

Home, Once in a While

A bustling city is always a hustling one, a busy one where time is neither absolute nor relative, a notion on which many prominent scientists have debated. But time is a non-existent entity in such a city. Time is not measured in hours, minutes, seconds or dates but in the magnitude of the work being done that keeps the city running.

Ankit has been working here for the last two years and has become accustomed to this flow of life. He has not visited his native place since then. His mother was coming to see him as she had to attend the blessing ceremony of her cousin's daughter's child.

"Landed?" Ankit asked.

"Yes," his mother replied on the other end. "I just have to collect my luggage and then catch a cab."

"Sorry I couldn't make it," Ankit said apologetically. "I had an inevitable meeting today."

"No worries... just do your best!" she reassured him.

Ankit finished his meeting and wrapped up for the day but as always he got stuck in heavy traffic with vehicles moving at Snail's speed.

He kept blaring his car's horn when his phone rang, "Yup, did you get the cab?"

"Yeah, I will be reaching home in half an hour... It's already been an hour in this cab!" she said.

He said, “I am still stuck in traffic... If you reach then you can take the keys from flat 548. I have given them the keys.”

“Sure.. sure, no hurries take your time” she again assured him.

It took Ankit another hour to reach home. The doorbell’s ring echoed in the flat.

His mother opened the door, her eyes glittering.

The living room gave Ankit a different vibe—neat and clean. His sofa was free of the leftover snack packets, and the cushions were arranged properly.

He said surprisingly , “There was no need for cleaning up things!”

“Why ? You like to be messy and matted?” She asked.

“No... I could have cleaned it up.” He said.

“Let it be... it is not a heavy task to do. I was free as well” She defended her actions.

Ankit went straight to his room. The living room was absorbed in the aroma of boiling tea. He came out of the room with a book in his hand. He saw his mother pouring the tea in a black cup. He went to the balcony where he stood by the railing.

“Here is your cup of tea” His mother’s voice came from behind. He pulled one of the arm chairs, insisting his mother sit.

“No.. I don’t want to sit.”

The balcony overlooked the society’s playground, a place where children gathered as the day melted down, their laughter rising just as the sun prepared to go off duty.

Both of their eyes caught the sight of the happy faces of the children being carefree enjoying their time of the day.

“Do you remember how you used to go to play cricket as soon as the clock ticked at four in the evening?” She looked at him.

Ankit took a sip of the cup, “It is an old affair now, cricket and me” He smiled.

The cold breeze flashed his face as he reminisced his old memories of his carefree childhood days, time paused for a few seconds.

“I’ve got another thing for you” She got out of the balcony, and Ankit trailed.

She bowed down and kept her cup on the floor. She took a small photo album out of her luggage bag. In the meantime he went and sat on the floor beside her.

“You could have clicked them and sent them to me on the phone!” He said

She insisted, "Flipping through each photo of an album gives a different feeling altogether. The smell of each page takes you down in memory"

Time passed and both of them scanned each photo and shared laughter which echoed in this flat after a while perhaps after years.

Finally, the weekend arrived after a long and tiring week. Ankit decided to take his mother on a tour of the city, starting with a nearby mall complex. Since it was an off day, the roads were unusually clear, and he didn’t encounter much traffic. The mall, however, was alive with the weekend crowd.

They headed toward the escalator though his mother insisted that she would not be able to step on it.

“Why? Give it a try atleast” he asked.

She tried her best to step on the escalator though her every try went in vain. Her foot was going back and forth as the escalator went up. Ankit observed that there was a long queue behind him to use the escalator. He decided to take the lift instead of the escalator.

Ankit pressed the elevator button, and soon the doors opened.

“Come,” he said, stepping inside. His mother entered slowly, holding the railing, still unsure about the moving box. The lift gave a small jerk and went up.

On the top floor, they walked into a continental restaurant. The lights were soft and yellow, and the tables were neatly set with shiny cutlery. The smell of cheese, herbs, and fresh bread filled the air.

The waiter gave them a black menu. His mother turned the pages but frowned.

“What is all this? They haven’t written proper names!” she said.

“These are dishes from different countries, Ma,” Ankit explained.

“I can’t understand a single thing. You order what you like. I will eat that.”

Ankit laughed and ordered pasta in white sauce for her and grilled chicken for himself. When the food came, she looked at the pasta carefully before taking a bite. “It’s okay,” she said after chewing. “But next time, just simple Indian food.”

The day of the blessing ceremony came. They reached a big house with an open courtyard. Marigold flowers were tied along the walls, their bright yellow shining in the sun. Red and yellow cloth canopies covered the sitting area. The place was alive, guests chatting, some laughing, children running with balloons. From one corner, the smell of puris and kachoris drifted in from the kitchen, making the air feel even warmer.

In the middle of the courtyard, a group of women sat together in a circle. Their bangles jingled as they clapped to the beat of the dholak. One woman started a folk song, and the others joined in. The tune was simple yet full of feeling—about returning home after many years, meeting family again, and walking on the familiar village roads.

Ankit's eyes searched and then stopped, his mother was among them. She was smiling, singing loudly, her voice clear and strong. He stood there without moving, just listening.

She caught his eye for a moment and called out between verses,
“Do you remember this song? We used to sing it when we went to your nana’s house.”

Ankit smiled faintly, but his chest felt heavy.
“Yes... I remember,” he said softly.

Ankit's mother looked at him again and said, half in jest but half serious
“It's been so long... when will you come home?”

He didn't answer right away. The sound of the dholak, the clapping, the smell of the food, and the warmth in his mother's eyes, all of it made him realise how far he had drifted.

“I... don't know” he finally said, his voice low.
But inside, he knew, he had not gone home in years.

The next morning, Ankit had to leave early for work as a foreign client was visiting his office. He rushed out, leaving his mother at home. Later that day, she also left for the airport to return.

When Ankit came back in the evening, he unlocked the door and stepped in. The living room was messy again, snack packets on the sofa, cushions out of place. He stood there for a moment, the silence of the flat feeling heavier than before. For the first time in years, he felt a deep pull towards home. But the flat was quiet, and the only answer to that feeling was the sound of the wind against the railing.