Chronicles of a College Student: The Glass Bottle

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I have five mosquito bites randomly dispersed on me including one right on my lifeline: a palmist could probably misinterpret it as a foreboding event but I know that this "red doom" is just an itchy little bump that tells me I have arrived in Bangladesh (in addition to my hair which is a scary mass of frizz). I am here to spend my vacation with my grandparents and even though, I am willfully and happily here, I must admit (very shamefully) that there was one thing that I was not excited about: my lack of freedom. (I hate to admit it because it makes me seem like a wailing, spoiled Westernized brat, which is the type of person that I dislike and try especially hard not to be. But I can't help myself! I really, really do like my freedom.)

This freedom is a horrible addiction once you get introduced to it. After that, any time you find yourself in even two degrees of restraint, your lungs begin to collapse, the reality of suffocation sets in and you start to beat against the glass bottle you find you have been put into. It is frightening to be able to see this spacious world outside where the oxygen to sustain you swirls around, mockingly, as you die at a leisurely pace, sealed in your glass bottle, poisoned by your own air.

Perhaps my description is dramatic but those who have hungered for freedom understand the glass bottle.

The itchy bump on my palm takes awhile to become small, dark and hard. Instead of feeling the normal hatred for the nasty brute that did this to me, I consider that maybe the bump is a message from the Higher Powers through Nature. When the mosquito bit on my lifeline, it knew before I did, that my survival in Bangladesh this summer would be a struggle. The "red doom" meant that my grandparents would cast an overprotective mantra on me and trap me like a genie in a glass bottle. I couldn't go out whenever, wherever, and with whomever because they were afraid I would get hijacked since that is what *Bengalis* do in their free time to people from abroad. I admit, as I cringe in embarrassment, that they even provided a baby-sitter in the form of my grandma's cousin, Bela Nanu. Of course, I adore Bela Nanu but imagine taking this petite, 4' 9" elderly lady everywhere as my bodyguard. It did occur to me (very, very briefly) that I could possibly feed her some sleeping medicine and then, as soon as she would pass out, I could race to my liberation. But that's not my style. Besides, what if my plan goes askew and she, God forbid, passes out forever? Then, I'll be wearing a white *sari* like a proper female convict and my glass bottle will be a permanent encasement of stone blocks and rods of steel. From that point on, I can only imagine what freedom used to be like.

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Leaving this morbid topic aside and continuing with my baby-sitter dilemma, I had to take Bela Nanu *everywhere* from the shopping center, to my cousin's house, and even to my internship interview. In the latter, new thresholds to my awkwardness were set when my first interviewer discreetly asked who she was, why she was accompanying me, and before I could explain, dear Bela Nanu, forgive her heart, told him that she was my chaperone. I felt very similar to a chimp on a leash. He offered us coffee, she drank hers, I wanted to die but instead answered more questions, we went home, and two weeks later I got my internship notice. Other than my humiliation, everything went well.

But sick of being baby-sat, I thought to myself, the glass bottle is glass. If I strike it hard, it should crack. So I had a bit of a tiff with my grandparents and even then, I hated myself for arguing with them and seeming like that wailing, spoiled Westernized brat. In my anger, I went to the only place I could think of in Chittagong that could make me happy in this time of distress: Lucy's Beauty Parlour. Once again, Bela Nanu accompanied me, but I was too tired and frustrated to rebel some more. Feeling guilty about the confrontation with my grandparents, I decided to punish myself by inflicting pain through waxing. When I had enough, I took pity on me and decided to treat myself to a rejuvenating face pack. As the ladies around me pulled, slathered and massaged, I searched for a way out of the glass bottle without breaking it into shards.

With the smell of sandalwood emanating from my face, I reminisced of the time I had met *freedom*.

Freedom and I first got acquainted when I left home for college. Although I instantly loved her, I understood why my parents had previously regulated how much of her I was able to see.