

One more day in Mansur's life neared the dusk, leaving him drained of energy and willpower, as he finally reached the room waiting for him. It was modest and ordinary like his dull and dreary life, emerging from the corner of a cheap marble passage that connected similar rooms in its way. This flurry of Bachelor rooms guarded by a small wrought iron railing, synced accurately with the visage of old whitewashed building standing dolefully in the neglected downtown of Rawalpindi. It formed a rightful property for the working men's accommodation. Living among strangers in this mechanical neighborhood of the working class, Mansur found peace at the sight of his bed accompanied by a pair of chairs and an old reading table with a crooked bookshelf. A lounge table of unusual size, protruding at the side of his bed, was Mansur's center of all activities that were managed in dark seclusion of this room, after his rigorous clerical job in a neglected department of government. The room was spacious enough for a bachelor like Mansur in his early thirties. Living alone through all the hard work that earned him a stipend enough to send back home to his ailing parents and helpless one short of a dozen siblings. Mansur's family managed daily chores of poverty that accompany the rural peasants. He had no guests except for a few friends who visited him to discuss their little errands related to pending tasks in office.

Such an end to every tiring day left him with a ritual that refreshed his senescent intellect and tickled his dying nerves. Procured, clandestinely from the slums of Rawalpindi, hashish, when smoked in a reefer of delicate rice paper, was a revolt against the bustling world that he instigated from this room. It was a luxury to live in the country where such drugs were cheap because of a shared border with the war torn Afghanistan. Alcohol indulged him in deeper fantasies, and buying it was an expensive fantasy for the people of his stratum. So relying on hashish, he indulged in the delicacies of the sinfulness that women aroused in his brain, through the cell phone.

Today, he had smoked up his lungs early, even before taking off his office dress that comprised of a khaki trouser, pale white shirt, adorned with grey necktie and oxford shoes. A sudden urge to put off this British Era inspired dress took over him as he sensed the drug overpowering his veins. Shoes were the first to leave his sore feet followed by a hurried disposal of socks. Making himself comfortable in the colored boxers, he turned on the cell phone. Social judgment was always apprehensive of such nefarious activities, but judgment certainly didn't have eyes behind the curtains of his room warmed by the coils of the electric heater. He rested himself inside the cozy embrace of a clean but old quilt, waiting for warmth to embrace his body, meanwhile, texting all his lady friends, smirking at cherries in his words for innocent damsels who replied to his texts out of their naivety. Mansur knew it was inappropriate to do so, but he kept all his shy affairs, private. He believed that privacy allowed him to achieve what other men could not. He considered himself an expert in dealing with the notions of platonic love, philosophically, with nudges of sensuality. Never having lived in an environment where women were free to interact, Mansur loved playing with them in his hands as puppets by flowering words held together in a bouquet of sweet dialogues. Dating women was not what he desired, as it required courage and more importantly money, both of which were the greyest areas in his

life. As a prepared knight, charging into a joust with poetic manliness imaging in his words, he surrounded the first woman who replied.

Asking for photos with amounts of obscenity, he casually took puffs from the rising smoke of his drug. She didn't oblige completely. The photos were all but nude. His desires remainder unfulfilled.

'You look fabulous.' he lied anticipating more of such nudity.

'Thank you.' beeped the text on his screen.

That marked the end to a conversation but Mansur's tainted body burnt with desires.

'A little more of your beauty won't kill this lover, darling.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that I want to see more of you.'

A silence in the sequence of beeps over the gadgetry followed. It was broken by an incessant sound of continuously pouring in photos of the young damsel.

'That would suffice, I guess. See you later. Gotta go!' displayed across the screen.

That was it. All his entreaties had failed in conjuring up a naked image of womanliness, that the girl half his age possessed. He turned in his bed as the drug formed a whirling tornado in his head. Her rejection had been discomforting for the drug's sweet buzz. Mansur uncoiled the earphones and played some trance in his phone. He couldn't comprehend a single word in the vocals being alien to the accent. He just loved the music and it kept his connection with Europe alive. It was the land of his dreams, where he had heard that people were liberal enough to cherish the ecstasies of life. Mansur got up at this thought and danced a few rhythmic steps. It was an awkward dance of half-naked body with muscle definitions of peasant labor from childhood, covered by a pair of boxers. He crept near the bookshelf. It was now a bit late for him to throw himself down, and get back to his fitness plan by initiating a flurry of pushups. He loved to maintain his lean body because he disliked the clerks with bellies turning into waterfalls over the khakis. But today the recent rejection by women had fallen heavy on his energies, and plans of turning himself into an alpha male were put aside. The moment of trance and euphoria tingled with his intellect instead of muscles. He used to think of himself as a philosopher when his thoughts drifted through the hypnotizing smoke of his drug. In the world full of high ranking officials, celebrities, and most eloquent politicians who rebelled or portrayed to do so, he was a pawn of their desires. Yet he rebelled against them each day by saluting the books on his shelf lined by Dostoevsky and Kafka. Mansur had thought of bringing rebellion by knowledge that he possessed through this book shelf. He accepted himself as the champion of intellect, and an outcast until he saw the same books and many more lined up inside the polished, wood paneled study of a person he loathed the most. The prodigal boss in his department. He was of the same age, but life had treated him fairly for the position he had earned. The man was eloquent about the minutest words of each author. Mansur had worked hard to gather all he had on the bookshelf, but his boss had hundreds of such books in original lined up along his bedside since childhood. This fair advantage would make him the head of establishment someday, whereas Mansur pictured himself as a clerk even with all the knowledge. He was against formal education in the universities which was biased and restricted his free thinking. Moreover, he had

never been able to finance himself for a better qualification. Tears lined his eyes as realization of denied knowledge engulfed him. He raised the middle finger towards the shelf through his watery eyes. Hashish, now rushed inside his body and tickled with his gut. Drowned in mixed feelings of dejection and sorrow at his condition, Mansur fell to the ground on his back, and cried like a child.

He cried for a long while, and then as if a thought formed in his mind, Mansur got up and reached for his cell phone aside the pillow. Feeling that his prior spot was better, he came back to the warm carpet and lied down there. A spec in the drug wanted him to sleep, another kept him stirring in the world of naked bodies, adorning the screen of his cell phone. Mansur slept among ecstasy, euphoria, sexuality, and blasphemy. He slept, but was not sure of his state as he dreamed of a mirror that reflected his curled up body on the ground. He still thought that he was awake because his eyes burned but instincts played like a fountain. The room in his dream was dimly lit with golden ambience, coming from a concealed source. There were remnants of smoke in the air that touched his nostrils, making him feel the freshness of his drugged mind. The roof looked at him while he inclined towards bottom of the shelf. As he turned to acknowledge the looks from his roof or, maybe, it was the uneasiness of lying on the floor, he felt a presence in the side of his eyes. Taking it for one of the visions that an eye conjures in the dark, he blinked. The feeling was gone. It was all black around him and the trance had stopped. Mansur was awake. He realized it but his fatigued mind and body made him fall asleep again there on the carpet in front of the shelf.

He dreamed of himself walking in clean white Salwar Kameez. It was Eid, the only day of the year when he looked handsome. But in the farthest portions of his subconscious, he remembered that he did not look like that on the last Eid. So, he realized that it was a dream after all, but it seemed so real that Mansur moved on with it. Still, the realization brought him back to his room with half open eyes. He slept again and dreamt that now he was on the bed. He was wide awake in his dream now. Clean white light travelled into the room through the windows. The light was not dazzling but sweet and swept from under the door. The door opened. A woman, with a countenance that he recollected from somewhere, sailed in. He couldn't gather how he knew her but somehow there was something that connected Mansur with her. She walked in silently measuring her steps so cautiously that the creases of her apparel remained straight. She had a sculpted figure. He saw her waist was tapered, and she made no sound. A pair of arched eyebrows looked down on her sweeping eyelashes. Her delicate ears framed a button nose. Her enticing, light brown eyes gazed in distance. An expression of smile, adorned her heart shaped lips.

Mansur woke up realizing that he was on the carpet instead of the bed, and was now sitting upright with his back towards the door. Sweat had dampened his back, but there was nothing on his forehead. He was out of his drugged state now, but felt weak in the hangover. His mental wits had gone weak, thus paralyzing his physical capabilities. He was blank about the incidents in his dreams that came running back to him. Mansur feared to face the door being terrified by what he had seen. He stood up like a bolt, and ran for the tube-light switch which sparked on

from the starter as a flash of lightning. There was nothing, and the smell of weed had gone too, only to be replaced by sting of a perfume. A perfume with feminine touch.

That too was short-lived, and it left his nostrils quickly. He shrugged the idea, but Mansur was now horrified. He had loved the tantalizing feeling that womanly perfume had brought in him, but it was gone. He now sat at the corner of his bed, concentrating on the corners of his room. Fatigued from the proceedings earlier, and his tiring job, he turned off the light and pushed himself back to the pillows on his bed and reclined more in them uneasily. After his back became accustomed to the bed, he relaxed his muscles all over. Sleep took over quickly.

Just before the morning he winced a little, and opened his eyes slowly. The light of his room was turned off, and he laid there in boxers. Immediately, he remembered what had happened, and realized that the situation had subsided, and morning was near. He turned to one side to relax his nerves completely by the newly mustered courage. A shot of lightning went through his chest, and he gasped for breath right in the moment. In the middle of that very moment, his body was paralyzed with shock. Mansur convulsed at the site near his cupboard, but couldn't take his eyes away. He wanted to ensure that he was not dreaming or maybe he wanted to nudge the wondrous excitement that fear and uncertainty held in that nick of time. When the site lingered awhile, he realized what transpired in front of him was not fake. The woman in his dream was there in front of him.

He felt a pulsating throb in his body which begged him to run away. But his body being paralyzed didn't react to his commands and sweat popped out of his forehead in droplets. Mansur was trembling enough to bring thoughts of death which he felt creeping near under the cold pressure of this revelation. Another moment passed, and he felt himself calming down as he had reached the peak of fear and anxiety. Now, his body was at its limits. He felt as if unconsciousness would take him over soon, but he was held between fear and euphoria. His throat was dry, and gave away voices with each crooked breath. But as soon as he got used to the vision he felt a ray of happiness.

Reviewing his pathetic life that he had considered while standing in front of the shelf, Mansur now felt honored and emancipated that such supernatural being had come to visit him. He made a gesture with his lips that went nowhere near a smile, and the lady smiled back at him. Another wave of chill ran inside him as the night repainted itself in front of his eyes. He was about to faint when the perfume hit his nostrils, this time strong enough to make him shiver. Before Mansur could react, he heard a rustle inside the room. She was facing him like a revelation, and put a finger to her lips indicating to stay quiet. He nodded in affirmation.

'Who are you?' he squeaked and lost his breath.

The apparition didn't reply. There was more rustling and the room was filled with perfume. She smiled again and made a gesture for him to keep quiet. He obeyed and blinked. In the instance of his blink, she was gone. He held his breath for some time, and then forgot to breathe.

A commotion had begun outside his room. *Azaan* for the morning prayers pressed against his ears, and he received it with mixed emotions. Glad that it was morning, he still lied there confused over the night's little incident. Mansur felt worse while making up his mind for the morning ritual of preparing himself in the appearance of a decent clerk, but it was all irrelevant. During the proceedings of, he felt the night hovering over him all along. He wanted to get rid of all events that unfolded in his daily routine. Mansur wanted to live in the night, but keeping it alive with work at hand was a sweet pain that he had to tolerate. Progressing into the day with early breakfast at *chaiwala*, he conjured a vivid picture of the night's uninvited visitor. Terror swept him as he felt the features of the apparition now clearing up in his mind. She wore a white blouse like those of the ladies who appeared in Hollywood movies. He didn't know anything about the dress, being foreign to his locality, and owing to little knowledge of the western clothing, all he knew was that it looked wondrous on the lady. He remembered that he had eyed the heroine lustfully, who wore the same dress on the billboard outside the City Cinema but that feeling had changed since last night. Lust, though somewhat half-filled was now replaced by fear. He remembered a **yellow** spec in the dress of the girl. Mansur was trying to remember whether she was a lady or a girl when he moved towards his bicycle after being done with the breakfast.

She smiled like a girl, but posed the figure of a lady. As he peddled ahead, the yellow spec cleared. It was a piece of cloth or something attached to her in a place where a woman's cleavage lied. It was all a great fusion of dress, skin, and smoke. Yes! Smoke, the smoke that didn't go up, but stayed near her in the colors of rainbow and skin. He remembered it all at that moment, and didn't realize when he had crossed the last *Chowk*, and reached his office.

Office was a routine that he would never remember in his later days as he was now focused on her smile. The girly smile that she beheld in her lady like demeanor for a spasm, and then vanished. His mind conjured the same scene, and dissolved it again between instants while his heartbeat synced with the scene. The office ended and he rushed home. Reaching the door of his room, he stopped. Putting down his briefcase Mansur stood there outside the room, motionless. Seconds passed, and then minutes. He kept standing, turned around, walked two paces and stopped. Unaware of what his mind was trying to conjure, he took out a cigarette from his pocket, the only one that he had and lighted it up while leaning against the wrought iron railing. He took a few puffs and inhaled deeply. Blood started rushing as he exhaled. His impulse was to turn and embrace whatever awaited him. Then he remembered that this was his last cigarette and he needed more. His dress suggested that he should go to the market after changing into something more comfortable. Mansur thought in favor of his urgency for the cigarettes. He was not sure whether it was fear that implicated this decision or a mere thought to delay the proceedings. He was unsure that if he mustered the courage to enter the room, would he ever come out of it again?

Rushing through the flight of stairs, Mansur reached the road. He wanted a little walk so he left the bicycle, and strolled his way to the market. This walk was not for making his mood pleasant, but to buy more time to think clearly. His mind was now fatigued of the thought process, and the body in office clothes yearned for rest too. He took quick steps to the market and bought a pack

of cigarettes from the nearest vendor. Lighting one, he felt a tinge of nicotine in his mouth and teeth that travelled to his throat. This meant that he forced himself to smoke this cigarette. The pain subsided after some time as he walked a few paces, overwhelmed by what awaited him.

He stood there at the door and having no remaining excuses, unlocked it and walked in. After closing the door behind him, he took a deep breath. Nothing happened. He realized that it was still not sunset and the lady had disappeared at the first spec of light. He praised himself for this realization that he had kept with him under such circumstances. Now there was an urgency to finish off with his proceedings. He had changed into his relaxing suit. Wearing tracks and a *chaadar* over, out of the respect for the opposite gender. He shivered at the thought of seeing her again and sat upright in his bed. Now he calculated that the sunset was about thirty minutes away. He thought of preparing a joint but then thought otherwise as he wanted to remain in full faculty of his mind. As the clock ticked and he sat idle with mixed emotions, he took the drug out and started forming it into a rolled piece of rista with deft hands. He finished it and put it on the table praising his perfection yet again. Proud of his little hint of crime, in the world full of it. Now he sat again watching the clock and the window and the fireplace and the burning rods of the heater but not the last night's spot where the woman had appeared. He eyed it crossly but then retaliated. He finally mustered the courage to look towards that side but thought otherwise and lighted the joint.

Mansur viewed the light diminish through his windows. By the time he finished his joint, it was dark. He transfixed his eyes over the lamp light that he turned on at the spot where she was last night in the mixed feeling of euphoria, fear, and anticipation. He was now relaxed because he was embracing the drug to take him over and the feeling of her presence didn't bother him. He kept his eyes at the spot for thirty more minutes until he realized that he had been fatigued the whole day and his neck now creaked by constantly sitting upright. Mansur relaxed back in the pillows still eyeing the spot. His eyes began to close and he fell in a stupor.

Mansur was awakened by the bright light of the morning. Nothing had happened and in his anticipation for the unreal to happen, he had lost the frame of real world. He was late. The thought made him rush and though he was fresh but his mind was tired and he reached for the bicycle after a considerate amount of time. As he kicked the pedals, he indulged in a strange ecstasy, feeling relieved by the fact that nothing had happened last night and he finally had had a better sleep. He was given a paper to explain the cause of being late and he replied apologetically cursing the apparition the whole time. The cursing took his thoughts back to her again and he went into a reverie. Soon he came out of it to concentrate on work and tea as he didn't want his brain to drive him insane. Mansur didn't tell it to anyone. It had become his prized possession.

At break time, Mansur rushed back to his room with a new feeling and enthusiasm. He bolted into his room and waited on caffeine, not taking any drug. At 12, he was a little tired but he waited. His body ached badly and he felt pain in his spine. His eyes were now burning. He felt himself addicted to the recent obsession. As the morning drew near his eyes, senses gave up

and Mansur was left with little strength to remain awake. He then pulled an unexpected act and got up and looked around with arms wide open and started narrating in a slow voice, 'Reveal!' He paused 'Reveal unto me today as I have waited for you.' A feeling of emotion had taken him over. Today he was not even drugged and a tear crept in his eye.

"I'm hurt. I'm so badly hurt. Don't you see? What have I got here in this world of mine. I'm a slave to bosses and these dames on my phone and then you show up to take possession of my room, my thoughts, and every pore of my drained body. Whatever you are reveal! Reveal! Reveal yourself for the love of whatever you are! Reveal as I'm dying in the last moments of this night. Please!' He felt tears running from his eyes. Mansur couldn't gather whether they were from the hopelessness or because of his newly discovered feelings for the supernatural. It was the first time he had seen something worth living for. Something supernatural that only he was allowed to gaze at. Mansur felt special. For once an unknown force had realized his true potentials. But it was gone. If he was special then it should come back whenever he beckoned for it. It didn't come.

He fell down and broke into a fit of sobbing and crying. After Mansur's dilemma had settled, he sat there in his collapsed form and started smiling, and then laughing hideously at himself. It was an approval of rejection. He cursed himself. A loser yet again. He rose in anger and fell on his arms and started a flurry of push-ups, then pulled back. He thumped his chest and thighs as he sat there. Spit and tears ran out of him as cascades of emotions. Blood rushed through every vein and he felt like a flood of dejection would burst out of him soon when the first light of Aurora entered his room through the windows. He felt like a warrior who had fought all night.

Mansur finally got ready and meticulously took the proceedings of the day. It was the normal pedaling of bicycle through the same chowk. He didn't feel a thing when his eyes stopped at the cinema billboard for a while. He was cold. He was a clerk again. When he came back, he rested himself in the bed and made a joint, not even bothering to look for the apparition again, feeling robust and ashamed, but the shame had wiped away. Robustness is born in men when they touch their lowest as it happens. He played the trance and rested. Euphorically happy in his boxers, he turned to his girls on the phone who had left due to his unavailability for the last two days. Now he had to entreat them again to regain what was lost. Hints of pleasure and trance took him into a playful mood and he danced to it. He came and lied down on the ground. What a life of same monotony! And with this thought, he started wallowing back in her nostalgic memories .

He casually looked towards the same cupboard. She was there right at the spot but this time he was on ground, helpless, half-naked. He closed his eyes and began to think of a different view. It was the same. She sat there. He noticed the smile and looked away. Mansur's heart pounded through his chest and he lost control of his breath. A sudden impulse was to shout, but he didn't have the breath for it. He wanted to make for the door but couldn't feel his limbs. His drugged mind was now alert. After being flushed out of all insanity, he felt fresh. His breath came back to him, and he tried to raise his sight towards her. He took the courage of his eyesight to linger a bit longer upon her.

She was a magnificent creature. The white of her dress gave out a luminous glow. She had a perfect figure and he could see her features even through the white gown. It was attached to her skin and from under her legs coiled a thin line of smoke coloured in rainbow that bordered her gown and circled around her leaning back as it moved rearwards. Her arms were white and it was hard to differentiate between her dress and skin. She sat in a graceful composure with a semi vibrant expression and smile. Mansur had never seen such a spectacle before.

'Who are you?' He could manage only that.

There was no answer.

She didn't change her position. Now Mansur felt warmth coming inside his body once more. His limbs came to life again and he moved on the floor. He folded his legs and watched her waiting for a move. Nothing happened. She sat there in the same composure; smilingly.

After a few moments, he stood from his place and reached his bed without taking his eyes off her. She still looked towards the carpet. He reclined on his bed and she didn't move a spec. Tired of it, he closed his eyes. Moments later, he opened his eyes and another shockwave ran through him. She was staring at him. He feared her looks now but understood that he would have to wait for her to make a move so he closed his eyes again, and when they were opened, she was standing by his bedside. He pulled his body back in horror. Her white had changed to red and a faint blush appeared on her cheeks. She was still beautiful but Mansur now sweated all over. She came closer and he slid backwards. He was stopped by the bedstead and she inched near. It was cold. He felt a sudden chill rushing through his body right at that moment. In an instant, she lifted herself up from his side and reached the roof where she started whirling. It was the most magnificent scene he had seen in his life. Her dress billowed around her and flared out in a fluttering blur of brilliant hues of pastels, and he layed there looking at the magnanimity of the scene.

She came back to her initial place and sat there eyeing him closely asking him to come closer by the gesture of her delicate fingers. He followed her as she descended backwards. She kept smiling and he was drenched in those curved lips. She shot up like firework in a sky and he stood with his neck strained, gaping at the scene and then came darkness in the room followed by the morning 'azan' and a thin spec of light behind. Mansur collapsed right in his spot and fell asleep.

He kept on sleeping and missed the office. When he woke up, it was evening. Spontaneously, he opened the door of his room and went out under the cover of his Chaddar. Mansur walked unnoticed through the alley and reached a secluded spot in the city. He typed a short text on the cell phone and, after a while, the young hashish dealer appeared. Grabbing the packets in return of cash was a brisk movement that both men carried out artistically. After procuring his fuel, he rushed straight back to his room following the same path. Mansur prepared as many

reefers as he could and started smoking as the sun went down. He was starving but that didn't bother him. Smoke filled his body and he liked the tantalizing feeling the drug had over his empty stomach. It was a sweet pain.

The lady didn't show up. Mansur was not bothered anymore. His body was numb and he found a strange peace. His cell phone was lying neglected and the beeps went unheard in the room. He felt like a saint who had found a moment of seclusion. Like a baby who had been soothed after wails for food. He was not hungry anymore. The hunger for lust and life had left him. It was a strange food that he had tasted. All his life he had waited for a sign, a symbol to acknowledge everything he had done. His laboured childhood flashed before him. The father cheating on his mother flashed next followed by a vision of his mother talking to another man about how unfaithful her husband was. Mansur saw himself leaving home for college. His parents were happy seeing him this way but were happier to receive the monthly stipend from him that he sent from hard earned labor. The smoke grew in the room. His patronizing boss stood over his bookshelf and laughed with a hand in his hair. Mansur smiled at all the visions. He had finally achieved what he wanted. His vision was dark now. The room was dark. His eyes flashed white and he collapsed on the carpet. Right as his head thumped on the floor, he saw her smiling at him. He smiled back at her. The flash was gone.