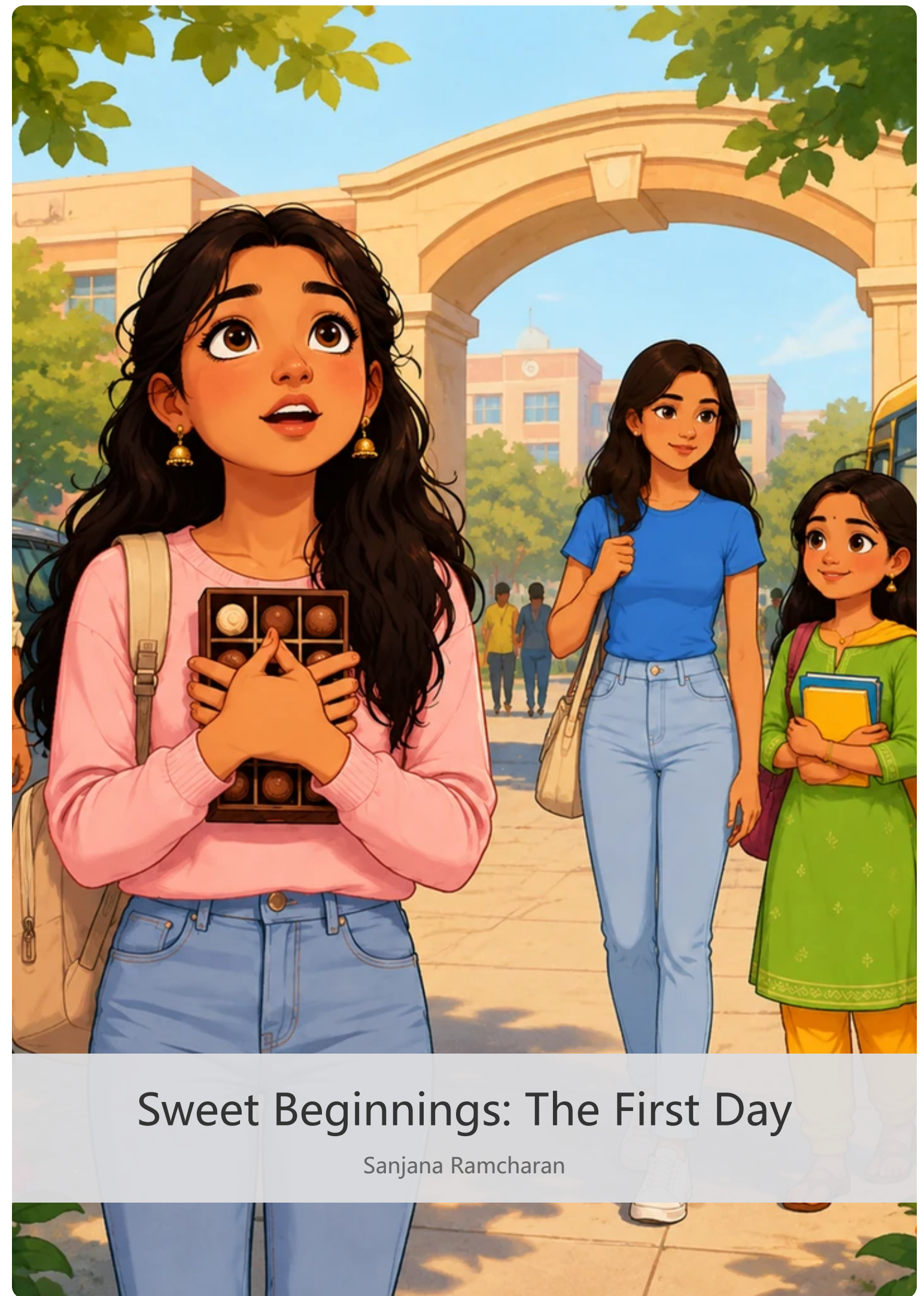




Sweet Beginnings: The First Day

Sanjana Ramcharan



Morning sunlight paints the bustling college entrance as Ananya steps out of her father's car. Her father hands her a small box of chocolates with a reassuring smile, reminding her to start her milestone day with something sweet.



Holding her father's sweet gift close, Ananya gazes up at the vast college building feeling a mix of awe and disorientation. The sprawling corridors are a grand maze, and she wanders around trying to figure out how to reach the sixth-floor Jubilee Auditorium.



Sensing a shared confusion, Ananya spots another student hastily asking a faculty member for directions in the crowded hallway. Gathering her courage, she walks up with a gentle smile and asks if the girl is also heading toward Jubilee Audi.



Relief washes over both of them as the girl confirms, and they begin walking side by side up the bright staircases. They exchange warm introductions along the way, finding comfort in turning first-day anxiety into shared companionable chatter.



Inside the grand Jubilee Auditorium, soft golden lights glow over rows of eager students listening intently to the orientation speeches. Surrounded by hundreds of unfamiliar faces, Ananya feels the quiet thrill of officially starting her university journey.



As the crowds disperse after the program, Ananya stays behind near the administration desk to resolve a small detail. She patiently waits until her name is finally added to the official class WhatsApp group, ensuring she will not miss a thing.



Stepping into the warm late afternoon air, Ananya walks toward the bus stop where two girls are standing. She notices a tall girl looking toward the street and a shorter girl who looks remarkably youthful, prompting her to approach the tall girl first.



Ananya asks the tall girl if she is waiting for the college bus, discovering her name is Aditi. A wave of unexpected joy washes over Ananya as she learns Aditi speaks Marathi, giving her an instant connection through her mother tongue.



Joining their conversation, the shorter girl gently asks if they are both from the same college, introducing herself as Shravani. To Ananya's delightful surprise, Shravani is a sweet girl who lives in Byatarayanapura, just a couple of streets away from her own home.



The three girls stand together in cheerful conversation as the golden sun sets over the campus street. Unbeknownst to Ananya, this chance encounter at the bus stop marks the beautiful start of her college journey, while somewhere nearby, another story waits to unfold.