

Preface

All There Will Ever Be is a work of fiction inspired by true events from the author's life that happened in 2004, a time before Facebook, smartphones and WiFi, when international calls were expensive and people went to internet cafés to check their emails. It's a story about adventure, love and loss, natural disaster, the quest for happiness and living life to the fullest. In the middle of it all is Leya, a woman in her early twenties who embarks on a journey that is taking her far away from home and yet closer to herself than ever before. Conversations and monologues are an integral part of this book. The author, a teacher of English by profession, made it her priority to help her students understand and practise authentic real-life conversations.

The names of the people portrayed in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

Chapter 1 – Escaping the Treadmill

"How stunning!" Leya thought, staring at the poster. It was an ad showing a man on the edge of the Grand Canyon, taking in the breathtaking view. "And that slogan's really catchy, too. *Life is now*. How true. What I'd give to swap places with that man, to enjoy the taste of freedom combined with a sense of adventure."

Leya pushed the "stop" button and fifty metres down the road the bus came to a halt. She got off and headed straight to her favourite deli to grab a bite to eat. It was already 7.30pm. She'd been working late again and was starving.

Outside the deli, she sat down on a bench and took a big bite of her mouth-watering cheese sandwich. She closed her eyes and felt the rays of the evening sun on her face just before they were about to disappear behind the towering mountains. When she opened her eyes a few moments later, the mountains cast a huge shadow over the village. "There's just not enough time in the day to get all the work done and take enough breaks outside in the sun," Leya thought, concerned and a little annoyed. "No wonder everybody's lacking vitamin D nowadays."

She frowned as she remembered that there were piles of dirty dishes waiting for her at home in the kitchen sink. She hated doing the dishes because she found it tedious and by no means the kind of pastime that helps you recharge your batteries after a long and tough day at work.

Back home, Leya had a shower and changed into her PJs. While she was making herself a nice cup of herbal tea, she tried not to look at the dirty dishes so they wouldn't bother her too much. Cuddled up on the sofa in a soft blanket in front of her TV, she did what she liked best after a busy day; watching her favourite series until she dozed off.

When Leya opened her eyes, it was nearly 3am and the TV was still on. Half asleep, she fumbled for the remote when suddenly, a mob of kangaroos hopping through the Australian outback caught her attention. Something about that scene made her feel peaceful and whole. She found the remote, switched off the TV and with a smile on her face, drifted back to sleep.

The next morning was no different from any other morning at work. Without so much as a coffee break till lunchtime, she did her best to reply to as many emails as possible before the ten o'clock briefing. Thankfully, her work colleagues didn't need her help. The only thing she disliked more than being interrupted when she was trying to get actual work done was having to attend time-consuming meetings with very little outcome.

Leya's stomach started rumbling. She checked the time on her notebook. It was a few minutes past noon. "Time for a breath of fresh air, a strong coffee and something to satisfy my stomach," she thought aloud.

Outside, the rain was pouring down, but she didn't mind it. She loved the sound of rainwater drumming against her umbrella before it collected along the curb and drained into the gutters. When she reached the corner of 7th Street she turned left, then suddenly froze. There it was again in that shop window of the local travel agent's, the poster of that man standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

Bits and pieces of her dream the night before came back to her like flashbacks in a movie. Australia. Kangaroos. The outback. As if by magic, Leya felt an invisible force drawing her closer and closer to that poster until she was standing right in front of it. Determined, like a woman on a mission, she opened the glass door and went in.

As soon as she'd put her dripping umbrella in the umbrella stand, she looked up and saw a female travel agent attending to her male customer, who had his back to her. Judging by his voice, his well-shaped physique and his full head of hair, he must have been in his mid-twenties, just like Leya.

A few minutes passed by and Leya kept on waiting. She didn't exactly know what for and why, but she just kept waiting whilst feeling guilty for eavesdropping on the travel agent's conversation with her customer. It was a rather small room and there was no way not to overhear every word that was being said. The man was obviously planning a journey around the world. "How exciting," Leya thought. Suddenly, he turned around to reach for something in the chest pocket of his jacket that he had put over his chair. He pulled out his mobile phone and looked up at her. The very moment their eyes met for the first time, Leya's inner voice spoke to her loud and clear and what it had to say made her shiver in awe: "You know him. This is destiny."

His eyes were deep blue, like the ocean on a sunny day. His expression was soft and gentle, his features prominent and masculine. He was very handsome to say the least. A warm sensation went up and down Leya's spine. It was this once in a lifetime moment, when you simply know that you're in the right place at the right time and everything happening around you is meant to be. That moment when you know that destiny has brought the two of you together. Leya was completely stunned, paralysed, awestruck.

Finally, he broke the silence with a simple "hi". "H...H...Hi," Leya stammered, still not fully able to grasp the perfection of the moment. He smiled the loveliest smile and turned back around to the travel agent.

Leya's palms started to sweat. She was incredibly nervous on the inside, but tried to keep her cool on the outside. She knew that this was now or never. She had to try and strike up a conversation with this stranger who seemed everything but strange to her. When she heard him say "Australia", she summoned up her courage.

"Australia," she repeated cheerfully. "I just had the most fascinating dream about kangaroos and the outback last night and I've always wanted to go there. When are you headed there?"

"Next year in February," he replied, smiling at her. "I'm going to travel through Thailand first."

"Sounds amazing," Leya said enthusiastically. "Who knows, if I'm brave enough to follow my dream, we might get the chance to meet up in Sydney for coffee."

"I'd love that," he said. "What's your name?" he asked.

"I'm Leya."

"Really nice to meet you, Leya. I'm Kai. Let's exchange phone numbers and I'll ring you up when I get to Sydney."

"That sounds like a plan," Leya said. "I've got to go back to work now, but it was really nice meeting you, Kai."

"The pleasure was all mine," he said like a gentleman.

On her way back to work she was on top of the world and couldn't help but smile a wide smile. The empty, hungry feeling in her stomach had completely disappeared. After all, she had more exciting things to take care of now than to eat or work. It was about time she started making travel plans. "Australia, here I come," Leya thought.