

I have written my biography thousands of times in my head. Chapters shift, conclusions suspended, and paragraphs scrapped, but one day remains constant through all these mental prototypes. The most memorable day of my life is not a particularly remarkable one. It was a relatively normal day, but it has stuck in my mind every summer since, reminding me of my home across oceans.

We could hear the raindrops beating against the roof of the two-story family home and dripping down past our faces, which were peering out from the screen windows. Spices from the kitchen took over our senses, an abrupt change from the gloomy atmosphere of where we belonged. The leaves of the plants drooped downward and up again with the weight of the droplets, making the greenery dance in the humid air. It was more greenery than we had ever seen at once in New York City, where we lived in a regular apartment. Despite the ruthless monsoon weather, we— me and my two younger brothers— reached for our badminton rackets rather than our umbrellas, already plotting our respective victories.

Like every other day since we had arrived, we stepped out onto the marble staircase that led to our sanctuary— a wide stone pavement that entertained our constant badminton games. The thin tiles were uneven and housed puddles of varying depth, creating a constant challenge for the players. The only unconventional occurrence of that day was the sudden surplus of rain, even for the monsoon season. It fell around me and my brothers, engulfing us in the foreign familiarity of our second home. Despite the raging torrents, we raced to our sanctuary without looking back, carrying shuttlecocks and rackets that had been used by our mother, grandmother, and possibly even further back. I couldn't help but imagine the stories the racket held—of my mother, hurrying outside while simultaneously tying back the same thick black hair that I now possessed, or my uncle, following behind her, begging her to slow down. Hindi, our native language, rolled off their tongues in a way that I could never achieve. My status as an "American" felt more prominent than ever before in this moment, reminding me that I could never truly integrate myself into this life. I hit the shuttlecock exceptionally hard at this thought, shedding a point off my brother, who grinned at my sudden motivation.

We continued playing, soaked thoroughly, despite this realization. Our games lasted until our glasses were so wet we could no longer see the birdie or our feet. In fact, the birdie itself became heavier with each puddle it landed in, and soon, instead of battling each other, we battled the rough Indian weather. Our rackets slipped out of our hands and our pants were soaked, but our raucous laughter emerged above all the noise. We let the rain weigh us down, accepting our situation. Our relatives watched from their balconies, shouting words of encouragement we couldn't fully understand but recognized all the same. With each new step, the badminton racket felt lighter in my hand, letting my fingers nestle into its stubborn grooves. It started to feel different, no longer carrying the weight of the role I could never play in my native country. As I gained a point and lost another, my bleached jeans—tied up to avoid the water—started to feel more welcomed by the traditional Indian *courthi* I wore above them. When I called out a foul, I had an American accent, but I still possessed the luxury of being able to communicate with my family, despite the way I stuttered over words and paused between sentences. The badminton racket that so many had held before me ultimately repaired my relationship with my other world. As I continued playing in the torturing rain, screaming in my broken Hindi and laughing in my American accent, I felt more at home than I ever had before.

Suddenly, the surplus of mosquitoes, the banana trees, and the street vendors, all seemed ordinary, even pleasant to an extent.

On this day I finished constructing the bridge between my two worlds which could not contradict each other more. I was too “American” sometimes and too “Indian” when it was convenient. Finally, this internal storm of identity was somewhat placated, with the great chasm that once seemed insurmountable becoming suddenly crossable, all with the help of a cathartic badminton game. The fear that had once surrounded every word I spoke in such a foreign place slowly dissipated, leaving me with the genuine acceptance of my family and my newfound acceptance of myself.