I find myself staring at a blank screen. It’s 8 o’clock at night, and early decision college essays are due soon. Two days. Yet, I still am staring at a white Word document, the prompt in my mind. “What is an important moment or person in your life who changed the way your life went?” I can think of plenty of moments and people who influenced me. But the way my life went? Was changed by that moment or person? That was a whole other challenge I was not prepared for. I felt so many things, made so many choices, and looked up to so many people. Each changed my life in some way. The idea of choosing one was daunting, so I started from the beginning.

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*Third grade was the year I started learning again. That was the year my teacher saw that in my past school, in past years, I had been stunted. They didn’t know how to challenge me when I was already far ahead. That teacher made sure every student was challenged, wasn’t stunted, and was able to grow. Questions were answered to make a class of students think. For the first time in a while, asking questions felt less like admitting I felt dumb, but instead rather that I was learning…*

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No. I can’t do that. When I start deleting the paragraph I don’t stop to try and salvage a good essay. It was a good start, but not the right start. Too far back, too general, too simple. I need something to amaze people. That was not the right start. Staring at the screen, the clock reading a time where I probably should be in my warm bed, lights off, letting darkness swallow me, I think to myself. “Maybe I need to start at a more recent point.”

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*The lake glitters and I’m reminiscing. This is the last summer before college, the last summer I’ll truly be with my family. The only word to describe it is grateful. I’m grateful for everything my family has done for me, I’m realizing in this momen…*

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I have to be honest with myself, that feels like a conclusion and not something I can branch from. “Think Aasim, this has to be good,” I am starting to berate myself and I can almost hear it in my father’s voice. I sit with myself in silence. A slight buzz from the computer, the sound of my father snoring in the next room over. I look around the small space I’m in, the beige walls covered in posters and art, gifts from friends. It makes me smile, and an idea is in my head. Facing the keyboard I get to work.

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*Decorating a room helps people learn about themselves. Where do I want that pot? Is this a poster that should be in my room? Can I hide things I don’t want my parents to see? Even if it’s minuscule, it changes your perspective, life, and yourself. My room is a reflection of me. My heritage of being Afro-German. I was raised without ever knowing part of my family is still in Africa. There are posters and art from friends who have shaped me. Lamps around the room near every place I read and do work. It changes my perspective on myself, it…*

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Nope, not life-changing, just perspective-changing. Perhaps I’m going at this the wrong way, picking moments when maybe I should be picking people. There are so many people in my life though. Deciding which ones have changed my life is incredibly hard. My parents are too obvious, they gave me life and raised me. My friends are more or less just my friends. They don’t necessarily give me life-changing effects, just experiences. Teachers teach, that’s their job. I look out the window; the moon is full with faint outlines of stars glittering out there. The haze of pollution covers them, and I think about when I could see them. “That’s it!” When I say those two simple words I say them too loud. I wonder if my parents heard that. I go silent. Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Silence.

I let out a breath I don’t remember taking. I can write this part in peace, without waking my parents.

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*Before my grandmother died, we used to visit her on her farm. It was peaceful there, a place to get away and not think about everything they show on TV. I was happy there. At night she would go out with me, pointing out all the constellations in the night sky. She changed everything. She was a reminder that the world is more than TV, and to take time for myself. She was a fan of self-care and taught me that it was important. I felt silly then, I was a young boy; why do I need self-care? I needed it. More than I realized that going out to a rural farm, and doing self-care with my grandmother helped me. It made me able to relax and remember there is more than what’s on TV.*

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Something just doesn’t feel quite right. I don’t know how to go about it. I see too many ideas and too many threads. I need something to the point. But the prompt isn’t concrete– life-changing is not a specific thing. I wish there was more I could think of. I look over to my left, the clock reading one o’clock. I needed to get to sleep. It doesn’t help me think of ideas staying up late, it’s better that I sleep and try again tomorrow. I fall into a deep, uneventful sleep.

When I wake up at six in the morning I realize that this is not the sleep I was thinking I was getting. Five hours is not a lot. However, waking up earlier gives me more time to work on this. I go to open my computer. There’s the same white blank page on my screen. Before I get called down for breakfast I need to work on this. The sooner it’s done the better. So I get to thinking, reasoning it was good to start right away. Concentration was hard when the time limit was drawing near. I only had a day left. I need to focus.

“Aasim!” a motherly voice yells. Well, that thought was going to have to wait. I head down the stairs to go eat breakfast.

“You were up late last night. Did you finish?” My mom had her locs up in a bun.

“You heard that?” I didn’t think she heard.

“Well, I didn’t think I did, but now I know. So how is it going?”  
 “It’s going so great.”  
 “You have no idea what to write?” she looks me up and down. She’s figured out I have no idea what I am doing.  
 “Absolutely no idea.”

She thinks for a minute, “Have you thought about taking a walk to figure it out?”  
 “Of course I have… no I didn’t think of that. I’ll go do that”  
 She sighs, “Only after you eat. You need energy. And finish that soon, I want to try and do something as a family today.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” is the truest statement I can say right now. I don’t know if I’ll be able to get this done on time. I have no idea what I’m doing.

“Please do,” she replies going to wash some dishes.

After I eat breakfast, I go outside for a walk. I think about this whole experience. Look at the fall leaves, there is change all around me. It’s a beautiful sight. This is a change you can see, it’s known. I’m still thinking about life-changing events and people. I walk myself over to a park, sitting on a black bench overlooking a pond. The last of the waterfowl have started leaving and orange and yellow leaves dance about the lake, and I see a tree. The tree catches my eye, the bottom leaves are still green and there’s an ombre green to yellow to orange at the very top specks of red. I wish I had a polaroid to take a picture and put in my room. Back to thoughts of decorating my room. Maybe it’s the perfect idea.

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*Decorating a room helps people learn about themselves. Discovering where to put that poster. Do I want that shelf there? Maybe move my bed here? Or put a chair and desk over there? My room is a reflection of me. It showcases my Afro-German heritage, family photos, and flags across the ceiling. I can see all my friends there, looking at me with the pieces they add to my walls. Lights are set to colors to help me relax. All of it culminated as a reflection of me and all the changes I’ve been through. No singular moment or person led me here, so many have. I can still see the K-Pop posters I put up in 2017, versus now the posters of space and the stars. Decorating guides me to discover who I am and reflect on who I’ve become. Sometimes I have to take down things I’ve outgrown, like those K-pop posters, and sometimes I have to leave things up. I still see the shovel my grandmother gave me on the shelf. My room is a tree, branching into all the different parts of me, forever changing with the seasons of me. The room is the heart of me.*