I NOD

Mumtaz starts a fit. Kicking and screaming at the thought of losing her precious money makers. The two policemen holding her back take her outside, leaving just the American, a few other men, the American lady, and I in the room.

All at once I am flustered at the amount of movement and yelling in the happiness house. I immediately run up to the closet where Anita is hiding. Behind me is the American man and we both call to Anita in the closet, she doesn’t answer. The American runs down the hall, rips off one of Mumtaz’s bed legs and runs back with it. He rams the leg into the lock once, twice, and the door is open and we see Anita on the floor hugging her legs. She doesn’t make eye contact, we help her up and go down the stairs. As we are about to leave I run to Mumtaz’s office and grab a stash of money that should be the amount of money I earned plus extra for Anita. A minute later, we have left, the Happiness House behind us.

One or two blocks away the two Americans and the few men have stopped, I see ahead that the two policemen that grabbed Mumtaz are coming toward us. I wonder what they have done to Mumtaz. I feel foolish and not proud of thinking this but I hope they have done something to make her suffer the way she has made all us girls suffer.

I recognize some of these streets from my journey here with uncle husband. The group of us stop walking all of a sudden and the American turns to me. He says in my language “Lakshmi, now is the time to make your decision. Would you like to come to the safe house with us or go back to your family in Nepal? I will send one of these policemen with you if you wish to go back.” I know immediately what I want. I nod. It’s been far too long, I miss my Ama, the fresh mountain air, my baby brother, and my goat Tali. I miss going to school, watching Krishna (the boy with the sleepy cat eyes) at work, I miss the festival every year where Ama bought me a sweet cake and told me to be just like the other kids.

What I am looking forward to; seeing my Ama’s beautiful face as I walk in our small hut high on the mountain. What I will do; hug Ama, cry in her arms, and tell her that we will no longer suffer during the monsoon because we will have a tin roof, the ultimate symbol of wealth

So I nod and answer the American with one of the few lines I know, “I am from Nepal”, and say in my language “I wish to go back”