

Skyler,

I wish to breathe another season



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Chapter 1

The Smile People Once Mocked

The realm where a human breathes creates a ripple in the core of that soul. The constant shift of the season transforms that ripple into tranquility or waves. The season was summer then. That was one of the most brutal summers I ever witnessed. Eternity seemed short to wait for a single cloud shading a corner of the sun. The consequence was a canopy of pure blue sky. But to the ever-changing human hearts was that spotless blue with only the radiant white sun soothing or intimidating !!

I am Nova. Currently a college student. Every five days of the week, attending class without skipping any is my regular routine. Though that is the expected routine for a student. The regular scenario of the students is to make plans during off periods or after classes, which includes hanging out at popular sites or bookstalls, eating street food, and so on. The small gaps between classes will fill the classroom with clamor. In my case, not being an active participant in their chit-chat, all I left to do was just hear their stories. Certainly, I do enjoy this. However, hanging out with them is not in my pattern. Honestly, I enjoyed such moments most around my sister. As she went to a different city for work, I hardly got any chances to interrupt her schedule. As a consequence, another pastime was added to my chart. I often wander around on my own. Back at home, the stories of my class often become a way to chat with my mother.

Our college holds classes in the morning shift. There are some lab classes or extra classes that are held at noon. The latter sometimes feels too tiring to me. One Thursday, I had a lab class. It took longer to finish the task than the scheduled time. By the time the class ended, it was afternoon. I failed to answer correctly. The gloomy mood was unbearable. Suddenly, the idea of visiting my school area crossed my mind. That area is both my favorite and nostalgic. If I were a witch, I would turn back time.

I hurriedly caught the bus and got off at the nearest stop. There is a playground behind my school building. The appearance of that playground changed a bit. It was late in the afternoon by the time I reached there. The surroundings were like a group of students playing cricket, some children were riding bicycles, some children were playing seesaws and slides, while their parents were watching them and gossiping with their peers. There are some benches beside the slides. I slowly walked to an empty bench thoughtlessly. Sitting down on that bench, I took a deep breath. The fragrance of summer air was blended with the flavor of freshly made popcorn and fried

snacks. The air one breathed in with dear memories for most days of their childhood can be quite calming. As I kept looking at those children, I kept reminiscing about my day when I was at their place. Back then, I used to hang out with friends, and all the students in the class were cohesive. Time surely changes everything.

With a pensive mind, I kept staring at the surroundings. Suddenly, my gaze met a girl sitting on the bench at my right side. That girl smiled politely at me. I snapped back to reality. I could not recognize her. Is she somebody who knows me? Or, a school friend I cannot remember? Throughout my school life, I was mocked for smiling when I met someone I knew. Though not all of them did that. Maybe she was one of the latter. But I had a tiny bit of confidence left to remember those few people. Unable to find any solution, I turned my face after returning an uncomfortable smile. Not to embarrass myself further, I stood up that instance and strode out of the playground. Undoubtedly, it was disrespectful to ignore anyone like that. Instead, what was I supposed to say? Do we know each other? That would be a rude choice if she were a friend. Sorry, I cannot recall who you are. That was an option. The moment I started to get those points, I already left the area.

The setting sun was scattering the final red rays on the darker blue sky when I reached home. My clumsy character always gets me into such situations. With wide open notebooks, I tried to concentrate on my studies. But that event kept distracting. I regretted not talking. That was the moment I realized I did not properly remember her face. I was annoyed forgetting the notebooks in front. I left my room and found my mother just returning to the drawing room after doing her task to relax. She turned on the television. Our usual chat started. That was the moment I was able to calm myself and return to focus on my studies.

Days of the summer passed by. My routine was the usual, with the drifting time. One day, we had some special events arranged on our campus. The classes ended sooner than expected. I was not much interested in that event and came out. I started to walk towards the bus stand. The glare of the sun was making it hard to walk the whole way. To take a break, I sat on the bench under the large trees. While leaning back, a bunch of dangling green mangoes caught my eye. Those large green mangoes made me greedy to have at least one of them. However, I am still on the road, not in my garden. I don't have a garden to begin with. The real adventure was to steal the green mangoes from the school yard, which was forbidden to climb on. Due to the early leave, if I would go to school, I would be able to visit the school yard. The school had to be open then. Forgetting the break, I ran to get on the bus. When I reached it was still class time, and the yard was open. Visiting my school yard after so long, I felt so happy. The flower

plants in the yard had grown. The sight of the students in our school uniforms was very nostalgic. That mango tree in one corner of the yard is still in the same condition. A bunch of students were there. Some were trying to reach the tree while others were guarding if any teacher was coming. I pretended not to notice them, not to interfere with the fun. All of them were primary section students. The higher section classes were still ongoing. I left the school arena, humming a children's song, and came to the playground behind the school. The sun was showering the land with harsh vertical light rays, resulting in a deserted playground. I skipped to the side of the benches. However, arriving there, I saw someone sitting there in that rough sunlight with a light shade from the nearby tree. Noticing me, she stood up, wearing a familiar smile on her face, and approached me. She was the girl I met that day.

I was greeted with a 'Hello'. With hesitation, I replied to her greeting word and said, "I apologize. But I cannot recognize you? Are you a student here? Um, did we meet before?"

I first thought she might be a student here. On second thought, she seemed the same age as me. She might not be a school student then. She did not answer my question. It made me reconsider whether I should have said something else. It's hard to get a human's point of view. Their preferences are surely different. How can I know what the person on the other end is thinking? That was the reason I fled the other day, ignoring the whole incident.

She broke the silence with an apology, adding to her statement, "A friend of mine used to be a student at this school. I am familiar with this place. Nice to meet you."

She skipped answering some of my questions. Since she was not a student at this school, I was sure enough that we were not acquainted. The reason was that other than school, I had very few friends or acquaintances. I nodded slightly to reply pleasantly and confessed that I was a student there, so I visited that place often.

"Um. I have not introduced myself yet. I am Nova."

"It's Skyler," she said.

Skyler did not say any further about her; she did not seem interested. I also paused there. However, we continued our conversation. The topics were not related to us in the slightest. Mostly like the weather, that playground, etc. The extent of the chats was also short, like a constant shift of water ripples' direction. After a few minutes of talking, I mentioned my time to return home. She nodded, saying, "See you next time."

With uncertainty in mind, I smiled. She waved me bye with that same smile on her face. Even when I was leaving the playground, she was looking my way, just the same way we did back

in school days while returning home. I was not courageous enough to ask her more questions. But today I saw her face properly and thought, could it be that we met before? After searching through the pages of the mind diary, I could not find anything.

Childhood friends do have different feelings. As we grow up, we tend to look for people whose thoughts match ours more. Though it is not the soul truth. Back in school days, we defined our friendship in a different way. In my circle, almost everyone started to get along after a quarrel among us, not to mention the topics were way more childish than our age. That was a hilarious way, though. As time passed, we started to learn about the world and judge the people. At that moment, even though I wanted to befriend Skyler, my mind was clashing with joy, anxiety, and some other feelings I cannot describe. I ended up deciding not to come to this area for some time.

A daily notebook or diary is proof of every fleeting moment. Sometimes it turns into a collection of only the special moments. The view of the cover page of that notebook eventually becomes like the doorbell of the room. When you do not visit for a long time, the ringing of the bell will make you picture some corners of the room without your consent. I had one like that. My dearest friends bought a set of notebooks with the same designed cover but different colors. I had one of those. It had been two years since I opened the drawer in which I put it. I often draw on another notebook. It is not something that one will say is artistic. However, for me, it is similar to that diary that is superfluous to others but quite indispensable for the author. That night, I took my sketch notebook and sketched a random landscape. I had an urge to paint it, but the time started to run. I ended up making shades with pencils. The landscape was based on the vague memory of the place we went on a tour back at school. Writing the date in the bottom right corner, I closed the notebook as if to close the list of allotted events for that day.

Chapter 2

Words We Leave Unsaid

Marching to the end of April, the weather started to get warmer. On one holiday, I was at home. Away from the burning sun, it felt better. While relaxing after studies, handing me a list of things my mother told me to buy those things. To do the chores, I have to go out. So, what's the point of doing only one task when you have a lot of time in hand? It would take just 10 minutes, but I informed her that I would be back in an hour. Leaving the housing society, I crossed the road and started to stroll. Though it was hard to feel the wind inside the house, there was a light wind drifting from time to time. The light, windy atmosphere went perfectly with the heat of scorching summer.

There is a small rest area beside the wide footpath, primarily a place of evening gathering of all aged people of the surrounding societies. I bought a bottle of soft drink from the nearby store and found a place to sit under a tree. The summer noon streets on the holiday made the area feel deserted. The sun rays were coming through the gap in the leaves. When the wind was starting to blow, it was more fascinating. Leaning against the tree, I closed my eyes to hear the playful collision of leaves. I felt a tap like a falling leaf on my shoulder. I slowly turned while hearing a known voice saying, "So, we meet again!"

"Skyler!!", I said in awe.

Skyler chuckled, "How have you been?"

"Ah, fine."

"What are you doing here?"

"Just lazing around."

"Mind if I sit beside you?"

"Be my guest."

She sat on the ground next to me. I started to look at the ground. I did not know what to say. We are not school friends to talk about routine or after-school plans. To break the silence, Skyler mentioned the roughness of the weather and some other casual topics. I kept nodding or agreeing to follow her conversation.

"The leaves are shading as if the sunlight is fragmented, and so is the warmth." she said at the

change to a softer tone as if urging me to keep up the conversation. I looked at her and found her staring at the ground with sunlight through the leaves.

With a smile, I continued, “Yeah, it certainly is beautiful. The breeze is making fragmented sunbeams merge and then drift apart again—like spotlights on a dimly lit stage. You are the star, and your audience is all of nature, from a grain of sand in the stalls to the sky itself in the gallery.” The bright sunlight was making it difficult to gaze for a long time.

“So you can also talk for a long time. I thought you could only say ellipsis.” she giggled and said after bringing her palm to her cheek.

“Ah, haha. So what are you doing here, Skyler?”

Now that I think those were my first words with her, I had earnestly.

“I live near here. Seems you also live around.”

I nodded. Declaring us neighbors, she hoped to meet often. We chatted for a while. All of it was small talk, like hobbies, favorite dishes, and so on. But all the questions were done by her, and I was just answering.

I returned home. Upon seeing me empty-handed, I was scolded. As if a kid lost track of its task while getting a chance to play. It was actually for some guests who would visit that day. Seeing Skyler erased my sour mood to meet those guests for a moment. I hurried out again to return before they came.

On the following Saturday, I was home. I studied in the morning as the final exam was coming up. Then I took a break. On my holidays, I sometimes helped my mother with her work. With the flow of time, that became a habit. As the temperature was too high, my mother wanted to dry some fruits. I asked, “Mother, let me help you.”

“No, you don’t have to. Take a break.”

That is how my mother always is. No matter how much work she has to do, she won’t admit it, even if she is tired. To help her, I always have to start it secretly and make some excuses to continue.

I just sneaked a chance and took the bowl when she was not noticing. I went to the balcony, placed a fresh sheet. Then I sat by the door of the balcony and started to arrange the fruit slices. At the time my fingers touched the floor, I sensed the heat from the burning concrete floor. Brushing it a bit longer would make one cherish the roof over one’s head. Lia, a higher

secondary school friend, once said that. Her real name was Liana. Back then, I was pretty close to her. I used to hang out with her in a group with other girls. Reminiscing about them reminded me of the conversation with Skyler from the other day. From the day I met Skyler in the rest area, we often ran into each other there. By the time we got closer, the conversations turned longer and more earnest. That day, we were chatting about college studies. At one point, I did not agree with her. It felt as if she was willingly sidetracking her view. I stopped talking and just nodded to agree. The talkative expression replaced a nostalgic gesture on her face. To my surprise, she said, “ Seems like three years is not enough for human habits to change.”

I didn't get what she meant. Maybe my blank stare made her say, “ Remember? One day, Lia and others were joking about how to make expressions in the drama they were supposed to play at the cultural event. You were joking as well. However, when they joked about their own performance, you seemed to feel a bit uncomfortable. Then you suddenly turned silent as if you were not a part of it.”

At a loss for words, I kept staring blankly. I recall the story of the drama. It was just a story of a group of students before the final exam of the higher secondary school. But I still don't get why they named it ‘Rain of Dew’. Skyler continued, “ I told you I had a friend at your school. I used to meet her there. So occasionally I met her friends.”

Skyler didn't dive into reminiscing anymore. And quickly directed to a bench which was no longer occupied, to sit. She talked as if nothing unusual had happened. I didn't remember her. So I also closed that chapter, pretending everything was normal.

I decorated all the fruit slices in the middle of my thoughts. I tried to revive every page of my higher secondary school life memory. Everything related to Lia. Still, my brain failed to find a single photo of Skyler. All those jumbled thoughts resulted in constant sighing. Turning back from the balcony, I realized my mother was watching me. If you see someone way too absent-minded and has a regretful face, what will you think is obvious. Thanks to Skyler for leaving me to describe another mystery to my mother, whose reason I could not explain. Right then, a house sparrow entered the balcony through the metal railing, trying to approach the food. We both hurried to chase it away. It flew and sat on the edge of a broken branch. When my mother went back inside, I kept staring at that sparrow. I smiled at it gratefully for saving me and put a fruit slice near the railing secretly. As a shy bird, it was supposed to fly. However, it kept chirping while staring at me. I felt scorned. It seemed that the sparrow told me that I chased it away, which wouldn't be erased from its mind with a minor atonement. In the same manner, my mother might have thought that I was depressed with something rather indescribable.

Seeing me pretending to be indifferent, she might have skirted around the issue. Was it the same with Skyler? I told her I could not recognize her in our first conversation. Maybe, seeing me indifferent after mentioning Lia, she felt overlooked. Lecturing me with a constant chirp, it flew out of sight. Returning to the kitchen, I tried to help my mother with meal preparation. She directed me on what to do, but did not ask anything.

That night, I again took my sketch book. Though house sparrows are a common sight in my life, I could not sketch them using my mind. Surfing through the photos of them for hours, I got the confidence to sketch it myself. Ending the sketch, I left the room and silently went to the balcony. The lights of other houses were turned off. The half moon was creating a shadow of the railings on the floor. I sat on the floor. It was completely different compared to the morning. Suddenly, I noticed that the fruit slice I had placed near the railing was still there. However, it was half-dried and out of shape. Mocking the beautiful moonlight, it narrated how easily thoughtless deflection deteriorates. We often try to hide facts from the people we are around. Though it puts our mind at peace, it may cause the other side to take the tempest on mind. Maybe not just the other side, after a certain time, it can also make you feel the burden of unsaid words. The silent night deepened with a lot of words chirping from the surrounding.

Chapter 3

A Gift That Won't Rot

In the middle of May, my semester exams were held. During the preparation time, the time seems to run too fast to cover the syllabus. Still, why don't the exam weeks end at the same speed!! The funniest part is that we become more concerned and analyze the topics after answering in the exam paper than while studying. The fourth exam was English, a minor course in my department. My exam did not go well. Though I was positive about getting the passing score. After the exam ended, Joye, a classmate, called me. Our home is on the same route, and we often return home together. She suggested that we go to the bus stand together.

After arriving at the stand, the bus was already waiting. There were still twenty minutes before departure. We started to talk about the exam. It seemed Joye's exam was also not to her expectations. Rather than feeling depressed, we started to laugh at it. Maybe it is a bit consoling when I hear that someone else's exam also did not go well, not in an envious way, but to calm myself. At that time, Maya arrived on the bus with Rose. Maya is in the same department as us, whereas Rose is from a different one. We all had the same subject test, so our schedules matched. The three of them went to the nearest stall to buy some snacks. I didn't go with them. So, I got the duty to look after their belongings. The bus departed at the required time, and the chattering sounds started to resonate with the speedy flow of the wind.

That month was also about to end. At last, the semester final exams ended. It was 4.00 pm. All the faces leaving the exam hall seemed as if the summer tree leaves had received the long-awaited raindrops. At that time, while going towards the bus, Joye told me that she and some other classmates were going to a cafe. They were discussing where to go. I saw a known face walking at a distance. It was Skyler. I was not very surprised, though. This area is a bit far from our residential area. However, to study in a renowned college, this area is closer to our home. I ran towards her. Upon greeting, Skyler returned a dazzling smile.

"What are you doing here? It feels like you are following me everywhere." I said jokingly.

Skyler folded her arms, with a cocking eyebrow, said, "Why do I feel it's the opposite!"

We both laughed, and right then Joye came towards us and said in a go, "We are going to the Mouno cafe. Want to join?"

Mouno cafe is close to our college. However, I was unwilling to go with them as I was not that

close with everyone there and wanted to be with Skyler. I declined. As they were quite sure of my answer, they did not object and set on their way. When I turned towards Skyler, she asked if it was okay not to go with them. I answered in the affirmative. We went to a field beside the bus stand. Our college sports field can also be seen from here. As it was late in the afternoon, the field was full of people. We entered there and started to walk by the side to find a place to sit. Seeing me striding irregularly, Skyler asked, “What are you doing?”

“Trying not to step on those grasses.”

Considering a field full of grasses, this narrative may sound unreasonable. But she did not say anything, rather looked downward. There were Crabgrass flowers of a light brown color. We walked a bit farther and sat on the ground. In summer, flowers in the grass are common. The place where we sat was also surrounded by different colors of small Mimosa flowers. Though individuals of different ages came, most of them seemed to be students. A group of students gathered a bit further from us, forming a circle. One of them was playing the guitar and singing. Some of them joined voices with him. The song was familiar to me. I was humming the lyrics. Suddenly, I realized that Skyler was tapping her finger with the rhythm. However, her rhythm was matching with my hum, not their song. Realizing I noticed, Skyler looked at me. Out of the blue, she said, “You could join them. Why did you refuse?”

Maybe Skyler thought she was the reason I did not go with them. Avoiding the topic is the best choice for such moments. However, I didn’t want to recreate the same feeling I felt in front of that half-rotten fruit slice basking in moonlight. With that thought, I replied that I usually do not like to join such gatherings.

“You are clearly enjoying those students singing in the group. You certainly like these. Mind if I ask the reason you are not joining them?”

How could I say that such questions were the reason itself? I do not like to talk about myself to others that much. Neither do I love to listen to them. Maybe I mostly hate to become a part of their gossip. No, not in the way of backbiting, just casual small talk. I did not know Skyler for long. Though she claimed to be a friend of Lia, I didn’t remember. Talking to someone as a friend is a terrifying task. You may not realize that you are even ready to share thoughts that the other party should not know or feel annoyed. Either way, you will suffer.

“If you don’t want to answer, it’s fine. I promise to respect your thoughts.”

I was not sure what to tell her. Even if you tell after thinking a lot, others will not necessarily get what you mean.