

All That Time

"Some stories trap you. This one dares you to stay."

Act I: One

In a quiet hillside town with too many fences and too little noise, there was a school where no one ever shouted. The silence wasn't forced; it was just how things were.

At the back of class 4B sat Kiro. He wasn't the best student, but he was careful. His desk was always neat, his movements precise. Sometimes he seemed bored, even letting himself fail on purpose. He had no friends and kept to himself, carrying a worn notebook everywhere.

Kiro watched people closely, trying to understand feelings he couldn't fully grasp. Pain, happiness, loneliness, anger, calm. He noticed how others smiled without meaning it or spoke without thinking. To him, everything felt quiet and distant.

His family was rich but distant too. They visited rarely. At school and home, the silence was heavy, like something important was missing.

Kiro didn't know why, but he began writing it all down, not to remember, but to hold on to what felt like slipping away.

One afternoon, during recess, Kiro sat alone under an old oak tree. The other kids played and shouted, but their noise felt distant, as if coming from far away. He opened his notebook and wrote, "Why do they sound happy when I cannot feel the same?"

A boy passed by, kicking a stone. Their eyes met briefly. The boy smiled, but his eyes remained cold and empty. Kiro closed his notebook quickly, unsure what to make of the strange look in the boy's eyes.

That evening, Kiro lay awake, trying to remember what happiness truly felt like. The memory slipped away from him, like smoke fading into the night air.

Kiro lay on his bunk bed, staring out the small window. The moon hung low and pale, casting soft silver light that barely touched the walls. The room felt cold and empty, painted in shades of white that made everything seem distant and unreal. The quiet pressed in on him, filling the space like a thick fog. Watching the moon, he felt both drawn to its calm and trapped by the silence around him.

Kiro closed his eyes and tried to hold on to the feeling the moon gave him, something calm, steady, and real. But as soon as he reached for it, the calm slipped away, replaced by a dull ache he did not know how to name.

He thought about his parents, their rare visits full of polite words and empty smiles. Their faces were like masks he could not read. He wondered if they felt the same emptiness or if they had found a way to hide it better.

His notebook lay on the bedside table, waiting. He reached for it and began to draw. He sketched a simple cube with no doors and no windows. It was a small, quiet space he created to keep safe, a place where nothing could change and no pain could enter.

Outside, the rain began again, soft and steady, each drop like a quiet question falling from the sky.

The next morning, Kiros moved through the school halls like a shadow. His steps were quiet, his face calm but unreadable. Teachers noticed how focused he was and how nothing distracted him. He never raised his hand or joined conversations.

During lunch, he sat alone at the far end of the cafeteria, peeling an orange slowly. Every peel dropped carefully into a small pile. He watched others laugh and talk but did not try to join. It was not loneliness he felt but a quiet distance, like he was watching a play he did not belong in.

That afternoon, he found himself staring at the cracked tile floor. The cracks formed strange shapes, almost like a map he could not read. He traced them with his finger, wondering if somewhere inside those lines he could find a way out of the silence that held him.

Kiros pressed his fingertip along the cracks, feeling the rough edges beneath his skin. Each line twisted and bent like a path leading somewhere unknown. He imagined stepping inside the map, walking through silent halls where no one could reach him.

That night, he opened his notebook again. Instead of words, he drew shapes—circles, squares, and lines tangled like the cracks on the floor. Then he sketched the cube, simple and solid, with no doors or windows. It was a place he could control, a refuge from the confusing feelings he could not name.

He stared at the drawing for a long time, wishing he could step inside and leave the silence behind.

Kiros closed the notebook slowly and leaned back, his eyes tracing the shadows in the dim light. He felt the weight of everything he could not say pressing down on him. Outside, the school was quiet, but inside his mind, questions spun without answers.

He thought about the faces he saw each day—classmates laughing, teachers speaking—all moving through their lives with ease. He wondered what it was like to feel without holding back, to let emotions flow instead of locking them away.

His hands trembled slightly as he reached for the pencil again. This time, he began to draw lines that stretched beyond the cube, reaching out like fingers searching for something real. The shapes felt restless, as if they wanted to break free from the page.

Kiros did not understand these feelings yet. They were shadows lurking just beyond his reach, but he was determined to find them, one careful step at a time.

Years passed quietly. Kiros grew taller and his features became sharper. The boy who once traced cracks with his finger now sat still for hours, watching the world with quiet and careful eyes.

He learned to hide his confusion behind calm expressions. At school, he kept to himself but watched others closely. He read not only books but also the subtle language of people—the way their eyes shifted, the tension in their bodies, and the moments they tried to hide. He wanted to understand what lay beneath their words and actions, the feelings they did not show.

Sometimes a small smile appeared on his lips, but it never reached his eyes. His notebook stayed with him like a secret companion. It was filled with strange shapes, patterns, and cryptic notes that no one else ever saw. Through those pages he tried to make sense of a world that often felt confusing and distant.

He spent hours alone, searching for feelings that seemed just out of reach. Loneliness pressed down on him like a heavy weight. Anger rose inside but slipped away before it could take form. Joy and sadness felt like shadows he could only watch from afar.

Kiros became skilled at pretending, hiding his true self behind careful control. But inside him, a storm of questions grew louder. What was real? What did it mean to feel? He was trapped between the world he watched and the silence he carried.

As graduation approached, Kiros felt a strange mix of relief and uncertainty. He had learned to move through the school days like a shadow, quiet and unseen. Teachers knew him as a good student, though few understood the silence he carried.

His notebook was thicker now, filled with sketches, notes, and questions that still had no answers. He did not talk much about the future, but inside, a restless part of him wondered what would come next.

Though he kept his distance from others, Kiros watched the excitement around him. The promise of leaving this place felt close, but also like stepping into something unknown. He was ready to graduate, but not sure if he was ready to face what came after.

Kiros graduated quietly from the private school and soon enrolled at a prestigious university known for its neuroscience and psychology programs. He chose these fields because he wanted to unravel the mysteries of the mind that had always confused him. The lectures were intense and demanding. He spent long hours studying brain anatomy, neural pathways, and psychological theories. Each new concept gave him a small piece of the puzzle about human emotions and behavior.

His parents remained distant. They visited rarely and their visits were brief and formal. Their words were few and their expressions colder than he wished. Kiros learned to accept their absence without protest. He buried himself in his studies and avoided dwelling on the emptiness left by their distance.

The university campus was large and crowded. Students filled the halls with chatter and laughter. Despite this, Kiros kept to himself. He moved quietly through the busy corridors, never joining groups or conversations. Instead, he watched and listened carefully, studying how people interacted and expressed themselves. This observation became a part of his learning, helping him connect theory with real human behavior.

In the labs, Kiros became methodical and precise. He handled equipment with steady hands and recorded his observations in detailed notebooks. Experiments on memory, perception, and emotion fascinated him. He felt a strange mix of hope and frustration. Understanding the brain gave him tools to approach his own feelings but did not erase the deep loneliness and questions inside.

Some nights, when the campus was silent, he would stare at his notes and wonder if he would ever truly understand himself. Despite the distance from his family and the walls he built around himself, Kiros held onto a quiet determination. He was searching for answers, and he was willing to keep looking no matter how long it took.

As the first year at university came to an end, Kiros sat alone in his small dorm room. The walls were bare except for his notebook resting on the desk, filled with sketches and notes about the mind and emotions. Outside, the world moved on without him, full of noise and life he kept at a distance.

He felt both closer and farther from understanding himself than ever before. The questions inside him had grown louder, but so had his resolve to face them. Kiros knew this was only the beginning. The path ahead was uncertain and difficult, but he was ready to walk it alone.

With a final glance at his notebook, he closed it gently and looked out the window. Somewhere beyond the city lights, a new chapter was waiting to begin.

ACT II : The meeting

One evening, as Kiros left the university library, he noticed a new student sitting quietly on a bench beneath an old oak tree. The boy's eyes were sharp, observing the world with a mixture of curiosity and caution. There was something about him that drew Kiros closer, a silent understanding that went beyond words.

Kiros approached slowly and sat beside him. They exchanged a few words at first, but a connection started to form. The boy's name was Alemayhue. He was reserved, neat in appearance, and moved with a calm precision that made him seem older than his years.

Over the weeks, their meetings became a steady rhythm. Kiros shared his thoughts about the mind, emotions, and the search for truth. Alemayhue listened intently, sometimes sharing his own quiet observations about the world around him. They didn't need many words to feel the weight of each other's presence.

For Kiros, Alemayhue was more than a friend. He was a living puzzle, a mind waiting to be understood. And for Alemayhue, Kiros was the first person who seemed genuinely interested in seeing beyond the surface.

Their friendship grew in silence and shared moments, but underneath it all, Kiros carried a plan. He wanted to push the boundaries of what the mind could endure. He hoped Alemayhue would be the key.

Alemayhue often spoke quietly about his dream to join the army as a field engineer. He admired the discipline and purpose it gave him. The idea of being useful, of fixing things under pressure, seemed to give him a sense of meaning he couldn't find elsewhere.

Kiros listened carefully and made notes after every meeting. He watched how Alemayhue controlled his emotions, how he masked pain with a steady calm. Each detail was important. Kiros believed understanding Alemayhue's mind might unlock answers to the questions he had about human strength and fragility.

Their connection was more than friendship; it was a careful study. Kiros recorded every glance, every hesitation, and every rare moment when Alemayhue let his guard down. The notebook filled slowly, pages capturing the complexity behind Alemayhue's calm exterior.

This bond became the foundation of Kiros's plan, even as both boys remained unaware of the future their friendship would shape.

Alemayhue's life was shaped by struggle. His family had little, and their small home held more worries than comfort. Despite this, he kept a calm face, careful not to let anyone see the weight he carried. Love came quietly into his life through a girl who mattered deeply to him, a rare warmth in his cold world. He had a few friends but kept most people at a distance, except Kiros, who saw layers others missed. Every look, every word from Alemayhue was carefully noted by Kiros, who studied him like an open book. To Kiros, Alemayhue was a puzzle worth understanding, a mind both strong and fragile.

In the quiet corner of the university library, Kiros watched Alemayhue more closely than ever. They shared few words but each moment spoke volumes. Alemayhue's eyes held a mix of hope and guarded pain. Kiros noticed how carefully Alemayhue measured his steps, how every smile was cautious as if weighing trust before offering it.

Slowly their conversations deepened. Alemayhue talked about his dreams to join the army as a field engineer, the one path he believed might give his life meaning. Kiros listened, taking mental notes, watching how Alemayhue's voice softened when he spoke of the girl he loved, the rare warmth in his life.

Kiros began inviting Alemayhue to study sessions. Those moments became a fragile bridge between them built on quiet understanding and shared silence. But beneath that fragile bond, Kiros's mind was always working searching for patterns, reactions, weaknesses.

Alemayhue unaware of the full scope of Kiro's interest started to see him as one of the few people who truly paid attention. The walls around him slowly cracked revealing glimpses of vulnerability. Yet something beneath that trust held a shadow a question neither dared to voice.

The slow dance of friendship moved forward but the balance was delicate and every step carried weight.

As weeks passed, their meetings became more frequent and layered with meaning. Kiro noticed how Alemayhue held back parts of himself. His laughter was brief, his anger tightly controlled, and his pain hidden beneath a calm exterior. Every word and every glance was a carefully measured choice.

Alemayhue's world outside university was far from easy. His family struggled to get by. His father worked long hours and his mother stayed home caring for the house. Alemayhue rarely spoke of them but when he did there was a quiet weight in his voice. He had a small circle of friends but none close enough to break the loneliness he carried like a second skin.

There was one constant, a girl he loved deeply. She was a rare source of light, someone who saw beyond his quiet mask. Their brief moments together were filled with unspoken understanding, small smiles and the kind of comfort Alemayhue rarely allowed himself.

Kiro recorded every detail, not just in notes but etched into his mind. He watched how Alemayhue's expression shifted when he talked about the army and the girl. He noticed how his body language softened or tensed. Kiro understood that beneath the surface was a man shaped by hardship, longing and a fierce need to belong.

This growing knowledge brought Kiro closer to Alemayhue but also planted the seeds of control. The more he learned, the more he believed he could shape the course of Alemayhue's fate.

As time passed, Kiro pushed their conversations into deeper territory. He asked questions that seemed casual but were carefully aimed at uncovering Alemayhue's fears and desires. Alemayhue answered cautiously but did not realize how much was being gathered.

They spent late nights discussing the mind and emotions. Kiro shared his theories and watched Alemayhue's reactions. Sometimes Alemayhue's eyes would reveal a flicker of hope or confusion. Other times they would harden with resolve.

Outside those talks, Alemayhue worked part-time jobs to support his family. He rarely complained but the exhaustion showed in quiet moments. Kiro made note of this too, recognizing the resilience beneath the surface.

Their friendship grew stronger but carried an undercurrent of tension. Kiro believed this connection was necessary, even if it meant bending trust. For Alemayhue, the friendship was a fragile lifeline he clung to, unaware of the full consequences waiting ahead.

Kiros's father had been sick for a long time. When he finally passed, it was quiet and expected. At the funeral, Alemayhue stayed close to Kiros, trying to offer comfort. But Kiros stayed distant, his face unreadable. He did not cry or show sadness. While others wept and whispered, Kiros felt nothing. After the ceremony, his mother gave him all the money. He took it without a word, without feeling. The loss did not change him. It was as if part of him had already gone before his father did.

Kiros spent months planning and building the structure using the money he inherited. He chose a remote spot deep in the woods near the university where thick trees blocked the sky and even animals rarely wandered. He worked alone, carefully shaping each wall from heavy concrete blocks making them smooth and solid. The shape was exactly like the cube he always drew in his notebook, simple, perfect, and without any windows or doors.

The entrance was hidden and sealed so tightly it could not be opened from the inside. Once inside, there was no way to leave except by someone outside opening it. Kiros wanted it this way. The cube was not just a shelter but a prison he built for himself, a place where nothing could change, where he could feel safe from the confusing world outside. The walls held a stillness that matched the silence he carried inside.

Kiros sat alone in his room with his notebook open in front of him. He sketched the cube again, tracing the sharp lines and solid walls. He thought about how to bring Alemayhue inside without forcing him or breaking the silence that kept Kiros safe.

He studied the shapes and paths carefully. Then an idea sparked in his mind something clever and quiet like a hidden door. If he could find a way to let Alemayhue enter on his own terms, maybe he would understand the space better.

Kiros smiled slightly for the first time in a while. This was the plan. No words yet just a path waiting to be discovered.

Kiros had created the cube to be completely secure. The entrance could only open when someone touched the faces in a very specific sequence. This sequence was not random. It was a pattern he had drawn many times in his notebook. The pattern was made of shapes and lines tangled together in a way that only he understood.

To open the cube, a person needed to remember and reproduce this exact sequence by pressing or sliding parts of the cube's surface in the correct order. If the sequence was wrong, the cube would stay shut, solid and impenetrable.

Kiros never wrote the sequence down plainly. Instead, it was hidden in his sketches and notes, mixed with other drawings and symbols. Only someone patient and careful enough to study his notebook could find it. Watching Kiros closely over time might reveal the secret too.

In his room, Kiros often sat quietly, eyes closed, mentally practicing the sequence. He imagined sliding his fingers along the cube's hidden buttons and touching the faces in the right order.

Every movement was slow and deliberate, like a ritual only he knew. This practice gave him a strange sense of control and calm.

The cube was more than a shelter. It was a puzzle built from Kiro's own mind, a place only he could open and enter. The security was perfect because it required memory, focus, and trust in himself to unlock.

Kiros told Alemayhue, I need your engineer mind to help me with something important. Alemayhue felt uneasy but followed him. They walked through thick woods, the shadows growing darker around them. His chest tightened with every step.

Ahead, through the trees, Alemayhue saw the cube. It was exactly like the shape he had drawn in his mind a solid, white box with no doors or windows. Inside, the walls were smooth and pure white, so bright it almost hurt to look at them. The floor was cold and bare.

In the center of the room stood a single old sofa. Opposite it was a small TV set, its screen filled with static. No paintings, no other furniture, no decorations. The silence was heavy.

Alemayhue's skin crawled. He stopped and asked, What is this place? Kiro said softly, Let me show you.

As they stepped inside, the air grew heavy and thick. It felt like breathing underwater. Alemayhue's head spun. The white walls seemed to close in, endless and empty. His stomach twisted, nausea rising fast. The muffled silence made his heart beat loud in his ears. His mind struggled to focus, but everything blurred.

When Alemayhue blinked, Kiro stood before him, wearing a mask that hid his face. The mask made Kiro look distant and strange, like a ghost. Alemayhue tried to move or speak, but his body felt weak and heavy. He sank slowly to the cold floor, overwhelmed and helpless.

Act III: The Test

Alemayhue woke slowly on the sofa. The quiet in the room pressed down on him like a heavy weight. His eyes opened to the soft glow of the TV screen. The numbers on it flickered steadily: 00:00:01:12. He stared, unsure what they meant, but they felt important.

He pushed himself up, feeling the cold fabric of the sofa beneath him. His heart began to beat faster. He stood and took a few shaky steps toward the door. His hand reached out and slammed against the surface, loud in the silence.

"Kiros Kiro" what is this Let me out, Alemayhue yelled, his voice echoing off the empty walls.

The door did not move. No reply came. The white walls, bare and smooth, seemed to close in around him. The room felt smaller with every passing second. Fear started to settle deep inside Alemayhue, but still, no answer.

Alemayhue tried the door again and again. He pressed his ear to it but heard only silence. His hands trembled as he searched the walls for a crack or a seam. Nothing. The room stayed empty except for the sofa and the glowing TV.

He paced back and forth, his breaths quick and shallow. The numbers on the screen kept changing but meant nothing to him. Hours passed, maybe more. His voice grew hoarse from shouting Kiros's name, but no one came.

At one point, he sank to the floor, head in his hands. The weight of the quiet pressed on him, making it hard to think. He looked back at the TV, hoping for a sign, something to explain where he was or why he was trapped. But the numbers kept ticking, steady and cold.

Anxiety pulled Alemayhue down. His thoughts stopped moving. He could not think about his family or his fiancée. Outside, Kiros prepared for the first test, the first injection.

Hours passed in the quiet room. Alemayhue lay asleep on the sofa, exhausted from trying to escape. The silence was broken only by the faint hum of the TV.

Kiros entered silently. He carried a small syringe and moved carefully toward Alemayhue. Without waking him, Kiros injected a slow-acting medicine into his brain. It was meant to dull his thoughts, to keep him calm and less resistant.

Kiros left a small piece of bread on the floor nearby. Nothing else. Then he slipped out quietly, leaving Alemayhue trapped in the empty white room.

Alemayhue woke up with his head heavy and numb from the syringe. His thoughts were slow and fuzzy.

He ate the dry bread slowly. It gave him a little energy, but his throat burned with thirst. His mouth felt dry and sticky.

After a while, he stood up and moved to the door. He pushed, pulled, and shook it with all his strength. He knocked and shouted, but nothing worked.

The door stayed shut tight. Without the pattern and key from outside, there was no way to open it. He felt tired and thirsty, stuck in the silence again.

Alemayhue woke with a heavy numbness in his head. The dull ache from the syringe still lingered, clouding his thoughts. He reached for the bread left on the floor. It was dry and hard but it gave him a little energy. After eating, he moved to the door. He pushed, pulled, banged, and tried every way to open it. Nothing worked. The lock would not budge. No pattern, no key from inside. He was trapped.

Hours passed. His thirst grew but there was no water. Only the dry bread to keep him alive. The silence around him pressed deeper. At first, anger filled him. He shouted and cursed Kiros. He called him evil and cold. But nothing changed. No one answered.

Days turned into weeks. Alemayhue's struggles became weaker. He stopped fighting the door so hard. His movements slowed. The anger faded into a quiet sadness. He began to watch himself, feeling distant from the pain. He started marking time in his mind, counting breaths and heartbeats. The tests kept coming. Kiros appeared less often but always with a syringe or new challenge.

Months passed. Alemayhue's spirit bent under the weight of the endless routine. He learned to live within the room, small as it was. His mind grew sharper in strange ways. He studied his own fear and hope. He wondered how much of himself was left. Kiros observed quietly from behind the glass, noting each change.

Years later Alemayhue moved differently. The fight was gone. Acceptance took its place. His eyes no longer searched for a way out. Instead he focused inward, trying to understand the prison inside him. Kiros still watched, still tested. The experiment went on, as slow and relentless as time itself.

Then Kiros prepared the last test. This time he created a world inside Alemayhue's mind—a war zone filled with noise, fear, and endless chaos. The goal was to push Alemayhue to his limits, to see if he could survive the storm or break completely.

At first, Alemayhue's mind flared with vivid images of battles, explosions, and screams. The pressure was overwhelming. His body, already fragile from years of captivity, reacted as if it were truly trapped in the fight. His breathing became shallow. His limbs trembled, weak and unsteady. The walls of the white room seemed to close in tighter.

The endless stress shattered his thoughts. Memories slipped away like dust on the wind. Faces and voices he once held onto faded into a blur. His mind fractured under the weight of the war, unable to hold itself together.

Eventually, his strength gave out. He collapsed to the cold floor, his breath shallow and uneven. His eyes, once searching and sharp, dulled with exhaustion. The battle inside him had drained every last ounce of resistance.

Kiros watched silently as Alemayhue's body went still. The experiment had ended. The man who had clung to hope now lay broken, swallowed by the very test meant to measure his endurance.

Slowly, Kiros lifted Alemayhue's fragile body and carried him back to the center of the white room. He laid him gently on the cold sofa, careful not to cause any more pain. From his pocket, Kiros took a small folded note and slipped it quietly into Alemayhue's coat pocket. Without another word, he turned and walked away, leaving the room and Alemayhue silent once more.

For the first time, Kiros felt a deep sadness, something he had never truly known before. He retreated to his room, locked the door, and quietly packed everything he owned. Without looking back, he left and went to Alemayhue's family. They had been searching for Alemayhue all this time. When they saw Kiros arrive, his fiancée was there too, waiting silently.

He entered their home and sat down silently, his eyes distant and unreadable. He looked like a man carrying something heavy but unsure how to let it out. Alemayhue's family watched him closely. His fiancée sat beside them, her expression soft but expectant. None of them spoke at first. Then his mother said quietly, "We've been waiting, Kiros. All this time. Waiting for answers."

Alemayhue's fiancée leaned forward, her voice barely above a whisper. "It's been almost four years, Kiros. We haven't seen you. Not a word. What happened?"

Kiros looked down, hands shaking. His voice cracked as he spoke.

"I... I did something. Something bad," he said, barely getting the words out.

His chest rose and fell fast. "I need to confess. I know where Alemayhue is. I... I did this."

Each word came slower, heavier, like they cost him to say.

Alemayhue's mother stepped forward, eyes wide.

"What do you mean you did this? Alemayhue... my son... your best friend..." she stopped, her voice caught in her throat.

Then his fiancée, with a soft smile, turned toward the stairs and called out,

"Alemayhue, come down."

Time lost all meaning. The room seemed to stretch and shrink at once, as if reality itself had been pulled too tight. Kiros sat frozen, his body refusing to move, his thoughts scattering like ash in the wind. Every sound around him vanished. The ticking clock, the hum of the house, even the shallow breaths of the people beside him faded into a sharp and unbearable silence.

The name echoed in his mind. Alemayhue. Not a memory. Not a ghost. A voice calling him from the stairs.

His heart pounded like a drum, not with fear but something older, deeper. He could feel the air shift, heavy with something impossible. The weight of guilt, the years of silence, the endless nights watching a screen waiting for the mind of a man to break all of it cracked like thin glass beneath the footsteps.

His mouth dried. His throat clenched. The sound of those steps was slow, soft, but they landed like thunder. Kiros tried to breathe, but every breath felt stolen. The edge of everything he believed was folding inward, and at the center of it was the voice, the name, and the footfalls of a man he had thought he buried in silence.

Then Kiros turned.

At the foot of the stairs stood Alemayhue, smiling gently as if nothing had passed between them. He stepped forward and wrapped his arms around his fiancée, holding her with a quiet warmth. Then, lifting his gaze to Kiros, he said,

“Hey, my friend. It’s been so long.”

And in that moment, everything stopped.

The room, the air, the memories. Time folded in on itself like a glitch in a world too fragile to hold the truth. Kiros could no longer tell if he was awake or dreaming. If this was forgiveness or punishment. The silence pressed in, not empty, but filled with everything they never said.

Reality hung still, as if the universe itself had paused to understand what had just become real.

If you had to choose, would you stay inside or break free? And how much of you is already trapped?