



A star  
is  
born



*IT IS LATE AFTERNOON, THE SUN IS SETTING ACROSS THE CITY.*



*THE NIGHTMARE I HAD LAST NIGHT WAS TOO MUCH TO HANDLE. SEEING MY UNCLE AGAIN BROUGHT ME BACK TO THOSE DARK DAYS THAT I NEVER WANT TO EXPERIENCE AGAIN. WHY DO I FEEL THIS WAY ABOUT OTHER MEN? WHY DO YOU I FEEL THIS WAY? I AM SO TIRED.*

*HIS PHONE RINGS, IT IS HIS CHILDHOOD FRIEND, ADITHI*

*HELLO?*

*HARSH! YOU NEED TO CHECK YOUR INSTAGRAM! THERE IS A TALENT SHOW COMING UP NEXT MONTH! YOU SHOULD PERFORM! WITH YOUR VOICE, YOU CAN TOTALLY WIN IT!*





I REALLY DON'T KNOW...I HAVE NEVER PERFORMED IN FRONT OF PEOPLE. I HAVE ONLY SUNG IN FRONT OF YOU!



I DON'T CARE! MEET ME AT THE PARK TOMORROW. WE NEED TO DISCUSS A GAME PLAN!



THE PHONE CLICKS OFF.

BUT...  
I DON'T WANT TO



WHEN HE GETS HOME, HE GOES TO HIS ROOM & LAYS DOWN ON HIS BED. HE THINKS ABOUT THE TALENT SHOW AND GETS HIS PHONE.





AUDITIONS?  
OH, MAN....

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE  
NIGHT, HE SUDDENLY  
WAKES UP, CRYING. HE  
HAS ANOTHER NIGHTMARE.  
FOR A WHILE, HE SITS ON  
HIS BED, THINKING ABOUT  
HIS LIFE AND HOW HE  
FEELS SO UNHAPPY. HE  
GETS HIS PHONE, GOES  
ONTO THE POSTER ABOUT  
THE TALENT SHOW AGAIN

IT IS NOW OR NEVER.  
I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M  
GOING TO DO THIS...





IT IS A RAINY AFTERNOON. HARSH IS WALKING TO THE PARK TO MEET WITH ADITHI

HELLO, BUDDY!  
DID YOU SIGN UP FOR  
THE AUDITIONS FOR THE  
TALENT SHOW?

YES...I ALMOST DIDN'T  
WANT TO DO IT,  
BUT LAST NIGHT,  
I CHANGED MY MIND.

SUDDENLY, ADITHI'S FACE IS FULL OF CONCERN)

HARSH, ARE YOU  
OKAY? YOUR FACE  
LOOKS SO TIRED!  
ARE YOU WORRIED  
ABOUT THE AUDITION?

YES..BUT ALSO..  
DO YOU WANT  
TO GO GET  
SOME COFFEE?

SURE.  
YOU ARE SCARING  
ME A LITTLE..



REMEMBER, WHEN WE WERE BOTH YOUNG,  
AND I USED TO CRY RANDOMLY FOR  
NO REASON? I NEED TO TELL YOU  
WHY AND HOW IT RELATES  
TO THIS TALENT SHOW...



I WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED BY MY  
UNCLE WHEN I WAS FIVE AND IT  
DIDN'T STOP UNTIL I WAS  
TWELVE...AND YOU KNOW HOW I'M  
GAY. I CAN'T HELP THINKING THAT  
IS HOW I BECAME GAY. LAST NIGHT,  
I HAD A NIGHTMARE ABOUT MY  
UNCLE AND COULDN'T SLEEP. I FEEL  
SO FRUSTRATED AND DIRTY. THIS IS  
WHY I DECIDED TO SIGN UP FOR  
THE TALENT SHOW. I WANT TO  
WRITE A SONG ABOUT MY PAIN AND  
SUFFERING AND SING IT AT THE  
TALENT SHOW.



I THINK IT IS A WONDERFUL  
PLAN...THIS IS A GREAT FIRST STEP.  
WHY DON'T WE ALSO FIND SOMEONE  
YOU CAN TALK TO? ABOUT ALL OF  
THIS? HELP YOU TAKE THIS JOURNEY  
WITHOUT ANY FALLS.



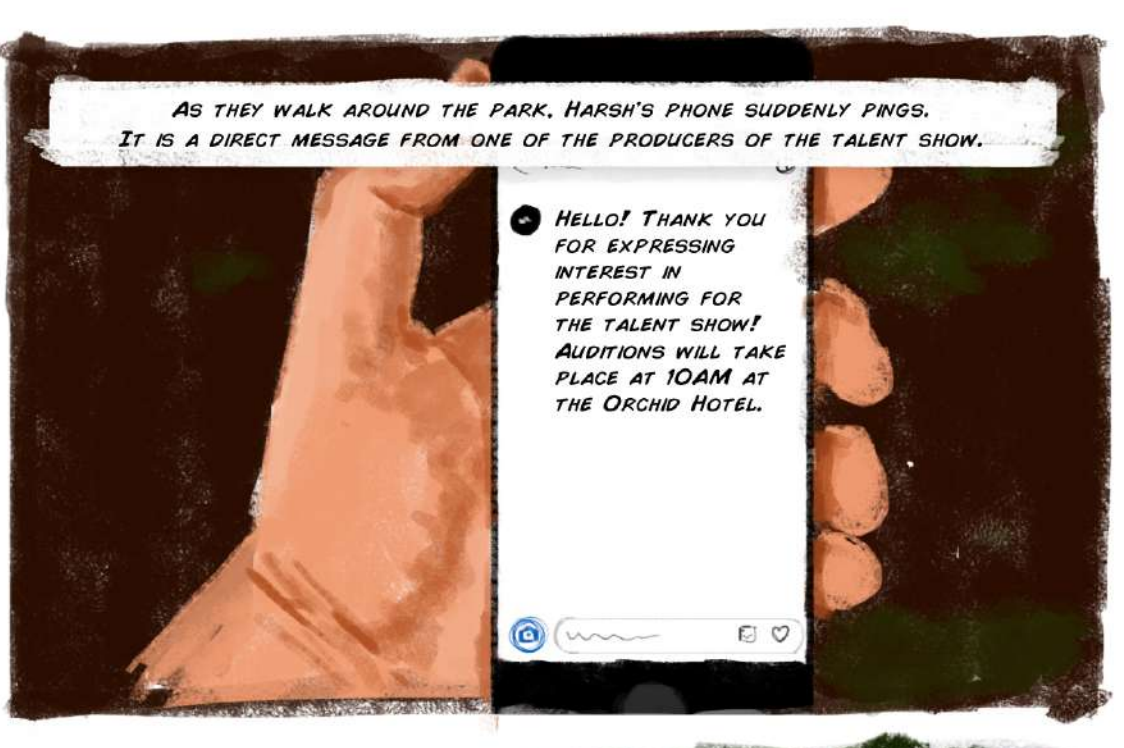
LIKE A COUNSELLOR? WILL THAT BE  
OKAY? I DON'T THINK I NEED THAT  
SORT OF HELP.





IT'S JUST TALKING.  
WHAT IS THE WORST  
THAT CAN HAPPEN?

OKAY,  
ALRIGHT.



AS THEY WALK AROUND THE PARK, HARSH'S PHONE SUDDENLY PINGS.  
IT IS A DIRECT MESSAGE FROM ONE OF THE PRODUCERS OF THE TALENT SHOW.

HELLO! THANK YOU  
FOR EXPRESSING  
INTEREST IN  
PERFORMING FOR  
THE TALENT SHOW!  
AUDITIONS WILL TAKE  
PLACE AT 10AM AT  
THE ORCHID HOTEL.



HARSH SHOWS ADITHI THE MESSAGE

GO AND SHOW THEM  
YOUR BEAUTIFUL TALENT!



THEY BOTH LAUGH AND CONTINUE  
TO WALK AROUND THE PARK  
UNTIL THE AFTERNOON



IT IS 10AM THE NEXT DAY. HARSH ARRIVES AT THE ORCHID HOTEL, HOLDING HIS GUITAR. HE NERVOUSLY WAITS OUTSIDE. AFTER A WHILE, HIS NUMBER IS CALLED. HE WALKS INTO THE ROOM. HE STANDS IN FRONT OF A LONG TABLE WITH TWO PEOPLE SITTING BEHIND IT.



HELLO! I AM ONE OF THE PRODUCERS OF THE TALENT SHOW. MY COLLEAGUE HERE, IS ANOTHER PRODUCER FOR THE SHOW. PLEASE TELL US YOUR NAME AND WHAT YOU WILL BE DOING. THEN, PROCEED...



HELLO, MY NAME IS HARSH. I AM 17 YEARS OLD. I WILL BE SINGING TO YOU "YELLOW" BY COLDPLAY, WITH MY GUITAR.





**HARSH BEGINS TO SING THE SONG, HE SOUNDS NERVOUS AT FIRST, BUT HE SLOWLY GETS COMFORTABLE SINGING THE SONG.**

**THE PRODUCERS START TO SMILE, MOVE THEIR HEADS TO THE SONG. ONCE HARSH IS FINISHED, THE PRODUCERS TURN TO TALK. THEY TALK FOR A LITTLE BIT AND TURN TO HARSH**



**WE WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE YOU AND SAY THAT WE ARE HAPPY TO GIVE YOU A SPOT TO PERFORM IN THE TALENT SHOW!**



**WOW!  
THANK YOU,  
SO MUCH!**



**WE WILL SEND YOU THE DETAILS FOR THE REHEARSAL OF THE TALENT SHOW WHICH WILL HAPPEN A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE THE BIG DAY. SINCE THE SHOW IS A MONTH FROM NOW, PLEASE USE THIS TIME TO PRACTICE AND PERFECT YOUR TALENT. WE WANT EVERY CONTESTANT TO DO WELL AND SHOW THEIR BEST.**





*HARSH LEAVES THE ROOM WITH A BIG SMILE ON HIS FACE. HE IMMEDIATELY CALLS ADITHI TO TELL HER THE NEWS*



*HELLO, HARSH?!  
TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED?*



*I GOT INTO  
THE TALENT SHOW!*



*ADITHI SCREAMS IN JOY*



*NOW, IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO  
WRITE THIS SONG AND PRACTICE!*

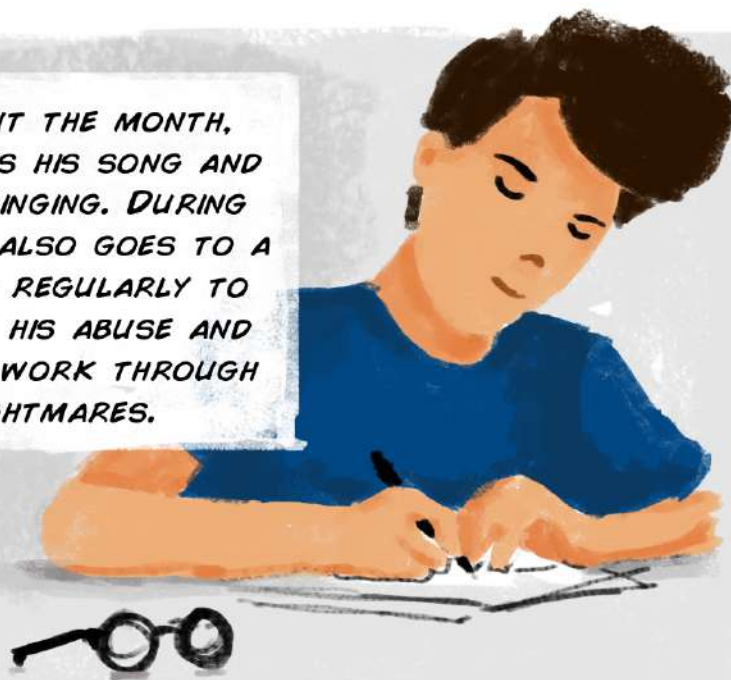


**YES!**





THROUGHOUT THE MONTH, HARSH WRITES HIS SONG AND PRACTICES SINGING. DURING THIS TIME HE ALSO GOES TO A COUNSELLOR REGULARLY TO TALK ABOUT HIS ABUSE AND HOW HE CAN WORK THROUGH HIS NIGHTMARES.



FROM TIME TO TIME, ADITHI COMES OVER TO HIS HOME TO LISTEN TO THE SONG. SHE GIVES HIM FEEDBACK ON CERTAIN LYRICS HERE AND THERE AND SOMETIMES, GIVES FEEDBACK ON THE MELODY. THROUGHOUT ALL OF THIS, THE NIGHTMARES HARSH EXPERIENCED START FADING AWAY. HE STARTS TO SLEEP WELL AND STARTS TO BE HAPPY



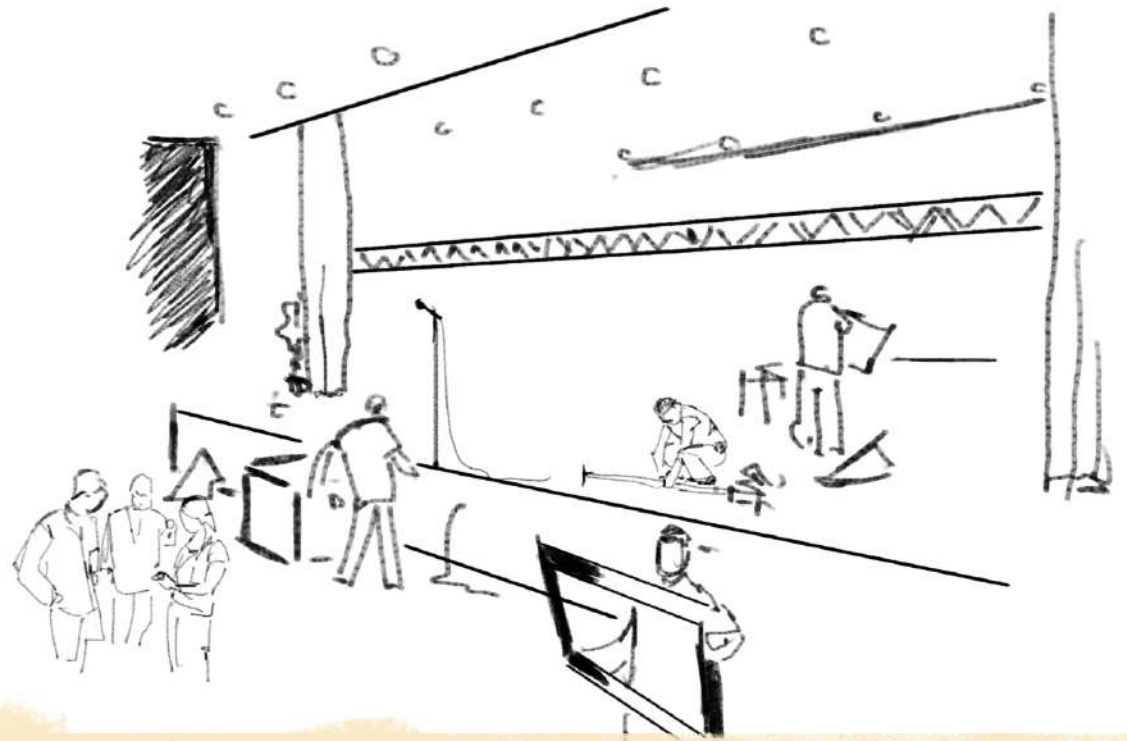
IT IS TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE TALENT SHOW. HARSH IS FEELING A LITTLE UNEASY, BUT SUPER MOTIVATED. HE SITS IN FRONT OF DESK, WITH HIS GUITAR IN HIS ARMS. HE SINGS A VERSE OF THE SONG

NOTHING IS GOING TO HOLD ME DOWN,  
I AM FREE...I AM FREE  
FROM THE DARKNESS.





TODAY, IT IS THE REHEARSAL OF THE TALENT SHOW. THE TALENTS SHOW WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE ORCHID HOTEL IN ONE OF THEIR BANQUET HALLS. A STAGE IS SET UP IN THE FRONT. SPEAKERS ARE PLACED ON BOTH SIDES. PEOPLE ARE DECORATING THE ROOM WITH FLOWERS AND ARE SETTING UP THE LIGHTS. THE PRODUCERS ARE BUSY TELLING PEOPLE WHAT TO DO.



IT IS HARSH'S TURN. HE SINGS A DIFFERENT SONG FOR THE REHEARSAL SINCE HE WANTS HIS ORIGINAL SONG TO DEBUT ON THE DAY OF THE SHOW.



SOUNDS REALLY GOOD HARSH! YOU SOUND A LITTLE NERVOUS IN THE BEGINNING, BUT OVERALL, GREAT! YOU WILL DO WELL!



HARSH IS ALL SMILES



HARSH GOES ON THE STAGE. HE TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND HE SEES ADITHI IN THE FRONT WITH A BIG SMILE ON HER FACE. HE BEGINS TO SING AND PLAYS HIS GUITAR



THE CAGES OF MY FEAR HELD ME IN  
SO FAR FROM MY HAPPINESS, SO FAR AWAY  
I WAS TIED DOWN FROM THE CONTROL, THE CONTROL OF  
MY OWN THOUGHTS  
I DRIFTED, DRIFTED INTO NOTHINGNESS

I TOOK THE LITTLE SEED OF MY STRENGTH  
TO LIFT ME UP OUT OF THE DARKNESS  
NOTHING IS GOING TO HOLD ME DOWN, I AM FREE, FREE  
FROM THE DARKNESS  
I RISE OUT OF THE CAGE, WITH MY WINGS HELPING ME  
TO REALIZE THAT I AM STRONGER THAN I THOUGHT I  
WAS

I AM FLYING, FLYING, FLYING  
NOTHING IS GOING TO HOLD ME DOWN  
I AM FLYING, FLYING, FLYING  
MY WINGS ARE MY HAPPINESS AND LOVE  
HAPPINESS AND LOVE FOR MYSELF

I DESCEND INTO THE GREATNESS  
I CAN FINALLY WALK IN FREEDOM  
FREEDOM TO LOVE WHO I AM  
I AM GREAT  
I AM ME



WHEN HARSH FINISHES SINGING, THE AUDIENCE STANDS UP IN APPLAUSE. ADITHI SCREAMS OUT HARSH'S NAME. HARSH BOWS AND WALKS OFF THE STAGE. HE GOES BACK TO THE ROOM HE WAS WAITING IN BEFORE.



I CAN'T BELIEVE I DID THAT! I AM SO RELIEVED AND SO PROUD OF MYSELF!



AFTER AN HOUR, THE TALENT SHOW IS FINISHED. THE PRODUCERS CALL ALL THE CONTESTANTS ON STAGE.

ALL CONTESTANTS PLEASE GET ON STAGE!



ALL OF THE CONTESTANTS GET ON STAGE, THEY ANXIOUSLY WAIT FOR THE RESULTS

ALL OF YOU WERE SO AMAZING! THIS IS THE BEST TALENT SHOW YET!



THE AUDIENCE APPLAUDS



I KNOW ALL OF YOU ARE  
WAITING FOR THE RESULTS!



THE PRODUCER OPENS UP THE ENVELOPE. HE ANNOUNCES THE  
RESULTS OF THE RUNNER-UP, THIRD PLACE WINNER AND SECOND  
PLACE WINNER. HARSH'S HEART FEELS LIKE IT'S GOING TO BURST

AND NOW, THE FIRST  
PLACE WINNER! THIS  
PERSON WOWED THE  
JUDGES WITH HIS  
BEAUTIFUL LYRICS AND  
HEARTFELT SINGING  
VOICE, THE FIRST PLACE  
WINNER IS....HARSH!!!



HARSH IS STUNNED. HE WALKS UP TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE.  
THE AUDIENCE APPLAUDS HIM. HE RECEIVES THE TROPHY.  
ADITHI RUNS UP TO THE STAGE AND GIVES HIM A HUG.





A COUPLE OF MONTHS AFTER WINNING FIRST PLACE, HARSH CONTINUED TO KEEP ON WRITING SONGS AND SINGING WITH HIS GUITAR. SINCE HE OVERCAME HIS FEAR OF PERFORMING FOR PEOPLE, HE DECIDED TO CREATE A YOUTUBE ACCOUNT AND RECORD HIMSELF SINGING HIS ORIGINAL SONGS AND COVER SONGS. THROUGH THIS PLATFORM, HE SPREADS AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND CHILD ABUSE. HE HELPS PEOPLE USE MUSIC TO HELP THEM COPE AND GET THROUGH THEIR DAYS OF SADNESS AND GIVE THEM STRENGTH





## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENT***

Movements and causes are best given birth to by those whose lives stand to change as a result of their wins. Gen Y is dear to us at Swasti Health Catalyst because this initiative is the brain child of the grassroots LGBTQA+ communities, whose journeys we have had the privilege to be part of and support. This comic book is just one of the many ways in which these communities are speaking to the world at large about their lived experiences and stating their right to be seen and accepted for who they are, in all their diversity. Thanks are due. The comic book idea originated from a dream of a resource center for adolescents at risk, specially the gender non-conforming. Amber Jean Coyne and Dr. Angela Chaudhuri helped shaped the idea of GenY initiative and the series of comic books. Our team led by Bhavani Kumaran and consisting of Shrirupa Sengupta, Priya Pillai, Nandini Murali and Natalie Macasa facilitated the storytelling sessions with the community members. Special thanks to Priya Babu, a transwoman leader, who inspired the youth to participate and be part of this movement. We look up to her for her leadership and consistent support.

At Swasti Health Catalyst, we stand firmly as allies of the community. A special gratitude to the Canada Fund For Local Initiatives for funding support to Gen Y.



THE STORY BEGINS WITH A TEENAGER NAMED HARSH. HE IS 17 YEARS OLD AND IDENTIFIES AS A GAY MAN. FROM THE AGES OF FIVE TO TWELVE YEARS OLD, HIS UNCLE SEXUALLY ABUSED HIM. HE HAS NEVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT THE ABUSE. BECAUSE OF THE ABUSE, HE BLAMES HIMSELF FOR BEING GAY. HARSH HAS A TALENT FOR WRITING MUSIC AND SINGING. ONE DAY, ON INSTAGRAM, HE COMES ACROSS A POSTER FOR A TALENT SHOW. AND THEN HIS LIFE IS NO LONGER THE SAME...

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