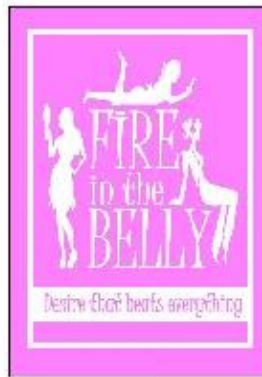


# **FIRE in the BELLY - Desire that beats everything**

**By : Hina Hazrat**

What happens when power of education leaves behind hot cashes, credit cards, and huge amount of money? What happens when gender inequality talks high? As we go along with the journey, the story revolves within lives of three best friends, who were raised in different fluctuating environments. With the power of education

Inna, a girl belonging to a mediocre family and Seno, who was unexpectedly born becoming victim of violence, turning results of ultrasound false, kissed the success, giving their rich friend Neo, a rich girl, a lesson of pushing herself against the power of money-gravity. However, as life proceeds, more morals come in way!



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# **FIRE in the BELLY - Desire that beats everything :**

## **Chapter 1**

Celebrations!

Parties!

Fire flies!

Fire crackers!

"Wow! Cute baby. I love her green eyes. Congrats Mrs. Khan," said the baby's aunt excitedly. "Your welcome dear," replied Aliyah Khan wife of Mr. Khan with full zeal and a round cheeky grin, hereby forming a fading dimple on her right cheek. Aliyah was all happy seeing her hands filled with a baby girl, after a very long time of around 10 years of marital life.

It was autumn round the corner, everyone was having a jerky up scorch dry wind blow; with no humidity at all. Green leaves were turning pale yellow and were flooding Mr. Khan's garden with their deposits. In the mid of this dry yet beautiful garden, a newly born baby was lying, Inna; named after her dead grandmother. A baby girl was finally born in Khan's family.

Mr. Khan loves celebrating events, but under limits. He never liked showing off his own stuff. He always considered simplicity should be reigned everywhere. He himself was a self-made person. He was a social person and had keen interest for serving humanity. He was tall green eyed gentleman, which made his personality extremely upright.

"Hey! Congrats God had listened to your words dude," said one of his friends, Mr. Gohar, while deeply analyzing Inna with his bulging eyes. "Stop staring! She is way too small," replied Khan while bearing a naughty gesture.

Mr. Gohar has travelled for 1 hour to meet his childhood friend, Mr. Khan on becoming father after a very long time. Mr. Gohar was really happy in the party and was highly expecting to be a father of a son after 5 daughters, in upcoming spring.

Khan loved cracking jokes, he loved making people smile, he loved being funny with near dear friends. He loved his family but what he did not like was when people refused to accept pluralism. His thinking was universal! He was good at working social, helping people without taking caste, creed and religion under consideration and this was something for which people loved him.

Khan had done his secondary studies from Chitral; a district in Northern Areas of Pakistan, where at the age of 19 he got married to an unknown lady. At that time children hardly get into friendships. Instead parents had owned full authority for choosing a wife for their son.

After getting married they moved to Karachi, a City in Pakistan, where after a total of 13 years he was blessed with Inna. It's been long since Khan had not tasted the blessing of being a father. He never thought a girl down; instead he always thought that girls are way too powerful. He himself has tried his level best to give his sisters amazingly high quality education.

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He is very happy and thankful to God for making him the lucky one to be blessed with such a wife who always stood by his side. Aliyah is too small. She was 1.58 meters tall, whereas Khan was 2.01 meters tall.

"Ah! It seems, it is 30 minutes passed the hour," was the statement everyone use to say, seeing Mr. and Mrs. Khan walking or standing together.

Aliyah Khan is way too opposite to Mr. Khan; a common yet true saying "OPPOSITE ATTRACTS." Same happened to them. They both were opposite in thinking but having a single baby was something which clicked their mind mutually.

Both were contented with their life. Since a baby is born, they made planning for her future, for her education, for her enlistment. They celebrated a small party, keeping the cultural norms of Chitral under consideration. A small cultural dance was organized. People truly enjoyed it.

"God! God! My poor money! I feel pity; wish to kick each one out. But no, After all it's my baby's party, let them enjoy." Mr. Khan murmured in his wide mouth with 29 teeth.

"What are you saying Khan? I can see your tongue waving," said his friend, Mr. Gohar who was standing beside him. "Enjoy the party. You mad! I'm worried why you are noticing my lips," replied Khan suspiciously.

"Ha-Ha! I knew it, you would be saying something bad! After all you can't think beyond this stuff," said Mr. Gohar while laughing out of his tummy.

Khan protruded his eyebrows and said, "And you mad cannot think of looking beyond people's lips and their daughter's eyes!"

"Ha-Ha! Stop being naughty Khan," smirked Mr. Gohar. "Oh! Is saying something naughty? You stare with bursting eyes, you are naughty!"

Mr. Khan said with piercing eyes.

"Stop gawking - you Khan," said Mr. Gohar with peculiar gesture.

"Me? Gawking? I think you are dreaming!" Counter attacked Khan arrogantly.

Khan than moved away towards the gathering, waving his hands towards his friend. They both were childhood friends. Mr. Gohar has helped Khan in all downs of his life. At times they fought, counterattacked each other with their mouth firing words but on the other hand loved each other so much. Later in life, both pursued different fields of studies. Mr. Khan was a pharmacist by profession and Mr. Gohar was an aircraft engineer.

After three hours of full enjoyment Mr. Gohar moved towards Khan stretching his huge fat bulky thighs horizontally and said, "I'm going Khan! Will see you next time very soon with a good news from my side, something I have been waiting for ages, God bless you and your family."

## Chapter 2

Good news just stroke the walls of Mr. Gohar's home. The beauty of spring season was all at peak. Buds were turning into beautiful yet exotic flowers. Mr. Gohar's funny attitude and smiling face was filled with glitters, as he was expecting to be a father of a male child after 5 daughters, which for him was a matter of pride and honor. Everyday in the morning, he began his day by having a quick glance at ultrasound results which expected birth of a male child. Time for celebration was coming closer and closer. Lungs were inhaling fresh oxygen. Heart was not able to tolerate infinite happiness, and was laughing continuously. Mr. Gohar had spent whole day in the hospital, with ears erect, and open, completely clean from all cerumen, so that nothing can be an obstacle in the way of hearing the most awaited good news.

The cry of the baby was heard. He jumped high in the sky. His hands were in air. The nurse stepped out and said, "Congratulations". He was jumping, jumping, ignoring the powerful force of gravity! Even gravity could not control him and left his happiness in air for minutes!

The nurse continues, "Congratulations again, you are a father of a cute baby girl".

He forced gravity leave him, and stood straight, and asked, "Are you joking?, the ultrasound results were expecting a baby boy".

"It was expected, and sometimes results fail", replied nurse.

All the good attitude, healthy nature, positive thinking which all had been possessed by him were dead in just a blink of an eye after hearing the news.

He carried all negative gesture, and drove the car to the home with wife, treating her like a baby producing machine, not thinking of the pain she just went through!

Right after stepping in the home, he looked at the newly born baby and said with all angriness,

*"Unlucky me! Above all, unlucky my wife, this unlucky daughter and unlucky day. I always demanded and prayed for a son, but received 6th girl in return. Huh!"*

His wife ignored his words. But still the words were piercing her heart. Mr. Gohar was cursing the baby girl, born under his father ship. He was not even liking the guests, who were coming to greet him. He was not giving even a smile to them. Though he was receiving them respectfully, as he had to do that to sustain his social life but from inside he was feeling so unlucky and was cursing himself again and again.

Mr. Gohar was an aircraft engineer by profession. He thought of himself an unlucky person in the whole world as according to him he had no son to look after him at his old age. Despite being blessed with several blessings, a wonderful life and a wonderful wife plus healthy beautiful daughters, cursing for not having a son was the usual act he had been doing.

There was a feeling of hatred for this newly born baby inside his heart.

*"Common stop cursing your daughter instead thank God, we never know the mystery behind God's decision,"* said the baby's mother; Zahra, with a grin, holding Mr. Gohar's left hand tightly, making him feel that he had a person to stand by with.

*"No! I'm un lucky,"* said her husband, leaving her hand in air.

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*"No, Don't call yourself unlucky, you are blessed, see the luxuries, see the blessings the uncountable blessings! Don't demoralize, discourage or curse your daughter, you will see one day she will make us proud, she will make your neck elevated high! Don't curse her and our other daughters too,"* said his wife with sobbing eyes.

*"I want a boy! Can you listen? I want a boy! A boy! This day is very unlucky, seriously unlucky,"* replied Mr. Gohar with pressured eyes tough and rigid talking style.

Zahra controlled her temper and did not say a single harsh word, instead was relaxed.

No party was arranged for the baby girl. Instead Gohar slept without dining with his family. After a rest of some hours, a lot of tension was released. He left for his office with empty stomach. And did his breakfast at office with his friends.

*"Aren't you feeling well Gohar? There is a lot of tension in your face,"* said one of his old mates while dining.

*"No, I am okay,"* replied Gohar with a fake smile. He passed his office timings and got back to home, not even asking about the baby, he left for his bedroom and started watching TV. This attitude irritated Zahra, but she was helpless, she was not able to do a bit, she was all dependent on her husband for bread and butter. Hence, she had to bear his harsh words which were truly killing her from inside.

Zahra was taking care of the girl; named Seno, as a great mother, keeping care of her cleanliness and her nourishment.

Mr. Gohar considered a boy; a sign of pride, a sign of high head, a sign of prosperity, a sign of perpetual continuation of heritage. And seeing girls and girls all round the corner of house were making him depressed and congested.

The girl was neglected by her father, which was truly affecting her psychology. And in years of rapid growth she was feeling something missing in her life.

## Chapter 3

And in the neighborhood, a party began!

*"Open the next door! The cradle is a big one, not passing through this door-and yeah! It's expensive my nerves cannot tolerate a single scratch against it,"* said Mrs. Rachna Bhamani to her maid, high necked.

*"Yes! The second door is opened; I will make it pass through the door!"* replied the maid.

The toys and the big cradle were placed in the baby's room. Since it was winter, heaters and sweaters were rechecked and placed available so that the newly born baby; Neo, might not face the cool breeze. She was being given extra love, extra affection, and extra care. She was cared super luxuriously. She just needed to stare at things no matter how expensive they were; they became all hers.

A huge party was arranged by her father! Celebrations were made luxurious a 33 stepped cake was made available. Mr. Bhamani walked on the floor along with his wife, Rachna to cut the huge cake; photography and spot lights were making scenario even more beautiful. Mr. Bhamani spent a lot of money for the arrangement of this party.

*"Oh! Wow! This is just Wow!"*

*"Fabulous!"*

*"Excellent!"*

These were the words spoken by every guest who was present in the party. Portraits of the baby were placed at every corner of venue, beautiful flowers were there and a lot of dishes were available. The set up was truly eye capturing. Rachna Bhamani was flooded with all gold ornaments. She was wearing stilettos, a lot of make over; her looks were truly eye captivating.

*"Hey! Congrats! Very warm congrats."* Said Zahra (Rachna's neighbor and Seno's mother) to Rachna while hugging her tightly. *"Thank you, sister, Thanks for your presence, I am glad seeing you here, where is Mr. Gohar?"* Replied Rachna with a splendid grin.

*"He isn't feeling well,"* lied Zahra in order to conceal the true happening at her home.

*"Oh, do ask him from my side sister, please sit and have your dinner feel free while eating,"* said Rachna generously.

*"Yeah! Yeah! I will be eating until my intestines would burst out of my tummy,"* replied Zahra laughingly, *concealing the pain of not having enough food for the last couple of days.*

*"Oh! I didn't notice this little princess lying there in cradle, how are you my little sweetie?"* said Rachna to little Seno while stretching her red cheeks to 180 degree.

She further added, *"I'm lucky, I have neighbors like you, you have been like a sister to me and see we both are blessed with baby girls, Oh! How can I neglect Seno at this moment,"* said Rachna and then took her under her arms, proceeded towards the stage and announced *"Ladies and gentlemen, today I have with me my closest neighbor, Zahra Gohar here among audience. She is too blessed with a daughter, who is now 4 months old and my dear little Neo is 20 days old. Lets clap for them both, I wish her father would have been here, but*

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*unfortunately he is not feeling well and therefore he is absent in this gathering, anyhow the party, the celebration must go on. I welcome you Zahra along with your little princess here in our gathering, kindly come towards the stage."*

Rachna further added holding Zahra's hand tightly, *"May I have the other cake which was being kept in fridge for me to cut? I want that cake here right now and would like you my sister Zahra to cut the cake with me, Neo and Seno."*

Zahra's eyes were filled with tears. She was spell-binded and was self happy for the celebrations and the attitude and love extended by Rachna Bhamani towards her and her baby.

Every single person clapped in continuous series. Zahra felt so happy for this gesture of Rachna.



## Chapter 4

Seno and Neo were brought up together. Since they were neighbors, they came at each others places, shared their thoughts, learning, friendships. They themselves were involved in several social activities as they lived in a community where people lived together - in short they were united under single plea. Things being cooked in one's kitchen were sensed by the other. This interlinked society had given Seno and Neo a great chance of several self discovery, self grooming opportunities and a chance to make links.

Seno was a medium heighten girl with short bouncy hair, with huge attractive brown eyes, a beautiful straight nose and a nice up cut. She has turned a very innovative, creative and amazingly intelligent nice young girl, but the negligence and discouragement extended by her father was something which can be seen by Seno's eyes. Though she was active in her school activities but the non-supportive behavior of her father towards her was killing her inside. Her mother supported her a lot in every step but was not present with her physically. She was sent to village by her father when Seno turned nine year old, with her 5 daughters, leaving Seno with her father. Seno was an intelligent child, her mother decided to leave her in city with her father for continuing her education. Seno used to contact her on phone and gave her all moral support which was supposed to be given by mother to her daughter. Seno and Neo turned best friends later in life, and their families' best neighbors.

And now here come Neo, let's start from her shoes. A brand new pair of pink high heels which she thinks looks hot! Her father has spoiled such a big deal of money on her shoes so that she could look longer and taller in front of her company. She had small pinkish hands with huge shinny nails which had always wore some nail color; she always wore nail polish and make-up. And her hair, she had long straight hair, a whitish attractive flawless skin.

Neo was a true brat; she was giving extra love, extra affection, extra care, extra support, extra luxuries and extra money.

She was not supposed to take permission before going anywhere, she just needed to call her private driver and then fly where ever she wanted.

At school she was the naughtiest one. She loved bunking classes, loved making random friends, loved texting and making phone calls all day long, loved using internet all night long.

Manicuring and pedicure was something for which she has to take time out every weekend. She was self-obsessive, possessive person. The extra love extended by her family had truly spoilt her. She was a pampered child. She was an utter spoilt brat but things taught her to b good later.

Neo's father admitted her to a medium school, as she herself had lack of interest in studies and her father never gave importance to her education, instead he was much concerned about fulfilling her demands. One main reason of admitting her in public high school was that, she had her friend Seno admitted there. Neo was such a lazy person that Seno had to come early in the morning to wake her up for the school then they both used to leave for the school together.

Seno started loving her dear friend Neo as time passed by because she got the pleasure at Neo's home which she found missing at her own home. Therefore she started spending her leisure time in Neo's home and soon Neo's friendship influenced her badly. She started getting indulged in Neo's friend circle. But with that she never ignored her studies.

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One day Seno came early at Neo's home, she had to come early because she had to wear make-up before leaving for school, Seno at first did not like cosmetics but the influence turned powerful and it's been few days that she herself started wearing make-up.

On results day, Seno was super-excited. On the contrary Neo was badly cursing as this day had come and she expected herself getting failed in exam as usual. This was something very usual for her. By the time they were leaving for result; Neo shouted,

*"Dad! Please do come to get my results, I know I have flunked a lot of subjects but please do the formality."*

*"Okay! I will come,"* said Bhamani with a confused face. She laughed showing her non-serious attitude, drew her legs in car, fixed her belt and flew with Seno.

Seno called her father on way, *"Dad please come to collect my result."*

*"I will try,"* he said and hung up. She did not reveal the pain on her face instead yelled, *"Drive fast!"* fixing her all pain inside.

They arrived at their school. Took their classes and left for lunch.

In class they noticed a new comer; it seemed to them as she had transferred herself from some other school. Neo and Seno both were looking at her and thus saw her proceeding towards them. She asked them with a grin on her face *"Hey, can I sit with you people? If you don't mind",*

Neo replied, *"Sure, why not? You can have my seat."* The girl smiled and sat down - but what was this! She met not the chair but the solid ground.

Everybody started laughing. She quickly waved her dress. *"Neo likes to make fun and tease people, I am sorry on her behalf,"* apologized Seno and pinched Neo to say sorry but Neo shrugged. *"Its alright, I don't mind these small happenings,"* replied the girl and as soon as the girl smiled her green bright eyes grabbed Neo's attention.

They soon left for their class; their teacher praised Seno and said, *"The diagrams are amazingly made by Seno in all over class."* Seno nodded and didn't reply.

School was being crammed by parents; some parents were coming excitedly and some with frowning faces marching out of the school. Seno lifted herself above her toes to see if her father had arrived. But there was no sign. Neo was asked to go in for her results along with her father.

*"I am sorry Mr. Bhamani your kid is failed she has to strive hard for finals,"*

the teacher said. Neo frowned badly, turned her nose to the left side, made her punch by tightening her fist, fixed it in her left hand, Mr. Bhamani said, *"Thank you so very much!"*

Neo's father was embarrassed a little but then he said to the teacher, *"Will you please call Seno?"*

As he had something to say. Seno came in. Bhamani asked Seno if her father was coming but the expression on Seno's face answered him a big no. *"No problem my child I will take your result"* said Mr. Bhamani lovingly. He asked the teacher if he could receive Seno's result and the teacher handed him her result. Mr. Bhamani hugged Seno tightly as she had scored highest marks in exams. *"You deserve a treat my daughter."* Mr. Bhamani said encouragingly. Seno smiled and wished that her father could have been here.

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They all sat at their positions and left for home. On the way, Seno's feet were dancing, her lungs and her nerves everything were taking in oxygen to the immense level. She went straight to home waited tirelessly for her father to come and was counting every single minute.

Her father entered, she made him drink water, cleaned his shoes and arranged the dinning table and said *"Dad you are forgetting to ask something! You didn't come to receive what I told you in the morning."*

*"Yes I was busy all the day,"* replied her father. *"But you can ask now about my result."*

Seno said with a sweet smile.

Her father never replied and went to his bed.

Seno started crying badly and missed her mother. This was something which was destroying her inside and just because of this she was looking for pleasure in Neo's friendship. Neo's father hugged her, whereas her own Father excused her. Neo made her happy, whereas she was isolated at her own home.

Seno took out her cell phone and sent a text message to Neo- "Are you awake?" after a moment she got a reply - "Nop!" Seno replied -"Trouble sleeping?" Neo replied "Was just talking to an old chum." And the chatting went onâ !â !.

## Chapter 5

Seno woke up at 6 early in the morning, her eyes were all swelled. She tried to press them inward, but then left it. She put on her school uniform, prepared breakfast for her father and then left for Neo's home without caring about her empty heart, kissed her father but her father rubbed his cheek, covered his face with blanket and inverted himself over bed.

She left crying. She herself missed the absence of a brother in her family truly.

*"What is my mistake?"*

She asked herself in a killing manner. *"I am a girl - Is this my mistake?"*

She arrived at Mr. Bhamani's place and saw that Neo's parents were asking her to wake up as it was the school time. Seno rubbed her damp cheek, preceded towards the luxurious bed where Neo was sleeping peacefully, and yelled,

*"You fat lazy lady! Wake up its 7 AM!"*

Neo yawned and said,

*"I missed you last night pal, are you fine? I think I had a dream. Anyway leave it. It was just a dream."*

She asked as if she had seen a bad dream but she didn't reveal it as it might be heart cracking for Seno.

*"No I am fine you little dwarf", Seno grinned.*

*"Have you taken your breakfast?" Seno first replied, "Yes I had".*

*"No you have to join me anyway,"* pleaded Neo and pressed her hand with her wrist, forcing her to eat.

They both ate some sandwiches and had a cup of coffee. She finally had a little of energy inside her. They proceeded towards their school. After break their teacher announced a poster competition where almost every student participated and the topic was "Hunger and Poverty". Neo was reluctant in participating but the case with Seno was different. She marked her name in the list, showing that she was going to participate in this competition. Her brain was storming badly with ideas, innovations and creativity.

All the participants were then asked to start their drawings and paintings which they were supposed to complete in 3 hours. Seno was seen too much indulged with her painting. Though she never painted before but in this competition she was looking way too experienced painter. Her feelings intensity was seen by the colors she used. She used all the dark ones- black, red, and grey. She was deeply indulged in her work.

Everybody was yelling for their friends so did Neo. Seno seemed to be lost somewhere. She was using her fingers, her nails, her wrist to give different shapes and shades to her painting.

The voice of "Stop!" was heard. She left her work. Everybody had taken the topic as they perceived it. *"AH! It's so intense,"* said one of the judges while analyzing the painting. *"Yes Sir! It is intense,"* said Seno with a grin.

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Meanwhile Neo was shouting with her friends for Seno but words were not capturing the ears of Seno, as her brain was seemed to be locally anesthetic with feelings.

*"Hello! I am asking you dear, where are you lost? Can you explain your painting? What it is depicting?" the judge asked for the 3rd time.*

*Seno's attention backed and she replied, "Yes sir, sorry sir, the picture is all about a mother and her child. Hunger is not only when you don't have anything to eat, hunger is not only when you sleep empty stomach, poverty is not only when you don't have basic necessities. You are also under poverty and hunger when you don't have the love of your near and dear especially your parents, especially when they are physically with you but the love which is suppose to be there as a parent- is missing in your life. This is something which makes a child poor and hungry."*

Seno controlled her tears which otherwise would have been bursting out if she had not controlled her throat tight. She said all this with great intensity, great power. Judge was himself shocked to see the idea behind the painting. Everybody seemed to be hooked with Seno's words as she ended. Everybody started clapping endlessly. After listening to each participant results were declared. *" I am glad that this school has amazingly talented kids, as a judge I have to make one participant the winner and this is something which is heart aching for others, who are not winners but we don't have to lose our hopes. There is a lot more to come for you all, so do take part in these kinds of competitions as well like you did in this. Here I would like to announce the winner by saying that, the reason behind calling her the winner is the essence behind the painting. Apart from the painting the idea being depicted is truly amazing. It is our today's need; every parent has to support their children because children are the basic and foremost responsibility on parents. And here is the winner, Miss Seno Gohar to whom we congratulate with all our hearts and whom we thank for giving us such a great depiction of the topic "Hunger and Poverty"."*

Seno walked upstairs, reached stage, hold the mic and said, *"Thank you so much for the love, calling me the winner. Now this achievement and these kind words truly make hungry- a rich person."* She grinned while holding her trophy. The judge hugged her and said *"I wish I could have a smile like you and I know you have something sparking, something amazing, and something unbelievable in you. You are so talented and believe me a great artist is dwelling inside you. Discover the art hidden in you. Reveal your artistic germs. Your painting is still flashing in my mind."* He ended and hugged her tightly. Seno thanked him held the trophy tightly and proceeded towards Neo. Where she tried to ask Seno, about what had made her think such but before Neo opened her mouth, somebody came and said, *"Congrats."*

## Chapter 6

A green eyed girl appeared and hit Seno's *shoulder*.

*"Hey congrats you did amazing job,"* she said excitedly out of breath.

*"Oh! Thank you. You are the same new comer, aren't you?"* Seno asked.

While Neo was being envy she possessing green eyes.

*"Yes! I am in your class it is my third day in your school,"* said the girl.

*"Oh, where were you before?"* Seno asked.

*"I was in community school but now I am here and I have shifted in C-4."* Inna replied.

*"What? You know I live in C-3 and my friend Neo in C-2, by the way, your good name?"* Seno asked with full excitement as she loved making new friends.

*"Inna,"* said the girl and moved her hand towards Seno.

*"I am new here in C- region I don't have friends but I really enjoyed this little conversation with you."*

Seno shook her hand with Inna,

*"So did I,"* replied Seno.

*"And yes, you rocked the whole school today with your talent!"* Inna replied with a wink.

*"Thanks Inna, it's easy to illustrate the emotions on a paper I will teach you someday."*

*"That's great!"* said Inna happily.

The three of them started walking towards the car. Seno offered Inna to come with them as she is their neighbor now and Inna agreed. They all sat in the car fixed their belts and started chatting, "Why you shifted yourself here?" asked Seno. Neo was all quite. Neo was always quite when she was desirable to get something for her which would make her look prettier. As Neo was thinking to get something for herself, Inna told Seno that they were living in site area but her father's office was now transferred to the C region so they had to come here. Inna revealed the fact that she has no friends here, in this new region.

*"Awww. Nothing to worry about! You will find our region the most excited place. I think this is the best place and above all we are friends now just call me up when you feel boring, we will be together,"* said Seno.

Inna smiled and felt so happy.

*"By the way what results did you get in your last year exam in your previous school?"* asked Seno.

*"I got 5 As,"* replied Inna.

*"Cool, I got 4 As and a single B,"* Seno pleaded.

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The car stopped as they reached Neo's place. Neo and Seno said bye to Inna and guided her the way to her home as she was new in their area. Inna thanked them and got off the car. Neo ordered the driver to get her to the mall.

*"Why? I am tired Neo, please lets go some other day, lets rest,"* said Seno while yawning.

*"No way! I can't rest until I don't have them in my eyes,"* replied Neo aggressively.

*"What are you talking about? What's that? Without which your eyes won't pass a single minute?"* Seno said, puzzled. "

*Yeah, you are right they won't pass a single minute without them and I want that right now,"* replied Neo naughtily.

*"Urgh! Idiot!"* said Seno with full anger."

*Let's move,"* smirked Neo to the driver and he drove them with speed and they arrived at the mall in a wink.

*"Yes! There they are. I got them!"* Neo rushed towards the shop.

*"Excuse me! Would you mind showing me that pair of lens? That green one,"* said Neo to the man who was standing right in front of them.

The man did so and showed them the same pair which Neo had asked him for. Neo took them and she went straight to the mirror, put them in her eyes and said,

*"This is what I wanted!"* she paid the man for the lens and asked Seno, *"How do I look?"*

*"Yeah, yeah you look pretty,"* replied Seno with a smile. *"Now stop getting happy, let's get back to home, idiot."* Seno pursed her lips fading her smile.

Neo was so excited she twisted and danced; Seno held her arms, pulled her and took her towards the door. They both reached the parking area and they moved towards the car.

*"Hey uncle! How do my eyes look? I mean how do I look?"* Neo asked her driver.

*"Amazing my child"* replied the old white haired driver with a smile.

*"Are you serious? I won't fire you from the job"* said Neo.

Her driver laughed and "amazing" was the only word which he said again.

Driver drove them to their area. Neo grabbed Seno's hand and looked for

C-3, where Inna lived. Neo rang the bell. A short heighten lady with same green eyes which Inna bears opened the door with a generous smile. She greeted them; her home was simple and sweet. Mrs. Aliyah, mother of Inna, recognized the two girls.

*"You must be Inna friends, Inna is sleeping right now please come in,"* said Mrs. Aliyah.

*"Yes we are her friends; I want to meet Inna. I mean we wanted to meet her."* Neo said.

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"Yes, *Why not?*" replied Inna's mum.

They entered the home. Neo was deeply noticing the simplicity of her home and the sweetness of her mother's words after all Mrs. Aliyah was so kind hearted and soft spoken.

They went straight to Inna's room as guided by her mother, pulled her hands and made her wake up. "*Hey! How you guys are here?*" said Inna with one eye and 30% mouth open.

"*Oh my goodness how would you know? Neo has been eating my small brain right after from school up till now.*" Seno said with a tiring face. "

*Yeah, Inna! Look at my eyes!*" Neo asked.

Inna made a strange gesture at first as she did not get the point and looked at Seno; Seno gave her a confused smile. Inna got the point she could have been burst out with a huge laugh but she controlled and said "*Umâ ! oh... Yes gorgeous, very pretty.*"

"*Thanks.*" Neo said.

Soon after that Mrs. Aliyah brought some snacks for them to eat, as the three of them were out of home since morning they were hungry so they filled their tummies. Both of them thanked Inna and her mother. Neo was so happy it was easy to make her happy. To make her happy it was enough to praise her. Neo left her home with all butterflies in her tummy.



## Chapter 7

After a week, their friendship started growing stronger and stronger, much closer and closer. Inna was a complete nerd, a very studious girl. A girl of wisdom, a girl who was aware of ethical values of her family. Inna was given a medium, a required love and affection from her parents. She had long curly hair, she was tall just like her father; Mr. Khan. She was the girl for whom her parents were proud of. Her parents were always encouraging her for not only her studies but also for her extra curricular activities. Her father always asked her about her school, her aims, and activities and about her time she spends in her school. Her father was very much concerned about her education. Inna always wanted to be a writer but becoming a biologist was her mother's dream. She always linked herself with the daily researches on science and technology. She loved broadening her intellectuality, her knowledge and what she loved most was writing about every point that stroke her mind. She was enrolled in the same school where Neo and Seno were already studying. Inna was giving tough competition to Seno. She was also helping her and Neo in their studies without getting jealous and never considered them her competitors. Her mother had always taught her to help everyone who came in her way for help. One day, the three of the girls were at Inna's place. They had their exam the next day. As their friendship had started getting stronger, they used to sit together for their studies. They also shared their thoughts, aims, likes and dislikes with each other, something which usually friends do. Inna and Seno were talking whereas Neo was busy with her phone. Neo's one ear was entangled by an earphone with radio on and at the same time she was sending text messages to her random friends. "Neo! Stop it, you have your exam tomorrow." Inna said. "Yeah I know you both look like some caterpillars, completely focusing on this boring book can't you take your eyes off it? Anyways carry on with your studies I will go and get some potato snacks for myself." Neo said and left the room. Potato snacks were something Neo was crazy for. She used to crack a joke by saying, "Seno, I wish I could marry that guy who sells potato snacks". And Seno would laugh out loud on it. "But your father has left you here to study. He must be thinking that you are studying here, making your future but look what are you with?" Inna said in a louder tone so that Neo could hear properly as she was in kitchen. "I don't want any lectures. And I don't like extra advices, did you get that?" Neo yelled out of kitchen. "But what if you get fewer marks? Your father would be blaming me as I have told him that I will make you study and we three will study together." Inna reasoned. "Alright! Here is the book and I am studying! Look it's in my hand is it fine?" "Now stop staring at me," Neo replied to cease the argument holding the book in her hand. Inna tried her level best to make her study but her every effort was useless. It seemed that her attention was somewhere else, however her eyes were duly on paper. Neo was just aimlessly zapping between the pages. "I would see-indeed I would see clearly that although your eyes are on the notes but your attention is somewhere else." Inna said suspiciously. "My attention? It's in book." Neo seemed little afraid but confident at the same time. Time passed and the morning sun rose above the horizon. And the two of them were still the same. They had a lot of coffee cups, books, notes and pencils messed in front of them and a lot of questions and answers in their minds were bouncing here and there. They also had fear, fear of getting failed or fear of forgetting the answers which they had memorized. But, Neo seemed no afraid. Indeed was busy with her make up, hip hop hair do's whereas Inna was tightening her braid and Seno just brushed her hair a bit as she loved her hair messy. Neo and Seno had brought their school uniforms with them so that they could get ready at Inna's place to save the time and get to school together but Neo's smart brain was planning a master step. Neo got ready at Inna's place but left earlier without having breakfast. "I am leaving for my home; I will join you both in exam premises," Neo excused. "Our plan was to go together, what's the rush? Why are you leaving like this?" Seno said. "No, I have something to deal with. I am sorry. I am in a hurry. Catch you later, all the best with your paper." Neo left without waiting for Seno to say a single word. "Sometimes she behaves so weird and talks absurd." Seno told Inna. "Leave it let's eat something I can only feel hot coffee in my tummy." Inna cracked a joke. They both had their breakfast. Inna asked Seno to revise the answers loudly so that she could listen the words too. Inna's father dropped the two girls at school and he greeted them with good wishes and left for his office. They entered the examination hall. They looked for their roll numbers. They were sitting perpendicular to each other. Invigilators distributed the sheets among students. Seno looked at the door for Neo. But Neo was not there. Seno prayed and opened her sheet and started writing. Inna was

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going through the questions she read the whole paper and she also looked for Neo meanwhile. It was 15 minutes passed until exam was started and still Neo was missing in the exam premises. Inna started her exam with a confusion that where is Neo still? After half an hour Neo entered the room with a smile, excused the invigilator, "My tire got punctured and we took it to the mechanic in order to fix it and I had to take lift so that I might not miss the exam. This is the reason I am late. Will you please give me the permission to give my exam?" The innocence of Neo appealed the teacher and she permitted her. Neo sat down, looked at the paper wrote what ever she knew. Neo with high and strong spirit finished the paper before the allocated time and left the hall. Inna looked at her and thought may be she had made preparations a lot without letting them know therefore she did it first. As for Inna this was her first exam with Neo and Seno - a first experience at that school. Seno and Inna ended the paper and marched out of the hall. They looked for Neo but found her nowhere. They checked the washrooms and other classes but had not find her in any corner. They tried to call her but her phone was switched off. Than they left for home as they had to tell her about the next paper's preparation. On the way, in the public bus Inna and Seno shared a great company. Inna got attached to the words of Seno; she loved her moves and the way she talked was attracting Seno a lot. Inna could feel a depth in Seno's eyes, she was attracted to her. Same was the case with Seno, she was deeply noticing Inna and she felt that their thinking was so much same. Inna knew about Seno's life, her family, and about Neo that she is a daughter of a wealthy business-man. "Neo never go around showing off her money and her stuff and that is what I like about her," Seno praised Neo. Inna smiled and thought that Seno is one with whom she passed a great time and they both made a good company. With all conversations going on, the question which was still buzzing in Inna's and Seno's mind was, where is Neo still? Nobody knew where she had been. Not even her parents who were busy with making guests list for their son's birthday party.

## Chapter 8

*"Hi there! You have to come at my brother's birthday party next weekend and you have to inform Inna as well",* Neo told Seno on the phone.

*"Alright, we will come, but tell me where you were the last day",* before Seno could say another word Neo hung the phone. Seno felt strange because Neo had never done such act before. But on the other hand Seno turned so excited hearing news of party .

It remained a mystery for Seno and Inna finding where Neo had been all the day long. Seno, had an intuition that Neo might have been involved with some other friends. Day went, a new day started, Seno and Inna started preparing for upcoming exams, calling Neo to join in for the same, but Neo joined in, with least interest.

One day, while studying, Neo found her tooth aching right in gum badly. She went straight to her home from Inna's home, the place where the three friends used to study.

Mama Mama Mama! My tooth has turned charcoal", Neo made a huge gasp of pain. Her lungs had started panting badly - faster and faster. Mrs. Rachna hastily made an appointment to the family dentist. Neo readily went, as it was her first time to visit any dentist so far. She was looking forward to enjoy the first know-how (later it turned grief-stricken one).

Neo greeted dentist with a grin. The dentist praised her teeth and asked her to take her weight off her feet. By the time she sat on his eccentric set up and had mouthful of air, the dentist said, "Open wider - wider Neo, Oh! Your teeth look great except one premolar, but I think I need to extract your tongue - your tongue", said the dentist laughingly. This dialogue was not able to work for Neo. The dentist started drumming a spoon like equipment, asking, whether it's throbbing or not? Neo was thinking she was beating the dentist's shining canine with the same spoon.

But after all, the dentist was her doctor. Neo was required to comply with him, as she was under his superlative supremacy at that time. Neo was inaudibly listening to his questions and answering them accordingly, throwing a heavenly smirk after every answer, as if she is ready to relish his treatment.

"You have got the biggest cavity - the biggest cavity. The infection has extended to pulp chamber - pulp chamber, so the root canal is vital treatment - vital treatment", said the dentist, after getting done with all diagnosis procedure. "Okay, but I am shocked you saying words like this twice", Neo replied shockingly. "I did not, that was an echo dear", said the dentist with a saccharine smile. All snobs had broken into high pitched laughter; She smartly tried to divert everybody's attention and therefore asked impatiently, "What is root canal?" The dentist said with a pleasant countenance, "It is a treatment used to repair and save a tooth that is badly decayed or becomes infected. During this procedure, the nerve and pulp are removed and the inside of the tooth is cleaned and sealed".

"What this pulp is?" Neo asked with a confused face. "The pulp is the soft area within the root canal. And there is a natural cavity within the centre of the tooth, which we call root canal, which contains tooth's nerves", the dentist replied professionally (as if Seno was not aware of anything, but Seno was, somehow she was trying to make him boil).

"Oh my God, you are going to make my tooth \*pulp less\*? How could it survive without its dear and near pulp?" Neo said with a strange frowning face . He laughed like a drain for the couple of minutes, and said, taking pauses because he could not control his bursting tummy, "No way, I am not going to harm your

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tooth, now just get serious, and listen to me dear, A tooth's nerve is not vitally important to a tooth's health and function after all the tooth has emerged through the gums. Its only function is sensory - to provide the sensation of hot or cold. The presence or absence of a nerve will not affect the day-to-day functioning of the tooth. When tissue or pulp of the tooth becomes infected, the bacteria begin to multiply within the pulp chamber. This can cause infection or abscessed tooth. We have to clean all the debris, so that the infection might not get worse. Its better to see a dentist just after you find your tooth with a cavity, because the treatment is then very simple, we are just required to do simple filling, it doesn't pain even".

Neo realized that if she would have been here on time, she wouldn't have been suffering this much. It was all her irresponsibility.

Neowas like okay (but still confused) and after all her knowledge had really increased to the optimum regarding this treatment.

Mrs. Rachna knitted her eyebrows, showing the gesture as if she wanted Neoto be quiet. She remained quiet and allowed doctor start the treatment. She was really feeling so bad for her pulp.

Now the time came to start the process. Mrs. Rachna agreed and the dentist started his work, without even asking Neo. She never knew what the root canal is? She was like okay! Do it now, she was not liking this charcoal tooth anymore; it disturbed her 360 degree laugh.

The dentist started his work, he had not shown him that the injection aggrieved me; Neowas unwind and was obeying his orders. But he has broadened time to 1 hour, and she was worn-out of keeping her mouth, unwrap for such a long me time. There were colorful endodontic files he was inserting in gum constantly.

"Relax one more endodontic file to go into pulp chamber then we will be done with your root canal", said the dentist, after a long time, with a smirking smile. Neowas envying his beam that time, she felt like he was showing off his outright white unblemished teeth. He He! she wanted to wallop the endodontic file straight, first into his round shaped tummy, then into his 44 years old pulp. Huh! All Neocould do was to remain quiet with mouth completely opened and fist fixed into fist, so that the hands won't walk off parallel to his face.

Finally, she was done with her root canal treatment but it wasn't completed yet. The prevailed infection compelled dentist to take a respite of one week before making the concave tooth filled and then crowned. He prescribed her some antibiotics along with a mouth wash and asked her to visit him in forthcoming week.

Soon, after Neoreachd home, she went to her bed as the crow flies had forty winks, with hand directing to that concave charcoaled premolar. She was busy with her exams, cell phone, parties and was not able to pay a distinct attention towards doctor's prescription and kept on delaying the appointment. After four days of the treatment, appalling soreness arose, which tended her to visit the dentist as early as doable.

She went to his clinic and took a quick an appointment from the counter. She was waiting outside his room with one hand on her paining cheek and the other on the appointment slip. Her name was called and she went straight in. She greeted him, asked him about his family and then sat on his dental chair even without his acquiescence. He asked her to settle down and hit some thing looked like spatula on the tooth and asked her if it's paining. She sought to say no because this time she was really afraid of those vivid files present just before her eyes but unluckily she had to say, "Yes, it's paining", in compressed voice.

"Pick out the red file fast, the infection has for a second time spread, we need to clean the pulp again", the dentist made an ordering account to his assistant. He passed the file and the dentist started doing his work, followed by some injection of local anesthesia (to reduce the recession costs, he should not had used anesthesia - but thank God, he used!)

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Neo's blood was sweltering at 100 degree centigrade, but she had to put up with this to get away from random chain attacks of pain. This time she was like smoldering this charcoal tooth and getting rid of its origin, "But useless silly; this idea won't work" - replied her unconscious mind.

The dentist worked for 2 hours working with all his drilling machines. (This drilling voice kept rounding in her ears for several hours).

"Neo, take a profound gulp of air, we are done with today's work", dentist lamented while waving his handkerchief around his forehead, showing that he is the only person who had worked hard. What about me who has just opened her mouth for a long time?, "Stop thinking like this silly, you can close your mouth now?" replied her unconscious mind. She was like okay! I am not thinking. By the time she closed her mouth she felt it quiet strange as her tongue was touching that filled charcoal premolar - tongue really missed the cavity. I was thankful to God that he gave us such a finicky blessing, but all she wanted was to flee from this oral hygiene room as early as possible.

She had regular medication and visited him accordingly. Her fourth visit was propitious for her, the infection was healed and the doctor was done with his full treatment. By the time she saw her treated tooth in the mirror, she realized the tooth, she used to call charcoal, had turned into beautiful white shiny tooth. "Thank you doctor, thank you, you made my 360 degree laugh come again - laugh come again (this repetition wasn't an echo this time)", she said to herself in excitement while standing in front of the mirror.

She realized that it was her irresponsibility and negligence which led to mammoth twinge and suffer. If she had been visiting him on time, she would not had to had all these serial pains directing towards pinnacle. Now Neostarted taking good care of her teeth, brushed them regularly, cleaned them with mouth wash, and gave equal time to oral hygiene.

## Chapter 9

Mr. Gohar's words were piercing the heart of Seno. Since, the time of birthday party of Neo's brother was so near, the excitement in heart of Seno was growing up and up.

The level of hate which Seno was receiving from her father, affected her studies, though she was good at it. She always tried to convince her father that she can do something worth watch, she can do something innovative in days ahead but her father used to say, "*You are just an another ordinary girl just like your other sisters*". These words were still running in her mind. She passed her whole day thinking about her life, her family, her future, her aims her goals. Her father was busy watching TV. And then when he turned hungry he ate his lunch; Seno had boiled some rice and cooked chicken with some gravy and also put salad on the table. He ate it all without even extending a smile.

*"Get me a water bottle from fridge this one is not chilled, I want chilled water and take off those heels there tic-tac voice is piercing my ears,"* said her father with all aggressiveness.

*"Sorry, Dad,"* replied Seno in an innocent tone and took off her heels aside like a nice and obedient daughter and she asked,

*"Dad, may I ask you something?"* Mr. Gohar nodded.

*"Tomorrow is Neo's brother's birthday. May I go? I won't go unless I won't have your prompt permission",* she asked softly.

*"You can go,"* his father replied, then left for his bedroom and fell asleep.

Seno felt bad but she did not cry, it had been 18 years with her father and she was used to it. She was now strong. Not a single word affected her in fact she missed her friends she thought about Neo, about the enjoyment and happiness which she received from Neo and then she thought about Inna who was currently busy with exams preparation. Seno thought about sharing her happening with Inna, which had definitely released her stress to a great extent but when Seno called her Inna to join in the party, she refused as she was serious with her studies and needed time to prepare herself for exams. *"Come over here Seno we will study together, when you are free"*, was the message Inna left on Seno's phone. Seno was craving for a funny and excited company because her own home was haunting her, she was so sick of her life sitting with dumb walls and it was even more paining her- living with a father who always discouraged her, she was sick of those old statements, *"Your just an another ordinary girl, you can do nothing, nothing, nothing"*. And the fire started burning in her belly which her father had ignited it. *"You will see what I can do and what I will do, I will show you the daughter power dad, one day I will show you"*, Seno was speaking to herself. On the other hand Neo's jokes, random talks and funny company was attracting her, the pleasure with Neo was not allowing her to make her dreams come true, to show her father that she will do something creative. Seno was enjoying so much with Neo that she forgot what she had promised with herself.

*"No Inna, I am not feeling like studying I am going at Neo's place. Take care."* Seno replied to Inna's message.

She spent her whole day at Neo's home, had her lunch and dinner and spent sometime talking to Mrs. Rachna. Seno loved talking with her, she loved looking at her. After all Mrs. Rachna was such a sophisticated mother with long silky hair till her waist. She was always wearing a gold chain in her neck, a white gold ring with a ruby in it. She had manicured nails just like Neo. Seno was looking at her and thought about her mother what if her mother had maintained herself and dressed up like Neo's mother, she imagined her mother looking so pretty and gorgeous in her mind.

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*"Hello! You lost?"* Neo waved her hand in front of Seno's face.

*'Ohâ ¸ umm.. Where is mother? I mean your mom? She left?"* Seno said with a shock.

*"It has been 15 minutes mum left for make over, what are you thinking exactly?"* Neo was suspicious.

*"Don't worry! I am not making any plan to capture your cool mother",* Seno giggled.

*"I know, but I think you're making plan to sleep over here at my home tonight",* Neo said with all excitement.

*"What? Darn it! Its 9: 30 I have to get back to home",* Seno said while looking at the pendulum which was hanging on the wall in Mr. Bhamani's living room.

*"Oh please no, stay at my home tonight we will have fun",* Neo said with her half tongue out.

*"No way dad is going to kill me",* Seno said with horror on her face. *"Oh yes I know he will. You are already late it is better to stay here may be he will be cool till morning",* Neo said laughingly.

*"Shut up!"* Seno said and rushed out of her home. When Seno arrived home her dad was already sleeping. Seno quietly entered her home, closed the door and tip-toed to her bedroom and fell asleep thinking about Neo's loving family and Neo's glamorous life and then she thought of something she had forgotten. The same question, "Where Neo had been that exam day?" was flashing in her mind again and again, though a week had already gone, after it happened.

*"I will ask her tomorrow at the party",* Seno murmured, thought and drifted off.

## Chapter 10

Seno opened her one eye, managed to move her hand towards the side table, took the clock and watched the time with one eye open. It was 12:00 am sharp. She got out of bed, brushed her teeth, washed her face, applied her favorite mousse on her damp hair to give a rough and wet look, took out her casual outfit. She loved being casual, she never liked her formal gaudy dresses. She then grabbed her duffle bag and looked for her father. But there was no sign of his presence at home. She left a note.

*"I am leaving for the party as I took permission from you the last week." Take care.*

*Seno.*

*P.S, the food is in microwave."*

Seno locked the door put the keys in her bag and hurried down the stairs with all excitement. She entered Neo's home which was being decorated by the most famous company of event management.

*"Hey! Seno! There you are. Come on, come here"*, Neo appeared from her room looking drop-dead gorgeous. She was wearing a combination of black and pink, her hair were as usual left open. She was wearing light make up on her eyes and a shiny gloss on her lips.

*"Oh my! You look so pretty"*, Seno said with her mouth opened.

Neo smiled and said, *"Don't worry you will be the same after half an hour now come with me."*

Seno was not able to understand her point until she sat in front of the mirror in Neo's bedroom and two make artists started styling her hair and putting make up on her face. Seno could feel a great sense of amusement there. The make up artist started grooming her, making her look prettier. They got her hair straightened, which looked too glamorous. Neo gave her a nice dress to wear. And Seno wore it. Seno was looking even more beautiful than Neo. At first Seno felt strange but standing with Neo was just complimenting her.

Party was started. Seno's all tensions were released she even forgot about her exam. She danced and danced and danced with Neo until she felt pain in her feet. She enjoyed the dance, she loved it indeed.

Neo's brother cutted the cake; everybody had a great dinner which included all Indian dishes along with some continental. Seno enjoyed the party terribly; she loved the party and wanted the music not to stop.

*"Listen Neo, I want to ask you something"*, Seno said aloud in Neo's ear because the music was very loud.

*"Hmmm I am listening go ahead"*, Neo replied with interest.

*"Ummmâ 1. Where were you on last exam day? We tried to call you but your phone was switched off and then when you called me for invitation for the birthday party, I wanted to ask you this same question but you hung up on me. Is there something you are hiding from me?"* Seno said with hesitation.

*I am dead* - Neo said under her breath.

*"What are you muttering? Tell me where you were?"* Seno questioned.



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*"Ohh.. ummâ !. Actuallyâ ! nothing seriousâ !.. I justâ !ummmâ !.. I just wanted something for myself so I left for mall", Neo answered.*

*"But you never go to mall alone you always take me up with you", Seno said suspiciously.*

*"What do you mean by that?", asked Neo.*

*"I mean where were you actually?", said Seno.*

*"Is this you think about me?", replied Neo.*

*"You think I am lying?", continued Neo.*

*"Don't you trust me?", said Neo.*

The one-sided conversation went on for 10 minutes. Seno kept quiet and waited for her to stop.

*"I never expected such question from you, Seno; I know, now you have got a friend, Inna so you don't care about me, and have lost trust over me", Neo asked with a long sigh.*

*"If I didn't care about you, I would not have asked you this question and that after a long week Neo. How can you think like that?" Seno said with all sadness and disappointment on her face. Neo had never talked like this with Seno before, never ever.*

*"I am getting late, thanks for the party, I really enjoyed it, really." Seno left for her home with tears in her eyes.*

With a lot of confusions she entered her home. She looked for her father. He was asleep in his room. She went in and kissed on his cheek, entered in her own room looked at herself in the mirror and thought how cute she was looking, she looked at the dress and thought - *Neo gave me this dress with so much love* - she stood there for a long time and apparently her eyes met the picture of her mother. *"Mom, I wish you could see me like this. I am all alone now, Neo was all I had and now she thinks that I don't care about her. How can she be so rude?"* Seno was speaking to herself holding the picture tight in her hands missing her mother. She started reminiscing those moments when her mother used to advice her.

*One day Seno's mother said, "Remember my child these worldly things are of no use, they will give you pleasure just for today. The real satisfaction of your soul lies in your prayers, in your good deeds, in your kindness to others. Always respect your parents, your elders. Money is not everything, beauty is not everything, make your soul beautiful and make your character beautiful."*

Seno was thinking about those advices and noticed that she was not following her mother's advice, this was not her natural beauty. It was all artificial. She washed her face and again sat in front of mirror and said, *"This is the real Seno, simple and sweet."*

Something stroked her mind, *"You're just an ordinary girl you can do nothing, nothing, nothing", the statement which her father usually said.*

She thought her father was right what was she doing? Putting make up on her face? Wearing gaudy clothes, showing off her beauty and dancing aimlessly? She again thought of her mother, - *"Make your soul beautiful and do something practical do something of real worth, do something which will make your father and your mother proud."*

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Then she remembered her own words which she said a day before to herself, "*You will see what I can do and what I will do; I will show you what I can do, dad, one day I will show you*".

Is this all I can do? She was feeling like a fool, a stupid. Seno looked at her phone, expecting a text message from Neo but her phone also seemed to be upset.

Seno thought this was the time to be like Inna, this was the time to focus, and this was the time to make her future, as her mother said. Seno thought that wherever her mother is, she must be expecting something from her dear little Seno and this was the time to fulfill her expectations. Seno took out the dress which Neo gave her from her cupboard and packed it to give it to her the next day at school. Seno, then cleaned her mind from all time-wasting activities, looked for her school bag and opened her notes and studied till sun rose.

## Chapter 11

Seno opened her eyes at 10 am. She had exam the other day. She felt her mouth dry as she hadn't had any glass of water since last night. She was so numb because of the fight she had with Neo last night. Without glancing at her father's room she entered the kitchen and talked to herself, *"I am too thin. I must start eating more"* - She begun to fix breakfast, forced her mind to forget about her fight with Neo and concentrated on preparing a fluffy omelet". She turned on the coffeemaker and put a slice of bread in the toaster. Ten minutes later, everything was ready. Seno placed the plate on the table and sat down. She picked up a fork, stared at the food for a moment, then shook her head in despair - *"I don't feel like eating this"* - she thought and again went to her room leaving the plate on the table as it was. She sat down on her bed.

*Beep-*

Seno had a text message, it read:

*"Good morning, how much chapters are you done with?"*

Seno replied:

*"I have to tell you something, we need to talk right now."*

*Beep-*

*"Come over here, we will also study here together."*

Seno replied:

*"I will be there within 10 minutes."*

*Beep-*

*"I will be waiting."*

*"Come in my child."* Mrs. Aliyah welcomed Seno with a big generous smile.

*"Thanks aunty, you are so nice"*, Seno said feeling like being at her own home and then she hurried towards Inna's room thinking about Neo.

Seno found Inna trapped between a lot of books, notes and coffee mugs around her.

*"It seems like you have not slept for a second!"* Seno said in a state of shock.

*"Oh yeah, doesn't matter," said Inna while yawning.*

*"Alright now keep these books aside I need to tell you something, I fought with Neo last night at her brother's birthday party she acted so weird I mean she was so rude, I just asked her that where she was after the last exam we had, and she started yelling at me, her attitude did not hurt me, the thing is that she is hiding something from us"*, Seno explained.

*"Hmmm I see, what can I say, that's something between you and Neo."*

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Inna replied with hesitation and her mind was still revising the question which she had read before the arrival of Seno.

*"Do you really want me to think that we are linked in regard of studies only, we sit together just to memorize these papers, we are friends just because we need help in our studies? Don't you care about other things? Our feelings, emotions, problems? Do you know how did I spend the whole night thinking about Neo, thinking about our friendship? How can you be so selfish Inna? We need to do something with this! We need to get her to the right track! We are her friends Inna! For God sake come out of these books! There are so much other things to worry about",* Seno found herself shouting.

Inna watched her with her mouth opened. She had never seen Seno in this furious mood.

*"But what can I do Seno? I am new with you both, I don't know anything about you and Neo",* Inna reasoned.

*"At least you can help me."* Seno said with hope.

*"Ok what do you want me to do?"* Inna asked.

*"We'd have to check up on her, like where she goes, with whom sheâs with."*

*"Are you crazy? Do I look like some kind of enquiry officer? What if Neo gets to know that we are spying her? She will kill us both!"* Inna said before Seno could complete her sentence.

*"And what about our exams? When are we going to study with all this spying, huh?"* Inna added further.

*"I know it is difficult but Neo comes first, our friendship comes first, right?"* Seno asked.

Inna did not want to disappoint Seno. Inna could feel how sincere, faithful and honest Seno was with Neo.

*"I wish Neo could know how lucky she is for having such a sincere friend",*

Inna said with a loving smile.

Seno smiled and thought - *I liked this green eyed girl -*

*"Now shall we start?"* Inna asked.

*"Yep! Let's start",* Seno grinned.

And then the two of them were totally focused on their books. Seno was all passionate for her studies. She wanted to do something, something different, she wanted to show the world how much talent she has. Inna was also passionate about making her parents proud of her.

While conversing for long, Seno asked Inna,

*"What's your aim?"*

*"Ummm I have never given it a thought",* Inna said laughingly. In fact she lied, she thought if she would tell her about her dreams Seno would laugh out loud.

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*"Are you serious? You should start thinking about it, it is about your whole future, don't be so careless", Seno said.*

*"A writer or may be an editor", Inna wished.*

And Seno wanted to be an artist - *A designer, or a sculptor, or may be a cartoonist or a graphic designer, Seno the most famous graphic designer-* Seno whispered to herself. Seno was all absent minded staring at her notes holding a pencil in her hand, thinking about being a graphic designer. She started scratching pencil and her hand started illustrating a cartoon. Inna's attention was diverted towards her eye-catching illustration.

*"Hey! You draw so well", Inna exclaimed.*

*"Ohhâ it's nothing have a look at this", Seno opened her bag and handed Inna her sketch book.*

Inna opened it and was impressed by the sketches. Starting from a mother, a baby, even to a fetus, sketches were made awesome. Inna felt each and every mood in her sketches, anger, irritation, loneliness, love, hate, and happiness.

*"You are so damn creative Seno. You should start doing something with your art. I mean you should put them on some kind of exhibition or an auction show enabling the world see how creative you are", Inna shouted with all excitement.*

*"Your right Inna, I must do something with these sketches", Seno said with full zest.*

*"I want to be a graphic designer", Seno said with hesitation.*

*"That is so good. You can Seno! You have the talent. You can do it", Inna encouraged her.*

*"Yes, I know I can. Now tell me what your dreams are?" Seno asked again. She knew that Inna had something revolving in her mind.*

*"A writer", Inna revealed. "Do you think I have the potential?" Inna asked.*

*"Of course you have, you idiot! Do you write? I mean do you have your own writings on any topic?" Seno asked as a reply.*

*"Yes I do", Inna said with half tongue out.*

*"I am going to kill you, you're a big pretender, you never told me. Let me have a look at them", Seno demanded desperately.*

*"Ohhh Really? Did you tell me about your all those dreams you have in your mind?" Inna replied and Seno only grinned. Then Inna took out a file and showed Seno her writings. Seno read them all. There were short stories, articles on Pakistan. They were really very interesting, Seno loved it.*

*"We both will do something innovative and artistic together", Inna just had a thought.*

*"Now let's get back to our studies, we have our exam tomorrow and look what we are doing? Planning future before having results", Seno said laughingly.*

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*"Yeah, right",* Inna replied. She kept that file safely in the cupboard and got back to her books. They both studied and made clear their concepts. They revised again and again. Mrs. Aliyah brought lunch for them in the room. Seno sniffed as she knew that Mrs. Aliyah had cooked Chinese.

*"Aunty! How do you know that I love Chinese food?"* Seno asked with her tummy empty.

*"Just a thought."* Mrs. Aliyah said with a smile.

They all laughed and finished the food with no mark of ketchup left on plate. Mrs. Aliyah had cooked Chicken Manchurian with Chinese rice. Seno enjoyed them a lot. She thanked Inna and her mother. She left for her home, thinking that how lucky she was having two friends, just like her sisters and two women, just like her mothers.

## Chapter 12

Results were declared. Inna got first position, Seno second and Neo was hardly just passed. Surprisingly, Neo was not worried, she had an expression which said - *it's all fine dude*.

*"I told you that night to study but you were not serious, see your result, being a friend it was my duty to guide you to the correct path. Please don't spoil your parents trust. We have our final exams soon, will you make good preparation with us?"* Inna asked in a friendly manner holding her report card as promised with Seno that they both together will be staying loyal with Neo and will be helping her study, finding next the real problem which is keeping her away from her studies.

*"Yes I will"*, Neo replied in a way that she was so damn tired of these serial torturing lectures. "Do you need any help?" asked Inna. "I know you have many many queries in your mind regarding various equations in Physics. You can have my help any time you want", said Inna in a real friendly manner.

"No, I will make myself understand, Yahoooo", said Neo with complete amusement.

"Ok, as you say", Inna replied and left for her home.

While she arrived home, she shouted, "Hey Mom, I got highest marks in the class". "Hardwork talks my daughter", replied her mother. "Yes, Mom it's all your support which gave me positive strength to work hard, I can't forget a single second you and Dad gave me love", Inna said while getting emotional.

She just saw her dad entering home, without waiting for him completely get entered home, she hugged him tight and in a very slow voice left few words in air, which said, "Dad, I love you a lot and I want to do something which can high your neck. It was all your efforts, you drove me to school early in the morning, not letting me miss any class, and I am today with highest marks in the class dad. I feel so lucky that God has bestowed me with such amazing father. I felt so great when you smiled from inside after hearing about my results. Your smile and love is my driving force for success and achievement".

"Don't get me emotional child, common let's dine together, I am really hungry", replied her father, keeping all sentiments inside his heart. They both began their lunch and talked for hours while sitting on same chairs.

"Dad, my teacher has given me a chance to write for school's yearly magazine. I am given a topic on Earth Day to write on", said Inna with a grin.

"That's amazing, I know you will do amazing in it", replied her dad.

"Dad, but what should I write, I know I am a good writer but I need your help", asked Inna followed by a wink

"I know you are a good writer and that's the reason I make you write my office work", grinned her father.

"It's fun plus learning working with you Dad", replied Inna.

"Well, I have a plan for this year, which I won't be sharing right not. Let it be a secret for a while", said her father.

"I love secrets, let it be a secret then", said Inna.

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Inna continued, "Dad, Dad, but a secret for a small time".

The conversation was over, when Inna's Mom shouted from the kitchen, asking Inna to help her in some work. Inna, her father and mother remained busy all the day long with domestic work. Finally night over took the sky. Inna had big butterflies in her tummy bouncing here and there all the way round. "I want to know the secret, Dad", Inna asked while yawning.

"Check out my bag", replied her father.

Inna took huge steps to the place where her father's bag was lying. She bent herself down and opened the bag. Her mouth opened wide, for couple of minutes and eyes filled with joy. She quickly went back to the room where her parents were sitting. She hopped and asked her dad excitedly, "Is it true?"

"Yes, of course", yawned his dad.

"I can't imagine my summer holidays are going to be real fun", said Inna.

"Now, imagine that", yawned her dad.

"Ha-ha that was funny dad", replied Inna.

"Stop hopping, tiles will be scratched", said her father.

"That was even too funnier", replied Inna and hopped with even faster pace.

Inna continued, "I can't imagine this surprise dad!".

"This is not just for you, it is for my wife too", said her dad.

"Ha-ha, dad", replied Inna.



## Chapter 13

Night was overpowered by the excitement which Inna had in her heart, and night appeared to be a day full of light for Inna. Inna's mother prepared delicious sandwiches in the breakfast.

After having a hot cup of tea, Mr. Khan rushed towards his car and proceeded afterwards her father with one foot without socks, holding the socks tightly in her fist and other arm holding a heavy bag. Inna had her seat. Mr. Khan drove fast and dropped Inna at her school.

At school, the smile was not able to leave Inna, as she was super excited for her summer trip, which was revolving in her mind continuously. It was her final exam after she had left for her trip. Inna had no fear of exams, and was very excited for the upcoming final exams. She has prepared for them, from the day one. She was waiting for the day of her trip to hit the calendar.

At school, the butterflies in her tummy seemed to be losing energy when she heard no voice on attendance time, when the name of Seno and Neo were answered with a big, Absent. Inna was then completely in the state of boredom, missing her friends and counting every single second to pass by the clock.

The school timings were over. Inna went back her home, as soon as she entered her home, she took her cell phone out, and immediately wrote a message to Seno, "Where were you today? We had our biology class, I really missed you my friend".

By the time, the message was landing in the inbox of Seno's cell phone, Inna washed her dusty face. She was near to closing the tap, amidst the cell phone rang. She fled like a bee and opened her inbox with wet hands. "I was busy packing my dresses dude", replied Seno.

"But why?", asked Inna.

"No, I will be going for a picnic with Neo", replied Seno.

"Have a good time then", said Inna.

Days passed, and Inna kept herself busy with preparations for exams.

## Chapter 14

Mr. Khan and Mr. Gohar were good childhood friends. Soon after Seno entered in life of Mr. Gohar, he kept his social life neglected. And even neglected Mr. Khan and his family who was his wonderful friend, no one knew why entrance of Seno had impacted so badly the social life of Mr. Gohar. Right after Mr. Khan shifted in the neighborhood of Mr. Gohar, he looked at him as a stranger. Mr. Gohar was just overpowered by the feeling of inferiority complex, thinking all the time that he is not blessed, and cursing every moment.

Mr. Khan had tried a lot to convince Mr. Gohar get back to his previous life, when he never stopped joking and making fun. He always thought of the time when Inna was born and the fun and love Gohar spread in the party. Memorizing all such happenings was enough for Mr. Khan have a well of tears in his eyes. Many times he hugged Mr. Gohar, but no body was successful in melting his frozen feelings against his daughters.

Before Mr. Khan and his wife could make plans for their summer trip. Mrs. Khan whispered in ears of her husband, "I think we should make Mr. Gohar and Seno join us". "Don't you know? He never listens to me!" Replied Mr. Khan. "I will talk to him", said Mrs. Khan.

Upon acceptance of Mr. Khan, Mrs. Khan talked to Mr. Gohar on call, and said with emotions, "I consider you my elder brother, and it is your sister's wish to join her and her family in summer trip. Being eldest brother, I don't think you will be replying with a no". "Ok", was the only word, which Mr. Gohar used for reply.

Mr. Gohar left a message in the inbox of Mr. Khan, "I will be coming, but Seno won't be coming". "Ah! That's not right, bring it just for the sake of Inna, she will be clapping alone in air otherwise, please", replied Inna's father. "Ok", was the reply from Mr. Gohar.

Days passed, exams were over, and the journey began. It was a wonderful trip to the northern part of Pakistan. Inna after many years breathed again the fresh air in mountains. They had a wonderful 30 days of time in many areas of Northern part of Pakistan. The journey turned out to be a real power for Inna and Seno both, as they shared best knowledge, best learning, became more closer to each other, shared their feelings and planned out their aims. Seno realized that meeting Inna was a gift from God, as se found a mirror of what her mother had said to her when she were a child and on calls when she was turning a big girl in eyes and gestures of Inna, who had always been keeping her parents happy. They captured beautiful pictures togetehr and planned out an amazing idea of writing a book on this journey and contribute some efforts in promoting tourism in their country. Inna decided that as she is good at writing, she will be writing for the images that Seno will be desiging which will solely be to promote tourism in Pakistan. With all constructive efforts added in the time of the journey, the time was over to say bye bye to this beautiful nature that reside in Northern Areas of Pakistan. While coming back to their homes, they realized the level of pollution, and other crisis which city lives have. While on journey back to their city, they saw white clouds turning black.

## Chapter 15

When the journey of summer vacations turned out to be a real achievement for Seno and Inna, it appeared to be devastating for Neo, as she kept herself busy with random friends and in parties, breathing luxuries every second. Neo had immense talent in her, but extra love and too much luxurious life where she swam in golds, had ruined her.

Right after Inna and Seno were back to their homes, they called Neo to join them. But Neo seemed to have moved her ears. After a very long time, Neo arrived and joined the conversation. She started telling about the fun, parties, the money she spent on calls, made Inna and Seno wake up. They asked her a lot to please stop such activities and assigned her a task of contributing some efforts in making the book which they planned. For Neo, this book idea was a trash, she laughed badly when she heard from Inna, the idea of book. Her mouth was opened so big that the charcoal filled tooth appeared so prominent in mouth. This attitude made Inna burnt with embarrassment and her cheeks turned red, with three pimples on forehead jammed with clotted blood.

The day went with all such harsh and bitter conversations, just in 30 days when Inna and Seno were remained so focused with their future plans, Seno seemed to be neglected from studies. In final results, as predicted, Inna secured highest, Seno secured good marks and Neo was just passed.

Right after when they three were coming outside from their class holding report cards in hands, Inna suddenly had a glance over Red Marked Announcement on softboard. Inna's attention grappled Seno's and Neo's eyes towards the notice. It was an announcement for a scholarship to study abroad for a year at world's leading school. It was an exchange program, with one seat for self finance student. Inna and Seno applied instantly by going to the student affairs office. Neo was not eligible to apply for the scholarship due to her low grades.

After a tough process of selection, the two candidates selected for the scholarship were none other than Inna and Seno, who smartly helped each other in getting through the process successfully with hands ready to help each other at every moment. The idea of book turned out to be a real surprise for the selection committee when they saw such incredible efforts live in front of them in the form of book, which was partially completed. The selection committee found Inna and Seno, an excellent combination of talent and hard work who will be giving a good name to the school while studying abroad. The mystery occurred, when Neo decided to take place on self finance basis, and again the time came when money played its power and Neo entered the same school where Inna and Seno were registered on scholarship. While on flight, Neo fastened her belt proudly giving a message that money talks. It was not so surprising for Inna and Seno who were seeing such arrogant behavior of Neo who entered the process with the power of money, by paying a huge amount for a year.

They were welcomed by the new school, Inna and Seno were happy seeing such warm welcome by the school management, hostel management and students. Neo was not giving them a smile back, so arrogant!

Even in school, Neo never left her activities, and many students complained about her behaviour and frequent absents from classes. While Neo, was busy with her activities. Inna and Seno were planning to build an online website for the world to see the art of both talents young girls. They decided to put their writings and sketches on the website making their art accessible for the world to see and get inspired. It was no longer that the school announced, "International Contest - Recognizing Art" for the students worldwide. And luckily before the deadline of submission, the artistic website featuring creativity, innovation and unique expertise of two young girls was live before world. They made the submission, and asked Neo too, to enter in, but she seemed really not interested. The amalgamation of Inna's writings and Seno's paintings, sketches and drawings were completely mesmerizing for the world. Out of over 1200 submissions entered from students worldwide from

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122 countries, the website of Inna and Seno stood the winner of all. And the school, planned to organize an event for them in the school's largest audience, invited their parents and provided them tickets and sponsored their journey, after hearing that they were not able to pay for their own. When the news stroke the media of Pakistan, that two young girls have won an International Award recognition their Art, they became a young celebrities in Pakistan and of course abroad. Their families were so happy and excited seeing their young stars shining globally. Neo's parents tried a lot to join their neighbors in their journey but they failed as the school replied with no to help them in any way. Seno's father was silent in his journey, because the daughter whom he had been thinking as a matter of disgrace for him, was the one who made him sit on aeroplane for the first time and she was the reason which was made him, a celebrity. He was not able to stop his heart cursing his hands which had beaten Seno badly. While Mr. Gohar was thinking, Gohar stroke his fist in his belly and said, "Hey, have some food". Seno became the reason for his father to sit again with his near and dear friend Mr. Gohar after so many years. Inna's this global achievement had made his father feel proud and he forgot his all miseries and pains.

Upon their arrival at the school after a long journey of 36 hours, they were treated so beautifully that tears fell down their eyes. They entered on the red carpet and were not able to digest the level of happiness in their hearts seeing their daughters sitting on golden chair in front. Soon the ceremony began, and a series of announcements, different sessions by international speakers started. The winners were announced in public, and Inna and Seno were asked to come on stage to receive their trophies. When Inna and Seno were given so much love by the people all around the world, Neo felt something missing while sitting at the back in the audience, missing her parents who just lived in the neighborhood of the winners. Inna began her speech which highlighted the importance of a relationship between parents and child in grooming the child's personality. She said, upon which the corners of the auditorium broke with the voice of clappings, "There is no alternate of parents in this world - RESPECT THEM". She further added, "If a child is not able to find real love from parents, the child then tries to seek the love and affection in some other company, which unfortunately if is bad, will affect the child, of course badly. I have seen my own friend working so hard for studies, but since the love from parents was not there, it killed her emotions and she remained frustrated even in school. It killed her emotions, it killed her emotions". After when Inna ended her speech, Seno took the mic while shivering, "From where should I start, and from where should I end. My hands palpitate when I say something. Well, now I am okay and now I will speak my heart. My mother was tortured when I was born, because I was a girl. The question which kept my mother in dark for years was, why was I a girl? Why? And she had no answer! There my journey began. I captured every torturous moment as a piece of art and turned them with my hands as a memory. I thank my father for everything he did for me. I thank my mother for giving me a gift, whom I call life!" Her jargons remained in her throat and she left the speech incomplete as emotions overtook his mind completely. Mr. Gohar was touched by her words, and was not able to look up with his eyes over Seno. He felt proud from inside. His feet had some natural energy, he ran over the red carpet towards stage, stepped up the stairs, and hugged Seno tightly, and whispered, "Forgive me". The ceremony was over with beautiful messages which world remembered for long.

Neo sitting in the corner at the back, when saw such an international award in hands of her friends, who had asked her to utilize her talent, was just cursing for not using her time constructively. It was a lesson she learned, that talent talks. She promised to herself in deep voice, "Now I will be pushing myself away against the powerful force of money gravity".

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