

## ***A Sip of Matcha***

Like a cold tide, the aching in my skull ebbed and flowed.

18 for 2 whole days. Raced into the new year with a hangover. My feet were dead from all the dancing.

Flashes. Chug! Screaming. Chug! Dancing. Chug! Singing. Chug! Games. Chug! Friends. Chug, Chug, Chug!

It was a blur, a blur of happiness.

There was a fresh smile on my face as I woke up. My first morning of this new year was intoxicated by love and exhilaration, and as were we. It was our year! TWENTY-TWENTY! Surprises of Adulthood+Teenage waited to unravel. Big plans waited to unveil. A new chapter of life waited to unfold. But little did I know, a twist was already unfurling.

I remember drowning in assignments and deadlines and submissions and college admissions and meetings and portfolio ideas and worry and stress. I remember the hustle finally settling down. I remember late night drives and dressing all fancy and eating at my favorite restaurant and dancing in clubs and living the teenage dream. I remember counting down the days to graduation. I remember counting down days to my next trip. I remember the excitement dancing inside my core.

Then somewhere in the first week of March...

Or maybe the second week...

It all happened so quickly I barely remember it...

PM Modi released an order. Covid was on the rise. Stay at home. Quarantine. Lock down for 2 weeks.

What? No school? How am I going to do this? And that? And that? And this? What next? Suddenly, uncertainty infiltrated our lives. No one knew. Lock down extended for 2 more weeks. Extended again. And again. And again. We faded into obscurity, as our targets were crumpled and crushed. The 2 weeks turned into a month which turned into 5 months and then the year passed by. So quickly, yet so slowly.

*It was a sip of matcha. Bittersweet.*

My heart sunk in sorrow as school shifted online. Prom, graduation, and the iconic Goa trip were cancelled. I was forbidden from stepping outside, from seeing my friends my family my beloved city. I was a withering plant deprived of water. My body drooped with the burden of the unwanted boredom. The endless hours of sleep stole my energy.

I wish I was surfing. Paddling towards the waves, as my spirit rises with the wave. Riding freely as serenity rippled around me. Savoring the salty air while I drew a water-lace trail. The wave tunneling me as I escape its cold shackles. I wanted to be addicted so badly, that my board pulls me to explore the ocean, dawn till dusk. Liberated and unstoppable. Breathing and alive.

My heart instantly flipped as I saw the notification: 'Your admission decision is available'. This was it. My dream university. New York of Nothing. My nerves were popping as my finger approached the button. I couldn't do it. My brother opened the letter and screamed, "YOU'RE IN!" Tears gushed down my eyes as I laughed and smiled, and I yelled and hugged my pillow. PARSONS BABY! My excitement woke my entire world up and we celebrated virtually.

Living in New York, attending Parsons School of Design. I was so close to my dream, yet so far. I wish I transform my dream to reality instantly. Meeting new people, attending frat parties, sipping on bubble tea, schmearing my bagel, walking where the city takes me, experiencing a new adventure every day. My heart longed the thrill. My veins wanted to feel the bustle of New York City.

Tap that ass? My hair said yes. Bushy eyebrows.  
Hairy hands. Hairy legs. Hairy armpits. I had a  
mustache too! Oh my god, I resembled a bear.  
Itchy, lazy, gross. I missed my salon.

I wish I was stuck in my favorite city. Walking  
across Parisian streets in my summer dress  
paired with my Steve Madden boots. The aroma  
of freshly baked croissants teasing my tongue.  
My mouth drooling over the spectacular view,  
of the city and French boys. Dancing along the  
rhythm of the language, as the wine leads me.  
Simply wrapped in the arms of bliss, stuck in the  
world's fashion capital and city of love.

From my laptop to my phone to my parent's  
room to the kitchen and back to my room.  
House touring were my only trips, escaping the  
fights and disagreements from one room to  
another. Stuck here for so long, I was tired.  
Exhausted. Eat. Sleep. Clean the house. Repeat.

I wish I could act on my spontaneous nerves.  
Call my friends. Throw in essentials. Grab my  
bag pack. Take off. Take a road trip to the city  
nearby or escape into the wilderness of  
mountains. As my celebrity crush said in a  
movie, "Main udna chahta hoon, daudna chahta  
hoon, girna bhi chahta hoon... Bas, rukna nahi  
chahta ", - I don't want to stop. I want to  
discover the unheard places and have new  
experiences, good and bad. I want to unleash  
my craziness and cherish new memories. I want  
to scratch off items on my bucket list.

My love for cooking bloomed as I spent hours  
exploring cuisines. YouTube workouts and  
TikTok trends let me dive into the world of fun.  
The magnificent sunsets helped me escape

anywhere in the world. Books and board games became my new buds. Sketching. Family time. Spa days. The little moments became big and important. I found my peace in this chaos and snuggled the bursts of joy.

It was a roller coaster of emotions and lessons. Time doesn't stop for you, nor do opportunities. I decided to appreciate that time and make different memories. As I sip onto my cup of matcha, I reminisce the history 2020 made. I savor the aftertaste. Bittersweet.

By, Rishita Mehta