

It was barely dawn when Ishan woke up.

It was the train's three tiered compartment. He had the lowermost berth and couldn't sit up. Not until the passenger asleep in the middle berth got down and lowered his slot. There was not much he could do except remain lying awake in his place. There was the option of quietly sliding out of the berth and standing up. *But how is that any better than remaining lying down?*, he argued against it. Mumbai was still quite a while away. And there was no telling when the middle berth would be lowered.

Someone in the compartment had left their window open. The icy winds of the desolate countryside shattered against the speeding train before darting through the grills of the open window in shards, stinging Ishan's skin. The dreary motion of the wheels had synchronised with the crude rhythm of the engine to form a languid lullaby, as the train cradled its sleeping passengers indifferently.

Best to remain lying down, Ishan resolved. His mind began swirling around, as it yearned to grab on to his passing thoughts and leap into the realm of remote memories. He let his mind run free. At times he would hold onto something; an image or a thought. Other times everything would just slip through, leaving his hands kneading against one another. As the motions of his subconsciousness played out a montage of his deepest reflections, Ishan stretched comfortably and watched on.

All of a sudden, a pair of heavy legs, wrapped in black pants, dangled from above. The suspended limbs oscillated freely, symphonised by the movements of the train. It was the man in the topmost berth. He had woken up too. The man took a deep breath and lunged forward, lowering down his enormous body. His entire weight dangled by his elbows as his outstretched toes probed for a landing spot. They eventually tipped on top of Ishan's bedsheet at which point he let go of his elbows and slumped heavily onto the edge of Ishan's berth. His lower back pressed against Ishan's knees, he leaned forward and floundered around the dark floor for his *chappals*. One by one he picked *chappals* off the ground, squinting at them as hard as he could. Finally, settling on a pair that looked more or less like his, he clumsily slipped them on and quietly began making his way to the end of the coach, towards the door.

The touch of another man's body against his own repulsed Ishan. He felt an urgent impulse to bathe and cleanse himself immediately. If it was up to him he would even have had the bedsheets and his clothes washed right away. But, alas, he was stranded on a moving train; a train chugging towards Mumbai without the slightest regard for Ishan's preferences.

Some time later, the man from the top berth waddled back into the compartment. He began prodding at the man asleep in the middle berth. "Wake up, Suleiman. Borivali is here." Suleiman was not ready to get up yet. "We haven't even crossed Virar bridge," he replied without moving.

"It will be here any minute. Now get up!"

Suleiman began squirming inside the cocoon of his blanket. He let out a gaping yawn, as he emerged from its layers. He stretched his arms and thrust his chest forward, pushing out all the pent up sluggishness. A moment later, he slid down from his bunk. The three of them lowered the middle berth together and settled down on Ishan's seat, upright in a row. By the window, Ishan gazed at the abstract shapes being conjured by the emerging daylight in a horizon of fractured shadows. The other two were immersed in conversation.

In the meantime, the baby with the woman in the berth parallel to Ishan's began wailing. "Shut him up!" a coarse voice boomed from above. The woman obediently began coddling the child. "Go back to sleep," she mumbled softly into his ears. But the child showed no intention of being pacified. Soon, the man from above descended. He lit a *beedi* and growled at the child. "Shut your mouth! Shut up *now*... or I will toss you into the sea."

The train was crossing over the Virar creek, a deceptively vast water body. The dwindling light of the setting moon along with the simmering glow of daybreak wove into each other, painting the wavering waters with striking colours. *There must be countless creatures that birth, live and die under these waters. It is their world. Do they ever dream about land or the skies? Hmmm...I doubt it.* Ishan maintained a steady gaze on the restless water as his thoughts began trailing. *Maybe someone is looking down at us right now... wondering about us... pitying our own confined existence... like the fish in this water...*

A sultry, salty odour wafted in through the window. They were past the bridge. The stench of decay from the dead snails, mussels and fish, subsumed within the swampy layers of the Virar creek, began to drown the fresh morning breeze. He watched the landscapes transform drastically, from one to another, in an instant. *So much packed into a moment that barely lasted a blink. Breathing in the fresh air of vast plains in one instant and exhaling it onto*

the sweltering surface of an endless reservoir in the next. It's like living in a loop. Humming and swaying to its own tune, the train continued its advance towards the final destination. The closer they got, the more restless Ishan felt. *How did all of this happen? What have I gotten myself into?*

Half the coach had emptied by the time Borivali arrived. The crowd on the platform maintained rigid expressions, devoid of any sort of tenderness. Some of them scorned at the faces crammed behind the bars of the train's windows while others were just plain indifferent. Hawkers announced their wares, careful to not divulge the prices, so as to invite enquiries and bargains. Ishan recoiled from the window uncomfortably. They still had to cross Dadar before they finally arrived at Mumbai Central. Until then, he intended to do nothing except remain in his seat. The train jerked a couple of times before it finally took off again.

Ishan looked on in silent confusion. He didn't feel like he was in Mumbai at all. He hadn't come here out of choice, so he had nothing in the form of expectations. But the stark difference between the landscape in sight and the one that he had captured in his mind while leaving the city fifteen years ago was the source of his disorientation. Giant cement boxes. Large moving crowds filled with psychologically isolated individuals. It seemed like no one wanted to have anything to do with one another, as far as possible.

The city must be gasping under all this weight. The skyline is not a clean frame anymore. It seems splintered. And no one seems to be bothered by that. The clutter of buildings made him anxious. *I will have to make my way through all this and find a hole to hide in,* Ishan heaved. He, however, had no clue how he was going to go about that. And there was no turning back from here now. At least not for the time being. His immediate future was shackled to the train that was running at full speed, backwards ahead. The past had been left far behind. A choice that was his. He continued looking out the window, wide eyed, searching for any sign of the Mumbai he knew. He blankly watched local trains whirring by and platforms overflowing with swarms of all kinds.

He disembarked onto the platform at Mumbai Central and remained standing there for a while. Not that he was expecting to be received by anyone. He was simply trying to calibrate his senses to the chaos. He didn't know where he belonged or what was his role in this madness. A few moments later, he picked up his shoulder bag and flung it around his left arm while picking up the bigger bag in the other hand. He could feel the books in his bag by their burden, weighing down on his shoulders and his mind. He began moving towards the exit of the station, switching the heavier bag between hands every

now and then. At the exit, he placed the larger bag down and pulled out a piece of paper with an address from his pocket. He took a step towards the chain of taxis for hire. He went from window to window, extending the piece of paper towards irritated taxi drivers, hoping for a sympathetic response. The fifth taxi driver he approached magnanimously clicked his tongue at Ishan, reset his fare metre and shoved the backdoor open towards him.

The city that looked alien from the distant view of the train window seemed all the more unfamiliar on its roads and streets. The multitude of sights, sounds, and smells, all at once, had numbed his senses. As his restlessness grew he sank into a corner of the backseat, where he remained for the rest of the ride.

A while later, the taxi came to a halt. Ishan glanced at the taxi metre and began pulling out money from his wallet. The driver signalled Ishan to stop and handed him a creased rate card. *Ohohoho!* Ishan studied the card in shock. *These are the fares??* But he almost immediately resigned to the fact that there was not much he could do other than pay up. Once the taxi driver left, Ishan faced the building across from him and cross-checked its name board with the address on the piece of paper.

'Padmaraag', 5th floor, Ashutosh Parikh.

He had been corresponding with this address through letters for a while now. He got into the lift and pressed the button that said '5.' Stepping out of the lift, he walked up to the only door on the floor and rang the doorbell. It was one of those musical doorbells that squealed an entire tune, an annoying contrast to the traditional single chime. Just as the tune died out, a small peeking window opened up out of the frame of the main door. A pair of eyes studied him carefully. He then heard the scrape of the chain lock, followed by the thuds of two bolts being unlatched. The door widened open by five or six inches and then shut again.

"Someone is here. Looks like it's for you!" a woman's voice yelled, away from Ishan's direction.

A few moments later the door opened once more, completely ajar this time. Ashutosh stood in the doorway, measuring up Ishan with a sharp gaze. He then took a step back and moved aside, indicating that it was okay for him to enter. *Looks like this is the extent of my welcome,* Ishan nodded slightly. He stepped inside and halted after taking a couple of steps.

Ashutosh felt a strong compulsion to say something. *I need to say something. But not too much. And definitely not something that will latch him onto me. Not too friendly. But not dismissive either. He shouldn't feel unwelcome.* He

looked on at the clean shaven, crop-haired Ishan. “The train was on time, no?” he finally managed to spurt out.

“Yes.”

“Sitaram! Quick! Show him his room. And get the rest of the luggage...” He turned to Ishan. “Where is the rest?”

“No more. This is it.”

“Hm.”

Sitaram led Ishan to his room. There was a sofa-cum-bed, a cupboard arranged neatly against a wall, a study table with a chair, a ceiling fan and a window. *What more could I need?*

“The bathroom is this way,” Sitaram interrupted Ishan’s inspection. “Fresh soap and towel are on the wash-basin counter.”

“Okay,” Ishan said. As Sitaram returned to his morning duties towards the Parikh family, Ishan closed the door behind him.

The moment Sitaram had escorted Ishan away to his room, Ashutosh had rushed to the phone, punching numbers on the dialpad. His wife, Reema, stood anxiously next to him, extending her ear as closely to the receiver as her neck would allow. Quite a few rings went by before the line on the other end crackled to life.

“Arnav! He’s here,” Ashutosh barked into the phone before the voice on the other end could even elicit a greeting.

“Really?” the voice responded after a quiet moment. “How does he look? Has he said anything yet - what is he doing here or how long he plans to stay?”

“No. I haven’t asked him yet.”

“Right.”

“Look! He is not my responsibility alone! Do you understand...?”

“Yes. But you are the eldest—”

“How does that matter? You are coming here, right?”

“Um...can we push that to the evening? I genuinely have a lot of work at the office today. Let’s do one thing. Let us meet at the club a little early. We’ll catch up for a while and then we will come back to your house together from there.”

“Hm. And then we’ll talk to him here. Together. Yes. That will be better.”

“Great. Six-thirty, then?”

“Fine.”

“Alright. See you soon.”

He replaced the receiver in its place, keeping his eyes as low as he could, trying to avoid the urgent answers being demanded by Reema’s glare. He already knew she wouldn’t approve of what the two brothers had just agreed upon. *But what more can I do?* He cleared his throat and spoke in the most unruffled tone he could manage. “Let him rest here for now. We’ll figure the rest out at night.”

Reema composed herself, taking deep breaths, and then shrugged indifferently as she walked away. She wanted to make her protest clear. She wanted to have nothing to do with any of this. *It’s between the three brothers, after all. Let them do what they want. As long as they understand that this is my house! Not a lodge! People can’t just land up here whenever they want and stay for as long as they feel like. No. I will not have it.*

An hour later, she noticed Sitaram returning from Ishan’s room with the tea tray. The sight of the tea and snacks, untouched, irked her. She knew she couldn’t do much about it. So she decided to use it as an opportunity to make a personal appearance, inquire into his well-being and be done with the formal obligations she owed him as his sister-in-law.

She knocked on Ishan’s door and waited. Ishan opened the door and held it courteously for her as she entered the room.

“Hi. How are you? Don’t you want some hot tea?” she asked, adorning an excited grin.

“No.”

She stood there looking at Ishan sitting on the sofa awkwardly with his line of sight on the floor. She continued looking at him for the longest time, unable to come up with anything to say. “Lunch is at one,” she finally managed to squeeze out.

Ishan raised his head slightly in acknowledgement. He couldn’t think of anything to say to that. She had passed on some information. He had made a mental note of said information and acknowledged it. End of matter.

“Will you join us at the table or should I have it sent to your room?”

“I’ll come to the table.”

She had run out of excuses for being there any longer. Reema tried smiling

at him, but Ishan wasn't looking. She walked out of the room, flustered, as the door shut behind her.

Back in the drawing room, Karan was lying down on the carpet playing a video game.

"What are you still doing here? Don't you have college today?"

"It's not time yet."

"So what? You can start getting ready. Get up! Go have a bath."

"Mihika has gone in for a bath."

"Then go and use the other guest room. Now, get up. Hurry up!"

"Okay..." said Karan, getting up. A tall and broad boy, it was hard to tell he was just seventeen. The contours of his face were shapely, his skin fair and his eyes perpetually wide with curiosity.

"Mummy..."

"What is it?"

"Can I go to *that* guest room?"

"Karan!"

"But I want to see him!"

"We have had this discussion already! What did we decide?"

"Mummy...pleaaaaase!"

"Absolutely not! Get going right now." Reema began walking away. She took a few steps, stopped and looked around. Karan was still lying around on the floor. Her brows narrowed, locking onto Karan as the target of her concentrated annoyance. Karan opened his mouth to say something in his defence, but immediately decided against it. He got up reluctantly, and went away towards the other guest room, as instructed.

For Reema, this was the biggest concern about having a visitor. Especially this one, in particular. Ever since she was informed of his arrival she had pleaded with Ashutosh, several times, to keep in mind how Ishan's presence could be a distracting influence on the kids. She was extremely sceptical of him, to say the least. "The kids will not be able to concentrate on their studies. Their exams are almost here. They cannot afford any kind of distraction." Ashutosh would listen patiently only to give the same response every time. "We'll see."

Generally, the kids were seldom home for lunch. Their day really began only after college had ended. On most days they would be off gallivanting, exercising their limited freedom as young adults. That day, however, both of them were *Miraculously* present at their respective seats on the dining table as the hands of the clock took their positions to officially declare lunch time.

Mihika was an attractive girl. She had barely turned fifteen, but was already gaining attention amongst the boys at her college. *If this is how it is in junior college, what is university going to be like?* Reema would worry looking at her. On the one hand, she was concerned for her daughter, just as much as any mother to an adolescent girl. But on the other hand, she was secretly proud. *Look at how pretty she is though. Look at how fair. She makes the girls around her look plain.*

Mihika had quietly settled down in her usual seat around the dining table, watching Karan pace around restlessly. "Mummy! Shall I go fetch him?" he impatiently asked.

"No. Sit down in your chair. And be quiet! Sitaram will get him. And remember. No questions!"

Karan's posterior had barely touched the seat of the chair when he sprang back onto his feet, seeing Ishan coming out from his room. Karan himself was not quite sure as to what he was looking to find in Ishan. But seeing the tall, lanky man dressed in a simple white *dhoti* and a plain white shirt had disappointed him at some level. The head had closely kept hair. But besides that, the rest of his face was clean. There was absolutely nothing remarkable about him.

Karan began to regret his overt gesture of enthusiasm. But he was already standing now. *I can't sit down just like that. He is looking at me.* Karan stepped out and casually walked towards Ishan, trying very hard to disregard his mother's scowl. He carefully pulled up a chair, dragging it along as delicately as he could, and placed it next to Ishan. He then stood next to it, in attention, waiting for Ishan to take his seat. Once Ishan had sat down, Karan awkwardly began walking towards his own seat. "Quite a warm day. Anyone else feeling hot?" he remarked, casually, to no one in particular as he slumped into his chair.

Ishan remained quiet, not entirely sure how to respond to that. He kept his eyes on the plate in front of him and began eating quietly. A few moments later, with everyone engrossed in their own plates, Reema asked in her most inquisitive tone, "So, what did you usually eat over there?"

“Whatever we could get.”

Mihika and Karan exchanged glances without raising their heads from their plates. Neither of them was comfortable enough to make small talk with Ishan. At least, not yet. Reema cleared out the awkwardness of Ishan’s blunt response by shooting a few routine enquiries at her children. Both of them kept their responses as brief as they could. Ishan continued to eat quietly with his head down, as if the others on the table were speaking a language he did not understand. He ate very little but tidily so. Once done, he lifted his head and looked around the table, stopping at Karan who was looking right back at him. Ishan smiled gently and said, “You were very little, the last time I saw you.”

Karan nodded excitedly. “But we know who you are very well. We’ve seen your photos in the old albums.”

“Oh. Those must be very, very old.”

Reema got up from her seat, prompting everyone else to get up as well. Mihika was hoping to grab Ishan’s attention too. She noticed Ishan turning towards the wash area as he spoke to Karan. She swiftly placed herself by the wash basin and pretended to wash her hands as Ishan and Karan moved towards that area. A few seconds later, Ishan walked over to her. She smiled at him as warmly as she could. He looked at her gravely. “You are – Mihika?”

“Yes.”

Ishan nodded but didn’t say anything further. He found it inherently hard to be at ease around women. He just stood there, waiting for her to finish washing her hands. Mihika’s face fell slightly as she pulled back her soaked fingers from under the tap and made way for Ishan. Once he was washed up, Ishan didn’t pause for even a moment before retreating back into his room. The three of them looked on after him as he shut the door.

“Alright. Both of you go to your rooms as well.”

“Isn’t he handsome, mummy?” Mihika blushed.

“Don’t be stupid. Are you going swimming today or not?”

“Yes. But that’s later.”

“I know. Karan, you will drop her at the pool today. Okay?”

“Will you come to pick me up then?” Mihika asked, clinging on to Reema’s arm.

“No. I don’t plan on stepping out of the house today.”

“But why?”

Reema ignored her daughter. *As if they don't know why. They know everything. She's just playing dumb on purpose.*

“Mummy. Do you think they drink tea where he comes from?” It was Karan's turn to ask questions.

“I don't know. He didn't have any when I sent him a cup this morning.”

“So he won't be coming out of his room for tea? Mummy. Just for one minute...can I please go to his room?”

“Karan, no! Let – let him rest.”

Once she had dispersed the kids from there, Reema sat down to catch her breath. She never liked sitting around at home after lunch. But she didn't have much of an option that day. She felt uneasy about lying down. *What if I fall asleep? There will be no one to watch over the house. No...That can't happen.* She picked up her latest endeavour in embroidery from the corner of the living room and began with her cross-stitches as she settled down on a recliner.

The telephone rang. It was Shalmali. Reema didn't like her one bit. But what could she do? As with Ishan, she was duty bound to maintain a civil relationship with this in-law too.

“Hello, *bhabhi*!. It's me, Shalu.”

“Hi. How are you?”

“I am fine. What has been happening with you? Anything new?”

“Nothing much. Same old.”

“How is *he*?”

“Like any other man. Why?”

“No, I thought...”

“What?”

“Are you at home?”

“I will have to stay at home today, won't I?”

“That's true...in case he needs anything. It must feel so strange, no?”

“Anything else?”

“Those two are meeting at the club today. You know that, right?”

“Yes.”

“And after that Arnav is coming over to your place. As in, both of them will be coming there together. *Bhabhi...*”

“What is it?”

“Will you please let me know if Arnav is going to be eating dinner there? I don’t want to wait up for him unnecessarily.”

“Sure.”

“What do you think? Should I come too?”

“That’s for you to decide.”

“I mean...will *Ishanbhai*² feel awkward?”

“How would I know?”

“Then I’ll come?”

“Your call.”

“Forget it. I don’t think I’ll come.”

“Okay.”

It had been a while since Reema had picked up her embroidery basket. Some of the yarn was tangled. It took nearly an hour to untangle all of it. Exhausted, she put the embroidery basket aside and began browsing through a magazine. Before she knew it, she had fallen asleep.

“Mummy! Mummy! *Sādhu*³ uncle is going out somewhere.”

Reema woke up to find two pairs of eyes, sparkling with excitement, looking down at her.

“Oh no!” Reema suppressed every wave of grogginess rising from within as she pulled herself up and dashed towards Ishan’s room. Karan and Mihika followed. Reema, of course, didn’t want them coming behind her. But the situation was too urgent for a discussion that was most likely to be futile.

“Where are you going?” Reema shot at Ishan as she spotted him pacing towards the door.

“I thought I’d take a walk.”

2 *Bhai* literally means brother but is used to address any male peers in a friendly or respectful manner

3 *Ascetic*. Someone who has renounced material pleasure.

“No, no! Please. Do whatever you like once Ashutosh is back.”

Ishan halted in his tracks. He looked keenly at Reema as if trying to solve a riddle. Reema began feeling a bit jittery. She figured it was best to give him something more in terms of a reason. “What if you get lost? Everyone will panic,” Reema managed to keep her footing.

“That won’t happen.”

“Maybe. But even otherwise. Just not today. Please?”

“Alright,” Ishan said after a brief pause and went back into his room.

Mihika’s face fell. She looked at Karan as he took up the mantle of confronting their mother. “Why did you do that, mummy?” he snapped at Reema almost immediately.

Reema didn’t answer. She walked away pretending she never heard Karan’s question. But Karan reiterated himself. “Why did you not let him go?”

“Weren’t you the one who warned me that he was stepping out? Why did you do that? Because deep inside, even you knew he shouldn’t be stepping out all by himself like this. All I did was tell him what you were already thinking. What was wrong with that?”

Karan bit his bottom lip with frustration. There was no denying the truth in his mother’s argument. But Karan had his own reasons for telling on Ishan. *Couldn’t she have just asked me to go with him on the walk?*, he sighed. Mihika said nothing. She stood listening silently.

“He has just arrived today. He is new to the city. And a city like Bombay, no less.” Reema began muttering under her breath as she reoriented herself from all the confusion. “What if he gets lost somewhere? What if your father and Arnav *kaka*⁴ come home and ask for him, only to find him gone? What will I tell them? No, no. Let them all sit together and figure out the whole situation. Let everything become clear. Then we are all free from this responsibility. But, until then, someone has to watch over him or not? I had to cancel everything and sit at home today because of this. But who cares about that, right? And you two!? Don’t you have to study or something?”

They really had nothing to do. But even if they did, nothing good would come of it. Their attention was trapped between the closed doors of Ishan’s room. And that was something their mother wouldn’t empathise with even if she could. Both of them went their own ways; one towards the video game device on the floor and the other towards a more quiet corner, convenient

4 *Uncle. Father’s brother, specifically.*

for long, uninterrupted phone calls. Reema too let out a momentary sigh of relief. She quickly went through her mental checklist and retired into her room to get ready for the evening. She always made sure that she was dressed in her best and had her make-up on to greet Ashutosh when he came home every evening.

But when Ashutosh came home that day, he barely noticed Reema. His mind was elsewhere. His gaze was unblinkingly fixed onto Arnav's face. Arnav was trying his best to diffuse the tension with heightened laughter and loud banter. He was a master of this art. *Better to hide behind a fountain of noise than a mountain of silence*, he often professed. His arrival was announced by his clattering laugh, as he teased Reema and enquired about the kids. After he had finally run out of small talk, he called up Shalmali for a couple of minutes and then finally turned to Ashutosh. "Should we be done with it right now and get it out of the way? Or do we wait till dinner is done?"

"Let's see if something comes up during dinner," Ashutosh said, gravely.

But when Sitaram knocked on Ishan's door and told him dinner was served, the door remained shut. Instead, a voice muffled through from the other side, "I eat only once a day."

When Sitaram informed them about it, the three of them looked at each other, confused and annoyed in equal measure. This was not one of those matters that could wait. "Fine. Let's just get done with this right away, then," Ashutosh said, finally.

Arnav stood up after Ashutosh. He then placed his hand on Reema's shoulder and said, "*Bhabhi*. Why don't you come along as well?"

"What? No way. Not a chance. I am not getting sucked into this. It's for both of you to sort out."

The two of them stood outside Ishan's closed room, looking at the door and then at each other. Finally Ashutosh pulled in a deep breath and knocked. To his surprise, Ishan opened the door almost immediately. He looked at Ashutosh, then at Arnav, and stepped aside to make way for the both of them. "Do come in," he gently said as they passed by him into the room.

Arnav glanced around the room and then settled down on one end of the sofa. Ashutosh took the other end. Ishan stood facing them both.

"Why don't you sit down?"

"No. I'm fine this way."

Both Arnav and Ashutosh couldn't wait to get done with the discussion. But,

at the same time, neither of them possessed the finesse to bring up a delicate topic with grace. The air between them hung heavy. Finally, Arnav summoned his zesty spirit and began. "So! Uttarkashi must be really cold this time of the year, no?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It gets very stuffy and hot here in Mumbai. Arré, Ashu *bhai*. Why haven't you installed an AC in this room?" Ashutosh gave Arnav a dirty look. It was hard enough for him, keeping up cheerful appearances. The last thing he needed was a snarky comment. "It's just that we rarely use this room. That's why," Ashutosh explained, while his eyes shot arrows at Arnav.

"That's true, really." Arnav said, toeing his line, "Plus, once you put an AC in this room that will be it for Sitaram. No work will get done. He will just linger around the room all day."

"That's right! He already takes those dreadful long naps every afternoon."

"Yes. Imagine how long his naps will be in AC. Imagine Reena *bhabhi* coming home to find Sitaram napping happily in the room. She will lose it." Their voices had reached a feverish pitch.

Ishan looked on calmly without saying a word. Uneasy silence took over, once more, like the thirsty wetlands of a swamp. No matter how much you try covering it up, it will swallow everything and still reemerge at the top. Ashutosh was getting really restless. He gave Arnav a sharp glare. Arnav took the cue and cleared his throat. He got up, walked towards the window and began looking outside. "The view from here is wonderful. Isn't it? Do you like it?"

"Yes."

Ishan could have helped the situation if he wanted to. He knew exactly what was worrying them, why they were there and what they wanted to talk about. But, he had decided to remain silent. It was not that he enjoyed seeing them grapple for things to say. He just did not have answers to their impending questions. He hadn't yet even figured out what he was going to do the next day. He was as clueless as his brothers, if not more. *Maybe I'll know what to do once...*

"Ishan!"

Ishan raised his head and looked towards Ashutosh. It was a view to behold. Ishan marvelled at the lack of character in his brother's tone. *That didn't sound like a question or a threat. Empty. Like a clear, cloudless sky. Although, how long can one keep looking at a clear, cloudless sky?*