

TEASCAPE



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In the movie *The Shine of Your Eyes*, Lyn was roaming around the city, hopeless, when she stumbled upon a grumpy old grandmother, who owned *Wayfarers*, a close-knit group of people who almost lost themselves to the society and its expectations.

In *Stairway to Beyond*, Eliot had taken upon the secret passageways of the city to travel; until he found *The Dregs*, who found a way to bring themselves to light.

In both cases, the protagonists had fallen rock-bottom; falling into circles of abnegation. Until they found something or someone who cared who helped.

As Zainab roamed around the graveled roads of Neldsor, a tiny town in the middle of forests and mountains, she found herself in front of *Teascape*. She was immediately reminded of her favourite two movies, and thought this must be it.

Some say the lady who owns it was a fortune-teller. Some say she's preposterous. But no one denied that she was always right.

The small store was wedged between two other local businesses. Ivy hung on its red bricked walls from above, and rectangular pots lined up with different flowers in the front. Zainab peered through the windows, finding her own worn out self staring back. She couldn't help it, for a great few seconds she stared at the messy bun on her head, her loose worn sweatshirt and wondered, how did I end up like this?

This will be another waste of time. Again.

Just as Zainab decided against entering and stepped back onto the pavement, the door of the store creaked open. Goosebumps erupted across her skin as she

turned back to meet the kindest almond eyes and saccharine smile.

The people certainly left out how suave the lady in front of her was. Her dark hair pulled into an elegant bun behind her head, a few strands falling on the sides. Dark plum lips, and high-necked blouse, with a long skirt that gathered at the bottom. She was quite shorter than Zainab, her voice soft-spoken as she said, "Come in, dear."

Was this how fortune-tellers brought customers?

Zainab didn't feel like refusing. What was there to lose with some fortune-telling anyway?

She nodded, and the woman pulled the door open wider for her to enter.

The store on the inside was lit from the daylight, and a few spotlights over the counter. It smelled like flowers and herbs in here surely from the ingredients she used for her fortune-telling. The tables were little wooden and circular; the chairs shaped small. The walls were filled with dark, designed wallpapers. A chandelier hung above the counter, where lay dainty cups and saucers, jars full of... herbs, dried flowers, and whatnot.

"Sit," the woman's voice broke her from her trance. She motioned to a cushioned stool as she placed herself on the other side of the counter. Zainab obliged, and asked politely, "May I know your name?"

The owner's eyes perked up. *Surely, people must've asked her name before?*

"You can call me Isobel." She flashed her a disarming smile. "And you are...?"

"Z-Zainab." Zainab answered, smiling weakly.

"What a beautiful name."

"Thank you."

Isobel clasped her hands in front of her and arched an eyebrow. "Tell me about yourself, Zainab." The way her name rolled off her tongue felt like... home, to Zainab. People called her Zee nowadays.

"About myself," Zainab repeated. She bit the inside of her cheek thinking of where to start.

"How has life been treating you lately?" Isobel asked. "No sleep?"

Zainab shook her head. The people were correct she was spot on.

"I've been stressed recently. About a lot of things. Whether what I'm doing is the right thing to do, how can I fit in here," the words escaped her mouth in a hurry, like they were begging to be released.

"You're afraid that you might be wasting your time. That has led you to lose your sleep. It's normal to find it hard to sleep when you have a lot of things in your mind."

Is she a fortune-teller or a therapist? Or perhaps, a mind reader?

"Yes," Zainab nodded, and watched as Isobel set an empty cup in front of her. Then she reached out to a jar with tea leaves and dried flowers, before putting one white flower in and poured steaming hot water into it. Zainab hadn't even realised when she'd boiled that water.

"Drink this," Isobel said, turning the handle towards her.

She read tea leaves, then.

"What is this... tea?" Zainab asked, voice hoarse. She didn't want to sound rude.

"Chamomile tea."

Chamomile. Why did it sound so familiar?

Zainab took the cup in her hands and flinched when the heat burned into her fingers. She brought it to her lips, tasting the flavor. Isobel watched her the entire time, until she finished the tea to the last drop and set the cup down. But not before she spared a glance at the bottom of the cup herself.

It didn't look anything special to her.

Isobel took the cup in her hands and set it down.

"You're not going to read that?" Zainab blurted out.

Isobel quirked an eyebrow at her. "No. I actually think my work here is done."

"What?"

"You could stay for another cup if you'd like.."

"You're not gonna... do fortune-telling for me?"

"I am not a fortune-teller, Zainab."

Zainab appalled her for a few moments, before spluttering, "H-how much do I owe you?"

"I always offer the first cup free. Go home and get some sleep."

A quick glance at the clock said it was close to eight; sunset happened quite late in this place.

Later that night, Zainab slept soundly. But not before she went through every part of the internet to find out about Chamomile tea.

Isobel wasn't a fortune-teller.

Chamomile tea: From the chamomile flower, chamomile tea is good for the mind, promotes sleep and treats insomnia.

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