

A Foreign Touch

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As Amira stepped out the old rusty Honda, the bright, beaming sunlight blinded her. Immediately, she began rummaging through her purse for her broken shades. Her new husband carried the suitcase out of the taxi and led the way up a flight of yellowish covered stairs. The uneven pavement was covered with mould and paint was peeling off the wall of the building. She had imagined America as a colourful place filled with many rich people flaunting their wealth and houses right out of the American films she used to watch every Saturday night, with cucumber coloured lawns and double storey houses.

She guided her hands through the dusty furniture as the floorboards creaked under her footsteps. He turned on the dim lights where a cream-coloured couch covered in a layer of dust sat slanted in the middle, as though dropped there by accident. There was no television, no bookshelf, no dining table; only the chairs arranged around a bespoke fireplace which leapt with a gas flame. As her husband unpacked the furniture, Amira polished it clean to her liking. By the time they finished unpacking everything, it was dark. They headed towards the bedroom and collapsed on a single-layered firm mattress.

“Goodnight”, he mumbled in a monotone.

“शभु रा”, she whispered.

Amira relaxed moments later when she heard her new husband’s snoring. It started with a deep rumble in his throat and ended up on a high pitch, a sound like a sharp whistle. They didn’t warn her about these things when they arranged her marriage. She missed the loud, noisy, bustling sounds of her old home. She missed the lively atmosphere surrounding her and the cries of joy from her family. “सन रह!” , her father used to say, as she felt a tear slide down.

Amira’s husband woke her up by settling his body on her side of the bed. She decided it was the best time to wake up, while he was asleep. She carefully slid off the bed and walked quietly towards the kitchen. Her husband had told her yesterday that he liked to have fresh coffee made every morning before he wakes up to begin his day. The problem was Amira didn’t know how to make coffee and had never admired the taste of it. It was very clammy and bitter, like chewing old gum. She anxiously bit her lip and decided it was best to go to the nearest food market and ask them for some directions.

The market was bustling with noise at every corner; shops of all sizes stood on either side of the street obediently. The shops were stuffed with food and items of clothing, which made the street extremely narrow, forcing people to walk in a straight line like soldiers heading to battle. Herds of people climbing over each other at each counter, like monkeys chasing a banana. After having to squeeze through a group of people Amira found a store that sold books on how to cook. As she grabbed a book, a whole swarm of people ran past her and started screaming loudly, which made her ears split.

Amira climbs in through the store window first and then holds the shutter as a woman climbs in after her. There are broken vending machines lying on the ground and the store looks as if it were deserted long before the riots started. The woman climbs in and the window shutters squeak as Amira lets go of them. Amira's calves are red and have scars from running through the market in her high heeled sandals. She wants to thank the woman for stopping her and yelling "No! Run that way!" and leading her to this empty store. But before she can say thank you the woman, looking into her Prada bag, says "I've lost everything!"

"I've dropped everything," Amira says. "I was buying books on how to cook for my husband, and he must have woken up by now and realised I'm missing."

The woman sighs and sinks to the ground, Amira does the same. The other woman, like most Americans, has a light-skinned complexion with blond hair that shines when the sun hits it. She wears a flimsy scarf that she hands to Amira to stop her bleeding.

"This place is safe," the woman whispers.

Later, Amira will learn that, as she and the woman are speaking, Donald Trump supporters were hacking down America with their machetes to gain "freedom and independence". But now she says, "Thank you for calling out to me. Everything happened so fast and everybody ran and I was suddenly alone". The woman grins at her.

She learns that the other woman's name is Alyn. The two of them stand silently in the store for a while, looking out the window they have just climbed through. The sun warms up the stuffy, musty air which smells of sweat and rotting fish. Later, she will see the street, lifeless and as silent as a graveyard. Later, she will discover that America isn't always as it seems. Riots like this were what she read about in the newspaper. Riots like this were what happened to other people. She hears Alyn get up and open the window, letting in the pale yellow of the afternoon. Now Amira unties the scarf around her leg, shakes it as though to take the bloodstains out and holds it out to Alyn.

"Thank you", Amira says.

“Wash your leg well and greet your husband,” says Alyn.

Later as she walks home, she will pick up a pink stained scarf and hold it tight to her chest.

“May I keep your scarf? The bleeding might start again,” says Amira.

Alyn looks at her for a moment, then grins and nods.

This is perhaps the beginning of future grief on Amira’s face, but she smiles slightly and holds the scarf. She sighs looking out the window, then walks towards her home.

Rydham Oza is a teenage student who lives in the western suburbs of Melbourne who studies at Suzanne Cory High School. She loves reading fiction books and graphic novels from when she was young, which greatly inspires her. She enjoys writing short stories based on different cultures and their beliefs, as she deeply believes in equality and the world to be more accepting of multiculturalism. Writing creatively allows her to explore stories from different perspectives and stereotypes they have about religions. The genres of novels she enjoys include mystery and science fiction; she aims to continue writing for her enjoyment and passion.