

## The Neighbour's Window

Maya reclined on the kitchen counter, looking out of the wide window in her flat. The evening light cast a gorgeous golden glow over the city, but her attention was drawn across the street to a young couple who lived in the corner apartment. Maya was fascinated by their lives, though she never voiced it. While cleaning dishes one evening, she observed them through the window. They were dancing and twirling around their living room in a carefree manner that seemed strange to her today. She hadn't danced like that in years.

She smiled at the sight, temporarily forgetting about the pile of laundry waiting for her, the unfinished work emails, and the schoolwork that her seven-year-old son, Arjun, had left scattered across the dining table.

At first, it was merely a rare glance. But Maya found herself looking more and more often. There was something wonderful about watching the young couple's lives unfold, something vibrant and free from the mundane obligations that seemed to weigh her down. They laughed frequently, those full-body laughs that made you toss your head back. They often had guests over and hosted parties that filled their flat with music and enthusiasm. They also shared peaceful moments and were often seen reclining together on their sofa, either watching TV or conversing intimately, their heads close together. On Friday evenings, they would dance in their living room to music that Maya could not hear but could only imagine. Their infectious intimacy shone brightly, bringing a smile to Maya's face as she observed from her quiet kitchen.

Raj, her husband, was in the living room, scrolling through TV channels in search of something to watch. They had been married for ten years, long enough for the first spark to grow into a steady flame—warm but not exhilarating. They loved each other, but some days it felt like they were going through the motions on autopilot. Being a mother brought her the greatest joy in life, but it was also exhausting. Some days, she barely had time to think, let alone fantasize about anything beyond the next meal or school project. The days of spontaneous park picnics, late-night drives, and stolen kisses at red lights felt like memories from a previous marriage.

She walked into the living room and sat next to Raj on the couch. "Anything interesting?" she inquired, despite already knowing the answer. Raj responded casually, without looking up from his remote. "Just the usual." They both sat quietly for a minute, the television's light illuminating their faces. Maya's thoughts shifted back to the couple across the street. She wondered if they had ever experienced a similar situation—sitting side by side yet feeling worlds apart, needing television to fill the emptiness. She had her doubts. Her phone vibrated on the coffee table, interrupting the silence. It was a message from her friend Priya inquiring about a school function next week.

Maya quickly responded, then set the phone down and looked at Raj, who was still watching television. Her focus returned to the window. Tonight, the young couple across the street was hosting a party. She watched as guests entered their flat, holding drinks, and laughter echoed across the street. Maya's heart broke, not from envy but from a longing for the spontaneity of youth. For a brief moment, she envisioned herself in that apartment, whirling in the arms of

someone who regarded her the same way that the young man did his companion. She wondered if Raj shared her feelings.

A slight tug on her shirt brought her back to reality. It was their son, Arjun, holding his toy truck. "Mommy, can we play?" Maya smiled and kissed him on the forehead. "In a minute, sweetheart." Arjun ran away, and Maya resumed her seat by the window. The celebration appeared to be gaining momentum. One of the guests, a tall, lanky man with wild hair, began dancing hilariously, and the entire room burst out laughing. Maya chuckled quietly, remembering Raj doing the same when they were younger. He was always the goofy one, making her laugh so hard that her stomach hurt. But that was years ago, before jobs, money, and children became significant burdens on their shoulders.

She sighed and moved away, but something in the reflection caught her eye. Away from the celebration, a young woman sat alone on the windowsill, her face illuminated by the dazzling city lights. Her eyes were sleepy, and she had a distant expression, as if the party was going on all around her but not for her. Maya noticed the young woman's eyes had faint lines of tiredness, and her shoulders stooped as if she were carrying an invisible weight. Maya recognized the look all too well. She had worn the same expression before when exhaustion overshadowed happiness. Suddenly, the distance between their lives didn't seem as great. She came to a realization. Perhaps others' lives were never as flawless as they appeared through a pane of glass.

Maya hesitated before taking a seat next to Raj on the couch after Arjun had gone to bed. The television was still on, but the volume was low, creating background noise in the quiet room. Raj smiled at her and crinkled his eyes at the corners. "How was your day?" he asked as he did every evening. Thinking about the young couple, their parties, their dances, and the exhaustion in the young woman's eyes, Maya replied, "Busy," before coming to a halt. "You know... we haven't spent a night alone in a long time. What if we...?" Raj looked bewildered, his brow furrowing slightly before he smirked. "You want to have a dance party or something?"

Maya grinned, feeling lighter than she had in months. "Maybe. Why not? We used to." Raj stood up and extended his hand with a cheeky bow. "Then may I have this dance?" Maya took his hand. They swayed slowly in the living room, their steps hesitant and uncertain at first, but they quickly found their beat. The weight of years appeared to lighten, if only for a minute, as they moved together in the warm light of their apartment. Maya felt warmth spread across her chest as they slowly moved together. Raj twirled her around, and their laughter blended with the faint sounds of the television. It wasn't the wild, carefree dancing of their youth, but it was uniquely theirs. And it was enough.

As they danced, she looked out the window. The young couple's party was winding down, with guests departing into the night. For a brief moment, the young woman looked out the window and locked eyes with Maya. They exchanged a faint, knowing smile. Maya realized that the lifestyles we admire from afar are rarely as flawless as they appear. She didn't need to envy other people's joy when her own life still had so many opportunities for such moments. And perhaps there was still room for joy in her own life. Tomorrow, the routine would resume. There would be dishes to clean, debts to pay, and long, exhausting days. But for tonight, Maya danced. And for now, that was more than enough.