

that they are surrounded by family and friends who adore them.

One cannot ask for better parents than mine. I only wish that I am able to practice the life lessons that I have learned from them. They have experienced the British Colonial life, the Pakistan life, the Bangladesh era, and now the western life in the US. I pray that their wisdom will be embraced by all of us.

'RABBIR HAMHOMA KAMA RABBAYANI SAGHIRA' (Surah Al-Isra – 17:24)

"My Lord! Bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood."



A Sleeping Giant, Awakened

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The rental car is gray and dull. The rear seat affords little freedom, confining me

to a stifling existence of mile upon mile of ennui. The disc brakes and calipers firmly bring the car to a halt, delicately lunging my body toward the driver's seatback. A rogue smile, blasphemous to my stoic lips, climbs from the depths of my heart and graces my face, a barren, bumpy amalgam of exotic color and adolescent acne. I unbuckle the restraining seatbelt and unclothe the door, eagerly. There's no glorious wash of sunlight to greet me, for Helios's chariot is quickly approaching the horizon. Rather, the cool, crisp California air, light and airy with that rugged Sierra Nevada charm, welcomes me with open arms, as if I were an old acquaintance returning after years of travel abroad. The rental car, carrying the scars left by scores of brutal drivers, sits apathetically in the empty parking lot as my family exits. Yosemite Falls smashes its mighty aquatic fists into the stone base, resonating a sound like that of a toothbrush against teeth. It's sunset on the Merced River in Yosemite National Park, California.

My wandering feet lead me to a forest trail. Spruces, black oak, Jeffery pines, the occasional titanic redwood – such verdure tempt me to stroll into the forest, as though passing through the caliginous coppice would lead me to the gates of heaven. I do not doubt the prospect. The trees emit a distinct sage fragrance. My family, their arms filled with cameras, maps, and purses, follow me into the grove. The brown, earthy path is hard, callous, and unyieldingly firm. Sublime sprinkles of sunlight and shadow, ever common on a mid-afternoon forest hike, do not exist in this

tenebrous forest; rather, deep hues of mahogany and coarse bark are all that I see, as the dense timberland obstructs other sights. The oaks and pines form a canopy, leaving the trail below wrapped in cold air. My ears continue to register the faint rushing sound of flowing water, the sound of the Merced River. Listen. Missing is the calling of birds; my family's crunching footsteps and the river are all that interrupts Nature's meditative silence. The water is not so much a rushing sound now: it's a gentle trickle. There are fewer trees here, and the path widens. A glimpse of sunlight graces my eye, but only for a moment. I increase my pace and reach the river bank.

I step into a flood of sunshine and absorb the warmth and divine radiance. The cold, the brown, the gray – the sun kindly cleanses me of such grime. The bank, sprinkled with boulders placed delicately by ancient glaciers, borders the shallow, serene Merced River; it is more of a wide stream than a river. The deep, vibrant crimson of the summer sun, sitting in the sky to my right, falls upon the gentle crests of the ripples, causing the cranberry rays to scatter. The light quickly strains my astigmatic eyes. I glance to the right and my vision falls upon an arched, cobblestone walking bridge; several couples, graduate students perhaps, cradle each other while facing in my direction. The resplendent, scarlet sun silhouettes their bodies. I hear footsteps behind me, and my family emerges from the grove. They immediately look to their left and witness a divinely beautiful scene.

The imposing granite face of Half Dome radiates a piercing rust tone, a red more commonly found in the embers of campfires. Although usually a flat faced, gray and black, curvaceous monolith, Half Dome now looks like a quarter of a freshly cut tomato. In the midst of an afternoon nap, Half Dome has been awakened by the sun's glorious rays. The giant, stirred by such a brilliant cast, radiates its own beaming glow. I no longer hear the gentle trickles of the Merced, although I know the river lies at my feet. I am completely entranced by the peak, draped in alpenglow. The pewter tint of the sky behind the mountain only serves to underscore the ruby tinge.

The sun continues to set, causing the deep olive of perennial leaves and coniferous needles to appear sooty and black. Half Dome, too, begins to withdraw its blush. The stark, shady granite slowly supplants the vivid garnet until the mountain is gray again. I note the absence of my family, and I begin to retrace my steps to the car. The arthropods of the forest are readying their instruments for their nocturnal symphony. As I enter the forest, the trees seem to ask, "Have you seen the gates of heaven?" I quietly nod. A smile reaches my lips, naturally. I release a deep breath and step back into the dark forest, changed.