

Chapter 1

Prologue

Redwood University. Not the best academy to be in, yet the bored, 19 year old Ranmara Rohith had to study there. "Study hard, and get a good job, then you can be a chooser", he was told. He would have rather gone to an Ivy League college, but his widowed mother did not have the funds for that. He enrolled in as many classes as he could, which meant that he had to stay in the university longer than all the other students. He always thought that going to Redwood was not only a thankless endeavour, but a waste of his time. He did not want to be an engineer, yet his mother insisted, and he could not say no.

His professors always noted his lack of focus and interaction in the lectures. Day after day he would gaze out of the window, often spotting the same group of raddiwalas walking by the side of the road. Even if it was too rainy, they would walk by the side of the road, as if nothing were happening. They never carried an umbrella either; it was too expensive for them. If on the off chance they did not come, Ranmara would talk to his only friend at the university, Pharia Makhi. They were friends ever since they were children playing in a park, ignorant of the pains of life. None of the professors appreciated this lack of respect.

Pharia was a very silent girl, and never appreciated small talk, yet she got along with him, and only him. The alumni were jealous of their close relationship and often spread rumours against them, which had no effect on the duo, other than to bond them closer together and isolate them from the rest of the world. She was the only person who made his experience at Redwood bearable.

One day, Pharia did not come to the university. Ranmara suspected that she had fallen sick, not a very uncommon phenomenon in the middle of the dengue season. People were falling sick with dengue by the dozen. However, a week went by, then a month. She was nowhere to be seen. What was wrong? He called her on her number. No response. He tried sending an SMS message, but his phone displayed the haunting message "NO BALANCE". "Why did I not ask for her address!" he groaned, and felt a bit uneasy. "I hope nothing is wrong".

Then, it struck him, like a bolt of thunder from the heavens. On his 19th birthday, he screamed out "I got it!" in front of his mother, the only attendant to his birthday 'party'. He jumped from the chair and ran to his room, knocking the birthday cake from the table, making it almost fall down. He had an idea, and he himself was not sure about what it would entail. He packed his hiking backpack with the items he takes whenever he goes travelling with his mother, a laptop, some chargers, his nearly empty wallet and some medicine.

Without explaining, he ran out of the door with his half packed bag and ran down the stairs of his apartment. "I'll explain everything to you!" he yelled as he jumped down the stairs.