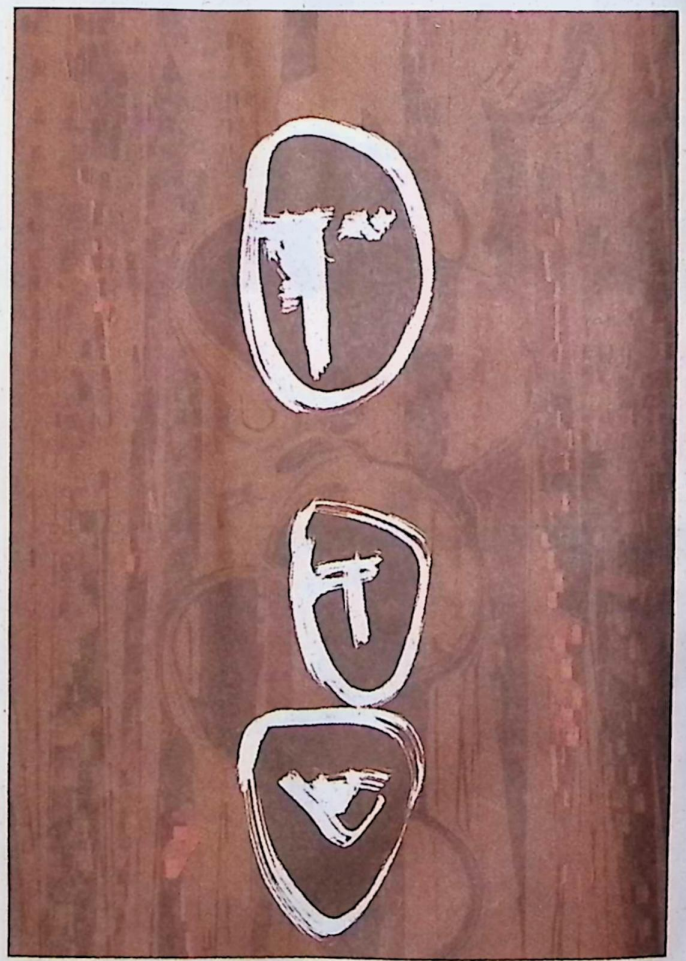
In My Dreams

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It has been a harsh, hot October in Dhaka since I landed. In my dreams, a soft and juicy morning, wrapped in rain-swollen breeze, unfolds. Then I sit up in bed, wide-awake, and find that it is all true. The air-conditioning is turned off, as is the fan, yet I feel cool enough to huddle under a quilt because, a soft and juicy morning has indeed unfolded, with the rain-swollen breeze rolling in like tide through the sliding glass panels of my bedroom, opening onto the Gulshan lake.

With dream-like certainty I can sense the drizzle of rain, wrinkling the surface of the water. There is a dank smell, but never mind. At least, the rains have arrived, and with it a day that promises to be cool and fresh.

I also grow wiser to the disadvantages of a room unprotected by the hum of air-conditioning. The cool, damp (and sometimes dank) breeze blowing through the bedroom is mostly delightful but creates some challenges. Apart from micro-phonic assaults, my ears are assailed by the entire human population across the lake, all clearing their throats with hacking and spitting sounds at the same time; the chorus of scolding crows; the din of irate car horns; the arrhythmic hammering in some construction site close-by; and cheerful human voices calling out friendly lines like, "*Oyee! Shunos na*?"

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The voices from the lake float into my room in a steady ebb and flow as I sit tapping at my computer. Outside my window panes, the sky has momentarily pulled in the fishnet of rain. I hear the slap of green waters on gliding boats, and dream of ebony fishermen in flame coloured shirts or *lungis* hauling nets of sliver fish, their reflection in the water as of dark trunks of *krishnochura* trees with vermillion flowers and twinkling stars blooming under water. Then I walk outside to my balcony and find that it is all true.

A boat is indeed drifting across the lake under my balcony, with the sun-toasted men aboard casting their nets and pulling in shoals of fish, while a group of men standing on the shore with hitched up *lungis* are watching and cheering them on.

I am appalled.

The banks of the lake are littered with trash, as are the shallow waters at the edge. And I know that the water of the lake is where the sewage from the apartments around it, such as my own, is dumped. Now I try to imagine the silvery harvest from these contaminated waters. My imagination shudders and fails.

Instead, I dream that the water of the lake has been purified, and the trash from the banks and from the streets around me, cleared. But I know that my dream will not be answered. I know this because I realise that I am dreaming the wrong dream, praying for the wrong things. What I need to imagine and pray for is that we, the citizens of this city and country, take upon ourselves the responsibility of ensuring that our rubbish is properly disposed and our water bodies are purified.

In this context, I must recount a strange sight that has been haunting me for a while in Rome. My Roman house overlooks a main street where every day a garbage truck comes and empties the covered rubbish bins. Still the streets often look less than clean, with the odd cigarette butts, bits of paper, or heaps of pine needles mixed with dead leaves, empty plastic bottles or food wrappers. All this is naturally considered disgraceful by us, the inhabitants of the locality, who did not create the litter on these sidewalks. We click our tongues in disgust and wait patiently for the once- a- month street cleaners to come and sweep and