

“Sachi, bazaar jaate hain”, today is the day people from Meena came. Tyrannia is what we call our world today. Not Earth. It is not the same as before. With our past being shrouded in mystery anyway.

“Nani, stop speaking in Hindi”, I chastised. “You know I can’t understand half of what you say”, it was true. Nani also told me that our family had migrated from Rural Punjab to what used to be Campeche. A state in what was once called Mexico. Our family, she says, used to speak in Hindi to keep it alive even though we’re not in India anymore.

“Sachi beta, I am keeping the language alive”, Nani Bhabita spoke in a thick Indian accent. “We must, it is our duty to our *language!* Our *country!* Our *people!* Our *flag!*” I zoned her out. It was always like this since I was young.

From as early as I remember, Nani would always wake up before the sun rose, freshening up and donning a bright red saree. And she still does, to this day. Her once long black locks were now matted with gray. Her clear earthy skin was

now peppered with wrinkles. But her smile never changed. She always had a smile, even in the most depressing times.

The corner of her eyes crinkled, as her cheeks puffed up. Her red lips stretched into a wide smile, showcasing pearl white teeth.

*It was infuriating.*

“Theek hai... theek hai...”, I huffed, pretending to understand. Which I really don’t. What good is it to surrender to a flag. An animal, person or legend, I understand. But to a piece of fabric?

“See, you can speak in Hindi,” she laughed. “You don’t need to learn the language, if you speak from your heart, you’ll know whether it’s right or wrong”, she looked at me. “Hai na?” Before I could speak she ushered me out of the house. “Jaldee vaapas aa jao hai na!” grabbing some change, I walked towards the bazaar.

Kiraki was a simple town. Filled with immigrants from the Northern hemisphere. The people are descendents of Asia, Europe, and North America. The ‘**state**’ used to be full of

limestone hills, rainforests and near the Gulf of Mexico according to Nani. But because of human activity, the oceans rose and most of the land left was dirt. Climate change happened, permanently causing all food to cease growing until Tryannia formed under the ***'Regents'***.

I walked along the market. People were bustling as they prepared to put up their stalls. The night market would soon come into full bloom.

Meena was the state that controlled the supply of agriculture. Every few months, they'd take their products and travel from city to city. The infamous Night Market.

I always loved coming to the Night Market. It was better than suffering in that old house, the halls filled with the whispering laughter of the dead. But Nani lived there. She refused to move. And I couldn't leave her.

"*CHICHI*," a loud voice pierced the crowd. I turned around, my lips stretching into a small smile as the boy thundered across the streets. He was tall, like most men. But his skin was as white as marble. With equally light hair and shining green eyes. An oddity. In the town filled with people of color. "Hey

ChiChi," huffed the boy as he bent over, supporting his weight on his knees.

"Ayaan." My oldest friend from as far back as I could remember. We grew up attached to the hip. He was like an older brother I had never had. "What are you doing here? Why aren't you at your shop?"

"Ma said I can go out today cause the Meenian merchants are coming," we walked through the crowds, weaving in between people dressed in colorful draperies as we reached the central bazaar.

I smiled as children ran around my feet a few times before skittering off to somewhere unknown. "How nice it would be if life was this easy?"

"You're mad at Nani Bhabita again aren't you?" Ayaan sighed. "What'd she say this time?"

"The usual," I replied flatly. "Our country and language, blah, blah ,blah," I rolled my eyes. "I don't get it. It's always the same thing. I mean, is it such a bad thing if we don't remember our history? We're living right now aren't we? For God's sake,

being able to survive is all that matters in this world! She never understands. History this-Language that,” I ranted to him.

“Maybe. But history’s like a story ChiChi,” replied the boy as he ran an agitated hand through his hair. “Heaven knows we all need some around here. Waking up at the break of dawn. Heading to the oasis to gather water, praying half of it doesn’t turn to mist in this scorching heat. People are tired ChiChi,” Ayaan spoke. “History may not be of much use in our times, but at least it gives us a connection to how our ancestors had survived years ago. You can’t blame Nani for speaking about it. Not when you’ve never once understood properly how much she sacrifices for you. For me. For everyone!” The words are stuck in my throat, before irritation settled in my blood. “You’re so lucky you know that? To have someone like her.”

“I understand better than you Ayaan,” I snapped at him. “That house is filled with ghosts. And Nani keeps feeding them. Feeding herself! With the thought that the dead may come back through the useless history of countries and languages long lost,” I don’t care if people are looking. Watching. All I cared about was how Ayaan could blame me. He didn’t understand how unbearable living there was. With a woman who was a shell of false fantasies.

“Well maybe that’s because she’s never had anyone appreciate her properly. Help her. Care for her. *Understand* her!” I froze. “Especially not from you. Her own granddaughter!” My eyes burned with unshed tears. It’s been a long time since I cried. And I wasn’t going to now. Not after his words. He was *wrong*.

“I do love her,” I stated, hating how my voice cracked. But Ayaan didn’t care. He stared at me with anger.

“You say that. But if you did. You wouldn’t treat her the way you would and take her struggles to keep you alive for granted Sachi!” With that, he stormed off, leaving me standing alone at the center of the bustling marketplace.

“B-but I do,” I whispered to myself. “Ayaan,” I called after him. “Ayaan,” I said louder, hoping to catch his attention. But he was far too deep into the crowds. “AYAA-” I stopped mid call.

A warm breeze ruffled my clothes, kicking up a bit of sand. I covered my eyes, as the wind got more violent.

When I uncovered my eyes, everything was silent. Not a spot of dust out of place, except for those few bits of sand floating in. *Wait... Sand?*

I looked around me. People were looking at each other in confusion. Kiraki was located a few miles away from the desert. A natural barrier. Those unexperienced enough to know the desert won't last for more than a few days to two weeks at least. East of Kiraki has a range of rocky mountain cliffs, and remains of the Mexican Gulf. Kiraki is surrounded by natural barriers. And with years of traveling through the desert, as a local at Kiraki, this normally happens when there's about to be a sandstorm. *Sandstorm.*

My eyes widened as I opened my mouth to shout, but someone from the crowd beat me to it. "*SANDSTORM, TAKE COVER,*" everyone dropped whatever they were holding and started scattered all over the little town square as they hurried to retreat to their houses. I swiftly turned around and followed their example. I clutched my basket to my chest as I ran. I cursed as my dress kept getting trapped in between my legs, tripping me a few times.

The storm was close. I could tell. And would never forget it. It may have been a few years when I was caught in one of them, but till this day, I can remember every single second of what happened. I remembered it like it was yesterday. The fear was clutching at my lungs as I hid behind a large boulder. Nani Bhabita's tear filled face as she pulled me into a crushing hug. The warmth and worry that radiated off her body when I first stood in front of the doorstep.

I didn't dare look back. I heard the familiar sound of strong, whipping winds. Sand swirling and scrunching under the villager's feet. *Almost there*, I thought. *I have to make it home. I can't do that to Nani again. Ayaan was right. She'd be devastated. She wouldn't bear the loss of her only remaining family. She'd already lost one grandchild.*