

Prose

1. Title: Pitter Patter

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A little girl in a red dress races through the living room. Thunder rolls heavily outside. “Mithaas”, Maa calls after her, “It’s going to rain soon, do fetch the clothes from the terrace. Take the little troublemaker along, will you?”

Hearing this, five-year-old Aashi stops chasing his didi, and realizing that chores await him, tries to slip through the back door. He manages to just flee upstairs when Mithaas catches him by the collar. She gives him that evil smile of sweet victory, and drags the reluctant figure to the terrace.

Nanaji sitting on the sofa, coughs lightly, and gazes fondly at the chaos created by the little monsters. He notices Nanima dozing off beside him, and smiles that same evil smile of his grand-daughter. He turns towards the red and black tape recorder kept by the side of the sofa, and quietly switches it on, immediately increasing the volume. Nanima wakes up with a start, clutching the hymnbook in her hand, and glares sharply at her sprightly husband. Nanaji waves his hand, smiles with a content sigh and starts humming to the tune of “Kabhie Kabhie Mere Dil Mein”. Nanima gives him a long look, and then slowly joins him, as thunder growls in the background.

Maa looks longingly at the aged couple, her eyes clouding with the fleeting images of a stranger, and a time gone by. Her body is filled with slightly hazy, wonderfully comforting feelings. Mithaas and Aashi enter with heaps of clothes and she quickly wipes her tears with the pallu. Then with a contented sigh, she places a pot of oil on the chulha and announces a surprise feast of aloo pakoras and masala chai.

The clouds join in the celebration with a tumultuous roar, and it starts raining. The water pours in a feisty caress, leaving no place untouched. The music stops abruptly as the power goes out. So, the feast is shifted outdoors to the verandah. The rain falls, and everyone is somehow lost in the silence and the noise, with the pitter patter reciting its own rhythmic tale. This sweet calmness is only interrupted here and there by an anecdote recalled from buttery memory and light laughter of nostalgia which follows.

Mithaas, lost in the thoughts of distant lands and faraway oceans, folds up numerous paper boats out of the day’s newspaper. Both the children bring out their colours, sit on the ground and begin delving into the precious art of boat designing. Later, they sail them away towards the gate, praying for their vessels to sail the seven seas. Maa gazes distantly into the falling sheets of rain, her loneliness somewhat healed for the moment. Her meditation is interrupted when Nanaji coughs again and she instructs that he leaves for bed. He ignores her warnings, and points around him, “Nothing is more peaceful than this”.

He starts humming again, it becomes serene again. With the rain falling from above, and Nanaji singing below. No one knows that this hum will never be heard six months after this moment. Maa slowly smiles, awash in the beautiful delusion of the sincerity and love around her. She believes no God can take this away from her. Tomorrow, the chulha will stop working. Mithaas will find the crumpled paper boats near the drain, their carefully painted colours bleeding into the muddy water. Aashi will get sick, and a stranger will return. The sky will be clear.

But today, right now, it is creating music, and everything is whole.