

The War of A Million Years

Diya Dhawal

At first I avoided her. She looked mean as she towered over me, her dark curls and aggressive face hiding in a corner while kids around her talked. It was my first day in a new district; I was here to reinvent myself, not help loners in a corner. Our teacher tried to introduce us, and we scanned over our All About Me sheets to find something in common. Later that day, we sat near each other in orchestra, her face remained indifferent and mine remained hopeful. The next day, for either racist reasons or pure fate, the teacher sat us together in French. By another coincident, by racism or by fate again, we were sent to deliver a note to the 5th grade wing. Teachers have all kinds of technology to communicate with each other, but our teacher chose two awkward brown kids to deliver a pink post-it across the school. Both of us just transferred to the district, so we had no idea where the 5th grade wing was, and we were both awkward kids, so polite conversation was all we could muster as we walked circles trying to find the 5th grade wing. In orchestra the next day, we started polite conversation. Neither of us can remember when the lines of awkward conversation blurred into full of friendship, but soon we were inseparable. We made up jokes and laughed so hard until people behind us thought we were crazy, we would turn around our respective lunch tables and talk, we would walk to the buses after school together every day. Until one day, she joined me at my lunch table, and my life was perfect. We shared stories on how our past friends had hurt us, and she was the first person I called my best friend. We were texting each other non-stop, her on her iPad and me on my phone, we would walk laps around the 6th grade wing before class started, and when teachers wanted to know where she was, they'd ask me. When COVID hit, it hurt every part of me not to walk with her and talk with her and to not see her face every day. Then came Eid. She was Muslim; I was Hindu/Sikh. She invited me to her family's Eid party, my parents were reluctant to let me go, but I went, and there a tradition was born. Every year after, I went to her house for Eid, and I even brought my grandparents, whose lives were torn apart by Partition. Pakistan and India were warring countries, who were we to be in the forbidden friendship, but my grandparents went to the Eid party, and they became fast friends with her family. By our friendship, and walking around the school every day and our passing of notes on pink-post its in orchestra and french, we had bridged a river of hate. Wars happened between the countries we called home, and there we were, laughing at my house. Because of our friendship, our families are rid of hate for the other. Because of our friendship the wounds that Partition and the Britishers left were healed. Because of our friendship, the war between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims that dated back to the beginning of time, had ended with us. The hatred our ancestors had for each other was now replaced with the love we had for each other. Our kids will grow up with hearts filled with love instead of hate. Our friendship brought peace to a war of a million years. But after Eid, disaster struck. By build up miscommunication, and angry words and piles of small things, the ocean that was our friendship dried out until there was a puddle left, and now there's nothing but dry sidewalk where once laughter echoed the room. We still talked freshman year, commenting on each other's Instagram posts and sharing laughs in orchestra until each interaction became scarcer, and we walked past each other in the hallway like we didn't know each other. I had lost a lot of things in my life, but nothing compared to her. I was already empty, but losing her made me a hollowed-out shell, and I spent freshman year wishing that I was walking laps around our new school with her, hearing her opinion on our teachers and watching the

Pakistan vs India cricket matches with her. Somewhere in my heart, I know there's a version of our friendship that goes on. I know that somewhere, my family goes to her house for Eid every year of our lives, and eventually her family comes to Diwali too. I know that somewhere, we both get married on the edge of our countries in Karachi, bringing peace to yet another war, like we always dreamed of. I know that somewhere, our kids will grow up together and their hearts will be filled with nothing but love. I know that somewhere, our laughter still fills the room during the India Pakistan game and during Bollywood movies and on the bus ride home. I know somewhere, our bond is so strong that not even a million years of war could break it. My heart aches for the friend I lost, for the stranger she has become, because once we were family. I saw her sister as my sister, and her curls were as familiar as mine. Our friendship created a family, healing wounds, bridging aggression, replacing hate with love. The hate between India and Pakistan killed love, but our friendship killed that hate and brought love. We may pretend that we are strangers now, but the bond we forged brought peace to a million generations ahead of us.