

Chapter 1: Nothing's Wrong, Exactly

I don't know what I'm supposed to say here. I'm not even sure why I'm writing any of this.

No one told me to. No therapist assigned it. No teacher asked for a "reflective essay." I just... felt like something needed to come out. Maybe it's all the noise in my head. Maybe it's nothing. Maybe I'll just delete it tomorrow.

Anyways.

My name's Jason. I'm 13. I live in the city, not some noticeable broken place, just a regular place where everyone pretends, they're busier than they actually are.

My family's middle-class. Real middle-class, not the kind that buys Apple Watches for Eid. My father came from nothing, joined the military when he was barely old enough to shave, and somehow built us a life without ever complaining. My mother keeps the house running. She's soft with her hands, hard with her words. Kind, in her own way.

And me? I'm just... floating. Between things. Between moods. Between people.

I go to school, I get okay grades. Studies are just not my thing, but people say I'm brilliant. Still, no magnificent grades. Just okay grades.

I pray. I try to be a good son, a good person — and all the things you're supposed to be.

Nothing's wrong, exactly. I'm not in trouble. I don't hate my life. I'm not sad. But I'm not happy either.

People always talk about finding meaning. Finding purpose. Like it's something you lost under your bed and just forgot to look for. At school, people think I have things figured out.

They say stuff like,

"You're a lucky man. You're smart without even trying."

or

"You're the chilliest person I know — nothing ever gets to you."

I nod, smile, throw in a joke. Something dry. Something that makes people laugh and feel like I'm fine. It's instinct at this point.

In my friend group, I'm "the wise one." The one they ask when they're stressing over tests or fighting with their parents or pretending to care about politics. I say things that sound mature. Things I've heard adults say. Things that could pass as insight. Most of the time, I don't even believe in them.

But teachers?

Most of them doesn't even know my name.

I'm the type that slips through the cracks — not loud enough to be a problem, not bright enough to be a star. I turn in assignments just good enough to pass. Sit in the back, avoid eye contact, say "present" when they roll calls and never again. They've taught whole lessons with me three feet away and not once looked me in the eye.

It's almost a skill — being that invisible.

And the weird thing is, outside of class, people still think I've got it together. Some of my relatives even think I'm popular. Maybe I am. I laugh at the right times. I reply fast enough on group chats. I say the kind of things people screenshot. But no one actually sees me.

Not really.

No one sees that every time someone says "you're smart," I feel like a fraud. That my brain works in weird bursts — clear one day, fogged the next. That I haven't read half the books people think I've read.

No one sees that I'm tired. Not the sleepy kind, but the kind of tired where you wake up and already want the day to end, even if nothing's wrong.

Sometimes I wonder if I could disappear for a week — not die, not run away, just go completely ethereal.

I know it's dramatic. I know other people have it worse. My mom already told me that at least a 100 times.

But that doesn't make it feel less real. It's weird being treated like you have all the answers when you're the one quietly asking the biggest questions.