

Job Hunting for the Broken-Hearted

By

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I wonder if most 23-year-olds think that their life is over. Anyone older would tell me you're still a baby. You still have so much to learn and grow. But honestly, I'm tired of learning and growing. I decided to enter the job market two years after the pandemic wreaked havoc all over the world. What would I say to my prospective employers? That I was too depressed to work a full-time job? This is not exactly a quality you look for in a future employee.

LinkedIn is a whole new nightmare in itself. People seem to be achieving something every second. I see a girl who has graduated from my dream school with a master's in South Asian Studies and English Literature. Yes, good luck in finding a job with that Ms. Columbia University. Now I have to enter in vaguely relevant search terms about the kinds of jobs I want.

All the while, I have to get over someone that wasn't right for me. How could this person move on from me so quickly? Did I mean nothing? Jobs are harder to find during heartbreak I'm assuming. I texted a friend about the whole ordeal explaining how he had said we were too different. And she replied, "*Kyunke tum uski tarah charsi nahi ho? Harami na ho tou*" (Because you're not a stoner like him? Bastard). This provided some enlightening perspective and made me feel better about myself.

Anyways, back to job hunting. I click on the apply button and upload my resume. I see that Company A is hiring. The salary: a whopping two lacs; I'd be so rich I wouldn't know what to do with myself. I've applied before but they've never responded. There's no harm in trying again.

Let's see what else can we find. I see a digital marketing company (Company B) is also hiring. I hit apply and upload my resume once more. Fun.

I explained to Younis my problems with job hunting. Younis was about to depart to London for a hotshot job. He offered to get me a referral to his old

Company C in Lahore. I thanked him for the help. My resume had been sent through the inter-webs again. I had done my part.

Things have a funny way of working out and soon enough I had three emails in my inbox. One in-person interview for Company A. Company B chose Google Meet as their medium of choice for the interview and Company C chose Zoom. I liked how all three did not clash in timings or work or the interview procedures. No overlapping meant more opportunities for me to take hold of. I felt like a woman having multiple love affairs. All three foreign rich men with one possessing more money than the others.

I jostled in awkwardly into the office where my job interview was to take place. It was a small hallway, crammed with people working away at their desks inside their cubicles. I approached a young woman sitting at a corner cubicle telling her I had an interview scheduled. She pointed and asked me to sit down on the black couch and wait. I sat down and leaned back against the cushions on the sofa, nervous.

The office was a bit untidy and there was an air of stillness. The Lahori heat was pouring into the room, seeping through the walls of the office despite the air conditioning. I sat there sweating. I waited quietly while people in front of me worked. The girl had eyed me up and down while making a face clearly unimpressed with my awkwardness.

The people working there were young and all appeared to be in their 20s. Almost all were wearing colorful clothes as if a rainbow had vomited on them. They reminded me of my cousin who studies at NCA. The shocking prints on the clothes with bright yellows, oranges, and blues made my eyes sore. The girl however was dressed in an all-black ensemble and wore glasses. I realized that I was judging these people solely on the basis of their clothing without knowing anything about them. I

further made my judgment about them as being part of the upper-middle class of Lahore as the office was in DHA Phase 6, a posh colony.

The office was a bit untidy as well. There was a large black bag next to the sofa. Having lived in Pakistan, it would not be too much of a stretch to think that the bag could contain a bomb. However, we were sitting in DHA within the heart of the semi-elites so perhaps not. Poor people really do get the short end of the stick here. The young employees chattered away in hushed voices in the otherwise quiet office. There were soft humming noises coming from the computers and there was the click-clack of the keyboards on which the employees typed away. The leather sofa started to become uncomfortable as I started to sweat more. The fluorescent white lights were harsh on my face. The office was located on top of a pizza place. The thought made me hungry before I remembered that the pizza served there is sub-par.

I wondered how much bullshitting I would have to do to get this job that I had no strong desire for.

Before long, a finger tapped on the glass from inside the cubicle next to the sofa. I was called in and the head honcho of the place was sitting before me. He had the same untidiness about him as the office. His hair was not combed or if it was, it was a job poorly done, or maybe perhaps the heat had made them frizzy and unkempt. His collar was also bent. He asked the typical why, when, and hows of the interview and my previous experience. They told me they were considering other candidates as well and I left with the ambiguous “We will let you know”. I sighed and left the office wondering if they were more unimpressed with me or if I was with them.

Two more to go. Google Meet and Zoom. I also have to recover from my heartache. This isn't getting any easier. The Zoom interview took place first. I was asked questions with my internal monologue answering differently than the words coming out of my mouth.

“Why do you want this job?”

“For professional growth and experience” (Lies I said to myself, it's obviously for the money)

“What is your weakness?”

“Multitasking.” (Lie again, nothing I have no weaknesses but I need to appear human).

“So, you wouldn't be up for a challenge?”

“No, no.” I exclaimed (Goddamnit, don't appear too human)

Before I knew it, the Zoom call ended.

On to Google Meet.

“Why do you want this job?”

“For professional growth and experience to jumpstart my corporate career.”

(Um, hello two lac is what you're offering in an inflation-ridden Pakistan, why else do I want this job?)

After selling myself again, hopefully not too short. The Google Meet call ended as well.

“I miss him.” I lamented to a friend over WhatsApp.

“Look you have to zoom out and give yourself space to heal.”

“Did I mean nothing to him?”

“Why does that matter?”

“I guess it doesn’t. But I wish I wasn’t questioning my self-worth.”

The same friend had brownies delivered to my house at 11 pm. They were delicious.

No word from the digital agency (Company A), that’s all right.

Company B sent over an assessment link that my head spun. I have never felt so dizzy. Twenty questions in ten minutes per each of the five sections. I randomly chose the best answers as I saw the timer counting down. I had probably blown the whole thing. Bye, bye two lac.

The UK company wanted to do another Zoom interview. I guess I had impressed them as much as a miserable twenty-something could in today’s job market.

A white lady with half her hair dyed pink was in the Zoom call and to my shock, an annoying senior of mine was there to take notes. Great, I thought to myself. My university would keep haunting me one way or another.

“So, I see you majored in Economics.”

Shit, please don’t ask me anything related to economics.

“Did what you learn in class apply to the real world?”

“No, actually it didn’t.”

Some curveballs were thrown at me about my job. I was interrupted by my cat who I apologized for. I felt like the BBC news guy whose two kids had toddled off into his room during the interview. I admired the hair of the lady interviewing. Maybe, I should dye my hair too. That would make me feel better and get over him. Purple and blue for me, that would show him.

“Well, it was lovely to meet you.”

Was it really?

On top of it all, I still missed him. But I had to move on. Another email popped in, a second interview for Company B. The figure of two lac flashed before my eyes. Everything would be okay now. This is the self-esteem boost I needed. I had made it. I don't need anybody, I'm so happy. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

“What are your top three qualities?”

“I'm hardworking, kind and thoughtful.” (Lie, lie and lie).

“Where do you see yourself in the next five years?”

I was coming up with an answer related to climbing the corporate ladder and whatnot but decided against it.

“I would like to have published a book.” (Truth, for once)

“Oh wow, really what about?”

“About time travel and a girl who tries to fix her past.”

“Do you have a hard time letting go of past mistakes?”

“No, I used to but I'm much better at it now.” (Half-truth).

There, all done. I had exhausted my energies in the past few weeks with job interview after job interview.

I had also prayed that no one asked about my experience in writing. The writing that I had termed as freelance content writing was actually doing homework assignments for rich Arab kids in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. You can't exactly write all of this out in a resume. It was frustrating being me. No wonder he had left me, even he couldn't stand the person that I was.

A few days, later I received a call from Company C. They offered me the job. I was supposed to be elated. I asked the HR lady if I could have time to think if I wanted to accept.

She asked me, "Why?" almost in an accusing tone.

"Oh, I have to discuss it with my father." (Lie again, because lady I'm waiting for the two lac call)

"All right, you have till 6 pm."

I frantically paced, what was I supposed to do. Still no word from the two lac job.

I emailed Company C to accept the offer as I had no other choice. I prayed that I would get the 200K job.

My father was excited about me getting the offer from Company C.

"You should be dancing around that you got hired."

I should be but the two lac baba, I thought to myself.

I went to sleep dreaming of me living the high life and earning more money than anybody I knew. I had made it.

I woke up to an email stating “We have decided to go with another candidate for the job position.”

Shattered, in a word is how I felt.

I went to baba and told him the news while he sipped his morning chai.

He said, “It’s all right.”

He saw how deflated I looked and said “You’ll never be happy this way you know.”

“I just feel there’s a list of things piling up of things I didn’t do. Missed opportunities one after another. You know how you always quote Steve Jobs’ commencement speech about connecting the dots?”

“Ahan”

“I wish I was at that point where everything made sense. All my failings would mean something and I could understand why things happened the way that they did.”

“Everything happens for a reason you know. But you need to also enjoy things in the present. You have everything you could want. You have a job offer, parents, siblings, home, financial freedom, and countless other things.”

I knew he was right but that did not change the feeling of emptiness that was resonating deep within me.

I decided to journal away from the pain and packed away my various heartaches. I felt momentarily crushed but also a sigh of relief. Something in me knew

that I would be okay and I would figure things out. I would connect the dots. It just wouldn't be today. It was simply a dot positioned arbitrarily in my life. Things wouldn't make sense, but hopefully, they would in the future.

I didn't get the job I wanted, and I couldn't get the person that I wanted but it all would serve a purpose, or at least that's how I consoled myself.

Umeed pe dunya qaim hai (The world stands to exist because of hope).

Plan A and Plan B didn't work out but there was always Plan C.

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