



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

Traffic Tryst

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On this crowded pavement full of pedestrians pushing past each other, we're strangers in every definition of the word. The remains of the petrichor from the morning thunderstorm linger in the air, coupled with the raging cacophony of city horns and the acrid smell of the humid fumes that emerge in dilapidated forms from the cars. The aging evening passes by us like a melting ruby, the sky above us pouring out in frenzied shades of cerulean and a striking yellow.

The weariness is so evident in both of us that even a hurrying stranger could probably detect it – yours in the slumping of your shoulders and dishevelled hair, and mine in the way the *anchol* of my saree slowly starts to fall off my shoulder and the restlessness that resides beneath my eyes. It's this that made us think that maybe you and I were all the same – strangers in every sense of the word, yet connected by the vast array of similarities that ran amongst us. You raise your right hand lazily, hailing a rickshaw, but in the crowded streets of Farmgate at peak hour, none of the riders spare

you a glance.

The ground beneath our feet quivers as pedestrians pass us by, the little cracks in the pavement widening. The sound of the car engines running, the rustling branches on the greening trees, the whistling wind and the birds flying above us are all screaming that in this moment, there's you, and there's me, no one else but us.

From top to bottom, I survey you. Thin, round, black glasses adorn your dark brown eyes. Your already dishevelled hair dances with the wind as the sky above brews a storm. Black suspenders hang across your back, a black blazer gripped tightly on your left hand. You glance at the watch on your wrist. Your eyes suggest a hurriedness. I start to think that maybe you have a loved one to get home to. (*Please don't*). A loud thunder rumbles as you raise your hand once again, signalling for a rickshaw. A CNG auto-rickshaw. Something. Anything. The yellowing streetlights cast a dark shadow over you as the sun bids us farewell for the day.

My body is screaming for me to beckon a cab. To go home and sleep and hope that this tiredness that is envel-

oping my body leaves by the time it's morning again. My heart is screaming for me to talk to you. To ask you if the weariness of your body is from the nine-to-five working hours, or if it's something that's become a part of you now, like mine has. To ask if you've learned to live your life freely – like the birds that fly above our heads, twisting and dancing with the blowing wind. To ask about what lies hidden inside your briefcase, whether you're an aspiring artist, a heartfelt poet or just another corporate slave that's succumbed to the capitalist world that surrounds us.

Your eyes stare straight ahead, as if they're trying to pierce the road that lies before us. Or maybe you're just thinking about the lover that's waiting for you in another corner of this staggering city. Or perhaps you're occupied with thoughts of an important report you have to hand in. A TV show you've yet to catch up on. A cold box of *morog polao* waiting to be reheated. Another loud thunder rumbles.

The city slowly goes to sleep as the lights from the skyscrapers above start to drain out. The streetlight hovering above starts to flicker a little. I wonder,

what you would say if I said "Hello". Would you say "Hi" back, deem me as another mindless person in this big city, or would you take the time to introduce yourself? Would this be like another one of those movies lined up on my Netflix? You know, the ones where it would turn out that you were thinking about me this entire time too? Would you comment about the rowdy weather or the unmoving traffic? Or would you ignore me, because this city has reminded us repeatedly not to engage in conversations with strangers?

A light drizzle starts to fall from the sky, which has now shifted into a dark blue form, but with hints of yellow still lingering. You pull out an umbrella from your obscenely large briefcase, and I struggle to cover myself with my pathetic excuse of a handbag. Finally, you raise your hand one last time and a CNG pulls up. I watch as you disappear into it, only to climb back out a second later. I notice something I hadn't before: the dimples that dig into your cheek as the corners of your lips turn up and you look to me to ask, "Looks like it's about to start pouring heavily in a bit – you want to share the CNG?"