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A.B.C.D

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A.B.C.D. (American Born Confused Desi)

You are lying on the bed with not a lot to do. You regard the popcorn ceiling and the bright light your father had installed to help you study better. It makes dark spots flash in front of your eyes. You catch a sudden whiff of food—notes of turmeric and curry leaves that you automatically adjust to. It sinks into your clothes.

You remember the first time you were in India. It was more rugged than America, but it had a certain charm you were accustomed to so you don't worry too much about fitting in—that is, until you met your family. You understood Hindi perfectly, and you could speak it well enough. But there were certain differences between your accent and theirs that they—your cousins, your grandparents, your uncles, and your aunts—made painfully obvious.

You closed off. That language has nearly withered off your tongue, and you are left with only understanding and regret. As if your family wasn't far enough already.

You came back to America, dressed in shabby clothes that were all you packed because the dust in India settles on everything without discrimination. Your mother makes you throw them away.

Your parents aren't particularly bad about forcing you into a career. "Whatever you want, *beti*. This is a place of opportunities." Your mother, an engineer, is a small town girl who was arranged to get hitched to your father, also an engineer, as well as a city boy. They know what it's like to be forced into something you don't want. On honest rides to Disney World, your mom lets you know that when you get into college, you're either a doctor or an engineer or *kachra*, garbage.

However, it's all about the subtext and the subtleties: forwarded emails about math competitions, science competitions, things that will look good on your resume because "you're Asian, so getting into college will be a million times harder."

You think about your love life. Ha. Just kidding. You are not to worry about that until you are at least in college, or so your mother tells you when you are ten. You solemnly swore that you would never. Words that you threw around that casually constrict you now. An automatic *ping!* in your head when you think a boy is cute reminds you: you have exams in two months!

You think about the first time you realized you were different from the white girls with light shades of hair that shimmered in the sun, or skin that was paler than the moon. Thinking to yourself, at the tender age of ten, that no one would like you anyway because you are INDIAN and BROWN and NOT LIKE THE OTHERS.

You are not very sure of your identity. Am I more Indian than American? Am I more American than Indian? Am I an equal balance of both? These are questions you ask yourself as you watch a cricket game with more enthusiasm than you've ever had for football or basketball, while eating BBQ ribs and French fries.

You think about all the times some stranger has called you "exotic". Like a foreign plant or a strange animal. What a compliment. You weren't "pretty" like the white girls. You were *exotic*. You flinch when people ask: "Do you speak Hindu?" You are very conflicted when non-Indians wear *bindis* or *mehndi* or *sarees* or stand in front of Ganesha statues and hum "*Namaste*" in their yoga classes for the sake of aesthetic.

You were in a writing camp one summer and they took you on the tour of the campus. They had a grand, opulent cathedral with stained glass windows and a beautiful ceremony. You

think about how, if it were a Hindu temple, you would have to take off your shoes at the front to respectfully conduct the *pooja*.

You wonder if you are racist because you get pissed when someone confuses you for being Arabic or occasionally, Hispanic. You wonder if being brown had lent you some sort of racial anonymity to the rest of the black and white world. You wonder if being brown excused everyone else for mistaking you for the other Indian girl in your class.

Your mother calls you for dinner. You get off your ass and walk to the dining room. You consider the food. Does the food make up for it?

Almost.

Not quite.