“Have you grown weary of riding the same old car to college every day?”

The tea just felt like acid on the tongue. “Pardon me, Dad?”

“I see you don’t travel by the car to the college these days, the keys seem to have been glued to the hook?”

Taking the eyes off from the gaze of his father, he tightly closed his eyes, trying to force out a reason. “Aah, oh yes, umm… I have been going by the bus to the college, and in the evening I walk home. Dad, the routine was getting too exhaustive. I wasn’t getting enough time to work out in the gym and break some sweat. So, aaaI thought it better to walk back.” He waved off a big grin to his father, thinking “phooh, close shave!” He started nibbling the toast in the plate and took another sip of tea, pretending to listen to the weather forecast.

The skies will remain overcast during daytime, with a little likelihood of drizzle in the evening.

“Don’t take much stress, these days are meant to learn and play, there will be time to work and worry!” father remarked casually when he found that his son was no longer interested in the question.

“What, of course Dad, I know that, you know me, you don’t expect me to freak out on stress, do you?” he playfully tried to chide his father as he wiped his face and waited for his father to finish his’.

“Very well, probably I could drop you to college today, no appointments for today morning.”

His eyes shone, “no way, you bunking office? That’s bad daddy”

“Hah, you have full right to bunk college classes, and I can’t even ditch one hour at the office I own? That’s unfair”, father teased him.

“But then, I’ll drive till college, give the chauffer a day off.” He encouraged.

“Okay, not a bad idea, let’s go.”

“It’s really good to walk. I think you are picking on a very good habit. In our college days, my parents never had money enough to afford for everyday petrol for the lone scooter, leave alone letting me take it to college. See how time changes. Hehe” his father was reminiscing his youthful days.

Meanwhile, there was a rush of blood to the son’s face as the topic was brought up again. He too was thinking of something and smiling by the corners of his lips.

“Your mother, she liked to walk, and it was because of her, I also started loving it.”Delightfully, he dived into his old memories. “She was scared of her father that he would never approve of us. I had no future that time. It was fun, hiding from our parents, and meeting, walking home together, and eating ‘paani puri’ by the ‘Chauraha’ (square). She loved it more with spice. I used to be in tears by the time we had eaten five, but she loved its taste. She used to laugh when she saw my condition. I loved it.”

The son was chuckling, partly at his father’s memories, and partly at the serendipity of the situation.

He put on the radio, the song drifted his father into deeper memories.

*Our lives are made,  
In these small hours,  
These little wonders,  
These twists and turns of fate,  
Time falls away,  
But these small hours,  
These small hours still remain…*

“Bye dad, see you at home”

“Hey, she’s nowhere around you, what did you see in her?” asked his best friend.

“Yeah, by no means I could deserve her. She’s way too good for me” he said as if in a dream.

“You kidding dude, look at you…I mean, look at her, she looks like nothing beside you.”

“Shut up, just keep shut!” there was a fierce command in these words and his friend sensed it.

“Sorry! Relax, I mean it” Trying to cool him off.

(Silence)

“She’s beautiful, I agree!” he said affectionately.

“I know, and you know… for the first time, I wish to change everything. Change myself, for her. You know, she so charming that she could have anyone. I won’t even stand a chance, and yet she said she loves me. I am afraid that I would let her down. I want to change.”

“There is nothing wrong in you, don’t you think you are getting too paranoid about this? I mean, it’s ridiculously insane, you’re getting too much conscious. Ask her if you don’t believe me.”

“That’s not the case, I just want to be worthy of her.” He said in a helpless lament.

“It’s no use sounding the bugle to deaf ears, only she can reform you. I got to go now. Take care, and tell her I said Hi”

He simply waved his hand and they parted, in opposite directions.

She, by no means could be called rich, upper middle class at best. A rather timid girl, who seemed to rain down grace when she walked. Yes, she was beautiful, exotic and royal. Much of an introvert (reticent would be more appropriate), as opposed to him, a jovial, fun loving person. She was not the one whom someone would sit and ogle, but stand and admire. Slender, but not skinny, gorgeous, no lesser than a fairy when dressed in the silken white skirt. Innocent, beautiful, deep black eyes against contrasting white eyeballs, hair that shined golden in the sun, and in the shade, like a dark night one would sleep peacefully in. The way the strands of her hair, tucked loosely by the ear, fell, so did drop the heart beats of many. Her smile was angelic. Her upper lips were just like a majestic bow, which once strung would surely reverberate melodies. No, she was not the only beautiful girl in the college. There were many, who could be counted as much better than her, and who were better paid off as well. But for him, she was nothing short of, but life.

Like every other day, they started for home in the evening. Talking, chit chatting, laughing, joking. He was telling how he was shoved out of the classroom by the lecturer for sleeping in the classroom. She was part laughing, part scolding him and was pulling his ear for doing such stupidity.

“*I want you to concentrate on studies. Your father has great expectations. Do you want to let him down*?” she scolded as she twisted his ear.

“Aaah, please stop, it hurts, do you want to rip it off? Ouch, *meri maa, maaf karo, jaan logi kya bachhe ki?* (Forgive me, do you want to kill this little child?), and where did Dad drop in between us two?”

As he was pretending of being hurt and trying to fend off her assault, a car passed by and came to a stop. His shoulders drooped and he moved a little forward to the front window. All he could remember was the weather forecast. Rain, drizzle, or a thundershower now?

“Dad, I…”

“She’s cute, do I get to invite her home?” his father did not wait for the answer and climbed out of the seat, smiling.

“Dad, wait…” he panicked slightly.

His father instead of going towards her, approached him, took him by his arm and bent a little towards his ears, “what? now don’t tell me she’s just another friend?” trying to keep it down in a hushed tone, but in vain. She blushed and started staring at her own feet, growing red every passing second.

Father was clearly eager to meet her, it reflected in his voice.

“Yes, I...I mean no, I mean… how…?”

“I am your father, son! I know you………….So now, may I?”

“No, I mean, dad, please understand”, he said from between his teeth.

“You disappoint me, well, your mother would have been very happy for you, she might be gleaming from above on you in happiness” He said with emotion, remembering her made him nostalgic.

“No dad, I’ll make sure she’s invited ASAP, you goooo now!”

“Well I was thinking of offering you two a ride in the back seat”, he was smiling now, beaming a wide smile in her direction.

“Dad…” he paused for a moment, and then smiled, ***“she loves to walk!”***