

In The Absence of Colour

Written by: Anushka Dias

Iyer woke up at 8 am sharp, stretched his frail body and slowly climbed out of bed. After going through his set morning routine, he made his way to the living room, read his paper as he quietly chewed his breakfast. Ramu helped him clear the table while he wore his socks and white walking shoes. Iyer then sauntered to the *Mandir*, and as was a daily custom, put his hand to his lips, kissing softly, and placed his fingers gently on the idol of *Ganapati*, and then on the garlanded photo frame of his late wife Lakshmi. He then stepped out of the house. Being a God-loving man, Iyer never left the house without taking blessings from the Lord and bestowing blessings upon the departed. When he reached the gate he turned and faced Ramu to say, "I'll go for my walk alone today, Ramu". His days had a mundane

Iyer continued on his daily route. His pace was steady and he kept his eyes focused on the path. Walking slightly faster than his usual pace, he looked forward to spending time at the *Nana Nani Udyan*, and liked spending many moments of his fleeting life in the presence of the serenity that the park offered him. When he arrived at the park, he stopped and bent low to catch his breath. He felt the strain of his accelerated pace in his raggedy breath.

The park didn't look like how it usually did. That day it is covered on all corners with people. Young adults and slightly older adults allowed themselves to convene and celebrate the good news. The verdict was out and the air was filled with joy and colour. The old park, often dull and grey was overwhelmed by energy, noise, and laughter. There were groups of boys and girls wearing rainbow coloured flags and scarves with painted faces, embracing each other in high-pitched voices of joy.

News reporters scrambled around to capture these voices. This was the right moment for them. These made for some juicy bits and bites and would appear on the screens of the telly, thanking the supreme court for their maturity and sensibility in granting justice to those who have been shunned, for ages, as a community. Questions such as "How are you feeling right now?" were met with answers that showed resounding wisdom on the lines of justice, love and acceptance for one another. Society was learning to become more inclusive and warm. The waves of change were rushing, furiously. Washing out the dull grey skies and flushing the air with vibrant color. The people present were at the peak of their emotions and felt unencumbered joy. They felt

satisfied and validated. Their voices reflected a sense of belonging after ages and ages of struggle.

Amidst all the frenzy, Iyer looked quite dull and grey himself. Just like the old park, with yellowing grass and big bald patches of mud, looking tired and worn out. It's rusty red swings and slides were too unappealing to gain any attention from the children. No children played in this park. It was only the grandmothers and grandfathers who found their peace in this desolate space. They acknowledged one another without needing to make conversation and found comfort in keeping company with this neglected space.

But today was different. Today the undisturbed air that lay between the gates of the old park was shattered by the invasion of colour. The dull grey people and the old lonely park were submerged under an effervescence of noise and loud activity. The worn-out and tired park and its people had no choice but to submit.

Iyer stood in the center of the park, still heaving from his work out and stayed where he was while looking upon interestedly at the mania around him. Standing shakily, walking stick in his hand, and peering through his cataracted eyes and heavy glasses, he turned his head from side to side, focusing on the many faces of celebration. His blank expression didn't seem to reveal any confusion, irritation, or emotion at all. He simply looked, with furrowed brows and focused eyes. He seemed almost invisible to the bubbling crowds. No news reporters or painted-faced young adults stopped to embrace him or ask him any questions about his opinion. They moved about, congratulating, greeting and embracing one another. They orbited on their paths, leaving the space around Iyer un-encroached.

After circling the park, Iyer began to make his way back home. This time, at his slower, normal pace. He reached the gates of his home to be greeted by the worried face of his daughter. "Appa how can you just leave the house like this? We were worried about you!" Lacking the patience to deal with her unresponsive father, she turned her irritation to Ramu. "Tumne Appa ko akele jaane kyun diya? Maine kitni baar bola hain ki tum saath me chalo." Ramu lazily mumbled a response and staggered back to his duties. Kundalika turned back at her father, "Appa you know what the doctors have said. You shouldn't be taking walks alone anymore."

But Iyer tuned her voice out. He smiled at his daughter, patted her lovingly on her head and made his way to his room. His daughter, utterly perplexed by her father's strange behavior, stopped babbling and followed her father. Iyer was a reserved man and rarely let his emotions show. Although he was a loving and caring man, he seldom showed any gestures of affection or joy. His nature was disciplined and safe, with a resting expression

of seriousness that was impossible to read. He never took risks with his health or gave anybody any reason to complain or worry about him and had always been the same way with his daughter and his wife who were well accustomed to his mannerisms. His calm, elated and tranquil expression this morning, prompted his daughter as quite strange and unlike him.

She stood quietly behind him as he shuffled through his drawer, desperately looking for something. After having found what he was looking for, what appeared as a square bit of paper, Iyer walked towards the Mandir. Iyer had a gentle, elated smile plastered across his face as he shakily placed the square bit of paper on the Mandir, near the photo-frame of his late wife. Kundalika inched closer to see who the new addition to the *Mandir* was. The recently inducted photograph revealed the black-and-white faces of two young men. One was the face of her handsome and youthful father and the other was the laughing face of another pretty and lean, young man. They were both holding hands and their faces were a transparent expression of pure joy. Even in the absence of colour, their faces radiated happiness in a way that made them seem whole and complete. Iyer appeared bold, confident and content in the photograph. Adjectives that nobody in this world that knew him well, would associate with his character. Kundalika noticed his expression in the photograph and matched it with the traces of the calm and tranquil that he wore on his face right then. He looked satisfied and validated.

Iyer pressed his fingers, softly on his smiling lips and gently placed them, first on the Lord Ganapati, on the photo-frame of his late wife Lakshmi and then on the small square black-and-white photograph.
