



BROKEN STRINGS

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

The window itself of the shop is beautiful. Lined by a sliver of golden, the stunning wide glass pane reflects me back.

It reflects me standing limply on the street, staring at the gossamer ribbons and tapestries; my line of sight feasting upon the polished wooden floor, the small vacant chairs and the huge, gilded chandelier emanating specks of light over the guitar.

The guitar sits over a beige drapery; its body a simple work of mahogany with golden strings. Its silence seeps into me, its desolation slithering its way from inside the shop, covertly to me in the cold, lone street.

At that moment though, inside the shop, a pixie like girl with teal highlights and piercings glimmering like headlights calls the salesman in that cobalt blue shirt. She points to the guitar, *my* guitar and they speak in hushed tones. The man grins and his hand hovers over the guitar, his fingertips finally brushing the surface.

As if an elastic band that was holding me back broke, I trudge into the shop like I was running for a long time to get here and not standing and staring at that guitar since who knows when.

The girl takes in my dishevelled appearance, her face contorting into irritation, and inches closer to the

counter; her hands already fishing inside her purse for cash to pay for the instrument.

"No," I say like an idiot. My mouth opens and closes like a fish out of water. *Say it Ihan, how long are you going to stare at it anyway? Just say it.*

"Um, this may sound awkward. But," I touse my hair even more than it is and look at the girl, "I really wan....can I buy this guitar?" The last couple of words come out like a strained whisper of a desperate child telling himself that he isn't scared. But as soon as I say it out loud, I'm filled with pride. Ironically, I feel like a hero of a rom-com confessing my feelings instead of wanting to buy a guitar I've wanted all my life.

"What?" her forehead creases, "I mean, I was going to buy it."

"I know. That's why, I want to request you to not buy it and let me be the one. Look, I've had my eyes on this guitar for a really long time. In fact, I was the one who—"

"You can buy it," she rolls her eyes and petulantly moves off to check a vibrant ukulele.

"Seriously?" I blurt out. *Ihan, you've done your work. Now shut your mouth up.*

She throws me a total look of annoyance as a reply.

A gush of erratic laughter breaks out from me as I move closer to my guitar. The salesman smiles, "Sir, would you like

to buy it?"

"Yes! Yes!" I felt like doing the salsa.

As the salesman goes to make a bill, my hands tremble and I finally touch my guitar.

If that's what you think happened, then it didn't.

Is life that easy? Is it that simple that everyone can follow their dreams and do what they want?

The answer, of course, is in this story.

I don't go inside. I never did. Instead, I only stare at the guitar, *my* guitar. My guitar — because I was the one who made it.

I learnt the art of fashioning wood into something so magnificent at a really young age. Those lessons from my father were a draft of midnight stories told in whispers while working by the fire. My eyes would dance along with his calloused hands carving the wood while drinking in every word that husky voice said. For him it was just his profession, yet in time, for me it also became my passion. I would make guitars with him too in the dead of night, in the warm firelight. And soon, dreams of playing the guitars I made festered within me, to play a beautiful symphony like my father's stories with the thing my hands wrought and shaped took over me.

But people like me can't do everything they want to. This particular guitar was the one I had bravely decided to not sell

so that I can start playing it. But one unsold guitar was equivalent to having an empty stomach one whole day. Affording a luxury like that while living in tatters and bits was beyond any of us.

So the window of the shop where I sold our guitars reflects me staring at the pixie like girl pointing at the one guitar my father didn't let me keep, and dreaming that I had the courage to barge in and buy it, as the salesman lifts it and smilingly packs it for that girl to buy. They delicately fit the guitar inside an unyielding-looking black case that had a lean, silver bird streaking past the corner. The girl gingerly slings it over her shoulder and marches out of the shop.

When she gets out, standing at the threshold, we lock eyes for just a minimal fraction. I don't know what I look for in her set of jet black eyes. Maybe I search for some miracle to let her know that I also dreamt of shouldering that guitar, of calling it mine, of truly owning it.

But all she does is walk past me, pull shades over her eyes and climb onto a sleek, spotless white car with the guitar, *her* guitar now, still in her possession.

Maisha Nazifa Kamal is a multipolar, procrastinating species who is tired of reflexively turning her head every time someone in the streets call a "Maisha". Find out is she's the Maisha you've been looking for at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com