

One Day The Sky Turned Blue

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One day the sky turned blue. It did not look like the ocean- like a door to an unknown darkness. It was not glassy like the bridge between the land and the sea, where the little creatures and pebbles that didn't belong lived, it was not finite like the line way far back that we call the horizon. It was pale, yet bright, and introduced itself to the earth with a soft embrace. I do not know what color the sky was before, but today it turned blue.

Amma and Papa did not seem to notice, neither did my sister, but then again I didn't bring it up. Instead I waved goodbye to them (my sister tugged at Papa's sweater for him to carry her) and hopped on the school bus.

They make us stand in long narrow lines at school. I've never liked that. It makes it difficult to see all the students as different people. Everyone looks the same, with the same uniform, and all I usually see is the back of someone's head. Today the head was way above mine and it was oddly long in a shape somewhere between a donut and an éclair. I made sure to follow the head directly to the classroom where the lessons had already begun. During class the other kids would whisper to one another when the teacher was not looking. I tried it out too. It went like this:

Me: Hey, Classmate No. 1

Classmate No. 1: What's up?

Me: Did you notice that the sky was blue today?

Classmate No. 1: Really? I had no idea. That's crazy.

Classmate No. 1: Hey Anay.

Me: What's up?

Classmate No. 1: Did you notice that when you speak everything that comes out of your mouth sounds really stupid?

Teacher: Anay, stop talking in the back row.

Me: Sorry.

A few of the other classmates snickered. I think that Classmate No. 1 was initially being sarcastic.

Kyra taught me about sarcasm. Kyra was in my grade except she had a different teacher so she was in a different class. I had only spoken to Kyra a couple of times in the past, but she had always been very kind, and helped me out on several occasions. She taught me about sarcasm and how sometimes even when you think you are doing the right thing you have to apologize so situations don't escalate. She also taught me how to eat pasta with a spoon. Kyra didn't believe in forks. She said the ridges inside the forks were still dirty.

The rest of the school day was a blur to me. I kept peeking at the sky, but my seat was too far from the windows. The teachers kept telling me to focus too. I was too distracted today, they said. In fact they said that all through the day, right up to the very end when they also told us to file into a line and head to the buses. I thanked the teachers and promised them that I would be more focused tomorrow and then I climbed the bus to go home.

There's a single place I would go to after school. Not on most days, but on a few. Everyone assumes that living in a busy city like Bangalore meant there were only streets of pungent smells, or flickering tube lights and buzzing auto rickshaws and BMTC buses, but I knew a place nobody else did.

Where the site of my house ends begins a nursery of flowers. Passing through it is like passing through twenty perfume bottles at once, but after that, there's a gentle hill of dense forest. As you go deeper into the forest, you go higher up a hill, and after a ten minute walk is a large and wide cliff ledge facing the setting sun. It overlooks the nursery, my neighborhood, and the main road behind it, but the trees in the forest provide enough insulation for the honking cars and vendors to be measly background noise. I like it because I am alone.

But today I could hear someone there.

I stepped towards the ledge. I could hear some huffing, and scraping. I tip-toes towards the ledge and peeked from behind a tree. I could tell by the back of her head that it was Kyra. And she was painting something.

Paint dripped from her fingertips. Below her, a tarp was smothered in browns and white. She huffed, pressing colors on a canvas placed on the tarp, rather violently. Kyra finally caught her breath. Her arms screamed of aggressive reds and black, her hair once tightly tied had come apart, and was dipped in the paint streaked at her shoulders. I stepped closer, peaking over her shoulders to the canvas but she turned to look at me so suddenly I jumped back.

“Anay, It’s just you.” she muttered to herself. She had large brown eyes, usually perceptive and watchful, but they were wide open like they were looking at everything and nothing all at once. She fumbled with the paintbrushes before her, placing them to her side before squirming to the side of the tarp to offer me a seat. I politely declined and sat right next to her on the grass.

We both sat, staring at the sleeping sun.

“The sky turned blue today.” I blurted. I looked over at her, half expecting a loud laugh, but she just looked straight ahead. My throat suddenly became very dry.

She sat in silence and rested her head on her knees.

“Tell me about it.”

So I told her about how I woke up and saw the ocean in the sky, but how it was too bright to be the ocean, and how I asked my classmate in school if he saw the same thing, but he just answered with sarcasm.

Kyra let out a laugh. “That wasn’t too nice of your classmate, but it’s definitely a pretty peculiar thing to ask.” she said. Kyra looked more relaxed now. I was glad I could make her laugh.

We were silent again, only interrupted by the calls of the neighboring birds getting ready for supper. However, the silence did not trouble me this time. I did not need to blurt anything out. Instead I looked at the sky. I wondered what colors it had hid from me before today, and why nobody else seemed surprised by the blue sky. And why Kyra had not said anything about the sky either. And I noticed the pearly clouds, once colourless, that swam with one another, sharing their weaknesses in soft embraces. And I noticed beyond that the sun watched them, and stripped them of their purity as it slipped into a deep sleep.

I wondered what Kyra was wondering about as she stared at the sun; like she had seen it a thousand times before, and I wondered what Kyra had been painting when I had arrived. I didn’t even realise I had leaned over to take a look at her canvas until she scooted away to give me a better look.

“Today I woke up with a body.” she said simply.

Her painting was a depiction of individual hands and feet and arms and other body parts, in no specific order.

“I didn’t notice it before.” she started, turning her head to scan her own painting. “Before, I thought of my body as me.” she waved her multicoloured hands over herself. “But today I just had two legs that walked, two hands that could paint, eyes to see...” she motioned to the setting sun and nodded, once more to herself. “ All mine, but only a part of me.”

I nodded in acknowledgement. I think I understood what Kyra was saying. It was a revelation, much like the one I had experienced this morning.

“Do you come here often?” I asked.

“Not really. My parents used to bring me here to watch the sunset when I was younger. Now I come here sometimes when I want to watch it alone.”

“I didn’t know you painted either.”

“I do,” Kyra started. “Everytime one of these little revelations happens I paint it. It helps me keep track.”

“This has happened before?”

“Many times, for many different things. I think it happens to most people our age.”

“But when I asked my classmate he said-”

“Anay, you’ll find that most of the things our classmates say are to impress other classmates. Most of them are lies.”

“Then how do you know that everyone has these little revelations?”

“Well, we can’t be the only two people in the world who’ve experienced them.” she laughed.

The sun had slept by now. The vibrant colours had faded out with the conversation, leaving an empty black canvas.

Kyra turned to me this time. “What do you see when you look at the sky?” she asked. She did that sometimes- ask complicated questions with complicated answers. Everytime, I had no idea what to answer so I would say the first thing that came to my head. She would always laugh and then I would ask her the same thing. She would say something even more confusing. It would sound something like this:

Kyra: What don’t you believe in?

Me: *Very long pause to think* I don’t believe in destiny.

Kyra: *Laughs* That’s a good thing not to believe in.

Me: How about you?

Kyra: Forks.

This time it was different though. I still needed a long pause to think, but I don't think Kyra minded. "I see something that held no significance to me yesterday, or the day before that, but because it turned blue, I've been thinking about it all day. Maybe I'll be thinking about it for the rest of my life."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because I have no idea why it turned blue."

A quick smile spread across Kyra's face. She laughed. "I don't think it's a question of why your sky turned blue, rather the fact that it did. Your sky did turn blue, whether you like it or not, maybe you'll end up figuring out why, but it already holds a significance in your life now. Because it changed. And your life will never be the same."

"How about you?"

"Well I don't think my life will be the same either now."

A darker counterpart had now chased away the pale blue sky. Wisps of black painted on black and with each wisp the lights on the main road flickered off making it darker and darker. Until one by one through the dense black background sparkled little dots. One by one, like they had been playing hide-and-seek only to realise they had all been found. They spread to the corners of the sky, dancing around and making fun of one another like little kids.

I went back to the ledge the next day. Because I couldn't stop thinking about the colours I had seen the day before, but also because I was hoping Kyra was there again. To my surprise, she was. She had her paints out, but looked less violent than the day before. I couldn't tell her that though. We spoke about the sky and how it turned into stars and we spoke about how sometimes all classmates want to do is impress one another. I went back the day after that one. And the day after that. And the day after that.

"What do you see when you look at the sky?" The ocean of pale blue floated around us. It had been a few months since our first encounter on the ledge. More recently we spoke less and less about the sky so when Kyra asked the question it took me by surprise. She sat next to me grinning, but I couldn't see her face. It was the kind of grin where she knew the answer to her question but she asked it anyway.

"Something that has changed my life forever."

