



RAY OF HOPE

Above the frenetic city hubbub, the blaring of vehicle honks and swarm of pedestrians off to their personal missions, the vast sky seemed still and peaceful. Evanescent hues of mauve-pink and orange spread far across the horizon, engulfing the sky with its magnificent flourish. The Golden beams illuminated the stark, old, decayed buildings gripped with ivy in the peeling walls like a timeless hug. The foliage glistened under its sunny rays, slipping through our fingers, a glorious thing out of reach. Naina's green, mossy orbs wandered upon her surroundings, frowning silently as no single head raised high to quench



this beautiful, serene sight.

Startled by the din and racket around her, she promptly pulled up her sleeves to check the time. Cursing to herself, she ran towards the bus stop but unfortunately missed it. Calming down her racing heart, she swiftly pulled out her phone and informed her worried parents -

"Naina...? where are you? Have you checked the time?", her mother's turning yet concerned voice filled her ears.

She replied softly, "Ma... I'm sorry... I missed my bus. Don't worry. I'll be home soon..."

"Wait till you get here, missy... You are grounded for the next two weeks..."



Before she could quip something back, her mother hung up quite harshly.

She wiped her clammy hands on her wrinkled shirt and waited patiently for the next bus.

Few minutes ~~many hours~~ passed, but no single bus in sight. Biting her bow-shaped lips, she decided to take a stroll and promised herself to come back as soon as possible. Naina's curious eyes wandered around her surroundings, relishing the beauty of old, brown-stone buildings, the chirping of birds and the cool gust of breeze making her hair more tousled. Everything seemed clean and pristine and so calm. Just as she was returning back to her bus stop, hears clamour of utensils and



rushed voices caught her ears. She glanced towards the pavement from where the sounds ^{were} heard and said to herself -

"Naina... Don't go there... You are already in ~~lots~~ of trouble. Ma will be furious."

She tried to dwindle her curiosity but in vain. With great haste, she walked forward with hesitant steps, and the sight she witnessed baffled her. A large crowd in a tightly congested place, with stagnant water enveloping their houses completely. Her eyes glistened with stray tears on witnessing their condition. She wondered how they could survive in such a poorly-constructed area.

The sight of a small boy with protruded ribs, the result of pure starvation



and lack of basic necessities made her heart quench with grief and pain.

Biting back a sob, she ran back to the bus stop and took the next bus back to her house.

Naina's mind was muddled and heart overwhelmed with sadness. She saw the buildings, high and stark, oozing power and elegance but she realized how it was all just a deception. The world is driven by materialism and personal pleasures, but the downtrodden are suffering every single day. At that moment, she pledged to herself to be selfless and do something for them to eradicate poverty and discrimination from this world; to fight for the marginalised groups, to voice out her



thoughts and opinions for the injustice that hangs around like dark clouds above people draining their poor souls to death. She made it her mission, her dream to give out some goodness to this world driven by hate and corruption. She owed it to herself, and by god, she hopes to keep it...

Naina busy immersed in her homework, munching down the apples her mom freshly bought. Her mother and father having small conversations in the living room. Her eyes lazily roamed on the T.V, catching her attention. The headlines made her want to throw up -

" Two men castrated as they were identified to be part of the LGBTQIA+ community. This happened today..."



Her father shook his head with pity and said, "This is so sad... Look how our people are turning into..."

Mother gave a deep sigh and said, "It's a dangerous place out there, honey. No one can be true to ourselves without looking over their shoulders. Poor kids..."

Her breath hitched in her throat and swiftly gave a harsh "good night" to her parents and slammed the door close. Naina was disgusted and overwhelmed. She wanted to scream at the top of her lungs yet bit her quivering lips to calm her heart which was pounding hard against her chest. She was overcome with fear and babblement of how people can be so brutal and ignorant.



~~The next day~~, The light chirping of birds announced the start of a new day, a new start. But Naina was still shaken ^{up} by the events that happened yesterday and the T-V broadcast didn't make her heavy heart any better. On her way to school, she was lost in her thoughts, as always, but it didn't revolve around the ethereal beauty of nature or the birds wheeling around in lazy, slow arcs but it was more than just that. Her heart went out for the people who were suffering every ticking minute, crying for help with their pleading eyes, someone to give them a jolt of hope. Halting her steps, Naina's eyes caught a large crowd around the corner. She walked towards it



which was brimming with energy
and her mossy green orbs caught on
the placards and slogans which said -
" STOP UNDERMINING THE POOR!"
" GIVE BACK THEIR HOME!"

Few seconds later, I got to know
the shun area I stumbled upon yest-
erday was to be evacuated to build
a supermarket for the elites. I clen-
ched my hands into fists, biting my
bruised lips, overstricken by anger
and disgust. Without thinking twice,
I got on the stage and grabbed the
speaker from a woman who was
talking to the crowd. With a deep breath,
I spoke -

" Good morning everyone. I am sorry
for being impulsive and rude but
I have to share something with all



to you today. Yesterday, I stumbled upon these slums and was devastated by witnessing their condition. It was saddening to watch how they live back there with little to no food, light and shelter. Yes, I am just a student... Yes, I am far so much younger and lack life experiences compared to all of you... But the injustice and ignorance shoved upon the downtrodden cannot be foregranted. People are dying, crying for help, hiding their true selves so that they won't be banished by the society and norms that prevail. I just wanted to say, I stand with you for the betterment of our society, to help you in anyway to let the good shine far brighter ^{and} brighter a brighter

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than the evil. Thank you for listening to me. "

A tranquil silence passed over the glowing crowd. I wiped away the few, stray tears that cleansed away my flushed cheeks. As I fervently got down the stage, everyone started to applaud and loud cheers and yells echoed in my ears. As Naina's eyes widened with surprise and a huge splitting-smile enveloped her lips. words of encouragement and friendly-pats showered on her made her feel valid and proud. Later, her face was broadcasted in every news channel, the video clip spread like hot cakes igniting the fire buried deep within the citizens to fight for their people, to stop this



injustice once and for all.

Naina's life took a whole 180° turn, her name was known to many, and her voice to thousands. Sitting beside the riverside, her slender fingers swiped along the river, with slight tripples forming on the clear, blue surface. The coolness startled her momentarily but with the passing time, she relished it. The shrill of her phone ringing brought her back to her senses. It was her father.

"Naina... where are you, my child?
I've got some news for you..."

puzzled and oblivious, Naina answered -

"What is it, Papa? I am in the riverside. Is everything OK?"

With a proud chuckle, his father



cheerfully replied,

" You did it, kiddo... They got their houses back. I am so proud of you."

A demure smile curved up her lips, with a sigh of relief she said,

" I did it, papa... I fulfilled my dream... "