PROJECT SECOND EARTH

IN THE PARALLEL UNIVERSE

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DEDICATED TO

My beloved mother and father

Who always encouraged me to dream big

And to every reader who holds this book

You are a now a part of my second earth

PREFACE

Have you ever wondered if another Earth exists? An Earth just like ours, but where everything works in the opposite way?

This question always fascinated me. That curiosity became Project Second Earth: In The Parallel Universe.

This book is about a team of researchers who find a portal to another world, but get trapped there when it closes. This world looks human but its laws of physics are reversed.

I wrote this book in my leisure time because I find immense pleasure in writing. I hope this adventure will make you think, thrill you, and make you wonder what lies beyond our world.

Somiya Das

Dear Emily,

I know you won't understand any of it now. I want you to read this letter some eight or nine years later. I am not doing well nowadays and I am not going to live for long. I won't be able to finish my research work on the parallel universe. Therefore, I want you to continue with it after me and I hope you will.

Lots of love,

Grandma

TWENTY YEARS LATER

CHAPTER 1

"Researchers have finally confirmed the existence of a parallel universe-yes the one we read in science fiction and see in movies-the day is not far when they would be able to create a portal to a second earth."

The news on the television made Emily feel proud of herself. It was not that she was feeling proud of herself for the first time. Multiple times before this she had taken much more pride in her achievements. The first time dating back to some two years when she was called "Dr.Emily" by everyone-even her mom and dad-the second time when she received an offer to join the famous IRPU or Institute of Research on Parallel Universe. The

third time being this. Whom the world called "Researchers who finally confirmed the existence of a parallel universe" or "Angels who made sci-fi thrillers reality", she was counted as one of them.

Her story began some fifteen years back. At the age of ten, she came to know about her grandma's research work. Not that she didn't know about her grandma being a researcher-it was just that her parents never let her know about what her grandma researched on and what letters did she write to her granddaughter. Emily's parents were well aware of her grandma's research work and also about those letters which she had written to Emily. But her parents seriously didn't want her to ever read those, get influenced by her late grandmother to create some portal to some unknown universe, get into such trouble. Once, while playing hide-and-seek with her friends at her home, she went to hide in the storeroom upstairs and hid behind the black cupboard which belonged to her grandma. God knows what made her open the drawers. And then she discovered a box-covered with layers of dust-of course it should be, it was for around five or six years maybe no one had opened the box. At that time, Emily was hardly nine or ten years old, and was only

excited after getting those letters addressed to her. A quite determination, a small manifestation sparked to life in her. Yes, she wants to fulfil her grandma's last wish. But at the present moment, she couldn't make heads or tails of a 'parallel universe'. When she grew up a bit and realized what her grandma actually researched on, she was flabbergasted. The concept of a 'parallel universe' indeed intrigued her, so she decided to make it her research topic. Being a sci-fi lover herself, she just couldn't resist the idea of working on such topics. Being a brilliant student in Physics, she easily got admission to one of the top research colleges in California. Her journey was simple but it wasn't so easy after all-Astrophysics is not a piece of cake for everyone. Sleepless nights, hundreds of research papers, no outings, no get-together with friends- this was Emily's life back in college. A time when other students of her age enjoyed with friends and family just before getting a job, she had to bury her face in thick books and laptop for long hours. On completing her bachelor degree and master degree, she proceeded on to her PhD degree and the biggest of its kind. This was the father of all those degrees- certainly because it required double efforts and double brains-but Emily

had it all-so that was not a problem. Yet when you have it all, you just can't use it every time and it's normal for you to get exhausted. But she was hell-bent on actualizing her grandma's vision of a second earth. After three years of endeavors, the day came when she earned her PhD degree and became a doctor- not a medical one but an academic one. Such was her genius and intelligence that in less than a month, she received a golden offer from Mr. Robert Mitchell to join IRPU. Then she found three friends-or rather three intellectual equals-Clara Turner, Henry Collins and Oliver Grant. Together these four scientists started working on parallel universe-not a theoretical one but a practical one. And it's really God who knew whether or not there existed one such universe but now in 2030, the whole world knows it-whole credit goes to the four Great Astrophysicists. But it's still God who knows if they can ever create a wormhole to another world. Undoubtedly, name of their project is "PROJECT SECOND EARTH" (set by Clara who's a bit of a wordsmith).

CHAPTER 2

"Good morning, Dr. Carter," a jovial voice called out as Emily entered the laboratory. Sapphire eyes, poker straight hair, it was Emily's present best friend or best ever fellow researcher, Clara.

"Honestly? Are we still calling each other doctors?" Emily sighed.

"Uh-oh I am sorry- I just keep forgetting-we call each other by our names", Clara smiled.

"Yeah-it feels weird when your colleague calls you doctor- especially one with whom you have achieved so much in your life- and more importantly one who is three years older than you in experience."

"Two and a half years."

"Oh yeah. Still, you've been here two and a half years before I joined-you know the place better than me-you actually know Astrophysics better than me."

"That doesn't really count. Having more experience doesn't always mean that you are better at that work than all the younger researchers, I believe. Had it been so, Samuel would have been the brainiest one among us for he's the oldest one here- but he's just the opposite- plus he's always envious of us- and I know it for sure- the way he eyed us when we were being interviewed."

"Haha that's a nice one. I bet when we'll be able to create a wormhole or something to the parallel universe, he will not be able to accompany us. I believe that Mr. Mitchell would never select him as one of the travelers-he knows Samuel's a sort of troublemaker-the whole institute knows that."

"That would be very nice of him then. But I fear we'll be able to create a portal ever."

"Do you think I don't fear that? Nevertheless, let's not forget that even the light bulb was invented after a thousand tries."

Both of them got to work. After confirming the existence of another universe that existed parallel to theirs, their main agenda was to create a portal to that universe. But their team feared if they ever could. It wasn't so easy- it wasn't just baking a cake in the kitchen or memorizing text books and giving two-hour long exams. It was something that no one had ever done before them-or rather tried, but failed.

A few minutes later, Oliver jumped in .Tousled hair, weary eyes-yes, it has to be Oliver- the most hardworking and the youngest of the lot. Following him entered his best friend, rather the one who accompanies him in everything and the one who's always late-Henry. Brown rustled hair, oversized shirt with his favourite yellow "Pokemon" on it-people think he's sort of cartoon lover, he must be the youngest one among them-here lies the irony-he's actually the oldest one among them.

"Hello, sorry for being late," said Oliver as he switched on his desk lamp. He's always the quietest one who would never disturb them or talk rubbish-he's a simple fellow who would just work day and night and solve the toughest of all problems-exactly

what you may say opposite of Samuel Harper, a senior scientist of their institute, who's brainy and intelligent, but sort of a 'troublemaker' and the one who's always arguing with everyone, telling them his idea is the best and the final one, and creating chaos all the while. Being peaceful and quite is also an art which Samuel should learn from Oliver. Samuel too was trying to discover the parallel universe with his own team, but failed to do so and so is jealous of the younger team being successful in it.

"Hey we are almost done with our work. Oliver, show them the research paper we wrote yesterday- that was a brilliant one I must say and ninety percent of the credit goes to us, ten percent goes to the source from where we collected," said Henry who's much of that someone who toots his own horn yet he is sometimes actually worth it and quite helpful.

"That's nice but there's not much progress on our side. We were almost losing hope. Let's see if your research papers are of some use," Emily remarked.

Then after a prolonged two-hour discussion the four of them came to a conclusion that making a wormhole is possible the way Oliver and Henry

proposed. It wasn't the first time they were trying to make one. Hundreds of times before that they have tried, but failed. And this was one was what- the umpteenth time maybe. Yet the burning desire to discover a new world drove them forward. The thought if they could confirm the existence of a parallel universe, then they could surely create a portal to that, inspires them more than ever.

CHAPTER 3

The night grew darker. The grandfather clock in the living room was about to strike eleven. But Californian streets were full of people and it wasn't an uncommon scene. And it wasn't unusual for Emily not to return home till now. The Carter family was awake except one of them- John who was Emily's twelve-year old brother. He had some sort of test tomorrow at his school-which keeps taking tests everyday according to him-so he hit the bed earliest-rather was made to hit the bed by his mom, Mrs. Carter. Their dog, a playful golden retriever whom Emily called Puff and John called Tom who was not ready to give girlish names to their dog, slumbered on with paws across in the corner of the living room, his favourite place. But he was not asleep-he won't

sleep till Emily comes home- it's his daily routine to run to her as soon as the doorbell rings-for even he knew that Emily was the last to return home at the end of the day. Mr. Carter was busy watching his favourite show and Mrs. Carter was busy in the kitchen preparing a sweet soulful desert for the two of them and for Emily too when she returns home, if at all she has the energy to sit down on the sofa and spend some time with her family members. No one in the family was in a mood to sleep when their daughter was out there, working hard day and night to do something for the whole world- something for which her name would remain in pages of history- something for which she would be honored-and something which would lead to progress of their country and above all their planet Earth, in the field of science. And everyone in the family was proud of her and supported her fully only as long as the aspect of her going to an unknown universe came up. A number of times Emily and her parents had debated about it.

"Mom, once we're done creating a portal, your daughter is going to visit the parallel universe," Emily would say daily before leaving for work.

"No, we won't leave you alone in some unknown world like that-definitely we won't-as parents we can't. Yes if it was visiting some other city or other country, it was fine but it's another universe Em and we just can't let you go like this," her mother would say followed by a long speech of her father who would start talking about her chances of not returning and the consequences thereafter, which half of the days made her super late for her work, even more late than Henry-and then her ever fun-loving and adventurous partner-in-crime, John would say "Wherever you go, take me with you and don't say no," and then would bounce and leave for school, leaving hardly any time for Emily to pause and explain that she is not permitted to take a teenager non-researcher with her and even if she could, she would never take her brother to such risky places from where you might never return.

Emily liked her family being bothered about her and showing so much concern but at times it became intolerable. OK its fine I know there are risks-I know I might never return but even if there is a less than one percent chance what's the issue? She would think sometimes. Someone, someday, had to have discovered this—so why can't I be the one or rather

one of them? Someone someday had to have risked their life, so what's the issue if I am one of them? Earlier, it was just a mere interest and a desire to fulfil my late grandmother's dream but now it has become a necessity-for the whole world awaits it-such scientific discoveries would take our planet earth towards perfection and moreover our nation towards honour and dignity and most importantly we will be honoured for our work, wouldn't that make you feel proud mom and dad? Let's check-let's see- if ever a portal is created I am going to jump into it and I promise you I am going to return and have cappuccino with you all-John's favourite coffee-for I just can't go like that- for I just can't live without you all- even if I know you all will be there in the parallel universe- just that you won't be the same mom and dad, the same naughty brother, the same loving dog as you are.

CHAPTER 4

Day five of a new idea. And again, loads of work for "four small brains"-as Mr. Mitchell called them since they were among the youngest researchers in the institute. Chemicals, red and blue painted the floors in a dull, ugly manner and there was no one to clean them for sure-for everyone was busy. Emily mixed different chemicals together-they all were trying to work out Oliver and Henry's plan-but the outcome was disappointing. Clara was trying to summon more information about a 'practical parallel universe' from different books and she was trying her best to contact professors who dealt with this. They had done it earlier too. Confirming the existence of another universe was solely due to their efforts but famous professors too were their helping

hands. But certainly, this time no professor said, "Ah its possible. First do this then do that" which the whole group might have expected but rather they said, "I don't think it's possible with whatever resources we have. Do you think kiddos that we hadn't tried these back then, in our time? It's just that all those efforts were futile and at the end of the day, we were unsuccessful." Oliver helped Emily with the experiments-half of the times the test tubes would burst due to the tremendous heat, and the one holding them would suffer from severe burns-either Oliver or Emily. Henry had realised that their plan was awesome-yes it was brilliant, amazing-as he always said-but they just didn't have the resources they need, for those little test tubes cannot bear more heat and they will have to explode every time.

"I think Professor James is right when he says we don't have much resources," said Henry.

"Ok fine then tell us what to do next. We have been trying for say, for the past five days and this plan too is on the verge of failing. When you knew that we didn't have sufficient resources why did we even decide to proceed with this plan in the first place then? Wasn't it a complete waste of time?" Said

Emily who was burned out-her hands had turned dark with dirt and dust with severe wounds.

"I guess we should contact more professors outside America. There must be even better professors with whom we can collaborate and I am sure they would agree- after all we are the famous four, aren't we?" Oliver said, trying to ease the tension. This fellow always had a soothing solution for every problem.

"Yeah, that's a better idea. I guess I can google it up," said Clara who was already opening her laptop-here you should know something about her, this girl is very good at handling her laptop and her fingers would type research papers faster than all the others in the institute. "Oh, look over here. Google says Professor Suzuki from Japan had a try before us but he failed- and oh see he tried the same way as we did, hey Henry and Oliver did you guys check it out from here-the new plan?"

"I said we took just ten percent from the source, the source was a research paper of some Japanese person," replied Henry.

"Then it must be this one but hey we followed the exact process. And I am hundred percent sure. Where did the ninety percent go then Dr. Collins?" Clara wanted to know.

"Ah we actually I was-ah talking about the hard work you know-we did-Oliver and I," stammered Henry.

"It's fine. Henry is always boasting. Let's just contact this person and know from him why did he really abandon this method- I mean what was wrong with it, was he facing the same problem as we did?" Said Emily, another problem-solver.

CHAPTER 5

Day thirtieth. And they were almost done. Almost ninety percent there. Dr. Suzuki was indeed a good man. He agreed to work with them. He was an intelligent man but it was only that he decided to take a shortcut method and it didn't really work. And it was actually a long time back when he tried the method. They didn't have much advanced equipment back then. The group decided to carry out the same experiments on an autoclave, quartz tubes or thick-walled borosilicate glass as suggested by the Japanese professor, which was now available to them and he was glad it was and more importantly such resourceful people were available here, who could make best use of these. He had left all his experiments and had actually gone to his ancestral

village to live with his family after his initial experiments failed to work. But now that there was a second option and a third one, his joy knew no bounds. The team ordered all pieces of equipment which took time to come. Everything was arranged. Full-scale experiments were going on.

"The day is not far when we would be able to create a portal to a second earth," said Clara copying the words of the reporter of the BBC News channel.

"I believe that's possible- and let's say that 'moment' is not far rather than that 'day'-it makes it better", commented Emily.

"Yeah, it's now possible and all credit goes to Dr. Suzuki", said Henry who had for the first time in life given all credit to someone else and not himself.

"Thank you so much. But fifty percent of this goes to you four. I was only the beginner. It's you all who restarted everything, without you all it was just a dream."

"People don't believe in parallel universe, they still refuse to believe that researchers have confirmed the existence of one, these people won't believe it

unless they see it with their eyes. Well, you would be shocked to know that in a survey conducted by our team, eighty percent of the people don't know what a parallel universe is exactly and half of the world thought it's just fiction, unaware of the fact that you all will soon be able create a portal to it. Hence, I want to conduct an event here in which you can just present your research work in front of the people, if you don't mind, Dr. Carter. You are a good speaker", said Mr. Mitchel. Emily was shocked at this. Mr. Mitchell had called her in the middle of their work for this reason. They were in Japan, trying their best to discover what the whole world couldn't and he had called her from over there to America just for this, seriously?

"But sir why me-you knew we were busy out there and had almost completed with our work-

But Mr. Mitchell interposed her, "I know it-all of it-but currently this is more important. The whole world should know how you are doing it and what exactly you are doing-otherwise they just won't care about it-won't care about your hard work. And I think the world must know who you are and what you have done so far, come on Emily dear I know

you for three years- you never want to show people that you are so good but I hope you understand I want to show them- I want to show them how my people of my institute are working-how far they have reached- and you being the most brilliant one, I want you to show it to the whole world, and yes I never knew you speak so well, Samuel told me. He said he had heard you speaking at events and that you should be the speaker this time too.

Oh, that grouch. Emily thought.

"I understand it sir but-

"No buts anymore. You are doing this."

Emily knew it very well. It was all Samuel's plan. He wanted to delay their success and himself wanted to discover the parallel universe first with his team and be honoured and credited and he knew Emily was the mastermind of their plan-if she could somehow be disturbed, the whole plan would probably fail and that's what he wanted. But he failed to realise that this time the mastermind was someone else. He was told that they went to Japan to meet some professor and he certainly had no idea that the team was now working on his plan.

CHAPTER 6

The day of the event. And the day of frustrations for Emily. While her whole team was out there burning the midnight oil, she just couldn't wear a smile on her face and deliver a simple speech on 'What is a Parallel Universe' which could simply be done by anyone else. There's no point of her being here and mugging up things and vomiting those in front of a bunch of "ignorant people" as Professor Mitchell called them. Emily believed she was never a good speaker and she didn't want to show off about her achievements or brag about their Project Second Earth which she wanted to keep secretive till they reached the climax stage. But it was Mr. Mitchell's request and Emily just couldn't reject it. It was for him that she is now here, in this reputable institute,

working with such wonderful people and discovering another universe. She can't even imagine how much Samuel must have brainwashed Mr. Mitchell. She is pretty sure the whole idea of conducting a grand event was his, not just the 'speaker' part.

A dimly lit central stage surrounded by the audience on all four sides awaited her. She walked up to the stage, brave as she was. Of course, giving a speech was as easy as ABC. But she doubted how much people would take her seriously. Her eyes caught her parents and little John sitting exactly in the middle where she wanted them to sit so that she can set her eyes on them and speak-she knew that even if no one listened to her boring scientific lecture, they were definitely going to, they had always been. Sitting on the top, she saw Samuel with an evil smile, looking straight at her. She shifted her eyes back to her family.

She began, "Good evening one and all, today we gather here to know about something-something we see in sci-fi movies or read in books-yes that something is a parallel universe. Let me first explain what it is. A parallel universe is a hypothetical

separate reality or world that co-exists alongside our own universe. In simple terms it's another world similar to ours which exists and we have proven its existence already. Well, the idea of parallel universes isn't new. Back in 1957, a young physicist named Hugh Everett came up with an idea called the Many-Worlds Interpretation. His thought was simple but mind-bending — every time something can happen in two ways in our quantum world, the universe splits. Both things actually happen, just in different universes. So when we measure a particle and see its spin pointing up, in another universe, that same particle is pointing down. Isn't it wonderful?

The speech went on for half an hour. While concluding, she talked about their Project Second Earth though she didn't want to and assured the people that the day is not far when they would be travelling between the two worlds. A big round of applause rang through the auditorium. Emily went down the stage and hurried to the greenroom, she didn't want to be surrounded by reporters-that's the worst part of it all-they would ask you hundreds of questions and won't leave you till you have satisfied them with long answers. She wanted to escape from there and fly back to Japan, to her hardworking

team, Team Second Earth. And that's when Mr. Mitchell came. He must have wanted to say her something. But she was in a hurry. She had to go there and check if everything is fine.

"Emily, your family wanted to-

"Sir, please tell them I'm going back to Japan. I have to see what's going on, how much is done. And please tell them not to worry, I'll be fine."

CHAPTER 7

Day fiftieth. And they were finally done-but not yet sure that their plan had really worked out. A hole was created. A black, dense, spooky hole, looked like something creepy -was it really? No, definitely it wasn't. However much dark the hole looks, it's the key to everyone's success. It will be recorded in history-everything the famous four did or maybe, to be more accurate the famous five did for this time Dr. Suzuki too was there, the real mastermind. The portal was created at fifty -seven minutes past six in the morning of twenty fifth February in the year 2030 at the laboratory of National Japanese Research Institute, Tokyo (the exact time being recorded by Emily who was the happiest of them all). For others it was their dream come true, but for her

it was more than that. It was hers as well her dear grandma's dream come true. I wish grandma was here today, she thought. Thank you, grandma. Without you I could never have been a part of this wonderful achievement. All my thanks goes to you.

"Finally, researchers have created everyone's dream portal to the parallel universe-turned the fiction to reality. Now, it is to be seen-will the portal work?"

These were the headlines on the newspapers. Every news channel was broadcasting this news. This had become the biggest breaking news worldwide. Emily's phone was popping with messages and phone calls from her friends, relatives and well-wishers and all unknown people in the world who had become her and her Team Second Earth's fans. Even those friends of hers who had stopped replying to her messages were dying to talk with her.

"Congrats", "Congoooo", "I knew you could do it", "Proud of youuu" and all such messages kept popping for the next few days. Emily was happy, and so was her whole family.

"There's nothing to be so happy as of yet. We don't know if it's going to even work or not. We have to check if it does", she said to her family when her parents came to Japan and sat down on the sofa of a room at the 'SUGOI HOTEL' where her family was staying.

"I don't know anything about it. You have done a lot and I am proud of you sweetheart and you just need not do anything else-

Emily interjected, "Mom seriously? We are the ones who made it and we are the ones who are going to check it, if I am not wrong. And we had already decided it that I am going to go-now you just can't-

"Exactly when did we decide?" Mrs. Carter wanted to know.

"We never did actually", Mr. Carter said, supporting Mrs. Carter

"We did. I am going to go with Em", John chipped in.

"John, please don't interfere in this. It's a serious discussion going on", warned Mrs. Carter and John sadly sat down.

"Oh please, no discussion anymore. I am an adult and I know what to do and what to not and you all just can't force me. Please don't. I am just one step behind visualizing grandma's dream and I just can't let it go."

"But it's a question of your life. We can't lose you Em and you know it very well. Being an adult doesn't mean that you are going to risk your life and we are going to sit with finger on our lips."

"But mom-

"No buts anymore. Tomorrow, your dad and I would talk with Mr. Mitchell about it"

CHAPTER 8

The door opened and Mr. Robert Mitchell came out. He too was staying in the same hotel. In fact, all the researchers' families were staying here. They were here to bid farewell to their children before they leave for their journey. Busy as he was, he didn't look like in a mood to talk-obviously he was on cloud nine, constantly being interviewed by reporters all around the world-regarded as the head of the institute people of which had made such a remarkable discovery-but all that has certainly exhausted him -yet he wanted more of it. There were more reporters waiting outside to have a word with him but he was urgently called by Anabel Carter and Thomas Carter, parents of Dr. Emily Carter.

"Good evening sir, we are-

"Sorry, can you please say what's the matter? Actually, I am quite busy", said Mr. Mitchell, trying to keep his temper cool. He was actually a soft-hearted man or maybe as Emily's parents knew him to be.

"Yeah, we can understand that", said Mrs. Carter and she went on, "Mr Mitchell, we wanted to thank you for your guidance without which our daughter wouldn't have been able to achieve so much in her life. But there's one request. Please don't send her to the parallel universe- I know there surely are people much more skilled and experienced than Emily and they can handle it better than her, so-

"Ah, madam, I am sorry to say but there's hardly people in the institute who are better than your daughter-I have always praised her for her astuteness-she deserves it, but yeah for the time being, she's not being sent there for her acuity or her brains-she's being sent there because she's a part of this project, and she's the one who wanted to go. We never force or never order anyone here. But, we request you not to intervene in this-for I can understand her desire

to go and discover something which she invented and she has the right to do it so, I believe I could explain myself?"

"Everything is fine-but what if she doesn't return?" This was Mr. Carter's turn to say in the shortest possible way he could, for none of the sides had enough time to explain things.

"She would-and I assure you that."

"Would there be anything written in the agreement that you are guaranteeing my daughter's life?" Mrs. Carter wanted to know.

"I am sorry but what? There's no agreement. It's not a simple contest or an event where your daughter has been selected and we are ought to "guarantee" her life. It's kind of a reality stunt show where players have to take the responsibility of their own lives", said Mr. Mitchell, his tone still gentle but words were rude. "It's another universe. Anything, anytime can happen over there and we might just be clueless about it", he concluded.

"How are we supposed to send our children over there? As parents, it is hard." Mrs. Carter continued to argue, despite being well-aware of the fact that it

was her own daughter who wanted to go-her own daughter who constantly contended with her on this.

"How am I supposed to tell that? I am sorry I can understand your feelings. Have a talk with Dr. Carter. If she doesn't want to go, then it's fine, but we'll really regret her not going. And if she went, I was ninety percent sure that everything would be fine over there. And I perfectly understand how does it feel when your children don't listen to you, for I have lost a daughter for this same stubbornness-ah fine I must go now."

CHAPTER 9

"Finally, researchers on the run. The day has arrived and they are about to jump into this portal and veer off to the unknown world on the other side."

Reporters, as usual had gathered on the spot. It was fifteenth of March, year 2030. The remarkable day in history when the world discovered their parallel universe-or rather attempted to discover a parallel universe. Apart from reporters, there were too many common people crowding the laboratory-this included Emily and her parents (who were actually pissed off at her and were in no mood to leave her alone), Oliver and his mother, a short, sweet lady who was busy hugging him 'for one last

time' which had certainly become the fiftieth time or something, Clara with her parents and her elder sister who were constantly explaining her something and she was just nodding her head in return. Henry was still not there, as usual. The laboratory could not accommodate more than fifty people on an average, more than fifty percent of which was now filled with reporters, so other family members had to wait outside after meeting their heroes or heroines once. Dr. Suzuki was there but he was not accompanying them because he had grown too old and Mr. Mitchel didn't want to send more than four people. And Samuel was present too. Smiling. Shaking hands with everyone. He wasn't supposed to come, but he did. Maybe he had changed himself finally. Learnt to share the happiness of others' achievements because being a part of the institute makes him a part of this huge discovery too.

The time had arrived. Henry, too had managed to come at the last moment, wearing his favourite 'Pokemon' oversized shirt, and he didn't mind people eyeing him anymore-wasn't he supposed to look serious today? Anyways, everyone was there and there was no point wasting more time over here. The sooner, the better. Families waved them goodbyes

and bade them farewell, mixed with spontaneous feelings of cheerfulness, wistfulness, anxiety all at once. Emily's mom hugged her tightly for one last time, saying "Take care my dear." Emily was surprised at her mom crying-she had never seen her crying so much in her life. "Mom don't make a fuss here. I am going to come back soon-try my best as I always have done- and have cappuccino with you all as I always say and just tell John that I am never going to ever talk to him again", said Emily and hugged her mom and dad for one last time. John had not come because her sister wasn't going to take her to that 'unknown uni' as he called it- and Emily was certainly not going to forgive him for that. She knew she's going to return home, she has to. But still she wanted to see her brother before she jumps into that spooky portal.

The hole was small, unwelcoming, scary but the famous four didn't fear anything now-they were ready to overcome anything and everything.

CHAPTER 10

The four jumped in-no not in the way we see in sci-fi movies-it was quite technical or you may say 'scientific'. It was kind of a 'long, narrow passage which linked the two universes' as Clara said to the reporters on being asked to describe their wormhole. Actually, even the makers don't know what it is really and would it even work or not. It's kind of a dark tunnel which was going on and on and on spirally-anyone could have got in and walked through it-but the question is will it lead them somewhere? Or would they just return back saying that they didn't find any parallel universe. Oh no please not this. Not after all the hard work.

"We've been walking for nearly twenty minutes I suppose", said Henry, the most impatient one.

"We had made it like this if you remember, it's not magical that we'll jump in and in the next moment land in some unknown world, it will take some time, actually the distance between our universe and the second nearest universe is five light years which makes it nearly 47.3 trillion kilometres and it's not humanly possible to cover it by walking so we decided to take a different path, to compress the distance and doing lot of calculations we ended up making a small loophole which directly could lead us to the parallel universe in the shortest possible time", said Emily at one go.

"You're right. Otherwise, it would have seriously taken 1.08 billion years for a man to walk and reach parallel universe or about six million years to reach there by a commercial jet so anyway the man would have to die and visit as a ghost", said Clara, almost laughing at the thought of it.

"And this is the exact reason why professors before us abandoned their plans to reach the other universe and just termed it as 'impossible' but we made it possible solely because we had most of the

equipment right out here and brains as well to handle them in the best possible way", claimed Oliver with a smile on his lips.

"Resourcefulness as I call it", said Emily. And suddenly it happened. Emily was the first to feel it. Was she shaking or was the portal shaking? She looked around- thinking it was her mistake. No, everything was fine-at place. But wait, what did she hear then-or rather feel? A slight jerk. And then her eyeballs rolled up- The tunnel was compressing all of a sudden-the roof-it was-was it coming down? What do you call it-maybe squeezing them? Oh no oh no. What was happening?

"Hey, look up-wh- what's happening why are the upper walls leaning down on us?" Emily called out. There was no time to think, no time to talk. "Wh-what's happening?" Clara stuttered. "Start digging in from the bottom, fast, anyone bought any tools?" Emily suggested or rather ordered. Henry had bought a sledgehammer-couldn't he get anything better? But it was the only weapon now. "Come on break in", Clara shouted. Henry tried to smash the glass floor. And bang. Again bang. No. "It's not breaking", said Henry who was sweating. Everyone

was sweating. The upper walls were coming down-strange sight but it was happening and nobody knew why-no time to think why. “Fast, break the glass, break it fast”, Clara said. “Are there more sledgehammers?” Oliver asked, his tone quavering and he shaking. “Yes th-there are”, said a breathless Henry, unable to break the glass which was made of the world’s hardest materials-only for their safety so that they just won’t fall down-and now it had turned against them- obviously who would think that the ceiling might just fall on them or rather come closer to the floor-kind of sink all of a sudden. All four of them started hitting the glass floor, with all the energy in their muscles, trembling, sweating, looking up……

“Oh, it’s done”, said Oliver finally, “There’s a crack”. Just in time. The ceiling was just about to hit them. God. “What are-are we-will we just fall-where will we go?” Henry stammered. “I don’t know-but c-currently to save ourselves from breaking our heads, hop in, quick”, said Emily.

And so, they did, falling into a world of unknown darkness-only destiny knew where will they end up in-if there was ever an end to it.

CHAPTER 11

And breathe. Air. Open space. Had they made it through? Where were they?

"Did we lose consciousness while coming?" Emily said, rubbing her eyes as if just woken up from a long sleep.

"I too can't get it, did we take an eternity to come here? Where are we actually? Is everyone here?" Asked Clara, visibly pale and tired. The journey must have taken them a long time.

Oliver and Henry were there too-but they were unconscious or were they asleep? "Hey wake up!" Clara threw her backpacks over their faces. They woke up with a jolt, but looked tired, weak, hungry-

what was the matter with them all? They had a good dinner while leaving from home-it must have been the journey-but exactly how much time did it take?

"Where are we-are we alive?" Henry asked, thanking God that they were.

"Are we-are we in-

And no one had to complete it for Oliver for they all knew they were somewhere-and for the time being it was the best thing-to be alive and to end up somewhere-not having to go back to their home unsuccessful or not having to go up in heaven or hell-thank God-thank you so much.

They had landed in some forest. Beautiful, enchanting one-the one we see in fairy tales and the one exactly opposite to ours. Birds chirping, cuckoo singing, meaning its spring and they left their home universe in spring, meaning most probably time hasn't changed. Double thank God for that.

"How do you say it's the same spring we started our journey? It could have been a spring a hundred years later?" Said Clara, walking through the forest.

"No, but do you think forests would look so good a hundred years later? They probably won't owing to rampant deforestation and climate change and all?" Said Emily, who tried to get up-but couldn't.

"Logical", Oliver commented, helping Emily to get up.

"Plus it's the parallel universe where there's everything going to be contradictory-opposite to what is there in our home universe. Forests in our home universe are not in so good condition as we can see them here." said Henry who continued, "Well I am hungry I guess we should have some food first" and was about to reach for his bag and take out the packet of chips he was sure he didn't forget to bring when he sees that his bag is empty. Everything is gone. What was going on? Others checked their bags. Oh, same thing. Theirs was empty too. Seriously?

"That means everything got destroyed as we were travelling between time and space?" Clara sighed.

"Then how are our bags still in a perfect condition?" Said Oliver.

"Probably they didn't get the time to burn up-we reached before that", said Henry.

Emily was confounded. "No, it's impossible. And I am quite sure. Think how can the contents burn up first-without the bag getting-

"Probably because it's the parallel universe where cause and effect are fundamentally flipped?" Henry proposed-from when did he get brainier than Emily? Certainly, he was a smart fellow and he of course had to be otherwise he just couldn't have been a part of Team Second Earth or a researcher in one of the top research institutes of the world-but now he was countering Emily, the nerd-was it too an effect of the parallel universe-no it can't be because there's a second Henry out there too, who's actually supposed to contradict Earthian Henry.

"Well, let's leave it. You got the remote-right? Don't tell me that's gone too", said Emily, suddenly realising the most important thing just can't go missing-no it cannot be like it happens in every adventurous story where the key to return home gets

vanished-what the adventurers fear the most-it's a question of life and death-they just can't return without it.

"It was supposed to be with me", said Clara who searched her pocket and then she took it out. "Yes, it's there, luckily", said Clara and gave a sigh of relief. So did the others. "I had kept it in my pocket and not in my bag, I am so glad I did it. I remember mom and Mr. Mitchell telling me to keep the remote in by bag so that it doesn't get lost", said Clara.

"Well thank God our pockets didn't incinerate, thank God we didn't burn down into ashes. We reached just in time", said Oliver.

"So remote there, everything there except food, let's go and explore this universe, have some food and have fun-and be free because the remote is there so everything is absolutely fine." Said Henry.

But was it really?

CHAPTER 12

The world outside was so similar-except they didn't know where they were-in which corner of the world, but seems like they were in their home universe. Also, world looked more technologized. Industries and factories filled the area. All men and women walking in business attire. Some were wearing white overcoats- oh they were doctors. No common man. Everyone working. Hustle and bustle all around. Does that mean they just got transported to some technologized and urbanized country but were still there in their home universe? Well that still would mean a discovery-being able to transport to a different country through a portal-but not the one the world there awaits-not the one the Team Second Earth awaits.

Oliver was the first to point it out, “Are we in some other country or what? I don’t think so it’s the para-

“Look”, said Emily, pointing her thin, bony finger at a shop-did it look like a shop? It had occupied almost whole of the land area they were standing on. Such a big shop, not the one they see in home universe usually on streets. The shop had a neon signboard saying “STEEWS”. Yes STEEWS. Wait what did that mean?

“Is that some shop selling stew-I am hungry, let’s go over there”, said a restless Henry- could he just stop thinking about food now, please?

“No, it’s not stew- it’s not a way you name a shop”, said Emily.

Oh, she wanted them to notice the name, not the shop. Henry, the foodie was disappointed.

“Maybe to be eye-catchy, you know shops do that. Don’t we have that cake shop which says ‘Soulfullyyy Sweettt’- I thought it was some sort of typo they did- then realised the owner did it just for making it enticing”, said Clara.

They went over there-not for Henry-but to see who was right-Clara or Emily?

The shop was beaming with Scotchmallows, Bordeaux truffles, all sorts of candies and hot-fudge sundaes-oh these were anything but stew.

"My favourites-let's buy them", began Henry but then on seeing the whole group eyeing him he just changed the topic, "I mean oh these are sweets, these aren't stew really."

"Let's ask the shopkeeper," said Emily but there wasn't anyone in the shop. The shop was full of all sorts of sweets without a shopkeeper.

"Hey look at this truffle, aren't the toppings supposed to be on top?" Said Clara pointing out to a chocolaty truffle, which was indescribable, because it was anything but a truffle-was it standing on the cherry toppings? How was it balancing itself?

"Umm and those bluish-pinkish candies over there-there's the same thing with those also-toppings upside down, huh?" Said Emily, who, too was confused.

And then suddenly a man emerged from the small door, short-heighted, with a round, plump face and chestnut eyes.

"Olleh! Tahw od ouy deen?" The man suddenly blabbered something which went on top of everyone's head. Wait what was he speaking? What language was this?

Emily began, "Sir, we are from America, if you would kindly speak in English-

"Huh, tahw era ouy gniyas?" The man looked at them, glinting suspiciously as if they had come from a different planet-wait didn't this is what they think they would ever come across-a different language, a different world, a different universe?

And then Emily's eyes went on the calendar. RAEY 0302-is this a year? Emily thought. But wait-wasn't it supposed to be like this-opposite?

She took out her notebook, as fast as she could and nudged Clara and handed it over to her, and at that same instant, Clara understood what Emily wanted her to do. "Olleh, olleh!" Emily said, remembering the only word the shopkeeper spoke. She just had to make the shopkeeper talk and Clara

would write it down. They would study it later on and find out exactly what language was he using.

"Olleh olleh", the shopkeeper said and then went on. Clara wrote fast, she had always been the fastest writer and the fastest typist of the institute. Henry and Oliver leaned over to see.

The shopkeeper stopped blabbering and his face was growing red-he was losing his temper. Sensing that, Emily waved at him -said "Good bye" although the man didn't change his expression and the four rushed off.

They entered into a coffee shop as it seemed from outside so that no one disturbs them. "ÉFAC ETTAL" was written on a neon signboard, glowing brightly- it was daylight but still the signboard was illuminated.

"So, you see here, we say "HELLO" they say "OLLEH", isn't it exactly opposite?" Emily said, first one to understand.

"That means we are in the parallel universe, right?" Clara said with a mild triumph.

"Yes, and that too means we are going to face super difficulty talking with it's inhabitants", claimed Henry.

"And that's why "STEEWS" instead of "SWEETS" and "ÉFAC ETTAL" instead of "CAFÉ LATTE", said Oliver finally after scribbling so much in his notebook.

"And that's why RAEY 0302 instead of YEAR 2030", said Emily, who was the only one to spot the calendar, she supposed. "That means time hasn't changed. Thank God it hasn't. Oh, here comes the waitress."

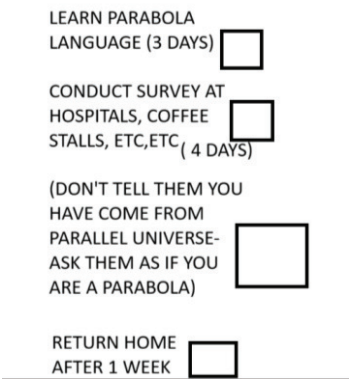
"Four black coffee please", said Clara, and the waitress shook a little. Clara, realising what she said just now, took back her words, and said, "r-u-o-f k-c-a-l-b e-e-f-f-o-c", taking more than one minute to slowly think and pronounce each word, omitting the 'please' in the end. The waitress looked upset. Without saying anything, she went away. Why did she look upset? Emily thought. Was it for the language? But, English wasn't supposed to be a foreign language. For them, it was their own language just laterally inverted. Well, stop your

thoughts, Emily. Stop overthinking. Stop thinking over reactions now.

The coffee arrived. Meanwhile, the four had planned out everything they needed for their survey and then going back home as soon as possible for they just can't speak the parabola's language anymore (parabola here, inhabitants of parallel universe, termed by Clara, a bit of a wordsmith, you know, always coining terms.)

CHAPTER 13

TO-DO LIST



"So, here's our to-do list", said Emily, handing it over to the others. There was just one list so it took the three of them three minutes to go through it.

"Eh-seven days! It's a joke or what? Where are we going to stay and what are we going to eat? All our food is destroyed!" Said Henry, who was the first to complain.

"I just can't learn parabola language, especially when there's no teacher. Do you know anyone who teaches it?" Asked Clara in a rather satirical way.

Oliver, the quiet one said "Justify your points, Emily."

"Yeah so", Emily took a deep breath, as if beginning a speech, "Friends, we have come here for the first time ever in life and we are the first Earthians to arrive here, if I am not wrong. Hurrying would be of no use. We might not ever come back here again. Remember Mr. Mitchel's words, we need to conduct a survey here as if we are just from the welfare department, know how parabolas live here, record their experiences and bring back the proof- otherwise the world is not going to believe us. If we go back to our own world right now, don't you think Earthians would just think we were inside the tunnel and just trying to fool them? We have to make them believe we visited the universe that co-exists parallel to our universe. And as far as the language is

concerned, it's nothing new. It's just the opposite of what we know. We don't need a teacher. We just need some practice. So that we don't rouse anyone's suspicion, we just need to practise it among ourselves and then present ourselves in front of them. And we can't mention we are from the other universe, because its worthless, no one's going to believe us for sure, they are actually going to suspect us if we claim ourselves from the other world-they might think that we are mad. And as far as our staying is concerned, we can ask someone if we can stay in their home for a week -and remember all in parabola language-and we'll say we are student researchers who have come here for some research work-then they are definitely going to allow us to stay-and taking a home on rent will be risky since we do not have parabola's currency, so now I think I can justify myself?"

Emily took another deep breath.

"Yeah, ok fine but where do we find a home now? See there, maybe that yellowish house, over there?" Said Henry, pointing his finger to the last house on the street they were present. Actually, it was the only "house" there or what they can call as a

typical house in which people usually live in their home universe. Rest, all others are fifty-storeyed buildings or huge industries. Everyone nodded their heads. There was no other option. This house was the closest one to the beautiful, enchanting forest where they landed and where they believed the portal was still present.

They walked up till they arrived at the end of the street. Emily knocked first. No answer. Then Clara pressed the doorbell. EMOCLEW OT NOSTAW'S ESOUH. This was written on a nameplate hanging on the door. WELCOME TO WATSON'S HOUSE. Emily read it aloud. She was learning parabola's language very well now. The door opened after the doorbell tune ended. A willow-thin woman with hazel eyes and ash-blonde hair came out.

(HENCEFORTH, ALL COMMUNICATIONS WILL BE DONE IN PARABOLA LANGUAGE BUT FOR THE EASE OF THE READER, THESE WILL BE TRANSCRIBED IN ENGLISH)

"Hello, we are a group of student researchers from Discovery Institute of Scientific Research. We came here for some research purpose and we are

supposed to conduct a survey here in this locality and we were in search of a shelter. It would be very kind of you if you allow us to stay in your home for a week", Emily said it with a sweet smile on her face, seeing her notebook most of the times where she has written these lines in parabola language, but of course not letting the listener understand she was doing so.

"Ok-um I don't have any problem. It's fine", said the parabola and she went quite slow, making it easier for Emily to grasp each word. For others, it was certainly Greek to them.

And so things started to go smoothly from then on. The house was quite big from inside though it didn't seem so from outside. There were a total of ten rooms inside the house. All were empty actually. Quite shocking. Ten rooms for one person. Maybe that was the way everyone lived here, in parallel universe. They were underpopulated and Earthians were overpopulated. Quite fine.

Night time. The four were called for dinner. By that time, they had practised a lot. And now everyone could speak parabola language quite fine except Henry. He still needed some practice. They

were given four separate rooms to live in, but of course they were practising inside the same room for maybe four or five hours. And they were not aware of anyone's arrival.

When they sat down at the dinner table, Emily noticed that along with the woman who allowed them to stay at their home, there was another lady. She was the waitress, the same one to whom Clara had spoken accidentally in English. Oh so this was her house. Well. Fine enough.

At the table, the woman introduced herself, "I am Susie Watson, you can call me Susie." And the waitress too introduced herself but her tone was quite strained, "I am Margaret Watson, oh I met you all today in the café right?"

"Yeah, you work over there?" Emily asked. She was the one who talked the most. No one was quite comfortable among the four of them to talk in parabola language, in case they made a mistake.

"Yes."

"Oh."

"And what do you do, Susie?"

"I work at the café too. But I didn't go there today as I was having a terrible headache", said Susie.

"What are you guys researching about?" This was Susie's turn to ask.

"We-uh-are-geographical researchers-we-uh-are visiting different countries, surveying people over there, knowing about the climate, their difficulties and various other things related to human habitations", said Emily going extremely slow trying to flip each word coming in her mind and trying her best to avoid bigger words as much as possible. She knew she could be asked this question any time, so she had quite prepared the answer.

One thing struck Emily. The two Watsons took a long time to think about what she said every time. When Emily answered a question, the Watsons shook their head and asked the next question after a long pause. Probably they were just thinking if they had given shelter to right people-if those four of them were safe to be kept-after all they were strangers to the Watsons. Or maybe it was the cause and effect flipping law in parallel universe. Earthians usually talk a lot and go very fast, while communicating, maybe parabolas went slow.

CHAPTER 14

They didn't require three days for learning the language or rather practising it. They had already gained perfection in two days. Day one of survey went quite well. They surveyed the Watsons, to start with. Then they went off to survey some more parabolas. Their goal was to survey at least five people each. In that way they could survey about twenty people. If they could continue it for four days, according to Emily's to-do list, it would be about hundred people. That's a good count. And they didn't want to survey people in a common area. They want to go farther off. The Watsons had two cars at their home. Emily and Clara went off with Susie in her car. Oliver and Henry went off with Margaret in her car. The two cars belonged to two of

them. Both were sisters perhaps, must be. Emily wanted to know more about them, so was Clara. But Oliver said it would be better not to interact much. Less chances of rousing suspicion and less chances of making mistakes.

Their survey included a total of fifteen questions, of which most of them were common. Four of them actually made a different set of questions as they needed more variations and more answers.

1. Tell us your name and where you live.
2. How is the general climate over here?
3. What is your mother tongue?
4. How many people live at your home? Their names? Their professions?
5. If you don't mind, can you give us a home tour?
6. Tell us more about your country.
7. What is your profession?
8. What do you like to do?
9. (If the person has kids at home)- How many kids do you have and what are their names?
10. Which school do your kids go to?
11. How is the education system here?

12. How is the medical system here?
13. How is the technical system here?
14. How does your country try to protect the environment?
15. What is the population of your country?

This was Emily's set of questions. Clara's, Henry's and Oliver's were a bit different but all of them included most of these questions. The survey was conducted orally. The surveyors wrote them down in English (of course, hiding it from the parabolas) to discuss later on with each other.

EMILY'S SURVEY WITH DIYA GHOSH (AN INDIAN RESIDING IN US)

EMILY: Tell us your name and where you live.

DIYA: I am Diya Ghosh, an Indian residing here in US.

EMILY: How is the general climate over here?

DIYA: It's extremely hot during the days and extremely cold at nights. (POINT TO BE NOTED- IN HOME UNIVERSE, US LIES IN TEMPERATE ZONE WHERE THERE'S A MODERATE TEMPERATURE. BUT HERE, IT IS EXTREME.)

EMILY: What is your mother tongue?

DIYA: HSILGNE (ENGLISH)

EMILY: How many people live at your home? Their names? Their professions?

DIYA: Six in all. My grandparents, Arjun Ghosh, a neurosurgeon and Ankita Ghosh, a psychiatrist. My parents, Ankit Ghosh who is a general physician, my mother Maria Hood, she's an oncologist and my fifteen-year old sister, Maya, she's a Science student. (POINT TO BE NOTED, PEOPLE VALUE SCIENCE HERE, ESPECIALLY MEDICAL SCIENCE. A FAMILY WITH FOUR DOCTORS.)

EMILY: If you don't mind, can you give us a home tour.

DIYA: Yes sure. (She then did a home tour. The house was so big. Thirty bedrooms, oh my god. From outside it did look big but Emily didn't imagine it to be so big from inside. All rooms were golden-coloured. It was pure gold actually. Luxurious! It was more than a seven-star hotel. People were so rich over here. No beggars on the streets too. Thirty bedrooms for

a house of six people and ten rooms for two people at Watson's house. Fine. That means five rooms for one person if they follow unitary method. That's too much actually.)

EMILY: Tell us more about your country.

DIYA:US is good in everything I believe. There are people from every tradition, not just Indians. And US welcomes everyone wholeheartedly. People are happy all the time over here. That's all. (POINT TO BE NOTED- PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS HAPPY HERE WHEREAS PEOPLE IN HOME UNIVERSE ARE NOT ALWAYS HAPPY. THERE ARE SOME THINGS CALLED "SORROWS" AND "SADNESS". WAS THERE ANTYHING LIKE THIS HERE OR WERE PEOPLE REALLY HAPPY ALL THE TIME?)

EMILY: What is your profession?

DIYA: I am a doctor, a pulmonologist (POINT TO BE NOTED- PROFESSIONS ARE HEREDITARY OVER HERE, WHICH ARE NOT SO IN HOME UNIVERSE. FAMILY FULL OF DOCTORS. FIVE DOCTORS IN ALL.)

EMILY: What do you like to do?

DIYA: Work. I mean what do you mean by that? We all love our work a lot. We don't do anything except that. I hope you do that too. Everyone does that only. Everyone likes that only. (POINT TO BE NOTED-IN HOME UNIVERSE, PEOPLE BALANCE WORK LIFE AND CO-CURRICULARS ACTIVITIES. HERE THEY DON'T. THERE'S NOTHING CALLED HOBBIES OR PASSIONS. WORLD HERE IS SO EMOTIONLESS, SO WORKAHOLIC)

EMILY: How many kids do you have and what are their names?

DIYA: I am not married yet. I guess I am not supposed to. We don't marry before thirty years. (POINT TO BE NOTED: MARRIEAGABLE AGE-30 HERE, NOT 18)

EMILY: You become adult at?

DIYA: Why thirty years?(POINT TO BE NOTED- IN HOME UNIVERSE, PEOPLE BECOME ADULT AT 18 YEARS OF AGE BUT HERE ITS 30. OH MY GOD.)

EMILY: And you vote at thirty, right?

DIYA: No, from ten. We have voting rights here in US. But most countries have monarchy. (POINT TO BE NOTED-VOTING AGE IN MOST COUNTRIES 18 AND ABOVE. HERE IT'S 10. IN HOME UNIVERSE, MOST COUNTRIES ARE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, HERE ITS MONARCHY MOSTLY, SHOCKING)

EMILY: Which school does your sister go to?

DIYA: No special school. It's a generalised school where all kids go. Actually, it's all online. Nobody goes anywhere. (POINT TO BE NOTED-NO OFFLINE SCHOOLS, WORLD IS SO TECHNOLOGISED)

EMILY: How is the education system here?

DIYA: It's just like all other countries. Online education. Virtual classes start from morning and go on till evening. There is a two-hour class for each subject and there's half an hour's gap between. It goes on from six in the morning till six in the evening. Then there's homework and all which goes on till ten o' clock and then students go to bed. Actually, ten is the normal time for everyone to hit the bed. And people study those subjects which their

parents have studied-its hereditary here-you have no choice and I am truly against it-there's only a handful of people who are against it. There are two subjects actually- artificial intelligence and medical science and then there are broader divisions. There is our mother tongue taught to us too but that's just for primary stage. After fifteen years of age, you are into your career completely. By thirty, whichever profession you are, you must be properly established, otherwise you go to jail. (POINT TO BE NOTED- NO CHOICE OF EDUCATION)

EMILY: What? Jail?

DIYA: Yes, as if you don't know? It's followed everywhere in the world I suppose. If people don't do any work, they go to jail. I mean if they are foolish, unsmart and unintellectual, then they are definitely criminals.

EMILY: Ok, so that's the crime system here? What is the case for theft or murder?

DIYA: That hardly happens here. Everyone is rich enough. Who will rob other's property? If anyone is unintellectual, they do. They go to jail then. Anyways they go to jail when police finds out

they do no work. For example, students who are poor in studies or those who have the potential but don't use their brains much, go to juvenile jail. And if a person feeds on their parents' money, then that's a huge crime and police would know it because they conduct a survey very often. Home surveys and everything. They are quite regular. (EXACTLY OPPOSITE TO OUR UNIVERSE WHERE PEOPLE GO TO JAIL FOR THEFT OR MURDER)

EMILY: What is the life expectancy here?

DIYA: Hundred years for a normal person. But people may live up to one hundred and fifty years or up. (YEAH, QUITE LOGICAL WITH MEDICAL SYSTEM SO ADVANCED AND SO MANY DOCTORS IN EACH FAMILY)

EMILY: How is the medical system here?

DIYA: Quite advanced. There are AI doctors and human doctors, working hand-in-hand. Today, there's a cure for every disease. (THAT'S WHY PEOPLE ARE SO HAPPY HERE. POINT TO BE NOTED- WE LIVE IN 2030 BUT STILL WE ARE NOT SO ADVANCED LIKE THEM. WE ARE

ADVANCED COMPARED TO 2020 LEVEL BUT WE HAVE DESTROYED OUR ENVIRONMENT IN THE PROCESS. THEY HAVEN'T. PERFECT BALANCE)

EMILY: How is the technical system here?

DIYA: Quite advanced. Nothing new. You can see it. Everything is excellent. Everything is so comfortable. We have flying cars here, yes. (FLYING CARS? BUT MARAGARET'S AND SUSIE'S ARE NORMAL CARS?)

EMILY: No normal cars here?

DIYA: Yes, there are. The old-fashioned ones. People who don't have good intellectual brains and don't want to go to jail but want to work hard in some other way and earn their living by working in cafes and as assistant workers in different sectors, their salary is quite low. For them, old fashioned cars are affordable. (OH THAT MEANS MARGARET AND SUSIE ARE "FOOLISH" AND "UNSMART" ACCORDING TO THE PARABOLAS. ANOTHER SHOCK. IF THE POLICE FINDS OUT WE FOUR DON'T EARN MONEY AND CAN'T SHOW PROOF THAT WE ARE

STUDENTS THEN CERTAINLY WE'LL BE GOING TO JAIL)

EMILY: How does your country try to protect the environment?

DIYA: Why, we give everything to the environment. To Mother Nature. Because she has given so much to us in the past. We worship her. She's our Goddess. (POINT TO BE NOTED- WE WORSHIPPED MOTHER NATURE IN THE PAST. THEY DO IT EVEN IN THE PRESENT.)

EMILY: Do you use fossil fuels in industries? How do you keep your environment so clean?

DIYA: Yes, we use them. They are renewable and they are more than sufficient for us. Modern agricultural practices. They use fertilizers and pesticides that don't cause harm to Mother Nature. (POINT TO BE NOTED-IN HOME UNIVERSE, FOSSIL FUEL IS NON-RENEWABLE AND MODERN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES ARE HARMFUL TO THE ENVIRONMENT. THESE PROBLEMS ARE NOT THERE IN THIS UNIVERSE OBVIOUSLY BECAUSE THEY

HAVE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES AND BRIGHTER MINDS)

EMILY: And what is the population of your country?

DIYA: One thousand. Not more than that. (POINT TO BE NOTED- BIGGEST SHOCK. PARALLEL UNIVERSE IS UNDERPOPULATED. THERE ARE MORE RESOURCES AND LESS PEOPLE. THAT EXPLAINS WHY PEOPLE ARE NEVER SAD HERE. PARALLEL UNIVERSE IS THEREFORE A HEAVEN. A HAPPY HEAVEN)

EMILY: And lastly, do you have the caste system in practice? (Not a part of survey, but Emily wanted to know it)

DIYA: Yes, of course. We have democracy here but we still have the caste system. In US, it's not so strict after all. There are three groups of people in all. Upper classes who are doctors and engineers, middle classes who are businessmen and lower classes, the unintellectual and unsmart ones, who work in cafeterias or as assistant workers. In countries where monarchy persists, caste system is much strict, depending on various things. There are

quite severe punishments for people over there. And those who go to jail fall in the lower caste only, except that they are stubborn and won't do any work. (POINT TO BE NOTED: CASTE SYSTEM IS HERE. NO CASTE SYSTEM IN HOME UNIVERSE.WOW.)

EMILY: You go to jail for how much time?

DIYA: Why, lifetime imprisonment? Unless the prisoner wants to change himself or do some work to earn money, he will stay in the prison. Punishments are not so severe here in US. US people are quite welcoming. They don't punish prisoners much.

EMILY: Fine. Thank you for your time.

CHAPTER 15

"I am tired", said Clara rolling on the bed. Oliver and Henry sat down on the floors, cross-legged, sleepy, somewhat seemed to be burdened with a lot of work by Emily.

"I know, but that's all so amazing. You all are not considering the fun", said Emily trying to lift their spirits.

"Spending days speaking parabola language, conducting surveys and spending nights discussing over them. Life has become so boring here. More than that, it's all so tiring. I have almost no energy left in my body and I am seriously serious", said Henry.

Oliver, the quiet one, also did not refrain from complaining, "I know it's all very interesting but the short period of time and the huge load of work...."

Emily looked away, scribbled something in her notebook, probably corrected something and then looked back. "Didn't we tackle the same work load before also? We are astrophysicists and we are quite familiar with this. It's nothing new, is it?"

"I want to go back home, I just can't wait for the moment we will return and people will rush toward us, cheering, clicking photos. And the day we will be honoured for our discovery...." Said Clara and started to dream. She's always been a dreamer. And dreamers do fulfil their dreams.

Five minutes past three o' clock. The night was so dark here. Maybe darker than home universe. Four of them were fast asleep in their own bedrooms. Of course, had to be. Something woke Emily up. Was it the dead silence outside? Silence too has a noise. But it didn't, here in parallel universe. The whole town was silent, dark. No lights anywhere. Opposite to the scene of US streets. Emily needed some water. She was thirsty. The Watsons had provided each one of their guests with a water

bottle, which was so unique, the cap was at the bottom and water came out from the bottom, not from the top. But the four of them were habituated now. Emily moved her hand, searching for the bottle on the bedside table. The bottle was empty. Fine, she would just go to the grand living room and take one bottle from there. Slowly, rubbing her eyes, she got out of her bed, opened the door which creaked a bit. Then she tiptoed up to the grand living room where ten bottles full of water were kept. Parabolas are so organised, she thought. Always have more than one solution ready for a problem. And then, she heard a noise. The room was dark, of course she didn't switch on the lights, partly because she didn't want to wake anyone up and partly because she didn't know where the lights were. There were actually more than twenty switchboards over here. Then, she looked back. One room was still shining brightly, the lights were still on. Oh, this was Margaret's room. Why was she awake so late at night? Emily heard something. Murmurings. Two voices. That means Margaret was not alone in her room. Possibly talking to her sister, Susie. Emily went closer to Margaret's room, not to eavesdrop, of course not.

"Nothing, I am working this out." (THIS TIME, TALKING IN ENGLISH)

"Why are you doing so? You know we will never get out of here. We are stuck forever."

Did Emily hear it right? These were English words. And she recognised Susie's and Margaret's voice very well. Why are they talking in English? They are supposed to speak in parabola's language as they are… parabolas. But are they really? Emily shifted her position and collided with the beautiful vase kept beside her, and before anything could happen, the vase fell and broke the dead silence of the night. Oops. What now? Emily thought.

Everyone came out of their rooms. Emily apologised for breaking the vase and she could have said that she had gone out to take a water bottle, which was true enough, and in the darkness, accidentally collided with the vase and it fell and broke. But she didn't. She was flabbergasted on hearing what she heard right now and she wanted a justification.

"I am sorry I heard you both talking with each other. Are you from Earth?" She said quite directly,

in English, without any stammering as if she was charging both of them for some kind of theft, meanwhile, Clara, Henry and Oliver were clueless about what was going on.

Susie and Margaret looked at each other, in utter disbelief, not only for the fact that Emily heard them talking in English but also for the fact that Emily talked in English with them.

"Y-you a-are f-from Earth?" Said Susie, almost bursting in tears.

"Uh-yes", said Emily and now Clara, Henry and Oliver too were shocked to hear the two parabola Watsons talking in English.

Susie had started crying. Margaret hugged her tightly. She too was crying. What was going on?

"Ok, so-Uh I can't understand anything? You two are too from Earth?" Said Henry, followed by Oliver, followed by Clara asking the same question.

"Yes, we are", said Margaret, wiping her face, still full of tears.

"First, sit down on the chairs. I'll tell you everything", said Susie.

All four of them sat down, except the Watsons, all six of them still trembling from the shock they just received, and Susie began, "I am Susie Watson and she is Margaret Hood. We were student researchers, researching on the parallel universe. Both of us were seventeen and were good friends. We often carried out risky experiments in the lab provided to us by our university, and often made a mess. One day, while we were trying to create a portal to the parallel universe, fully sure we won't be able to succeed, we got transported to a beautiful forest, the one we see in fairy tales, it's actually that one beside our house. We were unsure of where we had landed and what was happening with us. We came out of the forest and discovered this highly technologized world here. We still were unsure if we had come in the parallel universe. We heard people talking in some other language. When we tried to understand it, we discovered that it was opposite to what we speak. The words were flipped. We had understood by then that we had landed in the parallel universe and made a huge discovery. We were so happy and so excited. We tried to communicate in that language with the residents and found out more about the parallel universe. We

had no qualifications over here so we were about to be put in jail. Then we requested the police officers to give us one last chance. So, they told us to work in this cafeteria. Meanwhile, we started searching for ways to go back. But couldn't. The cafeteria gives us money, quite sufficient for our living. We told the people here that we had come from the parallel universe but no one believed. We were about to be put in The Mad's House. So, we just said nothing more and started working in the café. To look like normal parallel universe people, we bought a house, bought a car, after saving our earnings. And believe us, since five years we are trying our best to return, but we couldn't... We just cannot."

"When Clara talked in English with me at the café, for a moment I thought you all had come from Earth but when she spoke in flipped language, I just thought I was somehow mistaken. Well, who are you four then?" Said Margaret after Susie ended.

"We too are researchers and Astrophysicists, except that we are not students, but established researchers, working on parallel universe. The whole world out there knows we four have successfully created a portal to the parallel universe. We thought

we were the first ones to do it and the only Earthians here. Well, we were quite wrong", said Emily.

"You all are here for five years?" Henry asked.

"Yes, unfortunately. And the world out there probably thinks we just vanished for nobody knew we were up to something like creating a portal", said Susie.

"Do you people know how to return back?" Said Margaret at last.

"Fortunately, yes", said Emily proudly, glad that she could be of help to those helpless people trapped in the parallel universe. Margaret and Susie's faces lit up. They hadn't smiled for five years.

"We knew it-I had always told Susie, someone will come in the future and save us, help us to finally escape from here and go back home", said Margaret and hugged all four of them.

CHAPTER 16

Day seven. And the final day of work. The day of return has finally arrived. It was a blissful day for the four of them but a red-letter day for Susie and Margaret. “I wonder how are mom and dad and Joseph”, said Susie.

“Joseph, your brother?” Asked Emily, being reminded of her own family and her sweet brother, John.

“Yes, my big brother. Always wanted me to discover the parallel universe and give him a free tour”, Susie said and laughed.

“And I too wonder how is my mom over there. I hope she’s fine. After dad passed away, she’s not

doing well and I was her only walking stick, you know", said Margaret.

"No wonder she would be so happy on seeing you back", said Clara and gave her a hug.

They reached the forest-the spectacular, lush forest where they had landed-both the group of researchers. Emily wanted to be the first ever person or one of them to discover the parallel universe, but she is now happier that two students had done it before her and her team. And she was glad she could help them. Never before did she feel so happy. Discovering the parallel universe was going to be her biggest achievement but this was something much much bigger than that. Her grandma had always taught her to help others, no matter what you need to do for that. "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity"-Leo Tolstoy. She had always inspired her through this quote.

"Where is the portal?" Said Henry. "I very well remember it was here."

"It's supposed to be right here", said Emily. She took out the remote. "I guess we can use this. We had brought it in case the portal disappears", she said to Susie and Margaret.

Emily pressed the big red button which was the only button on the remote. No. Nothing happened. She pressed it again, harder than the previous time. Still nothing happened. She smiled, trying to hope for the best and tried again. Again. Again. And again. Clara took it from her. She tried it thrice. Then Oliver took it. Then Henry. No. Nothing was happening. But it was supposed to happen. And there was a ninety-percent chance in it. Does that mean they failed?

Emily rubbed her temples. Clara walked here and there. The atmosphere was tense. Susie and Margaret, completely clueless about how the remote works but could figure it out that something was wrong. But they didn't open their mouths. Suddenly Henry shouted, "Hey see this. What's this written over here?" And surely something was written in small letters, in illegible handwriting, at the back of the remote.

"Bye forever", Emily read out the words. "What is this?"

"I don't know. Who wrote it?" Asked Henry.

"Who carried the remote?" Asked Oliver.

"I-I carried it but I didn't write anything on it", said Clara.

"Who handed it over to you last?" Asked Emily.

Clara thought a bit. "Why, Samuel, Mr. Mitchell told him to bring it from our lab."

And then things became clear, crystal clear.

"So that grouch did it. I bet he did it. This is not the remote that we made. This is a duplicate. Samuel wanted us to get stuck over here and never return", said Emily finally.

"Who is Samuel?" Asked Margaret and Susie who were unable to understand what was happening.

"He's a researcher too, but has always been envious of our achievements. He's always trying to get us into trouble. But I seriously can't believe that he can go this far", said Clara.

"Wh-what does that mean now?" Asked Oliver and Susie at the same time.

"That means that we are stuck here and are never going to return", Emily concluded.

CHAPTER 17

A week had passed by then. And the four Great Astrophysicists were stuck in the parallel universe along with the two student researchers. Six Earthians trapped in an unknown universe. It would be great if it was caption for some film or some book but unfortunately, it's not. It's a caption for their present situation. Emily still working hard, little bit of hope was still in her, Clara losing all her hope, Oliver and Henry already lost theirs, and Susie and Margaret were completely numb and dumbfounded. For them, it hit hardest, harder than it had hit the four of them. Life had become so monotonous now. The four of them were working in the café now, along with Susie and Margaret, to look normal, as

going to the jail of the parallel universe was the last thing they wanted.

"The police comes once a week to inspect everyone's home in this locality. And probably today is the date, if I am not wrong. They can come anytime", said Susie which was perhaps the first thing she said after that incident. Both the friends were utterly disappointed with Team Second Earth but did not wish to reveal it. Hence, they didn't talk much.

"I am sorry, Susie and Margaret", said Emily, followed by apologies from Clara, Henry and Oliver, who were sorry both for themselves and for the two of them.

"No, it's alright. Getting out of here is not so easy", said Margaret, in a tone which might seem sarcastic but wasn't really.

Then the doorbell rang. The police had arrived. Oh God. If they discovered new residents at the Watsons' house, they would surely ask for their identity cards or something and of course, the four of them didn't have any, so they were going to be put behind the bars.

"Come on, hide fast", said Susie.

Emily and Clara ran upstairs. Oliver and Henry followed them. They stood still in the staircase. There were five rooms upstairs and five rooms downstairs, it was a small house as compared to the other houses in the locality, so the police would definitely inspect each and every nook and corner of all the rooms.

"The police are downstairs, searching, wait let me see..." Saying so, Emily accidentally tripped over her feet, just in time, saving herself, but the noise was loud enough to arise suspicion. One of the officers came running upstairs. Oh, these were robots. God. All the four rushed upstairs and hid in four different rooms. The robot went here and there, peered into each room-as if peering wasn't enough. He veered off and entered the first room. Henry hiding inside the cupboard-didn't he find a better place? The robot was certainly going to open it and then what? The robot went off to the table, bent down. Next, it went off to the television. Looked behind it. No one was here. "Go go please", Henry whispered to himself. And sure enough, the robot went away. Now, it entered the second room.

Emily hiding under the bed-a bad place to hide. The robot would definitely search there. But no, it didn't. Might have thought that the underbed storage space was too small for anyone to hide. But Emily can do it, she was so slim that she could fit inside the world's thinnest pathway. The robot went away. Third room. Oliver was here. He was hiding inside the cupboard too, like Henry, their thinking was so much similar, must be they were the best of friends. The robot opened the first half of the cupboard in which Oliver was hiding. Oh, it was interconnected, having a sliding double-back design. Fantastic. Fabulous. Oliver didn't think much. He slid smoothly to the next chamber. The robot closed the first one and opened the second one. Oliver slid to the first one instantly. It was a huge cupboard. By the time, the robot reached the end of the cupboard, Oliver got out of there and crawled outside the room. He saw Emily and Henry fetching Clara from the fourth room. Just then, the robot came out of the third room. All four of them rushed to the first one, already checked by the robot-so it won't come there again. For ten minutes, they waited. Then finally, they could see through the door knob, the robot going downstairs. Perfect. This was the

chance. Four of them rushed downstairs, opened the gate and ran away. So, was this going to be their life from now on? Hiding from the robot police, acting as a parabola, spending days and nights working in cafes and as assistant workers to avoid being suspected? Living life just like Susie and Margaret did for past five years?

CHAPTER 18

Two more weeks passed. The robot police did come two times, but fortunately, four of them were working in their workplace during that time. For the present moment, Emily was thinking something, thinking very deeply, a smile began dawning on her face.

"What happened? Why are you smiling?" Clara asked.

"No, I was thinking something. An idea."

"What idea?" Oliver said. They had thought a lot before this also. But nothing worked.

"No I was thinking, as far as law of parallel universe is concerned, cause and effect are fundamentally flipped over here-

"Yeah, we all know that, so?" Henry asked, his tone rude.

"So, I was thinking that just like when a coin is flipped in home universe and if suppose, head comes, so in parallel universe, a tail will come, right? Then, if I am or rather, we are without the solution to a problem don't you think our parallel selves will have the solution?"

"You mean the remote?" Susie asked.

"Um-yes."

"But you're not in home universe now anyway. We and our parallel selves are in the same universe currently. And why do you think our parallel self will have the remote? If we are researchers out there, they are certainly some lower caste people here, what will they do with a scientific remote? Tell me", Clara wanted to know.

"Yeah, but what's the point of not trying it out? If it works, somehow....."

"Yes, I think we can execute her plan", said Maragaret.

"How to do that? How to find our parallel selves? We don't know in which corner of the world they are sitting in, if they are in jail or not. How are we going to find them? And where are we going to find them?" Henry asked, his face reddening, his volume rising.

"Relax Henry. If suppose, we create a poster and post it on social media, with my photo suppose and say suppose, "HELP ME FIND MY TWIN SISTER" would that work?" Emily asked.

"So, your parallel self will come rushing to you, do you think that?" Henry asked.

"No, it might take a few days to reach her-that is-my parallel self. We can distribute offline posters as well, if possible. I am sure my parallel self will be confused and will come to the location we give. We can explain things to her and ask for the remote-

"Where are you going to get the social media from?" Oliver asked.

"Margaret, Susie, if there's anything like that here, any phone or something?" Clara asked them.

"Yes, there is one, an old-fashioned one as parallel universe people call it. We bought it, thinking if we could contact our home universe, but no use obviously. We didn't open it much. Should I bring it? We have only one actually", said Susie.

"Yup, go and bring it. If we find any social media apps over there, it's going to be useful." Emily said.

Margaret rushed up to the storeroom, the one upstairs. They perhaps didn't use the phone much-of course, it was of no use for them. Whom to call in this unknown universe? Ten minutes later, she came down with an Apple iPhone Pro 18 Max-which the parabolas called old-fashioned.

"Here, take it", said Margaret handing it over to Emily. Everyone leaned over.

"So, uh-here yeah, umm, play store right, all in their language, yes I type here facebook, no I type here koobecaf, yes alright here it comes, I install it, fine done. Well, quite fast. I open it, create an account and yes, it's done. I named it Emily Carter,

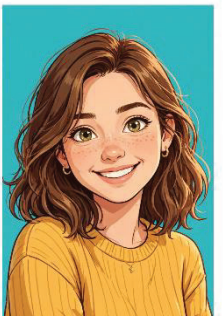
actually Retrac Ylime, yes done. Oh no. I should not name it that way. The one whom we are finding shares the same name so..Well, Joe Carter, that's fine. Short and easy to write, Retrac Eoj.

"So, it's done. Now what do you do?" Susie asked.

"Install an editing app. Click my photo. Create a poster and upload it here. Probably I'll download Instagram too. The more, the better. Yeah, I'll do it all. It will take me some time."

CHAPTER 19

A day later. Fifteenth day in the unknown universe. And Emily had created the poster and posted it online. She had downloaded Instagram and Twitter too. She had created six accounts for six of them and posted the same poster in each account. Only difference, in hers, the poster says "HELP ME FIND MY TWIN SISTER" and in the others' it says, "HELP ME FIND MY FRIEND'S TWIN SISTER". She could create a poster for everyone's twin sister or brother, but didn't do so, in case it might rouse suspicion. She wanted to start slow. Slow but steady. Another thing her grandma taught her. Had always helped her.



HELP ME FIND MY TWIN SISTER

SISTER'S NAME:EMILY CARTER

CONTACT NUMBER: 8786339006

LOCATION: 23/7, MELODY STREET, COLORADO, USA

IF YOU GET THIS MEASSAGE, PLEASE COME BACK.

The poster was somewhat emotional. Thank God, it looked emotional. She had to make it so, in order to circulate it fast, so that finally it reaches Emily Carter, the second Emily Carter.

"Now, we have to wait, until someone called RETRAC YLIME contacts us, right?" Clara sighed.

"No, you have work to do. Take print outs of this poster and distribute them outside. Help me

find my twin sister", said Emily in a tone which seemed sarcastic and light-hearted. How was she so relaxed in a moment like this? Well, her grandmother had taught her to be so. Told her bedtime stories with morals. Taught her that "Patience is not passive; on the contrary, it is active; it is concentrated strength." — *Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton.*

"Ok fine, but won't you come out with us? You'll wait here to see if your twin sister messages you?" Asked Henry.

"No, I am surely going to accompany you. It's just that I had some more work to do. I was thinking if we could use this mobile to search Retrac Ylime's number? Or facebook account", said Emily.

"But we had tried it earlier, messaged her. The message didn't go and we seriously don't know why", said Oliver.

"You all didn't know something and I don't wish to share it with you", said Emily and smiled. Did she remember how to smile? Others had forgotten it.

"Eh-what?" Said Clara.

"Back in the home universe, I was always active in my professional facebook account which was Dr. Emily Carter. Here, the 'Dr' is not there. Fine. But no one except my brother knew that at times I opened different accounts too. Some for personal use, messaging my friends and family. Some accounts on my pet dog, Puff's name. Since I was always active on my main account in home universe and hardly opened the rest of them, I believe my parallel self must have done the opposite. So, I am going to try to contact her through those", said Emily.

"Fine, try it out but I think poster was a better way. Retrac Ylime would grow suspicious and eventually come to us. Why would she believe you and come to us if you send her a message saying "Hi I am your parallel self. I am in trouble. You can help me and my friends out." Said Henry.

"But poster is going to take a long time to reach her, especially when we don't know her location", said Emily and continued, "Therefore I am going to try it this way and you all try it the other way."

CHAPTER 20

Day thirtieth. And still no response. Neither from Retrac Ylime's side nor from poster's side. This plan was going to fail too. They should have been here for just a week and it's been a month. God knows what the Earthians might be thinking. Emily thought, her parents might be super worried about her and might be thrashing Mr. Mitchel's head. Clara, Henry and Oliver thought the same. None of their parents were supportive of their going to some unknown universe. But at some point of time, they had faith in their children. And now all the faith was going down the drain. Emily thought, why didn't she listen to her parents? She had never been disobedient. She was always that calm daughter of theirs who always obeyed every word of her parents

and John was their cheeky son who's always telling 'no' at everything. And this time, she was the one who forced her parents to leave her, not to compel her to stay back with them. But now she regretted it. Had she listened to her parents and indeed stayed back, she would never have had to get stuck in this parallel universe and rot here. Maybe she wouldn't have been able to fulfil her grandma's wish. But she knows that grandma would never be offended because of her. Maybe grandma is more annoyed because she defied her parents, didn't listen to them. She can see her future. She is going to die over here and her parents would never know about her, what happened to her, where did she go? She can't inform them anything, can't talk with them, in the most critical moment. She's going to vanish just like that only. Imagine what the world on the other side might have been thinking. The 'Famous Four' literally vanished through that hole. Magic. Rather absolute nonsense. They might be hiding somewhere because they know that they are unsuccessful. They can't show their faces anymore. The world there is completely unaware that they have discovered the parallel universe, made the impossible possible and before them, two student

researchers had done it, which senior scientists could not.

Susie and Margaret were still outside, working in the café. They had lost all their hope and had stopped distributing posters. And now the 'Famous Four' were thinking over where should they go to stay next? The Watsons are not probably going to keep them at their home for a lifetime. They certainly had to save some money and buy a house.

"I can't believe we are going to give up and are now talking about buying a house to stay in this universe", said Clara.

"We have no other option", said Emily.

"Don't give up Emily. You are the one who always helps us out in the most difficult times. And now you're literally giving up?" Said Oliver.

Henry was quietly sitting at one corner of the living room, munching on a weird hamburger with its contents outside, as it was supposed to be in the parallel universe. He had lost all hope too. He had stopped talking actually. Everyone had stopped talking with each other, except necessary conversations.

Suddenly, the phone vibrated. A call was coming.

"Hey, someone's calling! Come fast", said Henry who was so shocked that he threw his half-munched hamburger on the floor, and shouted at the top of his voice. The phone was closest to him but he was paralysed. He couldn't move. No one could move. The phone never rang. Never in the past thirty days. Never in the past five years, as the Watsons said. Everyone expected only one person to call.

Emily rushed to the phone. RETRAC FFUP CALLING.

That means Puff Carter was calling. No, a dog can't call-absolutely can't, maybe in parallel universe everything was supposed to be fundamentally flipped but it can't be that time is flipped too. Animals could talk with humans in the Golden Age but this is the Electronic Age so certainly there was nothing like that here. Then who was calling? "PUFF CARTER" was the dog account she had made in the home universe for her cute little puppy. She remembered that she had tried to find this account on the Watson's phone and messaged to it a number of times when the others were out, distributing posters. And someone was finally

calling. It must be RETRAC YLIME. Emily's twin sister. Her parallel self.

She picked up the phone. Her hand was shaking.

"HELLO" someone said. (PHONE CALL IS IN PARABOLA LANGUAGE BUT TRANSCRIBED IN ENGLISH FOR THE EASE OF THE READER)

"Hello, is it Ylime?" Said Emily.

"Yes, I am. Who are you? Messaging me it's urgent. Help and all these nonsense" Said Ylime. Though Ylime's tone was rude at this point of time, Emily was pleased. She had found her parallel self finally.

"Yes, I'll explain things. But I can't, through a phone call. It's difficult. Just listen to me. I am your parallel self. I have come from parallel universe. You have to meet me. Please. I'll send you the location", said Emily taking a long time to flip each word. She had not spoken in parabola language for many days.

"How do I believe the rubbish you are saying? Do you think I'm a fool?"

"No, it's serious. Please try to understand. I can give you proof. Right away"

Everyone looked up at Emily. Where was she going to get a proof now?

"Video call me. You'll see it. I look like you. I am you-I mean your parallel self", she said.

The phone was hung up. Ylime hung it up.

Emily video called her. She had to get it now. Get her parallel self convinced to believe the truth. To help them out. To get back home.

No. Ylime was not picking it up. Why. Why. Why.

She video called again. Again. Again. Ylime has to pick it up.

And then she picked it up.

In the next moment the world changed. Everything changed. No, everything was same. Just the complexion of the atmosphere changed. The tension melted. Two dopplegangers face to face. Medium was online. A simple video call. But the moment was extraordinary, inexplicable. Emily could see Ylime. Short, wavy hair, golden coloured eyes. Ylime could see Emily. Ylime was shocked. Her mouth hung open. But Emily wasn't. She knew it

would happen someday. And she was prepared for it.

"So now do you believe it?" Emily said,

"Wh-what?" Ylime stammered. Of course, anyone would.

The camera then shifted to Ylime's parents' face. Emily could see parallel selves of her parents. She was happy. She had not seen her parents for a month. But for the time being, she just couldn't believe the fact that she had found her parallel self. She was not shocked but was exhilarated. She looked closely. Ylime's parents looked so much alike. Exact copy of her parents.

The facsimiles of Emily's parents were flabbergasted. They spoke something in parabola language but went too fast for Emily to catch it.

The camera slowly shifted to Ylime's face. She said "Ok I'll meet you. Send me your location. But I'll bring my parents too with me. I'm not going to come alone."

"Sure", said Emily and a tear trickled down her cheek.

CHAPTER 21

The next morning. Ylime was supposed to arrive, with her parents. Emily was sitting on the couch, looking at the phone, in case Ylime couldn't locate their home and tried to contact her. Clara, Susie and Margaret were sitting beside her, trying to assure each other that Ylime will come any moment. Henry and Oliver were standing at the doorstep, to see if they had come or not. They expected a flying car to come. Or maybe a normal 'old-fashioned car' as they call it. Or perhaps they would just walk and come if Ylime lived nearby. They didn't know how she was coming or from where she was coming as Ylime seemed too uncomfortable to share information about her with strangers. The clock was striking eleven. No one had eaten anything. No one

could eat actually. It was not the time for eating. It was the time to go back. Or at least try their best to go back.

"When is she going to come?" Asked Henry from the doorstep.

"I don't know. When I sent her the location, she just said that she will come today morning, she didn't specify any time", said Emily, her eyes fixed on the phone screen.

"Are you sure that she will come?" Oliver asked walking towards them and sat down on the couch. Henry closed the door and followed him.

"Uh-I-no-I mean the way she said it, she seemed to be a scaredy-cat. I mean it's fine when you see your parallel self talking with you, you get a bit shocked, it's fine, it's normal to be amazed, but it seemed as if she suspected us being some hacker or what I don't know. As if we are going to kidnap her or something. She said she's not going to come alone, she will bring her parents too", said Emily and now put the phone aside. Her hands were paining. She has been holding the phone for hours.

Suddenly the doorbell rang. The same tune started ringing. Ylime had come. Finally. Everyone got up from their seats. Emily went ahead and opened the door.

Robot police standing.

What? They weren't supposed to come now. They come once in a week.

Emily was dead frozen.

"Who are you? Show us your identity card", said one of them in parabola language.

Emily said nothing. What could she say?

Susie came ahead.

"She is a student researcher from a different country. Actually, in their country they aren't supposed to carry I-D cards so...They didn't carry it. They didn't know the system of our country", she said.

"Susie and Margaret Watson, do you know her and those three standing at the back?" Another one asked.

"Yes", said Susie, followed by a meek "Yes" from Margaret, who was shivering with fear.

"Ok", said the robot police and started inspecting their home.

"Thank God, you all got saved. Certainly, the robot police haven't come across such a case earlier of student researchers from other country forgetting to bring their identity cards for it's not always required in their own country. Otherwise, they won't have left you so easily", whispered Susie.

"Thanks for saving us", Emily said and continued, "But why did they come now? Weren't they supposed to come only once a week?"

"It's usual for them to come once in a week. But not unusual to come more often", said Margaret.

"We all were so busy with the remote thing, we just forgot to tell you this, sorry for that", said Susie.

"It's fine. Let's just hope they inspect your home and get out quickly before Ylime comes. Otherwise, if they see two Emilys together, we are going to be in trouble", said Clara.

Hopefully the robot police left soon.

Just after that an old-fashioned green-coloured car pulled up outside the Watsons' house. It must be Ylime and her parents this time.

The door of the car opened and a slender lady, dressed in a straight, loose T-shirt and black jeans, got out of the car. Yes, she was Ylime. Same face. Same features.

Emily ran towards her. Others followed.

CHAPTER 22

Ylime's parents got out of the car. Mrs. Retrac, wearing an elegant, well-structured wrapped dress and Mr. Retrac in a classic shirt and a dark-wash jean.

"Welcome to our home", said Susie, stepping ahead, "You can come in and sit."

"No, it's fine. Can you please tell us everything right now? We are perplexed. How does th-this woman look exactly like our daughter?" Said Mrs. Retrac. (ALL CONVERSATIONS ARE IN PARABOLA LANGUAGE)

"We'll tell you everything. But it's a long story. That's why we want you to come in and sit", said Clara.

All of them got inside.

Emily began, "We are researchers, researching on parallel universe. It's actually a universe that co-exists parallel to our universe. To make things easy, just think that we have come from the other universe, fine?"

No answer. Not even a nod. The Retracs stood still.

"Well, me and my three companions were trying to find out a link to our parallel universe. We did so and landed here. We discovered that there were two student researchers who did it before us and got stuck here", continued Emily and pointed at Susie and Margaret.

"We had already bought a remote with us with which we could go back. But unfortunately, due to some problems, this remote is not working (a lie) and we ended up getting stuck here."

Now, Ylime said “Fine. Your story is sad, I can understand but what do you want us to do?” Her words were so rude. Emily wasn’t so rude. Well, it’s the parallel universe. So, manners had to be different.

But Emily’s tone was still gentle, “It is a fact that in the parallel universe, everything is fundamentally flipped, meaning if you toss a coin and get ‘head’ in your universe, in the other universe you’ll get a ‘tail’. So, we thought that if we aren’t able to get back, we don’t have a solution to our problem, our parallel selves may have it, so it’s just a try.”

“That means you want to say we have your remote?” Asked Ylime’s father.

“Ah-yes. See this. Look at it carefully. If you have anything like this at your home”, said Clara.

The Retracs looked at it intently for ten to fifteen minutes.

“Sorry, we don’t have anything like this at our home”, said Ylime.

Everyone gave up at that moment except one of them. Emily.

"You might have it but you may not know it. Can you please allow us to search your home?" She asked.

"Absolutely not. A stranger can't search our home like that", said Ylime's mother, in a much harsher tone.

"Please mom-I mean-uh sorry, Mrs. Retrac, this is a question of our life and death. We have to get back to our universe. Please try to understand."

"Ok fine. Let them do it", said Emily, sorry Ylime's father.

"Ok, but we'll be there along with you, just to see if you're not doing something wrong", said Ylime's mother. Emily's mother can't be so rude, of course. On the contrary, Emily's father was told to do something by her mother in home universe and here it's opposite. Ylime's father tells Ylime's mother to do things.

Home. Not Emily's. But Ylime's. It was a one-hour journey to reach their home. The house was big, spacious, luxurious like other houses in the parallel universe. But it lacked that homely feeling. It was just that it was Ylime's house, not Emily's.

The six of them started searching the different rooms. Since three people live here, there were fifteen rooms and three storeys. Two of them searched each floor.

For one long hour, they kept searching. Ylime was keeping an eye on Emily and Clara, her mom on Susie and Margaret and her dad on Oliver and Henry.

Nothing was found. No remote. No remote-like thing.

Emily noticed that they had not found that black cupboard yet which was her grandma's from which she had found out letters written to her. She wondered where it could be.

"Do you have a black cupboard which belonged to your grandma?" Asked Emily.

"Yes, after her death we haven't opened it. It's upstairs, in the storeroom", said Ylime. Yes. The storeroom. They hadn't checked it yet.

All six of them went upstairs. Followed by the Retracs.

Yes. There was that black cupboard, in which she went to hide in, some sixteen or seventeen years back. But it was not that one. That one was dusty, dirty. This one was shiny, polished. Nevertheless, Emily opened it.

No box. No letters. Has to be. It's the parallel universe. Emily's grandma wrote her letters. Ylime's grandma didn't.

But under a ragged cloth, there was something shining brightest. Brighter than the surface of the cupboard.

Emily placed her hand under the cloth, expected to find it. Find the remote.

And then she did. She withdrew her hand out. Along with a remote.

"This is it. This is it", said Emily, her hands shaking.

"Yay we did it, we did it", Henry jumped with joy. Oliver started dancing. Clara, Margaret and Susie fell on their knees, unable to believe that they had made it through. Finally. Now all was going to be over. All pain. All sadness. A renewal awaits

them. But one final question. “What is it actually?”, Emily asked the Retracs.

“I don’t know. We never opened her cupboard”, said Ylime’s father.

“Can we take it?”

“Yes, it’s of no use to us.”

“But the most useful thing to us”, said Henry.

“We are leaving now. Just one last request. Please don’t mention your government or anyone else that we came here, from another universe. Let us get back to our universe. If possible, we’ll come back again and we can see it later”, said Emily. She hugged Ylime and her parents once, though they didn’t hug her back. They still saw her as a stranger.

CHAPTER 23

Six of them back to where it all began. The beautiful, enchanting forest.

"So, shall I press it. The small red button?" Emily asked.

"Are you sure it's going to work?" Henry asked.

"Let's hope for the best", said Clara.

Emily turned the remote once, just to see that no message was written on its back. No, it was empty. Thank God.

"We couldn't see our parallel selves, that's a pity on our end", said Oliver.

"We couldn't too, despite living here for five years", said Susie and Margaret.

"Ok, I'm pressing it", said Emily and did so.

Then at one go, the portal opened up. Spooky, dark, creepy. Yes, it was the same one from which the famous four came and from which the super six would go.

They smiled at each other. Some started to cry. Henry didn't cry. He was not emotional. He stepped ahead and hopped in.

Others did too.

Emily opened her eyes. She was surrounded by her mom, dad and John. Where was she? Back to home universe?

"Wh-where am I?" She stammered.

She saw her mom was crying and dad was crying too. John was clicking her photographs. She realised she was on hospital bed. She felt a pain in her arms and legs. They were half-burnt. Oh God. But she was alive. And she was back.

"You're back home", Emily's mother said and hugged her.

"And finally back home after so long", said her father.

"H-how much time did it take?" She asked.

"Why-you don't know. How did it take so long? We were so so worried over here. Stopped sleeping. Stopped eating. You were about to return in a week. The whole world was perturbed. Everyone was tensed", said Emily's mother. She couldn't stop crying.

John started shooting a video, saying, "It took one month and ten days for my sister, one of the famous four to return", the camera on her bed-ridden sister.

Thank God, only a few days went in the journey and not months.

"Did others return. Are they safe?" Asked Emily, trying to get up from the bed.

Her father handed her a glass of water and said, "Yes all of you came back. Few people were near the portal, working in the laboratory. They suddenly heard some noise from inside. Then six of you came out. All of you were unconscious and suffered from

burns. But you all are safe now. Well, who were the other two?"

"Susie and Margaret, two student researchers. They accidentally landed over there before us and got stuck like us", said Emily.

"Why did you all take so long to come back?" Emily's mother asked.

"It's Samuel. He had replaced our remote."

"What, how?" John asked.

"I don't know. There was this note written on the back of the remote saying 'BYE FOREVER' and the remote was not working. Clara said Samuel gave her the remote last. So, we know it's him but there's no exact evidence", said Emily.

"I would kill him", said Emily's father.

"He is killed already, when he saw us returning alive, successful in our mission, I believe", said Emily and hugged her family. Home. Finally, back to home.

She looked around. She saw Clara, Henry and Oliver with their family. Susie and Margaret as well with their family members. Imagine how their family

members might have been feeling. The hospital room was filled with cries of joy and laughter. Reporters were about to arrive. It's a breaking news, has to be, "THE COMEBACK OF NOT THE FAMOUS FOUR, BUT THE SUPER SIX."

NEWSPAPER AND TELEVISION HEADLINES:

NOBEL PRIZE AWARDED FOR DISCOVERY OF THE PARALLEL UNIVERSE TO TEAM SECOND EARTH,

DR. EMILY CARTER, DR. CLARA TURNER, DR. OLIVER GRANT, DR. HENRY COLLINS

AND TWO STUDENT RESEARCHERS,

SUSIE WATSON AND MARGARET HOOD.

When they were being awarded the Nobel Prize, all of them were asked to deliver a few words. Emily said, "My grandmother instilled in me the desire to discover a parallel universe and fulfil her last wish. I am so delightful that I am finally able to fulfil her wish. I wish she was here today. But I know she's

seeing me from the heaven. I don't have much to say actually, but yes, I wish to say one last thing. According to some scientists, we live in a multiverse. Whatever action, we perform here, there are multiple effects of that one action in multiple other universes. This means that there's not just a single parallel universe that co-exists our universe, but there might be infinite unknown universes, where we, or rather dopplegangers who look similar to us might be present, but exhibit opposite characteristics. Maybe in the parallel universe we discovered, people had opposite features, but in other universes, the conditions may be different. So, I mean to say that there may be many who may be better than us and we may not know about it. Pride is therefore foolish. Oh, and yes, I wish to share this with you all. I know I am a researcher, people call us intelligent, brainy, yes and in parallel universe, I saw myself as a rather rude person. I am not rude and mom knows it. Dad knows it too. I felt bad on seeing my parallel self. But she's the one who helped me find the remote. Without her, we wouldn't have been able to return. So, I believe that no one is good or bad. Perfect or worst. Everyone has both these sides. It is just depending on the situation which side

of theirs they will show. And lastly, yes, I know I have been talking a lot but I will conclude my speech with one last advice. Don't be afraid or scared of anything. My mom and dad didn't want me to go to the other universe. But I went. And that's why I could experience so much in my life, know the unknown. Therefore, future always has interesting things in store for you. You never know when and where you stumble upon your duplicate, looking the same like you, but being so different. For the time being, we have just discovered a single parallel universe, but we want to go on an endless journey to discover more such hidden universes, and we hope that we will always have full support from your end. Thank you."

Dear Grandma,

Your granddaughter has finally found out the parallel universe, and fulfilled your final wish. You know I got the Nobel Prize along with my Team Second Earth. I want to thank you for the confidence you built up in me. Without you, I wouldn't have been able to return from there. Your lessons were a constant guide just as you had been. Thank you so much.

Lots of Love,

Emily

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Finally, thank you to all my readers. I hope you enjoy travelling to the parallel universe with me.

Somiya Das

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Somiya Das is a 14-year-old ninth grader from Vivekananda Mission School, Joka, Kolkata, India. An academic topper who secured the first position among all sections in her class, she excels in academics and is passionate about writing, reading, and public speaking. She has written many stories for various magazines and also her school magazine, and Project Second Earth: In The Parallel Universe is her first ever book.