

NEW

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"Kushi, Come on, we have to go catch the plane," said Mom. I looked around as slow tears slowly dripped down my cheeks. Who knows when I will see this same house again? When would I hug my grandmother again? I locked eye contact with my grandmother. Her eyes longed for us not to leave her alone, but again she knew that this would be a great opportunity for us. She sighed and mustered with all of her strength. "Come here Kushi, Now I want you to be a good kid for Mom and Dad. Please don't trouble them." A small tear escaped from her eye onto her old fragile skin. "Come., Hug me." I whimpered and leaped in for another last hug. "Promise me that you'll call often,"

"Yes, Grandma I promise."

"Now don't you dare forget about me when you get carried away"

"I will never ever forget about you"

"Be a good girl" Grandma says as she traces her hand on my face. I smiled as a tear escaped.

"Kushi come on, where your seat belt. The plane is going to take off." Oddly enough, Mom seemed pretty calm even though she going on a plane without Dad. As I got on my seat, I asked, "Mom, Are you scared" I looked her in the eye. She looked like she wanted to break down and just be a kid and throw a tantrum. But she couldn't, she was the adult here. Her eyes watered. She took a deep breath. "No, Kushi.. Why would I be scared? We are just going to a different part of Earth. We have been on Earth before."

"We will take off on in 3...2.." I sighed. This was it. We were going to America. I will be living in the America that I used to see on TV. Goodbye to all

those bike rides to school. Goodbye to my itchy uniform. Goodbye to all those fights with my cousins about the TV remote while my sister yelled "FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT". Goodbye to the street side pani-puri. The thing that I'll miss the most is my extended family and my Grandparents.

"Akka, Come on. We are in America" My sister said as she held my hand. I took a deep breath. Here we were in America, thousands of miles away from my extended family and the people I love.

As we drove away in the icy weather to our new house, I stared at the tall building that reached the sky. I stuck my head out of the window but the wind and cold caught up to me. "Brrrrrrr, It's so cold outside" I shivered "I know, How are we going to survive in this cold?" Mom said. Luckily my dad had already come to America in August, so had gotten everything ready for us. I had missed my dad a lot, I had missed his famous tea, his hug, and his humor. That was the main reason I was going to America leaving everyone back home in India. I needed my Dad. He couldn't come to pick us up from the airport cause he had an important meeting at his work. But, he had promised us that he'll be at home before we came home.

"DAD!" I yelled as we drove into the street. The taxi driver smiled. I opened the door as fast as I could I leaped to hug him. He was still the same with his fuzzy beard and the smell of chai. "How are you, you've grown so tall," he said as he admired me. I straightened my back, "Oh, yes I've grown so tall that I'm taller than you" I smiled. Dad chuckled, as he replied, "Oh yes,"

I looked at my new apartment, it was big and spacious for the four of us. I sighed, but it was not my real house. The house where I grew up. The house where I spent 12 years in. I looked at the couch and the TV. My house in India had a gray couch that was beaten up cause my sister and I spent most of our childhood jumping on it. This couch looked nice, but it didn't look

like home. I dropped my things on the floor, my bag, and suitcase as I roamed around, the rough carpet beneath my head tickled my feet. My house in India had white tiles. Where me and my sister used to make it dirty with our dirty shoes when we came inside. More than anything I wanted to go back home, with all of my family. But for now, I would have to make this my house. My sister came next to me and wrapped her hand around my shoulder as she stood on her tip-toes. "I miss our house," she said. I looked down at her, I would have to be a good role model for her. I was her older sister. Though she was only 2 years younger than me, she still looked up to me. I couldn't cry now. Not when she is right next to me.

"Ready for your first day of school in America?" Mom asked, I got up excited though I was just complaining about not having to wake up and yesterday about not going to school. It was a week after we came to America, yet it seemed like a year. "Ummmm, I don't know" I whimpered. Though I was excited, I was also scared. As though Mom could read my mind, she sat next to me on the side of my bed. "It's ok, just barge in there with head held high." I took a deep breath. I was ready. I got up to go take a shower.

There was no uniform here like in India. So I had to pick out the best outfit to make a good impression. I picked out a pair of jeans and a green shirt with a small little cactus. The shirt came up to my waist. Just last week it fit perfectly. I will need new clothes soon. I looked at my new closet, it was a small walk-in closet that could only fit clothes and one person. It was like a small room.

"You must be Kushi?" the principal said. We were in Stoneham Middle School, I kept fidgeting with my hands. This school was exactly like in the movies. All of this felt fake like I was in a dream. I just hoped there weren't any big mean bullies like in movies. "Yes Mam," I said in a small voice. The lady

was surprised was it because my accent was too thick? "No need to call me 'Mam' just call me Mrs.Anderson. My face flushed and my face turned red. How could I make such a petty mistake? The first word I said to her was wrong. This was not a good impression. I looked at my mom and dad, they smiled back at me even though I wasn't smiling. "Your homeroom is room 634. And here is your schedule. I knew what to do here. We had a schedule in India too. "So you should be in Math class right now, you have about 20 minutes. Do you want to go take a look?" Mrs.Anderson asked. I nodded. "You guys can leave now" She nodded at my parents. "Bye Kushi," My parents said to me. I smiled and waved at them.

"So how do you like America so far?" The principal asked. I raised my head, "It's ok" I replied as I played with my long braid. "Do you miss your home?" she asked "A lot" as all of my school memories came back to me. It hit me like a train, I would have to make new friends again.

I looked at the new school, trying to soak it all in. The lockers with odd locks on them. Why would we have to put locks on them? It wasn't like we were going to store money in there. Plus it wasn't, locked with keys. It was a circle lock with a button in the middle and numbers around it like a clock. I looked at the hallways, it was big and wide with lockers everywhere. We turned left as we were in a sea of classrooms. "Your math class is right here." She said. "Mrs. Kennedy. This is Kushi." Mrs.Anderson said. I smiled and tried to hide my fear. Math has never been my best subject. "Kushi here is your Chromebook, your password is on a sticky note inside. You can put away your things in your locker. You just need a Chromebook and Mrs.Kennady is going to give you your binder. OK?" She smiled. I tried to understand what she was saying, but was just going way too fast for me. All I understood was Chromebook, locker, and binder. I walked to my locker trying to make sense and do the right thing. I slowly opened the locker put away my things and grabbed the Chromebook. In India we use textbooks. This was different, but I liked it at the same time. Suddenly, a thought hit me. How

was school back in India without me? Did they miss me or did they already forget about me?

"Kushi, this is your seat, and here is your math book," Mrs. Kenddy said. Textbook? This made a lot of sense. "So, are you new?" the girl next to me asked. "Yeah," I replied. Suddenly her facial expression changed, she was disgusted. Was it me? Did I do anything wrong? "What Happened?" I asked, again she looked grossed out. For the rest of the class, she didn't say anything.

"Hey, Kashi," A sweet girl said with a smile. I turned around to say hi. "How do you like it here?" the girl asked. "It's pretty good" I replied. Her expression changed, but she shook her head and smiled. "What Happened?" I asked. "Nothing, anyway my name is Katie"

I smiled and replied, "My name is Kushi"

"Oh, Kushi not Kashi," she said feeling embarrassed.

RING. I jumped frightened. What happened I thought. Suddenly, everyone got up grabbed their things, and just walked out of the classroom. What was happening? Katie smiled and informed, "We are going to our next classroom." I was confuzzled. I thought the teachers came to our classroom, not us going to the teacher's classroom. I quickly grabbed my things and headed out. "We have Social Studies next," told Katie. I smiled, Social Studies was my my favorite class back in India. "Good morning," said the teacher. "Kushi, you are going to sit in the 4th row last seat," he said, I slowly walked to my seat. "Now, today we are going to learn about Egypt"

"Hey why do you have that dot on your head?" a boy asked me when were walking to class. It was the second day of school so far for me. I told Mom not to put it today. Not even the other Indian kids wear it. "Umm, it's a Bindi" The boy laughed, "Dude did you hear that? Not only she is Bindhi Kushi, she also can't speak English." The boy said to his friend. I stood there startled, I could speak English. I just spoke English a few minutes ago to them.

And what was this, 'bindhi Kushi?' It hit me, they were all making fun of me behind my back. I thought I was good enough. Apparently Not.. "Jacob, leave her alone." a voice said. I turned around. It was another Indian girl and Katie! "Why do you care?" Jacob asked. "I care 'cause Kushi is my friend," Katie said. I couldn't believe it! Katie was my friend! I made my first American friend. Jacob and his idiot friend walked away. "Hi Kushi! Sorry about them, they are really obnoxious." Katie said. I smiled, I was getting better at English. I could understand them! "Kushi, this is Anaya. Anaya this is Kushi" Katie introduced. Anaya smiled to say hello. I waved at her. But, I just couldn't get over Bindi Kushi and my thick accent.

"Mom, I have to ask you something," I asked Mom.
"What is it?" she asked
"Some kids are calling me Bindi Kushi"
Mom gasped, and a small tear escaped from my eyes.
"Oh, Kushi don't cry. You are new. And they just can't get over the fact that you are better than them and prettier." Mom said
I smiled, but I just didn't feel better. "Look, there are haters everywhere, even in India. Sometimes people are just like that. But in any place that there is hate. There is also at least one person to help you and go against the hate." Katie and Anaya came into my mind. The way that they protected me. "You can take off your Bindhi, dress like them, and do everything. But there is going to be one person who is going to hate you. Because you are you. And you can't change that. But, what can change is how you can take it. Now you know that you don't want to wear Bindhi to school anymore. But, please don't change yourself for that one person when you have so many people who love you" I smiled, that was true. "Now go eat some food". Mom said. The thick accent still hurt me, but I knew who to ask.

"Dad, when you were at work, did people make fun of your accent" I asked. Dad smiled and replied. "Oh yes. They used to laugh when I made a

mistake. It used to hurt me. Why?" Dad replied. I looked down, "Kushi" Dad gave a stern look. "Someone made fun of my accent at school" I mustered. He laughed, "So let them laugh. They'll shut their face when they realize, even though we have trouble keeping up in language, we are just as good as them" I smiled, I wouldn't let a couple of boys get in my way. Plus, I had Katie and Anaya.

One year later:

Believe it or not, I actually got used to my house in America. Though I still miss India, America is just as good. Katie and Anaya became my closest friends. Remember that girl at the beginning, where she kept casting dirty looks at me cause my accent is pretty nice... if you don't get on her bad side. Bindi Kushi is gone. Jacob and the other boy are now my friends. It was a long ride, to feel like I actually belonged, but it was worth it. For most immigrants feeling like you belong in an ocean of differences is hard, but they'll try And make it. All they need is someone like Katie, Mom, and Dad.