



# Countdown to the Last Hour

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Simrit's alarm greeted her at 7 am sharp. "Good morning, Simrit. Today is Saturday, May 23rd, 2022. You have 2 months, 29 days, and 7 hours more to live. Have a nice day."

Reluctantly, Simrit rose from her twin bed. The message from the alarm, which her parents had gifted her a few years ago to better keep track of time (a commodity she had in low supply), triggered a familiar sinking feeling in her stomach – a reminder that she had to make the most out of the short amount of life she had left.

Simrit had gotten very unlucky, people kept reminding her. Not many people died at 24. "A prime age for discovering one's goal in life and making a plan towards achieving it," her uncle always said. It was unfortunate that she had to die so young, but there was nothing she could do to change it – she needed to make her life, however short, as meaningful and memorable as possible, a task her parents were overly invested in helping her accomplish.

After getting out of bed, Simrit walked over to the small wooden desk in the corner of her room, opened her laptop, and looked at her bucket list document to see how much progress she was making. She had covered  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the list so far. This was an impressive accomplishment, considering she had completed all of these items after graduating high school.

This weekend, she was scheduled to tackle two items – indoor skydiving and rafting. Simrit had already carefully planned these activities into her weekend schedule, making sure to set aside enough time to finish her work obligations. Satisfied with her plan for the day, Simrit began to get ready – a task she had budgeted precisely 30 minutes for. She quickly changed into the pair of clothes she had meticulously selected the night before, braided her hair as she always did, and had a large doughnut with a cup of coffee for breakfast. Before leaving her apartment, she packed a few things into her backpack – a large water bottle, a few snacks, and most importantly, her schedule. Simrit walked out of her apartment, down two flights of stairs, and onto the sidewalk of her city.

Because it was only 7:30, the city was quieter than normal – not as many people crowded the sidewalks, and fewer cars were on the road. Simrit enjoyed the rather peaceful atmosphere as she set off toward the subway station. She boarded her train and listened to music until getting off at the 5th stop. She then took an Uber to the indoor skydiving location. It certainly paled in comparison to actual skydiving, but Simrit's budget was a limiting factor in deciding what kind of bucket list items she could hope to achieve. Simrit walked into the lobby toward the front desk. Even as Simrit approached, the lady did not lift her gaze from her computer. Without looking, the lady began talking.

“Last name?” the lady asked.

“Kaur, K-A-U-R” Simrit replied.

“First name Simrit?” the lady asked.

“Yes,” Simrit replied.

“Would you like us to take a picture of you while you are skydiving today?” asked the lady as she typed on her keyboard.

“Yes, please,” Simrit responded. She could stick this photo in her already half-full album of memories – another gift from her parents – something her family could use to remember her.

“All right, wonderful. That will be an extra \$5.95.”

Simrit handed the lady her credit card and paid.

“Here is your sticker. Maricela will give you your skydiving suit, and we will get you in soon.” The lady handed Simrit the sticker and went back to typing on her keyboard.

Simrit waited in the lobby, and around 5 minutes later, a lady with glasses came in. “Here is your suit, helmet, goggles, and earplugs,” she said. “The changing room is down and to the right. You have 15 minutes to change. Once you’re done, go upstairs. Your ride will start at 8:30. Have a nice time.” Maricela handed over the equipment and walked away.

Simrit took her suit and goggles into the changing room and changed. It was 8:25. Simrit decided to make her way upstairs. She sat patiently as she watched an old, stout individual wobble in mid-air in the tunnel. Once his turn was over, the skydiving instructor called out “Next,” and Simrit got up from her chair with a distinct feeling of nervousness tinged with excitement.

The minute she stepped into the glass tunnel, Simrit felt like she was entering a different world. She could see everyone outside, only a couple of feet away from her, going about normal human activities – walking around, sitting down, looking at their phones, eating snacks. At the same time, she was removed, isolated from the world, all by a sheet of glass. Simrit temporarily forgot about all of her work obligations and plans for the weekend. All she could feel was the air rushing below her body as she tried to remain balanced in mid-air and the accompanying thrill of doing something completely new.

Simrit wished she could stay there forever. However, a loud beeping sound soon signaled the end of her turn, and she was directed out of the glass tunnel. “Next,” the skydiving instructor called again.

Outside the tunnel, Simrit could no longer hear the rush of the air, and she felt like she was once again carrying the large weight of life on her shoulders with every step she took.

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