

## Chapter 1: Breaking the Cycle

I was a prisoner in my own life—trapped behind screens and snacks as the world outside raced forward without me.

Unlike most teenagers, I wasn't living the "typical" teenage life. Instead of exploring new skills or striving to become clever, cultured, and confident, I was stuck in a cycle of distractions. My days blurred together, consumed by hours of video games and endless scrolling on Instagram and YouTube—anything to escape the boredom that seemed to define my existence.

It wasn't just the screens holding me back. Junk food became my comfort, a quick fix for every moment of frustration. The weight I gained didn't go unnoticed. Family gatherings turned into painful experiences as relatives made sharp comments about my appearance. Their words were daggers, each one deepening my shame. I started avoiding mirrors and family photos, terrified of what I'd see—or worse, what others might say.

Instead of facing these problems, I ran from them. I buried myself deeper in distractions, hoping the discomfort would disappear. But it only grew louder. The glow of my devices became a wall between me and the real world.

"Is this it?" I often wondered. Was this how I would spend the rest of my life? The thought gnawed at me. The more I tried to ignore it, the louder it became.

High school ended, and I thought I'd finally get the break I so desperately needed. But the relief was short-lived. Suddenly, everyone around me was asking the same daunting question: "What's next?"

My relatives had plenty of answers. “Go to university,” they said. “Choose a stable career and secure your future.” A part of me wanted that stability, too, but I couldn’t shake the feeling it wasn’t my path. That summer, I wrestled with questions I wasn’t ready to answer: Did I want to spend my life in an office? Or was I longing for something different—something bigger?

The idea of working for myself flickered in my mind, but it felt impossible. I had no plan, no direction—just a vague longing for a meaningful life.

As I hesitated, two years slipped by. Each day felt heavier than the last, weighed down by indecision and self-doubt. University wasn’t the answer—I knew that much. That’s when my aunt stepped in with a suggestion: a job at a supermarket near my grandma’s house. She even arranged an interview for me. Though unsure of what to expect, I decided to give it a try.

Walking into the supermarket on my first day, I felt a mix of nerves and excitement. To my surprise, the atmosphere was welcoming. My colleagues were young, full of energy, and quick to joke. It was a far cry from the isolation I had known.

Even the customers became part of my journey. Many appreciated my politeness and attention to detail. I learned small tricks, like opening those frustrating plastic shopping bags without tearing them—earning praise and even a few smiles. My efforts didn’t go unnoticed. Soon, I earned a reputation among my peers as the “standard of excellence.”

Looking back, my first job gave me more than a paycheck. It taught me resilience, the value of hard work, and the confidence to dream bigger. While I was proud of what I had achieved, I knew deep down that this was just the beginning.