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To Tam, the calm in my storms.

To Avantika, the mirror that showed me my worth.

And to you, dear reader,

may you lose yourself in these pages

only to find a piece of your soul waiting at the end.

A NEW BEGINNING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

On a rainy day in Goa, I was sitting in the balcony, admiring the raindrops. The air was thick, heavy with the scent of wet soil, and I felt an odd calmness settle over me. I lit a cigarette, the tip glowing warm orange against the grey backdrop.

The rain had a way of washing everything clean, but today, it only seemed to stir up what I'd tried to bury.

Suddenly I feel a vibration in my pocket. I thought to myself it would be just another college related message. But something in my heart was telling me to check the notification. And there it was, my heart skipped a beat as I read the message. **"Can we be strangers again?"**

I felt a familiar ache, like an old wound reopening. I sighed, slipping the phone back into my pocket, and found myself lost in thoughts of my past—a time filled with extreme emotions of ecstasy and doubt.

Every small detail about my past, be it the lows or the highs reminded me of her, the girl who touched my heart deeply. Her presence was a mix of happiness and heartache, and even though it left a scar, it was beautiful in its own painful way.

"She helped shape the person I am today," I thought, feeling a strange blend of nostalgia and longing.

The rain drummed steadily, like a familiar rhythm underscoring the quiet echoes of my memories. I smiled a little, remembering how we would laugh at the simplest things, how she lit up even the darkest of my days. But just as swiftly, the sadness crept back in—bringing with it the memory