**What’s Your Rorschach?**

**By Pialee Roy**

**Second Edition**

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**Part One: Padma Sherni What’s Your Rorschach?**

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**by Pialee Roy (aka Padma Sherni)**

**Chapter 1**

So I, Padma Sherni, had another good idea earlier tonight and within a second the lampshade on my nightstand fell and directed my gaze to the overcrowded bookshelf. My metaphorical halo of friends, family, and community, as well as my own lessons learned, protects me when I curiously explore life and the one light many lamps philosophy. I was reading a beautiful book of poetry that I randomly discovered on the bookshelf: “The World is Beautiful – A Collection” by Rabindranth Tagore which makes me smile and laugh to think of so many different perspectives about life....

I was born in the USA. My parents are from India. What do you suppose my Rorschach personality would be like? I have diverse family and friends from all over the world and from all walks of life that not even an open inkblot test of artwork could surmise or capture the whole of my characteristics or influences.

I think back to my college days when I used to imbibe cappuccino mocha ice coffee swirled with ice cream scoops and tried to study notes on flashcards especially for my course on Logic. A good friend from Australia, who I used to spend time with at the coffee shop, wanted to make sure when he saw my flash cards that I was not cheating. I was offended. Although he was also a student, he had never seen anyone study with flashcards before. Due to other priorities, I avoided studying too much for this class. However, later, my brother gifted me an entire book about how to be more logical; ha ha. So, although I never got a good grade in that math class for logic I still recall what a tautology is and made my point that I was in fact, not cheating. More importantly I was getting myself “edumacated” about love and friendships and that balance of independence and inter-dependence every college student goes through as they evolve from their life with their parents to their own way of being. And to answer my dad’s question, the other time I really was in the library and that building really does stay open late. Fortunately I did not have to answer that question again later as I may have possibly been in a conundrum as to how to explain my whereabouts. That balance of personal evolvement and independence and attachment to family or societal obligations and relationship expectations is often a struggle in emerging adulthood, especially for women of any descent.

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**Chapter 2**

I went to college in Delaware although I was born and brought up in the area of Boston, Massachusetts. I had lived in Massachusetts until 1995 and only moved from Boston to Delaware because of my Dad's job when I was approximately 18 years old. I went reluctantly because I love Boston: the skyline, the restaurants, the diversity, the walking trails, and the sailboats on the Charles River.

If I had stayed in Boston the scholarship I was offered for a school of physical therapy would have resolved my financial dilemma at least for the first year, as I strived for my independence.

However, the college tuition was more affordable in Delaware and my parents wanted me to stay closer to my new “home”, so I was required to apply at the last minute, to a university closer to them.

Fortunately for them, I was accepted just before orientation and classes started. If I was smarter I should have thought to mess up the application process, but I did not think of this brilliant idea until just this second 18 years too late.

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My mother probably just wanted to be hawk eyes at me for my whereabouts and so after I was accepted, I had to go to De-la-where? And eventually my mother's job was literally down the street from my dorm room. My mother’s employment location, at the time, then presented one more challenge on the journey to my freedom and independence as a strong willed Indian-American female growing up in the USA.

I somehow managed to get through life and school during the last few college years with some help from friends in a similar boat.

**Chapter 3**

As I had mentioned, I had never wanted to leave Boston and that was at the time the toughest decision of my life. I used go for runs around campus just to figure out how or when I was going to get back to my hometown or if I should stay where I was. I was the only one famished at 8am after a run and calling any of my friends to see if they wanted to get breakfast yet in the cafeteria. "Padma Sherni we're still sleeping. You go." Thank goodness for the all you can eat buffet and yet miraculously I still had good metabolism to maintain a strong core because I used to dance all the time.

At the end of my first year although I was achieving just what I wanted to, I struggled with my decision to continue to pursue a physical therapy course of study. Others felt this indecision was not good enough and demanded that I go home to refocus my energy and efforts. I said "No. Watch and wait. I will figure this out." At the end of my second year I was achieving just what I wanted yet others felt this was still not enough and demanded that I go home. I said "No.". Then my provisions of money for on campus housing ran out and I marched over to the local community center and got a job to work at an after school program. I paid my own residence bill and found out that I loved that feeling of financial freedom, independence and self-reliance. This was very important to me as a woman continuing to grow into my adulthood. Someone I dated during my first year must have understood this need, as I reflect with sarcasm, once when we went out for dinner. He would conveniently forget his wallet, and I would end up paying for both of us. Consequently this meeting did not evolve significantly. Ha ha. Then again, I had been brainwashed about gender roles in the way many people are still in a tug of war about this, and therefore, my friends both male and female were critical of that incident. I now look at that dinner with empowerment and yet have personal rules and expectations for dating etiquette which I will not divulge yet.

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**Chapter 4**

As an Indian-American, the sometimes conflicting guidance and advice from at least two cultures have been both confusing and amusing. The summer before high school I signed up for basketball camp. I love basketball even though I'm not all that talented in the hoop sport. I had only ever played in the challenging level of athletics, for the first time in my life, in 8th grade gym class. I learned how to play well, however. Still, I was mortified to then realize that I would be the *only* girl attending a supposedly coed summer camp the year after.

I was among approximately 15 guys I mostly didn't know. I was also the only brown person. My dad reminded me that I had a level head and encouraged me and reassured me that I would be just fine to get through the sports opportunity. So, after years of hearing the mantra, “Don’t talk to boys. Go study.” the rules had suddenly changed and yet not really. It is a fine balance that many females growing up can identify with. (I was not really sure I wanted this opportunity because I already had a very specific daydream to pursue of a guy I had a crush on from Boston. He was not on the basketball team in any school district, but I liked him anyways. I decided to keep myself busy until I got to see him again.

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So, I went to the basketball camp, just to see what would happen. During three-on-three scrimmages the guys would sometimes stop and politely hand me the ball. I eventually asked them to pass me the ball without knocking me over. This was pretty funny when I think about it now. They would devour donuts and soda during the breaks and I was in the midst of trying to figure if I was supposed to wear more make-up or not. From my perspective, there was no helpful person to really get advice from who had been through a similar life experience yet, in the whole history of the United States of America!

Anyways, I got through camp and then made the freshman basketball team in high school. My mother didn't understand that attending practices was not optional though. "Study! No boys. Study!" she recommended with emphasis. I protested, "But mom! Dad said that I have a level head and...." Then mom would double check for corroboration with my Dad, with a strong warning in her tone of voice "AY!!!! Shuncho??!!" and consequently inquired, “What on earth was this impractical idea for a girl her age?” Consequently, my basketball career ended. I'm embellishing slightly but you get the point. This is not too far off from what actually happened.

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**Chapter 5**

Okay, now after reflecting upon some of my earlier days and first year of college, I’m ready to tell you about my personal preferences about dating etiquette. Let’s start with a side note about paying the bill. Please don't stress me out with the fancy everything and restaurant and all that the first time around because I’ll have my jazz hands up and crossed in front of me the entire time. (I learned excellent defense and offense from basketball camp.) Just let’s go and meet up somewhere, maybe for coffee, where I can or you can run screaming in the opposite direction if needed after politely backing away after an hour or so if all is not going so well. However, all bells and whistles if this is for real the next time after and this will be your responsibility as my partner who has asked to spend time with me to treat. Then, I like taking turns leading and following and sharing in the responsibility of treats there on after if you're genuine. (This is what I have figured out from high school to first to second year of college or so until now with increasingly earned privileges.) If you have anything other than genuine intentions towards me, you will have me, my sisters and brothers, my surrogate sisters and brothers, and a whole bunch of other people I don’t even know who are already intruding into my life, because I am a female who is brown, who will then have a new agenda of trying to identify you for some type of consequence. I am not responsible for what happens to you after that.

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I learned a lot my second year in ways you wouldn't have expected by spending more time getting to know other students everywhere, and this was so much fun! And I was smart enough to choose the dorm with the walk in closet. And an antique piano. And no boys as residents in this building. The college residence was pristine and lovely.

**Chapter 6**

That was the best decision of my life at that time. Of course, as President of the student government for the women’s dorm, I made sure there were opportunities to have socials among other events and let people enjoy their free life in good company as they chose. Staying in the residence hall cost a lot of money. The job I had was good but did not pay enough to meet my living costs on campus. I eventually ran out of funds from the after school program I worked at for the community center. So, when the employment had ended, I had to go home.

During this transition time, I then decided at the end of my second year of college, that I no longer wanted to be a physical therapist and I dropped my major. I was tired of looking at cells. “When are we going to get to muscles?!” I thought. To make my decision and to volunteer time in community service, I helped the elderly who had multiple sclerosis in an aqua-size therapy program. I got into the pool even though I still couldn't really swim because I wanted to help them out and learn. Plus, I thought the idea was a good one, not only for them, but also to make sure that I could at least float in water.

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**Chapter 7**

My parents were very concerned when I told them about changing my major. When I had a vague idea of subjects that interested me more, like: the whole person in the context of their socio-ecological environment comprised of inter-dependent systems, I thought, “Yes, I’ll change my major.” My parents’ overprotective reaction was less confident at the time, “What on earth are you talking about?!” “Will you still be a type of doctor in the medical field?” "What kind of job will you get?” So again I had to strive harder for my goals regardless of whether or not others’ understood. I knew after observing toddlers trying to problem solve with their still growing vocabulary and motor skills that there was something a lot more important to me than just mitosis and meiosis alone or the citric acid cycle or krebs cycle.

My parents just wanted to make sure that after all their sacrifice to offer their children more opportunities to reach their dreams, that taking an atypical route would still ensure success. For my parents and fortunately for me, the definition of success included that we were happy, resilient, and able to support ourselves and others. They never barked orders except in loving convincing ways and this goes back and forth in a way that only someone like me could truly discern for others as to what is a literal disciplinary consequence to testing limits, versus a reprimand. The corroboration with one another regarding a need for a consequence usually began with the reference to each other: “Ay! Shuncho?” followed by some metaphorical figure of speech in a Shakespearean level of an Indian language that was way over my head. For many years all I needed to comprehend was the tone that I was definitely in trouble for something, (that as usual, most likely, was not my fault.).

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After three more years of college studies after my sophomore year, I had two undergraduate degrees in a field different than what I had started in. Most people did not expect this as I had taken a temporary part-time hiatus to go home after my funds ran out which precipitated my shift in plans. My Mom was an employee at the University in a Biology laboratory so that was how I afforded to attend college. There was no old money or advice to get from other members of our families because no one else had ever gone through any of the school or health or employment systems in America before our own immediate family. I had learned that it wasn’t until changes in immigration policy in approximately 1965 that an influx wave of Asians arrived in the United States, but not too many before then. I had also heard stories from my parents’ friends that in the late 60s and early 70s people got so lonely when they first arrived in the U.S. that they would call the phone number to the weather line just to have the sound of a friendly human voice.
**Chapter 8**

As soon as I graduated from college, I wanted my own apartment. My parents said "NO WAY Jose." Okay, they didn't really say that last part, but they did say "NA." So, I wrote out a logical reason, in a three page essay, that was actually very sound and rational (given references to my earlier course on logic) as to why I should be allowed to move out and get my own place (all the while cursing why I didn't study harder with flash cards in that logic math class.) I only partly won my debate. I may be an atypical but nicely argumentative Indian-American with a big heart. Interpret my malady however you will. (Smile.)

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My parents must have been preparing me for what certain types of love relationship arguing styles are like in response to my announcement that I wanted to move out into my own apartment. They said to me at first seemingly reasonable and rationale, "Okay let's discuss." We gathered at the kitchen table and within one minute they would say, "We have decided this is not a good idea…(pause)…This was a good discussion." And then they would adjourn! This was obviously non democratic oppression and a violation of my women's rights! (I had learned something about this during my second year of college.)

So, with female friends who sympathized and empathized I planned my escape. I got a job (this methodology seemed to be the formula that worked best for my life goals) and it broke my heart but I self-reflected a lot and ultimately decided that I wasn't doing anything wrong. I left. I signed a lease and I called to tell my parents that I had and that we could meet for dinner at home if they wanted to talk more. All chaos broke loose after that. I was smart enough at least to have friends that were boys too at the time if I needed protection either from bad guys or my parents at that point. Plus I still had to find out who "dharu" was apparently. Although I had met a lot of people I still didn't know “dharu” but my friends educated me in the way that good friends would for families like ours who have no prior generation to ask for advice or depend on for support and therefore often act as surrogate family but not literally. I was not all the friendly with dharu at first, as I discovered, this was actually just another word for alcohol and not a real person. Other than that, I cannot tell you how many times people have verified my last name this year and how exactly it is pronounced. Meter fail on the accent comprehension apparently, regarding my name as Padma Sherni. (My name, by the way evolved out of the word for Lotus and then consequently my temperament at times as I was described to be like a female tigress. Therefore, the name Padma Sherni is what everyone began to refer to me as and I accepted my moniker.)

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Well for TEN YEARS my parents would not let me forget that I had moved out on my own. Everyone was mad at me when I left. I did not even know what I was looking for other than I wanted everyone (my parents and all of society “brown town and friends” as well as “non-brown town and friends”) to stop demanding of me and telling me what to do and to stop making me feel like I had to meet all their expectations for who they thought I should be. The year or two prior to this I was realizing this and I ran SO hard to find myself I ended up right back where MY PARENTS started (in India) and met a lot of cool people where we discussed matters with a lot important personnel around about the difference between individualistic and collectivist thinking. This included the Prime Minister and Vice President of India at that time in 1999. I also learned that no matter how late you are running, even according to Indian Standard Time, you should never run on the grounds of important personnel because there are a lot of security people with arms around who are really not there to hug you. I continued with life and work and friends when I returned to the USA and was happy to make new friends and continue progressing with life.

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**Chapter 9**

Then there was the horse trainer. I was single in my early twenties and as usual my friends or colleagues would try their hand at matchmaking for me. My co-worker set me up on a blind date. She told me my date was tall, dark, and handsome, of Indian descent, possibly from the West, and therefore maybe from the West Indies, and most likely well off. I already gathered something was off with her understanding of geography but I let it go. She didn’t understand what part of India would make me “a hindi” or not. “Padma Sherni, what type of hindi are you?” (She had meant to say Hindu). So she tried to motivate me to meet with this guy who I might have so much in common with being from the west, (the U.S. being considered “the West”.). I had my hesitations because I had never been on a blind date before, but I was feeling adventurous. I decided to be tough though. I only agreed to meet this guy on my turf: the donut and coffee shop where I usually got my cappuccino mocha ice coffees.

 First I noticed he had a beard. I did NOT like facial hair, so I was disappointed. He had a baseball cap. I was not into baseball at that time. (Remember, I am a basketball girl). He was somewhat too opinionated because he already had a preset idea that we were going to have dinner together, whereas I had only agreed to coffee. I had not yet honed my debate skills enough, for lack of opportunity with prior decision making experiences. I was somewhat concerned about being polite, but I really wanted coffee and donuts, plus the cashier behind the counter there was nice. I started talking to the cashier and learned that he was European but of Middle-Eastern descent and he was happy to learn that I was of Indian descent because he loved Bollywood music videos.

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The horse-trainer guy seemed so upset at the idea that I did not want to spend more time with him than just coffee, that I would have been okay to have someone else present who was understanding. The cashier looked at me sympathetically. I was still learning about the horse trainer guy and decided I was in fact going to have to have dinner so I agreed to give him a chance and have dinner with him. Then of course I proceeded to grill politely. I demanded to know where exactly he wanted to go. ( I got better at this standard procedure with other people later. ) He suggested a restaurant whose name I did not recognize, but I had an idea of the location. I at least knew the road and told him I would go in my own car. He was so frustrated with me. We were still deciding as he got up and started to walk with me outside when I realized he was shorter than me. I was so frustrated with my friend who set up the date in the first place.

Side note: Why do most heterosexual women and men prefer to have the man be taller than the woman? Is that because of traditional gender roles of the expectation of the woman being able to lean on a man and have his support? Personally I was still exploring the concept of the equal.

Anyways, horse trainer guy wanted to drive even though I had my own car but I was more comfortable with him driving his own car and me driving mine. Plus he had a pick-up truck and I just thought that was impractical for any future family as I thought, way ahead of myself.

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Unfortunately, I ended up going with him to the restaurant in his pick-up truck. I had never been in a pickup truck and figured I should at least know what that kind of vehicle was like. My only other concern was what music station he might select and whether or not we would clash with our preferences. We decided not to listen to the radio and it was awkwardly silent for twelve minutes as we drove to our destination.

At the restaurant, as soon as he started to tell me what I should eat or not from the menu, I knew immediately the “relationship” was over. I learned more about him though while we waited for food about his life as a horse trainer (and yet his human interaction had no emotional sense which I thought was weird, therefore he probably was not a very good horse trainer because he did not understand how I was feeling, and I deduced he might not be very good with people or animals. I did not like this idea at all. He already had a preset idea of how his date was going to be but he was not in the present moment.) I learned that although he was of Indian descent he was actually from Dubai and he was telling me about horse races. I think he was rich, but I did not care about his financial status. I told him I knew about dog tracks but I did not think they were very compassionate. I was somewhat more curious about Dubai but had no immediate plans of going there, at the time. I got through dinner and he was driving me back to my car when he suggested that we go check out his apartment, which was more than half an hour away. I realized with a change of environment I was still not going to like this horse trainer because he was not aware of my feelings. He tried to entice me with the idea that we could have something to drink there. Thank goodness I already knew about dharu from my friends. Well, I was not thirsty and I did not like the guy and was still trying to be polite. Also, I did not really drink much so I was not enticed. I was reprimanding myself for not driving my own car as I had wanted to and as I had planned. As we approached a traffic light, the horse trainer guy tried to lean toward me to make a move to kiss me and both he and I were shocked that I was willing to open the car door to jump out of a moving vehicle to avoid this. I think that was when I yelled at him and gave him a lecture and demanded to go back to the donut and coffee shop immediately and enforced the fact that I had no interest in going to his apartment or anywhere else. I think I said thank you for dinner and closed the door to the horse trainer guy. The cashier at the shop smiled sympathetically as he looked at my face to get a read on whether all went well or not on my date. I shook my head disappointed and he shrugged, told me not to worry and offered more coffee, sympathetically. I thanked him and then I was happy to be back in my own car, my own music, and heading back to my own home with a reminder to myself that in the future I should avoid blind dates.

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**Chapter 10**

There was a diversity hurricane that spun through many of our lives during many efforts of relationship starts and ends and I continued to hear the stories of my family and friends and their loves and dreams as well as losses and unexpected unrealized wishes. That was a tough and confusing time for a lot of people especially with everyone moving around so much for work or school so that impacted relationships too. Hearts be gettin' stolen and broken every other day like an indecisive revolving door. Who wouldn't understand drama? Percussion.

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As everyone who has known me well in my life will tell you I was still pining for my Boston crush whether or not I was aware of this myself. I applied to only two graduate schools for further studies. I really wanted to learn more and I really wanted a good match of an environment for a new experience to understand systems that make people feel better. I was accepted into both schools and decided upon the Boston area.

I had heard by then in my personal exploration of culture and faith that there is an Elephant God of wisdom and obstacle removals as one representation of the One light many lamps. My jaw hit the ground running when I stood in front of the student services building of one of the schools, facing an elephant representation and I was so thankful even though the school was not affiliated in particular with an Elephant God. So, that was one reason for choosing that particular school, or perhaps the school chose me, and I was hopeful of good luck, to earn my way to some knowledge and wisdom.

Getting to Boston at the time was a metaphor for my life because that was where I felt I would thrive. The move back from Delaware to Massachusetts was during the summer before my graduate coursework had started. My Mom had asked my Dad to drive me to Boston for graduate school. So he did. Literally. He dropped me off at my friend’s place and then left and drove all the way back to Delaware. I love my Dad. He is awesome and a good advisor and offers loads of encouragement. However the transportation role was usually my Mom’s department so the instructions were followed quite literally much to both my Mom’s and my amazement.

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The travel to Massachusetts was actually quite inconvenient for me as someone else had heard we were going and also needed a ride because they had no other means of transport. So, I had to take less of my belongings in order to accommodate this stranger who was the friend of a friend of an “athiyo” or avatar somewhere. I had nothing more than a suitcase of clothes that filled half a trunk and then my desk parts that I still assemble with two pieces left over on the side. I didn’t have room for anything else due to this inconvenience and my parents always helping support everyone else and helping me to understand that it was important to help others.

When I got to Boston, I didn't have a car so I walked and took the bus or the T (train/metro/subway) that took 1.5hrs each way even though I wasn't that far from where I was trying to get to. I had never been on public transportation of any kind on my own other than a school bus because I had only ever gone to public school far away from the main city. I didn't know where anything was on the map and was so overwhelmed with so many changes at once that I cried. My friend’s response to this emotional outburst was frustrated exasperation and to yell at me. I would later remind her that she had the privilege of attending private school and always took the T to commute because she lived closer to the city and that although she was also of Indian descent she didn’t understand me or how I felt. At least some friends and I escaped to Cape Cod that weekend but then they abandoned me that first weekend for other priorities. This included my friend who lectured me because she is in fact like one of my many surrogate sisters who I can’t really live without in spite of my complaints and protests because there are too many others who might understand me even less.

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THEN, I had the worst allergic reaction that had ever erupted. (This was all within 1 week of returning to Boston after a number of years.). I called another friend, this time, the Boston crush from my daydream, and said something to the effect of, cue the melody: “…Hello you fool, I love you…” (Roxette, 1991 “Joyride” music lyrics).- Actually no that's just my stream of consciousness running away without me. Actually what I stated was more along the lines of "Hi. I'm in Boston. I didn't have time to tell you yet but I moved back and I just started school. I'm having a severe allergic reaction and I don't know where anything or anyone is. Where are you? Please come get me. Knowing that hopefully he would show up. My friend asked, surprised, "You’re in Boston? You moved back?! I'm in the middle of class. Wait, this sounds… Serious. Okay. I’ll be there." He arrived and my heart felt so much better, plus he still looked really handsome, and then the first thing he says to me after not having seen me in years: "Wow. You look terrible." “Thanks a lot, I’m in the midst of an allergic reaction, remember?” He smiled. He sang to me while we waited for my medicine in the pharmacy parking lot. Even though I knew my allergic reaction would heal in a day or so, I felt a lot better with him nearby. I hope we get to spend more time together in the future.

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Later I would go for walks in the neighborhood with another friend and had one foot in Delaware still and another in Boston. In the summer my friend looked at my toes that I had happily painted something sweet and brick red when she announced "That is a fire me (euphemism) red, Padma Sherni." I was so offended and protested. "Well don't be offended. That's what that is," she said matter-of-factly about MY toes. I was definitely upset. My other friend in Delaware made me feel better. He laughed and joked with me "If you guys keep up with this you'll eventually re-invent the nail polish color wheel charts!" Truer words had not been previously spoken.

**Chapter 11**

After two years of coursework, I went to see the koala bears in person in Australia for real to escape. The cable car had awesome people travelling over Taronga zoo. They shouted out "Hey look at all the humans!" My grandfather, GKM, who lived in India and I would write letters back and forth and send postcards to share the latest reflections of life. He loved that I had chosen to learn by exploring for myself in person other places to help my mind grow. He was a scientist but every morning, he would garden flowers and vegetables and when I would go to India he would wake me up super early in the morning to go for a walk together and talk about life. When he had lost most of his hearing, he still used his hearing aid because he wanted to hear all my love stories to make sure I was living my life freely (unlike what my parents seemed to understand at the time). I remember having to shout out at the top of my lungs the details in the middle of the park where we had stopped to rest because he didn't hear me the first time. “I HAVE A BOYFRIEND!” Who knows what that looked like to anyone who didn’t know me or that this older gentleman was my beloved grandfather. I asked my Dadu (“grandfather”) to not to tell my parents yet. He agreed. The next day he reported back to me "But your mother seems to know and like this person.” Then, I exclaimed, "Dadu! Did you tell someone something you were not supposed to?!” No. He had asked my mother similar questions and figured it out for himself. Phew. He was really smart. My Dida (“grandmother”) Latika was even smarter though. She had been hoping for quite some time that I would eventually learn how to talk with my Boston crush and to learn how to “fish and cook”: “Bhetki macher bhaja” and “Eeleesh mach until then”. Bhetki mach is a type of fish that has only a few bones whereas Eeleesh mach is a type of fish that has a lot of bones and is difficult to eat. The preparation is usually West Bengali, Indian style, either fried or in light watery curry sauce: “jhol”.
**Chapter 12**

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I tried to start to make sense of the world at some point before or after basketball camp through my college and graduate school years and beyond in an ongoing effort. I had learned to love both my own diverse cultural background and other diverse cultures because in many ways we are more similar than not. People are so interesting and glamorous in their own way just like anthropologists. I am pretty sure there was a grand misunderstanding somewhere that fed into what I would just like to say was the start of many dating disasters that ran simultaneous and parallel to many matchmaking disasters that coincided with many weddings of friends.

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Those who were of West Bengal, Indian descent or Desi (from “desh” from “the land” of India) of any kind will tell you these relationship drama details with embellishment and em-PHA-sis, in sweet way and confident opinionated manner of speaking. Then the drama that has unfolded is retold through historical and modern interpretations at those wedding events or even the annual cultural conference of the eastern peoples in the western hemisphere. At weddings and cultural events, and the dramatic interpretations of these incidents, no typical drama network has anything they could compete with in comparison to our colloquial wannabe Bollywood style of dramatic descriptions of people and the world around us. You must concede this. At weddings, people will steal shoes, “athiyo” and extended family will bribe, others will barricade, your own friends and family will not let you sleep on your own wedding night! This is customary people, just customary. Some family, will, as is tradition in one side of my family (just let any future suitors be forewarned) find a good hiding place and plot and wait for hours in the room of the bride and groom to jump out at them at some rather inopportune or very hopefully fortuitous moment later that night and tell everyone what they did or never really did see. Ha ha! Last time this happened NO ONE WOULD TELL ME because I always empathize for anyone who does not have informed consent or the privacy policy. Of course my efforts would spoil the plans of good humored mischief, and yes I usually do try to foil those plans with equal enthusiasm and send a warning. "GET A PHONE NUMBER to evacuate! CALL THE family support switchboard - TELL THEM TO CHANGE ROOMS! GO GO GO NOW!" There is no point. They never gave me the correct information to work with to begin with. This may be partly why I am still single or am hoping for more time with my Boston crush. I am not disclosing my fiancé hopes or engagement status plans yet. As far as anyone else is concerned, I subconsciously foil my own other dates because I value my dreams and my crush.

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I'm hoping someone with the collective support of well-wishers, something good happens. I learned what a hook shot was in 8th grade basketball camp but I think it is possible that someone else might hopefully have better technique.

~ Good Night and Sweet Dreams Everyone, Padma Sherni

**Part Two: Twenty –two Years Later: 2017**

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**Part Two: Twenty –two Years Later: 2017**

I, Padma Sherni, just celebrated my fortieth birthday in Spring of 2017. I was born in 1977 in Massachusetts. Now, what updates can I share with you? For starters, I’ve learned not to foil my own dates anymore. This came after the realization that my Boston crush had in fact just settled into a friendship with me and a date with someone else. Unfortunately, I went into rebound mode (I’m still a basketball girl, remember?). I then learned the tough lesson of no response from a would-be good catch of a guy that rightly was not interested in my desperate email with too many run on sentences.

Now for the task of a self-defined make over.  I spent the last year being barraged by other people’s opinions about what to do with my life as I got closer to completing a Ph.D. Some people gave me unsolicited advice about what to do with my medium length hair multiple times a day: “put it in a bun”, “leave it down”, “get highlights”, “shorten it”, and while at the salon: “shorter! Shorter!” until they gave up as I stubbornly kept it the same style: long layers with angles around the face.
I thoroughly enjoyed my winter hibernation also. I indulged in whatever I wanted to eat and whenever I wanted to sleep and only occasionally kept up with gym workouts because I just needed to rest after the prior season’s workaholic lifestyle. I had signed up for two graduate courses, an internship, a part time evening receptionist job, while working on my dissertation proposal.

Also during the winter, I restarted guitar lessons for 5 weeks while I waited anxiously for university review and approval of my dissertation proposal. Once that passed, I got busy with my research project almost immediately. While my family travelled for a visit to India, I stayed home and the kitchen became my second office space for piles and piles of survey paperwork organizing for outreach to approximately 800 people in order to get a hopeful 20% response rate.  I’ll let you know what happens with the research later.

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I talked with a guy for a few weeks, that I met online, during the winter also. And you guessed it: foiled plans for meeting in the spring. He randomly texted me by mistake when he got a new phone number. After a few civil and friendly explanations we said our goodbye’s again.  This happened a second time with a different guy in the spring and now my summer is totally free.

It’s just as well. I have to finish my Ph.D. and as soon as I do, move out of my parents’ house. I know, I know, that’s a deal breaker for most people to date someone still in graduate school and especially while living at home, but it was a welcome time to study while avoiding a serious relationship.

The second major change is that with a little bit of salary, I’ve learned to enjoy shopping and a nail polish collection. This began when I missed my flight shopping at an airport cart in Florida.  With nothing else to do for fourteen more hours, I spent money at a different cart on a $10 t-shirt and $17 nail polish and promptly went to a hotel which was an additional expense I hadn’t planned for.

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Anyways, with all of these lessons learned, I’m approaching summer with a steadfast goal to keep my priorities on track:  Get in shape, make progress on the PhD, get a full time job, and move out.  I’ve been applying to jobs in both local places and further, in cities like Philadelphia and New York.  I hope something works out soon.

In the meantime, I have started a bookclub, and when people actually sign up, I have the opportunity to try different restaurants and cafes while meeting new people who want to discuss a good read over a meal.

I still have wavy black hair and brown eyes.  After the Florida mishap and the past several years, I now aspire to add balance to an economical fashion sense. With a better budget from my job given my educational expenses and business ventures.  I’ve learned to be practical even though in actuality I have expensive taste. After experience working for difference research organizations, I have started my own company, so I can plan to be more available to a future growing family and various interdependent relationships. Along the way, I often seek out mentorship from others to continue life learning and sometimes give advice to others who request my counsel as well.

When I write more again, stories of life experiences and relationships may be included in future vignettes of people to describe accomplishments of people of multicultural backgrounds as well as the obstacles they had to overcome in order to get to where, they are today. I am still understanding the wide range of single life, dating and marriage plans that people have, children, and career endeavors.  Some people are still
exploring, while others have had love marriages, semi-arranged marriages, and arranged marriages...

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So although in my younger years I prioritized finding the right relationship I’ve learned that I needed to respect my own set of activities and priorities first and gradually the right relationship then becomes part of my life as well.  That’s where I stand today. My boston crush, is still one of my really good friends that I have shared a lot of fun experiences with. This is a story itself, because we helped each other find other love interests unexpectedly...

 For now, however, I should go. My phone is ringing with the indication of a new text message and I am looking forward to talking with a new guy…However, I find that I am happiest simply being myself and living my life freely. Hope all of you are well and finding what makes you happy with respect to others as well. I also hope you continue to build towards meeting your dreams and aspirations. I know that I am.

~ Good Night and Sweet Dreams Everyone, Padma Sherni

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**Part Three:**

***Padma Sherni answers the phone***:

Cooper: Hi, what are you up to?

Padma Sherni: Oh, it’s just you. I thought it was going to be a guy and instead it’s just one of my female friends.

Cooper: laughter. Are you free? Let’s go to the coffee shop. No horse trainers or anything.

Padma Sherni: laughter. Actually, I’ll make coffee or tea here instead. Just come over.

Cooper: Okay.

Padma Sherni: I need a baked good. Let’s go to the coffee shop from here.

Cooper: Alright. Let’s go.

***At the coffee shop of Padma Sherni:***

Padma Sherni: I was just thinking how awesome it would be if I was ever on a date with an international actor!
Cooper: Why would you think that you would be on a date with an international actor?
Padma Sherni: What sort of question is that?
Cooper: okay okay – like who?
Padma Sherni: Like…Shriyadita C. London
Friend: roaring laughter – you’re never going to get a date with Shriyadita C. London.
Padma Sherni: I’m just saying…anything can happen if you dream of it…
Cooper: laughing… okay okay… where would you go?
Padma Sherni: well…
Cooper: oh look!
Both see international actor getting coffee at the counter
Padma Sherni: wow…

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Cooper: ask him out…right now.
Padma Sherni: are you crazy? Okay.
Cooper: roaring laughter
Padma Sherni: I’ll pretend we’re friends that haven’t seen each other for a long time… or I’ll simply run into him and we’ll drop our things and then our eyes will meet and we’ll gaze romantically at each other…
Cooper: Don’t make him spill his coffee and you’d better hurry up because he’s leaving…
Padma Sherni: I can’t, I’m not ready… I have to prepare!
Cooper: he just left.  oh! He forgot his book!
Padma Sherni: runs to pick it up.
Cooper: go go go!
Padma Sherni: Excuse me! You forgot your book! And here’s my business card if you ever forget anything else -
Shriyadita C. London: laughs
Padma Sherni: actually I’m an aspiring writer…maybe if you get a chance to read my stuff that would be awesome. Hope you have a nice day.
Shriyadita C. London: thank you and smiles…and leaves
Padma Sherni to Friend: he’s really nice
Cooper: laughter. Well, I have to go now also but that was fun.
Padma Sherni: Okay, talk with you later.

Padma Sherni goes home and her phone rings…

**Coffee Toffee Table Talk: What Do You Think ?**

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by Pialee Roy (Padma Sherni)

1. Do magnets work in space? With current technology, can you track an object that goes into a black hole? Can we safely send garbage out to the black holes in space or to the sun without potentially causing a second Big Bang?

2. Who gets to choose the music or radio station in the car – the driver or the passenger? What if the passenger chooses music that is distracting to the driver? What if the passenger is made to feel devalued in an imbalance of power because they cannot control the driving or the music? How much time is it reasonable to experience this?

3. How do women in India drive a bicycle wearing a sari? That amazes me. How do women in America drive a bicycle wearing only a bikini? That also amazes me. Either way, both women should wear helmets.

5. When and why did women start dieting? When and why did women start exercising? When and why did women stop wearing corsets and when did women start wearing modern tighter outfit gear?

6. Why do people go on a cruise to swim in a pool on a boat while they are in the middle of the ocean? That is true, but when did people expend so much energy getting off the boat, only to reconsider this as a luxury?