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SMOKE

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“When it seems dull as if there is nothing,
hope is the only key that shines in everything”

-Soumen Roy

And before I realized it was smoke, the room was filled with it. Choking, I ran to Abu's room but my feet felt a sifted. I was in the puddle of my sweat, suffocating, calling out my brother sleeping next to my bed. My voice seemed alien and it didn't reach him. I punched my fist on the floor, more like hammer on a nail. It bled, yet I couldn't feel the pain. I reached out my bottle, but the water didn't drip.

Soon, I saw a reflection of the golden yellowish flame taking up the flat next to ours. By that time, my brother woke up, and everyone else did. I couldn't feel anything, except the taste of the smoke, whirling around my intestine.

I grabbed some possessions I could, certificates, passport, and some beloved books, and shouted again, to flee. My voice didn't reach them, again. My eyes burnt. As I hurried through the hall, I saw dad sleep walking into the flame that has now eaten up half of our bedroom and now spreading to the carpet, next room. I cried out. Threw all the possessions I carried and ran towards him. He didn't stop. I cried out again. He kept walking in his white *thob*.

The moments I had with him looked at me from a projector. Last night's unsettled dispute and the untouched meal mocked me. I screamed.

My veins ached. My ribs tangled around my beating heart. All my organs acted as if misplaced. My eyes bled and I bent down. I prayed and my body weakened with milli seconds passed. The sound of my voice decreased as someone switched on their cooler, somewhere.

I would have traded my whole life to get another moment with him. For drinking, his half drank tea, for another laugh, for another argument. I swear, I would have traded anything and everything, to hug him, which was always hard. The faint sound of *Azaan* from my app echoed, *Allahu Akbar* (God is Greatest). I couldn't move an inch but was in my bed, the next moment. I was still hitting my fist harder, like the hammer on the nail. My fist was bleeding, and I could feel that.



But my brother sleeping next to my bed disappeared. Flats disappeared. Desert, where I lived formore than a decade disappeared. I was breathing harder but not choking or coughing. The smoke that whirled around my intestine lost its taste. I reached for the bottle and the water dripped. The hostel ceiling became clearer. I was shivering still managed to dial dad's number. He picked up at the third ring and greeted *As-Salaam- Alaikum* (Peace be unto you) and asked if I need money. I replied, *Wa - Alaikum Salaam* (And unto you peace) but my voice was feeble as my tears poured. I could hear him telling someone back home, "Capital city it is, still network acts odd".

I tied my bleeding fist.

That was not a nightmare or a daydream. Maybe, a reminder. Or is it something happening next door?

Because now, I smell smoke.



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To Cite the Article: *Hameed, Adhila, "Smoke"*. *Literary Cognizance*, III-2 (September, 2022): 08-09. Web.