

SOMEHOW I MISSED IT

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You will also discover the philosophy of life while going through the motivational quotes mentioned in this novel.

I will keep sharing further chapters as and when they are edited.

Happy Reading! 😊

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Chapter 1:

Did I ignore my gut feeling?

I'm in my mid-thirties, medium height, slender build.

Aimlessly, I'm wandering around Carrefour, dawdling with my shopping trolley, and doing more window shopping than grocery shopping.

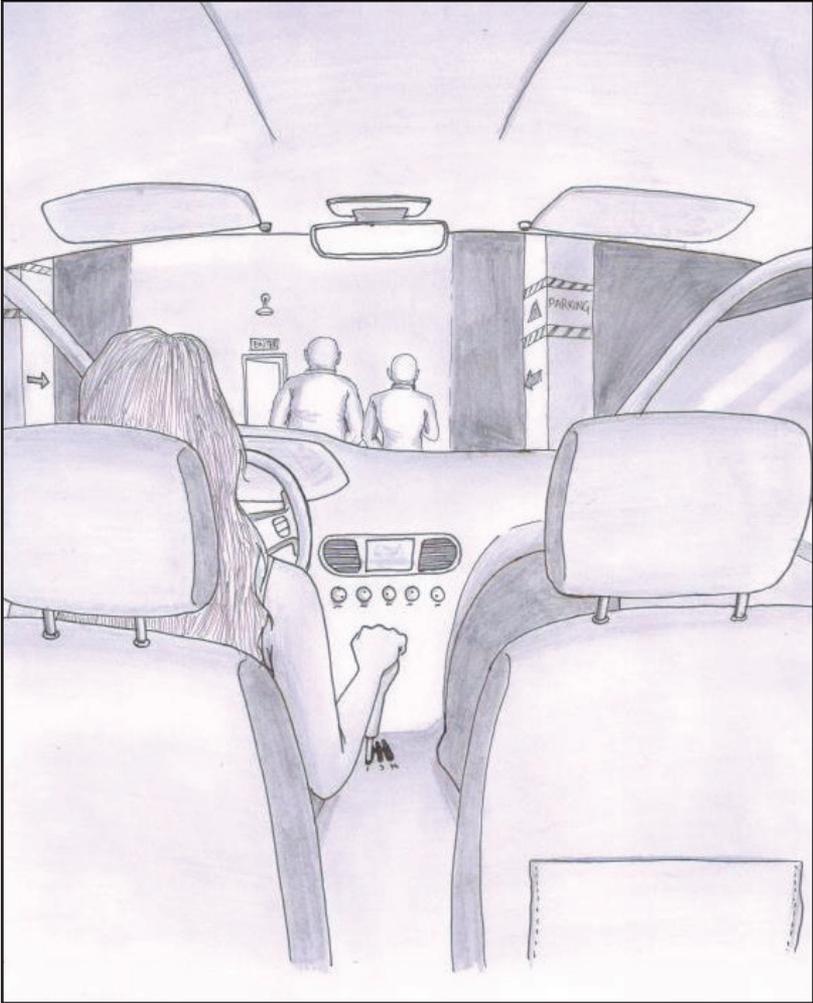
I spend half an hour in the sour cream section, checking prices of all six brands, trying to spot my brand Amul, which doesn't seem to exist here in Muscat. Eventually, I settle on a Bega cheese—I recognize the logo designed by my Australian friend Nilofer—and add it to the trolley.

I might be wasting time, but I know I need it. For the first time since the beginning of this month, I feel relaxed and sense my batteries charging. I'm happy with window shopping today.

Then my weekly trip to Carrefour is over, and I'm driving back home.

Recharged, I'm ready for routine tasks like planning the rest of my evening. *"I'll finish everything fast and sleep early. I need to get two big bags out from the boot, which I can do quickly. Then I'll just need to put the food away, which I can finish tonight. Stuff from one of the bags will go in the refrigerator, and groceries from the second bag will go in the kitchen cabinets."* I'm a thinking person since there's nothing else to occupy my brain.

I arrive home and park the car in 'my' car parking in front of the building, the one that's open to the night sky.



Still sitting in the car, I catch a flash of movement to my left. I quickly turn my head and look out the window to see that a grey BMW has quickly parked two spaces over from me.

I study the two men in the car, curious what they're doing here. I usually mind my own business, so this is unusual behavior for me. But something about the men makes me keep looking.

They descend from their BMW.

One of them has a square face and a broad frame with a fattish bald head. The second man has a comparatively smaller physique but a stout and robust body. He's hurrying along with his shining bald head. Both of them are young to be bald and must have neatly shaved their heads. They wear severe expressions on their faces.

I watch as they walk quickly inside my building without looking back. Both these men seem to be busy with something of their own, and they seem united in purpose as if they are close to each other and they've known each other a long time.

I don't recognize either of them.

Both of them are wearing the same black T-shirt zipped up to the neck, the same coco leather jackets matching their complexion. Their jackets are loose-fitting and open-front—same pairs of tight stonewashed faded blue jeans, same pairs of nice fitted black leather boots. Like police officers or army men, they wear similar uniforms, but their costumes are less formal, unlike them.

Something about the two men who have gone inside scares me, but I don't know what it is.

Not because I live alone. Living alone has never scared me.

I hear alarm bells ringing. I sense danger, and I'm scared to the core. There's no reason for me to shiver in this heat. This irrational fear is choking my breath too. I can sense some unexpected happening is gripping my body. Something about this situation has raised a red flag deep inside me.

I don't like admitting this, as I can find nothing scary in what's happening. My logical mind has tried and failed to find the logic in my fear. "*You're acting stupid,*" it assures me. "*You need to be sensible and brave.*"

My heart, however, is adamant. In the unusual solemn silence created by my fear, I hear a clear whisper, "**You better run.**"

"**Run... run... run...**" The word echoes loud and clear around my empty brain.

"*Whatever you do, you,*" my heart tells me, "*don't go up to your flat where you'll be alone.*"

My heart is racing, and my breathing is coming fast. I can't remember ever experiencing anything like this before.

“Don’t be silly!” my logical mind cuts in. *“Both of them look normal. You’re reacting as though they’re running towards your car!”* But my instinct pushes the thought out of my head.

I sit locked safely inside the car, eyes wide open, casting around for anything else out of place. I’m expecting something unexpected, but the car parking is empty now.

Once again, my logical mind questions these thoughts that are beyond logic.

See, they’re walking down the corridor like ordinary people. Why do I feel shaken?

Why did I stare unblinking at their backs in terror?

Now they’re disappearing around the corner like any other resident.

The men are out of sight.

I feel slightly better, but I’m still not at ease.

I can’t shake the fear that the men will suddenly reappear in the corridor, come straight toward my car, and become violent, maybe physically harming me in some way. I keep peeping outside, but no one appears, and everything is still.

I’m breathing in jerks. The fear of these men has overpowered me, and I still don’t feel at all safe getting out of the car.

If they chase me, I think, I'll use the car to run away. My behavior is incomprehensible, even to myself.

Just an hour ago, I was having a normal, peaceful day. Then I saw these two ordinary-looking guys go inside my building, and within seconds my energy and strength have disappeared as if sucked away by some unknown force. In place of calm, I feel weak, helpless, scared. Any sensible person would call it illogical, ridiculous, or even funny.

I am afraid of my constant mental chatter.

But I keep waiting in the car, trying without much success to quiet my mental chatter. Slowly it's starting to die down into scary, not-so-peaceful, hollow silence.

"Mmmmm.... I shouldn't get out of the car. I'm safer inside, and I can use it to escape if anyone chases me."

At the same time, I'm aware that if anyone saw me sitting in the car, they would wonder what I was doing.

I pull out my phone and act as if someone's texted me, tapping vigilantly on the empty screen.

The feeling I have is out of the blue, beyond logic, beyond my five senses, yet so powerful and completely new to me. Now that the two men have moved inside the building, I feel the danger has gone inside with them.

As I tap on the inert phone, I try to make sense of my feeling.

“I didn’t see anything, but I felt it;

I didn’t hear anything, but I felt it;

I didn’t smell anything, but I felt it;

I didn’t taste anything, but I felt it;

I didn’t feel anything by touch, but I experienced it...”

The more I sit there, the more sure I am that this is intuition and not anxiety or laziness. Still, I know I would have a hard time explaining my feeling logically to a psychologist.

But I’ve been waiting for thirty minutes now; how much more can I practically wait? What if those men stay inside all night?

I listen to my willpower coated with my ego. I protest against the conclusion my mind has already come to, that the men are criminals disguising themselves as residents.



***Intuition is God’s rare gift, and ignoring it with
will power is the biggest egoistic foolishness***



Trying to muster the courage, I tell myself not to think so negatively. *“You’re a brave girl. Are you going to let this silly fear make you sit in the car for another half-hour because you’re scared? Think positive, move out of the car, and go inside.”*

I’m still not convinced enough to go inside.

Surprised and irritated with my state of mind, I glance at my watch. *“Oyo! Ten o’clock!”*

By a mighty effort of will, I again muster my courage and try to convince myself to get out of the car.

“I shouldn’t be listening to this irrational fear. Tomorrow’s a workday. What I need is to go inside and relax instead of wasting time here with foolish thoughts.”

“Well, am I a coward?” I mutter to myself.

“No!!! I am not a coward.”

“Then there’s no reason to get scared!” I scream the words out loud enough to break the grip of the fear.

I can feel the time slipping away as I sit here doing nothing.

It’s time to be brave and go inside.

I turn around in my seat. Do a final check with eyes wide open. The car parking still looks empty. Pushing past the last remnants of my fear, I slowly unbuckle the seat belt.

“Don’t think,” I tell myself. *“Thinking will not let you go inside.”*

I slide down in my seat, face-up, eyes alert, observing through the window as my hand searches the floor for my purse. I place my clutch purse under my arm, then slip the keys out of the ignition and cautiously switch off the parking lights.

Trying not to make a sound, I gently open the door and step out of the car.

It’s then that I remember the milk and other groceries in the boot; I know they’ll spoil in the Omani heat, but there’s no way I’m getting them now.

So I lock the car and start walking, purse in hand, into the building. I can feel the wind ruffling my hair as my steps grow faster, and I try to tell myself to act more normal. But my legs seem unwilling to slow down.

By the time I reach the stairs, I’m running faster than my legs can keep up with. I’m running through the dark corridor—strangely, the street lights are out, and the building lights are off.

Then I’m standing outside the wooden door to my flat, shuffling through my purse in the dark; I can’t find the keys.

Desperate to get inside, I open the back zip of my purse and take out the spare key I keep for emergencies.

Unlock the door, step inside, and quickly pull the door closed behind me, my heart racing. I breathe in sharply and let out a long, shuddery sigh. The entire flat is dark; that much is typical for this hour, but my feelings are anything but normal. Afraid of what may already lurk in the flat, I stand stock-still as my vigilant eyes adjust to the dark.

I move to the second bedroom and close the door; then I lock it to feel safer.

Under the door, I can see the light coming from the living room; I must've switched it on automatically when I came in, but it will have to stay on.

I fall with a heavy thud onto the bed, like a dead object.

Finally feeling safer, I listen to my racing heart and look at the full bright moon for solace, to quieten me. The moon agrees to calm me down.

But soon, the street cars grow jealous of my silent conversation with the moon, and they do everything they can to disturb me with horns and flashing lights.

Restless energy is circulating freely like a mad wild bull inside me.

Just lying there, I feel restless, so I pick myself up off the bed and move to the living room, then start pacing aimlessly back and forth across the room.

After a few minutes of pacing, I rush to the balcony in the last room, gazing down at the street. I don't know what I expect to see out there, but there's nothing suspicious.

My logical mind tells me, *"Of course there isn't; everything is normal and in order. The issue, if any, is with you. You need to manage yourself and be peaceful."* I take a deep breath, hold it, and release it slowly. I do this several times, but the effect is minimal; my heart is still pounding, and my eyes keep darting back down to the street.

"Let me try alternate nostril breathing; maybe that'll calm my mind." Finally, something that helps; I begin to calm down and become relatively relaxed.

Yawning, I head back towards the middle room to sleep.

But I'm still aware of being alone, and an echo of the fear still waits in the corner of my mind.

I lie silent on the bed, close my eyes through force of will, and try letting myself sleep. But my eyes snap open in the darkness and fall on the lighted phone at my side. The phone is ringing but in silent mode.

"Oh! That's why I haven't heard my phone go off in hours."

I don't remember muting it, but I must've at some point.

I won't pick up any call, no matter how long it rings."

What seems like hours later, I'm still not asleep. What's happened is too strange, and I imagine anyone in my situation would have a hard time sleeping.

So I use the powerful force of autosuggestion to regain the strength I brainwash myself, *"There is no danger in this building; I'm strong and feeling sleepy."*



"Autosuggestion is good, but not using it to control the mind chatter and ignoring something as precious as intuition or the signs or caution from the universe is foolishness."



The next day, I'm thinking about what I want to wear to work.

I have long, silky-fine Indian hair, trimmed well with gentle waves. I always keep them clean and shiny, and today is no exception.

I walk gracefully around the office, hair hanging below my shoulders. I love it when people turn around and see me.

The plain office shoes with extended heels make me look a little taller than I am.

Like most girls my age, I love to catch attention.

“I’ve been wearing only trousers and shirts to the office for weeks. It’s time for something more exciting. I don’t feel able to express myself in western clothes. I want to wear some Indian colors. Today, I can spend time to decide on a decent Indian outfit for an ethnic look.”

“Hmmm.... . what should I wear?”

Sets are neatly hanging in my wardrobe. I glance through them.

“It’s Thursday, and I can wear yellow.”

The use of colors in Indian culture is more symbolic; yellow brings happiness, peace, and mental concentration.

I hold the yellow lehariya chiffon pastel kurta in front of me in the wardrobe mirror. *“It’s not too much for office wear,”* I assure myself. *“With fawn leggings, it’ll be just right.”*

I hang silver earrings with small jhumkis at the bottom in my ears, then glance back into the mirror and am happy to see they’ll look fabulous with this outfit.

Dressed up in ethnic attire, I look like a fresh, pretty, confident Indian software girl—with a beautiful smile as always.

For makeup, I limit myself to red lipstick, smack my lips, and pick up a napkin to kiss it. I think I look perfect with a natural, even skin tone.

I lean closer to the mirror, smile slightly, and my beautiful, large teeth appear to protrude to brighten my face effortlessly. I love this smile.

I'm ready to go to the office.

With my car keys in hand and a leather handbag on my shoulder, I trot briskly to the kitchen and start looking around for my office water bottle. When I'm unable to find it, my face loses some of its cheer, and I can feel a slight headache coming on.

"I'll manage without it. If I don't leave now, I'll be late." I rush to the car, my heels making a noticeable tik-tok.

My neighbor Sara is waiting in her car; she turns around, waving at me, *"Hi Priya? you look lovely!"*

I smile and wave back. I know I look nice.

Work is non-stop all day long, and when I get home in the evening, I collapse on my stomach on the living room sofa. My breathing is shallow, and I feel nauseous.

I reach out and drag the dustbin near my head in case of an emergency.

"I should have been careful," I think as I reflect on the day. I felt a migraine coming on this morning before breakfast, but I ignored it, thinking it would subside as the day progressed. If I'd taken it easier at work, I could've avoided it.

It didn't help that it was a bright day and I left my sunglasses at home, so the headache had got worse even before I reached the office. I owe today's migraine entirely to my carelessness.

The bedroom light is on, but I don't even have the energy to switch it off.

Lying down, I shield my eyes against the light with the pillow.

My body is wet with sweat, and it feels like the sweat is draining all the nutrients out of my body and leaving me exhausted.

Tomorrow is the weekend. I can take the rest of the day to rest, but the pain is terrible, and I'm not even sure I'll survive the night.

I give up on the idea of sleeping, figuring instead that I'll just lie down and rest as long as I can.

I wake up with the morning sun rays stubbornly making their way through the weak curtains. I don't know when I slept.

I still feel tired, but at least the migraine seems to be dying down. As I brush my teeth, I can still feel a tolerable but unwelcome headache. I know I can't rush through today. I have to take things easy; thankfully, work should be light today, so maybe I'll feel better by the end of the day.

I gulp down a small glass of fresh orange juice.

To my surprise, I feel a little hungry.

I microwave a tiny amount of oat porridge in a small bowl, which is one-fourth of my everyday diet. I eat it with curd, black salt, cut onions, and a pinch of mint powder. My tender body receives it well, and I feel my energy growing, but the headache persists.

In the kitchen cleaning the dishes, I think to myself, *“I’ll have to make sure I’m productive today, so I have to push myself to be active. I can finish off the mundane tasks I’ll have to do this weekend, like washing these dishes and cleaning the flat.”*

I’m sluggish and bloated, and my back is aching.

I can’t risk another migraine, and I again promise myself to make it an easy day at work, putting in slow and steady effort until the migraine eventually lessens and dies out.

Next, I make tea with fennel seeds and lemongrass and search for something light to munch on with it.

I open an orange airtight container and take out some foxnuts. These will be perfect, as they’re light on the stomach.

It’s a lazy weekend, early afternoon. I’m sipping tea from a Japanese bone china cup, curled up on the sofa, munching buttery home-roasted foxnuts. Externally, life can’t be better than this. Internally, I feel nauseous, windy, and bloated with slight traces of yesterday’s migraine.

“Anyone can mistake my current state as a greener grass here. As they say, “Seeing is believing.” Suppose anyone who sees apparently with

pair of eyes will see it wrong. One needs to feel the invisible story of another's life with patience and maturity.”

Suddenly, I'm starting to feel better. I guess it was the lemongrass tea and bland foxnuts. I'm not sure which helped more, and I decide it must have been the combination.

Thankfully, the migraine is almost dead, and there's nothing much I can do at home. There's no milk for tomorrow morning, as the one I got yesterday went bad lying in the car boot all night.

I decide to head to a nearby kiosk to grab another liter of milk.





Chapter 2

Is it a cosmic hum?

Bill execution is underway. A stream of numbers flows continuously across the screen, flickering as each new bill generates.

I sit hunched, eyes popping out to stare fixedly at the computer screen. *“I think everything is alright; bill execution is going as expected.”*

Looking at the scrolling numbers, my head is clouded and needs a break. I often close my eyes to revive myself when waiting for this process; this time, my deep breath turns into a relaxing yawn.

I sit for a while with my eyes closed, then suddenly, I ponder out loud, *“The bill run started at 11pm, and it’s 3 am now, so it’s been nearly four hours. But we’ve still only produced two thousand bills. Something must be wrong. This speed is crawlingly slow.”*

I want to let it go and keep resting, but my mind begins a rough calculation without my permission. *“If it’s already taken four hours to get here, it might get even slower as the load on the database increases. At that rate, this bill run will take more than two days and a night.”*

We can’t carry on with this slow billing speed; the code needs to be optimized.

But I’ll need to proceed carefully; I can’t risk changing the code for this billing cycle. Somehow, I need to get this bill run completed with the current code.

One thing is sure: this won’t work next bill cycle.

First thing first, for this bill run to complete, it needs to run all night without even stopping for an hour. *“I have to be awake the whole night; I don’t have a choice,”* I tell myself.

It’s midnight. The office is cool with purring air conditioners.

My skin is numb, but my mind chatters, *“It’s freezing,”* and it’s as if the air conditioners have heard my complaint; just then, they turn off due to after-hours power restrictions.

Exhausted, I continue to sit and record the bill run activities to be automated next time if possible. Soon, the room becomes roasting hot, and I open the window. Drenched in sweat and sitting in a lonely office with my computer may be a risk for many, but I’m not scared of sitting alone in the office

For a change, I gaze out of the window, just to keep myself in a good mood. On the roads far below, cars look like toys.

Wearily watching time tick by on the computer screen, I raise my favorite office water bottle to my lips and take another sip of water.

I lay my head down on the desk next to the computer. I won’t be getting a full night’s rest, but at least I can nap for a few minutes.

When I wake up, my eyes feel swollen and stuck together. Heart racing, I look out the window, but I’m relieved to see it’s still dark outside. My hand feels clammy, and the desk is damp with sweat from where it was resting. A glance at the computer screen tells me it’s three in the morning.

I yawn heartily. *“Thank God I didn’t oversleep.”* The long nap has left me feeling surprisingly restored, and I still have five good hours to myself.

Armed with a fresh infusion of energy, I get to work. Every twenty minutes or so, I take careful note of the time and the corresponding number of bills completed. I calculate the rate of completion by subtracting any two bill numbers and time pairs.

By the time the sun is bright outside my window, we’ve completed over seventy percent of the work; the rest is simple, and I’ll easily do it during the day. Knowing this, I allow myself to lean back in my chair. I’m tired, but I feel accomplished.

It’s ten past eight, and people have started entering the office. They look crisp and fresh. Here I am, still at my desk, sinking into my chair with sagging shoulders and not a hundred percent awake. As Reena passes by, I glance up, swallowing my fatigue; I mumble, *“Hello,”* but she walks straight past without noticing me or responding. I stretch out my arms again with a yawn, hands comforting my back.

As I sit, a thought comes to my mind from somewhere: ***“People look at our big cars and think we have a happy life. They envy our rich lifestyle and pockets full of money. Do they understand the responsibility and mental stress we handle?”*** My eyes are hurting, and my lower back is pleading with me to lie down. With eyes closed, shoulders pushed up, and elbows down, I kick myself awake, getting back to work and finishing the last mile.

I rise slowly to my feet, turn around to face the awakening office, and walk toward the pantry for a cup of tea. I'm doing my best to overcome this sleep and tiredness.



It's midnight again. I have been in the office all day and night without going home, and I'm dog tired, but the bill run is complete. Post-bill checks have given accurate results as expected.

She's entitled to recharge her batteries for two lazy days. Nothing official about this break, but no one will question it.



It's eight the next morning, and I'm lying in bed hours past my usual wake-up time, thinking about anything but work and listening to my favorite Kishore Kumar songs. I'm taking it easy; there's no hurry in life today. Finally getting up, I fill a hot water bucket with the juice of a lime, a cup of potent mustard oil, and a cup of sea salt to give my legs a long, relaxing soak, slowly and softly calming down from the last two days. There's something about Kishore Kumar's songs that makes me sing along every time. Next, I do a hot oil head massage, and then, skipping the day's routine chores, I go out for a leisurely breakfast at my favorite restaurant. It's a comfy, cozy atmosphere where I love to listen to the relaxing sounds of the water fountain, and as always, it helps rejuvenate my nerves.

After a day of relaxing, I'm eating my dinner and pondering the next day at the office. *"I have just a couple of weeks to alter the code*

for better speed, and this will be a giant monster rather than a simple execution of bill runs,” I murmur. “This bill run was a manual task without too much risk. It’ll be a good idea to start working on it tomorrow.”

I go into the bedroom and undress myself to go to sleep. As I lie on the bed, my mind is calm, but it imagines all that could happen in the next few days. Weighing all that’s possible for me to achieve while trying to find the time to get it all done, thinking hard to connect the dots, and sketch out an appropriate course of action. *“Fortunately, it’s Ramadaan-Eid season. Everyone will be fasting and praying, so it’ll be slower in the office.”*

I know that Omanis eagerly await Eid celebrations after an entire month of fasting. Tomorrow is the Iftar party, which I can quickly decline. I am not in India and not a Muslim. The day after tomorrow is the weekend. Fortunately, colleagues are planning to go for a movie, which I’ll avoid in favor of some uninterrupted time with my laptop—the ideal way for my creativity to manifest.

“With such a crucial task to complete and so much free time to dedicate to billing code, I shouldn’t waste time,” I tell myself.

It’s still dark when I wake up naturally; my alarm clock is for 5 am, but I’ve woken up without hearing it as usual. I stay in bed, awake but eyes closed, enjoying the early morning luxury of being in bed till my alarm goes off.

The rest of the world is still fast asleep, and the flat is quiet except for the ticking of the wall clock and the steady hum of the refrigerator.

But as my eyes open and I look at the refrigerator, I notice how very silent it is. My eyes immediately pick up doubt and uncertainty. *“That’s not the noise of refrigerator motor,”* they tell me. I chew my lip and scratch my prominent forehead as I consider the source of the noise.



“Hey, could this be cosmic hum I read about yesterday?” I smile at the thought of having discovered something big, but I’m still not sure. In an attempt to dig deeper and clear up the uncertainty, I plug my ears tightly with my index fingers. *“Let me check if this is the cosmic hum,”* I scream with excitement. *“Ohhhhh... Wow! I can hear it with my ears closed. It’s a cosmic noise, just like they describe it!!!”* I almost crush my ears tightly with both palms. Thrilled to bits, I keep shouting out loud. *“Oh my GOD, I can hear it clear as day. I’m sure this isn’t refrigerator noise; this is cosmic humming. Unbelievable! I can listen to cosmic humming. Good God, I could identify cosmic noise today!!! Today is a good day.”*

I’m happy to have woken up peacefully on my own so close to my alarm. I’m feeling a headache reaching down towards my neck on the right side, but I’m even happier that this didn’t throw off my internal alarm this morning. I make myself slide onto the sofa to sit comfortably and rest, with the sincere intention of waking up soon. I manage to focus on my breath, inhale and exhale consciously and deeply as I gaze at the stars out the window. Many minutes pass, and I gradually begin to feel more awake as I rest. Finally, I push myself off the sofa, conquering mild body aches and protests.

This hour of the morning is peaceful, both inside the flat and outside. I look at a big copper jug with a screw cap that stands loudly on the side table. The jar holds clean water overnight, and I swallow one glass after the other, quickly finishing almost the entire jar. When I set it down, I notice a little pool of water on top of the table, which must’ve spilled when I was pouring it. My

instinct tells me to wipe it up immediately, but I stop myself. It makes me a little uncomfortable to leave it, but I know it'll dry on its own. Pushing the water out of my mind, I move around the house, getting ready in silence; then, for some time, I stand and stare at the bare, white wall, creating a silence inside myself.

It's this silence that's so valuable.



I'm breathing in silence comfortably; I can feel not only my mind but even my spirit getting rejuvenated. This divine silence reassures me that I'm protected, and I need this reassurance every day. In the midst of this, I gather all the ideas and wonder silently how and what I can create.



My mind has filled with useful ideas for work, and I sit down to capture them on a blank piece of paper before I lose them. Also, the little things I need to do throughout the day pop into my mind. “I need to buy yogurt and peanut butter... I'll finish the croissants today; only two are there. The scrubbing brush I saw at Preeti's house. I can get it all on my way back from the office.” Ignoring nothing, I capture everything that comes to me on the paper. Yesterday I was so exhausted, I missed the deli kiosk around the corner and drove straight back empty-handed. It happens, and I don't let it worry me too much.

After capturing ideas, it's time to plan and do a question-and-answer session with me to brainstorm solutions to difficult problems.

I tear off a croissant crumb, dip it in sour cream, place it in my mouth. My fingers are covered with sugar and cinnamon, and rather than wiping them with a tissue; I enjoy licking each one clean. I take a sip of black coffee, which tastes heavenly.

Carefully, so as not to spill coffee on the white paper, I lift the coffee mug away from the table to place it on the floor.

I return my attention to the blank white wall and jerk my chin to push my long hair out of my face. Oops! My hand knocks against the mug, which tips and spills coffee. The white planner sheet is happily enjoying the smell and taste of fresh coffee.

I take a deep breath and reassure myself that it's because of the headache. That's when things like this happen; otherwise, I'm careful.

I run to the kitchen and return with a bunch of paper towels, gently patting the spilled coffee to sop up as much as possible. I squeeze it in the mug, thinking it will bounce back like a sponge, but it's sodden and useless, and I toss it in the wastebasket.

I've soaked up the majority of the coffee, but the dampness has spread throughout the stack of paper. I wave it back and forth to dry, then smile with relief. The planning sheet has taken on a slight coffee color, but the contents are still legible.

“I better get back to work,” I remind myself, then glance at the unimportant papers strewn on the floor. *“I can clear this mess later; no need to worry about them at this hour.”*

As I stood there holding the stack of paper damp and drooping with coffee, the solutions I’ve come up with are surprisingly sensible and ingenious.



Early in the morning is a time not to miss meeting MYSELF, an excellent person I trust completely. It’s a time for reassurance that God is with me, so I’ll sail through everything smoothly. Everything I discuss with myself is vital for my mind, and there are so many positive effects that I might not know until later.



I’m inspired and recharged, full of peace and joy inside.

The sun hasn’t even risen, and already I have a real sense of achievement; it’s been a productive start to a productive day. I’ve used the early morning hours creatively—I have a plan for my daily activities, and I have a list of fantastic ideas.

I go out on the balcony, where it’s dark and hot. Air-conditioned bedrooms are tempting to crawl back into bed, but I have the inner strength to make hard choices.

The weather is very different from India, where mornings are always pleasantly cool irrespective of seasons. Here, the night is slowly turning to day, but it's hazy. I struggle to make out the line of date trees across the road. Behind them, I know there's a field of dark-colored grass, but I can't see it yet.

I know it will be a busy day, so I decide to put on my shoes and go out for an early morning walk. I walk tall like an achiever, throwing my slightly narrow shoulders back and striding peacefully on a deserted jogging trail, just me and nature.

Before I know it, I'm jogging down the track, but my legs start to ache, so I slow down to a walk. My body is reminding me of the posture I spend too many hours in every day, back bowed and shoulders hunched to stare at a laptop screen. I consciously throw out my chest and straighten my back and shoulders and continue taking long, firm strides. Although warm, the breeze has cooled my head for a tough day ahead, and soothing greetings from birds are probably activating some creative parts of my brain. It's a relatively long walk for me, and I can tell it's made me feel happier.

I don't know when it happens, but thoughts of work begin to seep into my mind. *"The billing engine is far too slow. We can't have another cycle like that last one—we ordered pizza for dinner in the office, and we spent the entire night working to catch up so we could complete the bill run on time. I remember, four months back, bill runs were speedy. I could doone myself in a couple of hours. It's got slower and slower over the last few months. Priority for me is sussing out the root cause and finding a way to fix it."*

My mind, calm and energized from the early-morning air, dive deep into visualizing the code—*“I think the innermost loop in the rating logic is making the unnecessary hit to the database with every transaction. And obviously, this is increasing the bill execution time. Wow!!!*

“This is most probably the culprit or at least one of the culprits. I’ll correct that, and it should increase the billing speed exponentially.”

I promise myself to register and test this logic later today to measure how much it will speed up the bill.

My body moves almost on its own, my mind still in the “inertia of rest” with the bill run slowness issue. I look at my surroundings with awe as I walk further. *“OMG! It’s so beautiful. Look at this long avenue of date trees next to the footpath.”* They’ve stretched out their drooping prickly spiked leaves for a friendly embrace. Each branch offers multiple bunches of rusty red, marble-like dates. I hurriedly put my hands up and pluck as many as my trouser side pockets can hold, making them bulge out like rugby balls on both sides of my thighs.

“Let me taste one,” I cautiously muse. I pop one of the fruits into my mouth, and my face instantly takes on an expression of satisfaction and pleasure; the date is so sweet and succulent, unlike Indian dates. My pocketfuls of dates will meet my fruit needs for a couple of days.

My dancing heart begs for a song. I hurriedly cover the ground back home, singing with hand-plucked, organic dates in happy rhythmic strides:

“Subana Safar aur yey Mausam hasee.... .”

Translation:

Pleasant journey and lovely weather,

Pleasant journey and lovely weather

I'm scared I might get lost (with happiness)

Pleasant journey and lovely weather...

The morning walk is over, and I can't bear a dirty house.

My wall clock shows me I have a little less than two hours to get ready and finish the household chores before I leave for the office.

“I'll need to be quick,” I tell myself because soon the morning minutes start ticking into hours. I'll avoid getting ready at a leisurely pace and making up my mind to rush now that the morning walk is over. I start multitasking to get ready; I'm hurriedly untying the laces, take off my walking shoes, *and* I hear a bucket overflowing with water. I walk to the bathroom with an untied shoelace. Water is overflowing from soaked clothes, and white detergent foam is all around the floor.

I mop up the water from the bathroom, then start with a quick clean of the house. I pick up containers from the table, scraping the leftovers into the rubbish bin, and place dishes into the sink to soak—I'll wash everything in one go later. I toss an empty plastic bottle at the rubbish bin from around four meters and miss the target. *"It's alright,"* I tell myself. *"I'll put it in the bin when I clean the kitchen."* I run back to the living room full of energy, twisting and turning super-fast like a gymnast. The living room bin is overflowing—I haven't emptied it for a long time. I take out the rubbish bag, tie it shut and run to the front door to drop it outside. I replace it with a plastic shopping bag, then quickly wipe the dining table, dusting everywhere I can in the tiny window of time I have. I'm sweating as I clean, and I know this is the best sort of exercise.

Keeping my place clean isn't too tricky as I live alone, so I make sure to keep everything spic and span.

I look out of the window; I'm irritated as I see at the rubbish heapyikes, a rubbish heap dumped in front of the building.

I run back to the bathroom, where the clothes have had time to soak. Jumping into the bucket is like jumping on swampy land. It might look funny to an outside observer, but it's an innovative way to wash clothes that doubles as excellent cardiovascular exercise.

In the past, I washed my clothes once a week by hand. But each time, I would develop severe pain in my shoulders or back. One morning I woke up with severe muscle pain all over my upper

body. I had to go back to sleep more and didn't get to the office until after lunch.

For a clean freak like myself, washing clothes is inevitable when we're staying away from home and my country, so I knew I had to find another way to do it. They say necessity is the mother of invention, and I invented a new way to wash my clothes. It may not be high-tech, but it's made a tough routine job much more manageable.

Taking a paper towel, I wipe the steam off the mirror so I can see myself. I liberally apply kohl to my eyes and paint dark red lipstick over my lips. I puff my hair in the front and quickly clutch my long black hair waving down my back.

I check my makeup in the mirror. I feel a little over-made up for the office, so I wipe off the lipstick, reapply only simple pink lip gloss, and look at my face again. *"I think this lip gloss is enough by itself, and it looks suitable for the office."*

Twisting sideways a bit and satisfied with my curves, I lovingly stare at myself in the mirror. Then, looking down at my tiny undulated stomach, I ask, *"When will you go taut and flat to match my slim body?"*

Back in the kitchen, I quickly prepare today's breakfast, a delectable soft pancake called butter dosa and masala tea. While the dosa cook, I quickly gulp down a chikoo fruit, skin, and all. I'm very fond of chikoo, and they keep me and my gut active.

By the time the dosa is ready, my mouth is watering. It's a traditional South Indian breakfast except for masala tea, a North Indian beverage; I love to integrate these North and South Indian elements, both equally delicious in their own right.

I put my plate on the breakfast table add a dollop of kaara-thengai, or spicy tomato, chutney. I made this chutney over the weekend, and I usually store it for a couple of days. Whenever I eat this tomato chutney, I remember my neighbor Mrs. Narayanan. I would roll my eyes at her back when she taught me "Kaara-Thengai-chutney," speaking English with an authentic South Indian accent like an authentic South Indian filter coffee.

I look at my watch and realize I only have ten minutes to get dressed before going to the office, so there's no moment's leisure. I hurriedly finish breakfast, gulp down the rest of my tea, and get up, leaving the dishes in the sink.

I open my wardrobe and notice a white shirt, a final set of an ironed piece from dhobi(Laundryman) left in the closet. My innocent unwashed jeans always come to my rescue. They give me a fresh look, asking me to reuse them, which I accept. I casually put the dress on without looking in the mirror; I know this combination is perfect on a hot, summery day at the office.

I run and jump in my car with a thud at exactly 7:30. It's a thirty-minute drive, and I make it to the office right at my target of 8:00 am.

Before the office, I see the monitor lizard again; it's a 4-5 feet long lizard and looks like a mini-dinosaurs. This lizard may bring me good luck for sure today. I reach office confident, and I choose to avoid the lift. As I climb the stairs, I see through large ground-floor windows the deserted office hall with stark white office walls, beautiful potted indoor plants, and empty office furniture with computers. Only one tiny-built guy is sitting in one corner.

This time of the day provides the ideal environment for a person to work with peak efficiency.

I open my laptop without any delay. I also have an e-mail from Ananya with the subject "Pre-bill check results – Passed 100%."

It's encouraging news to start the day. Still, I open the e-mail to analyze the pre-bill checks, detailed reporting, and billing speed.

"All of the test cases have passed, and the billing seems to be accurate, but how is this happening? Rather than decreasing like it should have done, the test results show, the execution time increased by ten percent.

"This doesn't mean anything. Billing system changes aren't providing time efficiency benefits as expected.

"I have to ensure this software isn't rolling out into the live environment."

Whenever any code is rolling out into the live environment, it needs my go-ahead e-mail. I know this, but I still send an e-mail to discontinue the rollout across the live setting, which is a necessary precaution against disruption.

Priya sits upright in her office chair with her eyes fixed on the screen, looking around at quick intervals like a frightened deer.

Nalini waves at her as she walks past, “Hello Priya...” Priya’s big eyes on her bony, clean face are blank, and don’t respond. Priya is immersed in her work and doesn’t seem to see Nalini, who understands and passes on quietly without talking further. Nalini takes no offense at this; whenever someone doesn’t respond to us in the office, we know it’s because they’re busy thinking.



After a week of code modifications and successful test results, today, I feel relaxed. It’s late afternoon, and most of the Indians are abuzz with activity. On the other hand, Brits are active in the morning; when I rarely see Indians, it’s time for Brits to wind down now. Thanks to the powerful air conditioners, it’s reasonably cool inside the office. Orange sunshine is angling down through the window, as though divine is treating me with a huge orange ice cream baramidhot summer.

Having rolled out the code, I think to myself. *“I can call it a day and head home early. I don’t have anything more to do, so I’ll just waste time if I stay back. The testers will be testing tonight and have their results in by the morning.”*

My brain gets busy, visualizing a relaxing evening accompanied by exotic food cooked in grandma’s style. Soon, my white teeth flash in a cheerful smile. *“Let’s make good use of this evening. I’ll cook*

chickpeas on a slow flame. I haven't eaten that in a while. I'll have an early dinner and sleep early to compensate for last week's sleep loss.

"I'll wake up refreshed tomorrow, reach the office early and check the new code test results." Thinking this, I hit the 'SEND' button on the e-mail informing the testers that I'll be rolling out the billing code onto the 'dress rehearsal environment.'

Out the window, the orange sun is quickly surrendering to the growing darkness. The dust storm has made it hazy everywhere. *"It's not too bad outside; I think I can still drive home."*

But then I start hearing scary slapping, whipping sounds outside. Sand, Lay's chips wrappers, cigarette packets, and empty plastic water bottles are all whipping around in the gusty wind. I begin to pace back and forth impatiently.

Crash! Startled, I look out the window, holding my breath, hunched arms crossed. All I see are tree arms whipping viciously to and fro in the darkness. *"I don't know what broke."*

In the corridor, I cross paths with Dennis, who's frowning deeply with folded arms, a deep ridge between his brows. We share the same pain, so I smile to cheer him up, and he responds with a forced smile. Parking my problem and diverting my attention, I feel happier.

Finally, I surrender to the situation. *"This fierce wind and darkness is a deadly combination. It would be foolish to drive back home during*

this massive dust storm—I'd be asking for trouble. I'll wait indoors and stay safe.”

