Jack stood in front of his mirror, as he did every morning before he left the house to make sure he looked presentable. He thought it was especially important to perform the routine this morning because he was going to work and not school. He stared at his reflection for a few seconds. He already had a black jeans and his black all stars on but no shirt. He always styled his hair before putting a shirt on, so that he could avoid getting water or gel on it. Once he was satisfied with his comb over, he put on the shirt. It was plain white, customary of iStore employees, and long-sleeved. Even though it was summer he had requested long-sleeved shirts only, and he didn't intend on rolling up the sleeves. All his shirts and t-shirts are long sleeved, so that he could hide his mark. Most people are comfortable showing their marks to the world, wearing it like hearts on their sleeves, but he felt that his mark wasn't anyone else’s business. The only other people to have seen his mark are his parents, his friends from primary school and the doctor who delivered him, and he planned to keep it that way until he met her.

The reason he didn't hide it in primary school was that he didn't know any better and he wasn't concerned because in those days no one really paid attention to it. He rolled up his right sleeve just up passed his forearm so that he could glance at it. It had a very odd shape, like a circle with one end pulled outward. He heard stories of the strangest marks; some, when completed, even formed the shape of animals. He rolled his sleeve down and left the room, making his way toward the kitchen where his parents, and breakfast, were waiting. "Nervous?" asks his mother, Susan, putting an arm on his shoulder. Susan Graham worked as a librarian in their town. Since it was so close to their house she walked there and back every day, claiming that the exercise was good for her. She worked at the library in her school days and enjoyed it so much that she decided to stay.

She met Jacks father, Steve, while working. She joked that she knew he was the one instantly, for two reasons. The first being that his mark completed hers and the second being that he was checking out the entire Harry Potter series. Together, their marks made a circle. A circle is said to have many symbolic meanings, from strength to psyche. In the context of love, however, it symbolises connectedness, wholeness and unity. Jack always enjoyed hearing the stories of how couples met because, even though it's inevitable, the universe seemed to always have interesting ways of bringing people together. By most standards Jack could be considered to be somewhat of a hopeless romantic, desiring desperately to meet the one. "Not at all" he replies, smiling. "That's my boy" says his father, nodding approvingly. "Come on, eat something. We leave in fifteen minutes." says Steve.

Jack isn't a big eater and is full after one sunny side up egg on a slice of toast with a cup of coffee. Since the mall wasn't very far from their house, and these days there's hardly ever traffic, they got there in just under twenty minutes. Steve studied pharmacy through UNISA and, instead of opening his own pharmacy, decided to take up a position at Dischem. Dischem was close to the entrance of the mall so Steve didn't have a very long way to walk. "See you at lunch?" he turns around and shouts out to Jack. "Yea, sure, I'll call you" Jack replies over his shoulder. He lifts his left arm to look at the time on his watch, 7:45am. He has been to the mall hundreds of times but never this early and has never seen it this empty. He makes his way to the iStore. When he gets there it is 7:50 am and the doors are still closed. The other employees stand outside and wait for the guy with the keys, who is obviously late. Jack sees two familiar faces, two people he met during training; Natalie and Fred. He makes his way towards them and as soon as Natalie sees him she smiles and waves.

She is shorter than him, her skin is light, her hair is reddish and her eyes a light brown and she had a sort of comforting smile. Only a blind man, or a fool, would deny that Natalie was very beautiful but since her mark wasn't the one to complete his, Jack tried his best to ignore her beauty. Next to her stood Fred, towering over her. Because of his muscular build and giant-height he looked menacing, but only from the neck down. Fred had the kindest-looking face that Jack had ever seen. His skin was light brown, his eyes a grassy green, his hair dark and his face seemed baby-like with no facial hair or pimples. His personality was a mixture between menacing, like his body, and kind, like his face. Jack scratched at his chin, where his recently-shaved beard was growing back.

"Hey guys. Ready?" he asks, smiling. "Yes, of course. After all that training this should be nothing" replies Fred. Natalie yawns and Jack notices the dark circles under her eyes. Her words aren't very clear but Jack hears them, "I just can't wait to get home" she rubs her eyes. "No need to be so happy about it, Nats" Jack says sarcastically, pulling her in for a hug. "Well, you promised to be the optimistic one. Considering why you even applied for this job" she says into his chest and he smiles. He remembers the second day of training, during their lunch break they spoke about why they applied for the position. Natalie’s only reason was money, Fred gave two reasons; money and he just simply loved "i products". Jack gave three. The first being money, the second being that he knew most of his two-month holiday would just be spent moping around at home (since he didn't have a very social life) and the third was that he thought getting a job would increase his chances of meeting the one this holiday. Logically he knew that he was wrong because his mother told him that it is not something we can control, that the universe (or God, as some people said) already had a specific plan for all of us and that we would meet them when the time was right.

He remembered the time he first found out about the marks. People didn't always have them. In the year 2020, his mother had said, the Earth had become severely overpopulated. The population count had reached 8 billion, and was still rising. Poverty, global warming, food shortages and water shortages were beginning to affect everyone, including the rich. Oil had also become very rare. His mother said the main reason for overpopulation was that everyone was getting intimate with everyone. It was quite possible for one woman to have five children, all from different men. It became so bad that thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands, of people were dying every day from hunger or diseases. Everyone knew that if this went on for much longer the human race would become extinct. Before the humans could do anything, however, nature began to take action; the Earth began to protect itself.

Over time, doctors got increasing reports of women being able to have only one child. At first they thought that it was just another disease but then they realised exactly what it was: the next step in human evolution. The evolution did not stop there, however. Nobody realised it at the time but these marks were part of the phase in human evolution. One day a man, no one remembers who he was, told the story of he met his wife. He claimed that for years he was drawn to a woman he had never met; this included having frequent dreams about her. He claimed that, though he didn't know if she even existed or not, he was attracted to no one but her. Then one day he met her, Juliet, and found that her mark complemented his. Together, the shape it made was a heart. And that is when everything changed. Suddenly every baby was being born with strange marks on their right arms, which was only half of a whole. Now, 200 years later, in the year 2220 Jack Graham begins his first day at work, anxious to meet his Juliet. The guy with the keys finally showed up, luckily before the manager. Jack checked his watch, 8:00 am.

The first two hours went by slowly because they had no customers. Everyone was just standing and talking. Then a man and a woman walked in, holding hands. Jack was closest to the door so he ended up helping them. They asked about the latest iPhone and Jack was able to tell them everything about it, because he had one. "It really is a great phone, you can't go wrong with it" he said finally. "Great. You're really good. We'll take two. One white, one black" said the man, smiling. Jack sent Fred to the back to get the phones while he tended to the couple. At 12 Jack, Fred, Natalie and the other new employees had their lunch break, till 1. Jack called his father and the four of them went to the food court. They sat down and started talking. "So, how's day one going?" asks Steve, looking across the table from Natalie to Fred, glad that his son had made friends. "Really slow, actually. But at least Jack made a sale" replies Natalie, yawing again.

The circles around her eyes had become darker in the four hours they'd been working. "Well I'm glad we got to talk so much" says Fred, putting a chip in his mouth. "What did you talk about?" asks Steve, looking at Jack. "Plato’s Symposium. What else?" replies Jack. "Oh yes" Steve says, smiling. Jack remembers the first time he read the text and the passage that stood out the most to him: *According to Greek mythology, humans were originally created with four arms, four legs and a head with two faces. Fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning them to spend their lives in search of their other halves.* Though he didn't believe in Greek mythology, he liked the idea. More so because he knew that, thanks to the marks, it was now sort of true. At 12:45pm they all made their way back. Steve to Dischem and the others to the iStore. "All I'm saying is that, with my luck, he was probably run over by a bus" Natalie snaps. Fred and Jack can't help but laugh. The rest of the day was just as quiet as the morning. Steve let Jack drive them home; once again there was no traffic. "In my opinion that's the best part about having only 4 billion people on the planet" says Steve, "Imagine all the traffic they had when there were 8 billion people!" Jack shuddered at the thought he had, 4 billion had to die. He found it hard to believe that they died naturally but there was no evidence to suggest anything else. When they reach the house Susan is sitting outside in the sun, reading a book.

As they pull into the driveway she stands, smiling. "How was it?" she asks, looking at Jack. Jack sighs, "Long, terribly long. But I made a sale" Susan smiles and kisses Steve on the cheek, "And how was your day?" He puts an arm around her shoulder and they walk into the house, "It just got a whole lot better" Jack watched them enviously. He tried to remain hopeful that he would meet her but as the days went by he began to lose hope, slowly but surely until the last week of his contract when he finally decided that he would just wait until "the right" time, whenever that may be. He looked back on the past two months and realised that, even though she hadn't stumbled into the iStore, he didn't regret it one bit. He had become close friends with Natalie and Fred and they planned to keep it that way once the contract was over. The Monday of the last week he didn't go home at 5 with his father, he had other plans. He met an attractive girl that day and they clicked and decided to get milkshakes or ice cream later that day. He took out his iPhone and was about to dial her number when he saw her, walking towards him. She was slightly shorter than him, her long dark hair flowed over her olive skin, her deep blue eyes seemed to look not at him but rather at his soul, at the very core of who he was, he liked that.

Then she smiled, and that's what he liked most about her. She had the kind of smile that could brighten up anyone’s day, no matter how bad it was, the kind of smile which seemed to say a thousand words without actually saying any. She was wearing the same dress she had on when he saw her earlier. It was a casual floral dress and she looked good in it but the part he liked most about her outfit was that she wore sneakers with it. He hadn't seen her mark earlier because she had covered it up with make-up. As she came closer he saw that the makeup was still on. "Hey, Adriana" he called out, smiling. She returned the smile. That smile he thought silently to himself. They went to one of the ice cream shops and sat down. He checked his watch, 5:30 pm. They decided on milkshakes, he had chocolate and she had strawberry. They just sat and talked and drank their milkshakes. She told him about growing up in Italy and why they moved to South Africa. She said that her father was offered a position in South Africa and he didn't think twice about accepting and when they left she was 15. She still had her Italian accent and Jack loved it, every word she spoke was like melody to his ears.

When she stopped talking an awkward silence filled the air. They both looked down at their milkshakes then Jack suddenly had an idea and looked up, smiling. "Hey, have you ever played 21 questions?" he asked, drinking some milkshake through a straw. Suddenly he had a striking pain in his head and he closed his eyes tightly, shaking his head. Brain freeze. Once the pain had stopped they both started laughing. "No I haven't. What is it?" she asked, her laugh turned into a smile and her eyes met his. Neither of them said anything for a few seconds, getting lost in each other’s eyes. Then Jack came out of his daze, "Ok, the way it works is, I ask you a question and you answer it and then ask me a question and then I answer and that just goes on. It's supposed to be a fun way of getting to know someone" he says, his eyes still locked on hers. "Ok, sounds interesting. You go first" she replies, not daring to blink. "Hmm, ok. What is your favourite colour?" he asks, looking down then catching her eyes again. Those eyes. "Well, lime. What's yours?" she replies. "You're not allowed to ask my question, but I'll allow it this once, because I'm so sweet" he laughs. She laughs too. "Well, it used to be white, but now I'm thinking the shade of blue that your eyes have" he says, smiling and winking.

She blushes and looks down. "Ok my turn. What school did you go to?" he asks. "Parktown girls. Ok I have a serious one. If you knew today was your last day on Earth, how would you spend it and why?" she asked, finally breaking the eye contact, but still smiling. "Hmmm, good question. Let's see..." he says, holding his neck looking out into the distance, staring at nothing for a few seconds before catching her eyes again and saying "I'd tell everyone I care about how much I love them, just so that I know that they know, and then I guess I'd just spend the day doing all my favourite things and invite you along" he smiles. "How come you cover yours?" he asks, looking at her right arm on the table, which seemed to have no mark. "Uhm, well I guess I just feel like it's private, you know. Not something I want to share with the world. I know I'm not allowed to ask the same question but why do you cover yours?" she asks, putting her right hand on his right forearm, where his mark is. He puts his left hand over her right hand. "The same reason you gave. It's private. And also, when I do eventually meet her I want her to fall for me, and not for the mark, you know? Probably sounds crazy" he replies, looking down at their hands.

She lifts his head with her free hand and smiles, "Doesn't sound crazy at all. I completely understand. And I think that you'll have no trouble making her fall for you" she says, smiling and winking. They continue their game of 21 questions for a while and then he looks at his watch, 10 pm. "Guess what" he says, putting his hand in his pocket to take out his wallet and smiling. "What?" she asks. 'We've been talking for five hours" he says, calling the waiter. They both start laughing. After he pays they make their way to his father’s car. After he made plans with Adriana he called his father to ask if he could use the car. "Yea sure, I'll tell your mom to get me. You have enough money?" was all his father had said. Adriana stayed 10 minutes away from the mall, almost within walking distance. Jack parked the car next to the pavement and got out to walk Adriana to her front door.

"Thank you f..." she starts to say but is stopped when Jack kisses her, she kisses him back. She puts he arms around his neck and he puts his hands around her waist to keep her close. They stay like that for a while, and then Jack pulls away. "Call me" she says. "I will" he replies, kissing her on her cheek and walking back to the car. When he gets home his parents are waiting up for him. "How was it?" his mother asks as soon as he walks through the front door. "It was great. She's amazing" he replies, smiling. "Is she the one you've been looking for?" his mother asks, smiling. "I think so" he replies. "So her mark complemented yours?" his father asks. Jack shakes his head, "We didn't show each other our marks" he looks down at his right arm. Susan and Steve exchange wary looks but don't say anything. "Well if you're hungry there's food in the kitchen" says Susan, breaking the silence. "No it's ok, I'm going to shower and then sleep. Good night, see you in the morning" he says, walking out of the room.

He stares up at his bedroom ceiling, unable to fall asleep. His mind runs and he struggles to catch it. What if her mark is different? He asks himself silently and battles with the idea for what seems hours before finally coming to a conclusion. It doesn't matter, it won't matter he assures himself before falling asleep. He wakes to the sound of his alarm and grabs it to shut it off when he sees a message, from Adriana. He sits up suddenly, staring at his phone, and forgets all about the sound of the alarm. Good morning, hope you have a great day. Call me later? She wrote, with a smiley face. For the first time in two months he gets out of bed with a smile, showers and performs his daily morning routine. After breakfast him and his father head to the mall. When he gets to the iStore he finds Natalie and Fred. "And? How did it go with that chick?" Fred asks. "Ahh man, it was great. We just sat and talked for a few hours" he replies smiling. He seemed to be glowing, something which, in all the time Natalie and Fred have known him, has never happened. "Did you see her mark? Is she the one?" Natalie asks, almost too excitedly.

Jack didn't blame her, for two months almost all he talked about was meeting her. "We didn't show each other our marks, but I've decided that it doesn't really matter" he replies, not quite sure what he means by that. Of course it mattered; it mattered more than anything in the world. Natalie’s eyes go wide. "You've fallen for her, haven't you?" she asks. Jack smiles and looks down at his feet. "You do know that if it isn't the same...” says Fred, but Natalie stops him from finishing his sentence.”Screw that. If he likes her then that's irrelevant" she snaps. But is it? He asks himself. "We'll talk about it at lunch" he says as the doors open. Four hours later the three of them make their way to the food court and sit down. "Where's your dad today?" Natalie asks, looking around. "I think he has a meeting or something" Jack replies, shrugging, "What did you mean earlier? When you said it doesn't matter?" he leans forward. "I meant that if you really like then that's all that matters, not some mark on your arm" she replies.

"But Nats...” Fred starts speaking before Natalie snaps at him, "What, Fred?! Should he just ignore how he feels and walk away?" Fred sinks into his chair. "Look. You spent two months waiting to meet some mystery girl you could fall in love with and now you have, don't let that mark on your arm change anything. That's all I mean" she says, folding her arms. Jack has never heard anyone speak about the mark this way, as if it was irrelevant. When they get back to the iStore after lunch he doesn't say much and a silence fills the air in the car on the way home. What Natalie said really got to him and he didn't even know who he could talk to about it. "What's troubling you?" his father asks eventually. Jack sighs. "Ok but whatever we talk about has to stay between us, you can't even tell mom. Deal?" he says, looking at his father who nods silently. "Ok. I've just been thinking. I really like that girl, Adriana, but what if her mark is different? What will I do then?" he takes a deep breath in and then exhales.

"Well. You're still really young. I know that most people meet the one at around your age but you still have your whole life to meet her. And if this thing with Adriana gets serious the choice will always be yours. When I met your mother I didn't know she was the one because of our marks, I knew because of how she made me feel, no other girl before her made me feel that way, and no other woman after has. That's how you know" his father replies, reassuringly. Jack let out a smile; he suddenly knew what he had to do. When he gets home he says hi to his mom and goes to his room to call Adriana. She answers and he swallows hard. "Hey" he says casually. They make small talk for a while, asking how the others day went, before he gets to the reason he called. "So I was thinking, do you want to come over Saturday night? If you don't already have plans. I remember you said that you like lying on the grass and watching the stars, alone, but I was thinking that maybe we could do it together" he says, his heart pounding against his chest.

"One thing I like more than being alone is being alone with the right person" she replies. He takes a deep breath in and then lets it out "Awesome. I'll pick you up at 7, then?" he stands up. "I'll be waiting. My mom’s calling me for supper, I'll message you when I'm done" she says. "I'll be waiting" he repeats. She chuckles then hangs up. The rest of the week is slow. Schools had opened again and people had returned to work so the mall was almost always empty, and the iStore even emptier. He told Natalie and Fred about his plan, Natalie agreed but Fred barely agreed or disagreed. After what seemed four years, but what was really four days, Saturday came. He wanted everything to be perfect. He made a list of everything he thought he might need: Snacks, drinks, music, pillows and two blankets (One to lie on and one in case it got cold). Everything was set up outside by 5pm. "A little eager, aren't we?" Susan asked as she stepped outside.

They both chuckled, "Just want to make sure I have everything" he says, looking down at the blanket spread out on the grass; The snacks were in the middle, two pillows were set side-by-side at one end and the other blanket was set on the other end. He wasn't sure exactly what she liked so he just got a bit of everything; some chocolate, some gums, some crisp, some bubblegum. After he's satisfied with everything outside he has a shower, sprays on some perfume and gets dressed. His black all stars, a light blue jeans and a black t shirt under a light blue, long-sleeved, shirt which he left unbuttoned. His hair was set in its usual comb over. He checks his watch, 6pm. He leaves his house at 6:30pm. The sun had almost completely set and the sky was clear, perfect for stargazing. He gets to her house at 6:50pm and walks up to the front door, he knocks three times. Not too hard, not too soft. The door opens and he expects to see Adriana, instead he sees what must be her father.

"You must be Jack" he says, his Italian accent stronger than his daughters. "Yes. Jack Graham, nice to meet you" he replies, smiling and holding out his hand. "Donatello Apollo, but you can call me Don. Please come in" her father replied, shaking Jacks hand. Jack followed Don to the living room where they sat down. "Adriana will come soon, sorry. You know women" says Don laughing and shaking his head. Jack smiles, "It's not a problem" Don tells Jack about his profession as an industrial psychologist and the company he worked for. He said his wife, Dr Elizabeth Apollo, worked as a clinical psychologist and was a lecturer at WITS University. After about 10 minutes Adriana walked into the room. Jack stared at her, barely even blinking. Her hair was loose and flowed over shoulders; she was wearing a casual white dress and black sneakers. She had a black cardigan in her hand. She smiled at him "Hey, you" he smiled back and stood up. "Hey" he said, walking towards her. "So what do you have planned for the night?" Don asks, standing up. "We're just going to hang out at my house; I won't bring her back too late" Jack replies.

Don walks them to the door and hugs his daughter, then kisses her on the forehead. "Have fun" he says so softly that it is almost a whisper. He shakes Jacks hand and they leave. "Your dad is really nice" he says in the car, looking at her. "Yea he is, such a sweetheart really" she replies, retuning his look. "You look really nice" he says, smiling. She blushes, "You're not too bad yourself" are the only words that come out. When they get to Jacks house he introduces her to Susan and Steve and they go outside. There is a light illuminating the backyard. She looks out at the open yard until she sees the blanket and then smiles. Jack puts the light off and they lay down, facing the night sky. Jack feels her hand next to his but doesn't take it. "Beautiful night" she says, slipping her fingers into the spaces between his. He moves his hand a bit, until her hand fits perfectly in his. They lay there for a while, Adriana pointing out all the constellations she could see. "You really know a lot about this stuff, hey" Jack says, sounding impressed.

"Yea. In Italy, when I was younger, my dad used to take me stargazing all the time" she replies. Jack sits up and then lays on his side, facing her. He is left breathless for a few seconds. "Adriana. I want to share something with you. But I want you to know that, no matter what, it won't change anything" he says, his eyes locked on hers. She sits up straight and faces him. Then she holds up her right arm. From the corner of his eye he could see her mark was visible but he couldn't make out what it was. Then he sits up straight, too. He starts rolling his right sleeve up and moves his right arm towards hers, slowly, while she moves hers towards his. They don't break eye contact and smile at each other. As soon as their arms touch he leans in and kisses her. She kisses him back. Then they pull away and look down at their joined arms.

Adriana looks up, her blue eyes wide. Jacks expression is blank. Blinking uncontrollably he looks up, then down, then up again.