

Priya's Timeline

Would you stay if you could leave the present behind you?

Everyone complains at some point in their life, wishing that the grueling events they are currently in would just be...removed from the timeline like a meteor denting a lonely patch of earth. However, many people notice that they seldom learn *nothing* from difficult experiences, that they've genuinely apprehended a lesson from them. Yet, these lessons mean nothing to you. You wait aimlessly for life to not be hard so that you can be happy, and when that does not happen for a while, you rage and quit; you opt out. You went to Stanford to study quantum physics and were about to start pursuing a PhD; you found your purpose, I know. You therefore must be so confused why I still believe you do not understand what it means to live.

Quick note: I thought it would be much more exciting than this to meet her.

Mom and Dad were always our idols. They taught us everything we knew: skincare (mainly Mom), a healthy diet, how to live a comfortable and cheerful life. We were active though: intrepid imaginers, "bending the rules of time and matter," ha-ha. Mom and Dad were still able to get us under control though and keep us from breaking down over the death of Uncle Cyprus.

It was then that I noticed she didn't just come to talk to me and let me know if more of my ideas would eventually work. However, I had no idea what she was up to because she first of all acted nothing like me: I hate telling stories. They're just a waste of time, especially since people don't like to listen to each other anymore. I'll just listen to her and see where we end up, how this goes.

He was such an empathetic, loving uncle. Cyprus always took us to Bail Creek where we would play Seamen and invent all kinds of ideas, all which were flawlessly brought to life. Uncle Cyprus would sometimes spend months in his inventor's studio at a time but would always give himself the assignment to create something we wanted for our next game of Seamen. He built stainless steel contractable boats, wind-up pirate and sailor figures. And I remember this...curved object that stretched across the narrow end of the river at Bail Creek that Uncle Cyprus set down for the wind-up figures to march across. I don't recall the term for it; I just can picture its beauty, its sturdy base lined with these decorative shapes—oh, right, a bridge, thank you.

This is NOT right. There's something wrong with her, but I cannot quite ascertain it. She forgot that the bridge was called a bridge. She is not telling me anything, not nearly as much as she thinks she is or not nearly as much as she is pretending to think she is. The bridge wasn't actually particularly beautiful; it only looked unique.

To be honest I don't remember the bridge much, let alone those boats and wind-up figures. I relive clumps of metal clanking against the rocks in the creek river, making this horrible shriek. To be honest I don't remember the bridge much, let alone those boats and wind-up figures. Wait, no, I already told you that. My footsteps when I was little, they were your footsteps too. Do you remember if we were jollily skipping or if we were sprinting after the boats in panic because we knew we would lose Uncle Cyprus's magical builds if they went too far down the river? What?! Why would you ever try to forget that on purpose? Memory is such a special gift. I am assuming reminiscing our dear dead uncle was just too much for you like how *everything* is.

Note to self: this is a dream; this is a dream; this is a dream. I wish I could just get her out of my head right now, out of my screen. I know I shouldn't try to know more but am strangely thirsting for it. It's like some sort of curse. It's like something out of a fantasy book, something magical and evil yet as captivating and charismatic as Uncle Cyprus. I've never felt this way about something before. Will I survive it?

I'm even forgetting how he passed away. There is a lot I could have remembered on my own, but you obstructed my mind from continuing to store all my wonderous memories. I would not be able to even recognize him if you showed me a picture. All I can recall is a pair of dark brown eyes. They were kind, generous; the corners scrunched up whenever he smiled. He could see through you and empathize with your situation. That moment on Christmas Eve when he stayed over and tucked me in bed, I stared right into those eyes. I felt so warm and welcomed; I felt like I was dreaming the best dream in the world. Uncle Cyprus was a full, well-rounded man, and when I looked out into his windows, I saw a person who built himself from bare ground.

I experienced a simple existence when I was with him, but this existence was filled with sheer joy. Looking out at the world with his eyes was so surreal and mature. It seemed like every day was Christmas, and he randomly smiled to himself at the most gratuitous things. He was positive yet practical, strict yet benevolent.

She remembers what he smiles about but not what his smile looks like. I suddenly pity her; I can't imagine how peculiar that would be to remember so much about a person yet not be able to recall what they looked like. I don't have aphantasia, so why would she have it? She still is able to picture things actually. It must be something else, but I can't do it. I CANNOT ascertain the issue here! She just does not seem like me, so it's terrifying how much she knows about me. A lot

of people close to me say my voice and the way I talk really don't reflect my rather sensitive personality. She has intruded me, and I'm willing to do anything to thwart her invasive actions.

I still get dreams where I am trying to push my way through a crowd of people, calling someone's name (*I remember those dreams*). Then, I abruptly turn around, chatter of the crowd suddenly becoming a soft ringing in my ears, and the world goes blurry. I spot Uncle Cyprus's eyes and only his eyes. There they are, just gazing at me so admiringly that only someone who truly adored me could look at me that way. I just wish I could stop time whenever I got those dreams so that I could stay asleep and allow his eyes to stare at me for hours on end. I would hear his voice too, telling me, "You're okay, Priya. You will always be okay as long as you believe it."

I felt courageous and was willing to undertake anything that came my way, but when I was forced to challenge myself in ways that I felt uncomfortable, I would forget about the warm and soothing strength that was the armory product of Uncle Cyprus's saint-like actions. It was very authentic and charismatic and enduring the way he radiated positivity and hope, so I knew you were being unimaginably stubborn when you could not move on a single bit from his death and just remember the spectacular times you had with him. You always try to find a shortcut through the present whenever it gets tough. I do not blame Mom and Dad. They could have never been responsible for creating such a cowardly monster because they were the opposite, an enemy of it.

I'm not a monster....

After Uncle Cyprus's death you just forfeit life, and the most you would do was watch time travel movies with Mom and Dad and read science books. You didn't even go to his

funeral! You left him even though you could have just politely and respectfully seen him one last time. I still can't process the chaos of screeching and balling as Dad tried to pull me out of bed that morning, pull *you* out of bed that morning. 2084 was *not* our year...because of *you*.

Oh, so sadly was the year of '84 with the traumatic visions of gore. Endured with haste, the world without him another place. I wished that everyone else would be there, but my love left to have what I call an affair, but really, he was just moving on. But still, why is she here telling me a tale I already know?

One of the time travel movies we watched with Mom and Dad after Uncle Cyprus's death was *Avengers: Endgame*. It was a relatively outdated movie. It was, for us, their 1954. However, it was still as heroic as the characters in it. They were very brave to return to their chaotic present after retrieving the Infinity Stones from the past. Characters take extreme measures in movies; turns out people in our reality can do the same. I wonder why *I* didn't feel capable of doing the things I could have mastered.

Utter silence, both in mind and mouth

About that name I always called in the dreams I had with Uncle Cyprus's eyes. I wasn't calling for Uncle; I was calling for Shane. I met him in ninth grade (I'm sure you can picture this), and your anxiety was guiding me around the hallways blindly, not even attempting to reveal my locker's location or a new beginning.

Countless teenagers have anxiety, and mine was not even that severe. I surmise that older people tend to magnify anxiety and mental illness diagnosed at a young age.

Predictably, someone approached me wondering if I was alright, but it wasn't a concerned teacher or the prideful student body president that year.

"You alright? Hm. I'm Shane, Shane Meier. What's your name?" You would know I was lying if I told you, I suddenly looked up and witnessed the appearance of an angel. At first, I just thought he was very polite to go up and introduce himself.

"M-my name's Priya, Priya Lang," I replied with forced casualty.

He smiled a smile almost as kind as my uncle's. "First year here? You seem awfully nervous." He chuckled.

"I'm only a little nervous." I replied abruptly, blushing.

Turned out it was his second year here, so he had the school mapped out in his head and the determination to experience a more exotic course in the curriculum, quantum physics. I began blurting about how I thirsted to take that course as well to the point where I might have frightened him. It was an awkward but engaging first conversation. He told me how excited he was to freeze atoms at intense temperatures and see how their properties changed and discover how the matter of the universe affected the flow of life. The school bell rang at that moment, the both of us thinking we wouldn't ever talk to each other much after retreating to our classes.

The class went by quite swiftly. I just stood up to introduce myself like all the other students and then took notes on the introductory lecture that the teacher gave us on the first day. At lunch, just like any teenager aside from the popular kids, I wasn't sure where to sit, so I just sat at a table near some kinder-seeming girls who gave me permission to sit with them. We talked about the usual things like what we did that summer, what we were into, weren't exactly

at the level where we could talk about boys since after all, we didn't really know any of them yet. It wasn't a horrible day in the end, but something subtle changed as high school progressed.

Shane started to sit with me at lunch which was quite peculiar since he usually surrounded himself with his friends, and they all paid attention to what he chatted about. I became bewildered at why he would walk straight to my seat and set himself and his lunch down across from me. Deep down I really enjoyed it though, and it didn't matter that one of the only things we had in common was our passion and interest for quantum physics. We grew so close, and we constantly invited each other over to watch a movie, do homework or even do a hangout at the amusement park for hours on end. I always felt so exhilarated when I was around him, and I'm aware that you cared for that feeling as much as I did.

He was so brilliant and conscientious and changed others for the better. He was like nobody and nothing else. That little Shane was the reason why you did not receive Valedictorian at the high school exam except that one time you managed to beat him in tenth grade. We really admired him. Oh, and his face. He was the handsomest boy I had ever set my eyes on. He had round energetic eyes, a chiseled jawline and glossy almond skin. I regret not asking him what moisturizer he used. He was perfection, timeless beauty...that I never ever, ever, ever, *ever* got to see again.

One day, we were sitting on my bed and having a talk. I was 16; he was 17. I knew that he had gotten accepted into Princeton and would eventually sign up for a long-term internship and PhD program at the International Institute of STEM. I noticed how chaotic it would be for me if I had left Arizona and traveled that far away. We concluded that California was the farthest we could manage. However, I told Shane I would really miss him, and that Arizona would not be the same without him.

The same emotion came to me after Uncle Cyprus left. I was only 16, and my heart had already been apathetically broken twice.

“I’ll miss you too, so let’s make the most of time we have left together,” he managed to say before he did what I thought he would never do to someone as pathetic as me. He leaned in and kissed me, his warm skin pressing against me.... But that’s all I remember. There for sure is a missing spot in this memory. You know that fullness and satisfaction and thirst for more. I just can’t remember; it’s as if I don’t know that feeling at all, yet I miss it. Do you remember? Of course, you do not want to talk about it.

It just doesn’t feel right after all these years. Of course, I miss him, and I inevitably can describe that feeling I had when we kissed, but it doesn’t feel like it did before. She relives these feelings better than I do, even though she is forgetting some of them. For example, she did not mention that time Shane and I were riding on a rollercoaster at the amusement park, and just before the rollercoaster was about to tip over the steep decline, someone near the front passed gas loudly. Everyone on the ride guffawed; the tension was cut just before the ride plummeted forward, and we all were surprised by the adrenaline we had prepared for initially. Shane and I reached for each other’s hands. Something about that moment brought us closer, but a moment like that never happened again until our first kiss. This memory is one exception: looking back on it helps me improve the experience more to my satisfaction than when it genuinely happened.

After the kiss, he wrapped his incredibly strong arm around me and delicately lowered us down into my bed. I stared at his glassy brown eyes and light beige skin tone. He softly embraced me with his sun kissed arms. He instructed me firmly to move on without him and he talked about Arizona as if he would finish his studies in the East Coast and return in a heartbeat.

“Like your uncle, Cyprus, said to you when you were little: ‘You’re okay, Priya. You will always be okay as long as you believe it.’” Tears brimmed my eyes, and we kissed and cuddled for the rest of the night. He eventually left my house and eventually the school once he graduated. I was so miserable to not be able to be with him for my last year of high school.

Then in comes you who foolishly and childishly assumed that he would come back as fast as possible and marry you and infuse that adrenaline of loving someone into your life. (**Utter silence once again**). Instead of finding someone new when the time came and getting your PhD, you are now stuck back in your Arizona basement at 22 years old trying to speed time forward five years, daydreaming about you and Shane together again. I executed this successfully by the way, and I came to find 50 missed voice messages on my phone from Shane saying he had gotten married and was going to stay in New York! His parents had moved along with him, and you were so shocked to discover that he decided to stay at the IIS and work there; you were furious and kept ranting to your friends about how he would be unfairly treated like a small cog in a large machine at such a complex, large institute. (**Utter silence followed with fury**).

You called him back crying, and you had to call seven times before he picked up the phone. He told you he was glad you were okay (classic Shane) and had also invited you to fly over to New York during the summer, but you never replied. He believed it didn’t feel right anymore to invite you. He did not even bother to ask where you went! That’s what you did to him; he could have been your friend who occasionally helped you with your studies and vice versa. You honestly could have made so many warm memories with such a special person, no matter how far apart you lived. You threw five whole years in the garbage just because you

missed someone and had ludicrous expectations for the future which would now be your present if I hadn't contacted you and stopped you.

Eventually we're going to also skip many more things like the special job promotion you had that required "too much tedious work" and the 3029 Relapse Virus pandemic where they announced quarantine while you were staying with your brother. You two could have connected so much better if you had allowed yourself to push through the pandemic and not travel forward in time. Now, he barely knows you. He felt like you were a ghost those three and a half years. He remembers you being there, but he hadn't made any memories with you and couldn't quite reminisce on the bitter-sweet experience of spending quarantine with a person he loved very much. It feels similar to the blank gaps the future you you're currently talking to is having. That was one of the many contradictory experiences you put the people you loved through. You became a shadow that they strived to bring back to the light but failed to, and they blamed themselves for it.

You don't know how awful and weak of a person you'd have to be to do that, and your future pain invoking actions won't come with an undeservingly good life. You see, I was diagnosed with dementia six months ago, but I know that it's more than dementia: it has only been half a year and I'm already unable to describe certain feelings and nostalgic events. I'm trying to reminisce on good memories and significant times in my life, but parts of my timeline feel botched. I have nothing to think about but the unbearable regret I have for jumping through time whenever I faced something despondent or laborious. This is not how you should make me spend my time before I forget everything.

Not enough memories, not enough memories, not enough time, never enough time. If I had lived it, I would have had more. I should have watched the clock to be a person, not build a machine that defied God. O Lord, cleanse me, please.

Listen, I am doing this for *your* mental and physical well-being. You DO NOT want to end up like me: a shallow, ignorant, mental and depressed hooligan. You never shared with anyone your invention, so everyone else is toiling through harder times while you skip past it like it was worth less than money. This is an unfair advantage; you don't know how much damage you have caused to yourself and everyone else. You would be astonished by how much a single person can contribute to the flow of life. I calculated the odds: you could have lived a simple and grounded life, instead of causing all this confusion and isolation. Time traveling without intention to return is an action that can torment many people, maybe all of society if it goes too far.

I've said enough. Destroy the time machine. Now! Yes, yes, cut up the wires! Disengage all the thrusters! Yes, keep going! You're almost there! Finally! Don't you feel so free now? There's so much for you to live for: your family, your friends, your studies. Aren't all these broken parts just a breathtaking way of building yourself? Haaah...I'm sure this was how Uncle Cyprus built himself: from broken rubble.

Wait...what is that? What are you doing? Why are you aiming that at yourself?! NO, NO, NO! This will change the entire timeline; I will disappear! Stop it now; don't do it! You don't know what you're—