MR JOSHI'S WIFE

By Mythily Meher

The fourth time she fell, her glass bangle cracked against her brow, narrowly missing her eye.

The hospital's brain scans were un-illuminating. Their doctor apologized, unable to tell them anything that offered conclusion. Husband and wife returned home.

The next day, she argued with the maid and flung spices at the kitchen wall. The doctor had said these bursts of rage were symptoms of her nameless neurological degeneration. Mr Joshi did not know how to go on like this, just the two of them.

Ten days later, she was admitted to the nursing home. It is a temporary arrangement while Mr Joshi works out what to do. He tells her this. He tells their children this. He vacillates between frayed options, none of which feel like choices.

Her absence yawns through their modest flat.

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Mr Joshi visits his wife daily.

This day he brings in her good earrings: a set of small gold pagodas. He stands by smiling as a worker affixes them to her ears.

Their daughter's first visit is a blow to the senses: her mother in this scene—the bare dormitories, these bed stains, the pale little roach exploring that packet of biscuits. Her own home, emptied of its occupants daily, is not viable either. Still, she is alarmed that *her* family would fail this way.

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Before retiring, she directed an international textiles institute department: import export. Now her carers will not cut her hair without her husband's permission: institution policy. Her frustrations grow louder.

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Mr Joshi visits his wife daily.

This day, upon returning from more inconclusive neurological tests, he has taken his wife's hand to help her out of a rickshaw and is leading her back to her ward. He stops, peers, picks a bug off her nightgown, throws it to the ground and steps decisively.

At their flat, he has kept their housemaid on, should the situation revert, but for now it is needless. After all, how much mess can one man create? A plate, a glass, two cups. He washes them himself to pass the time.

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Her movements grow inarticulate. Now she infrequently walks the grounds. A worker fetches her slippers and places them by the bed. She plants her feet at the base of the slippers and one at a time, clenching her toes, she creeps each foot in, the right, then the left.

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It has been five months.

These days, their daughter seldom visits. She nurses the unfulfilled desire to have done more. Guilt, too, is a form of intimacy.

Mr Joshi—dogged by this decision, dignified in his helplessness—still visits his wife daily.