



Ria Khatoniar

MEET THE WRITER

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No one tells you how strange it feels to be capable and still not confident.

For the longest time, I thought confidence would arrive like a letter of permission. One day I'd walk into adulthood prepared with the right words and answers: sharper, calmer, impossible to shake.

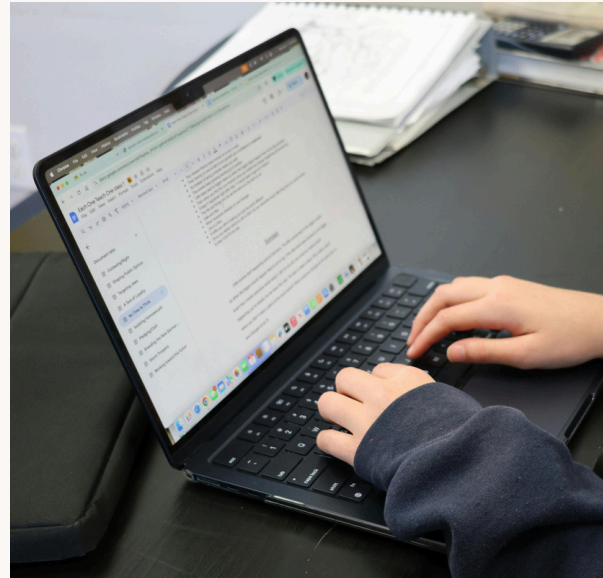
Alas! Not long ago I had to leave my make-believe utopia. Adulthood arrived before I felt ready. It came in rooms where everyone else seemed more certain, in questions I hadn't thought to ask, in presentations where my voice slid lower than the slides on the screen. It came with the embarrassment of realising that being hardworking is not the same as being visible, that knowing something privately is not the same as defending it publicly.

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Before entering the corporate world, I lived comfortably inside my own head. In college, I was never the one with a large circle or a loud presence; two close friends felt like enough. My world was built around books, research problems, conversations with professors and the ambition to think deeply about difficult things. I believed that if I worked hard enough and kept following questions, I could build a life around discovery.

And then I entered a world where intelligence had to be spoken, shown in meetings, defended in reviews, questioned by people who had seen more than me. Wait! When did this become my life? ***Exactly. It never comes invited.***

The first few months were difficult. Responsibility came before I knew how to carry it gracefully. **The struggle was real: presenting my work, asking questions at the right time, making my efforts visible without feeling like I was asking to be seen.**



Unexpected questions felt like evidence against myself. How did I not think of that? Why does everyone else seem to understand the problem before I do? Am I behind or simply new?

A kind of shame from being ambitious and then feeling small in the rooms I had prepared to enter haunted me. Not the loud kind, but the quietness that sits with you after a meeting and follows you home.

Every missed answer felt personal. And here comes the loop. As my confidence dropped, I became quieter. Silence felt safe. If I didn't speak, I couldn't be wrong. But invisibility has its own cost.

One day I admitted that my silence was no longer protecting me. It was making me smaller.

So I began again, awkwardly, asking more questions, approaching people even when I feared sounding uninformed, telling myself that people with more experience aren't proof of my inadequacy; sometimes they are simply evidence of time.

Slowly, I saw that everyone who sounded certain had once been new to a room. That's when the room changed. Or maybe I did.

I used to think confidence was a feeling. Now I think it's more of a relationship, one you build with yourself over the years, growing every time you speak with a shaking voice and realise the world doesn't end there.



But another uncertainty remains. **There is still the girl I imagined I would become, the one who would study deeply, build something important, become extraordinary without losing herself.**

Some days she inspires me. She reminds me to work harder, dream bigger, not settle too early. But some days she is cruel: making my present feel insufficient, rest feel like laziness, confusion feel like failure, asking why I'm not further ahead. This is the strange thing about ambition in your twenties: it can be both a mariner's needle and a punishment.

Part of me wants to sharpen every skill and become undeniable while another part wants to stay soft enough to notice the sky on my way to the office. **I want to succeed, yes, but not at the cost of becoming a stranger to myself.** Before I was trying to become excellent, I was also a girl who loved art, who painted, danced, read novels, wrote things she never showed anyone.

These things don't answer where I'll be in five years, but they keep me human.



Art gives me a place to put the feelings ambition doesn't know what to do with. When my mind feels overcrowded with goals and comparisons, it returns me to something simpler: a reminder that I am not only a person trying to become impressive, but also a person trying to feel alive.

Maybe a meaningful life doesn't require choosing between becoming excellent and remaining whole; maybe the artistic self isn't a distraction from ambition, but what keeps ambition from turning into emptiness.



There are practical things now too: earning money, saving for plans, thinking about higher studies, trying to understand what kind of work and person I want to become. ***This is the pressure of independence, the uncertainty of direction, the negotiation between what is urgent and important.*** Some days I feel clear; other days I feel like I'm holding too many possible futures in my hands.

But maybe that is what this age is: not a clean arrival into adulthood, but a long apprenticeship in becoming. I am not yet the person I imagined. I am less certain, less polished, less fearless than her, but I am also more real. I have failed in rooms and returned to them, lost confidence and rebuilt it slowly. ***I have learned that being capable does not always feel like being certain. Sometimes it feels like trying again while still afraid, asking the question, admitting I don't know yet staying in the room anyway.***

And maybe that is enough for now.



Confidence does not arrive before the room; it arrives because we keep entering. Maybe the future self I have been chasing isn't waiting at some distant finish line. She is being made here, in the midst of uncertainty, by the girl who is still learning how to speak, how to build, how to dream, and how not to abandon herself on the way.



CONFIDENCE