





# Mirror, Mirror

by AI



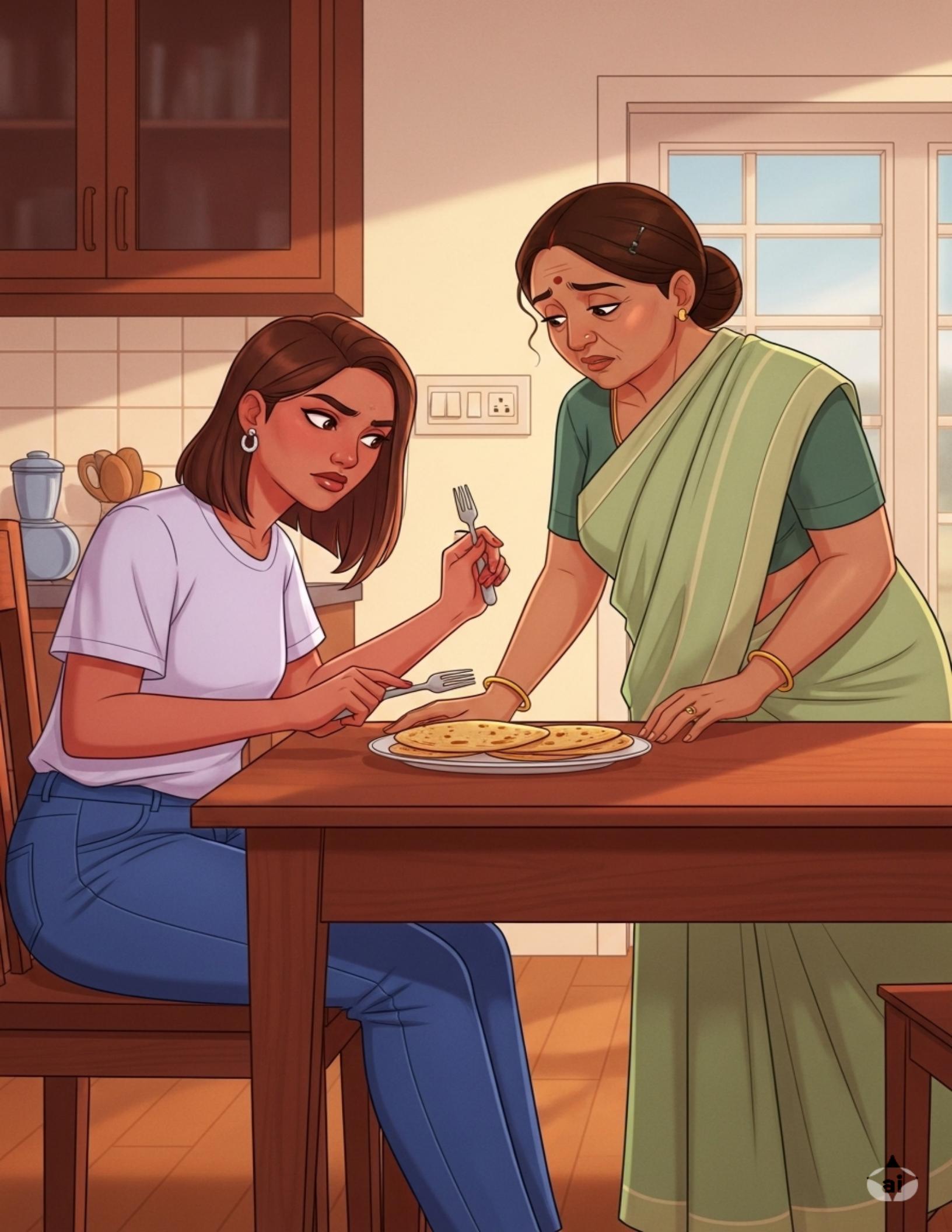
Aanya was eight years old when it happened. At a family wedding, she held her mother's hand as her cousin walked in wearing a beautiful pink lehenga. Everyone rushed to her. "So fair! Like a doll!" the aunties said. One aunt looked at Aanya and whispered, "This one is dark. Like her father's side." Aanya's mother held her hand tighter, but she didn't say anything. Aanya didn't understand the words, but she felt something change.



By the time Aanya was twelve, she knew. Red was her favourite color — bright and beautiful. One day, she wore a red dupatta to school and felt happy. A classmate laughed. “Red? On YOU? It makes you look darker. Wear light colors.” Aanya never wore red again.



Now Aanya was twenty-two. Her bathroom was full of creams and bottles promising “fair skin in two weeks.” Diet pills. Slimming teas. Special serums. Every night, she looked at photos online — fair girls, thin girls, perfect girls. She thought, “That’s beautiful. I’m not.” She had been trying to fix herself for so long that she forgot what it felt like to simply... be.



One morning, her mother made parathas.

“Beta, eat something,” Ma said. “I’m not hungry,” Aanya replied. “You said that yesterday too. You’re not eating.” Aanya was tired — and hungry — but angry at herself for feeling hungry at all.



That weekend, Aanya tried on a crop top at the mall. Size Small. Like the ones she saw on Instagram. She pulled, twisted, held her breath — but the zipper wouldn't close. In the mirror, she saw everything she hated. "Why doesn't anything fit?" she thought. From the next room, someone laughed. It was Diya from college.



Diya came out holding a shirt. "That didn't fit?" Aanya asked. Diya shrugged. "Their Medium is made for aliens. Oh well. Not every shirt deserves me." Aanya stared. "You're not upset?" "About a shirt?" Diya laughed. "It's their job to make clothes that fit people. Not my job to shrink for bad clothes." Her face softened. "I used to do this too... starve, hate myself, try to become what others wanted." "What changed?" Aanya whispered. "I realized I was chasing something that doesn't exist. The 'perfect' body. The 'right' color. People will always have opinions. Doesn't mean they're right."



A week later, Aanya stood in front of her mirror. Just standing. Not fixing. Not hating. She picked up her phone and took a photo — no filter, no perfect angle. She looked uncertain in the picture, but she didn't delete it. "I don't love this," she thought. "But maybe I don't have to hate it."



A few days later at the college canteen, someone handed her a plate of food. A voice inside whispered, "You shouldn't. You don't deserve this." She took a bite anyway. "Good," she said quietly. The voices didn't disappear, but they were softer now. She wasn't healed. She wasn't "fixed." But she was learning to stop fighting herself. And maybe that was enough for today.