

## Checking on Dreams

By S.M Abdi

Sheila stood on the patio, looking out on the street. The apartment was the sixth one they viewed that day, it was a little shabby, but it was within their budget. The apartment near campus which she thought she would get had been taken. The realtor said something about never receiving her completed forms, which she took as a way of telling her she found someone who could pay more for it. Her twin brother, Monel, was still sulking about being forced to leave New York and coming to LA. She, on the other hand, was ecstatic, the prospect of independence and college life gave her a sense of freedom. The only dark cloud was her parent's conditions for leaving home, which were his brother coming along and getting a job in three months' time.

"You finally came in. Hey Mon, come up here and see the view—it's breathtakingly beautiful."

"What is there to see besides traffic jams and people trying to get to their destination?"

"Oh come on, Monel, cheer up. LA is the city that's going to make us successful in life. Wait, and see—you're going to thank me for dragging you out here once you get to know the city and her people."

"Why couldn't you be like any normal New York girl who just wants to party every day and enjoy wasting her parent's money every night in clubs back home?"

"If I did that, I wouldn't be your sister now, would I?"

Monel looked at the side-by-side twin beds with black and white bed sheets. There was an old TV on the wall across from the beds. The purple wall went against the bed sheet colours. He could smell the bleach from the bathroom. No doubt that the Landlord wanted to get rid of the smell. No one had been living here, so the windows hadn't been opened to let fresh air in.

"I must have angered the universe in my past life to be living in a situation like this when I could have just stayed at our mansion with Mom and Dad."

"You're here because you got an ultimatum, you can only go back if I go too or you are cut off."

Monel made his way to the patio and stood right next to her. He started tapping his finger on the balcony railing as he looked at the poor people outside.

"This is all your fault, you know."

"Uh, no. You got into this mess on your own when you trashed your new car into the guest house, remember? Now quit wasting time grumbling and figure out a way you are going to make money for your half of the rent."

"Again, I say this. I don't want to work! I don't have to work, we-e have money!"

"Mom and Dad have money, we-e are broke!"

"You are such a dork."

"What can I say? Spoilt bra..."

Sheila's phone rang, interrupting their argument. It was their mom Face Timing her.

"It's your parents," she told Monel.

She answered the phone, “Hi Mom. Hi Dad.”

“Our beautiful children, how are you both doing? Settling in well? How is LA?”

Their parents sounded pretty interested to hear how their twins are doing.

“Do we actually have to stay here? I mean LA is probably not that bad, but this apartment? Are we being punished? Is that it?” Monel answered.

“Oh, shut up!” Sheila interrupted Monel. “It is really not that bad, I mean it is not exactly what we are used to, but we will survive...Monel is just being dramatic.”

“It is good to hear that, dear. Your father and I already miss you both,” their mom sighed.

“Well then let me come home!” Monel is irritated at this point.

“Well, Mom, Monel and I were thinking of going to look for jobs on Monday. This apartment is okay for now, but we want to move some place better,” Sheila said.

“Honey, are you sure you don’t want my assistance? I know you want to be independent, but you could pay for everything else like your groceries. We are still your parents, let us help you,” Dad said.

“Dad, I understand that you both love us and care about us, but I want to learn to stand on my own two feet, and do things for myself. I appreciate it though, I really do but Monel and I are adults now,” she said.

At this point Monel is defeated, he doesn’t even have the words to say to Sheila. Why is she like this?

“Okay, sweetheart. Three months is all you get. I’m proud of you,” Dad said.

“Your dad and I have a gala to attend so we will talk to you kids tomorrow! We love you both very much. Bye!”

“Love you too. Bye, Mom.” She said.

“Bye, Mom,” Monel said.

They both sit in silence.

“Monel, I was thinking of going to look for a job on Monday. I want us to find a better apartment closer to my campus,” she said.

“Good for you,” Monel responded, irritated.

“Come on! How long are you going to be mad at me for?” she asked.

“Until you come to your senses and call Mom and Dad and tell them that we both want to come home,” he answered.

“We haven’t even been here that long enough for you to decide that you don’t like this place. Please give it a chance. At least two months, then we can make a decision from then onwards,” she said.

Sheila did not like seeing her brother like this.

“Fine. Two months, but after that we are going back home! In those two months I can’t be living like this,” he said.

“Ok fine! You won’t regret it, you’ll see you’ll love it here! Thank you bro,” she said.

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever. What are we having for dinner?” Monel asked.

He was finally starting to come around, and Sheila was happy. Now all Sheila had to do was make sure that she finds a job so she can pay for the new apartment she has promised Monel.

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It is finally Monday, and Sheila has to go to school to sort out registration things. The plan is to get that sorted and then head to look for a job. She does not know where to start because she is unfamiliar with the setting, but she is determined to figure it out.

She gets to school and she is excited all over again. It is finally happening.

During registration, Sheila meets a girl. Her name is Amanda and she is also doing her first year. She is from LA and she offers to help Sheila look for a job as she is familiar with the city.

“What is exactly that you are looking to do?” Amanda asks.

“I would like to work in the media industry because I want to enjoy whatever it is that I will be doing, but at this particular moment I’m not picky. I’ll go for whatever I can find,” Sheila said.

“My sister actually works for American Publications, and she said her boss is looking for an assistant! Maybe you might get lucky.”

Sheila was so happy to hear this. Her new friend that she had just met had become the answer to all her problems. Maybe this was all meant to be after all.

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When Sheila got home she told Monel the good news!

“I have a job interview!” she said.

“That was quick. I thought you would have to look long enough till you had no choice but to have us move back home.” Monel replied.

“Do you always have to be this negative? I am trying to make things work for the both of us and you are over here being Negative Nancy, I can’t believe we are actually twins.” Sheila said.

At this point she was just so annoyed with her brother’s limited mindset, lack of aspirations and general lazy way of life. Why did he lack personal ambition and drive?

She blamed her parents. Yes, they wanted to be the best parents that they could be and afford their children with the best life they could offer, but they went a bit overboard and Monel is the outcome of that.

“Well Negative Nancy, my interview at American Publications is at 7am tomorrow and I must bring my article portfolio. Help me dig it out of the box please.” Sheila said.

“Okay, Mom,” Monel mocked.

The look on Monel’s face was unreadable but something felt off.

Monel thought that Sheila was inconsiderate. She may have wanted to show her parents that she is capable of being independent. Proving she was more than Mason’s daughter, but he was okay with being labelled as the spoilt rich kid. Now he must be the one to help her find a portfolio, that would get her a job, that will allow her to stay in a place he did not want to stay. He wanted no part in this ‘independent’ chat.

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The next day Sheila was running late to her interview. Her interview blouse was coffee stained. Her alarm was two hours late. And her portfolio had been shuffled

“Hi. My name is Sheila and I am here to interview for Laura Smith’s assistant position,” Sheila announced to the lady at the reception.

The receptionist gave her a perfunctory once over with her eyes.

“Oh great, you are here. I will go call Laura, please take a seat,” the receptionist responded.

Sheila sat down and looked around. This place was just how she had imagined it would be. Big, busy and productive. She was a mess, suddenly, she was terrified.

A tall, attractive, brunette lady wearing glasses, a black blouse and black leather pants was coming towards her.

“You must be Sheila, I’m Laura. You are late! Follow me,” the lady said.

Sheila became nervous. Laura looked like she was all about her business. Sheila was intimidated. She stood up and followed her.

“I’m sorry Mrs Smith, I had the most...” Sheila responded.

“It’s Miss Smith and call me Laura.” Laura interrupted. “Save your excuses, we are not in Junior School, just give me your portfolio.” Laura said sternly.

Sheila was embarrassed for assuming Laura was married. She did not want to make a bad impression. Sheila wanted to impress Laura.

“This is a total mess. Nothing is in order or even resembles any kind of preparation,” Laura continued while browsing her portfolio. “Are you sure you want this job?”

Her stomach was in knots and her face flushed. She felt chills on her back even though it was quite warm.

“I-I,” Sheila stammered, she felt like crying.

“Why should I hire you? You lack punctuality and personal grooming,” Laura said giving her the same head to toe the receptionist had given her.

“I’m willing to learn, and I promise to work really hard.” Sheila mustered the words but could see she was not convincing her.

“I see your surname is Mason, you don’t happen to be related to the Masons from New York are you?” Laura asked, without giving her a chance to speak.

Sheila was expecting this to happen. Whenever people hear her surname, they want to know if she is related to the business power couple, Sandra and Jerry Mason. Her parents.

She doesn’t want people to judge her based on her parents or give her any special treatment. She wants to be able to prove herself, and have people judge her as Sheila, and not as the daughter of two business moguls. This is the reason why she left New York.

“They are my parents,” she shyly responded.

“No ways! Then what are you doing here wanting to be an assistant for ME? You don’t even have to be working,” Laura seemed intrigued.

“You are right, I don’t have to be working, but I want to build my own name outside of my parent’s accomplishments. Back in New York, I could not detach myself from their shadow and that is why I decided to come here to LA for a fresh start where no one really knows me, so I can make a name for myself. That is why I got this job, to start somewhere,” Sheila answered.

Laura moved from being intrigued to being impressed. It was not every day where you would meet the child of multi-billionaires who wanted to detach from their family name and work for themselves. It was very impressive.

“I see... Well here, Sheila, you will have to work hard. I am a very busy woman and you will have to keep up with that. Are you going to be able to cope with this job and school?” Laura asked.



“Does that mean I have the job?”

“You start right away.”

“Thank you. Thank you so much. I promise I will work hard.”

She honestly did not know how this was going to work out. This was her first job, and she did not know whether she was going to be able to juggle it with school, but she was finally doing what she wanted and so she had no choice but to find out.

The day ended and Sheila went back home.

Monel was on the phone, laughing with someone at the other end of the line.

“...you should have seen her face when she woke up late, there’s no way she got that job. The alarm and coffee trick worked. I’m coming back to New York!”

Sheila could hear him breathe listening to the other person. She thought he was talking to one of his stupid friends.

“Yes, Dad. I messed up the portfolio nothing was in order. No one will hire her the way she was looking...”

Sheila froze mid-step; she was seething with anger. She breathed in heavily and exhaled slowly to calm down. She entered the room and snatched the phone from Monel.

“Hey!” he exclaimed with surprise.

“Hey, Dad.” Sheila screamed into the phone.

“Guess what? I got the job. If you thought you could manipulate and sabotage me from getting it, you were mistaken! I am never coming back to New York. Ever!” She hung up and threw the phone on Monel’s bed.

Sheila stormed to the bathroom and took a very long shower. When she came out Monel was twiddling his thumbs, she just walked past him.

“Sheila, wait.” Monel said

Sheila just looked at him and carried on walking.

“Sheila, please. Listen to me.” His voice was raspy, as if he would cry.

“So, you are the one who stole my apartment forms when I submitted them for that apartment near campus?”

Monel nodded, looking sheepish. “I’m sorry sis, I was desperate.”

“Why would you want to live a wasted life in New York? Doing drugs and partying with stupid people and brainless bimbos. Ha? Is that the life you are so desperate to go back to?”

Sheila was bursting with emotion at this point.

“You know why I agreed to bring you with me? I saw what New York was doing to you. You were wasting away, just drifting. I thought maybe- just maybe, if you came with me to LA, you would see a better way to live. That you would find your dreams and...,”

“And what?” Monel interjected. “I am not you. I’m the dumb twin. The one who has no purpose.”

“What?” Sheila was surprised at the turn of this conversation.

“You got all As in school, I got what.. Cs and Ds. Whose trophies and awards are hanging displayed proudly in Dad’s study? Yours, Sheila. I don’t matter!”

“No, Monel. Don’t say that.”

“You know its true. Dad and Mom know it. Everyone sees you as the bright star of the family. Dad cannot stand you being away, he wants you to come and be near and take over the business. Not me. I’m the black sheep, but at least in New York I have my friends. I won’t make it here.”

Tears were streaming down his face; Sheila was crying too. In all her life she had never seen her brother cry or even vulnerable. He had always been the carefree rebel, and now seeing him like this broke her heart. She had not realised how much he was hurting all this time.

“I’m sorry Mon, I didn’t realise that’s how you felt...,”

He continued as if he could not hear her, “you speak of independence, getting away from the Mason shadow, well you are my Mason shadow. If you’d come here alone and left me in LA, then Mom and Dad would have no choice but to see me too, away from your bright shadow.”

“I never thought of it that way. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me, Mon. There I was always thinking Mom and Dad loved you more because they let you do whatever you want.”

The twins hugged each other. That night hey spoke at length about their feelings, dreams and fears, they spoke like adults.

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That weekend Sheila and Monel’s parents visited to apologise to their children. They had time to talk and come to an agreement. Monel was staying in LA to pursue his studies and his dream of becoming a renowned artist. The twins would stay together in a better apartment their parents purchased for them.

“Thanks Mum and Dad for coming over. We really do miss you too.” Sheila said.

“We had to come; we are not proud of the way we handled the prospect of you staying so far away. We just love you two, maybe a little too much.” Dad said smiling.

“We do love you, as long as you keep us in your will,” laughed Monel.

Sheila looked at her family, laughing together and being normal for the first time in a very long time and she smiled.

Things were finally coming together.