



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

THE FIX

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

Something was ominous about the way the doorbell rang. Not that the one who pressed it was bringing bad luck, but the other side seemed menacing for the one who waited at the door.

The thought didn't cross Manik though. After years of carrying a faded green bag that had all his equipment, the pain on his shoulder had numbed him off his thoughts and musings. He found himself waiting for the door to open so that he could get back home and have his dinner.

The door opened by a fraction and someone almost shouted to his face, "Are you the mechanic, bhai?"

"Yes," Manik said.

The door opened wide now and Manik stepped in.

Manik had earlier got a call from his boss that he had to go fix whatever was wrong with the power supply of a house and that he needed to rush in right away. He was about to start his dinner when he was called and the urgent barking of his boss indicated that it was an important client.

Inside, he instantly felt the heat slapping right at his face as he walked in. The house was in pitch black darkness, and a kind of smoky veil hung over him. The woman who had opened the door and shouted, lost all her voice like a turtle returning to its shell and squeaked now, "Apa, he's here."

The darkness felt suffocating to Manik, and he wondered why they had not lit up any candles or flashlights when a white beam of light blinded him from his right.

"Good that you've arrived. Fix whatever needs fixing," a coy voice said.

The grumble in Manik's stomach made him shove his uneasiness to an abandoned corner and get to work. He asked the person who he assumed was the household help where the switchboard was and turned on his phone's flashlight.

Strangely, the stark white light was somewhat swallowed by the darkness and it only fell in thin limbs over what he shook his phone over. In that inadequate light, he saw heavy outlines of tall wooden shelves and antique pieces. "*Filthy rich*," he thought as he made his way to where he needed to work.

The work was quite simple and Manik let out a sigh of relief as the lights turned on but it immediately turned into nervous sweat as everything was painted in this sick yellow hue. It made the house look even more unwelcoming than it was before.

Manik suddenly realised that the household help was nowhere near and he was all alone in the dining hall, sweating like a maniac.

"Ma'am," he called out but there was no reply. He raised his voice just a bit more when he heard some shuffling from the room right in front of him.

The household help came in when he hurriedly told her his job was done and he needed to be paid. She nodded and told him to wait in the living room.

Manik's phone rang, it was his mother who called for him to bring home some medicine. He sighed and looked at all the ostentatious things around him. For some reason, whenever Manik saw any expensive thing, he couldn't appreciate their beauty. Not that he thought they were ugly or not worth the price, but he just couldn't see anything past the price tag he wondered they'd come with. He always thought life offered you separate lenses to look with. Some were rose tinted because everything was too dreamy for them, some were sharp and clean because they didn't have the luxury of otherwise. Manik believed he was provided with a lens that helped him filter and categorise things into two: what he could afford and what he never could. He didn't have any dream or aspirations to cross the line to the other side even when he was surrounded by others' wealth and luxury. He was simply a man who did his duty.

Manik was lost in his thoughts and didn't realise

that the household help had returned. But as she handed him his pay, Manik's eyes suddenly fell upon the room which had a door open.

Even though the house was now fully illuminated, that particular room had no lights on. It was just bathed in the soft moonlight that shyly invaded the space through the windows. And in that light, he saw an old woman eating something from a small bowl, her head bowed down. In that house that was filled to the ceiling with lavish belongings, it was perhaps the shabbiest corner, the most ascetic room in which the old woman was in, yet it looked the most hauntingly alive. It was as if he was looking at some paradox.

"You fixed everything, right?" the sweet, young voice suddenly called out from a room.

Manik took the notes from the household help and couldn't find his voice to answer yes. He simply left.

On his way back home, as he walked along a street that was dimly lit by dirty street lamps, he looked up at the sky multiple times to see if the moon was still shining. He stopped to buy the medicines for his ailing mother and saw an old man nearby selling tangerines that were so vividly orange. The man took one look at him and didn't look back. He was busy trying to get more customers who definitely looked more well off than Manik did. He stared at the tangerines for a long time. Somehow they reminded him of the moon he never saw but its light he had seen in that room.

"Fools," Manik muttered under his breath. He heard something crumble slightly under his feet as he went to buy half a dozen of the beautiful tangerines.

Maisha Nazifa Kamal has lost track of time and is living in a world where she never existed. Break her reverie at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com