

SHAER REAZ

"It is very interesting what the artist was trying to portray here. All art comes from the deep interpretation of our surroundings and our place among it. The yellow represents new beginnings and rebirth, being the colour of spring. It is also the colour of nicotine-crusted teeth, of the unsightly tinge a chain-smoker acquires on his fingers. It is the colour of putrid pus and of journalism today.

The yellow we see here is both life and death. And the black dot is the artist himself. He is encircled and overwhelmed by life and its many vagaries and double standards. He is black; he stands apart. But he is also alone and has no escape.

How long can he hold on?"

The people milling around the painting are awed, the hushed silence being broken by gasps of sudden understanding. Convinced, the crowd follows the brilliant and clearly inspired interpreter to the next painting.

Another comes forward to peer at the curiosity hanging from the wall.

"Exquisite. That's all there is to it. The yellow square, alone, is enough to make one cringe - to look at the absurdity that is life and ask like Camus - is it worth it? The blend of Dali's surrealism with Picasso's cubism, the yellow square is quintessentially modern life. Limited, framed and a dull shade of bile. But the artist shows true genius with the black dot; the redeeming quality of darkness. Joyce wandering under sombre

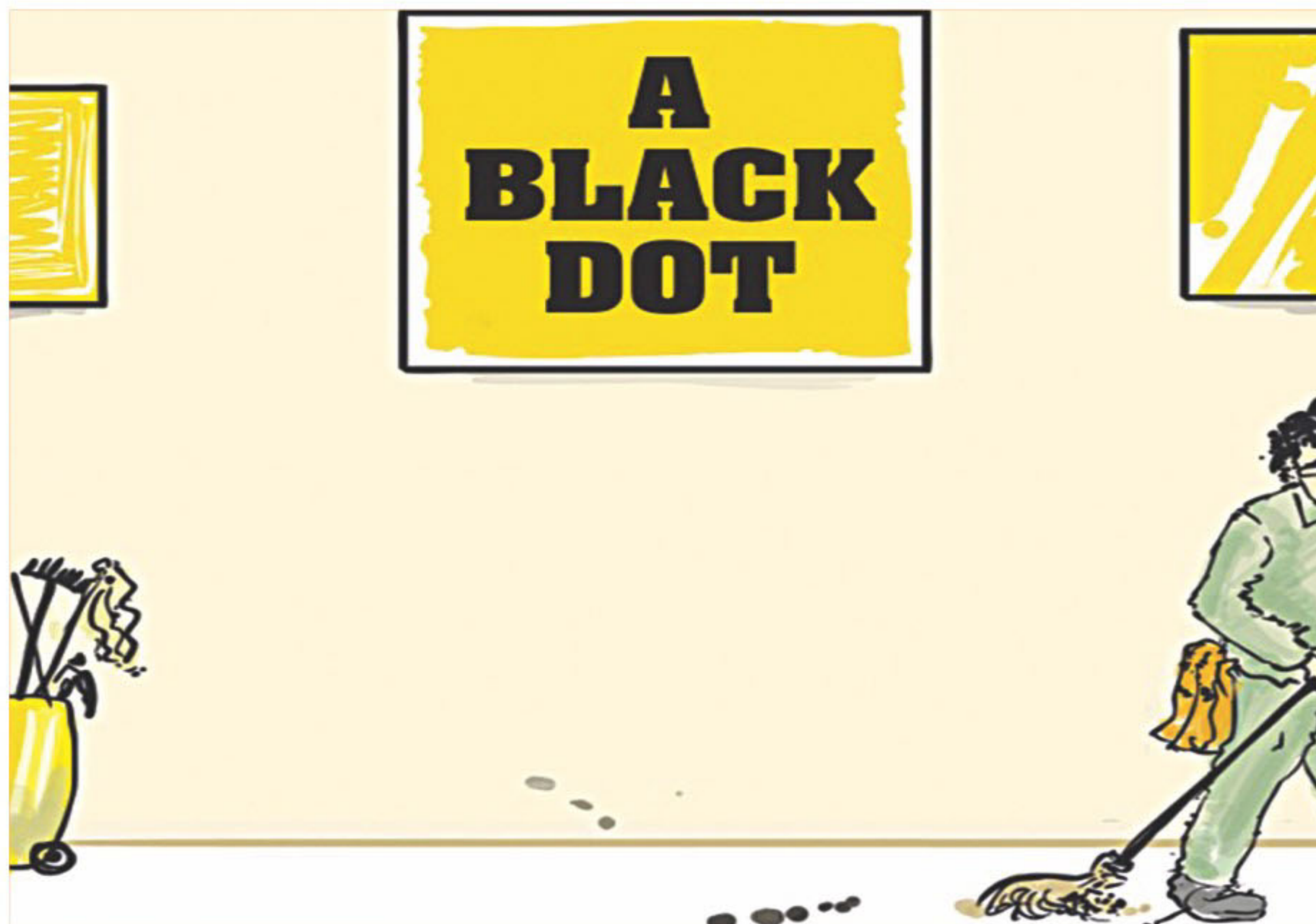


ILLUSTRATION: SADIA ISLAM

streetlights looking for the forbidden to redeem the yellow-ness of life. The yellow square engulfing the black dot is a heart-shattering cry against habit of living. It's a modernist interpretation of life from the time we were in dark, gloomy caves to our ascension into caves with better lighting. For all that life is - is a box we try to get out of, when we should really be looking within for the one black dot."

This time the explicator shares his thoughts with a spiked and gelled up teenager, who is clearly on a cheap date with a girl who looks like she hasn't had

a decent meal in a while.

"Holy smokes, that's good."

"Out there, among the trees and the weed-choked shrubbery, the leaves do not move. Out there, where the water meets the shore, where the sunlight fragments through the clutches of desperate branches, where it breaks apart on the surface of a pond skinned by lily pads, ringed and guarded by weeping willows, the dust motes do not move.

But I can see them move.

Over, at the table where they sit, locked in their last supper, the saints do not

move. At the table, the table clothed in white, bearing the plates and the goblets strewn, they look at him. Their mouths lodged in conversation, their gestures extravagant, their food forgotten, they do not move. He does not move.

But I can see them move.

At the edges of my vision, the corners where the light fights the shadow, I can see bodies trapped in writhing, pain and pleasure in still motion, their gaping mouths pleading. They do not move. Their hollow eyes and their pallid faces, their hands reaching. Here, at the easel that is my altar, there are colours. Black and yellow. I can see them in the colours. Caught in putrescent shit, their misery and their ecstasy, caught in spilled ink, their hate and their love. The colours do not move.

But I can see them move."

The prosaic interpretation is waxingly lyrical. It is also surprising, because it is delivered by a fat balding man who looks like he might be willing to spend the evening at home with a huge plate of ribs than be at an almost classy event like this. But heads start nodding, understanding that simplicity of mind might be an explanation to his genius.

As the crowds shuffle away, my volunteer tag somehow gets tangled up in my belt. Short people problems. Turning, I look over the painting, trying to grasp its meaning.

There's a black smudge on the frame's glass. Taking a tissue out of my pocket, I wipe the smudge away. And walk away from a yellow square hanging from a wall.



ILLUSTRATION: FAHIM ANZOOM

As the raven flies

BAREESH

The city below is overflowing. The gutters, filled with sins and lies, file out onto the surface. The inhabitants now drown in what they've sown. The children cry in the background as the sinners of all walks of life raise their arms to the sky, as tears flow down their hollow cheeks - they look up for someone to save them. But the storm is gathering. The lightning is crackling, somewhere off in the distance. The thunder is rumbling, and it's slowly getting louder. It's said that rain washes all dirt away, but no one really believes that. The filth of their minds is not affected by simple water.

Learned men are no different from motley fools, when they're dead. And they're no different when the fear of the reaper first pierces them. Their eyes will get wide, their lips will tremble and they will try to deny it. But inside, they shall know it is inevitable. Yet they shall scream and shout and writhe around as the flames of life are put out. And for all that, nothing will change. In the last moment, when the clammy hands of death move to close their eyes forever, all they shall feel is regret. That, and numbness. Through the window, I see an old man struggle to open the container for his pills. His heart is racing and it will kill him. The child lock refuses to budge. It's a cruel, sadistic comedy. He lives alone. No one cares for him anymore. His

children all live far away, they send him pictures of his grandchildren from time to time, and they give him a call during the holidays. The pictures decorate his mantle; the calls are laden with excuses and promises that will never be kept. In the floor above him, seductive music plays in a dark room. The curtains are shut. As one dies, another is being created. Neither are particularly wanted in this world. God has a sense of humour.

The devil's on the loose, feasting on the decadence of a crumbling society. Men lie in rubbish heaps looking at the sky, because the voices in their head told them to. They don't see the flashing lights they thought they would. Or maybe they do, and I don't? I sometimes wonder if they're happy.

Maybe they're happier than the men that drop loose change at their feet, just to clear their conscience of guilt. Guilt that has accumulated for years and years; guilt borne from secrets as black as the crevasses where their souls once were. It would make sense. But little enough does in this world.

My brethren take flight now. The sky was darkening before, and any symbolic hope they could have garnered from whatever bit of sun that poked through the clouds will be blocked out. The cacophony of crows sound out across this wasteland they call civilisation. Dark wings flutter towards the desolate sky.