

**MEET  
ME  
IN  
MUMBAI**

sabina khan

***PUSH***

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The page features several stylized, dark grey floral illustrations scattered around the title. There are three flowers in the upper left quadrant, one in the upper right, and three in the lower right quadrant. The flowers have five petals and a central detail.

# CHAPTER ONE

I stare at the stick, willing the second line not to appear. But my powers of persuasion must have dulled because it shows up, a pretty baby pink, which is ironic considering there's nothing pretty about this. An avalanche of thoughts threatens to bury me. Suresh hasn't responded to any of my emails or messages. I don't even have his home number in India.

It's starting to dawn on me that I might be alone in this.

There's a loud knock on the bathroom door, and I almost drop the stick. "Ayesha, are you done? You're going to be late for school." Salma Aunty sounds anxious, which is nothing new. The woman could win a gold medal if there's ever an Olympic event on how to worry yourself into an early grave. But she's sweet, and I hate it when she worries about me.

"Coming, Aunty." I quickly wrap the pregnancy test stick in a wad of toilet paper and shove it into the pocket of my Dora the Explorer robe, a gift from my cousin Reshma, who's only a couple of years older than me and headed back to college just before I arrived in Bloomington, Illinois. Apparently, she thinks I'm seven, not seventeen.

I open the door to find Salma Aunty smoothing the duvet on my bed. Then she turns around and begins to straighten the things on my desk. She picks up a few sketches that I've left on top of my notebooks and puts them together in a neat little pile.

"You don't have to do that, Aunty," I say in protest, mostly because I don't like her touching my stuff, but partly also because I promised my mom that I would be super polite and always keep my room neat and tidy, so as not to bring shame upon my family back in India.

Salma Aunty is my mom's cousin. She settled here in Bloomington-Normal about twenty years ago when her husband got a job teaching physics at Illinois State University. She graciously offered to let me live with them during my senior year of high school so I could apply to college from within the US. It's a bit complicated because my parents moved back to India soon after I was born here. So, I have a US passport but an Indian accent and brown skin, which is what drew Suresh and me together in the first place. There aren't a lot of brown people in our school, and it's nice to have someone else who misses eating pav bhaji and ragda patties at Elco Market as much as I do.

"Come down and have breakfast before it gets cold," Salma Aunty says. "I made Bombay toast. It's your favorite, na?"

"Yes, thank you, Aunty," I say, giving her arm a quick squeeze before disappearing into the walk-in closet to get changed.

The thick slices of fried bread soaked in egg with onion, green chilies, and cilantro are still hot and crispy as I slide into a chair at the breakfast table. Normally I would inhale at least three slices, but today all it does is make the bile rise up to my throat. I've been feeling this way for a couple of days now, starting right after I realized I'd missed my period. When I woke up that morning, I just knew.

I didn't really need a test to confirm, but I bought one anyway. And now I would kill for a cup of coffee, which I'm pretty sure is bad in my condition. *Condition. Is that what this is?* I meet a cute boy who feels like home, we hang out, talk a lot, and I end up getting pregnant? It's like we've known each other for a long time, but in reality, it's only been three months. Though here, far away from my parents and my little sisters, even a week feels like an eternity.

I have no idea what I'm going to do.