

# NOX CAELO

**NABIHA NUSAIBA**

She was a little taken aback by my laughter. Looking back, I think she reconsidered my diagnosis. Who in their right mind laughs when they're told they have severe depression? Someone who spent a lot of time thinking they have something worse, something more permanent, that's who.

We are in a small, square room at the farthest corner of the house. I take in everything around me to curb my nervousness, the clean mosaic floors below the wall of bookshelves, two cosy sap green sofas on either side of a rectangular glass table and a burnt sienna beanbag for the vermilion lady who charges by the hour. A beanbag is a very weird seat for a formal meeting, no?

"So, what brings you here?"

"I feel..."

Dr Niaz patiently waits for me to elaborate while I stare at my hands. It wasn't like I didn't know what to say, it was that I had too much to say. To understand me, she had to know everything. And everything was a few words more than what I could fit in 50 minutes.

"I used to be raven black with hints of glittering silver here and there. My grandmother would say that I had diamonds embedded to my skin. I was proof that blackness wasn't sorrow, that I lit up every room I set foot in, that my skin was true to my character. And then one day, the silver faded to a dull grey. I'm sure it was gradual, but I only noticed when a little less than half of it was gone. A few months later, the grey nonuniformly enveloped my entire body, leaving only streaks of darkness to remind me of my past magnificence."

"And how long ago was this?"

"Almost six years now?"

Before that, I thought all psychologists masked their expressions when they saw their patients, however, mine has no intention whatsoever to do so, leisurely raising one of her thin, wispy brows.

"And has it always remained grey after that?"

Pretty much, yes."

She says nothing, leaving me scrambling to end the silence.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm broken, that my body simply doesn't portray how I feel on the inside anymore. But then, have I been feeling anything other than jailed in a cage of melancholia?"

"So, you feel trapped?"

"From within, if that's even possible."

Again, with that patient gaze motioning me to carry on.

"I feel this ache in my chest, here," I point to the centre of my chest. "Coincidentally, this is where my body is the darkest."

Dr Niaz sits up straighter while using her right hand to rotate her pen between her thumb and forefinger.

"Maybe, it's not a coincidence, maybe the unevenness is a consequence of your pain. If that's the case, then your body does still portray how you feel," she smiles at me. What do I see on her face? Reassurance? Hope?

"What about the rest of your body? Does it hurt anywhere else?"

"My legs would hurt so bad I wouldn't be able to sleep for days, or even sit straight. Sometimes, my forehead. You can tell that my forehead is darker if you view it from up close," I say as I raise my emerald fringes from my forehead. She bends toward me to examine my forehead.

"Hmm, yes, yes, I can see it," she returns to her original position before asking, "What about on days your legs don't ache? Are you effortlessly able to fall asleep then?"

I try to stifle a burst of laughter bubbling up from deep within, but that only causes me to scoff villainously.

She chooses to let it go.

"So, why do you think your colour

*Out of your bed. Onto your balcony.*

*No, thanks. I'm good.*

NOW.

I jump out of my bed, put on my slippers, wrap the scarf laying the foot of my bed around me, grab my phone and dash out onto the balcony.

I almost slip in the dark, saved only by gripping the curtains at the last second. It must've rained sometime during the night. How did I not notice?

*I obviously cannot go into the balcony. You know how mom gets about muddy floors. Besides, where would I sit? Back to bed, then.*

*You're so annoying sometimes. Sorry, we do not use negativity towards ourselves. I'm sorry, I did not mean that. You're a wonderful person. Please grab a rag. We need to meditate.*

I sigh.

*I am a wonderful person. I am a truly won-*

notification. I open it at the speed of light to escape my little conversation.

"Been up all night trying to finish this assignment, Noxxie. Can we take a rain check for our plans? I'd like to sleep in," writes Casia.

"Sure," I write back.

"I'm sorry, did I wake you up? Or, are you having sleeping difficulties again?"

"Neither, I just have a terrible cold," I lie.

"You need to invade some Vicks right now."

"Okay, I'll gather my troops."

"What?"

OHH

*\*inhale\**

Why are you like this?"

I giggle.

*Can we go inside now, please? I'd like to sleep in too.*



ILLUSTRATION: **RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS**

shifted?—

*No, come back, come back. I let you stroll freely in dreamland, but venturing off to the why always makes you spin around. We don't need to ruin this moment. What did Dr Niaz say? WHAT DID DR NIAZ SAY?? PRACTICE MINDFULNESS. DO IT, DO IT RIGHT NOW.*

*But I don't want to. I just don't want to bother.*

*No, no, no. Up. UP!*

It is during moments like these that I regret reading The Hunger Games. If I hadn't, my brain wouldn't have known to use simple commands to make me do things. Up, it is.

I fumble for my glasses before sitting up and turning the bedside lamp on. The digital clock attached to it reads 04:57.

*I'm up. What now?*

*derful person.*

I tiptoe out of my room and into the kitchen with the precision of a ballerina and grab the topmost rag from the drawer before returning to the balcony and swiping at the floor with the ecru fabric under my feet. I set it aside and sit cross-legged on the floor with my back against the wall.

*Close your eyes. Now, I want you to feel the cool breeze.*

*Okay, but how did we miss the rain?*

*Shh. Focus on the breeze. Focus on every part of your body that it touches.*

*BIRDS. One bird, two birds...*

*SHH. THE BREE...*

*Aren't birds supposed to be asleep at night? Why do we hear them throughout the night? Is it because of light pollution? Is it? Is it?*

*Hmm, may...*

My phone buzzes urgently with a new

*I can't believe this. You're... fine.*

Almost reflexively, I check my hand in the dim glow of the rising sun before stepping back in, hoping for a change in my colour. Nothing. I sigh.

*Nox Caelo will be worthy of her name again someday.*

*Until then, we just have to focus on getting better.*

*It'll be okay, I'll be fine.*

\*\*\*

Unbeknownst to herself, a silver dot the size of a full stop is victorious in the war to place itself among its duller peers on the small of her back.

The writer 'accidentally' put 3 tablespoons of detergent in her brother's pancake batter. Contact her at [n.nusaibaah@gmail.com](mailto:n.nusaibaah@gmail.com) to view pictures of the resulting bubblecake.