

With Failure, Comes Success

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To my Mom, who has experienced Pakistan with many troubles, and now has become a great writer.

PROLOGUE

I opened my closet, crying- while thinking, “what was I made to do in this world? Am I not supposed to go to America? I mean, I worked so hard - I- I-” I sighed. “No, no. No!” I started throwing pillows, clothes, everywhere around my room. Ripping my favorite mini purse I sewed when I was little. Ruining everything. Crying.

“Failure!” I scream, although I should be screaming at myself, I screamed at the window. Staring at the car.

“I. Am. Useless.” I say. Then I bury my face in my pillow wondering, “why are there so many other stupid famous people out there, who can get and do whatever they want? I’m pointless. I calm myself down, then I start crying not even 2 seconds after.

“Wow- I- I’m really useless, aren’t I?” I sniffle.

“You know what. This diary is going away. I’m throwing you in the trash can. “Good. Bye. Actually, it’s not good. It’s sad. Okay-bye.” **I threw this Diary away. Well guess what? Almost twenty minutes later I came right back to write more.- From future Hana.**

THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER ONE: CURRENT LIFE

1992- 8 years old 9/16/1994

Dear Diary...

CURSHHHH. SHHHWISHHH "Save yourself! We will die! Hurry!" I rushed inside for dear life as thunder crackled and more water flooded the area. Flood. Flood. Flood. So many floods. "Ammi!" I scream. "Jannooh!" Says mama.

"Bhai! Agho! Thum kia kariho?" I call and ask my brother. *What was he doing? Why was he outside trying to help the old man? Has he gone insane? Mentally?*

"Hana!" Mama screams to save me from zoning out-and from the big wave.

"Undher! Inside! Aghoo!" Mama screams."DAUHHR" The sound of lightning crackles.

He's.. gone.

Hi. I'm Hana. I am eight years old. My Ammi was born in Karachi, and my Abu was born in Islamabad. My Abu went to places all over world. Like Singapore, Indonesia, Amroha, South Korea, and even in Idaho, and Maine, in USA. My Ammi just stays home making biryani, kitchari, butter chicken, and roti. I am top in my Math class, and English. My

brother died a few months ago, in an extreme flooding situation. Ever since then, I've been getting 90's on all of my tests. No 100's, no 101's, not even a 99. It's just... *Depressing* without him. We have been to five other funerals since his death. My mom's sister's, friend's husband died. Even one of my cousins died in a car crash during another flood. Life in Pakistan is *fun*, when you have the ability to *forget* all the *trauma* within a few years of your life. I want to see the USA. I bet millions of people don't die from floods happening week after week. At least I hope.

My sister Anah always says I'm wrong. Anah is a famous Model, who made it to beauty magazines *and* billboards in NYC! I want to be like her. Well, not like-like her. But I want to be on New York's Times Best Seller List. I want to write a book that really draws attention. A book that has a lesson. A story with action. A story- "Hana! Come! We are going to Nani Ammi's house" Screams Mama. Grandma's House. I don't want to go. They make me drink chai, *although I'm not too bothered by it*, I'm not in the mood for chai. I'm in the mood for studying, and getting one hundred on my English test. I'm just missing one thing. Motivation. I need time to think. *How do I study? Who do I study with?* For now, I'll just open my book and start reading. *That might be the best start.*

CHAPTER TWO: TETS
1994- 10 years old 2/4/1994

Dear Diary..

We had an English test yesterday. A math test the day before yesterday. Now, we have a Grammar test and a science test tomorrow! Tests. Does anyone really like tests? I mean, what a cruel thing. We work so hard to get good grades in these assignments, now, we have to take a test that is "30%" of our whole grade! Who would give a test that is 30% of our entire grade? A rude Russian/Pakistani teacher. That's who.

Not to be rude to other Russian/Pakistani teachers, but the one we have, should not be teaching. A *Police officer* would be a better fit. I found a great way to study. My Grammar teacher, who's my *favorite*, taught me how. It's simple, just write an essay. Then try to correct anything that I think is wrong. Then, look back in the book, and look at all the rules to see if I missed anything. If I do, I will correct it. If one of the grammar rules did not apply to what I wrote, I would write another essay which would have that rule.

My teacher told me to constantly repeat that rule, over and over again. That's How I study my grammar. I just need to find a way to do that with my math, science, and English. RING! DING! RING! DING! The bell goes. So many students chatting,

running, walking, and dropping stuff as they get to class. I open my locker but to see an open crevice, with a rat awaiting. I *would* scream, but I'm too used to it. I took out my lunch box, and gave him some of my cheese from my cheese-kabab sandwich. I usually just have a plain kabab sandwich, but my mother bought a lot of cheese, lattice, and ketchup for cheap.

I ran to Math class, hoping to get my favorite seat. Next to the one window with the best view in the entire classroom and- Ahaana took it. Of course she did! And of course she can eat her "yummy garlic pizza rolls" . Ok, to be honest, I want to try one sooo bad! But, then again, *of course* she won't give me one bite. She has four of them! WHAT makes it worse, is that the math teacher is Ahaana's mom. The math teacher, Mrs. Amin.Or, Sister Amin. I still find it awkward calling her Sister Amin, while sometimes I call her Mrs. Amin. It's confusing. "Ok, time to open up your books and go to page 436."

We all open our books and start filling in the answers. $7x + -8 = 16$. WHAT? I forgot how to do algebra in just a 4 day weekend. Ramadan is in 7 days. Just a week. I won't be able to eat. How will I study? Whatever, I should just focus on what's going on right now.. right?

Wrong. Wrong, Wrong ,Wrong. I was wrong. Turns out, my tests have been pushed to the first day of Ramadan! How stupid can these people really be? It's not like we are in America! I sighed. I just wished.. Wishes... wished... wishes... wait, what was I saying? Oh yeah! I just wished, well one, I wouldn't doze off, two, for this community, to just-, just-, be-better. I step out of my dad's car and hope to see my best friend in the parking lot- yet, she wasn't there. I only have 2 friends.

One is in my Grammar class, one is in my science class and english. I also made a "kinda" friend in french. We are not besties, but we are not strangers. We usually talk, or partner up when we have a group project. Her name is Maheen. My other friend who I have been with since 1st grade, is Zainab. She is in two of my classes.

The one who is just in my math class, is named Sana. Such pretty names, and then just me. Hana. Nothing special. There are many Zainabs too, but it just sounds so beautiful, and as if it's the most graceful name, but mine- just seems normal. Sana and Maheen sound so generous, and graceful, like a golden sheep. I could never be worthy of being a golden sheep.

"Hana!" Zainab and Sana call out. "Hmm?" I replied, wondering where are they and why I hear them?

“Helloo?” Zainab says, tapping my shoulder.

“Oh hi!” I say. Also wondering how they got there.

“Did you zone out again? We’ve been calling your name and tapping on your shoulder for almost 15 minutes.” Says Sana.

“Ohh, that’s why I heard you so ‘scream’ when I zoned back in!” I said.

“Guess what! You know how the principle moved the big tests to the first day of Ramadan? Well Mrs. Aman managed to change the grammar test back to today!” Siad Zainab.

“Really?”

“Yeah!” they both said.

Also, don’t mix the two teachers up. Mrs. Amin is the math teacher, Mrs. Aman is the grammar teacher. I think Mrs. Aman is the best teacher. She has helped me so much! She helped me petition for school snacks, she told me ways to study, she gave me private tutoring lessons, and well, you get the point.

“Ugh!” said Ahaana. Yes, her locker is just two lockers away from me. And Sana and Zainab’s locker are diagonal from each other! And their lockers are in the other hallway! How annoying.

“What?” says Zainab.

“My mom keeps packing me an orange! I even told her to stop! And she keeps forgetting to put the kabab in my pizza rolls!” Ahaana complains.

“So give it to us!” Sana says giggling.

“Fine! Here! Good thing my mom packed five today or else I would be even more starving.. Actually. I don't hate these, so.. Hana, you can have the orange. That saves three pizza rolls for me! Bye!”

“Is she for real?” Says Zainab.

“Here, I'm not hungry. Plus, I dont like food touched by Ahaana. But I'll take the orange, since it has a peel on it.” She gave me the pizza roll and took the orange. Then she left.

“That was weird..” I say. I turned around and saw Sana had left too. No one was in the hallway. I gasp. The bell! I'm in school! I need to get to class! How could I forget that?! AND a double oops, because grammar is first! I rushed to grammar class, got a board and a test and started writing. *That might be the best start.*

CHAPTER THREE: SECOND DAY OF RAMADAN
1994, 10 years old 6/13/1994

Dear Diary..

It's a tuesday. We have a science test today. I will surely fail- given that I don't understand half of what we are learning, my teacher said he would tutor me but never did, and I studied only for 2 days. Also, what I studied didn't make any sense to me! I practically wasted my time studying something I don't understand, although you would think studying would help me understand, yet it was the *complete opposite*.

"Heyy!" said a familiar voice. Although I didn't know who it was until-

"Did you work on the slideshows for french food?" It was Maheen!

"The slideshow..? Oh! The slideshow! Yes, I worked on three more slides on Sunday." I replied.

"Great! SO now I'll just work on the last two slides and we'll be done three days before the due date!"

"Yeah, new record!" I replied. We high-fived and went to class. I opened my locker to get my notebook before I rushed to class-*obviously* late.

"Ok, Open your books to page 438. Do Page 438-503, ok?" Five pages of work? Is Mrs. Amin okay? Did she disown Ahaana? Why is she so happy?

Only five pages? Wait.. what if.. Only two pages of homework today.. “EEK!” I said A bit too loudly. Everyone stared at me. A little embarrassing, but– It’s okay. I turned around to see Delilah, a former student who has had many ancestors and relatives come to this school, pulling on my hair.

“How is your hair so black and silky..” She said.

“Uhh, I.. like your..shoes?” I say, awkwardly because I thought we were complimenting each other.

“We’re wearing the same shoes..” Delilah says.

“No, yours are Mary Janes. Mine are fake ones.” I say.

“Uhm.. ok..” She backs into her seat. Was that weird to say? That my Mary Janes were fake? Whatever. It’s fine.. Right? My stomach started grumbling. I’m hungry. Even though I ate Parata and two eggs, and an apple! My mother hides apples from me because whenever we get them, she says I eat all of them within three days. But, why does she only get 5-10 apples? Get twenty apples. Or thirty. Five to ten is never enough. RING RING! Goes the bell. I’m tired as heck– and hungry as well. Time for Grammar class. The best class of all. Zainab comes over to me, and she–

“Help. Help. Help. I got a 96 on my math test. My Ammi will kill me. She will turn me into a kebab!” Zainab says.

“Calm down, you did better than me. I got a 92.” I say. Hopefully calming her down just a tad bit, and-

“I DON’T CARE! I’M GOING TO DIE!” She screamed at the top of her lungs. She opened her locker, then just slammed it close. Welp, that’s one way to get your anger out, I guess? I’m just confused how she had that kinda power to open a locker, just to slam it again. I mean, she’s fasting too. RING! RING! Goes the bell, again. Time to walk very slowly like a toad to grammar class.

I walk into the grammar classroom and see Mrs. Aman Doing a weird dance.. How.. interesting? Zain, my childhood neighborhood friend, eyed at me motioning with his hands to sit next to him. It felt awkward to go up to the third row and sit next to him.

I haven't gotten the chance to really speak to Zain, he went on a one month trip to the USA since his cousins and grandma lived there. Also since life in general gets busy at times, it's hard to talk and spend time with your friends that aren't in many of your classes within school. Some people say that we like each other. Bleh. Ew. He's a great friend, and I've done so much with him, like eating, playing games, talking for hours about random stuff, traveling together, and so much more. But that doesn't mean we like each other.

“Ok, ok, that's enough. Now, I want everybody to continue sharing the most funniest memory of your life. Or one of them. We left off on.. Hana. Right?” Said Mrs. Aman.

I walk to the front of the class and begin my story.

“So, this is an interesting..story. My father told me this, so, it may not be the exact perspective. So, one day, I was just walking on the streets of Karachi, when I saw someone smoking. I thought to myself, I would look cool if I did so. So, I do what any other four year old would do. And yes, I was four at the time. I asked my father if I could smoke. And he said ‘It would ruin your hard working lungs, and beautiful olive skin.’

Although I completely ignored him, and kept begging him. So he saw a cigarette outlet, and took me there. He whispered to the cashier, to give him a fake cigarette for me. He then gave it to me, but before letting me smoke the ‘cigarette’, he tried it first to make sure it was fake. He smoked it. And it was real. So he didn't pay, and shoved the cigarette up the cashier's nose and went outside, there was a bag of dog poop on the floor. How.. lovely.

Of course, being the very kind person my father is, he smacked him 36 times with the dog poop. That was how old my father was. The cashier then got a concussion. My Abu high fived me, and mumbled to himself, ‘just pretend he's drunk’ Over and over again. I then asked what drunk means. He

said, you describe people with it. So it means, someone who needs a life. And one day my friend's father got drunk. And she told me. Then I said, your father really needs a life. She cried and never talked to me again. So that's how to lose a friend, drive your dad crazy, give someone a concussion, all in one day."

- **This was called the cigarette story. Best time ever. Also, I still have the bright olive skin that my dad told me I had. - Future Hana**

The students laughed. Laughed. Giggled. Fell out of chairs. I chortled. Then I sat back down. "Ok Ok, that was a very.. Interesting story." Mrs. Aman said.

When I sat down, I did something I thought I would never do, I wished I was not me. I wished I had the confidence of my sister. I wish I was as pretty as Sania, who is practically the school heartthrob right now. I wish I had the Bravery of Zainab. I wish I had the voice of Sana, and I wish I was prettier. Just imagine, me, a girl with thick "luscious" hair, (according to Zainab) but really I just have brown thick hair, thick eyebrows, clear olive skin, nude lips, one piercing, with this one pimple that is so stubborn it has been there for a week, was a different person.

Imagine I had black silky long hair, with blond highlights, a nose piercing, a green shirt with the-

uhm.. Oh yes! Horseshoe jeans. Or.. flared jeans? I don't know.. But with hoop earrings, then the newest phone.. And all of those personalities I just mentioned, into one person. That's who I want to be.

RING! RING!

Time for science. I waved at Zain and left the classroom. I am so done. There is no possible way I will pass this test. I'm starving, I forgot what the test is even about, and I forgot that the test was this period, I thought it was after lunch, so I could have Zainab and Sana talk to me about it before the test. Plus, Sana and Zainab had taken the test last period. Did the timings change? Or am I going crazy? Or both? I walked to science class and took any seat. I stare at all the smart students, hoping they somehow magically look at me, smile, and tell me everything I need to know. But of course, who would do that? It's pakistan. No one is that nice. I bet they would be kinder in the US. Right?

“Sit down everyone.” Says Mr. Amini. I have never been so scared to take a test before. Mr. Amini hands out the tests and my heart drops. Twenty questions.. On each page? Usually it's only fifteen, or if he is in a great mood, it's only ten per page. Five pages. One hundred questions. That's a new record. The highest amount I've ever taken was 68

questions. I look at the first question and fill it in. I'm gonna fail. I'm gonna fail. I suck. I can't do this. Ok Ok, Ok, Ok, stop badmouthing yourself Hana! You know what? Maybe, I should keep all this stuff in the garbage, and focus on the test. *That might be the best start.*

CHAPTER FOUR: MY SISTER COMES TO VISIT AND
DOES NOTHING BUT EMBARRASS ME

1994- 10 years old - 2/25/1994

Dear Diary..

My sister seems to really hate me. She's visiting for a month! Yesterday in school she decided to put a kebab burger in my backpack- even though she knew I was fasting. I was surprised that they even just allowed her to waltz in. I decided to look in it and see if I could save it for iftar but she jumped in front of me and shot tomato sauce right in my face, and I almost swallowed some.

Apparently my sister had a "great legacy" here. Well she has a terrible legacy at cooking I'll say. The kebab was burnt, and put on it. At least the good thing was that it didn't look too appetizing, so I wasn't too tempted to eat it. But I was still hungry so I had some brain cells telling me to break my fast and eat, but I had other brain cells telling me to get back at my sister. My other-other brain cells were telling me to just stop thinking about food and revenge and quickly do my homework so I won't have to do it at home. And yes, I thought of all of this within two seconds.

My brain can think really fast, or slower than our microwave. And our microwave doesn't work. For now at least, it used to work so well! But I was always playing with it, like I would always mash up

bananas, mix cinnamon, (which was expensive so I only used a bit) flour, and eggs. It made this delicious banana treat. I made it almost every week. Sometimes, I would sell my little poems and stories. I would write it on a nice piece of paper, then use clay as a cover and sew it together. I even made some.. Interesting sculptures.

Surprisingly, people would pay quite a lot, since they thought it was cool that a “minor” created a fantastic piece of art. Anyways, when I made some money off of that, my father would let me buy extra supplies for my banana pastry. I also did the same but with strawberries, and vanilla extract instead of cinnamon. Again, my mom said only if i can earn some money, I can buy these “useless' ' things. Although my baking is much better than my mother's, she still tells me to not cook until I'm thirteen.

So I continue cooking and my mother says, “I thought I told you not to cook until you are thirteen?”

Then I stood there confused, saying, “yeah..?”

“So the why are you cooking?” She asked and then I remember i said,

“I'm baking though..”

And then she yelled at me.

Anyways, I need to find out how to get revenge on my sister. Anah. I understand why our names are like that. Hana, is Anah backwards, or “the exact opposite”. It really does apply to us. Anah is completely different from me. Who knew, being

seven years apart from your sassy older sister could end up being so successful, but definitely not in faith. I had never imagined my sister would grow up and be this kind of person. I thought she would be loyal, kind, and *not* bossy. Yet she is quite the exact opposite of that.

Although, she is quite pretty. Her bright chai colored skin, her luscious black long hair, (unlike my frizzy short black hair) her blue hoop nose piercing, her blue and purple-marbled-french tip, she even dyed her butterfly bangs pink. Her bright pink lips. Her flawless jawline. Her hair is naturally wavy, but mine is straight. I asked my mother if I could dye my hair a fun color, and get butterfly bangs like Anah.

My mother said I could, but my hair needs to grow past shoulder length for it to look as good as Anah's. So now I'm determined. I asked my mother to oil my hair everyday two days ago. With coconut oil. She said okay. But she was definitely lying since we don't even have coconut oil. Sadly, she refused to buy more. I just hope by the end of Ramadan my hair will be three or four more inches longer. Which probably won't happen. Oh well.

"Hana give me your hair brush"

"No."

"Give it NOW!"

"Wait, I'm using it! You don't have your own?"

"Stop asking stupid questions and just give it!" Then she tackled me to the ground.

"Ammi!!" I screamed.

“Shush! Now give it to me!” She covered my mouth but I just slid under her, easily escaping her little.. “Jail” she “trapped” me in. I was so tempted to kick her but, (literally) but then Ammi came and stopped her. Thank God.

“Go to hell!” Anah screamed at me. My mom sent her to the guest room. I locked the door and cried. Anah has never spoken like that to me. In fact, no one has ever spoken like that to me. It's like New York has completely corrupted her. I'm now starting to think I really don't know much about what's in her life. I watched her two movies that she starred in. I have saved up to try to buy every product she came out with and advertised.

I've done everything a supportive sister could do, at least to my limits. Yet she doesn't care. She just wants more and more fame. The dinner party with Robert Williams and other famous actors, have really just made her more- more, ruder. Worst. She also wears inappropriate clothes, doesn't pray namaz, and just isn't loyal in faith. She acts like God is irrelevant.

I can't do anything about it, but it's just sad to see your sister become so successful, and surely become higher in riches, but at rock bottom for faith. She else acts like I'm some servant. Which I'm definitely not. At least for her. She got so in with herself, she even got plastic surgery. She got a nose job, something that pushed her jawline-up? It's just sad. I've never seen someone change so quickly, other than my brother. He changed within seconds.

One second he was here, the next second blood was gushing out of him, no words came from him, no blinks, no breaths, just a dead body. Well, just *my brother's* dead body. Things sadly change, and although we never want them to, they do anyways. Things happen. For bad purposes, and good.

“Beta!” Ammi calls. I quickly wipe all my tears away and wash my face. Then I quickly wiped my face with my light blue leaf-patterned towel and rushed down the stairs.

“What were you saying? What did you need?”
I say, panting.

“You need to get the naan in fifteen minutes”
Says Ammi, sounding a bit lost since she was also cooking korma while talking to my uncle, Samin.

“Ok.” I said. Samin uncle and Anita Khala, (His wife) are amazing. They host parties all the time, and invite us to every single one. They live about a ten minute walk away from us. Last year, Anita Khala And Samin Uncle saved up enough money just to get me a 14,250 rupee perfume and matching hand lotion!

You could imagine how happy I was. Of course, Ammi won't let me use it, she said i can use it when I get to highschool, but she said that about everything. She said that about a phone, but my dad bought me one. Or, he bought himself one, and gave me his old one. It works, just, it doesn't have too much storage. He could have upgraded it, but chose to just get a new phone entirely. His phone was getting a bit old, but it functioned pretty well.

“Hana! Naan!” Anah screamed. I rushed down the stairs, took the money from my mothers wallet in her bag, and rushed to the naan place just diagonal from our house. We practically have a plaza right in front of our house. A hair salon, a McDonalds, A fresh naan and roti place, a place dedicated to their Alu, (potatoes) a perfume place, another perfume place but with *real brands* and very expensive, and a clothing store.

“Hello? I’m here to pick up Sarah Rizvi’s order for twenty-five naans?” I say.

“Sarah Rizvi.. Your order will be ready in ten minutes.” The store owner says.

“Oh, ok!” I say, very awkwardly and confused. Anah. Of course she did this! I should’ve checked the time before just believing Anah! How could I be so stupid? I run back home ready to yell at Anah and-

“Ammi I’m going to get my hair done!” Says Anah.

“What are you getting done?” Says Ammi.

“I’m getting blond and light brown highlights.. Then getting a wolf cut.. And dying my butterfly bangs teal.” Says Anah.

“Wait wait.. You have to tell me why you lied to me?” I say firmly.

“Hana move I don’t have time for your games, you’re older now. Stop playing pretend.” Says Anah. Pretend? Playing games? What? Has she really forgotten everything that has happened within the last ten minutes?

With Failure, Comes Success

“Alafas Ammi! Alafas Hana!” She said while kissing my head and then pushing me away. Love plus hate.. Doesn’t make sense. You either hate someone, or love them. You can’t be both. Otherwise it’s just confusing. Or, it’s not confusing. And my brain is working like our microwave again. “Hana! Naan!” says Ammi. Here we go again.

I opened our dark red front door and accidentally slammed it shut. I got the Naan and rushed back home. Sometimes, I wonder If I should try to be nicer to Anah. Maybe, If I become as nice as I can be, She’ll really understand that I love her. Maybe.. *That's the best start?*

CHAPTER FIVE: ABU GOT A JOB IN THE U.S.
1994- 10 years old - 3/14/1994

Dear Diary....

It's Eid!

"Eid Mubarak, Ammi!" I scream rushing down stairs. I screamed in happiness when I saw a bunch of chikoo and another bowl of dates laying in clay bowls my mom had made just a few days ago. I also saw my mother mashing up lemons and coconut oil together.

"Eid Mubarak Beta!" Said Ammi.

"Ammi.. what are you doing?" I ask.

"Eid Mubarak Beta!" Said Abu. He was back from his business trip! I ran and hugged him tight.

"Eid Mubarak Abu!" I said.

"Hana, come here. I will put this lemon juice thing in your hair, and it should lighten up. Eventually, you can dye your hair. Also, come, I need to do your Mehndi." Says Ammi.

"Ok?" I said. Mehndi? On The day of Eid? It's usually before the day of Eid, but okay?

I sat down and let my Ammi do my mehndi. I trusted her, she used to work at some salon and Mehndi place. So she knows what she's doing. She also does my Mehndi every year. Once she was done with my mehndi, she started putting the lemon and coconut oil in my hair, then wrapping it with tin foil.

“So I will put this in your hair everyday, and keep it in for one hour. Then I will dye your hair and it will stay for around 2-3 months.”

“Ok Ammi!” I have never seen lemon juice and coconut oil put in hair to take the place of the bleach. Ammi says bleach is bad for my hair, and we don’t have extra money to just buy many hair products other than Shampoo and conditioner. Sure we have the money, but Mom said we should save it for another house in America.

“Ammi, my hair is ready!” Says Anah. She looks stunning. She wore her very pretty light blue Eid dress, and she bought Ammi and I matching ones. Then she bought a suit for Abu. Her wolf cut, her blue-dyed butterfly bangs, her blond and brown highlights, it all looks so pretty! If only my mother could have done this lemon juice thing before, then I would've dyed my hair blue too.

A bunch of carts stood outside selling Chikoo milkshakes, chikoo, very expensive jewelry, biryani plates, fries covered with cheese, then fries in dates, I wonder how that would taste.. Ooh and regular dates! I was so excited to go outside, but I couldn't since I had this lemon juice thing in my hair. This year, my mother offered to host a huge neighborhood Eid party.

It would be like: outside is the party, then inside is food, outside there are a bunch of games to play, (we would also ask the carts to move to a different location) then they would eat outside, then dessert would be served, and we would stay up until

I am playing games, eating, chatting, drinking chai, and just enjoying.

My mother also bought a super loud Microphone just for the event! I've never been so excited for, I guess what you could call a block party before! All My friends would be there.

Everyone would be opening and exchanging gifts! It would be perfect! I only have six shalwars, a green one, a pink one, and yellow one which has green leafs on it, a light pink one with salmon-colored squiggly lines and pearls on it (Which is my favorite one), a chai-colored one, and a bright red one.

And now, I have this eid dress to wear to my cousin's wedding next year! I can finally now take the tinfoil off my hair. I don't see much of a difference, but I trust my mom. So then I go upstairs, secretly use my sister's hair curler thing, then I beg my mother to cut my hair like Anah's. She finally agreed. She didn't do a wolf cut, but she cut my hair in layers and gave me butterfly bangs. She said the lemon juice lightened my hair up a bit so it looks very nice. She then let me use a bit of her makeup, and finally she let me use the perfume that Samin Uncle and Anita Khala gave to me.

I finally stepped outside and immediately smelled the smoke of Karachi, and smiled. Many hate the smell of smoke, and others love it. Zainab and Sana live a five minute walk away from me. And

Zainab seemed so happy to see me, that she even hugged me. She was holding two dates and gave me one. I smiled even more. She then grabbed my arm and-

“C'mon! Let's go to the park! There are vanilla smoothies and chikoo smoothies! There are also free biryani samples!” Zainab said.

“Really?” I ask.

“Yes! Now Hurry!” Zainab says in a rush. We ran to the park, which is just a block away, and then the smell of dates, chikoo, and biryani, all just makes me feel like I'm ascending into heaven. We ran to the free biryani samples first.

“Hello! Can we get the chicken biryani sample please? With ritha?” I ask.

“Sure! Here you go.” Says the lady working at the stand. The sample of biryani is in a little plate, that is about the size of a 22oz yankee candle jar. And they just drizzle the ritha on top. Delicious! Zainab seemed to love it more than me. She then said she'll pay 286 rupees. That's seven American dollars!

I saw these three ladies wearing matching yellow and pink sarees and I wished so hard I could wear those one day. I mean, I could. But it might be hard to cover my stomach. That's why I don't wear them. Zainab's Mehndi is so dark, and vibrant. While mine is just, ok. It's much lighter than Zainab's, and less vibrant than Anah's. Alos, Anah did her nails, hair, and mehndi all in one day.

Yesterday. She went at 9:00 am to get her mehndi done, then she went to get her hair done at 10:30, (since her mehndi was done within a half-an-hour, she had an hour to go eat and drive to the hair salon) so then she ate breakfast, went to get her hair done, then at 4:00 pm, she was done. She went to eat lunch at McDonalds, then went to get her nails done, for three hours! She came back exactly at 8:21 pm. The drive was only five minutes, But she had to pick up the eid clothes for us.

“Hana? Hello?” Said Zainab.

“Hmm? Oh.. yeah! Wait, you already finished the biryani?” I asked.

“Uhm, yes? You zoned out for like ten minutes. I finished the biryani like seven minutes ago.” Said Zainab.

“You ate that whole plate in three minutes?” I ask.

“Yeah? It's biryani. How could I not finish it in three minutes?” said Zainab.

“So when is the party?” asked Zainab.

“In.. twenty minutes.” I said.

“Oh wait, twenty minutes! I need to go help my mom set up! See you later!” I said in a rush.

“Uhm.. okay! Bye!” Said Zainab. I feel bad for just leaving her like that so unexpectedly. But I have to pick up the naan before the store closes. It closes exactly at ten. The party is exactly at ten. So I have twenty minutes to get the naan, help make the chikoo pudding-dessert thing. Well, it's not really helping since it was my idea and everyone loved it

last year when we brought it to Sana's Eid block party. But I've taught my dad to make it and he is obsessed.

All you need is milk, chikoo, dates, and bananas. The banana is optional, but it does enhance the taste. I consider myself a professional baker. I take time and effort into my baking. And I should stop talking about this and hurry and get the naan. I ran to the naan store, picked up the naan, ran back home, and put the change in my mom's Green, fake leather-wallet.

I then rush to count the chikoo, and dates. I use half of the dates, and 75% of the chikoo. Since there were twenty-six of each, I used thirteen dates, and 19 chikoo. I quickly made the pudding and set it aside while covering it with one of our two towels in the kitchen. The blue one with dark blue stripes was the one we used to cover sweet food with. The light green one with pink squiggly lines on it was used to cover important cooked food. The plain red one was for drying hands. Then the rest of the food was covered with tin foil.

Ammi made Biryani, Korma, Nihari, Zainab's mom is also bringing her homemade biryani tacos. Sana's mom is bringing her signature chicken burgers. Zain, is bringing a whole sixteen trays of twenty kebabs in each tray. Then they put bread on the side of it, so if you want a kebab burger, just grab the bread, and some salad. Zain's cousin (Hamza) is also coming, and since Hamza's uncle on his fathers

side is the principal of our school. So we have to invite him. Then Sana's friend is also coming since-

"Hana! Get the door! And lead them to the backyard!" Says Ammi. Our backyard isn't really a backyard. It's a road. It used to be dirt, but they rebuilt it a week ago. Now it's a real road. Our street has five houses. There are two small houses to the right, one normal sized-two story house, (which is ours) and another small house and then the corner house, which is practically a mansion. It has four bedrooms, a big kitchen, four bathrooms, a very pretty entrance hallway, and a movie theater in the basement.

It's the house that stands out, which makes our neighborhood seem a bit more "rich". We were going to buy that house, but someone bought it right before us. So we went for this decent house. A two-bedroom house with a kitchen. A backyard door. And three bathrooms. And don't forget the laundry room.

I rush downstairs to open the door. I can just feel my mother cringing as all the dirty shoes touch the floor, but then I lead them outside to where all the snacks and refreshments are. My mom turned on the music and I had to keep running back and forth opening the door. I eventually made a sign that read: THE DOOR IS OPEN OR YOU CAN WALK TO THE BACK YARD FOLLOWING THE PATH

The only reason why I made that sign was because I was tired of running back and forth. So, I just made a sign. Then I sat on one of the seats outside. It was beautiful weather. Zain was offering to get water balloons thrown at him, and for him to dump ice water on himself. We thought that would add more fun into it, so we thought why not? Zain finally arrived and Zainab did too. Everyone in our neighborhood thinks they should marry each other. They both like playing games, they are both very brave, and they are both obsessed with Biryani tacos.

“Salaam!” Zain said.

“Salaam!” I said to both Zain and Zainab. I hugged Zainab and led her outside. A few ladies were helping my mom set up more chairs.

“Did your mom make Biryani?” Zain asked.

“Of course she did.” I replied.

“Ok, good.” he said. He is also totally in love with my Ammi’s Biryani. He even admitted it at school. WE don’t see each other much at school since we are in no classes together, but during lunch and locker time we try to chat a bit.

Although his locker is quite far from me, when we have the extra time we would try to squeeze in a few conversations just to pass time. But if he’s not there, Zainab and/or Sana would always be there. Or Maheen. She lives in a different neighborhood. We invited her but she said she was already having a party with family so they couldn’t come. Understandable.

DING DONG!

Sana! Finally! I ran to the door in hopes of Sana and.. It's not Sana. But it's better! Uncle Samin and Anita Khala! I lightly screamed in joy and hugged them super tight.

“Salaam Beti!” Samin Uncle said.

“Salaam Beta!” Anita Khala said.

“Salaam!” I said back. I've been waiting for so long!

“We have too, beta!” Said Uncle Samin. We laughed. We smiled. Then I lead them outside. Wait, did they read the sign? Because they rang the doorbell. I ran back outside to see the sign used as a “shoe cleaner” , as it was on the ground with smudges of foot prints on it. I was angered. I ran back upstairs and made a new sign. Then I put it up. I then walked outside and saw Sana. She must've come from the pathway leading to here.

“Okay everybody, gather around. We will quickly do this ice bucket challenge on our very brave contestant. Zain. Everyone started clapping. Sana, Zainab, and I sat next to each other in the first row.

“I got the job! I got it!” My father screamed. Job? The one he applied for in the USA? He got it? Oh my lord.. Oh my Lord....Oh my Lord.. EEEK! I screamed. In happiness. Everyone clapped again and screamed “Mashala! Eid Mubarak!” I swear I heard someone say Jalapeno Poppers. I am so happy about this.

With Failure, Comes Success

“Mashala! Ok, back to Zain.. Zain, do it!” Said my Ammi. He did it! he..He..

“Ambulances coming!” My mom said, I almost cried. One of my best friends, on the verge of practically dying. Apparently, there was some toxin in the water he dumped on himself. ANd He’s most likely going to die.

“It’s been fifteen minutes! Where is the ambulance?” Screamed Zain’s mother. She kept checking his heart beat and-

“He..He’s.. GONE!” Cries. Crying. Cries. Crying.

Zain.

Is.

Gone.

Dead.

No more.

Passed Away.

Humza comes and asks what happened.

This time, I don’t even know where to start.

CHAPTER SIX: SORROW
1999 - 15 years old - 12/26/1999

Dear Diary....

Sorrow is never fun to sit in. Especially when it's about your best friend. Or worse, your neighbor. Sitting in the laundry room. Still, and always, sad about Zain.

It's sad to think—his father killed him. Of course, it was an accident. It was some laundry toxin thing, he accidentally spilled it in but didn't know it would literally kill his son. So he just added more ice and water. Thinking it would make a big difference. But here I am. Sitting, in Sorrow. By the way, I lost this diary. For five years. I know. How stupid of me. I walk out of our white-walled laundry room. And stepped on our new dark brown wooden floor, that we got done just a few days ago. It was namaz time.

I took my green and white prayer mat, and laid it on the floor, west, which is facing Mecca. I go to our new light blue-painted bathroom. And we're thinking of getting new flooring, as the beige concrete floor was looking very old, and it used to be bright white. Our house has been getting many renovations. And I like that, but why don't we save the money for America? Abu's job is so good, that he can take a month break (If he works just a bit more than he's supposed to).

He sent us the money for the renovations. I've been working on this poem in school. Not for a

school project—but just in school with Zainab. Sana doesn't like writing. Honestly, it seems like she doesn't like *us* anymore. She acts weird. She always wears pink. She even broke the dress code and wore a Saree to school. Which showed her belly, and it looked like she felt pride in it. People change.

My Brother. Anah. Zain. And now Sana. It's sad. But, I can't do anything about it. I've been looking for a job, other than just selling poems glued onto very fine pieces of art work on a plastic table with a teal plastic sheet under them. Last year I used a green sheet. The year before that I used a hot pink sheet. The year before that I used a yellow sheet. And.. you get the point. I look in the mirror and do wudhu. Then I jump around like crazy trying to dry myself, since there is no towel. The towel was in the laundry basket I just did. I step on the Janamaz (The prayer Mat) and start praying.

“Hana! Zainab dropped off some lemon cakes for you! They taste so good!” My mom says as she eats them. I finish the last part of my prayer, thank Allah for everything, then fold the Janamaz and rush downstairs.

“I'm here!” I say loudly so Ammi could stop eating the lemon cakes. They were about the size of the lid of a standard gatorade bottle. But just slightly bigger.

I taste one and I'm immediately in-love.

"Did Zainab make these? Why didn't she stay?" I ask.

"She has to go to someone's birthday party. And her mom made extra for us since she was bringing them to the party." Ammi says.

"Ok." I say back.

"She made six extra for us. Isn't that so nice? I mean, I would've kept three for myself and given three to another person. Not six." Said Ammi.

"Who knows. Maybe there was more that she didn't give."

"Also, how does Zainab have lighter skin than her mother and father?

Also, why does she have black hair? Her mother and father have brown hair." I say.

"Well, uhm.. You see,"

"And she has pretty straight hair, yet her mom and dad have very curly hair. And, she has brown eyes. While her mother has blue eyes. And her dad has hazel eyes." I say cutting my mom off.

"Ammi, is there something I don't know of?" I ask.

"Beta I need to get my hair dyed . It's very gray. Ok? So try not to drink too much water, and there is kitchari in the fridge if you get hungry. Bye!" Ammi says. That was suspicious. There is something she doesn't want me to know. And I want to find out what it is.

Right now, I'm on winter break. And I also got to look at a hairstylist's place. I interviewed for it,

and I'm looking for approval. But I don't think I'll get the job. Although my mother has quite a lot of experience, I still don't think I will exactly qualify for it. The salon had light purple walls. It was light purple and white checkered flooring.

The lady who interviewed me had a pointed nose that was pointing towards the ceiling, blue short curly hair, olive skin, thin eyebrows, and had a very deep voice. She was wearing a bright green shirt with black pants. I understood her style within seconds.

The salon was saying they could also use me as a cleaner, and it sounded like they were joking. They were dead serious. She had long nails, and bright pink nail polish with a light pink french tip. Her desk had a bright pink strip of paint across all the edges and corners. She had a cup full of pink, blue, and green markers and pens. She also had a bright blue clipboard.

I could tell she really liked bright colors. While I am not that big of a fan anymore. I got my first pair of jeans yesterday from the mail. Abu sent them. They were bright blue. I went to the very expensive clothing store and went into the American clothes section.

I found this beige shirt that said:

WORK

WORK

WORK

It was printed in black squiggly print. Then I found this light white cardigan. I went into the dressing room, put on the jeans, tucked in the beige shirt, and put the cardigan on, and buttoned half of the buttons so you can't see the front or back of my butt, but you can still see the shirt. My mom says to cover my butt since it shows shape. So that's why I put a cardigan on top of it. I purchased the outfit—it's 12,895.64 rupees. Good thing My father gave me fifty American dollars for my birthday. Otherwise, we would be standing here, maybe not my mom, But I would be standing in sorrow.

Then, I went to the salon to get a wolf cut, and get light brown highlights. But my mom stopped me. She said I need to get a job, instead of saying,

“I'll pay you back.”

“Hana. Get a job.” My mom said. *Sadly, maybe that is the best start.*

SAVING UP
CHAPTER SEVEN: GOT THE JOB
1999 15 Years Old 1/13/1999

Dear Diary...

I got the job! I got the job! As the hairstylist! My first day of work starts in seven days. A week. And I've been wearing this outfit with jeans everywhere. I wish my father would send other colors, so I would have more of a variety. We're going to this seafood place in Rawalpindi. Tomorrow. For dinner. We are going there today.

My mother's college friend recently moved there, so we are going to check out her new house. And we're going to sleep over there for a day or two. I overheard these people talking about how their friends' books have been New York's best sellers. And I said to myself, I'll have a book like that too. Just like my mother. Although, it was a Pakistan best seller. Not New York. But my mission is to beat my mom. To beat Anah. To make myself proud, and feel accomplished.

So far in my life, I feel like I have done nothing, and I am of no use. But soon, when my feet touch the land of North America, I *will* be successful. I don't care if it's even two minutes before I die, I will have fame. And I will have a great book. And I promise, one day, I *will* feel proud of myself. That I am of use. I never felt that I could ever make it to AMerica. But now that it's come to my mind, I need

to start saving up. For a plane ticket. Today is tuesday. I just came back from school. We are going to Rawalpindi by car, and stopping at a hotel, somewhere in the middle. Then, we're going to pass some memorial thing, and then we'll finally be in Rawalpindi.

In Rawalpindi, we're going to my mom's friend's cousin's wedding. And for some reason, we were invited. Then, we're going to sleepover at her friend's new house. The next day, we're going to explore the city, and we're going to this very fancy seafood restaurant. Then we'll go back home and sleep over one last night and leave in the morning. We're then going to go to a different hotel, stop in the middle, and then we're going straight back home. We're leaving in one hour, and I still have these things to pack:

- TOOTH BRUSH
- PENCIL & NOTEBOOK FOR NOTES TO WRITE SUMMARY OF OUR TRAVEL
- HIJAB MAGNETS
- SISTER'S OLD EID DRESS
- WATER BOTTLE
- SAJDIKA (SINCE WHOM'S HOUSE WE'RE GOING TO ARE SUNNI MUSLIMS AND THEY DON'T USE SAJDIKAS)

My sister's old eid dress is the one that was worn when Zain died. But my mom is saving our money for renovations on our roof. There is a little hole that I climb through, I climb onto the bookshelves and push myself up onto the roof. Then I jump to the top. The rooftop is a flat surface. I would stay up there for like three hours, studying, drawing, writing, thinking, or picking mangoes as a snack if I got hungry.

Once I picked five ripe mangoes and hid them in a little green box with glitter and paint smeared almost all over it. She wants to patch the hole up. However I really do not. How else will I pick fresh mangoes? Normally? With a ladder? From the ground? There's no fun in that. Usually, in the early morning, there aren't many cars, so no honking. So I can study, or just relax. Once I stayed up there for hours, and ended up sleeping there with my grammar book in my lap.

I finished doing my mascara and put on my scarf since I already had my cap on. I then use the bathroom and pack my toothbrush. I open my closet and put my clothing in. I grab my dark blue stainless steel water bottle and rush downstairs to fill it up with water. I rush back upstairs and pack the eid dress.

Although I almost cried while looking at it, I just looked away and put it in my bag, hoping I even put it in the right stop, given I wasn't looking at it. I opened my drawer and got my pencil and notebook. We'll be there for four nights. One night at the hotel,

the next night at our friend's house, the next night at our friend's house, and another night at the hotel. And then home. I put my hijab magnets in a tiny pocket in the suitcase.

Then I grab a sajdika (something Shia muslims use when they are in Sujud [the action of prostrating to Allah] while they are praying). I zip up my dark green suit case. Then I bring it down the steep steps, that should really be renovated, instead of the hole in the roof. In the winter I just cover it up with a piece of wood and screws. Well, my dad did.

But I've learned how to from all these years of watching my dad. And when it's mango season, I just open it again. And when it rains, I easily cover it again. It's close to the window on the other side of my small bedroom. So even if the wood piece falls, it won't fall on me. Which is good. Since I don't want a concussion from something my mother says we should cover up. Because If i get hurt by it, then my Ammi will definitely cover it up without a doubt. I slowly go down the stairs, one step by one, taking my precious time, while Ammi yells-

“Hana! Hurry up!”

“Chup! I'm coming!” I say. I didn't mean to shush my mother though.

“Pathar se marungi!” Okay, when your mother threatens you with a rock, especially if it's a Pakistani mother, you better listen to what she's saying. Unless she's joking about it, then it's fine. I finally put my suitcase in the car and started eating

breakfast. I ate egg with paratha and chickpeas (Drowned in a sauce).

I quickly ate as Ammi loaded the car. I wanted a kebab and egg wrapped in my paratha, almost like an egg and kebab burrito, but we were saving the kebab for the road. Even though Ammi said we would stop somewhere for lunch, we brought kebabs just in case, or just for a snack. I quickly finish my breakfast and use the bathroom one more time.

Then I get in the car and text Abu, to tell him that we are leaving soon. Then he texts me to have a safe trip and sends a picture of him at a seafood restaurant, and him eating a fish burger, drinking an oreo milkshake, and eating coconut shrimp dipped in some spicy sauce, and cheese. My mouth starts watering at the thought of it. Our whole school, town, neighborhood, know that I love kebab and Chikoo, but mostly, sea food. Whenever we go to a restaurant, I always make sure to save extra for school for the next day or two. Then I text him back saying that we're going to a seafood restaurant in Rawalpindi.

He said ok and that's it.

Ammi finally got in the car, and we drove off. We use a Dannon yogurt bucket as a garbage bucket in our car. I wasn't hungry, but I wanted a kebab so badly. Good thing I sat in the back. Otherwise, I would have no chance in even getting the bright

blue box that has the kebabs in it. I reached for the box and took out two kebabs.

I shoved them in my mouth and of course right after I shoved them in my mouth, my mom asked me if I was excited, and asked if I would tell any of my friends about it. I was silent for a bit hoping she would just forget the question in two seconds and focus on her turn. But then she asked again.

“Beta. I’m asking you a question. Are you excited? Will you tell your friends about the vacation? Will you text them? Did you already tell them about it? You better have not.” Said Ammi. I finally swallowed the kebabs and said-

“Yeah I’m really excited. I think I’ll tell Zainab first.”

“What about Sana?” Ammi asks.

“Ammi, Sana doesn’t really talk to me anymore. I mean, from the start, I really just bonded with Zainab more than Sana. Maybe she got upset, or jealous.” I say.

“Tsk tsk tsk..”

I hate when Ammi does that. “Tsk tsk tsk.” It makes me feel like I did something so wrong, and so bad, that there’s no going back. Like I’m trapped in this black void and there’s a ladder, then Ammi said “tsk tsk tsk” and the ladder fell down further in the black void. And now I’m just here, sitting on this chunk of purple rock, connected to the void, and that is the only thing that’s holding me up.

Then the chunk slowly falls into smaller pieces, leaving me on two small rocks, balancing on my tippy toes, just for dear life, then the two rocks slowly fall, bringing me with it, then I see a ladder again. I jump to climb it, but miss, and end up falling even further into the void.

Then I scream for help but the only thing I hear is a loud ringing noise, going on and on in my ear, thank goodness I fall on a ledge, Or I would really die. I see the ladder one more time. This time I slowly reach my leg to it, and I grab on. I climb it up, then fall. And die. Because guess what? Ammi said “tsk tsk tsk” again. Which brings me to the bottom of the void. With no consciousness. Practically dead.

With no hope of ever getting back up again.

“Beta? Hello?” Ammi says.

“Hmm? Sorry, I was daydreaming” I replied.

“In ten minutes, remind me to get gas, okay?”

Says Ammi.

“Ok.” I say back.

I go on my phone and text Zainab “ Hey! Wanna call for a bit? I saw you called me yesterday. Also, I’m skipping about a week of school. I’m going to Rawalpindi. I took a photo of myself with a silly filter, with a mustache and sunglasses on. I sent it to Zainab. Then I remembered she was in school. So she wouldn’t reply for another five hours. Just great.

I went onto amazon and did some “online window shopping”. I saw these white jeans that looked so cute to me. Imagine I wear them with the work, work, work shirt? I immediately added it to my

cart. I also found this mini fan for whenever I get hot with the scarf and cap on. Hijab just doesn't look good on me anymore. They just look weird with the shape of my face.

People say I look like my dad more than my mom. But people used to say I looked like my mom more than my dad. But really, It doesn't look like I look like anyone to me. I don't understand how people's eyes work, but my face doesn't match either of my parents. Then I found these ten pairs of socks. I added it to my cart since I'm badly in need of socks. Tenn.. Ten.. Gas! Ten Minutes!

“Mama! Gas!” I say.

“Oh yes thank you beta.” Says Ammi.

I opened my phone again and saw I got a text from Zainab. It read:

“Hii! I'm in the bathroom right now, so I can't talk. Will get in trouble if I get caught. Talk later after school. Bye!”

“Okayyy!” I text back.

I go back to amazon and find this book that seems so interesting. The name was:

“Two Love Birds, Finally Find Love For Each Other”

I Added it to my cart. Since I was getting better at English, I wanted to challenge myself by reading the book. Then I found This dark green notebook with light green leaf patterns on it. I immediately added it to my cart since my current note book only has about twenty three pages left. Then I start playing with my shiny dark blue ring

that has a light blue pearl on it. I want a real diamond ring, but my dad thinks I'm way too young for it. A

lthough I see so many kids in our school with them. Abu always says they're fake and Ammi says that too, but I don't believe them. Why would someone get a fake diamond ring? What's the pride in that? When I get stuff, I want to get it in the best shape possible. So that I can admire it, and/or use it for a long time. I then get a call from Abu. and he ended it right away. Maybe it was a mistake? Now I want steak.

Once I went to this fancy restaurant that sells real steak. I tried it and I was in love. It tasted so smoky, salty, and a bit sweet. Then I got ribs and they were amazing too. They just fell off the bone. And It was perfectly seasoned. And they gave us so many sauce options. I chose buffalo ranch, and tartar sauce.

My mom drowned her beef ribs in barbecue sauce. I do not like barbecue sauce. I don't know how so many people like it. I just don't. I go ahead and take more funny selfies with more funny filters. Then I took a picture of my nails and drew on them. With the phone of course. Because I got bored. And when I get bored, I do random things. For some reason, my Ammi decided to get bright aqua stitching on the seats. I wanted her to get red because it looked cooler. But she chose bright aqua. She also wanted black leather seats. I opened my

note and continued writing the poem that I've been working on for almost two weeks now.

*"I stepped down into a new world.
Berries that lit up when fireflies were roaming,
flowers that sung when bees were roaming,
and I think the world will suffice, but this..
Exceeds limitations, beyond the world.*

*I walk down the dark and gloomy road,
knowing more beauty awaits.
ALthough, it's a void.
Will the void lead to internal happiness?
I jumped in without a skip,
I didn't need to throw a fit.*

Why would I hype myself up for this?"

That's all I have done. The poem is not supposed to rhyme. My teacher said poems don't need to rhyme. They can have rhyming patterns. Or they could have no patterns. I've been stuck on that one verse for five days. Absolutely nothing is going through my brain. I can't think.

My brain has completely shut down. I am quite confused, why am I in this? This white room. This blinding, eye gouging, lights make me want to take my eyes out. Replace them. With darkness. Well, that can't happen. Since I can't see. Then all these weird, morbid pictures pop up in my brain, at

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this point, I see orange squares. Green circles going round and round.

I gasp. I take a long breath. I adjust myself in my seat and ask myself.

What.

Just.

Happened.

I keep gasping for air as if I'm drowning and can't swim.

"Hana? Are you okay?" say Ammi.

"Yeah I'm fine," I replied. *I totally didn't just lie to my Mother. Totally. I look out of the window. Thinking about kebabs. It wouldn't hurt, for just one more, right? Just a few more hours until we get to Bahawalpur. I just stare out the window. Waiting. And waiting.*

Then I open my notebook, and start a new poem. *Maybe that's the best start.*

CHAPTER EIGHT: WE GOT SCAMMED

1999 15 Years old 1/14/1999

Dear Diary...

The hotel was terrible. There was no fridge, or microwave. The toilet was so small. It was a small circle. The sink was so tiny. The walls were colored brown. It looked like there were smudges of poop on it! But I just hope it was dirt. The flooring was disgusting. The beds were lumpy. There were only two lights, the bathroom light, and then the center of the room, which gave almost no light.

There was a coffee maker. *Who drinks coffee in Pakistan? Why is there a stove to make chai? Or better, a chai maker?* The walls were dark blue. The mirror was covered by a TV that didn't work. The bed sheets were light blue, with yellow stains. The door was almost impossible to open. The keycard was so hard to use.

The room smelled like lemons. There were dead plants at every corner of the room. There were random orange spots on the walls. The entrance was so nice. The upstairs was terrifying. Dark hallways with dim lights, weird pictures, and dirty couch, dirty floors, and yellow walls. I took a whole lot of pictures to send to Abu. I also sent some to Zainab.

Ammi and I were both very disappointed by the hotel. A lady who worked at the front desk also told us to just use the towels for praying when there was a stack of prayer mats behind her. Was she

blind? Did she just not want us to pray? Did she not care?

I sent Zainab a text telling her about how the lady at the front desk just told us to use a towel for praying even though there were a lot of prayer mats behind her. I even managed to take a picture of the prayer mats without the lady noticing. I also sent the same thing to Abu. The entrance for some reason looked so nice. There were bright blue couches, a big golden mirror, many bright green plants, dark blue walls, and great lighting. I just don't get why the upstairs looks so old, and rickety.

We decided to go out for breakfast, because we didn't trust the breakfast they served here. We found a cafe and decided to go to it, since it had well written reviews. Once we got there, it seemed very pleasant. It smelled like coffee and chai. I saw belgium waffles and good looking paratha. I decided to get paratha and chickpeas. Then I also got chai and a belgium waffle for me and Mama to try.

"Hello, Can I have chai, and a paratha and keema(grounded beef with lots of seasoning) wrap please?" Asked Ammi.

"Sure," Says the cashier. He starts making the wrap in front of us. We take a seat and wait for our food. I text abu telling him about the hotel and breakfast. Then I sent him a picture of the purple-walled and dark brown-wooden cafe we were in. It smelled like wood. And I love the smell of wood. I honestly want to eat it. Wood just looks so

tasty. Same with bricks. And rocks. The texture just looks so good.

As If it would be almost like the texture of smarties, but more chalky. Then I saw pomegranates and whipped cream on top of the waffles. I then thought about it, at least one hundred times, whether I should ask him, or tell my mom to ask him. I was really second guessing myself about it, but I chose to ask myself. I stood up. And Put my phone on the table. I pushed in my seat. Then I opened my seat again and sat back down to think about it one more time. What if he got mad at me? What if he kicked us out of the store? I took a deep breath. Then I stood up, and walked to the man .

“Hello, Can- I-i have uhm, pomegranates and whipped cream on our waffles?” I asked.

“Yes whipped cream, no more pomegranates.”

“Oh, okay!” I replied. All of that hard work to build up that confidence, just for him to say, “we ran out of pomegranates”. How annoying. Then I went back and sat down.

“Beta, thum kia kari ho?” Mama Asked.

“I was just going to ask for pomegranates. And whipped cream. On our waffle.” I replied.

“Ok.” Ammi said. Our breakfast was served just seconds after. We were pleasantly surprised by the looks of it. It looked very appetizing. I tried a bit of my mom’s first and fell in love. Mine was really good too, but my mom’s was better. They, then also gave me a blue cup with chai in it. Then they gave one to Ammi. Her cup was yellow faded into blue. It

also had bright golden sparkles on it. Mine was just blue.

It's weird how someone works so hard to make one thing look good, but then they get lazy and tired, so they don't continue the hard work on the next item. **It's** weird.

The chairs were handcrafted. Or at least I think. There was a heart sculpted in it. And the chairs were like a brown chocolate color. I then went back to eating my food and decided to try the waffle. It was golden brown, with whipped cream, and it looked quite thick.

I took a bite. It tasted terrible. It tasted like a papaya dipped in toilet water, covered in mustard. So, I gave the rest to my mom. She liked it, somehow. Once we finished our food, we went back to the hotel to check-out. We went up to the elevator to grab our stuff. Then we went back down the elevator and checked-out. We packed all the luggage in the car and drove off. I texted Zainab as soon as we left.

As soon as we reached my mother's friend's house, I smelled lemons. We ended up stopping at six McDonalds, and three KFC's. Anyways, there were a few lemon scented candles on the dinner table and coffee table.

"Asalaam." I said.

"Salaam." My Mom said.

"Salaam." My mother's friend said. I always usually try to say "Salaam" before my mother can.

We basically have this race to see who can say “Salaam” first.

Well, not to my mom. I just made it up. For myself. Also, to see if my mother has good manners. Which she does. But, just to make sure. I take a look around. I see the bright red couches. With bronze frames holding it up. Then I see many pictures of family, and one picture that includes my mom.

Then I see another picture with my mother and father included. And Anah as a baby. We looked the exact same as little kids. The way I could tell the difference is if I saw a little birthmark on the side of the neck. If I didn't see that, I knew it wasn't me. Since I've had the birthmark since well, birth. I just smiled.

“Okay, you guys can go upstairs and freshen up, I'll make some snacks.” Said Ammi's friend. Or otherwise known as, Fatima Auntie. I smiled and went upstairs into the bathroom. I used the bathroom.

I brushed my teeth since my breath smelled terrible for some reason. And yes, I had my tooth brush on me since I forgot to pack it into my bags at the hotel, so I just carried it in my pocket. I was also not willing to open my backpack, take half of my things out, put my toothbrush in, and repack half of my things. When I finished brushing my teeth, I went and did wudhu, (washing face, arms, and feet, or cleansing) then, I went downstairs.

They had a room dedicated to praying. I was so surprised. We were originally going to go to a

hotel, but we decided, if Fatima Aunty has room in her house, and if we want to spend less money, why not just take the opportunity and stay at her house. I layed out the prayer mat, is what I would usually say. But the prayer mats, yes, there were three, were laid out already! How fancy.

The room was a peach color. With simple lights, and a box with thazbees (a string tied together with beads on it, used in prayer) in it. The room was pretty basic. Nothing too special. But then, I smelled dates, mangos, watermelon, and best of all, Chikoo. I was peeking through the opening.

Okay, here is the layout of the house. When you walk in, you immediately turn to your left, and you see the prayer room. Then, there's a little hallway right in front of the main entrance which leads to the stairs on the right, the kitchen on the left, and the living room in front of the stairs. I'm terrible at explaining layouts without drawing them. But, oh well. I wrapped my hijab around one more time to make sure it wouldn't fall off, and then I attached the magnet.

After I had finished praying, I sat down on the couch and stared at the couch that was right in front of the blue one I was sitting on. The chandelier looked beautiful. There were different shades of blue shards in each tiny panel in each bigger panel connected to some string or piece of metal that was attached to the main piece of chandelier. Which was almost an upside down dome with blue shards

attached, and more metal dangly things which also had the same pattern shards and panels.

The couches were soft. But at the same time it felt like they had some sort of silky fabric. When Ammi finished praying she sat down next to me. Fatima Auntie then places loads of fruit and snacks. She even made chocolate covered strawberries. Fatima Auntie made this bean dip and got a huge bowl of nachos. She also had chole chaat. Which is chick peas mixed with types of veggies. When we came, it was four-o-clock.

She also had chai. Of course, I needed some. She poured out three cups of chai. Her husband was at work and he had an important meeting. And her son was at his friend's house. So it was just us three. My mom, Fatima Auntie, and I. We drank chai, ate, and chatted.

“So, what grade are you in Anah?” Fatima Auntie asked. Anah? Not this again. Don't tell me that she thinks I'm Anah.

“I'm so sorry, I-I meant Hana. I'm not good with names.” Said Fatima Auntie.

“That's fine. I'm in Grade ten.” I replied.

“Wow, you're getting so much older.” Said Fatima Auntie. I just nodded. I didn't really know what to say.

We spent the rest of the day talking and relaxing. For dinner, we ate korma with fresh naan. Then, we also had Biryani. The next day was the wedding day. The wedding place was a half an hour

away from Fatima Auntie's house. The beds we slept on were comfy. The pillows had a few tiny stains, but they weren't too obvious. As soon as I woke up I rushed to the bathroom and did wudhu. I missed the morning prayers. How could I? I quickly ran to the prayer room and started praying.

As Soon as I finished I rushed to the table and sat down. Everyone was already eating. I was surprised Ammi didn't wake me up. We had egg and paratha. To save you from the bore, let's skip to the wedding. Since we did absolutely nothing at home!

As soon as I walked into the wedding place, I felt like I was somewhere so fancy, that I wasn't even in Pakistan anymore. I decided to wear Ammi's old golden heels that don't fit her anymore. She said they were from when she was a child. And she said she would give it to the youngest child. In other words, me.

Since we ended up coming late of course, we only got to hear half of the speeches. Then, they started playing music and expected all of us to dance like crazy. Like that would happen. We just lightly danced. As we were drinking chai and eating food i suddenly heard-

"Evacuate! Fire! Leave!" Everyone was shouting. I saw the fire reaching all the food in our room! I quickly grabbed my bag, took as many bites of the biryani that I could, shoved one more piece of naan and tandoori chicken, and ran for dear life.
That's the best start.

CHAPTER NINE: CRAZY CLIENTS

1999 15 years old - 1/18/1999

Dear Diary.....

Work starts in five minutes. I wore my jean outfit to the salon, but everyone was wearing black pants and a Kamees. Tomorrow, I am going to wear my dark blue and white kameez. Or I may wear my light pink and Hot pink Kameez. I'm not quite sure yet, but I'll figure it out.

I was supposed to have my first client five minutes ago. But.. they're not here. I went to the chair I was going to work at, and my client came rushing in. She asked if I was still available, and I said of course I am. She thanked Allah and sat down. Interesting. She must be in a rush.

"So, you wanted to dye half of your head blue, one eyebrow blue, and a wolf cut on the side that will not be dyed?" I asked to confirm.

"Yes, but, uhm, do you think you could skip the eyebrow?" She asked.

"Oh, uhm, sure, I'll just remove that then." I said.

"How long will it take you to remove it? I only have two hours because I have to go to a really important meeting." She asked. A meeting? What, is it a meeting for how to make weirder hair wigs or something?

"Uhm, it takes like one click Ma'am" I said.

“Ok, hurry up.” She said, WHO is she to tell me to hurry up?

“Ok, done. I’ll start on the dye. I’ll be right back-”

“Wait, why? You don’t have the dye ready made?” She asked, cutting me off.

“Oh I do, I just need to mix up the bleach.” I quickly ran back before she could say anything else. The lady had chai colored skin. Her nose curved a bit, almost like a witches nose. She had deep brown eyes, a very scratchy voice, super thick eyebrows, she definitely has a bit of a unibrow, and she has jet black hair. She was wearing a bright yellow shirt with blue denim jeans. She had white sneakers. She had bright red lipstick on. Her hair was also very straight, and she had light blue nail polish, with almond shaped nails, at a medium size.

“Alright! Your bleach is all ready!” I said. I started to section out her hair.

“Hurry please. I also need gas in my car.” She said,

“Ma’am what’s your name?” I asked. Trying to start a conversation.

“You can’t find my name on your app?” She said.

“Well I can only see your email.” I replied.

“My name is Zaina” She said.

“Oh! I have a friend named Zaina. She’s not really a friend though, just more of a classmate.” I said.

“That’s nice.” She said. Then there was just an awkward silence for a long time. Her hair wasn’t as smooth as it looked. There was this huge tangle that I spent ten or fifteen minutes taking out before I could bleach. I hadn’t fully gotten the tangle out, But most of it was untangled. I then finally started the bleach.

“Ma’am, this may take three hours.” I say. Hoping she won’t go ballistic on me.

“That’s fine. I’ll just miss my only opportunity to get my favorite job. And I just won’t eat breakfast. That’s fine too.” She said, she said it in the nastiest way possible. Then I rushed the process. Instead of taking my precious time to bleach it so perfectly, I rushed myself. Did I accidentally somehow get bleach on her neck? Yes. Do I know How I did it? Yes. Because this crazy client was honestly scaring me.

“Ok ma’am, now just wait for an hour.” I say. After an hour, we’ll only have thirty minutes left. SO I need to rush as quickly as I can.

“Uhm ma’am, what I could do is that I can get you some breakfast, because there is this fresh egg sandwich place. If you pay me back, and pay me extra for getting you breakfast of course, then I’ll get it for you.” I said.

“Sure, So, I just want brown bread and egg and ketchup in it. So how much?”

“Well, only 100 rupees. But then 700 more rupees for giving it to you.” I said.

“Hmm, ok.” Said Zaina.

With Failure, Comes Success

I went on my bike and went to the egg sandwich place. I bought the egg sandwich and came back. I gave Zaina the sandwich and took the money. By then the bleach was ready, so I washed it out. I wanted to bleach it again, but there was no time.

“Now that I have breakfast, I think I have one more hour.” SHE said While she was taking all the crust from the bread off. Thank God. Although, we could bleach one more time, but not for an hour. So I bleached her hair again.

After half an hour, I then put the dye in. I waited like fifteen minutes and then washed it out. Then I had ten minutes to do her wolf cut.

“I Guess it’s okay if I’m five minutes late.” Said Zaina. Which means I now get fifteen minutes for the wolf cut. I started giving her the wolf cut and realized I also needed to blow out her air. When I finished with the cut I quickly started to style and blow out her hair. Another customer walks in. I hear my name and instantly know that she’s my next client. And I don’t want her to be. She looks rich. And from what I’ve learned,

Rich people are rude.Or at least billionaires. Zaina then got up, paid, and left. Then the rich lady sat down. She had purple eyeliner, and white rhinestones on her eyes. She was chewing gum. She had a perfect jawline. She also had fair skin. I wondered if she’s American. She had streaks of faded purple highlights, and faded blue bangs in the front.

"I need to dye my hair ginger. Quickly." She said, In a thick russian accent. What is a Russian doing in pakistan?

"I'm a tourist, so I expect the best quality."

"Ma'am, this is Karachi. So we don't have the best service in the entire world." I said.

"Ok but it better be good!" She said, She had a perfect nose, and freckles. She had bright pink lips. She also had long lashes. I couldn't tell if they were fake, but they sort of looked like it. She also had a big forehead. I went back to make the bleach. I came back and made sure-

"You wanted your whole head ginger, right?"

"Yes, now hurry." She said, Why is everyone in a hurry? Am I missing something? I started applying the bleach on her hair. Once I'm done I let it sit for a bit. I Only have it sit for a half hour and then I can go for the second bleach. I wonder how much money I made today, given that I'm only working for six hours today. Well, today I already made about nine American dollars. I started putting the tin foil on the lady's hair.

"So, what is your name?" I try to say In my best English voice.

"Alina," She replied.

"That's a great name. Mine's Hana." I said.

"That's a basic name." Alina said. *Oh no, Hana is totally not a basic name- Does she really think I don't know that my name is basic? Why does she need to make me feel bad about it?*

I make sure her hair is properly fit into the tin foil and leave to make the dye. Who did that lady think she was? To just insult my name? I don't know if she was just being honest, but the way she said it was just so nasty. I've never seen someone with such a bad attitude before. We have little lockers to store our money in, since they give us, or how they say it in america, "they give us cash, not credit". But I wonder why? Why not just take the money home? What if one day they forget to lock the store? Someone can easily take all our hard earned money. And Eventually, it'll get full. I go back to Alina and take the tin foil out. I wash her hair and then start to apply another coat of bleach.

"Wait, why are you bleaching my hair again?" Alina asked.

"Well, your hair is black at the moment. With a bunch of other streaks of colors. So I would need to bleach it twice for it to properly lighten up." I replied. Hoping she wouldn't argue anymore. And I also hoped she wouldn't judge my english.

"Hmm, fine. Just make it-" said Alina

"Make it quick, yes this will be very quick." I said, cutting her off, because at that point I have "make it quick, " or "Be quick" engraved at the top of my brain. I start by bleaching her roots and working my way down. I wanted to start a conversation with her, but I was scared she would *really* insult me. I mean, if you have the amount of rudeness in your body to tell someone that their name is "basic", even though they know their name is basic, then honestly,

you may be able to insult anything that they're insecure or at least annoyed about. So I just quietly bleached her hair. Once that was done, I took out some tin-foil and started rapping her hair with it. Then I went to the locker area, and took out my light pink backpack with hot pink leaf designs on the corners. I opened the first pocket and took out my phone. When my dad was traveling to Korea, he bought me a phone. He bought a phone for me, as a gift, and for Mama. And then of course for himself. I don't even know what Anah's doing. But she probably bought the phone the second after it came out.

I called my dad telling him about my job so far.

“Yeah, it's been okay. So far my two clients were pretty rude. I hope I get a normal client. Or maybe a kid. Lots of kids like fun hairstyles. And I do too. But I'm thinking, If I'm a hairstylist, can't I dye my own hair now? Last year I dyed my hair blue, and the year before that I got light brown highlights. Also, since my hair has lightened a whole lot. But, it's not permanent. If I use any other shampoo then the specific shampoo I was using, the lemon juice and coconut oil will easily wash out, giving me my black hair again. And that's what I did yesterday. Just a few more washes, and my hair will be jet black again. I'm thinking of dying the bottom of it light blue, or ginger. GINGER! Sorry, I need to go, Abu. Bye!” I said.

I rushed back to Alina hoping her hair had not burned off. And Thank God it didn't. I quickly unwrapped the tin wrap, grabbed the dye, and started to apply it.

"I'm going to be fifteen minutes late to the restaurant now. Thanks a lot." Alina said. Is she serious? She's lucky I'm even trying to fit this into one hour. It's physically impossible to dye her hair at "the best quality" when you're being rushed by your own client to bleach and dye their hair within one hour. She also said she wanted butterfly bangs, but she only said ginger when she walked in. But, I'm too scared to ask her. Ok, it's my job. I *need* to ask her.

"Ma'am? Did you still want the butterfly bangs done?" I asked.

"Not anymore. Since I've seen how slow you workers work. People lied. They said dyeing hair in Pakistan was better than America. It's worse." Said Alina.

"Ma'am you do know that most of the time what I'm doing with you would take three to four hours? Yet I'm trying to rush it into 1 hour and a half." I replied. Trying to stay calm.

"Ok. It's still not an hour." Alina said. At this rate, I'm just ignoring her. As soon as I'm done applying the dye, I rush back to the locker room area. Then I text Abu saying "ABU, I WILL TALK AFTER WORK, OK?" I accidentally sent it in all caps lock. Oh well. Then after thirty minutes I go to Alina and start washing her hair. The second after, someone walks in, and I hear my name again. She

Mariam Naqvi

comes to me and asks for a wolf cut. Why does everyone want a wolf cut? I go to the wash thing and start washing her hair. *That's the best start.*

CHAPTER TEN: I FINALLY MADE A FRIEND THAT IS
NOT MY COWORKER, BUT A CLIENT
2000 16 Years Old 6/13/ 1999

Dear Diary....

I finally managed to order these fairy lights. They only come in two colors though. They come in a bright teal and a subtle pink color. I take the last sip from my crushed plastic water bottle, and throw it out. I was using a plastic water bottle because I lost my stainless steel bottle. So now I need to keep using these plastic bottles. I decided to wear my pink and hot pink kameez today. For some reason, the store smelled like lemons. Almost like the hotel in Bahawalpur.

“Salaam!” Said Hareem. Hareem was my co-worker. Not my friend, but she would have chats. Like she would ask me if I needed help, or if I could give her something.

“Salaam! Did you add a lemon fragrance? Or scent? Or a candle?” I asked. Desperate to know the scent because I wanted it for when I get a house. I Managed to get a little fame over the week. Some lady brought me into her studio for an interview. To see how I felt about being the sister of someone so famous. And how I felt because I was not super famous. Anazah wants all her fame to herself. She won't say how it was her mom who was able to actually enroll her in all those movie parts when she

was younger, and how she sacrificed so much just for her to live her dream. And how I was okay and didn't complain that Anah got ten times more attention than me. I cared about Anah more in an hour than she could care about me in her life. If she was my mom, she would've set me up for adoption by now. Sadly, the "fame" I got on some american interviewers channel, was still about my sister. Not about my life, what I do, what I want to do. Just about my sister. I mean sure the post blew up, but that doesn't mean I'm still happy about it.

"Hana? Girl? Wake up!" Said Hareem.

"Huh? I zoned out again?" I said. In plain confusion.

"Yep. But anyway, their candles. I love them. You can have one." Said Hareem as she shoved a lemon and lavender scented candle in my hand. I go to the locker room and put my stuff in and call abu to tell him that i was at work. But, there was no reply. I sat in the client chair and twirled myself around. I then hear someone walk in. I push the chair back and lean backwards to see who it was. I squint my eyes. I rub them. I squint them again. No way. My mom? Ammi? What was she doing here? She can do her own hair! Why is she coming here? And why is she walking towards me?

"Beta, why are you acting so unprofessional?" Said Ammi. I picked up the black and purple scissors and asked,

"Mama, the better question is why are you here?" The lady who interviewed me for the job

walked in. I needed to compliment her so she would think I have some decency. Or so she would think I have manners. Or- yeah you get the point.

“I wanted to see your skill” Said Ammi.

“Salaam! You look very dapper today Mrs. Amini.” I said. I’m still super convinced that Mrs.Amini, (the lady who interviewed me) is the wife of my old science teacher. Or-was it english? I don’t know. It was definitely someone in my old school. His name was Mr. Amini. He was my old teacher in my old school, and he was the only guy teacher in my grade.

“Salaam. Thank you Hana. You do too.” Mrs. Amini replied. I felt butterflies in my stomach. Not the kind when you’re nervous. And Not the kind when You like someone. A Different type of butterflies. One that’s more, tingly. More, tangy. More Suspenseful. I decided to wear my white cap that has ear holes in it. So people can see the earrings I wear.

“Hana. I want a bob cut, I want bangs, and I want my grays dyed brown. I also want the bob layered.” Ammi said. A layered bob? I tried that on a mannequin and had to throw it away because it gave my nightmares. Welp, I know I’m not getting any tips today. After how this goes at least. I put the scissors down and took Ammi to the wash station.

“I’m going to charge you extra for the wash since you didn’t put it on the order, ok?” I said, checking her order.

“No. I’m not paying at all for this. I’m just testing you. But if you do good, I may ask your Nani Ammi, (Grandmother) to make biryani for you.” Ammi said.

“Biryani? Oh yes. Okay. Don’t worry. I’ll do just amazing.” Biryani is the best food ever created. It has the right spices, the right amount of spice, my grandma cooks the chicken so perfectly that it falls off the bone, its bright orange color, it’s just perfect! I start messaging Ammi’s head for just two minutes, just so she thinks I really care about my clients. Even though I don’t. Well, in reality, my clients don’t care about me. Ammi’s hair was extremely damaged.

I wasn’t sure if I should be dying it. Although I wasn’t bleaching it, I still didn’t know if that would be the best choice. But oh well. We then went over to my workstation and I started to layer her hair. As I finished, I took a spray bottle and sprayed the ends a bit and cut into a bob. Then I layered and thinned more and more. And eventually it looked good. I knew the bangs would save it. Well, the bangs have to save it. If the bangs don’t save it, I’m definitely not getting that biryani. My hand reaches out for the little scissors and drops the bigger ones on the table. I twist her hair in multiple ways and give her bigger bangs on the side, almost like butterfly bangs, but then sheer bangs in the front. Or light bangs. Whatever you want to call it.

“Not bad,” Said Ammi. I stared at her hair for a good second, seeking approval from myself. I then walked to the back, or the locker area, and mixed up

Ammi's dye. I made sure seven times that it was the correct color. I walked back to the black, very ripped up chair that Ammi was sitting in and started applying the dye to her roots. Then, I started dying all of her hair. Since she said to dye all of her grays.

Once I finished I decided to text Abu and Zainab about what happened. They both sent laughing emojis and said "hahaha". How rude? I sit down and start making matching bracelets for me and Zainab. We have so many matching things. We have matching sunglasses, matching kameez, matching anklets, matching bracelets, matching water bottles, or, we used to, but I lost mine. And Zainab broke hers. I went back to the torn chair and brought Ammi to the wash station. I washed her hair. I messaged it again. It felt like a broomstick. It was terrible. There was no way I was getting that Biryani. But, maybe she only cared about the looks. "Ammi, your hair feels like a broom stick almost. There are so many tangles. And there is dry hair that for some reason won't get wet??" I said.

"Oh, I know." Ammi said.

All that courage to insult my mothers hair just for an, "I know." I mean, I'm not complaining. I'm happy she's not yelling at me about it. But she could have explained why. I took her back to her seat and plugged in the blow dryer. I started blow drying her hair. And since she was my mom, I was almost playing with her hair because it didn't feel like a broom stick anymore. It felt so silky. It felt so smooth. Then I snapped out of it. It finished blow

drying and styling her hair. I just cut a few edges, since they looked uneven. I showed her what she looked like.

“It's pretty good. You could have done better though.” Said Ammi. That was the nicest thing she has ever said to me. SHE said it was pretty good. She starts playing with it and twirling it around. She took my phone and took pictures.

“Yeah, you're getting biryani,” Said Ammi. I was so happy. She was smiling and laughing.

“I feel so young!” Said Ammi.

“Ammi, to be honest, you look twenty.” I said back. She didn't look twenty at all. I just said that to make her feel somewhat pretty. SHE even gave me 30 rupees! Sure, that's nothing for Americans, but it's something. I can buy that one beautiful scarf I wanted! Now that I have enough for it! I know, I sound like a child. But hey. I mean, If someone got thirty american dollars from their parents, and their favorite food, the American would be happy too. I went to the locker area and did a little happy dance.

Happy Dance Rules:

- MAKE FISTS
- ROTATE FISTS IN A CIRCULAR MOTION
- DRAG FEET IN CIRCLES
- SHUFFLE
- DO 20X
- :)

And Yes, I have a page in my notebook dedicated to the happy dance. I also have a sad

dance, an excited dance, a fooled dance, an eid dance, and many, many more. I called abu and sent him the photos of Ammi. He just sent more laughing emojis. He said I did very well. And that I should keep on going and never stop my dream of hair. Although, That's not the slightest bit of my dream. I'm doing this to get money. When I get money, I can go to the US. When I go to the Us, I can write a book. It's all connected.

Here's where I'm going with this. In formula form:
WORK + WORK = MONEY .. MONEY + PLANE = USA
.. USA + EDUCATION = BOOK

My next customer walked in. Or, I think. I heard my name. So I think she's my client. I mean, she looks nice. She has fair skin, freckles, strawberry blond hair, and thinner eyebrows than Anah's heart. Maybe. She has chrome long nails. A few strands of pink hair. She must be at least 5'8. Well, higher with those heels. Her hair was curlier than my Abu's.

"Hi! My name is Elliana. I was born in America. I hear the dye here was made naturally, or something, and apparently it's really good." Said the lady.

"Oh yes, the dye is quite good. So you wanted Curtain bangs? And- you wanted to dye your hair black?" I asked.

She looked like a girl, who tried to look cute. Not pretty, not hot, cute. I feel like if she dyed her hair black, she wouldn't look cute anymore. She has

a septum nose piercing. And what seems like five million ear piercings.

“Yes, curtain bangs, and hair, black.” Says Eliana as she scrolls through stuff on her phone. Since her hair was already quite wet, I picked up my black scissors and started cutting the bangs. She kept scrolling through videos, and texting people. She was having a text argument with someone. The contacts said “my love” so I assume it was her husband.

Or boyfriend. Or lover. Or just someone. I’m not sure about what I’m thinking anymore. As I finish cutting the edges I go to the back to mix up the dye. I come back to the chair and start applying the dye.

The more I look at her the more familiar she seems. She looks like the girl I’ve seen on Talk-It, an interviewer show, in which they have mini challenges, judges choice—which is an episode where there are three celebrities, a question will be asked to the judges, and whoever they think is the best fit will win. For example, let’s suppose there are three celebrities named Joe, Amy, and Jane. Then there would be three judges named lest suppose Alex, John, and Gabriella. Let’s say the question from the host is asked, and it’s “Which celebrity was in the movie, *The Apple* doesn’t fall too far from the tree”.

Obviously that’s not a real movie, I’m just using it as an example. But then Alex, John, and

Gabriella would have to guess out of the celebrities which one was in the movie. Whichever judge wins, gets a point. The judge with the most money gets the honor of dumping slime on the host and the other judges. The judge also gets some money. It sounds weird to put that kind of episode in a talk show, but it's the only app I have. But they add episodes all the time.

They also add blooper episodes. I love the judges' choice videos the most. There's usually at least five every season. Every season is around twenty episodes. But the videos are usually eight to ten minutes. ALthough, the judges choose videos, are at least twenty minutes long. The blooper videos are usually five to six minutes long. And yeah, I know almost everything about the show. It's just so interesting.

"Uhm, This is an awkward question, but have you ever seen the show, Talk-It?" I asked. Hoping she would say yes. Otherwise I just sounded like an Idiot.

"Oh yes. I was in it. I was in one of the judges' choice videos." Said Eliana. I knew it! I was right!

"Yes! I've also seen you in that one movie. I forgot the name, sorry-" I said-

"Oh yes! Maple Street! It was my favorite movie. And I was so happy I got to play the main character. I was originally going to be the lady who died in the first few seconds. But they changed my role." Eliana said. I was so happy. Maple Street was a horror movie. It was about This girl, Maple, who

lived on Maple street. She had a cousin who also was named Mapple, but spelled with two p's. She lived in a town next to Maple street. The cousin Mapple loved the other Maple's life, so went on a hunt to kill everyone the other Maple loved. And Soon, the cousin Mapple, may even murder the other maple too. She always waited until she was eighteen. But she killed people slowly. But one day, when Mapple was twenty five, they sent her to jail. Since they found out what she had been doing. But then just a few days later, Maple's dad and Mom died with a knife through their chests.

Maple knew they would never kill themselves. But Mapple was in her cell the whole night. They even checked the security cameras. So then it was up to MApple her one last alive find to find out who did it. It was such a plot twist. And since I love to spoil movies, it was actually all Maple. Maple was the one who killed everyone. Since this was all from Maple's vision, it seemed like it was Mapple. Maple killed all these people including her parents. But blamed it on Mapple because Maple was mentally insane, and never realized she was killing her own family and friends.

“Yeah, so do you wanna friend each other?”

“How?”

“You click the settings and turn on sharing. Now if we friend each other we can share stuff. Since there is this new posting thing, ok here, click on, “wall”. Now here everyone can just post funny

pictures, and you can just say things. You can sort it by latest, and popular. Basically, you can press post something, and click on an episode, pinch these bars to an area you think was funny, you can make a meme about it, and then post it. You can get likes, money, and A little fame from it.” Said Eliana.

“That's a lot, wait, fame?” I ask.

“Yeah, just a little though.”She said. We exchanged numbers and Talk-It usernames.

“You're the nicest client I've met so far. and you're a celebrity, and you're famous, and you're cool, and..” Black.

The next thing I know I wake up on the floor of the salon-ew- and all the clients and co-workers surrounding me. Including Eliana.

“You fainted for a good ten minutes!” Said Eliana.

“Good?” We all exclaimed. How is it good that I fainted?

“No, by ‘good’ I mean you fainted for more than ten minutes, or at least ten minutes.” Elliana pleads. I will never understand English slang.

“Oh,” I say.

“That makes more sense,” Hareem says.

“Yep!” Says Tahreem.

“Alright.” Says Anaya.

“Well anyways ,I'm so sorry, back to your hair.” I said. Shaking my head, hoping to shake the thought of me fainting away.

“So, have you ever fainted before?” Elliana said, laughing.

“Uhm, no. But I randomly zone out. And I get these weird, like, day dreams.” I say, trying to express myself but failing since I can’t find the word in english to express what it felt like.

“Hmm, understandable. Anyways, wanna talk about how Cain found Chain?”

“I know! It’s so weird. I thought he said Chain died.”

“I know, but I had a little dinner party and invited him, and surprisingly he came. He said that he was lying the whole time about it. He never lost the chain, he gave it to his very against social media friend and faked it! He only did it for attention. But you can’t tell anybody. I like spilling secrets, but I don’t like being a snitch.” Said Eliana.

Woah. Who knew a celebrity would love to tell secrets about people.

“Hey, after you’re done with work, wanna meet up at this super fancy restaurant. It’s called, “*Metaih Jannah*”. They are best known for their sweets.” Says Elliana.

“No way, you can afford that?” I Ask.

“Yeah, in American money, It’s only two hundred dollars for a main course.”

“And the appetizers are about forty American dollars. Then, the desserts are more than a hundred American dollars, but I have the money.” Said Elliana. It felt so weird being friends with someone

so rich and famous. Although, what was she doing in pakistan?

“So, what are you doing here in pakistan?” I asked.

“Well, I’m shooting a movie here next week. So I decided, since I’m free this week, of course, instead of giving myself a break, why not come one week early to explore and make some friends. Well, not so much the friends part, since this movie is super secret, it’s a part two of, “Red Eyes”. Since we ended the movie with me having a heart attack while my sister was sitting there dead. Since it’s been a year, we decided to finally make the movie, all the crips were perfected and stuff, so now, we’re ready. We decided to film in Pakistan, since not many people in Pakistan have the internet and have a phone yet.” Eliana said.

“Oh, so I assume since it’s a secret, I shouldn’t tell anybody?” I asked.

“Yes, definitely don’t tell anybody.” Eliana said

“Yessiry!” I say. I bring her to the wash STation and start washing the dye out of her hair.

“Are you dying your hair for the Movie?” I asked.

“Well, mostly because I want to dye it, but they said If I didn’t dye it, they would give me a black colored wig. I mean, I’m fine with that, but I also do want to dye my hair. So for me, it’s a win-win.”

“Win-win?”

“Yeah, it means when something is good for you and good for someone else in both ways. A Win-

Win. Or, at least I think that's the definition. I hope it is. Otherwise, I've been using it wrong my whole life." Eliana said as she bit her plastic nails.

I had one client after Eliana, until lunch break. During lunch break, I just knew I was going to post something. I just can't resist. Abu would be surprised if I told all of this to him now. So I decided to wait a bit after work and maybe then I'll tell him about Elliana. I bring Elliana back to the chair and give it a blow out. I then started playing with her hair, just a bit, and when I finished styling her hair, she gave me a tip.

"No stop, please take it back!" I said.

"No! I can't let myself leave until you take the tip!" She said giggling. She shoved it in my arms, quickly paid and left. It gave me *deja vu* when Hareem shoved the vanilla scented candles in my arms. The candles were still in my locker. I mean, why wouldn't they. I got a text from Zainab. It read, "Hana, you finished the script for the play, right?". The play! I completely forgot about the play! I knew I had another customer, but our scripts were due by Friday. And today is Thursday.

I rushed to the counter, telling Hareem and everyone else that I couldn't take my next customer because of.. unexpected circumstances. I ran to the locker area, grabbed my backpack, and ran out. I got into the car and drove home. I got my driver's license just a few days ago. Even though I could have

gotten it earlier, I decided to wait. I got bright red stitching, and black fake leather seats. I also decided to add in a dark but bright red outline on the windows. And of course, I got a black car. The AC works so amazingly for some reason, yet, the radio pretty much sucks. They have two channels. And those two channels are either very old cracked up music, or just two men talking about the “New Drama Series That Came Out.” Rarely, there is good Pakistani music.

The radio manager said that it was extremely expensive to get American music, so the price would be unbelievable. But who was he to tell me about prices? He then told us the American radio would be amazing quality, but it would be at the price of 57,494.98. I was then starting to understand why he was warning us about the price. But, I still didn’t think that he must try to make us not want to buy it.

He was saying bad things about it, but then he started arguing with himself and saying that it was a great deal. This is what happens when you eat too much nihari. It starts to sink into your head. Or that could also happen with samosas. The man was practically having a full on battle with himself. While we were right in front of him. He was also kind of having a melt down. He looked like he needed a break. I mean, eventually, everyone needs a break.

As soon as I get home, I rush upstairs, open my school theater notebook, and start writing the

script. I also remembered I had to have the neatest handwriting I could possibly have. All the teachers compliment me about my handwriting, But I don't think it's as good as all the teachers say it is. Since I know myself, It's honestly just bad. And sloppy. Sure when I try to write neat it's pretty good, otherwise, It looks like a five year old's handwriting.

Which, according to American slang, means that My handwriting is terrible. Since five year olds apparently have bad handwriting. But who are they to assume that? I try to get all these random thoughts out of my mind so I could write in peace, but of course, my brain never works when I want it to. My brain also pretty much shuts off after six o'clock. And It's seven o'clock. Which means that my brain has officially shut off.

Seconds later Ammi calls me downstairs to watch the news. I reluctantly went downstairs. What I saw on the TV was, what I wished would never, ever happen. The hair salon that I worked at, burned down. All that hard work, all the money earned, was just a waste. Sure, I have some of it in my green neon money box, but that's not enough for a plane ticket. Just one more shift- and then I would have had all the money I would need. A tear went down my cheek. And surprisingly, a tear slowly went down Ammi's cheek too. I sat down, and hugged her. Then I ran upstairs. How does something happen so quickly? What is this? What is pakistan?

I opened my closet, crying- while thinking, “what was I made to do in this world? Am I not supposed to go to America? I mean, I worked so hard – I- I-” I sighed. “No, no. No!”

“Failure!” I scream, although I should be screaming at myself, I screamed at the window. Staring at the car.

“I. Am. Useless.” I say. Then I bury my face in my pillow wondering, “why are there so many other stupid famous people out there, who can get and do whatever they want? I’m pointless. I calm myself down, then I start crying not even 2 seconds after.

“Wow- I- I’m really useless, aren't I?” I sniffle.

I hate everything. I hate working, I hate writing, I hate me. Myself. I Just wish I was rich, I wish I was never born here, all these fires, floods, what is this? I hate all of it, when will this be normal? When will it stop? When will I be successful? Or, will I ever even be successful? I cried. I threw my pillow around the room. I threw my clothes on the floor. I traced my room. It's a really good therapy actually, just not the cleaning it up again part. At this point, I had no hope. There was nothing to do. I called Abu, telling him about it. My eyes widened.

“Hana, I’ve seen how hard you have worked. I’ll pay for the plane ticket. You keep the remaining money you have. Save it.” Said Abu. I screamed at the top of my lungs. I was so happy and excited, I did a happy dance and hugged mama, and I promised to myself, I would hug Abu thirty-six times when we

met. I mean, I saw a huge prider, so I may have been screaming a bit about that too, but mostly because of the plane ticket. I never thought this day would ever come. Well actually, I did. I just lost most hope. I quickly ran downstairs and told Mama.

This is the best start.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE PLANE RIDE AND AFTER
2002 18 Years Old 4/16/2002

Dear Diary...

As soon as I stepped onto the plane, I smelled biryani and fried food. I don't know how planes work, but this one already had a menu for us. Fried chicken.. Tandoori chicken.. Fries.. Chicken nuggets... Biryani..

I may just get into a food coma because of this one menu. At the airport I got these spicy chicken tenders and curly fries for dinner. Then, to stay healthy, I saw this salad stand and bought a caesar salad. Then I saw a stand selling zarda. And I couldn't control myself. But, I did need an award for eating a caesar salad. Or at least I think I deserve one.

Then I saw these strawberry cake rolls with ice cream in them. I had to get one. And I wish I got more. Anyways, back to the plane, I was just glad it didn't smell like lemons. For some reason, everything smells like lemons nowadays. Or at least just half of the places that I happen to go to.

I take a seat on the blue colored with white stitch plane seat. I opened up the menu. And started at all the good looking food. Then I closed it. A few minutes later we were soaring in the air. Was I having silent anxiety attacks? Yes. Was I scared? Also yes. But did I survive? Definitely. I was surprised at how quickly I slept. When I woke up in the morning,

it was 8:16 am. I boarded the plane at around ten in the night. Breakfast was at nine. I used the bathroom and came back to my seat. I decided to watch something on the plane. Was I extremely bored? Yes. Okay, now let's skip to the best part.

There were only five more minutes until I stepped foot in America. I finished my snack, and we had arrived. Finally, one big event that went by smoothly. As soon as I stepped foot in America, I took a big deep breath, and smiled. The air felt so fresh. Then I saw Abu. I ran as fast as I could while dragging the suitcase while trying not to fall and make a fool of myself. I hugged him so tight that somehow I couldn't even breathe.

This was definitely the best start.. For now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mariam is a 12 year old girl who lives in NJ. She takes pleasure in reading, swimming, singing & listening to music (specifically Dua Lipa) ice skating, history, and writing. She goes to St. Benedict School. This is her third published book. She also enjoys designing structures for fun. She is thinking about being a Geneticist or a therapist. This rollercoaster of fun writing has been amazing. I hope this story will maybe inspire you to write something one day!