

# Man, Ending

*by* Ajay Nair

The man had decided that this was going to be his last day. He'd find out one final thing and he'd be done. He had spent the last few years of his life unwinding things that had been wound and untying knots that had been tied. He had started doing this the moment he realised that there was no point to doing anything, because once you started with something, it just twisted and turned till every little bit of it was covered with thorns and needles, and he could do nothing to prevent being pricked by them, and when he would bleed the thing would still be there, incomplete and undone, staring balefully at him till he collapsed back with exhaustion, and still the thing would just sit there, unmoving, a pile of unsteady stones that he had to set right, but he just did not know how, and when he went on to another thing, every other thing left undone would follow him with merciless intensity, shouting into his ear in their strange whining language which had no soft vowels. So one by one, he took apart everything that he did — his education, his career, his love, his marriage till his life was empty of its ungrateful furniture and he could just jump out of its window.

To find out this one last thing, he was walking down the street looking at houses along both its sides. He was not a tall man, or even a big man. But he had a lazy presence about him - as if he could amount to something if he really tried, but he could not be bothered just yet. There was nothing superfluous about the way he was noting the facades of the houses; it was a tight, economical, efficient survey that was a fine mesh through which nothing could slip by.

The street itself was unremarkable. It was sleepy and dull and it threatened to dissipate away in the afternoon heat. The houses were common and insubstantial and betrayed a lack of purpose. It was

only the intensity of the man striding through it that kept it propped up after some fashion of physical reality.

The man was looking for a particular shade of green. It had haunted him all his life; every time he saw something that was coloured green, or a shade of it, he was reminded of this original, vital green; and every time he saw something that was not green, he was reminded of it too. It was a mossy, powdery green that reeked of a particular kind of unpleasantness that he both craved for and was repulsed by. It was the colour of a house on this street, the street where he grew up, the street of an unhappy childhood, and he desperately needed to find it.

In the green house of his memories, a little girl had lived. She had been the same age as he, but she had blue eyes and a happy, tinkling laughter and so he had always been older and sadder than her. He had wanted to play with her and had asked her several times and she had tossed her hair this way and that, and this was beautiful golden hair, as if the rays of the morning sun had been distilled by the complex apparatus of beauty and generously sprayed on her hair, the hair of the blue eyed girl in the green house. She had always refused him.

When he had turned six, he had worn a new shirt with violet buttons and shiny black boots that thudded echoingly on the gravel of the street when he walked, and he had gone to her and pulled her to him, hurting her wrists when he did so, and asked her why she refused to play with him.

'Because you are an ugly boy'

From that day on, he had known the truth and nothing could change it, not all the studying and working hard, not all the brass and gold medals he won for running fast, not all the scholarships named after dead people, not all the girls with their breathy voices

and hot, sultry kisses, not all the piles of money poured onto his lap for selling bonds, not his three children with their dreamy eyes and soft, warm bodies, not his wife who loved him with her hands and words. Because he was always an ugly boy.

Now he just needed to find that girl from the green house again and ask her one last time just to make sure that he had not got it all wrong all his life, whether she thought that he was an ugly boy still, because if he wasn't, maybe there was something to be saved yet from the wreck of his wasted life. But all the houses had been painted over, and the green-coloured house and its blue-eyed girl only existed in his memories and though he walked the street a hundred times, he could not find her. And every time he reached the end of the street which opened out to a fork, he felt the evening air get tighter around him, coddling him in its cold compactness, and making his hands and his feet and his ears go red. He could not go on, and he could not stop without finding that girl from back when he still had hope, so he just sat down there at the crook of the fork till a truck bearing milk ran him over.

