

Identity

Prologue

A family in Nepal were having dinner one night that includes a mother, father and four children. The father says grace and then they begin. The mother serves a freshly cooked dinner to her three eldest sons and only daughter when smashing of a window was heard. Two tall, dark men appear and charge towards the family.

Instantly, the father dashes towards them along with the two eldest sons. The mother grabs her daughter and bolts to the door when a gun is fired. The faint sound of his wife's body drop to the ground deafens the father ears. Suddenly a woman emerges from the shadows and grasps the crying, young girl and runs through the door. The sons follow her but she's disappeared into the night. When they return, they find their father's lifeless body dumped in the gutter and their mother barely breathing. With the house in this state, the three sons take their mother to the hospital. She is revived but the questions that on her mind were, "Why?" and "Where is my little girl now?"

12 Years Later

Beep! Beep! Beep! My alarm clock filled the room with noise. My roommate, Jamila, groaned and toppled out of bed. I stiffen a giggle and begin to start my morning routine. Jamila is an African girl who has been at this boarding school for orphan girls, for only few weeks however, I have been attending here for a long time.

Nobody will tell me my past. I just exist. All the head teacher can tell is that when I was about 3 years old, a woman that lived in the neighbourhood arrived one day saying she found me in a gutter, crying, in a basket with my birth certificate, my passport and a blurred picture of my mother with the Nepalese words, "New born Roshni with Yamu, born Chittagong hospital, Nepal." My teacher helped me translate it. Every day I look at it, longing to meet my family. Every day I stare into my mother's deep, brown eyes and wonder why I was ever separated from her. Or

even my family. Soon enough a mistress marches in, pots in hands, clanking them together, barking orders.

The day passes by, sitting in a chair for hours, listening to a mistress speak. One talks about punctuation, other talks about poverty. We all sit in classrooms, depending on your age or how well you understand the English. I have been moved classes & sat in the same spot for years, watching girls get adopted and then being replaced with girls with hopeful expressions.

The afternoon bell rings which means I have to work at the local coffee shop for four hours as part of the criteria. This provides opportunity for social skills and work experience. For me, it's just a time to relax and be myself.

The familiar sound of the front door opens as Jamila bounces through. She orders her drink and starts her homework at one of the booths. I'd say she's my best friend because she understands my pain the most however, she'll be snatched up any day now.

An hour passes by and everything is its normal self. I'm cleaning the blender as an Asian man points to a picture of eight-litres of water with his hand. I put on a smile as I deliver his water and he gives me an uncertain look. He shakes his head and walks out.

Later, he returns and looks around the empty shop. He points to a triple-chocolate milkshake on the menu board.

"Are you from around here?" I ask.

"Nepal." He answers bluntly.

"What's your name?" I question.

"Santosh," He tells me, "and you?"

"Roshni." I say. He looks at me, surprised. He mutters something then he shakes his head in disbelief. Santosh throws some dollar bills on the table, gives me a wave and walks out.

Pots clanking together are what I heard first thing the next morning. A mistress, stomps to our window and pulls open the blinds open. "Ah, it's a wonderful day." she says. Then the mistress slams the door and repeats everything in the next room.

I doodle on my page as one mistress reads the newspaper aloud to the class. All of a sudden, she calls out my name and says "You'll be researching child kidnapping, Nepal, 1995" and then she continues with other girls giving them information, a place and a date. I silently groan and I watch the clock tick by.

Once again I am behind the counter slaving away the hours. Jamila isn't here because a woman was interested in adopting her; I wasn't surprised. Business was slow, I decided to start my report. I read in one of the books that I borrowed from the library that people had been kidnapping young children for ransom in 1995. These people had abducted 28 children and had kidnapped women to keep them in good condition, also threatening to kill them if they didn't. These people had \$2,876,000 AUD in cash after the ransoms had been paid. That was just before the police caught them and the 11 men went to jail.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. I jumped and turned around. It was Santosh pointing at the same eight-litre water bottles as yesterday. I watch as Santosh's eyes land on my research book. I placed his water on the table along with the change as Santosh picks up the book and starts reading. Maybe he's interested in Nepal too I wonder.

I observe as his facial expressions darken as he continues to read the page. Santosh looks up and is sad. He hands me back my book and says "For school?"

"Yes." I answer. He bites his lips and spins around on his heels, looking at other customers.

"May I have that one?" Santosh says as I look at where his pointing which is at another customer's drink and nods. He sits down at my booth when I return with his drink.

"All very sad." Santosh says, looking at the book. His eyes are softer than before. He sighs loudly and fiddles with his straw.

"Yes it is." I reply. We sit in silence for a minute before I excuse myself and start to serve customers.

Another night passes and morning rolls around again. The mistress has let us work on our reports which I'm really enjoying. I have always wanted to meet my biological parents and what my book reveals interest me even more. It says that also in 2001, in order to copy what had happened, six different men imitated the 11 men and succeeded with kidnapping 13 children. However, their families couldn't afford to pay the ransom so the six men murdered the twelve children except for one, which was the first victim. They took the youngest child and stole the most valuable items to the family. The whereabouts of the first child are still unknown. The six men are now serving in jail.

Santosh, once again surprises me as I'm working and gives me a smile. He points to the same water picture and says, "Green tea, please?" I nod and start to prepare it as he takes my seat & reads my report. I watch as a single tear drops onto my page. Santosh wipes his eyes and quickly moves to a different table.

I notice him taking something out of his pocket. I follow his eyes onto a crumpled photo of a familiar picture. I gasp and drop his cup, splattering tea everywhere. Speedily, I walk over to Santosh and gape at the picture.

"Do you know this woman?" I ask with my finger shakily pointing at it.

"Yes. She's my mother and my baby sister." He whispers quietly. I sink into the chair beside him.

"Mother..." I repeat to myself.

Uncertainly, I take out my picture out of my back pocket and lay it down on the table. I witness Santosh inhale sharply. Immediately he flips it over and reads the back. He says it aloud in Nepalese. He drops it like it's on fire and stares at me.

"Roshni?"

3 Months Later

I stare outside the aeroplane window next to Santosh, travelling to Nepal.

Over time, I discovered through research, medical tests and government approval, I am indeed that child who was kidnapped that night, I am related to Santosh and soon I'll meet my family. I learnt that Santosh is the oldest and came out to Australia for an education. Raju is second and he is married and works with cars. Babu the third brother is still in school, wanting to become a doctor. Santosh tells me that my mother will be ever so excited to meet her fifteen year old daughter.

I am glad that I worked in that little coffee shop and that I served Santosh his 8 litres of water every day. Otherwise, I will never be who I am today.