



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

SONG THAT SPEAKS HALF TRUTH

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

Sing me a song of merrier times.
 Efface the crooks and all their crimes.
 With words of the past of a war-torn child
 Before being orphaned, vilely exiled.
 Indite for me words for lusher of green
 A city of dreams, both chaste and clean.
 Tune this song about the brave martyr,
 Died for his country, without doubt or fear.
 Sing me this song that speaks half-truth.
 Briefly allow my battle wounds to soothe.
 I'll imbibe this tune and ignore my scars,
 For tomorrow I must awaken and face my wars.

SPACE

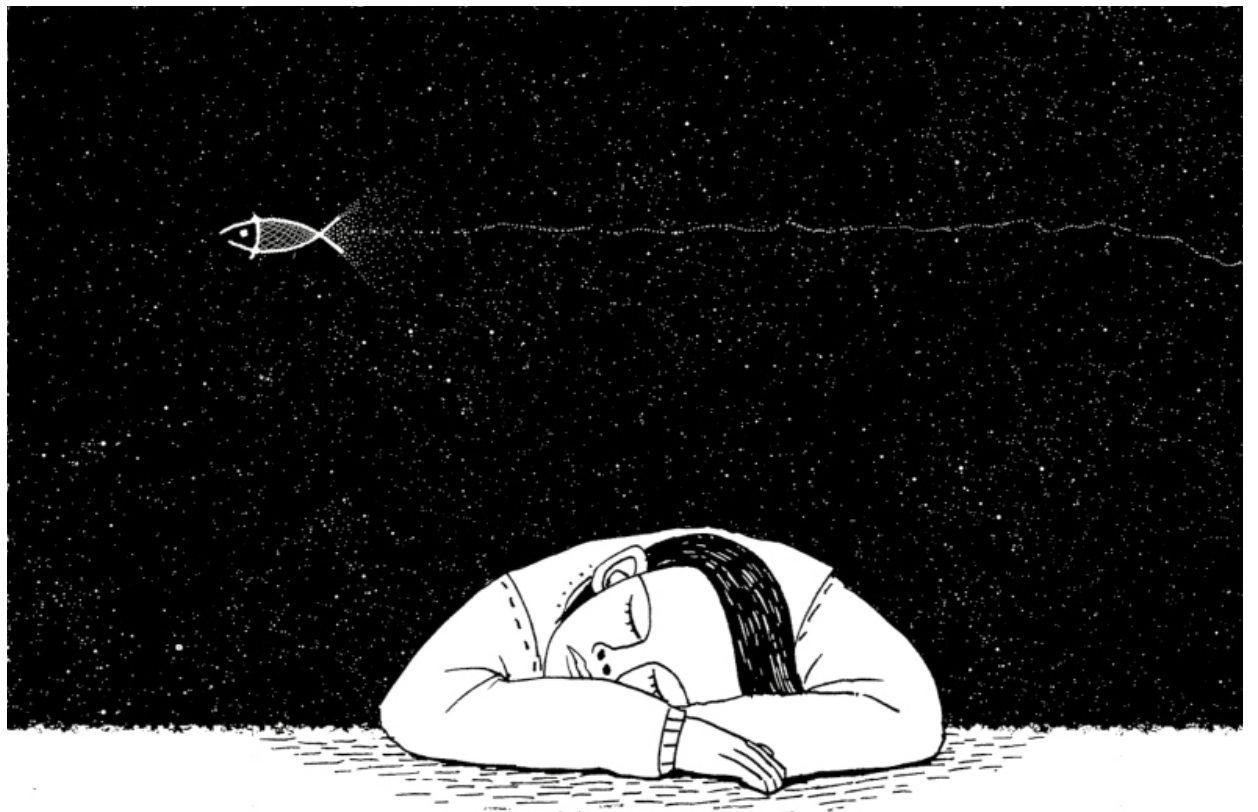
MASHAEKH HASSAN

Opening her eyes doesn't make a difference, the space is pitch-black. Unsure if she overslept, she looked around, noting the distinguishable shades of the lingering darkness. Estranged by familiar faces, Esha, in this new habitat of hers, wants to cling to the tranquillity she's still in search of. Among other things, Esha longed for her own space. She has it now. A space where she feels comfortable, albeit a cramped, dark, and sort of a personalised one. As nobody judges her current lifestyle and neither does anyone start an unwarranted lecture out of the blue, this place feels like no less than a sanctuary.

As uncomfortable as the place is, it provides her with a safe distance from people she wants to avoid. To her knowledge, she can't leave. Luckily, she doesn't want to. At least, so far, the thought hasn't crossed her mind. She is quite oblivious regarding how time works here. This place is remotely analogous to a labyrinth, yet capable of making one feel lost. A place she wants to be in for a period even unbeknownst to her, despite the sprinkled problems.

I'm never going back, she often reminds herself. Sometimes in an enthusiastic tone as if she's got other viable options, and less often than that in a suppressed one. Amidst all these incidents, something about this place soothes her. Without being sheltered from reality, here was where she felt protected. Perhaps because of the absence of judgmental eyes around her or the presence of agency she has always longed for, she doesn't know exactly why but she likes the place.

There was nothing about the darkness like a promise of dawn, but surrounded by an ambience that comforts her. So, she sleeps. She wakes up just to sleep again. She sleeps to forget frustration she can't help embracing for losing the track of time. She sleeps to make up for many sleepless nights, for the nights she cried to feel better, for each night which felt like an eternity. But she doesn't want them to pass as she isn't looking forward to a new day. Because a new day pushes her to her old routine, to the old people who fill up her emptied chest with more reasons to make her spend another night crying. Not experiencing the happiness that she clearly deserves isn't something that makes her sad nowadays, it's just the sleepless nights. She's exhausted. She wants sleep. In the



past, happiness was a luxury she rarely felt, whereas sleep felt like a necessity. Somehow throughout her past she had been deprived of both.

Most of the people who caused that, feel guilty now. Others have successfully blanketed the thoughts after disparate and desperate attempts. The ones with guilt often come near Esha's current vicinity to express their guilt. True to her constructed nature and current forcedness to conform to the reality, Esha never responds. The silence makes it easier for those people to convey their thoughts more expressively. It's easier to keep blabbering while being assured that the other party has nothing to offer them but silence. Esha listens to them when she isn't sleeping. Sometimes her sleep is interrupted by their voices. She

cannot interrupt in return. She doesn't want to. Listening to people asking for forgiveness makes her angry. "Why now?" she asks. To her, such cry for forgiveness seems like a task solely done for getting rid of the weight of their own guilt.

One of the reasons Esha likes this place is that at least she doesn't have to see their faces regularly like she had to when she wasn't in this grave. Undoubtedly, they wouldn't expect Esha to respond. Although listening to such shallow cries gets annoying at times, it still doesn't outshine the positive aspects. It's like a new life within a single life while being dead. That's no less than a new birth to her.

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