

THE DOMICILE OF MYSTERY

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Nafis, an AVERAGE person, joined his first-ever college. His life turned UPSIDE DOWN when he met this very MYSTERIOUS classmate in his college.

He was GIFTED with THE ART OF DEDUCTIONS; Nafis was fascinated by his GIFT. Both the boys soon got INVOLVED in a very DANGEROUS case. It was about an old BUNGALOW where they had to put their LIFE ON THE LINE. Have strong DEDICATION and AGILITY. Nafis was ANXIOUS about the whole INCIDENT but continued his first-ever ADVENTURE, filled with MURDER, CRIME, MYSTERY and MISERY, with his EXTRAORDINARY friend, in this BUNGALOW MADNESS.

‘It wasn’t ME who pulled YOU down; your FATE went AGAINST you...’ Says the MYSTERIOUS friend.

To my Abbu, without whom the book wouldn't even exist.

To my Ammu and Sister for support.

To Rima, Sweetie, Eva, Mashal, and Habibi. Who all have supported me from the beginning until the end.

Finally, special thanks to Alif. He made this book come to life.

CHAPTER 1

THE

UNFATHOMABLE

ABILITY

It was not simple to discern if Nafis was a college student by just looking at his face. He has a tenth or lower impression of a junior. He's 6 feet tall, has shorter black hair, and has a fair complexion. Today is a huge day for Nafis because he will be attending his new college for the first time. Despite this, he was late for his first day of college. He somehow made it to his class on time. Fortunately, the teacher had not yet entered the classroom; he was fortunate enough to see a vacant seat by a boy in the front row. He ran into the class, panting, and sat on the first vacant seat. The boy beside him had long, dark brown, messed-up curly hair. His eyes were light brown, and he was light-skinned. Nafis grinned at the boy to avoid the awkwardness and tried to suppress most of his panting. After briefly pausing to catch his breath, he extended his hand for a handshake.

‘You're Naimur Rashid Nafis, right?’ the boy asked out of the blue as Nafis was about to reveal himself to him.

‘How did you come to know my name? Have we met before?’ Nafis asked a little too suddenly.

‘Oh no... we have never met before.’ The boy smirked as though he was about to reveal the world's biggest secret. ‘I figured out your name, and you don't happen to live near the Hut Khola Bazaar, do you?’ he asked.

‘I live near the Hut Khola Bazaar- but how did you learn all this?’ Nafis was baffled.

‘Well, I had to observe many things about you to deduce this. It wasn't easy to figure out your name because I only saw your first and middle names. Naimur Rashid, and an incomplete letter, which could be either "N" or "M", on your ID card; I couldn't see your full name because half of the card was outside the pocket, and half of it was inside. So, the only thing left for me to do was look up your last name and a common Bengali name would be; apparently, it could be anything!’ The boy chuckled. ‘But a few names came to my mind at the time: Nabil, Noor, Nahid, Nasir, Niloy, Nafis, Meer, Monoar, Mintu, Mohammed, and a few others.’

‘However, why did you believe the letter would be "N" or "M"? It may have also been an "A", Nafis speculated.

‘I know the letter could have been an "A", but that letter does not fit in the ID font. So, the letter "N" or "M" was my closest guess.’ The mysterious boy responded. ‘Also, the incomplete letter referring to looks more like a triangle pointing downwards, and the letters "M", "N", or "A" in the English alphabet all have an incomplete triangle facing downwards. As it is an ID card, I considered the shapes and font, which could be any San Serif font. The letter "M" would form two triangles, while the letter "N" would form one, but both are right-angled triangles. Now for the important part- if you look closely, you'll see that the right-angled triangle formed by the letter "M" is a little narrower; that is, the hypotenuse is a little narrower than the right-angled triangle formed by the letter "N", which is why I picked "N" instead of "M". If you think about it, the letter "A" has a vertically tilted line from the left. In contrast, the letters "N" and "M" have a vertical straight line, and it's not tilted. Consequently, if I had looked at the incomplete letter from the left side and it had been the letter "A", I would not have seen a vertical line but a diagonal line. Even the name Nafis fits in nicely, if not perfectly, with the rest of your titles.’ With a calm accent, the boy concluded.

‘And all of this stuff you told me...you were considering all of this in your mind from the moment you saw me walk into the room before I sat beside you?’ With a hopeless grin, Nafis inquired.

‘Yes,’ says the mysterious boy.

‘Oh, Allah! This much thinking, a shocking right name, and a lucky guess.’ Perplexed Nafis.

‘However, I didn't guess it; I deduced it.’ Says the boy, ‘Would you like to know how I discovered your address?’

‘All right, then, go ahead.’ Nafis responded with a puzzled expression.

‘After deducing your name, I then observed your shoes and saw that they are dirty with mud stuck to them, so you must've got here by walking through a muddy road, and its winter; less possibility of having a muddy road at a time like this, only except if you are coming from a bazaar. It didn't rain

this morning. The mud is fresh, too. Judging by your face, it seems you were late; as you woke up late, you rushed to take the shortcut I saw beside Hut Khola Bazaar. The shortcut is a fish bazaar, which will take about ten minutes to get to the college. That is where you got your shoes muddy; fish bazaars are always muddy. And who doesn't like to take shortcuts? You would never pant this much if you came by rickshaw, so it means that your house is very close to the college; thus, you ran through the Hut Khola bazaar's fish market shortcut. And don't ask me how I got to know you woke up late; look at your face in the mirror. You did not wash your face properly.'

Nafis quickly rubbed his face with his hands. He then, with an astounded tone, said, 'Amazing...But still, it could be any bazaar around here...why Hut Khola specifically?'

'That's because none of the markets opens at this hour of the morning except for Hut Khola bazaar. Oh, and by the way, I am a first-year student, just like you.'

'Hmm...you figured it out with the ID card, right?'

'That's correct.'

'I'm speechless. I don't know what to say. With skills like these, you would probably end up replacing Robert Downey Jr as Sherlock Holmes.'

'First of all, that is a movie, and this is real life. And also, that is for Hollywood to decide, not you, my friend. Nice to meet you, by the way.' Said the boy. They shook hands, and Nafis asked his name.

'Hmm...I think you will know my name soon,' said the boy.

'What? Your name's a mystery?' Asked Nafis.

'Let it be a mystery for now....' Answered the boy with a smile.

'That was bizarre....' Thought Nafis.

Before Nafis could say anything else, the teacher entered the classroom, and everyone stood up and greeted the teacher. The teacher made the roll calls and the teacher started giving his lecture. After two long boring classes, during which everyone felt like time was passing at the speed of a snail, it was time for everyone to go home. Nafis became drowsy and tired after the classes, but it is nothing that a little friendly chat cannot fix. His neck ached because of the long and tedious staring at the whiteboard as Nafis's newfound friend packed his bag and was ready to set off. 'So, what do you think about the teachers?' asked Nafis.

'Well, they are good,' he answered. 'But do you know that the chemistry teacher loves birds and the physics teacher loves cats?'

'When did you get the time to figure that out?' asked Nafis.

'During the lectures.' Answered the boy.

'At this point, I don't even know if I should be amazed or creeped out.' Nafis thought to himself.

'And how could you possibly have known that during the lectures?' Asked Nafis.

'It was simple; for the Physics teacher, I had seen white hair on her legs below her kneecap, and now you might ask, why a cat? Why not a dog? The answer is straightforward; if you pet a dog, it won't pass by your leg but may jump around and roll over. Therefore, she has a cat. And do you remember the small scars and cuts on the fingers of our chemistry teacher?'

'Well, I never thought of noticing it.' answered Nafis.

'I observed it, but those weren't the only clues I spotted. I saw some downy feather on his -'

'Okay, I get it.' Interrupted Nafis. 'You will prove it to me with all your factual observations, and I will be amazed. So, can we go home now? Sorry to interrupt you like that, but I want to get some sleep at home in my comfortable bed.'

'All right. It's okay, Nafis. Let's go home then.'

The boys took their bags and left the classroom together. They walked through the corridor and went downstairs. Nafis and his strange new friend saw some students sitting, walking around, and playing football on the big campus field. The boy saw someone do magic tricks and said, 'Let's go over there, Nafis. I think something cool is happening there.' While saying this, the boy sprinted so fast that Nafis didn't even get enough time to react to what the boy said.

'Dude, can't this wait? I have to go home. I'm tired.' Sighed Nafis as he tried to walk quickly. Although Nafis was drowsy, he did not want to upset his new and only friend at college by abandoning him and walking home, so he lazily followed his friend.

'You're just in time, Nafis! This student there will show us all a magic trick involving a soda can!' Said the boy, with a tone of excitement.

'Ladies and gentlemen!' said a boy. He stood right in the middle of the group of students. He was holding a soda can. 'As you can see in my hand, there is an empty soda can, which is a bit folded in the middle,' the boy had a broad smile; he was thin and tall, had short black hair, he was white in complexion. 'I'm going to magically unfold this soda can and refill it with whatever soda it contained; in this case, coke since it is a can of Coca-Cola.'

Everyone started to clap. The Magician smiled, looked at his audience, and began to prove to his audience that the soda can was indeed empty. He shook the can lightly and proceeded to show the cap area where it could be seen that the soda can tab was missing.

'See- it does not contain any coke.' The Magician told the audience and then moved his hands around the soda can. A few seconds later, he stopped moving his hand and screamed, 'ABRACADABRA!' He kept the soda can in one hand and waved his other hand to the top of the can. Then suddenly, he shook the soda can strongly, holding it with both hands and stopped. The soda can started unfolding automatically and became erect without any folds. The audience started clapping out of amazement.

'No, the show isn't over yet. I'm going to refill this can with coke again!' Said the Magician loudly with a smirk.

The Magician then held the soda can in his left hand and started waving his right hand over the can again; he started doing various movements with his hand. The Magician then held the can finally with both of his hands. Then he gave the can a big shake. He turned the top of the can to the audience, where they could see the cap tab area.

'Look, people, I have magically brought back the straw holder!' the audience clapped in amazement. 'What do you think is inside the can, ladies and gentlemen?' asked the Magician with a broad crazy looking smile.

Nafis, with the audience, yelled, 'Coke!'

The Magician opened the cap, and the coke fizzed out of the can.

Nafis was very impressed by the Magician's trick.

'Did you understand how it was done?' asked Nafis's companion suddenly to Nafis.

'I didn't, but I bet you understood how to do it, right?' Asked Nafis in a Tell-Me-How-You-Figured-It-Out way.

'Understanding how to do it- was like eating a piece of cake for me!' said the boy with a bizarre smile. A smile that Nafis could not even explain.

'What, no way! Is it that easy?' exclaimed Nafis.

'Of course, it is! You just have to see through everything that is done and find a logical explanation for every move.' replied the boy.

'Well, were you figuring everything then and there?' asked Nafis.

'C'mon, it was easy. Why don't we walk over to the Magician, and I'll uncover the mystery to him to see if I'm correct.' Said the boy.

'So, are there any bets involved?' asked Nafis with a smirk.

‘The only bet is that I give you the permission to laugh at my embarrassing failure if I’m incorrect.’

‘That bet is quite good enough. I like my pocket money anyways.’ Said Nafis with a chuckle. As the audience was leaving, Nafis started walking towards the Magician.

‘Hey brother, I’m Nafis. How are you?’ Asked Nafis while the Magician was washing his hands.

‘Bro, I’m doing superb. I noticed that you were watching my magic trick with the audience. So, what do you think about it, my friend? Is it any good?’ He asked with a smile. Nafis realised that the Magician was not the arrogant or conceited student Nafis thought he would be; rather, he was quite friendly.

‘It was terrific!’ replied Nafis with a broad smile.

‘Oh, I’m glad that you loved it!’

‘Although I found your trick to be cool, my friend over there says he has revealed the mystery of your trick!’

‘Wow! Has he really?’ breathed the Magician.

‘Yes, my friend has solved your magic trick in a minute.’ said Nafis boldly. The Magician had a spark in his eyes. He was amazed and more eager to meet Nafis's friend.

‘I would like to meet your buddy.’ Said the Magician eagerly.

‘All right, I will take you to him.’

The Magician was in a rush and wanted to meet the companion of Nafis. Nafis approached his friend from behind and whispered, ‘He is here....’ The boy closed his eyes and nodded his head.

‘I heard from your friend here that you cracked the mystery of the magic trick I showed. So, can you explain how?’ The Magician said briskly, ‘And Nafis, my friend, can you please leave so we can talk privately?’

‘But-’ cried Nafis.

‘You’ll know it later.’ interrupted the Magician.

‘Don’t worry; he is trustworthy. He will not leak the mystery.’ Said the boy. The Magician stared at the boy.

‘He has to stay, or you won’t know how I have cracked it.’ Said the boy politely.

‘All right, I will let him stay then.’ Said the Magician. Nafis was delighted after hearing the Magician's approval and felt respected by the friendly attitude of his new strange friend.

‘Okay, so can you begin explaining, my friend?’ the Magician asked the boy.

‘So, let’s start,’ started the boy with a smile, ‘I believe that you crushed and folded the middle of the can lightly before the magic show started, right?’

‘Yes, I did.’ Answered the Magician.

‘So, my deduction is correct. At first, you made a small hole in one of the black bars of the barcode using a needle on the soda can. You made half of the coke drip out; you needed to make the can fold lightly. You taped that hole shut using a thin, long black tape, stopping further leakage. This also allowed a camouflage for the hole, so nobody thought there was a hole in the can. So, the first part is done. Now for the second part, which was done before the show began, just like the first. You used a black sticker, which you cut out like an open straw holder, covered the opening of the cap and held it in such a way that the light didn’t reflect on the black sticker, so the audience thought the soda can was empty, and the straw holder was gone. Now for the third part, as some coke was left in the can, you shook the can a little and then waved your right hand. You shook it again, which caused the carbon dioxide to form. The gas increased because of the shaking. Hence the pressure increased. Fixing the soda can from the folds. You see, the soda can returned to its original shape because of the pressure created inside the soda can. Now let’s move to the next step. The fourth step’

The Magician was astonished and could not utter a single word after most of the unravelling of this mystery.

‘What on earth? How did he know all this? Surprisingly it’s all logical too!’ Nafis wondered.

‘Now, the fourth step is elementary hand tricks. When you said you would refill the soda can with its contents, you waved your right hand above the soda can tab. Then, amid the audience's silence, you took off the black sticker very easily as the audience was not focusing carefully on your hands. Then you showed the audience the straw holder gave a shake, opened the cap, and sprayed the coke from the top. Well then...the mystery has been solved.’ Finished the boy boldly.

‘Marvelously done, brother!’ clapped Nafis.

The Magician was astonished and shocked. The Magician was at a loss for words. He was only looking at the boy with the same spark in his eyes.

‘Fabulous! No one...no one I met could crack this mystery with that much detail.’ Said the Magician; he scratched his head and asked, ‘What's your name, bro?’

‘I'm Javed. Nokib Javed.’ Answered the strange boy.

CHAPTER 2

RIDDLE AT THE BUNGALOW

Everything was happening very quickly. Javed started to walk away, leaving Nafis and the Magician behind. Nafis, while giggling, caught up to Javed.

‘Why are you doing that?’ asked Javed, seeing Nafis laugh.

‘Man, you were awesome back there. Did you see his face?’ asked Nafis with a chuckle.

‘Yes, but I thought you would be sad as you lost your bet.’

‘Of course, I’m sad...’

‘And I can see that in your face.’ Said Javed as he glanced at Nafis, who was choking himself with laughter.

‘Indeed, I lost the bet, but the funny part was the expression of the Magician afterwards. He was embarrassed after that expose!’ He stopped his laughter and continued, ‘Are you an alien or something? Because that expose was out of this world, dude! But seriously, don’t you get creeped out by these skills of yours sometimes? Like when you figure out someone’s secrets, don’t you feel scared?’

‘These skills are just...I am just used to it. And as for finding out someone’s secrets, you see, if you have lower expectations for any person, the chances of not being scared or being hurt are lower. But the Magician was a nice guy; as far as I know, that guy could have beaten me to a pulp, as it’s quite an embarrassment for a Magician’s magic trick to be exposed by someone from the public.’ Said Javed.

Nafis’s tiredness was gone, as what happened today seemed to have made his day. They left the school and started heading towards Hut Khola Bazaar. Nafis looked at Javed’s face, and it seemed like Javed was disturbed.

‘Hey? Javed, are you all right? Is there something going on in your mind?’ inquired Nafis

‘Well, I was thinking about something unimportant but exciting. It’s about the Magician; I saw a scratch on his right hand, which seems to be bothering me.’

‘What is it now that you found interesting about a scratch?’

‘Well, I somewhat think that scratch holds many things which are a mystery to us.’ As Javed said, Nafis noticed a weird spark in Javed’s light brown eyes. Javed stood still for a moment as he thought about it and continued, ‘But by the look of it could be an animal or a human being because if it was a sharp object, the shape of the scratch would’ve been different.’

‘He might’ve got it when playing with his friends or siblings. Or maybe when an incident occurred involving his pet like a cat, bird, or a dog?’

‘Oh, well, it is possible.’ Said Javed.

‘Oh, look, I have reached my house!’ Nafis pointed to a building.

It was a three-story building which was white and yellow. The Thai glasses on the windows were blue, which made them look like solar panels.

‘Wow! That’s quite a beautiful home you got, Nafis.’

‘Thanks a lot.’ Smiled Nafis. ‘It would be nice if you came inside and met my family, brother.’

‘Nah...not today, perhaps some other day. See you later.’ said Javed.

‘Alright, take care, bro.’ said Nafis as he waved Javed goodbye. Nafis walked into his house, remembering all those fascinating moments with Javed on the first day of college. His mind almost went into bliss as he remembered what he recalled as a first-time experience. Truly, Nafis felt like he would hold onto these memories forever until death parted them. Nafis never had as much fun as he did with Javed. But in his mind, he still could not believe it. A random guy he sat with could tell his name only by looking at incomplete alphabets. He could also figure out what that person has for a pet only by looking at their legs and finding a single clue; he could expose anything by observing the other person’s activity. Nafis could not believe that he had just met someone extraordinary. Someone with the same skills or gift he knew only existed in movies and books.

The class started at 9 o'clock in the morning and ended at noon; a few more classes needed to be finished. Time was moving awkwardly slow, and the day was getting boredom shoved down its throat. It was finally lunch break. The students all rushed to the canteen like a stampede of elephants, but Javed was still quiet. Javed has been eerily quiet ever since the beginning of the class. Javed sat down next to Nafis to eat his lunch, but his friend, Nafis, was worried and started to wonder what had happened to his mysterious friend. Nafis tried to start a conversation as both hadn't conversed with one another ever since the first class began. Still, after an attempt, Nafis failed to discuss a topic to converse about, so he just began to dig into his sandwiches. Suddenly, someone from behind Javed rushed in and sat beside him, which made him startled. The boy wore a black hoodie, which covered his entire face. Nafis bent a bit down, trying to look at their intruder's face but failed; then asked the boy if they knew him, but the boy did not utter a single word.

'Are you the Magician who was doing the magic show yesterday?' Asked Javed calmly.

'That's right! I'm the Magician!' as he said it enthusiastically, he immediately pulled down his hood. Nafis, recovering from the suddenness of the startle, then asks how he is.

'Yes! I'm fine,' the Magician replied. 'So, are you guys having lunch?' Both Javed and Nafis said yes.

'By the way, I am sorry if I disturbed you guys. The other tables were taken, so I needed to look for another table and found you guys. Is it okay if I eat with you guys?' asked the Magician.

'Sure! Sure!' said Nafis briskly.

The Magician settled himself down and started eating his pasta.

'By the way, brother, where did you learn that magic trick?' Asked Nafis.

'Well, no one taught me; I got the idea from a book. I'm kind of a person who loves to experiment a lot, and as a second-year student, I was excited to carry out this experiment due to what I think is an excessive production of adrenaline.' replied the Magician.

'Wow! You are a senior! It must feel cool to be a senior, right? Getting to boss around, get respect from the juniors and whatnot?' cheered Nafis.

'Being a second-year student is a big pain!' sniggered the Magician. 'Like the second year is so annoying, man! Believe me when I tell you two this - the second year feels like you went from a pressure cooker, which already is bad enough, to a Nuclear power station producing nuclear pressure via the fission process using the atoms of your brain! It is also like being the president of Japan. You take a break one moment, and Hiroshima, Nagasaki, gets bombed the next! Then you take another break, and America wants to start a war against your country! You get my point, right?'

'Yes...we do.' Said Nafis as he exchanged looks with Javed, who was trying to hold his laughter.

'As a science student, you will face too much trouble in your second year, and I suppose both of you are science students, right?' Asked the Magician. to which both the boys replied affirmatively. 'And how did you figure out my magic trick...umm, Javed, was it?' Asked the Magician.

'Yes, you got my name right, so what I did was-'

'-Oh! Where are my manners?' Interrupted the Magician. 'I am sorry we never were introduced to each other properly...I'm Tanzib Shafiel Umam Alif.'

'I am Naimur Rashid Nafis, and that right there is Nokib Javed...and of course, we all met each other yesterday and made quite a good scene.' giggled Nafis.

'Nice to meet you guys...and don't be shy to call me for any help you need regarding your studies, alright.' Alif smiled and continued, 'Okay, so Mr Javed, how did you know it was me under that hood?'

'I saw something, but it was vague. It was under the right sleeve of your jacket; as I saw *it*, I was sure it was you.' Answered Javed.

'Well, so what is that *it*?' asked Alif.

‘It was a scratch in your right hand.’ Said Javed.

‘You saw my scratch yesterday, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Um... May I ask you something, Alif, if you don't mind?’ Asked Nafis.

‘Sure.’ Said Alif.

‘How did you get this scratch?’ implored Nafis.

‘Ah, well, I-I don't recall.’ Stuttered Alif.

‘Are you hiding something from us?’ Astounded Javed while he gazed at him.

Alif was startled to see Javed looking at him in that way. Alif saw his light brown eyes sparkling as the sunlight hit Javed's eyes.

‘No, why would I?’ replied Alif nervously.

‘If you want, you can share it with us.’ Said Nafis.

‘I think it is a serious matter, right?’ asked Javed curiously. Alif did not answer. There was an awkward silence where Nafis and Javed looked at Alif solemnly. Alif was a bit scared by the silence.

‘Alright, I'm telling you...’ he finally broke the silence, ‘but please don't tell this to anyone; it's a matter that should not be shared, but I believe you guys, that's why I am telling you.’

‘Yeah, there you go!’ Said Nafis happily.

Javed closed his eyes to concentrate on whatever Alif was about to tell them.

‘So, it all happened a few months ago.’ Alif started. ‘There is an old abandoned bungalow beside my house in Wari, Ranking Street. It is a two-story bungalow with a backyard and a small front yard. I heard that the bungalow was made on illegal land, so the government gave strict order that it will be locked down, but I'm not sure if the information is correct, so don't trust me, with government orders and all that...’

‘Since how long has it been locked down?’ asked Javed, whose eyes were still closed.

‘Um... maybe forty years?’

‘So, before forty years, did anybody live there?’

‘Someone probably lived there a long time ago.’

‘Hmm...continue, please.’ Finished Javed.

‘So that bungalow can be seen from our balcony, the kitchen, and bedroom. A month ago, on a Saturday at midnight, if I can recall correctly, it was the first of October. It was midnight, and I could not sleep because of the hot weather. Therefore, I picked myself up and started roaming around my room. Suddenly, something caught my eye; a light flashed through my bedroom curtains, causing them to glow, but it was dim. So I thought I should check it out as I couldn't sleep and had nothing to do, but when I pulled the curtains away, I saw that a light was being emitted from the second floor's balcony and window of the abandoned bungalow. It seemed like someone had lit candles. I saw some shadows of people on the balcony and the windows. I was somewhat shocked that it was an abandoned house that had been locked down for more than a decade, and suddenly, some people managed to get in. In my mind, there was a whole bunch of questions. I started to wonder what those people were doing in there. Were they government officials? If so, what are they doing there with only a lit candle? And why at midnight?’ Javed opened his eyes and asked how many people were there.

‘Two men were arguing about something, but I couldn't get what they were talking about,’ Answered Alif. Javed closed his eyes to concentrate again and told Alif to continue.

‘So this scenario happened again and again. This past month was creepy; every Saturday, they were arguing and sometimes on Fridays too, and every day, my interest in knowing what was happening in that bungalow grew more. Suddenly, for a week, they were not there. It was like they took a break from arguing.’ Alif smiled and continued, ‘However, surprisingly, I'm not sure about the date on the fifteenth or sixteenth of October. They argued a lot and shouted, but the shouting was muffled. Maybe they are upset about something, or maybe something went wrong. I couldn't hold my curiosity. So I

went inside the bungalow on Friday evening. The main steel gates of the bungalow were closed, so I had to climb over the gate. Dry leaves covered the yard. I had to stealthily walk up to the door not to make any noise or be seen by anyone. To my surprise, as I walked towards the door, the door was not locked! I opened the door, and I was amazed by its interior. It looked even bigger inside. The bungalow was huge. Then, in front of me was a corridor, at the end of which were stairs. I had to get to the second floor to find out what was happening. So I didn't waste any more of my time getting lost in the beauty of the interior. I stealthily proceeded to walk up to the second floor. I couldn't see anything when I reached the second floor; it was dark. I turned on my flashlight. I then found myself standing in another corridor. Suddenly, out of nowhere, someone grabbed me from behind. I tried to free myself, but he was too strong for me. I was scared and couldn't see anything because I dropped my torchlight.' As Alif told his story, Nafis had an aura of tension towards Alif, and his interest grew simultaneously. As for Javed, he did not make a single sound; his eyes were still closed as if he was sleeping the entire time.

'I started screaming for help,' Alif continued, 'The more I screamed, the more he held me tightly; I tried to free myself by kicking him, but it didn't work. I tried to kick him repeatedly, but that only made me tired, and he held me even tighter. He wasn't letting me go. I tried to free myself again, but then I felt weak. Then he tried to drag me into a room; and at that time, as he was dragging me backwards, fortunately, he tripped, and this made him let go of me, but as I was about to make a run for he tried to grab my hand and ended up scratching this part of my skin with his fingernails. Although the scratch hurt, I could still pull myself together and escape, running nowhere else but to my home.' Alif finished the story with terror on his face. Javed opened his eyes, rubbed his face with both hands and said, 'That was a terrifying experience for you, wasn't it?'

'Yes, it was indeed. Now, keep this in mind. Do not tell this to anyone, okay?' breathed Alif.

'Okay, brother.' Said both Nafis and Javed.

Suddenly, the bell rang. Nafis and Alif were getting ready to go to their classes, but Javed remained seated and had no reaction towards the bell ringing. He looked as if he was not in this world anymore.

'Hey, Javed, we have a class to attend. Let's go!' Said Nafis. After a few seconds, he gazed at Nafis and said, 'Oh! Let's go then.'

They all went to their respective classes. After the class ended, Javed asked about Alif's whereabouts. Nafis did not know anything about Alif's whereabouts, so before Javed could ask anyone else, he realised that everyone else had already emptied the school, so they both thought maybe Alif had gone home. Javed and Nafis decided to walk home as well. As soon as they got closer to Nafis's home, Nafis heard some giggling. Nafis looked around to find the giggle's source, and Nafis was caught by surprise as he found out that Javed was the one giggling. Nafis then asked Javed why he was giggling.

'I have a reason, but I won't tell you now.' answered Javed.

'Are you giggling because we got our winter vacation or something?'

'No, well, I'm happy that our winter vacation starts today, but you will know the real reason soon...Oh yeah, answer me this one thing. Will your parents get angry if they get to know that you are going outside your house around ten o'clock at night?' asked Javed.

'Well, they won't get angry if it's only for a few hours.'

'Good, so if you want to know the answer, just wait for me in front of your house tonight at ten.' Said Javed.

'Okay...bro', Nafis replied with a confused tone.

While they gossiped, they reached Nafis's house and waved goodbyes to each other as they parted ways to their homes.

It was a cold night. Cries of cold breeze could be heard. The whole city fell asleep, keeping its head in the fog. Nafis exited his home wearing warm clothes and stood in front of his house at nine fifty-five after telling his mom about tonight's plan. Even though Nafis wore the warmest clothes that he owned, he still could not resist the cold efficiently. Nafis waited for Javed's arrival and kept an eye on the time.

'Now, why did he want to meet up at this hour?' Wondered Nafis.

Suddenly, Nafis saw someone walking towards him from afar. As the light from the lamppost fell on the person's face, Nafis realised that the person was none other than Javed. Javed arrived at Nafis's house wearing black pants, a sweater, and a white fanny pack. His brown curly hair was messy as ever; the strong wind made it more cluttered. Javed then greeted his awaiting friend and asked him how he was. Nafis replied in the affirmative. Javed then pulled a torch out of his fanny pack.

'What are we going to do with this?' Asked Nafis, pointing at Javed's torch.

'You were asking me why I was giggling, right?'

'Yes, I did.' Answered Nafis and was expecting a shocking answer from Javed. Javed's response exceeded Nafis's expectations as he said- 'We are going to Wari- to investigate that bungalow.'

'Dude! You know what, let me go back in and bring a screwdriver because I think you have a screw loose in your brain!' Shrieked Nafis. 'Are you insane? Don't you remember what happened to Alif? What if the same thing happens to us?'

'Calm down, Nafis, calm down, geez, nothing will happen to us. If Allah wants.' Said Javed politely.

'You don't even have anything to protect us with, and you want us to walk in that renounced bungalow with some mean bad guys? No! We are not going in that bungalow, you understand!' Nafis replied furiously and breathlessly.

'Okay then, you stay at home. I'll go in that bungalow *alone* then.' Said Javed. He started to walk away.

'What if the one who attacks Alif attacks Javed and kills him?' thought Nafis. 'What will I do then? I don't want my only college friend to die!'

'Wait, Javed!' yelled Nafis. Javed stopped and did not turn to Nafis. 'I'm going with you. Wait for me.'

'Then let's make our way to the bungalow post-haste.' Javed turned to Nafis and said it with a smirk. Nafis sprinted towards him and started walking with him. It was a long and cold night with only a few people walking on the main road of Hut Khola. The lampposts lighted up the road. As it was a freezing environment, the roads were all foggy. Thus, the boys could not see further ahead.

'Nafis, do you know the directions to Wari, Ranking Street?' Asked Javed.

'Sure, just follow me. The place isn't far, though.' said Nafis. Javed followed Nafis. Suddenly, Nafis turned to a pitch-black road that had no lampposts.

'Are we there yet?' asked Javed.

'We are almost there.' Replied Nafis.

They both felt the appalling silence of the night, but they continued to walk.

'This place is very different; do you even know where Ranking Street is?' Asked Javed.

'Yes, I do know. Keep following me.'

They turned to another road. Nafis then entered an alley and exclaimed, 'Yes! Finally! We are here.'

Javed and Nafis stood on a quiet road surrounded by buildings. A few lit-up lamps from afar buildings' windows could be seen. No one alive but themselves was on the road. Suddenly, Javed saw an old bungalow. From a distance, the bungalow looked almost like a yellow-coloured castle whose

gigantic walls surrounded it. The night gave a haunted look to the bungalow, which Javed cannot deny. Without any doubt, Javed knew Alif was talking about this bungalow he sees now. Javed turned to Nafis and realised he was not there. Javed was worried and called for him. Javed looked around and spotted him. He was hiding behind a lamppost, completely consumed by fear.

‘Oh, brother! Calm down and pull yourself together, man!’

Nafis gave a worried look to Javed.

‘I think we've found what we've been searching for. Come and look.’ Said Javed with a deep tone.

‘Yep. This is the building.’ Said Nafis with a shaky voice.

They walked closer to the giant steel gates. They both noticed two cars parked in front of the next-door neighbour of the bungalow. Both cars belonged to someone from the next door. After reaching the steel gates, both the boys were amazed, as the gates were not locked. The lock of the gates was lying on the ground.

‘Why is it not locked?’ Asked Nafis.

‘Maybe someone is inside?’ Said Javed grimly.

‘Well, we will get to know once inside, so let's go.’ Said Nafis bravely.

The front yard was covered with dry leaves, most of which were dead. Clouds block the moonlight, so they must use their flashlights to navigate. The bungalow looked like a house straight from a big-budget horror movie. They slowly walked towards the bungalow; they found the main door open.

‘My guess was right then. Nafis, follow me into the bungalow at all times and proceed stealthily. Keep your eyes and ears open at all times.’ Whispered Javed.

‘Sir, Yes sir!’ Replied Nafis loudly.

‘Don't scream! Idiot!’ snapped Javed.

‘Sorry, sorry.’ Whispered Nafis.

They entered the bungalow and tried not to make loud noises.

‘Wow! After so long, this bungalow still has one of the best and most beautiful interiors I have ever seen!’ Said Nafis quietly to Javed.

‘No doubt about that.’

Right in front of the door, there lay a long corridor. Right beside the entrance of the corridor was a door. Javed and Nafis opened the door, expecting someone in the room, but the room turned out to be an empty bathroom. The next few doors led to a dining room, a kitchen, and another bathroom, opposite which was a small room which seemed like a storage room. They both checked all the rooms on the ground floor until they found stairs at the end of the corridor. They walked up the stairs and saw another corridor with many other rooms.

‘Maybe this is where Alif was attacked.’ whispered Nafis.

‘Precisely, so be on guard. Anything can happen.’ Continued Javed with a whisper, ‘I'm going for the first room. You go for the others.’

‘Look, we are in an abandoned bungalow. It's very dark in here. We know some people are inside this bungalow, and these people seem dangerous as well. So don't you think we should stay together instead?’ proposed Nafis

‘Are you scared, Nafis?’ asked Javed.

‘As a matter of fact, Javed, I am alright. However, if we stay together, then we will be able to protect each other from danger. If a danger falls upon you, but I am a bit far away, then both of us will fall in grave danger and won't be able to rescue each other. Like in the movies where the group splits up, and they all fall in danger?’ replied Nafis.

‘Okay. We will do it your way then.’ Said Javed.

Javed and Nafis checked all the rooms and found that only one room was unlocked with an open balcony.

'Why would they leave the door open for a room only and its balcony unlocked? And it looks like no one is in the bungalow after all.' Thought Nafis.

Javed placed his torch on the floor and pointed it to the ceiling to see the whole room. The first thing they could see was a bunch of cigarette boxes and cigarette butts lying on the floor. Javed picked up one of the cigarette boxes. The pack had no cigarettes; it was open and had "Cuban" written on the box.

'Hey, I know that cigarette. It's a new brand.' Said Nafis.

'How do you know?' asked Javed briskly.

'Well, I saw my uncle smoking it a few days ago. I saw the packet and found the name a bit funny because it reminds me of a "cube" and a "bun."' Replied Nafis with a smile. 'So I told my uncle that's a funny name for a cigarette brand. And he was like - you don't know anything about cigarettes; it's a new brand and got very popular.'

'A new brand and popular, eh?' murmured Javed. He took the torch from Nafis and removed a magnifying glass from his fanny pack. He walked to the other side of the room and sat on the floor on one knee. Javed used his magnifying glass to check it. He picked up a small, tiny ball of wool, which was not much visible. It was red. He also noticed a hair. He then stood up, and right in front of the window, he found a white powdery substance scattered below the window wall.

'What is that?' asked Nafis.

'I don't know.' As Javed told Nafis, he constantly looked through the magnifying glass to identify the substance. At last, he picked up a minimal amount of the powder using his thumb and sniffed it.

'Don't tell me it's a drug.' Exhaled Nafis.

'Let me break your enthusiasm...it's not a drug.' Said Javed, still looking at his thumb and thinking hard.

'Do you even know how to identify drugs?' asked Nafis with a dim look.

'In this world, people will tend to surprise you.'

Nafis was silent, and Javed still looked at the thumb, but at last, he walked away from the window and observed the shades of dust on the floor.

'That's it!' exclaimed Javed.

'What?'

'This cigarette company is new and very popular, and this bungalow has been ancient and abandoned for over forty years. So, no one has lived here after it was abandoned, according to Alif, I mean. So if someone smoked here, a new brand of cigarette, it means-'

'-Someone's been here recently!' interrupted Nafis with a twinkle in his eyes.

'Exactly! But more importantly, someone was sleeping here for a long quiet time, but precisely someone lived here for days...'

'What? But how do you know?' asked Nafis Surprisingly.

'Look at the wool, the hair, and if my theory is correct, that powdery stuff is dandruff. He was sleeping in that corner in front of the window beside the balcony door. Look at the shading of the dust on the corner and where we are standing. We are standing beside the balcony door, which has a thick layer of dust, making it look dark, but the corner area has a light shade of dust. He was sleeping with a blanket; oh no, there were two wool blankets. I think now you know where the small, tiny ball of wool came from. One of the blankets was for the floor, and another to cover him. The one used for the floor was also used for a pillow. You can see the curvy lines of dust right at the top below the window because the blanket was folded to make a pillow. The blanket pillow wasn't very comfortable, so he didn't sleep

well and smoked to pass his time.’ As Javed explained, he picked up a hair and continued, ‘This hair that I am holding is too short and thick to be a female’s, so the person who slept was a male!’

‘This guy...is just crazy with his deductions...it also makes sense.’ Thought Nafis.

‘Just greatly done again, so what shall we do now?’ Nafis asked, clearing his throat.

‘We find out the man who was here the whole time!’ said Javed with a smirk.

As Javed finished his sentence, he heard a noise. It was a noise of a car ignition. Nafis and Javed both stopped. They exchanged looks and were cautious. Javed could still hear the car. It was more like someone ignited the car and kept the gear neutral. The sound was quiet; the night’s environment made it louder. Javed could now hear footsteps; he quickly turned off his flashlight to not bring any unwanted attention. Both the boys were silent; they listened to the people moving on the ground floor. Javed was not sure what they were doing. Javed could have made a reckless move but didn’t; he was worried for Nafis. Javed could still hear the engine sound, and the footsteps slowly faded. Soon, there was another ignition of a car engine. They listened to the hatch of the car open and then close again. After some time, the sound faded away. It was yet again tranquil.