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*Three minutes* is all it takes- the entire crowd around goes numb, the masses surrounding you rushing to their workplaces take a step back, and the visitors get ready with their cameras to capture the moment of the captivity of human architecture. This is how every day is- life feels like a cassette that has been stuck in a radio player- a loop is all it is- observing the world and being a part of it. Among this chaos, I stood with my finger wrapped around by the most significant part of me- a part which connected me to my roots- a part that makes the loop pleasant.

As I slowly watched the blue blend with the white, I saw the world resume with its usual lifestyle as the London Bridge fell down. The rods folded slowly- every second of the fall tested the patience of the

population surrounding the monument. Everyone took a breath of relief and stress at once as the bridge unfolded entirely. It is ironic that continuing with the loop of life is sweet and sour at once.

"Mom, let's walk," Agasthya- my eight-year-old son, pulled my finger as we continued to walk across the bridge. The weather was getting colder every second as the intensity of the wind and snow elevated. I could feel my cheeks turn red and my right hand brittle as I tried to match the speed of my son- surpassing the speed of the multitude.

"You want to take a roundabout at Brindisa before heading to the museum?" I offered- I couldn't fight against the urge to have something warm to defy the cold. For the past eight years- since when I got married and started to live in London- Tapas Brindisa has become my go-to place to have any time snack.

"Okay, but we are not missing the show again," at the end of the day, Agasthya was my son- the Universe belonged to him while he belonged to the Universe. Some people said that Agasthya was my exact mirror

image- but it was me who could see the similarity between him and his father in every little action. I smiled in his direction, nodding my head to agree. It is weird how just a short walk across London Bridge can make you meet many different aspects of life- some on the corner are sitting and just observing the fast world around them, and some are a part of the fast world, trying to make their own identity among the populace. The irony is- if you have stayed in London for long, you have been a part of both of these contrasting masses at some point in time.

As I looked at the world around me, trying to keep track of Agasthya, my eyes stopped moving for a minute second. It felt like I saw someone- and a chilling sensation ran through my spine. Someone who was the central dot in the pattern of my life. A dot that I have been trying to erase for a long time- Did I just see *him*?

For that particular second, I forgot who I was, and where I was- my brain could not keep track of the neurons, and my heart could not keep track of my blood. I could not move- I was too numb to feel my legs and too excited to decide the direction. The

blood circulation in my feet elevated, and still, it felt like I was losing balance and might fall any second. I could discern everything and nothing at the same time. It felt like a movie- the world around me stopped moving for that nanosecond, and all that played in my mind was that dwarf glimpse of those eyes that were the most familiar to me since I started to write the story of my life.

I took a step back to process what I just saw. I fantasized about this moment for years but never imagined that this sudden encounter would happen on London Bridge on a random cold winter day. My body started to shiver, and I pulled Agasthya to stop moving as I saw my past walk(run) across the magnificent piece of architecture in my direction. Of course, he recognized me, how could he not?

As he came and stood in front of me- it took me a good second to transfer the sensation from my heart to my mind. The same brown eyes- through which I could see his past- our past- the pain, the smiles, the guilt, the butterflies, everything. He looked confused-eager-sad-happy- he looked like everything-

everything but mine. It was visible in his expressions that it was hard for him to find words.

"Sahaana?" He said (my name is what he settled on) in his deep voice, which acted as dopamine to my mind and adrenaline to the rest of my body. It is strange how a single sight of someone who now exists nowhere but your photo album can turn you into the same person you used to be, how the strong layer that took years for you to build around yourself suddenly breaks with them just calling out your name.

"Kabir?" I said with my heart sinking down my chest- something was happening in my stomach- the butterflies that took me years to kill suddenly came out of their graves and tickled throughout the length of my body.

"Mom, who is he?" Agasthya broke my attention, pulling my finger toward him. I looked in his direction- but was speechless- so I turned my head back to Kabir, trying to find a common dictionary.

"Dad, who is this lady?" said a small girl, who would hardly be three, standing next to Kabir. My heart

broke swiftly, looking at this beautiful little girl- even when I was trying to be happy for Kabir, I could not control the tear that was trying to escape my right eye in this brittle cold. I looked at the girl, grinned at her, and consequently turned my gaze to Kabir.

We both were too numb to answer- we both looked at each other's occupied hands and turned around to look into each other's changed lives through our eyes- both our minds transversed back to the time when our lives *felt like poetry*.

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←←←16 YEARS AGO →→→

## ««« 2 »»»»

"But how many more stacks will you pile up?" shouted my mom as I sat in the corner of the room with the most recent addition to the stack. My room had its own unique aesthetic- there was a certain eloquent smell that you could sense as you set foot into the doorway to my Universe (my room)- a smell that could help you distinguish between the old and the new books- a smell that marked a clear boundary between the inside and the outside world. There were lights that selectively lit the parts of my life that I wanted to shine- my bookshelf. The majority of my room was not occupied by the bed but by the bookshelf that I had been building up for my lifetime.

I decided to keep the color of my room blue- which signified my love for the Universe. The walls were not

just covered by the color of the ocean but also by the pictures of the individuals that motivated me to stick to the path I chose for myself- the path of solving the mysteries of the cosmos. Even the mirror in my room (opposite my bed) was surrounded by books that took me deeper into Astronomy. If I looked into my reflection or tried to take a mirror selfie- I was predominantly covered by the books of my favorite authors. Looking into the mirror- I did not just see an Indian girl with brown eyes and hair that resembled the exact color of my eyes, with eyelashes a little longer and a skin tone lighter than usual- but a girl written by the authors of her treasured books.

"I'll adjust them somewhere," I told my mom without looking at her- still reading the back cover of the recent addition of John Green that I made to my shelf. I heard the footsteps of my mom leaving the room- she was most probably going to take her afternoon nap.

Being a bookaholic- I was highly possessive about my stack- but the rest was left for the world to do. I would not call myself an unhygienic person, but I could not say the contrary either. I would always arrange my books according to their color, genre, or alphabets, but

one would never find them unorganized sitting on the white wood in my room. As I was arranging my books, I saw the screen of my phone pop open- there was a notification- I did not open it right away. I took a deep breath before unlocking my phone.

As I saw the name 'Amir' through my half-opened eyes, I smiled a little and closed my phone as fast as I could. I felt a nervous excitement through my limbs looking at that name. Amir and I have been talking for a few days now. Lately, I have been feeling that Amir has been trying to take this friendship a step ahead. Maybe I am just overthinking. But talking to Amir helps me escape from reality. He feels like a place of comfort- a person of solace. Even though it's just been a month since I have been talking to him- but my teenage self feels like I have found the final person of respite for myself. I controlled my smile and opened my phone again.

"Back from school?" he said- about a couple of minutes ago,

"Yes," I said, driving myself out of my school uniform and changing into my clothes of comfort. I would graduate high school in two years, and each day of

mine was spent counting how near I was to my graduation, even when I was nowhere near to graduating.

"What did you do today?" he said. The best part about Amir was that he always wanted to know more about *me*. He did not just find me as a person to pass his time, but someone with a fascinating personality who deserved to be known.

"..." He was still typing, so I waited for him to complete his sentence,

"Want to meet sometime?" he said. A sudden grin came to my face, but it faded within seconds. Even though I liked talking to Amir, I was not sure if I could meet him. Not because I did not want to, but because I have never met a boy individually. Yes, at school maybe- but never beyond school and friends. Neither will my parents would encourage me to go out to meet a boy alone at this age. I have never even had a proper video call with Amir- meeting him was not an option.

I replied to the first message. I told him how I almost fought against my batchmate debating on a topic in

Astronomy, and how I broke my record of maximum goals in basketball.

"Great :)" He replied. I left him on seen and went back to my books. While arranging 'Looking for Alaska,' and 'Turtles all the way down,' in the right order, I was thinking of Amir's second message- his idea of meeting in person. As a fifteen-year-old meeting an older guy was a big deal for me. I was quite sure about the fact that my parents won't let me meet him and I did not want to break their trust. But a part of me really wanted to meet him and understand his true personality.

While completing the task, the screen of my phone lit up again, peeping into the screen I saw two question marks, "??" by Amir. I opened his chat but still was stuck in my thoughts. I could not talk about it with my parents because I knew they would never understand, and I hadn't talked about him among friends as I was scared they would judge me for talking to an older guy outside of school. My best friend- Kiara, has been in Hong Kong for the past four months to visit her father, and we haven't been in contact. Maybe I'll call her and talk about it.

I checked the time in Hong Kong- it was definitely not the right time to make a call. I switched back to Amir's chat and looked at the two question marks. I decided to introduce him to my friends group the next day and then tell him my final decision.

"Umm... I have a test tomorrow, we'll talk later?" I lied,

"Okay :)" he said. I loved that Amir never questioned me twice.

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"But, doesn't he look too old?" said Emily as I tilted my phone toward her and saw Ahana make a face at Amir's image as well,

"He is just nineteen, maybe three years older than us," I said in Amir's defense,

"He looks older," said Zayn

Telling my friends was a bad idea- but I did not have any other choice. If I wanted to meet Amir today, I needed someone's opinion. Though, I am not sure how impartial my friends would be. Since the past few years I have spent most of my time with Kiara, and I did not really bond with others. They do not know much

about me, but they know enough to judge if I should meet a guy like Amir.

We were sitting in the student lounge of my school. As it was exclusive hours for higher grades, the lounge was not very crowded. During this hour- the classes for medical students were going on in the lecture hall, and as none of us wanted to be doctors in the future except for Bella- the rest of us sat freely in the lounge, waiting for our lunch to arrive.

"I mean- if you want to, you can- depends on how close you are with him," said Riya smiling in my direction.

Riya understood me the best out of all the seven members of the group. She had been my friend for the past year and had been loyal to one guy named Neil since I had known her. She has been with him since we were in middle school, and even when Neil is not from our school, they make teenage relationships look so simple. She is my inspiration when it comes to making things work out at the worst.

"I mean, he is quite good when it comes to talking," I said, thinking of all the conversations I have had with Amir so far,

"Smooth talkers make you land into the deepest trap like butter," stated Zayn, making the most judgemental face he could. I gave him the gaze of a cat looking sharply at its prey.

"Don't team up against her," said Riya shielding me, I understood the point that my friends were making. Amir had the countenance of an elderly person, but he did not look *that old*. He had a slight beard surrounding the region of his mouth, and the rest of his face was not downright clean-shaved- it still had hair but not as much in volume- it made him look a little like Zac Efron. His skin complexion was wheatish, and the color of his eyes looked black through the eye of the camera. His eyes were the most attractive part of his body, they had a more profound touch to them than any usual human being- it seemed like they had their own story. His eyelashes complimented his beard, and he wore black thin-rimmed glasses to protect his eyes. I don't know if his eyes were weak because even in his pictures without the glasses, the shape of his eyes did

not change. They might be the blue-ray glasses to protect his eyes against the seamless effect of a screen. His nose pin-pointed toward the center and ran straight from the middle of his eyes to the edge of his lips- his lips were of the color of a newborn rose and bent in the most alluring way possible.

I was thinking deeper into it when the bell rang, and it was time for the Astronomy lecture- my lecture. I decided to make it a rose-petal decision and follow my heart while replying to his text when I reached home.

On my way to the lecture hall, I talked with Riya about the situation, and instead of making an outskirt judgment on the situation, she heard my side of the story and put herself in my shoes. She said if I had confidence in Amir's personality, the thought process of my friends shouldn't be stopping me. Frankly, I could not concentrate on my lecture- I should make this decision as fast as I can.

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I reached home thinking about Amir's situation. I landed my bag on the corner next to my bed and removed my shoes near the shoe shelf in the closet in my room. I decided to not touch my phone until I was completely ready to look at his text. Instead, I had lunch and picked up a book by Stephen Hawking on the top of my bookshelf. The title read 'Blackholes and Small Worlds,' sounded interesting, and a little contrary to the usual nature of blackholes. Ironic- just like my life.

I read through the first chapter and tried to understand the role of singularity in the existence of a black hole. How a singularity is the protagonist of the entire storyline of a blackhole- how it is not affected by the presence of any other matter around it - and no matter how big the object is, it tries to pull it(the object) toward itself, no matter how fast it is (even light). Just like the singularity, I am the main character of my story, and instead of getting affected by the words of my pals, I should be the one making the decisions for myself. Even if things go south- it should be me who is responsible for the anti-direction.

I finally took a deep breath and picked up my phone. I took longer than usual to unlock it and did not directly click on the green icon named Whatsapp, instead- I lingered through other applications and read through some recent news articles. I was reading about how a lake was stolen in a city in India when a drop-down notification showed itself on my screen. It was a message from Amir.

"Back home?" he asked. Instead of ignoring his texts, I decided to reply,

"Yes,"

"How was the test?" he asked,

Test? Oh, the test I lied about, "Good," I said, lying again,

"You sound bland, all good?" he questioned,

"Yeah, pretty good," I lied for the third time,

"Did you think upon the meeting situation?" he asked. I inhaled all the air I could, closed my eyes, and opened them when I made a final call,

"Let us meet this weekend," I said. I will think about the problem with my parents later, maybe discuss it with Riya.