



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

# A family man through and through

AZMIN AZRAN

There were certain rules in this house. Every morning, while dad and the kids were still asleep, mom woke up around 6 and took it upon herself to pull back the drapes and swing open the windows. Mornings have a unique smell that mom really liked, and there was something refreshing about letting in light into a dark room and standing in its glory. Although she could only ever stand in its glory for a brief moment, because there was a man in the next building who insisted on brushing his teeth out on the roof every morning and that was not a sight with which you wanted to start your day.

Next out of their beds were the kids, and while mom prepared breakfast, they'd try to sneak in a couple of minutes of extra sleep in the bathroom. The younger one always got out early, she was still young and school yet held some appeal for her, of friends, of new things to learn, of whatever it is that interests teenage girls. The older one on the other hand, went to bed late last night. He was at a peculiar stage of his life where he was never particularly sure about anything, and if you asked him what kept him up at night, he probably wouldn't have a solid answer for you. That is because among other unspeakable things, he spent a considerable portion of the night staring at the small stretch of wall in his room that didn't have a poster on it. He was embar-

rassed of his unfortunate expertise in the field of time wasting, and never talked about it with anyone, unless it was one of his friends who he was sure was a worse case.

While mom's shouts echoed through the house and the kids rushed into the car with breakfast stuffed into their mouths desperate not to be late for school and risk more screaming from their mother, dad stirred in his sleep in the bedroom. Dad worked hard, and everyone in the family appreciated that. He was allowed to sleep in on weekdays; mom prepared his breakfast and left it for him on the table when she took the kids to school. Dad was up soon enough, and it took him all of 20 minutes to freshen up and be done with breakfast. He always marvelled at how things got done so quickly when he was alone. He would have to work outdoors today, so he dressed business casual and grabbed his case, took a look at his phone to see where he was needed today, and headed towards the taxi stand.

When people asked what he did for a living, dad liked to say he was in the banking sector, which is what most people would guess if they looked at him anyway. For example, there he was, sitting in the taxi reading the business page from a daily newspaper, having already taken a couple of phone calls where he talks with the unique urgency people use when they talk money. So, when he asked the taxi driver to stop at a bus stand on an inter-

section that wasn't quite the walking distance from the road where all the big banks in the area were, the driver didn't expect it and the car came to an abrupt halt that ended with the slightest skid. He got out, paid the driver, and waited for him to speed away and turn the next corner. Once that happened, he took a good long look around him before it finally seemed he'd found what he was looking for, and then followed an elderly gentleman onto a bus.

The bus started moving not long after, in the usual stop-start motion that everyone in this city is used to. Soon, the heat had started to get to him and he took out a plastic bottle from his case which contained something that looked like lemonade. He was halfway through opening it, when the elderly gentleman, whom he'd followed into the bus and sat beside, looked at his flask and looked away quickly. Dad was a considerate man, so he held out the flask to the man and said, "Have some lemonade, uncle, I have another bottle. My wife packed it for me this morning, I guess she knew I'd need it." "Well, thank you, son. You're lucky to have such an intelligent wife, I wish mine was a bit brighter, to be honest, these things never occur to her," the man chuckled and accepted the offer.

The bus had left the busier part of the city and was settling into a steady rocking motion, which coupled with the heat, was a potent catalyst for sleep. Dad had slept

in this morning, so he wasn't sleepy at all, but the same couldn't be said about the elderly gentleman beside him. He had dozed off and the side of his head was tentatively resting on Dad's shoulder. It took a rather forceful shrug to displace the old man's head from Dad's shoulder, only for it to settle back into place soon after. Dad finally realised that the elderly gentleman wasn't going to be awoken easily now, and so he got to work. Dad had been told where the old man put the money he'd withdrawn from the bank, it was inside an inner pocket just below his waist. So, Dad put his hand into the man's pants and with the swift motion of someone who was used to doing this, pulled out a fat envelope that unmistakably had cash inside.

Dad got off at the next busy intersection, and found himself another taxi. He made the cursory phone call to his wife telling her he'd be picking up the kids from school. He allowed himself to calm down for the first time in hours and consulted his phone to realise he'd have to put in another shift after lunch. He ran a hand through his neatly done hair and told himself that he'd just have to get it done because his work put food on the table for his wife and kids, and made sure certain rules were maintained in his house. Dad was a family man through and through, and he remembered to tell the taxi driver to hurry up or the kids would be left alone at school.