

# Darkness and Hope

FAHMI MASNUN ASHRAF

I clean up after my demons,  
And when I'm almost done,  
I glance back and I realise —  
I'm running in a circle.

Running like a guinea pig,  
Caught in an endless loop called life.  
I live like an inanimate object,  
Subject to someone's mindless experiments.  
The cruelty and the frailty —  
I don't think I want to live  
Like this anymore.

I'm living through a cyclone,  
I'm living through a storm,  
I'm falling in the void —  
Where's the golden life they promised me?  
They lied.

I'm here at the bottom of the darkness —  
I look up,  
And I dare to hope.  
And I dare to build stairs,  
Made of threads of light  
And hope, in my mind.

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ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

## A MEMOIR IN PINK

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The arrival of a new member didn't stir up the residents of the Closet. After all, every few days their population increased as one member (and sometimes even more than one) was added from the outside. Even though the Closet wasn't a huge place to begin with, but somehow, every now and then, new members found niches and corners to wedge themselves in. So no one in the Closet really batted an eye when one of them, who was recently bathed and groomed, whispered that she's seen someone new who's going to live with them.

"Nothing surprising," Purple Top scoffed.

"When you are old like I am and still a resident of here, you'll find this to be a piece of cake, dear," said Blue Jeans.

Yellow Sundress pouted and said no more.

However, when the day did come, everyone looked at the newbie. Even the Black Dress cult chanced a glance, a group who normally stuck to each other and rarely paid attention to others because of their superiority.

The newcomer was of a salmon pink that seemed like a sighing dreaming river of leisurely fading pink. She had the tiniest of pearls and sequins here and there that caught the little spotlights on the ceiling of her new home and smiled shyly.

"Whoa!" Duo-chrome Tunic breathed, "You're a saree!"

Everyone heaved a sigh of envy. Sarees were the least used members, yet the most prized ones. They would even be given extra thin white papers to sleep in and ironed quite often.

"Welcome to your new home, the Closet!" they still greeted her with warmth and affection. "Here you live till you are handed over to a new owner."

"Or you might not," smirked Red Tee, who was so old that she had almost faded to pink.

"Shut up, oldie," replied the gorgeous Silver Gown with sass, "it could be any day now that Nikita's mother steals you and starts using you as a you-know-what." Red Tee blushed in anger, her true colour showing, as everyone laughed. The new one was confused and a bit anxious.

"She meant a floor mopping rag," the warm White Scarf explained to her. "Don't worry though, you're a saree, you'll never have to see that fate."

Days started to roll by, and Pink Saree slowly became comfortable with the others. Whenever

the sunlight peeped in, someone would gasp and notice a detail, maybe the exquisite stitches of a peacock bursting into a thicket of pearly flowers and vines. Or maybe the little lotus buds crafted with utmost care. It seemed that Pink Saree had uncountable details. And with every detail, she told a story. Melancholic and nurtured with nostalgia, she remembered the stories bits by bits. She spoke of the hands that had woven her and threaded the details and embellishments. She was the least fancy out of all the sarees, but soon she became the most popular one and everyone adored her.

With years, Pink Saree grew older, the pink in her entering the void of white, her skin starting to crust, the details slowly returning to the world they came from. She had more stories to tell even then, stories she had experienced first-hand from Nikita. But even those started to fade, blood red roses were cocooning back, a blurry vision of a lake that was a glassy green, chunks of cotton candy disappearing, brick red buildings going into ruin in her memory.

A day came when she was too frail and papery but she was taken out. Outside, she breathed just a bit better as the sunlight caressed her. The world seemed a lot different and Nikita too, she now had short choppy hair, wore black glasses and a genuine smile. She stared at her saree for a long time and handed it to someone else.

When Pink Saree opened her eyes again, she was in a completely different world. It was no Closet, not that plush wooden boarded palace. She was upon a dented tin box coloured in screaming confusing colours. There was no concrete floor, but a thin bedding, a broken chair balanced with a lot of steel utensils and plastic boxes. A small window with broken glass and spangled curtains let in narrow beams of sunlight that directly fell over the saree. Someone came in and sat directly in front of Pink Saree. And even in her most feeble condition, Pink Saree was gazed upon with complete admiration and happiness by her new owner. She took the saree in her hand and mumbled something unintelligible to herself. She prized it beyond words.

"Welcome to your new home," Pink Saree heard someone say and smiled.

*Maisha Nazifa Kamal is now concerned about how she has used one of her pink sarees as a prompt. Tell her that it's okay at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com*

