

FLASH FICTION

A Mute Morning

by Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar



"The Growing Space Between" by Ann Keeling

The dusty blades of the ceiling fan were still. The Summer storm last night with claps of lightning, gales of wind, and lashes of rain, had knocked out the electricity. She stirred in her sleep, then yawned and wiped her neck with her hand. Although the thought seemed preposterous, he hoped she would turn her head and look at him, but she dragged herself to the bathroom, and flicked the light switch on. *Oh*, she said, almost inaudibly, when the soft-white bulbs didn't light up.

Patches of daylight streaked in as he opened the blinds, illuminating the faded walnut nightstand that held the gilt-framed picture from their wedding day, the smile in her eyes prettier than the roses in her hands, the smile he hadn't seen in years. A patina of silence coated the walls, the floor, every surface he set his eyes on.

He found his boxers beside the bed and pulled them on, thinking how she never slept naked, always wore pajamas to bed. In the early days of their marriage, he used to complain, saying he needed uninterrupted access to her skin without fabric or barriers, but she enjoyed being undressed, and was aroused when he nudged her clothes away with his fingers or teeth.

In the morning, she used to call out to him from the bathroom in a garbled voice, her mouth full of toothpaste foam. *Look what you did*, she'd point at the love bite on her neck, red as a raspberry. He would swipe his tongue against the bruise, say it tasted better now, like a ripened plum, and the hairs on her arms would rise. He used to pull her into the shower, her laughter rising above the splash of water across their bodies.

Things changed. At first, squabbles about chores fell over them like fat raindrops. Later, when an unexplainable silence descended, it stayed like a gray fog coating their existence. Her books and journals formed a meridian on the king mattress. Their toes touched sometimes under the covers, but pulled away instantly, apologetically. In the morning, the drone of the electric shaver, the bubbling of her kettle, the gurgle of his Keurig, and the welcome of Good Morning America hosts rushed in to fill the remorseless quiet.

Today, there wouldn't be any appliance intrusions, not even the hum of the refrigerator. Today, he could try to stir the stultifying stillness. He curbed the impulse of grabbing her waist as she bent over the sink to rinse her mouth; he didn't want to place the burden of responding on her body.

Instead, he decided to go downstairs, light the gas stove, crack eggs over easy for her, whip up an omelet for himself. With the plates settled on mats, he would pluck a red rose from the bush in the backyard and place it in the empty vase between them.