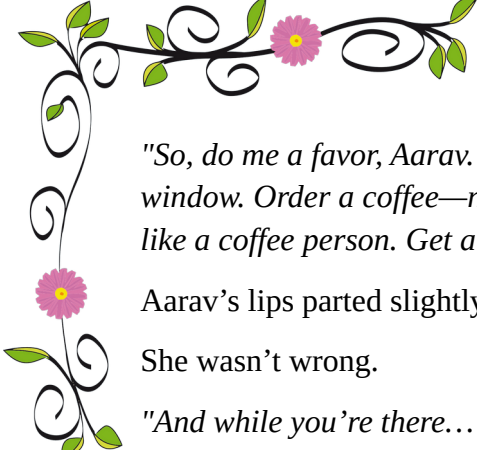
"But you know what's funny? I think, deep down, I always wished we could've been friends."

Something inside Aarav **ached** at those words.

Friends.

He had never had one.

And yet, this girl—this stranger—had once **wished** to be his.



"So, do me a favor, Aarav. Go there. Just once. Sit by the window. Order a coffee—no, wait, scratch that, you don't seem like a coffee person. Get a hot chocolate. Yeah, that suits you."

Aarav's lips parted slightly.

She wasn't wrong.

"And while you're there... think about what it would've been like if we had met. If we had talked. If you had looked up, just once, and seen me watching you."

The recording ended.

Aarav exhaled sharply, his **mind spinning**.

The café.

It was real.

And she had been there.

Watching him.

Waiting for something that never happened.

Aarav tightened his grip on the MP3 player, heart pounding against his ribs.

For the first time in his life, he wanted to go somewhere.

Not because he had to.

But because he **needed to**.



The Café Near the Lake

The next day, Aarav found himself walking down the narrow streets leading to the lake.

He wasn't sure what he was expecting.

Maybe nothing.

Maybe everything.

The air smelled of damp earth and brewing tea as he reached the lakefront.

And then—

There it was.

A small, **faded café** wedged between an old bookstore and a stationery shop.

How had he **never** noticed this place before?

His throat tightened as he stepped inside.

A soft bell **jingled** above the door.

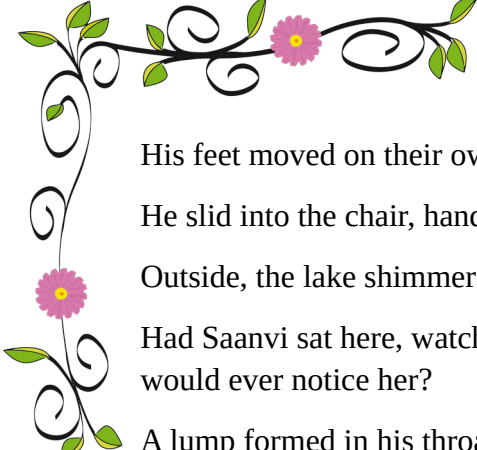
Warm lights flickered against wooden walls, and the scent of vanilla and cinnamon wrapped around him like a familiar embrace.

It was almost **empty**, except for an old man at the counter and a young waitress scribbling something in a notebook.

Aarav's gaze swept across the room—

And then he saw it.

The window seat.



His feet moved on their own as he approached it.

He slid into the chair, hands resting on the smooth wooden table.

Outside, the lake shimmered under the late afternoon sun.

Had Saanvi sat here, watching him walk past, wondering if he would ever notice her?

A lump formed in his throat.

He should've noticed her.

But he hadn't.

And now, she was gone.

The waitress approached with a smile.

"Good evening! What can I get you?"

Aarav hesitated.

And then, almost **without thinking**, he murmured—

"Hot chocolate."

The waitress nodded and walked away.

Aarav exhaled, running a hand through his hair.

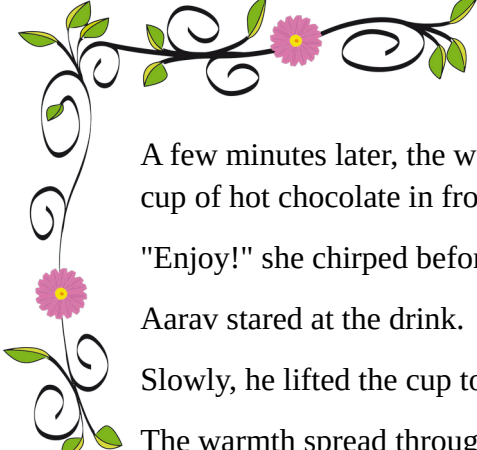
What was he even doing?

Chasing ghosts?

But no—this wasn't just about Saanvi anymore.

It was about **him**.

For the first time in years, he was **feeling something**.



A few minutes later, the waitress returned, placing a steaming cup of hot chocolate in front of him.

"Enjoy!" she chirped before heading back to the counter.

Aarav stared at the drink.

Slowly, he lifted the cup to his lips and took a sip.

The warmth spread through him, **comforting** and **unfamiliar**.

This was Saanvi's world.

And somehow, he was stepping into it.

Aarav reached into his pocket, fingers brushing against the MP3 player.

There were still more recordings.

More memories.

And for the first time in his life—

He didn't feel so **alone**



4

Echoes of a Stranger

The café felt warmer than the outside world, yet a chill ran down Aarav's spine.

He sat by the window, his fingers wrapped around the steaming cup of hot chocolate, but his mind wasn't here—it was **somewhere else, somewhen else.**

With Saanvi.

Or at least, with her **memories.**

Outside, the lake rippled under the setting sun, casting golden reflections on the water's surface. The world looked **calm, ordinary**—and yet, Aarav felt as if he had stepped into a different reality.

The thought was **unnerving.**

It had only been **a few days** since he found the MP3 player, yet he had already **changed.**

Or maybe, he was just **starting to wake up.**

Aarav pulled the **MP3 player** from his pocket, its worn-out buttons cool against his fingertips. He hesitated before scrolling to the **fourth track.**

Did he really want to know more?



Yes.

Yes, he did.

He took a deep breath and pressed **play**.

The Fourth Track – The Painting on the Wall

"Aarav... do you ever wonder how many moments we miss in life?"

Her voice drifted through the headphones, **soft yet piercing**.

"Like... you're here, living, breathing—but how much of the world do you actually see?"

The sound of **footsteps** echoed faintly in the background.

"I think about that a lot."

Aarav frowned.

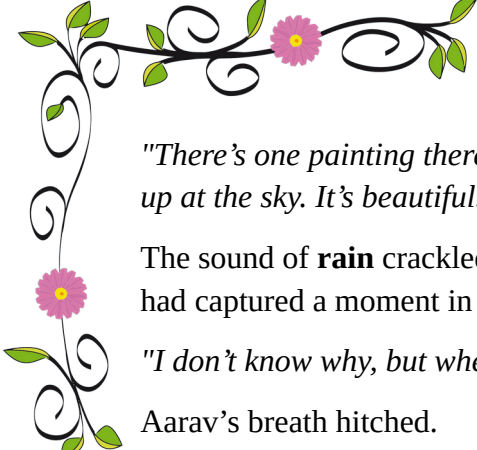
Something about her tone was different in this recording. Less playful. More... thoughtful.

"There's this place I love—a little abandoned art gallery near the old clock tower. Hardly anyone goes there anymore. The walls are covered in forgotten paintings, their colors faded, their stories unheard."

She sighed.

"It's sad, isn't it? Art is meant to be seen. Just like people are meant to be noticed."

Aarav swallowed.



"There's one painting there—a girl standing in the rain, looking up at the sky. It's beautiful. Melancholic, but beautiful."

The sound of **rain** crackled faintly in the recording, as if Saanvi had captured a moment in time.

"I don't know why, but whenever I look at it, I think of you."

Aarav's breath hitched.

"Maybe because you always look like you're drowning in thoughts. Or maybe because... I always imagined you standing in the rain, waiting for something you don't even know you're waiting for."

A moment of silence.

"Go there, Aarav."

Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"Look at the painting. And tell me if you see yourself in it."

The recording ended.

Aarav sat there, **frozen**, the weight of her words pressing down on him.

She had been watching him **more closely than he ever realized**.

She had **seen** him.

Even when he had never seen her.

His throat felt dry as he tucked the MP3 player back into his pocket.

He already knew what he had to do next.



The Forgotten Art Gallery

The clock tower loomed over the street, its weathered hands frozen at **2:17 PM**, as if time had abandoned it.

The old gallery was tucked beside it, hidden between a row of faded buildings.

Aarav had passed this place before—**hundreds of times**.

And yet, he had never **seen** it.

With a deep breath, he pushed open the creaky wooden door.

The air inside smelled of dust and forgotten stories.

Paintings lined the walls, their colors muted with time. Some were torn at the edges, others barely held together in their fragile frames.

Aarav's eyes scanned the room.

And then—

He saw it.

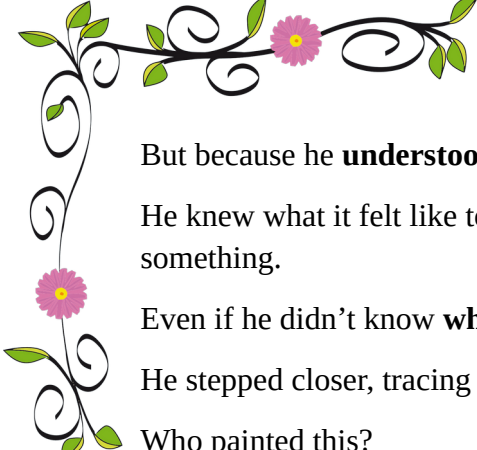
The painting.

A girl in the rain, her face tilted upward, eyes filled with a silent longing.

A lump formed in Aarav's throat.

She looked... familiar.

Not in the sense that he had seen her before.



But because he **understood** her.

He knew what it felt like to stand in the rain, waiting for something.

Even if he didn't know **what**.

He stepped closer, tracing the faint brushstrokes with his eyes.

Who painted this?

And more importantly—**why had Saanvi thought of him when she saw it?**

A small plaque was attached to the bottom of the frame.

Aarav's breath **stopped** when he read the name.

Artist: Saanvi Kapoor.

His pulse pounded in his ears.

Saanvi had painted this.

She had left this behind.

And yet, she was **gone**.

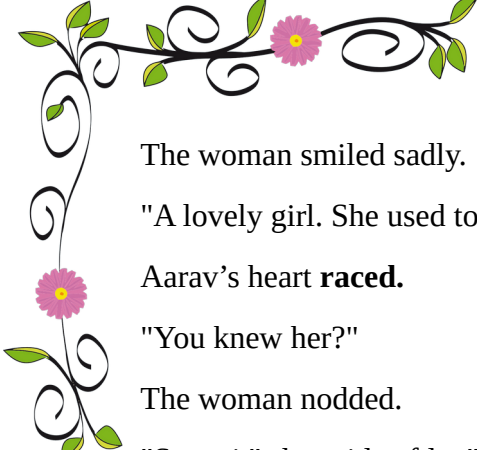
He reached out, his fingers hovering just above the canvas, as if touching it would somehow **connect him to her**.

"That's a beautiful piece, isn't it?"

Aarav turned sharply.

An **old woman** stood by the doorway, her kind eyes studying him.

He swallowed, nodding. "Do you... do you know who painted it?"



The woman smiled sadly.

"A lovely girl. She used to visit often. Always full of life."

Aarav's heart **raced**.

"You knew her?"

The woman nodded.

"Saanvi," she said softly. "She used to say this painting was about someone special."

Aarav felt like the air had been sucked from the room.

Someone special.

Did she mean... him?

He took a shaky breath.

"What else did she say about it?"

The woman hesitated, then gave him a knowing look.

"She said she hoped he would find it one day."

Aarav's knees almost **buckled**.

This wasn't just a coincidence.

Saanvi had painted this **for him**.

She had wanted him to see it.

To **understand**.

His fingers curled into fists.

He had spent so long **drifting through life, unnoticed, untouched**.



But Saanvi had noticed him.

And now, he was finally **noticing her**.

The woman gave him a gentle smile.

"She'd be happy you found it."

Aarav swallowed hard, his vision blurring.

He didn't know what he was looking for when he started listening to her recordings.

But now, he felt like he was on the verge of **finding something real**.

Maybe even **himself**.

He took one last look at the painting before turning away.

There were still **more recordings** to listen to.

And now, more than ever, he wanted to hear her voice again.



5

A Letter Never Sent

The night was still.

Aarav lay on his bed, the MP3 player clutched tightly in his hands. The weight of the day pressed down on him—the painting, the old woman’s words, the quiet yet overwhelming **realization** that Saanvi had been thinking about him all along.

He had spent **years** believing no one saw him.

And yet, a girl he had never truly met had **watched him closely enough to leave behind a message only he could understand.**

His heart ached in a way he couldn’t explain.

The next track was waiting.

With trembling fingers, he scrolled to **Track 5** and pressed **play**.

The Fifth Track – A Letter Never Sent

"Have you ever written a letter and never sent it?"

Saanvi’s voice was soft, tinged with something deeper—**melancholy? Regret?**

"I have. I wrote one for you, actually. But I never had the courage to give it to you."



Aarav's breath **caught** in his throat.

"It's funny, right? I'm the kind of person who speaks her mind, who says things without thinking... but when it came to you, I couldn't find the right words."

A faint rustling noise, as if she were holding a piece of paper.

"I wrote it a few months ago. I think I was too scared of what you'd say, too scared of being ignored, of being just another stranger in your world."

Aarav's chest tightened.

"I wonder if you ever noticed me at all."

A bitter laugh.

"Probably not."

He wanted to scream.

"I don't blame you. You were always lost in your thoughts. Always alone, sitting in the corner of the library, earphones in, shutting the world out. I used to wonder what you were listening to. What kind of songs made you feel something?"

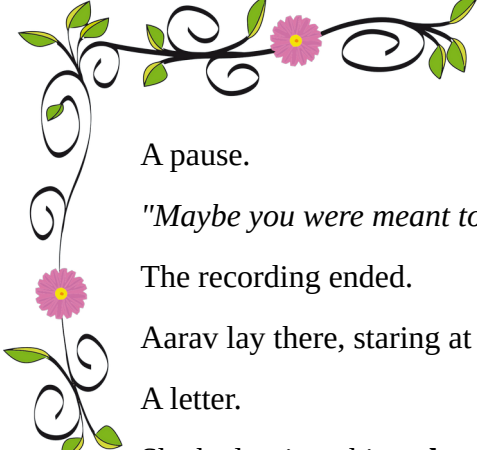
Aarav felt his throat burn.

"I wish I had told you sooner, Aarav. That you weren't invisible. Not to me."

Silence.

A sharp exhale.

"I left the letter somewhere. Maybe one day you'll find it."



A pause.

"Maybe you were meant to."

The recording ended.

Aarav lay there, staring at the ceiling, his heart **racing**.

A letter.

She had written him a **letter**.

And she had left it somewhere.

Waiting for him to **find it**.

Searching for Saanvi's Words

Aarav wasn't sure where to start.

He had been so **distant**, **so unaware** of his surroundings back then. He had never once noticed her watching him, never once felt her presence.

And yet, Saanvi had **left a trace**.

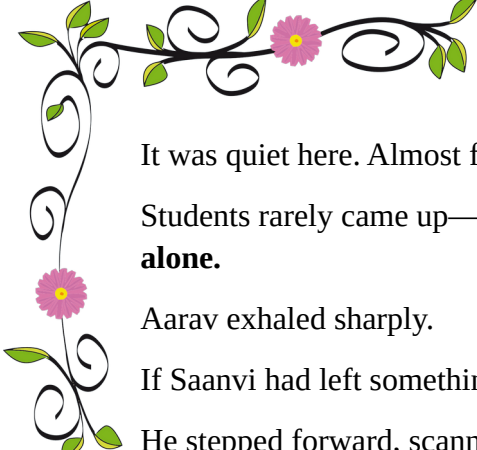
He spent the next few days revisiting places he had been—places Saanvi had mentioned in her recordings.

The library. The café. The old art gallery.

Nothing.

Then, on a cold evening, he found himself at the last place he hadn't checked.

The college rooftop.



It was quiet here. Almost forgotten.

Students rarely came up—except for the ones who wanted to be **alone**.

Aarav exhaled sharply.

If Saanvi had left something for him, this place made **sense**.

He stepped forward, scanning the empty space.

And then—

A small, **yellowed envelope**, tucked inside a crack in the wall.

His heart **slammed** against his ribs as he reached for it.

It had his name on it.

His fingers trembled as he opened the envelope, pulling out the fragile sheet of paper inside.

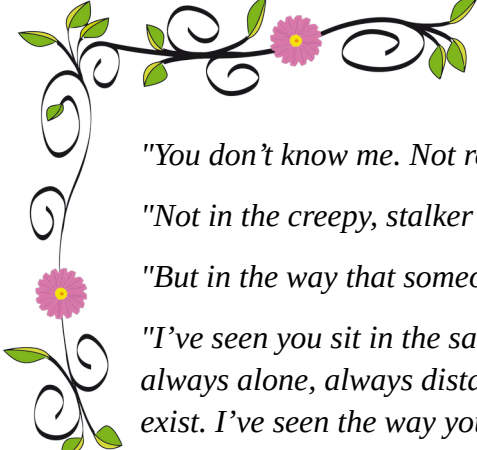
And then, he began to read.

The Letter

"Aarav,"

"If you're reading this, then maybe... just maybe, the universe isn't as random as I thought."

"I don't know why I'm writing this. Maybe because I know I won't have the courage to say it to your face. Maybe because I've always been better at expressing myself through words than through silence. Or maybe because I just need to get these thoughts out before they suffocate me."



"You don't know me. Not really. But I know you."

"Not in the creepy, stalker way—don't worry."

"But in the way that someone notices the things others don't."

"I've seen you sit in the same corner of the library every day, always alone, always distant, as if the world around you didn't exist. I've seen the way you avoid eye contact, the way you keep to yourself, the way you carry an invisible wall around you, daring anyone to break it."

"And I've seen the way you stare at nothing, like you're waiting for something to happen, but you don't even know what."

"I don't know why, but I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to tell you that you don't have to be alone. That someone notices you. That someone cares."

"But I never did."

"Because maybe I was just as scared as you."

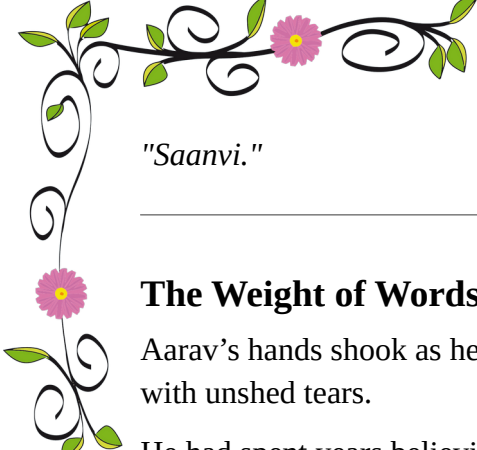
"But if you ever find this letter, Aarav, I want you to do one thing for me."

"Live."

"Don't let life pass you by like a song you weren't paying attention to. Don't keep waiting for something without knowing what it is. Stop surviving and start living."

"And if you ever think of me, just know—I was real. I was here. And for a little while, I saw you when no one else did."

"Goodbye, Aarav."



"Saanvi."

The Weight of Words

Aarav's hands shook as he folded the letter, his eyes burning with unshed tears.

He had spent years believing he was invisible.

And yet, Saanvi had **seen him**.

She had wanted to talk to him.

She had wanted to **be part of his world**.

But now, it was **too late**.

A deep, aching sadness filled his chest.

And yet, beneath it, something else stirred.

Something **warm**.

Something **alive**.

Saanvi was gone.

But her words **remained**.

And maybe—just maybe—he could honor them.

Maybe, for the first time, Aarav could finally start **living**.



6

The Girl in the Photograph

Aarav sat on the rooftop long after reading Saanvi's letter, the words echoing in his mind.

"Live."

She had written it with so much certainty, as if she knew he needed to hear it. But how?

How could someone he never spoke to understand him **so well**?

The air was crisp, carrying the scent of damp concrete from the recent drizzle. He traced his fingers over the aged paper, still trying to process what he had just read.

Saanvi had been watching him. Not in a distant, indifferent way—but truly **seeing** him, understanding the silence he carried.

And now, she was gone.

The thought felt heavier than anything he had ever felt before.

His grip tightened around the letter. He needed to know **more**.

He needed to see her.



A Fading Memory in the College Archives

The next morning, Aarav skipped his usual routine—no library corner, no headphones, no hiding. Instead, he walked straight to the **college archives**.

The records room was old, buried deep in the administrative wing. Hardly anyone came here unless they needed files from years past.

The woman at the front desk barely glanced at him.

"I need information on a student named Saanvi," he said, hesitating. *"She was a junior here last year."*

The woman looked up, frowning.

"Saanvi?" She repeated the name, flipping through an old student record book. *"We don't usually give out details of past students unless there's a specific reason."*

Aarav swallowed. *"She was my friend."*

The lie slipped out before he could stop it.

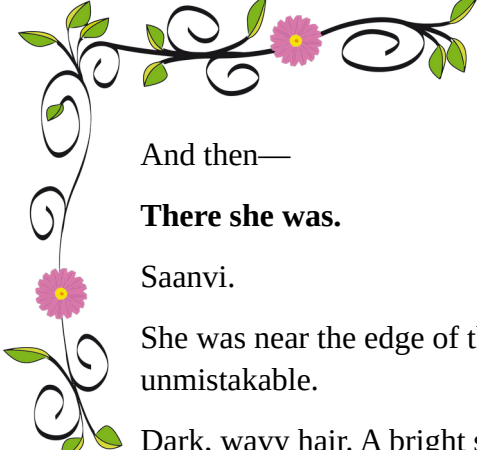
Something in his face must have convinced her, because she sighed and pulled out an old **batch photograph**.

"Here," she said, passing it to him. *"This was last year's group. You'll have to find her yourself."*

Aarav took the photo carefully.

It was slightly faded, the edges curling from age. Rows of students stood in neat lines, their faces bright, full of life.

His eyes scanned the image, heart pounding.



And then—

There she was.

Saanvi.

She was near the edge of the group, slightly out of focus, but unmistakable.

Dark, wavy hair. A bright smile. Eyes that seemed to sparkle even in a black-and-white photograph.

She looked exactly like how her voice had made her seem—
lively, free, as if she belonged to the world, while he had always been trying to escape it.

His fingers brushed over the image.

He had seen her before.

Not just in the recordings, not just in his imagination—he had passed by her in the hallways, sat near her in the cafeteria,
existed in the same space as her.

And yet, he had never really **noticed.**

"I was here. And for a little while, I saw you when no one else did."

Her words struck him all over again.

Aarav clenched the photograph in his hand.

He couldn't stop now.

There had to be **more.**



Chasing Traces of Saanvi

Holding the photograph, Aarav walked across campus, his eyes scanning every corner of the college with **new awareness**.

She had left behind **recordings, a letter, a name carved into a tree**. What else was still out there?

His next stop was **Saanvi's old dormitory**.

The corridor smelled of fresh paint, the walls recently renovated. It was a reminder of how time moved forward, erasing the things people left behind.

Room 203.

Her room.

The door was closed, a new nameplate replacing hers. Someone else lived here now.

Aarav exhaled. He couldn't just walk in.

Instead, he found an old hostel register at the warden's office and traced her name. The list showed her previous roommates.

One name stood out—**Ritika Malhotra**.

He had never spoken to her before, but he had seen her around campus. She was in his year, a confident girl who always seemed surrounded by people.

For the first time in years, Aarav pushed down his hesitation and **approached someone**.



A Conversation He Never Thought He'd Have

He found Ritika in the cafeteria, laughing with a group of friends.

Aarav almost turned around, but then he thought of **Saanvi**.

"Live."

Taking a deep breath, he stepped forward.

"Ritika."

She looked up, surprised. *"Yeah?"*

"I... I need to ask you about Saanvi."

Her expression shifted immediately.

The laughter in her eyes dimmed.

"Saanvi?" she repeated, her voice quieter.

Aarav nodded. *"You were her roommate, right?"*

Ritika hesitated, then nodded. *"Yeah... I was."*

There was a pause. Then, she gestured for him to sit.

He did.

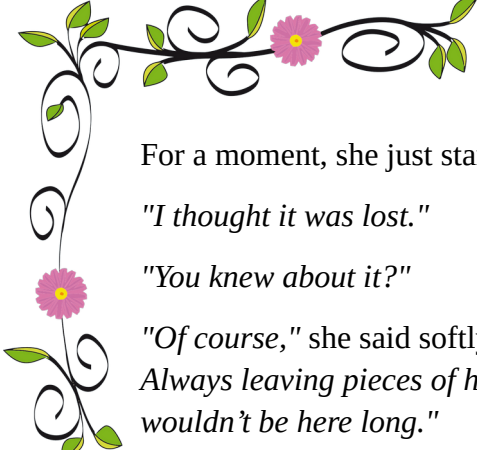
"Why are you asking about her?"

Aarav hesitated. *"She... left something behind. A playlist. Some recordings. I found them."*

Ritika's eyes widened.

"You found her MP3 player?"

Aarav nodded.



For a moment, she just stared at him, then exhaled deeply.

"I thought it was lost."

"You knew about it?"

"Of course," she said softly. "She was always recording things. Always leaving pieces of herself behind, like she knew she wouldn't be here long."

The words sent a chill down Aarav's spine.

"She talked about me," he admitted. "In the recordings. She said she noticed me."

Ritika smiled faintly.

"She did."

Aarav felt something heavy settle in his chest.

"Why?"

Ritika studied him for a moment before speaking.

"Because she liked you."

The world seemed to tilt.

"What?"

Ritika nodded. "She never said it outright, but I could tell. She'd mention you in passing—how you always sat alone, how you never talked to anyone. She wondered what went on in your mind. I think she saw something in you that reminded her of herself."

Aarav's throat went dry.



Saanvi... had liked him?

"Then why didn't she ever talk to me?"

Ritika hesitated, then sighed. *"Because she was scared."*

Aarav blinked. *"Scared? Of what?"*

Ritika's expression softened.

"Of wasting time."

The words hit harder than he expected.

"She knew she didn't have forever, Aarav. She was sick. And she didn't want to spend the little time she had chasing after something uncertain."

Aarav felt his chest tighten.

He thought back to the way she spoke in the recordings—**so full of life, so fearless.**

Yet, when it came to him...

She had hesitated.

"She left you something, didn't she?" Ritika asked.

Aarav nodded, gripping the photograph in his hand.

"Then don't let it go to waste," she said gently.

He didn't plan to.

Not anymore.



7

The Final Message

Aarav walked back to his hostel with slow, measured steps. The conversation with Ritika played in his head like a broken record.

"Because she liked you."

It felt surreal. Impossible, even.

Saanvi had noticed him. She had recorded an entire playlist, whispering pieces of herself into an old MP3 player.

She had left a message—**for him**.

And yet, she had never once spoken to him directly.

Not because she hadn't wanted to—but because she was afraid of wasting time.

The thought made his heart ache in a way he wasn't prepared for.

All these years, he had spent his days avoiding people, content in his isolation. He had convinced himself that connections weren't worth the effort. That loneliness was better than the risk of attachment.

And then came Saanvi—**someone he had never even known properly**—and she had unraveled everything.



Unlocking the Last Track

Aarav sat on his bed, staring at the MP3 player in his hands.

There was only **one** track left.

For the past few days, he had avoided it, hesitant to reach the end. Because once he played it, there would be nothing left of Saanvi except what he carried in his heart.

But he couldn't stop now.

Taking a deep breath, he pressed play.

A faint static crackled, and then—**her voice.**

"Hey, Aarav."

His chest tightened at how familiar it had become.

"If you're listening to this... it means you've made it to the end. I don't know if you ever figured out who I was, but I hope you did."

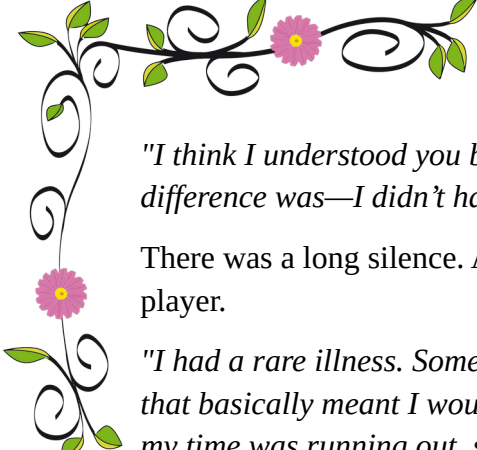
A pause. A soft chuckle.

"You were always so lost in your own world. I remember watching you sit by the library window, your headphones on, staring outside like you were waiting for something to change. But nothing ever did."

Aarav swallowed hard.

"I used to wonder what you were thinking. If you were happy in that silence. Or if you were just... existing."

Her voice softened.



"I think I understood you because I was like that too. But the difference was—I didn't have a choice."

There was a long silence. Aarav's fingers curled around the MP3 player.

"I had a rare illness. Something with a long, complicated name that basically meant I wouldn't live past college. I always knew my time was running out, so I tried to make the most of it. I laughed a little louder, spoke a little more, ran a little faster. Because if I slowed down, I'd remember that I didn't have forever."

A lump formed in Aarav's throat.

"And then... I saw you."

His breathing hitched.

"I used to wonder what would happen if I just sat next to you one day. If I pulled off your headphones and said—'Hey, the world is beautiful, you know? You should come outside and see it.' But I never did."

Aarav's vision blurred.

"I was afraid, Aarav. Not of dying. But of wasting the little time I had chasing after someone who didn't want to be found."

His fingers trembled.

*"But if you're here, if you've found this... then maybe you **do** want to be found."*

A deep breath. Then—

"You were meant to find me... so you could find yourself."



The track ended.

Aarav sat there, gripping the MP3 player so tightly his knuckles turned white.

He wanted to rewind. To hear her voice again. To hold onto her, even if it was just an echo from the past.

But he didn't.

Instead, he closed his eyes and let himself feel it. The weight of her words. The truth in them.

And for the first time in his life, he wasn't afraid of what came next.

He knew what he had to do.

He had to **live**.

The Last Note

Aarav sat in silence long after the final words faded. The empty hum of the speakers filled the room, but inside him, there was only a void—a deep, aching hollow that no sound could fill.

Saanvi was gone.

She had always been gone.

Yet, she had left behind a voice, a story, a secret love buried in melodies.

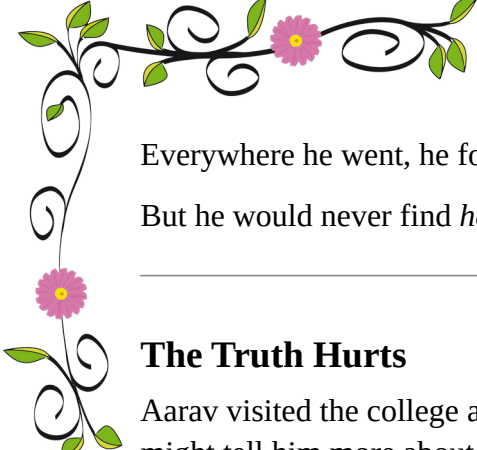
She had loved him. He had never even known her.

And now, he never would.

Chasing Shadows

Over the next few days, Aarav found himself drawn to the places Saanvi had mentioned in her recordings. He retraced the memories she had left behind—footprints in time that had almost faded but still lingered, waiting for someone to find them.

The rooftop where she had once watched the sunset.
The café where she had sat, unnoticed, as he studied alone.
The library where she had picked up a book, pretending to read while secretly stealing glances at him.



Everywhere he went, he found echoes of her.

But he would never find *her*.

The Truth Hurts

Aarav visited the college archives, desperate for anything that might tell him more about her. The librarian handed him a dusty old student record book.

His fingers trembled as he flipped through the pages.

And then—there she was.

Saanvi Sinha. Computer Science, Batch of Last Year.

Her student ID picture stared back at him. Bright eyes, a mischievous smile—full of life, full of everything he never noticed.

Below the entry, a note was scribbled in red ink:

"Deceased. Passed away due to chronic illness – April 18, last year."

Aarav's heart clenched. April 18. That was today.

Exactly one year.

Tears blurred his vision. It was almost cruel—like fate had led him here, only to break him apart in the end.

He wanted to argue. Wanted to scream.

But time had never been on his side.

It had never been on Saanvi's either.



The Final Goodbye

That evening, Aarav walked to the park, where Saanvi's name was still carved into the old oak tree.

He sat beneath it, holding the MP3 player close. The device felt heavier now—not just plastic and circuits, but memories, confessions, a love story that never had the chance to begin.

For the last time, he pressed play.

Her voice filled the air.

"You were meant to find me, so you could find yourself."

Aarav closed his eyes, letting the words sink in.

Saanvi had lived, even if it was brief. She had loved, even if she never got to say it out loud.

And in some strange, heartbreaking way, she had saved him.

Aarav had spent his whole life drowning in silence, in loneliness, in routines that made life feel like a blur.

But now, because of her, he had learned to listen.

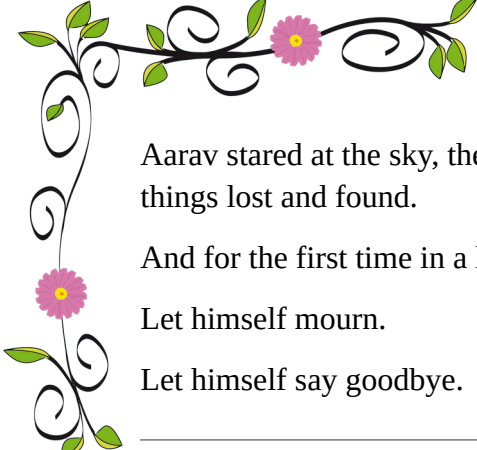
To see.

To feel.

A single tear slipped down his cheek. "I wish I had noticed you sooner, Saanvi."

The MP3 player clicked, the recording coming to an end.

Silence.



Aarav stared at the sky, the stars flickering like distant echoes of things lost and found.

And for the first time in a long time, he let himself cry.

Let himself mourn.

Let himself say goodbye.

Epilogue: A Song for Saanvi

Months passed. Seasons changed.

Aarav wasn't the same person anymore. He had friends now—people who made him laugh, who pulled him out of his head and into the world. He spoke more. Smiled more. Lived more.

But every year, on April 18th, he returned to the park, sat beneath the old oak tree, and played Saanvi's recordings.

Because even though she was gone—

She had never truly left.

And neither had her voice.