



The 90 Days

Volume 1

BY SHAKSHAM

THE 90 DAYS

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It is about the end of spring now. I am sitting here on this hospital bed, it smells like disinfectant, it gives me headache; the doctors, my dad and my grandmother are all watching over me. However, she is not here. I close my eyes for a moment, then I open them again, hoping to see her standing there. However, after all that has happened these past 90 days, it is foolish of me to want that.

Oh, I did not introduce myself.

Well, I am Neo lynch.

I am 17 years old and just finished my high school studies, not that it matters anymore.

Recently, in between my exams, my mother died on March 15th, so I was not able to properly grieve because I thought my mother would not want me ruining my exams because of her death. Nonetheless, all of that was for nothing, as on March 30th I received my blood test results from the hospital, stating that I had 4th stage blood cancer and that I had 81 days left to live from then.

I have a kid brother, his name is Neil, he is 13 years old. I feel sorry for him as from tomorrow he will have to take the responsibilities that once I claimed and accepted as mine. I did all I could to keep him off this shitty world but it seems things always do not go the way we want. He will have to take care of my grandmother and father too. My father, Nathan Lynch, is a policeman, it is really a very stressful job, I could tell it as whenever my father comes back to home, he always has that angry aura around him. My mother used to bring him cold water as soon as he sat on the sofa to open his shoes. Though one day when he came back my brother ran to him and started shouting and crying about my father not getting him the remote-control car that he promised. But, instead of apologizing he slapped my brother and told him to go study. He must have had a rough day to be that angry, though, he apologized to him for that just after he took a bath, and brought him the car the same day. After mom, I am the one who takes care of him now or rather I say I was. He has high B.P, diabetes, high sugar level, hence he has a lot of medicines to eat, mom used to give him those medicines, then me and now Neil will have to do it. And same stands for my grandma, she needs a lot of caring too. My grandfather died saving a kid by jumping in front of the bus which was about to hit that kid and pushing him out of the way. He was my hero and now soon I will get to meet him.

Well, this covers much about me, but this story is about my past 90 days, 90 days with her, that I wish never have ended.

After I came back from my mother's funeral. I wanted to just mourn and weep all day. But I sat on my chair, opened my books, and studied. I sat about 16 hours on that chair and studied about 8 hours. The rest 8 hours were just her memories flooding through my head. Whenever I closed my eyes, I just saw her face, I remember how I will not be able to touch her stomach anymore and how she will not hug me anymore whenever I get sad. Then my grandma came and made me eat something. I ate and then I fell asleep. I slept for more than 12 hours.

On 17th march I had my English exam; my head was flooding with the memories of my mother. All that I studied was getting out of my head. I thought I was done for. Then in the examination hall I saw her, the moment I saw her, all those thoughts stopped flooding. I had a crush on her from my first class. We were in same class but in different sections, so we did not really meet all those years. I always tried to get a glimpse of her whenever I could. My head got a bit calm after seeing her. I gave my exam and went home. And soon came the Day 1, the day when she talked to me. The day we really met.

DAY 1

MARCH 21st,2022

It was the beginning of spring and the day of my last exam. We had mathematics exam that day. I was good in mathematics so I was not that afraid despite of my conditions. I reached the examination center half an hour before the exam as per the rules, I looked around, then I found her. Fortunately, she was allotted a seat in the same class as mine that day. I was looking at her from a distance. She was mummering something and sweating too. Suddenly she looked up and saw me staring at her. I looked away and hoped that she did not see me. Someone grabbed my shoulder; I turned around and it was her. I tightened my cheeks as I prepared myself for getting slapped in front of everyone. I was blaming myself for being such a creep in my mind and then she spoke.

She said “Hey, I am Claire Rosenbaum, we are from the same school.”

I said in broken and low voice “hey Claire, my name is Neo (few seconds pause), Neo lynch.”

I was confused about why she was introducing herself to me and then she told me that she was nervous about the exam and she heard about me being good at mathematics

from her friends. She asked me to help her out with some last-minute doubts. For me, talking to her was like a dream come true and I happily said “sure, why not.”

I cleared all her doubts and then we told each other good lucks. After that we both gave our exams, I looked at her, she looked happy. Then she noticed me looking at her and gave me a smile.

Invigilator shouted “you two, eyes on your own sheets or I will tear them.”

We both smirked and finished our exams. I was sure that it was my first and last time meeting her as our exams were over. Though I was just happy thinking “At least I got to know her name before school is over.” On my way back to home, I was walking to bus stand lost in thoughts about my mom and my responsibilities. But a sound came from behind “wait, Neo,” I looked back.

It was Claire, she was running to catch up to me. I waited until she caught up to me, she was gasping, I asked her “water?” and she said “yes.” When she finished catching up her breath. I asked “why were you chasing me?”

She said “thanks for helping me out today.” I took the porch and said “it’s not a big deal, it was all my pleasure,” she smiled.

Then we had a conversation, a conversation that changed my fate from just meeting her once to me becoming more than her best friend.

She asked “are you going to appear in the National Mathematics Olympiad?”

I said “No, are you?”

She said “yes, I appear in every single Olympiad and exams, my father is very serious about my studies so I have to give it my all.”

“So that’s why you were afraid of those doubts this morning?” I asked.

“Yes, I didn’t want to lose any unnecessary scores, a point less than 9 CGPA and my father goes on a wrath and scold me whole day”, she answered.

“Is there any specific reason for that?” I asked.

“You see, my father is Jason Rosenbaum, owner of Rosenbaum Textiles,” she replied.

“What? You mean as in the Rosenbaum Textiles,” I asked shockingly.

She said “Yes, that’s the reason I want your help.”

“Help? How?”

She said “my father was looking forward to this Olympiad from a long time, But I am not so sure if I would be able to

get a good score. I am good at mathematics, but I just do not think I am at that national Olympiad level.”

“So, how can I help you?” I asked.

“Today when you were helping me out, I did not feel embarrassed to ask my doubts as I do in front of my tutors.

And, I understood everything better and easily.

The Olympiad is after a month from now, and our exams are over, so I was wondering if you could teach me,” she explained.

I told her that I was good in mathematics but I was not so sure about if I could teach anyone or not.

She grabbed my hand.

My heart started beating faster than a bullet train.

She said “I saw the recent years results of mathematics Olympiad and guess what I found; you were at the top in all of those Olympiads.”

“You stalked me?”

“it’s not like that”

“I suppose that today was no coincidence either, you intended to test me out, didn’t you?” I questioned.

She told me that it was a coincidence, At least the “asking doubt” part. She slept late the night before and did not had time to revise in the morning. Though she was stalking me

from quite long, as she always ended up in the second position in all mathematics Olympiad at school. She got curious about me and my studying strategies and all.

I was not sure that was I supposed to be flattered or offended.

“I see, but if I mess your scores up, I won’t be able to forgive myself,” I said.

I was afraid of letting her down, therefore I thought I rather should not help her, though I wanted to spend time with her.

She pressed my hands even tighter, she came closer, my breath stopped, my heart beat was racing so fast that it felt like it was about to explode.

she said, “please Neo, please, please, please. It will be alright until you help me out, if it goes any worse it would be on me”

I could not hold it back anymore, I said “Okay, I will teach you, so when are we going to start.”

After hearing that, she had this bright smile on her face.

I could feel it, I was falling for her even more.

She asked, “what about starting from day after tomorrow?”

I agreed.

She told me that she had dance classes in evening, hence we agreed on every morning starting from 23rd march,2022.

“Where do you live?” I asked her.

She told me that she lived in south district which was same as mine. Her home was just 2 blocks away from my mine, though we never met each other.

We exchanged numbers.

I took a bus to my home and she also got in the car waiting for her, just at a distance and left.

After getting home I thought about her all day.

I nearly got over my mother’s death. I was smiling again, my grandma saw me, she smiled too. Finally, we all were getting over it.

I was thinking about Claire again on Day 2(22nd march,2022). I revised all that I had to teach her on day 3.

It was exciting to just think that I was going to a girl’s home for the first time, and that girl being Claire was like a dream coming true for me.

Then came day 3, the day of my interrogation.

End of day 1!

DAY 3

March 23rd, 2022

“What is this sound? It is annoying,” I opened my eyes, smashed the alarm off and started getting ready to go to her house.

I was over excited to go to her home, as I thought

“Does she have any siblings? I wonder what her house is like? I should better hurry up or my first impression to her family will be into dust.”

I was doing everything hyper actively, the milk was boiling, I was watching over it and at the same time I was also filling this water bucket in my kitchen.

My phone rang, I did my math and ran to pick up the call.

I picked it up, “Good morning, Neo,” she said.

I heard her voice, I was in wonderlands, “Good morning, Claire,” I replied.

“So, you are coming today, right?” she asked.

I was lost in my thoughts imagining about how we would spend our time together.

“Right?” she asked again.

“Yup, I am,” I said.

“My driver will be there outside your house in half an hour then,” she told me.

“Driver? it’s just 2 blocks, I can walk that much”, I said.

She said that her father was insisting on it, as I was going to help with her studies.

Therefore, I agreed.

“Did you take enough sleep last night, I don’t want you falling asleep between our studies,” I said.

“Yes, I slept enough. By the way, my sister is so excited to meet you,” she tells me.

“What? Why? Did I do something?” I asked in confusion.

“No, you did not do anything. And the rest you can ask her directly,” she said.

I was talking to her then suddenly my feet felt wet, there was smoke in the house and there was this burning smell.

“Heck, I will meet you at your home then, bye,” I told her and threw my phone on the bed.

I ran to kitchen and turned the tap and stove off. The water and milk were spilled all over the floor. Also, there was this huge black stain of burned milk in the boiler.

I picked the boiler up with my bare hands in hurry, it was so hot that I lost the grip of it. It fell and my fingers also got

burnt a little bit. I ran to ice it, but I slipped over the water that was spilled on the floor and hurt by back.

“What are you doing Neo? Get a hold of yourself,” my grandma said.

I sat there for a minute, took a deep breath, stood up and cleared all the mess that I made.

I took a long bath and then selected my outfit.

I wore a white polo T-shirt pairing it with black trousers, I wore my father’s masculine perfume to impress her, I wore my black leather watch and I was all set.

The driver started honking from outside.

I told my grandma that I would be back in few hours and then I wore my white sneakers and I left.

I was sitting in the back seat of the Mercedes that they had sent. I was thinking if I was looking good or did I do too much. I realized this silence in the car and I thought I should start a conversation with the driver.

“How long have you been working for them?” I asked.

He did not reply. Seemed like he was pissed at me for something. So, I chose to be silent afterward for the whole drive.

I was thinking what her house might be like and then the car stopped.

He got out of the car and opened the gate for me.

I got out and there it was.

It was a huge villa but my eyes got stuck at her, she was standing at the door to welcome me.

My heartbeat was racing as she was walking towards me.

Suddenly someone grabbed my hand from behind and started running towards the house, it was a girl.

It was so sudden that I could not resist, the next moment we were in a girl's room, it smelled nice. She pushed me on the bed and I was just going on with it as my mind did not know what to do. She locked the door, my heart was beating at its max, my face went pale and I just nervously looked at her.

“Open the door, Chloe,” Claire shouted from outside.

She opened the door and started laughing.

“You should have seen his face Sis, it was all red and pale,” she told Claire.

Claire came in and sat beside me, then she said, “I am sorry about my older sister, I told you that she was excited to meet you.”

“So that's what it was, alright,” I said in confusion.

“Let us have a proper introduction Neo, I am Claire's older sister, Chloe. You are Neo?” Chloe asked.

She was a year older than Claire, so she was my age.

“I am Neo lynch, Claire and I studied in same school and I am here to help her out with her studies today.” I said in a single breath.

Claire said, “no need to be so formal Neo, I already told her about you, she is just kidding.”

“Oh, that’s funny, ha, ha,” I faked my laugh.

“By the way Claire, who is that little guy peeking from the room’s door,” I asked Claire and the boy ran away.

She said, “That is my little brother Chris.”

“How old is he?” I asked.

She said that he was 13.

“He is at the same age as my younger brother Neil,” I told her.

She asked me in which school was he studying and we got to know that both Neil and Chris went to same school as us. Later, we got to know that they were in the same class too and that really caused some problems for a bit, you will find that out as the story goes on.

Claire’s mother brought some snacks for us.

“She is my mother Carol, and mom he is Neo, whom I told you about,” Claire introduced us.

“You didn’t tell me that he is this much handsome,” her mother said.

I blushed.

“Mom.....,” Claire gave her the go flag.

“Well kids, now study hard and if you need something just call me,” Mrs. Rosenbaum said and left.

Chloe said, “I am going to study in my room too and Neo, while I am away don’t try to do anything funny with my sister.”

I got scared and just nodded.

“Stop teasing him and just go study, sis,” Claire said to Chloe.

Then we started.

It was around 11 am when we started.

I taught her some tricks to solve questions quickly and told her to try them on few questions herself.

While she was doing so, I was just looking at her, wondering how can someone be this beautiful.

Then a breeze of air came through the window and blew her hairs. My eyes were just stuck on her and I did not even realize when she started to look at me too.

“Neo, what are you looking at?” she asked.

I coughed and got a bit awkward and started looking here and there.

“Nothing, just your room,” I said.

She smiled.

There was a photo frame on her desk, it was a photo of her family and there was a spot left empty on it.

“Why didn’t you put any photo in this spot?” I asked.

She said, “my mother told me that I should keep it empty for photo of someone as important to me as my family is, it should be a person that I can call family.”

“I get it, so it is like you left it empty for your future husband,” I said.

“Yeah, something like that,” she said.

Suddenly my nose started bleeding.

“Are you okay Neo?”

“Yes, where is the restroom?”

“It is right after room next to us.”

I cleared my nose and came back. At the time I ignored it as it was common in teenagers to have nose bleeding.

I came back and got back to studies.

It was around 2 PM when her mother came in and asked us for lunch.

We stopped our studies for the day and I said that I should be going.

We were leaving the room when I saw Chris glaring at me with that look of hatred as he was going to kill me if he gets the chance and I moved after Claire.

We were at the door when Mr. Jason got back home.

“Welcome honey, meet Neo.”

“Hi, sir,” I said.

He did not say anything back.

“He is the same class as our Claire, he was helping her out with her studies,” her mother introduced me.

“Doesn’t she take tuition for that?” he asked.

“But dad he is the winner of every single math Olympiad in Our school and I understand way better from him than my tutor,” Claire said.

“If you say so then it is okay, So Neo what does your father do?” he asked.

“He is a Policeman, sir,” I told him.

“Then we should watch ourselves, I don’t want to go to jail,” he said.

We all laughed and the interrogative mood changed to a fun conversation.

“Make sure that she gets the first place then, okay son,” he said.

I got very happy seeing how her family accepted me except Chris whom I was most scared of.

“I will leave then,” I said.

Claire said she would walk me to the main gate of the villa.

As we were walking towards the gate she said, “what do you think?”

“About what?”

“My family, did you like them.”

“Yes, they seemed like my own family except Chris who seems to hate me for some reason.”

“It is not like that; he probably thinks that I will start to spend less time with him because of you.

“I get it now.”

“So, you will come tomorrow then?”

“Yes.”

She grabbed my hand and said “Thank You Neo.” Then she ran back inside, but I was still in shock as my mind was stuck in the moment she grabbed my hand.

Then the driver opened the door and I sat in the back.

There was silence and I was just smiling thinking about it all in the back.

Then the driver said, “Boy, don’t think anything weird about our Claire.”

I stopped smiling.

We reached and I got out of car.

I got inside my house.

“How was it?” my grandma asked.

I smiled and went to room.

“Okay then just eat your food then, Neo,” she shouted.

End of day 3!

DAY 6

March 26th, 2022

Day 4 & 5 were pretty much about studying, I went to her house, we studied for few hours while Chris tried to kill me with his stares and Chloe teased the hell out us. Soon it was day 6.

I was walking to Claire's house as her driver was on leave. I was thinking about what should I talk to her about if we get into that awkward kind of moment. "Should I talk to her about her favorite movies?" "Or should I talk to her about her friends, no that will be too personal". Suddenly, I heard a boy crying sitting on the side walk.

I went to him, sat down, and looked at him, it was Chris.

I told him to stop crying and asked what happened.

He told me that some boys from his classroom tried to rob him for money and when he denied that he did not had money, they beat him.

I said, "if you cry, they will think that you are weak, are you weak?"

"No."

“We don’t cry, we learn, what do we do?”

“We learn.”

“That’s right now get up.”

I picked him up on my back.

We stopped at a convenience store nearby. I bought him a bottle of juice first. Then I bought a bandage for him. While I was applying it on his scratched elbow, he was looking at me. He did not say anything, he just looked at me.

When we were getting out of the shop Chris stopped.

“What happened Chris?”

He pointed a group of boys in the shop and said, “they are the ones who beat me.”

“Okay, let’s go and teach them a lesson.”

“Yes,” he said.

We walked to them; they were all facing the opposite side. I tapped on the shoulder of one of the boys, he turned.

It was Neil, my younger brother.

I was angry though I was more disappointed in him. He asked “Big brother, why are you here and with him?”

I asked them, “did you guys beat Chris?”

They all looked down and did not say anything. Neil said, “you don’t know how mean he is, he is rich though when

we asked him if we could borrow some money from him, he denied.”

“Really Neil? Who taught you to think like this? I am sure that dad and I did not. If he denied then you should just go, you did not have any right to touch him. And in the first place why did you need to borrow money, don’t you get your monthly allowance?” I scolded him.

“I do get it but there is a new supercool game that came into market and me and my friends really wanted to get that but he didn’t lend us money,” Neil said.

I was so disappointed in him that I just wanted to go home. I told him that he could just have asked me for it.

I said, “I will let Dad handle this, you really need some beating.”

“No brother, I am sorry, I will never do this again, just do not tell Dad,” Neil apologized.

“There is no point in apologizing to me, you should apologize to Chris,” I said.

“I am sorry Chris, I promise that I will never do this again, please forgive me,” he apologized.

“You should also get rid of these friends of yours,” I said.

“Yes, I will,” Neil agreed.

“And you all, if I ever see anyone of you with Neil again you all are going to get scolded,” I said to all other kids with Neil.

They all ran away.

Chris said, “hey Big Bro, could he be my friend?”

I said, “of course, shake hands with him Neil.”

Neil was in shock that how fast Chris forgave him and asked him to be friends.

They smiled at each other and shook hands.

I told Neil to go home.

I carried Chris on my back again.

We were going to his house then he said “can you not tell my sis about what happened.”

I asked him, “why?”

“If my sis finds out that your brother did this to me, she will get angry on you, then you will not come to my house anymore, I don’t want that,” he said.

“Okay I will not tell her, don’t worry.”

There was silence for a few minutes then he said

“Thank you, Big Bro.”

We both smiled and walked on.

Claire was worried waiting for his brother at the gate.

She saw me carrying him on my back.

We went to hall inside and I put him on the Sofa.

“What happened, why are you this late and how did you get all these injuries,” Claire asked.

“I fell,” Chris said.

We both looked at each other and smiled.

“You should be more careful Chris, if Neo hasn’t been there, how would you have gotten home,” Claire said.

I blushed.

“And sis, I also made a friend today, His name is Neil,” Chris said.

“That’s great Chris, who is he?”

“He is Big Bro’s Brother.”

“Big Bro?”

“Yes, he is my Big Bro.”

Claire looked at me, I looked at her then we all smiled.

Then Claire and I went to her room to study.

We sat across the round table that was on the carpeted floor in her room.

I was reading the notes from our last class.

I looked up. She was looking at me, having the prettiest smile that I had ever seen on her face.

I just froze, I looked in her eyes, she was looking into mine. Then she came, slamming the door open and grabbed my collar.

“How can you be this stupid? If he was hurt you should have just ordered a taxi or something you idiot. You did not have to carry him all the way here,” Chloe said.

“But Chloe, Neo brought him back home, you should be thankful for that,” Claire said.

“Don’t try to defend Neo every time Claire.”

I started saying that “I am sor.” she told me to shut up and hugged me.

“Thank you, Neo, Chris is so stupid, how can someone just trip and hurt themselves,” Chloe said.

“I am sorry too Chloe, you are right, I should have just ordered a taxi, it is just that I am not used to that much care myself, therefore I didn’t have much idea about that situation,” I apologized.

Though I did what my parents did for me when I used to hurt myself as kid while playing in the park. My father would scold me and tell me to stop crying, Mother would treat my wounds and tell me a sweet story to calm me. I understood that they were rich and treated situations

according to them, I respected their opinions. I just accepted it all and apologized.

“Well, it was nothing big,” Claire said.

We all smiled.

She always said things that I wanted to say but I could not.

I felt complete whenever I was with her.

“Mom also wanted to thank you so she is baking some cupcakes right now,” Chloe told us.

I said, “that’s sweet of her but she didn’t have to go through all this trouble for me.”

“Let her thank you Neo,” Claire said.

“I am going to study now, you should also get back to studying, your Olympiad is coming close every day,” Chloe said.

She left the room,

“I also have to tell you something about what happened today,” I said to Claire.

I told her about everything that happened, about the bullying, about Neil, how they became friends and how Chris did not want me to tell her anything. Though I was scared she would get angry on me.

“Why did he lie to me about this? He likes you more than me now, doesn’t he?” she said.

“Only Chris can answer that question,” I said.

We laughed and got back to our studies.

After a few minutes her mom brought us cupcakes.

They were too good, they tasted way better to me than anyone else as I missed my mom’s cooking. Dad and I were used to cook at home. It had been too long for me to taste food filled with a mother’s love.

I did not want to make her feel sad for me so I did not tell her why I was so happy to eat those cupcakes.

After that we studied for few hours.

I was having headaches for few weeks, but at that point I also started feeling this itch inside my throat.

I started coughing, she asked If I needed water.

I drank some water though nothing changed.

I went to the washroom; I was waiting for my coughing to stop and suddenly I spat blood.

Seeing that I was coughing blood, I knew that I was ill.

I did not tell Claire about this and left for home.

I told my dad about this and we got an appointment with a doctor on 29th.

I realized that I should not have ignored all those symptoms.

I was just hoping it was nothing big as I knew, without me, everybody else in my family will be broken. Losing my mother was already a big shock for our family. I just hoped that it was some normal flu or fever, nothing big.

I went for the check up on 29th and waited for the reports.

END OF DAY 6!

DAY 10

March 30th, 2022

They say a new morning comes with new opportunities but for me this morning brought the termination of all my opportunities.

I started reading the reports and in the end of it, it was stated that I was terminal due to my growing cancer that was already in third stage. I had 81 days left. All the headaches and nose bleedings made sense at once. I was in denial at first, I left the reports on table in our hall. I came back to my room, closed the door, and lied on my bed. I laughed first knowing how messed up life was. Everything that was supposed to go wrong was going wrong. First, I lost my mother and now I was going to lose everyone I ever loved. My grandma, father, brother, and her.

It started hitting me slowly, thoughts started flooding through my head. As more as I realized the fact that I would never get to see them after 81 days the more I got broken. My mind went numb and my eyes got wet, I was holding my tears back but the pain was just so much that they did not stop. Just imagine how much would it hurt when you just started feeling alive and you get to know that even that is going to be taken from you.

It felt like I was cursed, every time something good happened to me it was followed by something much bad, though this time it was worst.

My dad was leaving when he saw the reports lying there on the table. My grandma entered my room, her eyes were filled with tears. She hugged me so tight that I could barely breathe. There was that look in her eyes, the look of pity.

“Grandma, it is ok, I am fine,” I said.

She said, “It is not okay, why did this happen. You are just a kid. Why is everything so difficult? why is it so painful? This was not how it was supposed to be. You were supposed to enjoy your youth, go out with girls, Marry the love of your life one day, have kids. This did not have to be this hard.”

Seeing how broken she was by this made me cry even more.

“Probably it is just a wrong report and nothing is wrong,” she said in denial.

“Reports are not wrong Grandma; I have had the symptoms for few weeks now.”

“Why didn’t you say anything before? It could have come out differently if we knew.”

“I didn’t want to bother anyone anymore Grandma, everyone was already suffering because of mom’s death.”

“Why do you kids have to be so mature. You are supposed to tell us if anything is wrong, not overthink it by yourself. Now it came out even worse. Not only for you, for everyone that liked you, what are you going to say to Neil? And your dad is even more broken than me right now. He did not want to come to see you because he cannot stop his tears, he did not want to make you sadder than you already are. He blames himself for everything, he thinks it was his fault that you did not tell us anything.”

“I am sorry, Grandma, I am so sorry.”

“It is too late for apologies now Neo, I want you to live the rest of your time at your fullest, every moment that you are going to spend will never come back so savor every little bit of joy you can get.”

“Yes Grandma, I promise that I will enjoy it as much as I can but before that I have to make somethings right, I don’t want to die with regrets.”

I got out of my room and went to my dad; he was sitting in the hall. His eyes were filled with tears. I sat beside him.

“I am sorry Neo, I should have talked to you more, I should have been more friendly, I failed as a dad, even my son couldn’t come to me and tell me his problems.”

“It is not your fault dad, I was too naïve, I overthought about it and messed it all up, really dad, no son could have a better father than you. You had to be strict with us in

times, whenever you punished us, it hurt you more than us.

But you understood your place and did it. If I could choose who my father will be in my next life, I would ask for you every single time.”

I hugged him after saying that.

“Do you know who was the happiest person in this world when you were born Neo?” my dad asked.

“Grandma?” I spoke.

“It was me, when the nurse told me that I had a healthy boy I was so happy that I ran to the sweet shop instantly, shouting that I had a boy, I gave sweets to every single person I saw on my way back, I ran across all the floors of hospital giving sweets to everyone telling them that I had a boy.”

“You did all that? You do not seem that way, dad.”

“Oh, I did it alright. Then the nurse allowed me to see you after a bit. Your mom and I were so happy. All we thought was how were we going to take care of you. You were our first child so we both were still new to all that parenting thing.

When you got 3 years old, you somehow managed to put the hot iron on your foot that I just had used. Your mother

saw you crying, but standing still with the hot iron still lying on your feet.

Then when you got five you wanted to get off the bike on your own and you managed to get burned by the hot silencer of the bike.

We sucked at parenting but we loved you, we were ready to go to any lengths for you and your little born brother.

You meant the world to us.

All we wanted was to make sure that you both were happy, you grow to be all that we could not be.”

“What are you talking about dad, you are the best parent in this whole world, all I could ever want to be is to be a gentleman like you, respect everyone like you do, to be responsible like you, to make tough decisions when they were necessary like you.”

“Thank you, Neo. For making our lives so much better, you are the perfect kid that a parent could have, I want you to live the rest of the time as you want, do not think about consequences and responsibilities, I am supposed to that and I will, you can ask me for anything you want, I would even give my life if I could If it meant you get mine.”

“Thank you, dad, for taking care of me and making me everything I am right now.”

We both smiled and then I went back to my room.

And then I realized this meant that I did not have much time with Claire. I wanted to tell her that I liked her because I did not want to waste much time. I wanted to have every moment I could have with her.

I gathered the courage and called her.

She picked up.

“Hello Claire, it’s Neo”

“Well, this is a first, you never called me before”

“Actually, I wanted to tell you something”

“Yes? What is it?”

“I would like to tell it to you in person”

“Oh, when do you want to meet then?”

“Are you free today evening?”

“Umm... Sorry Neo I am going on a date with my boyfriend in the evening”

“What?”

“Yeah, it is his birthday today so we planned to go out”

“You have a boyfriend?”

“Oh, that’s right I never told you about him, his name is jack”

“That’s great Claire, I will see you tomorrow”

And then I hung up on her.

As if everything was not bad, this got added up in the pile too. At that time, I was just losing myself. I did not know what wrong I had done to deserve all that. I never got anything that I ever loved. Still, I hoped for everything to get better, never treated anyone badly but all I did was to suffer. I suffered all the way through life and it all came to an end but not the way I wanted. I was overthinking like always, and then, the door opened and there was Neil standing there.

“Big brother, grandma was crying so I asked her what happened and she told me that you are going to leave soon, where are you going?”

It was hard for me to even look at him, all my responsibilities were going to be his now. He is just a kid; he also lost his mother and now he was going to lose his brother too. With all that pain I looked at him and said “I am going away Neil.”

He asked me “for how long big bro?”

“Forever, but I will always be with you” I said.

“Are you going to die Big bro?” he asked. I could not answer him, I just patted him on his head as tears fell down my cheeks.

End of day 10!

DAY 11

March 31st 2022

I woke up, my grandma was sitting there, right beside me.

“Hey grandma, how long have you been here?”

“Not for long, I just want to admire your pretty little face till you are with us”

“Grandma I get it that you don’t want me to die so soon, but it cannot be changed”

“I know, that is why I am going to have all the time I can have with you Neo,” her eyes got wet while saying that.

“I would like to live as much as an average human being too, but now that this is my fate, I want you accept that and I want you to not treat me differently, that is like a constant reminder for me that I don’t have much time Grandma,” I said with a heavy heart.

My dad entered the room and said, “I figured that you would say that, I also tried to tell her that sitting and looking at you for hours isn’t going to make you better, it will just remind you of everything.”

My grandma said, “so you two want me to just accept it and move on with it? I am sorry but I cannot do that, he is

the boy that grew in front of my eyes, the boy I fed with my hands, I cannot just pretend that nothing happened.”

She got up and left the room.

“Well, that was a good morning for sure,” my dad said.

We both smiled.

“Dad, I know you are just as sad as her, I am sorry that I am going away.”

“It’s not your fault son, I told you that you are a blessing for us.”

“Dad, I want to spend more time with you all too but it will just remind of my time slipping right beneath my feet.”

“I know son and that is why we are going on a family vacation to Bali next month.”

Neil entered the room jumping and shouting, “yes, we are going to Bali, yeah, I am going to go tell Chris.”

“Be careful Neil, you will get hurt.”

Neil ran out of the room.

I looked at my dad and he looked at me and then we both smiled.

“You knew dad?”

“Yes, your mom told me once that you wanted to go to Bali with your family”

“I am so happy Dad”

“I hope your mom is happy too where she is”

“I am sure she will be, dad”

We smiled and he patted me on my head.

“Who is this Chris that Neil was talking about?” my dad asked.

“He is Neil’s friend and his older sister Claire is my friend,” I told him.

“That is a lot of connection Son”

We laughed.

“What’s their surname”

“It is “Rosenbaum” dad, as in “Jason Rosenbaum”

“That’s a weird coincidence, he is my friend”

“What? For real dad?”

“Yes, there was I time I escorted him through the airport, then we talked a bit and after that we had drinks together a couple of times, but he only mentioned a single girl, her name was Chloe I guess”

“How long have you not met him dad?”

“It’s been like 18 years now”

“That’s a very long-time dad, Chloe is the eldest sister, she’s about my age, Claire is an year younger than me and Chris is as old as Neil”

“It’s really been long, isn’t it, can you get Jason’s number from Claire?”

“Umm. I guess yes, I am going to meet her today”

“Great then, what time are you going to meet her?”

I looked at my watch and my soul just left me. She texted me to meet her at a Café nearby at 10 in the morning and it was already 9:30. I got up and started running here and there to get ready. But then it hit me that she told me about Jack, and suddenly I stopped. I thought, what was the point in being nice after that. I took my time and got ready and reached café at like 10:30.

There she was, even though I was pulling the tough guy act just a glimpse of her took it all away. I was already regretting about being late. And as I was going closer my mind was going numb because I did not know what to say to her as I was the one that called her.

I went more closer and as her face became clearer, I saw tears in her eyes and her eyes were all sore. I ran to her and sat in front of her.

“I am very sorry for being late Claire, please stop crying, I am sorry that you felt stood up.”

She just kept crying

“Hey just hit me, curse me, but please don’t cry.”

She hugged me, I was in shock for a moment and then I hugged her back.

Then she said, “We broke up yesterday, Jack and I.”

I was kind of happy that I had a chance again but also sad that she was crying so badly, I calmed her down.

I bought her an ice cream and then she started telling me about it.

She told me that he brought few of his friends with him at their date and later they disrespected her and when she scolded them, Jack told her that she was overreacting.

She told me how he always puts everyone else above her and how she was losing feelings for him from a long time. She realized that it was just a kid’s relationship with no pillars to stand on. And when she told him to choose between his disrespectful friends and her, he chose his friends.

“Jack, more like a jerk,” I said.

“You know, you are right he is total douchebag”

“Come with me Claire,” I said.

I took her to a lake nearby and we I picked two rocks; I gave one to her and kept one myself.

Then I shouted, “I miss you mom” and then I threw the rock in the lake.

“What was that Neo? everybody is looking at us,” she asked.

“Don’t worry about everyone, just let it all out and then sink it all away with the rock.”

She hesitated at first then she shouted, “You are a jerk Jack, I hate you” and then she threw the rock in the lake.

I looked at her and she looked at me then we both started laughing, I wiped rest of the tears off her cheeks and then she hugged me again.

“Thank you, Neo”

“I will be here whenever you need me Claire,” I said.

Then she pushed me away and started punching me with her soft little fists.

“You are a jerk too Neo, I thought you stood me up, you also hung up on me yesterday”

“I am very sorry for that Claire”

“It’s okay, just never do it again”

“I will not Claire”

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

I froze as my mind went blank because she had just got broken up and I cannot just put her in this situation so soon again.

“What is it, Neo?”

“Umm... yes, I wanted to ask you for your father’s number”

“And you wanted to meet me in person for only that?”

“Yes, I thought we could use some time to let the heat out after studying every day too”

I was thanking my dad in my mind, if he had not told me to get Mr. Rosenbaum’s number, I would have messed it all up today.

Then she gave me her dad’s number and asked me, “did something happen to your mom? You shouted you miss her.”

I was not so sure, if I wanted to tell her about that or not. “What if she thinks that I just want her sympathy and I just want to leach onto her,” I thought. She stood still waiting for a response. I looked at my wristwatch and said, “damn it, I am late, I have to receive Neil from school, sorry Claire but I have to go.” I know it was stupid, I could have just told her everything simply. I left and when I looked back, I saw that she stood still looking at the lake, thinking about something. Later, I realized that it was HOLIDAY!

End of day 11!

DAY 12

April 1ST 2022

I woke up but I could not move my body, it was not that I was feeling sick. Instead, it was because of the thoughts going through my head after spending time with Claire yesterday.

What happened a day before was overwhelming for me, as I could still feel her body touching me from when we hugged. The fact that we came even closer, we were better friends and most important of all that she was single now. That Jack was out of the equation now. But then I remembered what happened in the end and it was saddening. “What would she think about me?” this question was eating me from inside. I was having anxiety that she would stop talking to me again, as I lied to her.

I gathered all my thoughts and calmed my head, I got out of bed and moved towards the hall. Dad was sitting there on the sofa reading newspaper. I did not meet him yesterday night as I slept early. He asked me, “how was your date son?”

“It was fine, dad” I said. Obviously, I was not going to tell him how bad I messed up.

“Did you do what I asked you?”

“Yes, I got Mr. Rosenbaum’s no.”

I shared him the contact and dad called him instantly, Mr. Rosenbaum picked up the phone and they started talking.

They literally talked for an hour over the phone, talking about all sort of things. Including how were we doing and what was going on in our lives.

I was sitting right there listening to them till my cellphone started ringing. It was Claire, I picked up as my heartbeat raised. But it was not about what I was afraid of, instead she had called me to ask if I was coming over for studies or not.

I told her that I would be there in an hour and I went to get ready. Grandma had made pancakes for breakfast as she knew that I liked pancakes very much. I was just about to head out but someone grabbed my shirt from behind. I turned back and it was Chris. I slapped myself to make sure that it was him and yes, he was truly standing there.

“What are you doing here?” that was my instant response after seeing him.

“I just got here big bro, Neil and I have decided to go to school together from now on so we will head out from here, together” he said. I then realized that he was in school dress.

Neil came out of his room too, “I am all set Chris, let’s go” he said as he saw me standing with Chris.

“You guys got too close, didn’t you?” I asked.

They both smiled and said together, “It is all thanks to you, big bro.”

I got a little hyped up too, I took them to a nearby convenience store and bought them their favorite chocolates, then they went on their way to school and I started walking to Rosenbaum residence.

As close as I was getting to there, as slower my steps got. The thought of how would she react in person was eating me but whatever it would be, it was sure that I made her lose her trust in me by lying.

I reached there, she was waiting at the main door, I looked at her but she did not say anything. She started walking to her room and I walked after her, everything was just so quiet that it was giving me goosebumps. I could feel, how sad she was. Then we went inside her room and sat beside each other. She looked at me, that look was a bit off. It was not because that I lied but something else. Suddenly big drop of tears started coming out of her eyes and I did not understand what was happening. She hugged me, she hugged me so tight that we both fell on the bed right beside us.

“What happened Claire, why are you crying?”

“I am so sorry please forgive me” she said.

“But why are you sorry? I lied I am sorry”

“No, I did not know about your mother, please forgive me for being so insensitive with you, I am stupid, you were sad about it but still you smiled and went away instead of scolding me for being insensitive” she said.

It was then I realized that I was not the only one who was listening to our father’s conversation, she also happened to be there listening to her father on phone. My father literally overshared, it was like he could not keep anything. But now I had an idea of the situation.

I said “it is okay Claire; I am not sad or angry about it.”

She hugged me even tighter and kept sobbing, “it is not okay, I am so sorry Neo, you must be so upset with me that you lied and left” she said.

“It is really okay Claire; I promise you it is, I cannot ever be upset with you, does not matter what you do.”

She stopped crying and let go of me, as she was getting back up, she stepped on a ball that Chris left there and she fell on me. She was so close to me that if she even moved her face an inch closer to me, it would have been a lip to lip.

She was on me, I could feel her chest pressing against me, if I had let my intrusive thoughts win that day, I would

have kissed her. But I controlled myself and she got back up and just laughed, I laughed too.

Well, here was the thing, of course I was lost in her smile right at that moment but my body was also reacting to what just happened, I controlled my thoughts but there are certain things that I cannot control.

I said “I will be back in a moment Claire” and went to the washroom.

I was waiting for it to get back to normal by distracting myself, I was looking here and there, I was trying to revise the mathematics formulas in my mind.

After 5 minutes, I was ready to get back out but suddenly I felt this pain in my head and fell there as I was dizzy. Blood drops started falling out of my nose, I started taking short breaths, I sat down and composed myself. I turned my head up to stop the bleeding through my nose.

This was when I started thinking about the possibility that she knows about my cancer too. Now I had to get it out of her, that if she knows or not. I sat there for 10 minutes and when I started feeling a little better, I came out.

I did not want to panic and let them all know about my condition. I went back to Claire’s room and sat on the chair. I was quietly looking at her, observing her as I wanted to know if she knows about me or not.

I was doing that but then the room door got opened, Chloe rushed in, she got me up from the chair and climbed on me crying, telling me that it is alright and they were all there to support me.

Then she said something very important that, “We were so heartbroken when we heard about your mother, Claire even started crying and ran back to her room.”

“Stop it Chloe, don’t tell him that,” Claire said.

“Okay I am going now but take care Neo and do not be shy to ask for any kind of help.”

“Yes, I will, thank you.” And then she went outside.

Now I knew that even if my father talked about my condition Claire does not know. Chloe also did not know as she did not talk to me about that. So, I guessed that my father just did not talk about it on the phone.

Now that I had my head clear, we started to study. After two hours we closed the books as we were done for the day. I got up and walked towards the exit as she followed me but to our surprise, when I entered the hall, I saw my dad talking with Mr. Rosenbaum. They were laughing talking about something.

“So, this is Claire, huh Neo?” my dad asked me.

“Yes, dad.”

“She is really pretty isn’t she Neo?”

I was so embarrassed when he said that but I looked at Mr. and Mrs. Rosenbaum's face, they were smiling.

I took a deep breath and said, "Yes dad she is."

I looked at Claire, her cheeks were red as she was blushing, she did not make eye contact with me, instead, she was looking down hiding her face from me.

"When is your exam, Claire?" dad asked.

She told him that it is on 20th April. Then Mr. Rosenbaum and my father looked at each other and nodded their heads in agreement.

Mr. Rosenbaum said to Claire, "You, Neo and Chloe should go out for some shopping."

"Why dad?" she asked.

"Mr. lynch and our family is going together to Bali for a vacation after your exam," Mr. Rosenbaum replied.

I cannot explain in writing how excited she was at that moment; she was so happy about it that she forgot, she had to give an exam before all of that.

Chloe was also listening and then she said "Okay, we will go the mall a day after your exam Claire and you better be prepared Neo as it will be exhausting."

"She is my older daughter" Mr. Rosenbaum told my father.

Well, at that point I was getting bubbles in my stomach out of happiness. I was so happy that I would have kissed Mr. Rosenbaum if I could.

“Yes, I will be prepared for it, Chloe. Neil and Chris will be so happy to hear about this” I said.

“Yes, they are going to be very happy” Claire replied.

We were all smiling and making plans for our trip. Then after an hour, Mr. Rosenbaum walked us to the exit. My father told me to go ahead and he stopped to talk to Mr. Rosenbaum. I looked back and they were having a serious conversation about something. Then I kept walking to our car parked outside.

“How many days does he have?”

“According to the doctors less than 80”

“I have a friend who studied in Harvard Medical School, he deals with worst cases of cancer, maybe he can help”

“Really? please contact him as soon as you can Jason”

“Yes, I called him when you told me about Neo’s Cancer on the phone, he was going for an operation so he said, he is going to call me later and I am waiting for it.”

#Phone rings

It was his friend, he picked up.

“So, what did you want to talk to me about Jason?”

“Yes, so there is a kid, he is like a son to me, doctors here said that he is not going to get through his cancer, can you check him once?”

“Which stage is he on?”

“He is on 4th stage, blood cancer.”

“This is a very critical case Jason, it will require professional assistance and special equipment’s, it will be very costly, can they afford it?”

“You do not have to worry about the money, I will pay for it, however costly It is, just save the kid.”

“Okay bring him here on 10th April, if everything goes great, we can operate him right on that day.”

“We will be there, thanks.”

They hung up. My father sat down on his knees crying and thanking Mr. Rosenbaum.

“What are you doing Nathan? Get up.”

“I do not have enough words to thank you Jason.”

“He is your son Nathan, which means he is also a son to me, let us hope that everything will be great.”

My dad got up and asked Mr. Rosenbaum if he can hide this from everyone in their family as he knew, I would not have liked it.

Then my father also walked back to our car.

I was already sitting inside the car at the front passenger's seat, my dad got in and started driving. He had this smile on his face, he looked at me and said "I have a good news Neo."

"I also have to tell you something, dad."

"What is it?"

"My nose started bleeding again, I got dizzy and fell. Also, my head hurts constantly."

After hearing this the smile on my dad's face wore off.

End of day 12!

DAY 21

April 10th 2022

It has been 9 days since I told my dad about the headache and fainting. We visited the hospital on our way back and doctor told us that my cancer was getting worse. My spleen was enlarging and it had to be treated soon. As my father had already talked to Mr. Rosenbaum's friend, we discussed it with our doctor and he gave me some medicines to reduce pain meanwhile the waiting period.

Now, it is the day I am going to get treated. I left with my dad for the airport at 8 am as we had the 11 am flight. It takes about one-and-a-half-hour by flight to reach Boston from NYC. There we met Mr. and Mrs. Rosenbaum.

“Neo, son, why didn't you tell us about this before, do you think it's fine to hide this from us, I understand that you wouldn't want to tell the kids but not even me?” Mrs. Rosenbaum asked me furiously.

I looked at Mr. Rosenbaum, “don't look at me like that, I couldn't hide it from her” he said.

“Sorry Mrs. Rosenbaum I just didn't think it was worth bothering you all” I said.

“Don’t say that son, you don’t know how much it would have hurt us if something had happened to you and we even hadn’t known about it,” Mrs. Rosenbaum said.

“I am really very sorry Mrs. Rosenbaum.”

“Let’s just hope and everything goes great today” dad said.

“Of course, Nathan, everything is just going to be alright” Mr. Rosenbaum said.

Then we all boarded the plane and it took off to Boston.

I had the window seat so I was looking outside, we were above the clouds, it was nice but I was lost in the thought that what would happen today? Can I really be cured? What will I do if I get cured? I might ask her out to if I get to live. And not long after, we landed at Boston Logan International Airport. From there we took a cab to Massachusetts General Hospital.

Mr. Rosenbaum’s friend worked there, he met us and we moved to the oncology department that deals with the cases of cancer. They wanted do some tests again to see how worse it had gotten. They needed an MRI scan, I don’t know how many of you know about MRI but basically they put you in a machine that produce very loud sounds, that are let’s say not very pleasant. And to add up to that I am claustrophobic. I changed my clothes, put my mobile phone and all metallic things I was carrying in a locker.

I went to the magnet room(where MRI scans are done). I laid down on the bed like thingy, that moves in and out the machine.

As it moved inside, I started feeling suffocated and I was about to panic but I somehow managed to keep my head cool.

I closed my eyes and started to think about Claire, and not long after, I was asleep.

“Shaksham, wake up!!!!, it’s 8 A.M, why are you asleep till now, go to the shop and buy milk and on your way back buy a dozen bananas too” a lady was shouting from a distance.

There was this noise of utensils banging into each other, it was clear that the lady was washing those utensils but seemed like she was banging those utensils on purpose to wake me up. I got off the bed folded the blanket and went to the lady in the kitchen.

“Where is the money? Mom.”

“It’s there at the table.”

I went outside and started walking to the shop.

There were notifications sound on my phone, I took the phone out of my pocket, there were 15 messages and 107 missed calls from a no. tagged as girlfriend. Well, the girl was upset that I slept without telling her. First few

messages were out of concern if I am alright and after those, a few were like “If you are bored of me you should have said so, you didn’t have to ignore me like this”, and at last she texted, “I love you Shaksham, but I don’t think it’s going to work”.

I was just thinking how weird it was and then I started hearing Shaksham’s thoughts.

“I want to die, it’s so not peaceful, everything is annoying me, I don’t want to text back, I don’t want to go back home, I just want to die.”

“Hey Neo, wake up, your scan is complete,” Mr. Rosenbaum’s friend said.

I got off the machine and while I was walking back to the Doctor’s room I thought how weird the dream was. It was totally opposite of the reality. How the guy had everything and still wanted to end it all and how I lost everything and I am still hoping for even a slim chance to get to live.

I was waiting in the room with Mr. Rosenbaum, as only one person was allowed inside. My Dad himself had high B.P. So, Mrs. Rosenbaum suggested that she and my dad should just wait outside. The doctor came back with the reports. He had a hasty look on his face.

Mr. Rosenbaum asked, “what is it doctor?”

The doctor said, “we have examined him thoroughly and found that he can still be saved. But it’s 50-50, and we will have to operate today because it will be worse than 50-50 after today, you have to decide quickly, I will give you guys 15 minutes to decided and tell me.”

We both were confused and didn’t know what to do, we walked out of the room and sat down on the seat outside. My father asked what is it? We both were silent, he asked again.

Mr. Rosenbaum told him about the situation and my father immediately said no. Only a few days are left and I don’t want to lose you even before that. I was silent. Mr. Rosenbaum said that they should go through with the operation and Mrs. Rosenbaum was against it. They all were arguing, it was noisy. I said “everyone can you please give me a moment to think, it’s my life, and I need to think what to do and Mrs. Rosenbaum can you please give me your phone for a minute.”

She gave me her phone and they all went to the other side of the corridor, I dialed Claire, she picked it up.

“Hey mom, how’s your trip going?” she said.

I cut the phone. I had already made my decision. I just wanted to hear her sound as it could have been my last day and I wouldn’t have died in peace if I hadn’t. I had decided to go through with the operation.

They came back after two minutes and I told them about my decision, my dad didn't argue with me because he didn't want to force what he wanted onto me.

We told the doctor that we will go through with it.

They started preparing for the operation, I was nervous my heart was beating fast, my dad put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Don't worry Neo, it will be fine. I was afraid too but now that you have decided to go through with it, have hope that it will be fine. Just remember we all love you Neo." Even so he tried to hide it but his eyes were wet but he was showing all the courage he had and I thought to do the same.

I got a bit calm and started thinking positively, a nurse came and shaved my head and then they took me inside the O.T. Mr. and Mrs. Rosenbaum and my dad were outside. They gave me an anesthetic and started the operation as soon as I went numb.

I felt that they were cutting through my skin, I was hearing their mumbled sounds and after long the operation was over. Doctor went outside and they all started asking what happened. The doctor said, "he is out of danger for now."

They all were relieved after hearing that. Mrs. Rosenbaum even started crying. Then the doctor told them that even though I was out of danger, I should be very careful and not to anything too exhausting and avoid injuries at all

cost, that I was very weak after the operation and any injury can lead to organ failure.

They all understood that how much care I to be put in.

I was moved to a room after the operation and I had to be kept there for next 5 days to observe if anything was wrong.

when the effects of anesthetic wore off, the pain started, it hurted like hell, it was so worse that I slept out of pain.

“Don’t jump, please they all love you” a sound came from behind.

I was standing at a railing of terrace of at least 20 story building. It was high, very high, people seemed like ants, the wind was pushing me back but I was determined to jump but there was this girl.

I looked back there was this girl telling me not to jump, she had fair skin, silky black hairs, black eyes, she was wearing glasses, her nose, her lips everything was just so beautiful, she was about 5 ft 7 inches tall.

Apparently, it was the same dream that continued and this guy, Shaksham who wanted to be dead, was actually going through with it. But who was this girl, was she the girlfriend that broke up with me? Then I said.

“I don’t even know you why do you want to save me?”

“Are you an idiot? I would do the same for anyone trying to jump off a freaking 20 story tall terrace.”

“I see” I said as I raised my foot to jump down.

“Hey stop you idiot, do you even know how many people are on the edge of dying and just want even the tiniest of possibility to live and you are here throwing it all away”

“They should die too, what’s there to live for? Life is annoying, you are annoying”

“I am here trying to save you from this idiocy of yours and you are calling me annoying, real classy”

“I am sorry but please just shut up now”

“And let you jump? As you are going to die can you do one last favor, can you do something for me?”

“What is it?”

“Just sit down and talk to me for 5 minutes and then I won’t stop you from jumping”

“okay”

I sat down and before she could say anything, “wake up, Neo, eat something” Mrs. Rosenbaum said.

I was wondering what was happening why did my dream continue.

It was all so confusing but then I realized that now that I cured I can ask Claire out in future, we could be together for all my life. I was so happy and excited.

Mrs. Rosenbaum was smiling while looking at me, I looked at her and said “thanks Mrs. Rosenbaum.”

Then I said, “it was really tough when mom died, I thought that I won’t ever feel that feeling of having a mother ever again in my life but thanks to you I am feeling that again”, a few tears fell down my cheek as I said so.

She came near me, wiped my tears off and pulled my cheeks and said, “look at you trying to be all mature, you are just a kid, and don’t ever feel like you don’t have a mother, I am here for you”, then she smiled and patted my head.

After 5 days I was discharged after final checkup and then we flew back to NYC.

End of chapter 7!

DAY 26-27

April 15th 2022

I am happy, I am going to meet her soon, now I can live with her, forever. We were headed back to NYC, we were exiting the airport, we saw Chloe holding a board, written "BALDY". We were walking towards her but I had a doubt.

"Hey baldy, she said", I just thought how did she know that I got bald. But I couldn't ask that to her in front of our parents as it would have made the situation awkward. I just smiled.

"Thanks Jason, thank you very much" my dad said to Mr. Rosenbaum.

Mr. Rosenbaum held my dad's hand and said "don't Nathan, he's like my own son, you don't have to thank me".

I was just standing there thinking how can someone be this giving. He's just so kind, he helped us and without asking for anything in return, not even a thanks. I thought I can't ever explain to him in words how thankful I am. I can do one thing and that is to keep her daughter happy. I will do that to my very best.

Rosenbaum's dropped us to our home and they went to theirs.

We entered in our house and there was grandma sitting in the living room waiting for me and Neil sleeping beside her on the sofa.

"Wake up Neil, your brother is here" Grandma said to Neil as she saw me coming in. She tried to stand up and come to me but her knees are weak so I went to her and sat in front of her on the floor. She was sitting on the sofa holding my cheeks, happily smiling as tears dropped from her eyes.

She was just admiring me we both were happy and didn't say anything just looked at each other and cried happily, Neil jumped on to my back and started rubbing my bald head.

"Don't do that Neil, your brother is weak" dad scolded him.

"It's fine dad, I can handle this little fellow", I grabbed his hand and pulled him for a hug, he giggled. I patted him on his head. We were all happy and smiling but as always that wasn't going to last long.

"Go freshen up, I am going to get the dinner ready", Grandma said to us.

I went to bath, as I was bathing I was thinking about Chloe, why did she had that sign in her hand, how does she know about this and how much?

With all those doubts I ate dinner and went to sleep.

April 16th 2022

Claire's exam was on 20th, we had so less time to prepare, but we had almost prepared everything, only revision and a few more mock tests were needed so the pressure was little less. I was going to her house to solve her mock tests doubts.

"I am going to meet her today, I am bald, how would she react?" I was panicking about how would my interaction with Claire turn out today.

But, I got ready, put a cap on and went there. I was excited to meet her too, because now we can fall in love and be with each other, I was thinking about confessing to her in Bali like in some fantasy series. But, everything changed when I reached there.

I heard some muffled voices as I was reaching there, they were coming from their door.

"I love you, Claire, I am sorry, I shouldn't have done that, please forgive me."

"It's okay, just don't do it from now on"

My heart was beating fast, I looked up and saw that it was Jack apologizing to Claire and they were hugging. I can't explain in words how I felt. My heart ached, it was

physically painful for me to see that. My eyes were teary, they didn't notice me, so I quietly turned back to go back to my house.

As I turned, she was in front of me.

"Where are you going Baldy?" Chloe said to me as she was standing in front of me.

"Oh hey! What are you doing here? You scared me"

"It's my house, what do you mean by what I am doing here. Were you stealing something?"

"No"

"Then don't get scared, you came to solve Claire's doubts didn't you? Let's go inside"

I had no choice, I turned back and started walking with her towards the gate.

As I was getting closer to them, my feelings were getting stirred up, I was thinking of getting it all out in front of them, how I loved Claire so much, how I just want to beat the hell out of Jack. But, guess what I did. I smiled and shook hands with Jack.

"Hey Neo, meet Jack" Claire said to me.

"Hi Jack" I said as I shook his hand.

"Who's this Claire?" he asked to Claire.

“He’s Neo, he helps me in my studies, he is brilliant in maths, he’s a real nice guy” she told him.

“Is that so? Keep it study only, don’t try to get closer to her, she’s only mine” he said to me and I was so furious at that point of time.

“Shut it and go to your house, I heard you failed this year, you should go and study” Chloe said to Jack and really that was so good, it was a medicine to all the pain I was having.

He turned his head down and went to his home.

“That was so harsh Chloe” Claire said to her.

“He deserves it, don’t know what you see in him, such a douche” Chloe said to her and went inside.

I was impressed by Chloe at that point.

“Sorry for that Neo”

“it’s ok, so patch up huh?”

“Yes, he said he realized his mistakes and won’t repeat them, and I guess I really do love him”

It did break my heart to hear that but I tried to move past that and focus on her studies. We were walking to her room that’s when she asked me, “Hey what happened to your hairs?”

I was confused about what to say, I hadn't really thought about what I was going to say to her, so I was just standing in panic that's when a voice came from behind.

"He told me that his head was heavy so he got it shaved off" Chloe said while she was bringing snacks for us.

"Oh, but shaving it all was a bit hasty wasn't it?" Claire asked.

"Yeah, maybe everything I do is hasty" and then I laughed weirdly.

Claire didn't seem to mind it but Chloe seemed bothered by it.

Anyways she left and we started our studies, and I was thinking that how, how was Jack better than me? Like really, what's up with her choices. I was teaching her but I hadn't fully recovered so I was still a little dizzy.

Chloe came again with a glass of mixed fruit juice and some pieces of kiwi.

"Why are you bringing all these healthy things Chloe" Claire asked.

"Because, you should eat healthy for a change" she said and then she looked at me and smiled and I smiled back then she went to her room.

I kept teaching Claire and Chloe kept bringing all these healthy things for me to eat, at a point I felt like as if she was taking care of me like my mother used to.

After two hours we were done with the doubts so I got up and started walking outside, Claire told me to wait in the hall while she was putting everything back to their places.

I was waiting in the hall when Chloe said from behind “you shouldn’t stand for so long Neo, sit on the sofa.”

I sat on the sofa she sat on the sofa besides me. I was confused whether I should ask it or not, but I thought it was the perfect moment, no one was around.

As I started to speak, she said “I was listening.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was listening when your father called my father, I thought you wouldn’t like anyone else to know so I hid it from Claire.”

It was weird, how she just knew what I was going to say.

“That explains the sign board”

“Oh that, yeah mum told me that they shaved your head so I thought it would be fun to tease you a little.”

“It wasn’t a little, okay. You have been at it since that day.”

She giggled and said sorry while laughing.

I smiled a little too.

In midst that, two little hands came from behind my neck and hugged me tightly, “Hey Big bro, where were you?” Chris said.

“Hey buddy, I was umm on a vacation” I said.

“You didn’t take me with you” he said and made a sad face.

“We are all going to Bali in few days Chris” Chloe said.

“Yes and I am going to ask dad if Jack could come too” Claire said as she entered the hall.

“WHAT??” both Chloe and I were dumbstruck.

End of chapter 8!

DAY 30

"The broken heart. You think you will die, but you keep living, day after day after terrible day," Charles Dickens Said.

This is my reality now.

About 30 days ago, I was mourning the death of my mother, I wanted to die, living felt like hell, it was suffocating to breathe. Every second felt like an hour, while I was there on my chair weeping and crying, I stupidly waited, I looked at my door, hoping that my mother would come to wipe my tears, but it was an infinity of waiting, she didn't come. I honestly didn't know how to live without her.

A few days ago, I knew for a fact that I was going to die. I wanted to live, live with her, with Claire, forever. I was hoping every second for some miracle to happen, somehow just the tiniest ounce of hope that I could survive this, that I could be with her.

Then, a miracle did happen, I was saved, I thought now I could do it, I can have everything I want, I can be with her, just as soon as I got that, life took it away from me, again.

April 19th 2022

I woke up, the vibe in my house was different, it felt happy, a good smell of my Grandma's special curry, Dad going to leave for job, Neil going to school but everything felt cheerful. Grandma made me a cup of tea, I sat in our garden looking at the sky, I was there but my mind wasn't.

"Tomorrow is her exam, no more classes, no more reason to see her. Just an awkward little trip to Bali, that's all that is remaining between me and her. If that wasn't enough, the jerk will come to the trip too, how would I survive seeing them close to each other, it hurts me even to think about it. Please god give me the strength to survive this trip then I will disappear from Rausenbaum's life forever."

This was going through my mind, then a funny thought came in my mind that how stupid I was to think that I'll be the guy in Claire's photo frame.

I was smiling and then my phone rang, I thought it must be Claire, I ignored it. I just sat in silence, then a smack at my head came from behind.

"Aye Baldy you deaf or what?" he said.

"Wait, I have heard this voice, what? It can't be, it can't be him" I turned around.

"Miss me?" Kyle said.

Kyle, he was my best friend till 10th standard, then his father had to move to Canada due to work purpose, so he left school as his family was going to shift. We were not just best friends actually, we were more like brothers. I thought he's gone forever.

I stood up, hugged him, we both laughed.

“Wait, it's really you, but how?” I asked in confusion.

“My father had to deal with some business here so I tagged along as I wanted to meet you, how are you?”

Well I am a secretive person, but there wasn't anything secret between us, we knew everything about each other, our shoe size to our umm yk. Well that's irrelevant information but yk we were chuddy buddies.

I started telling him everthing about my mother, Claire, my cancer, my operation and then about jack.

“Oh man! That's a lot, how did you handle it? You never even called me, you are so stupid man, I would have taken a flight here so long ago,” He said.

“it's okay, everything is fine now,” I told him.

“NO! everything is not fine, let's go”

“Where?” I asked.

“What do you mean where, lets give jack a visit.”

“What are you planning to do Kyle?”

“Nothing just a friendly chat,” he said.

It was so stupid but I don't know how he convinced me into doing this.

I got ready, and we both were on our way to his home, it was around 11 A.M. I thought that tomorrow's Claire's exam, so she won't be meeting Jack today. She must be studying so even though we share a couple of words today Jack wouldn't tell her. He mustn't want to disturb her.

Then I remembered I didn't know Jack's address so I called Chloe, she picked up.

“Hey Chloe, it's Neo”

“Yeah, I know idiot I have caller id, tell me have you eaten anything are you drinking fruit juice or not”

“Yes, I have eaten and drank juice”

Kyle looked at me and smiled.

I turned around and asked her, “do you know where Jack lives?”

“Sorry, I don't know that”

“Okay thanks Chloe, bye”

“Yeah, take care, Bye Neo” she said and I hung up.

“Hey Kyle, I don't know his address man” I told him.

“Oh, don’t worry about it, let me just..” He said this and called someone.

“Hello, hey fang.., it’s Kyle, do you know where Jack lives? Umm what you need sir name, wait? Hey Neo what’s his sir name?”

“I don’t know” I said.

“umm, hey fang, his girl is Claire Rausenbaum, Oh okay okay, can you repeat that, okay 21 jump street okay” he hung up the phone.

“You will be the same Kyle, you always have some guy everywhere”

“Well what can I say, I am Kyle Zobriach afterall.”

We both laughed and went to his house but before that, you must be wondering who are Zobriach’s. So, this city is unofficially run by four richest people of the city, “Jason Rasuenbaum,” “Jeremiah Zobriach” Kyle’s dad, “Ramaswamy ayer” and fourth one is our mayor “Loius Lavy.”

Now, Kyle’s dad owns a security firm which provides security to important personnels on a high price and they also work in alliance with government on various missions, so that’s why Kyle has so many connections.

When we entered the street he lived in, whole vibe changed, it was all very dull, gangster like people here and there. We

reached his house anyways, we pressed the bell but someone else opened the door. The house was all smoky from inside. It was a goofy guy with a weed pot in his hand. The guy at the door, His eyes were red and then he asked, “You want some?” offering us the pot.

I said “No, do you know where Jack is?”

He said, “Yeah, he out with his hoe.”

Boom I punched him in the chin as soon as he said that, I thought he was saying that about Claire so I got angry. He called other guys from inside, he seemed angry about that punch, so I thought it would be better to leave

“Let’s go Kyle” I said as I turned towards Kyle.

Kyle being Kyle, he was smoking that guys pot, I smacked his head and snatched the pot from him and threw it. All there guys were grouping up so I told Kyle to run but he said not to worry, as long as he’s there no one will touch us. So we got out of there and then started going back to our house, but suddenly I saw.

Jack coming out of a hotel, he was with some other girl, they were kissing, I got fumingly angry and I ran towards him and knocked him out in one punch. The girl standing beside him ran away.

Jack was down on ground, he asked “What’s your problem man? Why did you hit me?”

“How the hell can you do this? How can you cheat on her again? She loves you so much and you keep doing this, I will tell her about this,” I said to him.

He started laughing, “Oh did I steal your girl nerd? Does it hurt you? Yes you are right, she loves me so much, she does everything that I tell her to, Let me guess no girl ever even touched you right? You know your Claire, yesterday I came here with her, we booked a room and we did everything you could ever wish to do with her, Oh you don’t believe me right? See there she comes I’ll show you a demo and you would not be able to do a thing about it, if you tell her anything, I will tell her you and your little friend came here to threaten me to breakup with her, with this mark from your punch on my cheek, who do you think she will believe? She will never talk to you again, you are such a little bitch, I know you can’t bear that thought” he said as Claire came from a distance.

I was so hurt, it was so suffocating, I just wanted to die, to even think she did all that with him it was so painful for me. A slap came from the side, it was Kyle slapping Jack, well if it’s a deal that he wouldn’t tell her why we hit him if we don’t tell her about what he did then might as well get some more hits, Kyle had a point so I also slapped him.

He just smiled, Claire came and hugged him, “What happened to your face?” she asked him.

“Nothing, just this and that. Come on give me a kiss” he kissed her in front of her as he wanted to make me jealous, he pressed her hips to make me even more jealous. I looked down as I couldn’t bear seeing that, I didn’t get it, what was she doing there. On 20th she had her exam, what was even going on, Kyle pressed my shoulder and told me, “ Let’s go dude.”

As I turned around, Claire said, “Wait Neo, Where are you going, tomorrow is my exam aren’t you going to wish me luck?”

I smiled in pain and said “Hi Claire, I was just passing by, I saw Jack, so I came here just to say hi.”

“Hey, I am Kyle by the way, his best friend, he is a little slow at introducing people.”

Claire laughed and said, “Yes you are right, I am Claire, his friend, now as you both are here too, let us all go to a café nearby and chit chat, that should reduce my stress about my exam tomorrow.”

I didn’t want to go but Kyle insisted, he had some kind of plan, so we went to a café nearby.

It was a fancy café, we sat at a table, Jack went to the washroom, I wanted to tell Claire so bad but I couldn’t as she was all brainwashed. Kyle stood up and also went after Jack, but Kyle came back before him and told us that jack said that he’s going to pay the bill and wanted us to go to

our home as it was getting late, Claire was suspicious but she agreed. We three were walking home having a good talk, at least Kyle and Claire did, I was just so hurt about what Jack said. Then we wished Claire good luck and Claire went to her home.

Kyle was laughing crazy, I asked him, “what happened?”

He took me back to the café, we saw Jack was moping the floor there and we both were laughing so bad, I asked him how did that happen, he then told me that he snatched Jack’s wallet and locked him inside toilet.” The place had a strict policy that if some one didn’t pay that had to work there for the whole day.

It was so funny, it didn’t take away the pain but it was like a band-aid. We both walked back home laughing.

Then I reached my home and it was time, Kyle had to leave. He wrapped his arm around my neck and told me that, “NEO! You are the bravest and most kindest person I know, even though you have so much pain, you are going through so much yet you helped her, you did so much for her even though it wasn’t necessary, you wanted to live, but for her that’s where you went wrong my friend.”

“What do you mean Kyle?”

“I know that it is tough to go through so much, I know how it feels when your mother dies, when my mom died it felt like hell, but you can’t get stuck at these phases of life, it’s

okay to stop when things rush like this, you just stop and take a breath, it's never the end of your story, it's your story decide yourself where you will end it, if you want to live, live for a better future, that not just includes Claire and you, think about Neil, Uncle Nathan, Grandma, live for them. I have known you very well and I know if there is someone who can do this, it is you Neo."

"Thanks Kyle, you don't know how much I needed to hear that, I wish I was more like you."

"NO! it's totally opposite, I always could only admire you from a distance. I wanted to be more like you but how you handle responsibilities without making a fuss about it, how maturely you accept the reality, I don't think I can ever do it, you are all about giving people, I can't ever be like that.

But you know, there is someone who's just like you, you should talk more to her, maybe even ask her out."

"What, who?"

"Chloe, she seemed interested in you, well, think about it."

I didn't know how to react to that because I never really noticed that but now that he had told me, it bothered me for a while too but that's another story, for now we hugged and he left. All thanks to him, Now I was feeling motivated and ready to move on but who knew what day 33 held.

End of chapter 9!