



**The Constellation of Ravine Roy (extract)**

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## **A Constellation is Born**

1999

*You came for me at midnight. A pudgy hand tugging mine, yanking me awake. I rubbed my lids, asked what the heck was going on (I needed sleep. I was a growing girl). You smiled, handed me my robe, continued to tug-tug as we crept from the cave of my room, past the rumbling snores of Amma's lair, down the stairs and out of the flat.*

*Your brother was standing outside in lightning bolt pyjamas. The scruffy strands of his hair matched the zigzag pattern. He looked sleepy and cross all at the same time.*

*"Marianne..." I said, trying to sound stern even as my body yawned.*

*You pressed a finger over my mouth then turned away, guiding us through the night. Our feet stumbled against concrete steps, hands stretching out for metal railings that made me shiver.*

*On the fourth floor you signalled for us to sit in our usual places by the wire mesh on the balcony. Legs dangled through pre-made holes as you parked your body between us. You linked your arms through the loop of ours. Curls of your hair brushed against my cheek.*

*You pointed to the sky.*

*"Look," you said.*

*I looked. I saw. A billion stars against an indigo sky. The brightness of them. The sheer number of them. Eyes widened. Jaw dropped.*

*"That," you said pointing straight up, "is the Constellation of Cartwheels."*

*Your head fell back, a crescent grin across your face.*

*I snuck my hand in my robe pocket and felt the edge of the book inside.*

*"That," I said pointing to a wispy cluster, "is the Constellation of Mini-dictionaries."*

*I looked over at Jonathan, waiting for scientific objections.*

*"No," he said shaking his head, glasses jiggling on the bridge of his nose. "That is the Constellation of Thunderstorms."*

*You looked at me and me at you, buzzing with surprise.*

*Our fingers rose, arms outstretched.*

*"The Constellation of Lemon Sherbets..." you said.*

*"The Constellation of Hurricanes..." your brother said.*

*"The Constellation of Vegetable Dansak..." I said.*

*We continued naming the constellations all through the night until soon we weren't even using words but a jumble of made-up sounds. I felt the warmth of you by my side, heating me up*

*like a blanket. When I looked at the horizon I saw a shooting star. It skimmed across the velvet night in a streaking blaze.*

*Or maybe I didn't see that. Maybe that's just what I wanted to see...*

## The Constellation of Bed

2010

I woke up this morning to find my room had been entered ninja-style during the night. Streamers lined the ceiling, balloons were taped in clusters to the corners as a giant holographic banner dangled crooked on the wall.

If there was an award for the World's Worst Listener my mother would win hands down. Give her a simple sentence and watch the cogs of her brain pull in the words, twist them up and spit out a new meaning. You say you want a kitten: she buys you a coat. You say you don't like cabbage: she cooks seven different cabbage recipes that week. You say you don't want a party and you wake up to a sight that makes you sweat so heavily your pyjamas glue to your skin and you have to check your knickers to make sure you haven't wet yourself.

I propped myself up in bed as the smell of onion bhajis floated up from the kitchen. It was mixed with the heavy scent of Citrus Breeze air freshener. My eyes swivelled around the room; a frantic dash to see what I didn't want to see, a faint hope that – even though the boat was rocking – the waves were still calm.

My eyes froze. A dozen photographs were tacked across the wall. It was like a museum timeline done on the cheap.

Photo 1: 1992 - Birth of Ravine (shriveled new born with too much hair)

Photo 3: 1996 - Nativity Play (girl dressed as sheep, straw hanging from mouth)

Photo 8: 2009 - New Year's Eve (teenager lying in bed, party hat perched jaunty on head).

I blinked, rubbed my eyes and waited for the nightmare to be over. I shook my head, blinked some more but the balloons, the banner and the photos were all still there. This was worse than a nightmare. It was real.

"You are up!" Amma said, wobbling through the door with a cake the size of a coffee table in her arms.

She was wearing an orange sari pleated perfectly down the middle, a gallon of coconut oil combed through her hair. Leaning to the side, she kicked the stereo into PLAY with the heel of her foot. Synthesized drums erupted into the room. She stood grinning at me as though this was the finale of a show and it was time for me to applaud.

I shuffled to a sitting position.

“Amma...” I began.

She shook her head, eyes fogging over as she cocked her ear to the music. I watched her nod in time to the beat. The song continued to play, the cake began to slide.

“Amma,” I said.

“Wait wait!” she said balancing the platter.

The drums changed beat as Stevie Wonder hit the chorus.

“...*Happy Birthday to ya! Happy Birthday to ya! Happy Biiiiirthay!*”

My head spun. My stomach flipped. It was like being on the bumper cars in a fun fair.

Amma waited until the chorus finished before waddling over to me. With a smug wiggle of her head, she placed the chocolate gravestone across my lap.

“It took three days to make,” she said.

Covered in brown frosting and a series of plastic roses, the cake had eighteen candles plotted carefully around its perimeter. In the middle, carefully iced in pink loopy writing were the words *Happy 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday Ravine Roy!!* The letters shrank as they reached the bottom but somehow Amma had still managed to ice two smiley faces after the exclamation marks.