

FICTION

Djed

SABRINE BINTE MASUD

THE container didn't have any wheels. It stood in the middle of the busy street. It was square, big and solid. It had a continuation to it that reverberated endlessness. It occupied the senses indomitably. It impaired visual acuity. It created shadows long and peaceful. It remained in its silence. Eventually it caused an abrupt monotony. The traffic was languid at the beginning. As long as it could, the traffic liquidly trickled past the narrow passages its mass had created on both sides. The traffic's eyes are not used to peripheral discrimination. It only recognizes the back of the vehicle that made past it for the mad dash of the red, orange and green. The traffic only functions by reclaiming every inch that has been offered by the vehicle that got away. Yet there came a time when the traffic could no longer move - the cars, the buses, the rickshaws, the motorbikes, the pedestrians. At first, they were trickling past one by one next to the wheel-less container, taking it as a nonnegotiable outcome of the city. But soon someone lost patience and tried to pass as two breaking the line. That created a clog. So there was this halt and a silence hung over this sudden disruption in the movement. The solid metal was no longer avoidable. Its steely body was resonating cold mass and calm. The container was missing a driver. It had the keys hanging in the ignition. It became a problem that demanded immediate answer., stoically.

The silence reigned for a while. Eventually the traffic unhinged. The mass regained its individual limbs due to a barrier created by the container's improbable presence. Though it took time but those who made up the front facing the metallic cork recognized the thing was actually a vehicle that was missing wheels. Heads popped out of windows. Men emerged out of their interrupted destination. One or two wondered aloud, "Who was driving this thing?" Only those who were ahead of the halting traffic, only those who were in the shade of the metallic block looming overhead, asked. The rest, still sealed by the insignia of habit, retained their contentment, tongues lolling, drooping. Then there was a man whose car was spooning the container almost to a degree that required immediate separation. He is the one, who had faith rather than resignation that the solid mass would move on its own. His pants were held up by a belt coming up to his middle. He wore a polo shirt. He didn't have any designer shades that ought to match his black Harrier. Rather he had a bald spot that twinkled with sweat. He wore sandals caked in mud. Obviously he wasn't a chauffeur who knew better to dress to match the car. He walked towards the container and the metallic block on top of the wheel-less cart. The wind picked up. It



moved the lull that was the silence few seconds ago. A girl's orna flapped with it, danced around red, blue and white.

The dust lay silent like the crowd, stuck and bemused. The rain, that had fallen some time or the other, had robbed it of its flight. The traffic stretched endlessly shivering with the late afternoon's rising heat. Even the children waited for the initiation, their ears cocked. The man turned around facing the crowd with his back to the metal box. He looked at the vehicles sitting posed, facing him-- grimace of a sepulcher metropolis. The street lay hemmed in by twinkling mass of windows on both sides as the world stepped on the heart of Shaista Khan's city. The man, of the spooning black Harrier, took a minute. He couldn't see beyond the first row of the traffic. So he stood under the shadow of the container. Slowly one by one the occupants of the vehicles of the first row dislodged. They all faced the man and the metal box that has its shadow extended over him. The wind didn't carry dust, it might have carried pollens. It was the end of monsoon. It was the beginning of another kind of blister. The man sniffed and then sneezed. The first row uttered together, "bless you!" The voices couldn't travel much. The steel body of the carrier blocked the way. The sound was amplified by it, as it bounced back from the metal frame. The man with his back to the container, looked back, and then looked ahead. He spoke, "We need to move this". The crowd lumbered on. The wind again picked up the girl's orna, now turned purple gray and almost cerulean with the setting light. The sun grasped the collar of the looming shadows of the shopping malls and the corporate heights, forcing them to bend. Only the container remained untouched, its shadow frigid, its comparative smaller height limiting the setting orbs stretch, timidly.

The man again sneezed. The

crowd amplified louder "Bless you!" Those who stood, sat, hunched behind the first row couldn't see the man or hear the sneeze but felt the wave of oncoming words. This time, they rose to their feet and lent their voice, not knowing the sneezer. The words now had an echo coming from the opposite direction of the metallic form. It was amplified and thrown back by an organic mass "Bless You", cried a higher pitch. The man looked up. There were tiny dots of blood glistening on his finger tips. He had wiped his nose after the sneeze. He spread the blood around with his thumb and index, absent-mindedly. He then wiped it on his pants seat. He said, "If we all push together we can move it." the crowd looked on. The man, who stood in the shadow of the metal box, stared with no flicker of emotion. Only his bald spot glistened. The Harrier with its tip snagging up the container's rear made him shuffle his weight from one foot to the other.

A boy holding his mother's finger pointed to the man and said "blood". Another stepped from the side, moved forward and lent the man standing in the shadow of the metal box a hand so that he could stand up on the bonnet of his car. He took a deep breath as his height increased and he had a stretching view of the snaking traffic. The man once again spoke, "if we push together we can move this." The first row fidgeted. The words grasping on to the wind tips due to the freedom of elevated space stretched further. Suddenly there was an abrupt burst of energy reaching out for the man standing in the metallic shadow. It came from the traffic starting from the second row and continued onwards. They growled, "Bless you!" The first row turned their head in utter disbelief. Did these people just echo words that were fruitless? There was a disgruntled, unified slouching of their shoulders. They physically captioned the word "Morons!"

The boy holding the mother's

finger once again tugged at his adult supervisor. He wanted to get the message across. He had seen blood. He was ignored as his height was closer to the ground.

To give it one more shot, the man who had his back turned to the metallic body of the container tried to rephrase "Let's put our palm on the surface and push hard. It will move." His voice quivered a notch. He shifted a glance towards the nose of the Harrier that almost sniffed the rear of the container, incredulously. At this time the girl with onyx eyes and twilight orna almost raised her hands and mouthed the words, "But what about the wheels?" But she was drowned as a massive voice echoed from almost all the stretches of the traffic, "BLESS YOU!" By now the first row was livid! They couldn't believe that the people they could only notice when they turned their head couldn't distinguish between a sneeze and a proposition! So they each individually came to the same decision at once and stepped forward to put palms on the surface of the container and push.

The man, with sweat trickling from his bald patch, recognized the resolve on the faces of the first row although he failed to notice the upturned noses, as if they were sniffing for a dead dog. The girl with the twilight orna, who stood aloof, noticed the separation of the first row from the rest and rolled her eyes in recognition. The number wasn't enough. It would never move without the wheels.

The rest who had only learned two words that came to them at the beginning of the clog remained passive. They waited for the single figure standing on an elevated something (from their spot they couldn't distinguish the bonnet) to mouth words so that once again they could chant in unison "Bless you!" Of course they were oblivious to the derivative shrug of the unified shoulders of the first row who had decided that the others had originated from monkeys.

Thus the first row circled the massive metallic block, minus the wheels, placed their palms on its cool and peaceful body and decided to push in cue. And they waited...and waited. The boy, whose mother didn't move to join the cluster of palms because she was holding a tiny finger, was beseeching once again. The boy said, "Ma, blood." The girl with the onyx eyes and a dark orna was the only one who heard the boy. She looked up at the man's face who was standing on the bonnet and had scrunched up his brows because the rear of the container had almost added a dent on the tip of his Harrier. She couldn't see anything as the sun had set long ago and the shadow of the container had dispersed.

They waited.

The rest waited.

The monkeys lamented the opposable thumbs.

Then came the long awaiting word:

"Push" said the man.

"Blood" said the boy.

"No wheels" whispered the girl. "BLESS YOU!" roared the rest. "Pffffittt", farted the deceitful steel block.

The metallic mass deflated. It hunched back within its core. The massive restraint to the vision was removed as air was sucked out from within. The bulbous plastic that was giving off the metallic sheen a moment ago fell back within its frame. The indomitable will of the giant was omitted in one stroke. All that remained was the transporter with its key hanging in the ignition.

The man standing on top of the bonnet whistled. He seems to have forgotten to dislodge from his vantage point and lend a hand. But it seemed that the massive deflation of the once metallic cargo, now a plastic mass, had decreased the pressure on the tip of his harrier's nose substantially. The dent was not that big.

"BLESS YOU!" roared the others. They had heard him whistle. The first row was glaring at the passive lot. How could they not see what just happened? The problem was still at large. The container was waiting stoically; only the deceitful block of metal, which actually was a giant balloon in the shape of a metal body, was now a mass of airless rubber.

The man came to the rescue. "Ok now, let's try to push the transporter itself rather than its cargo", he winced. "BLESS YOU!" roared the air. The first row grumbled and put their palms on the body of the transporter and gave it a massive shove.

The others saw the shoulders of the people surrounding the cargo hunch from left to right. Not even the wind moved. All they were able to create were mighty footprints on the caked dust. They tried again. The girl in the midnight blue orna cocked an eye brow. The boy sucked

his thumb.

The man waited. The first row stopped their efforts and stared back at him. The man couldn't understand. Why weren't they pushing? "Well?" said the man. "Bless you!" said the background. The first row cowed in defeat. Their strength alone wasn't enough. There was the lull once again. Nothing moved.

"How do you suppose to move something that doesn't have wheels?" asked the girl at last. Her voice no longer drowned. The man jerked a little. The girl had onyx eyes. The orna danced in midnight blue. He said, "Wheels?" "Bless YOU!" screamed the potent force. Slowly a smirk rose at the end of the lips of the man with the bald patch and pants held by a belt in the middle. "Why, by using that!?" he pointed to the mass standing away from the container who once again doggedly roared the two words.

Thus came a mighty shove that included numerous palms and adequate shoulders. At first the first row cringed for a bit to stand so close to the others who they decided have descended from the monkeys. But they relented when the man with the black Harrier spooning the container wiped another drop of blood from his nose. The crimson dot added a promise that sealed the fate of the transporter. So they pushed and they shoved. Eventually the container moved and almost made a path.

"Yes!!" yelled the man.

"Bless.ss.. you!" huffed the tiered mass.

His harrier's nose was free. The indomitable will of the rear was removed.

The first row had dislodged from the shoving a while ago when they had discovered that no one objected if they didn't push.

"Ehm..." coughed the girl with the onyx eyes and a twilight orna. The dawn was creeping in on them. Everyone turned at her. She raised a finger and pointed at the space from where they had pushed the container without the wheel and created a path. They looked back at the end of her finger in unison.

"Now how do you propose we continue with our journey?" her index wriggled at the massive crater that has been created by the gnawing of the metals of the wheel-less transporter. It had left gauging lines like that of a clawing beast chafing the surface of the once pristine street, now left shredded to pieces. They all looked down at their feet and wondered if they were wearing the right kind of footwear to resume their long trek home.

The monkeys never mourn the opposable thumbs and have learned to use a stick to maneuver tight spots.

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POETRY

TWO POEMS BY SEEMA NUSRAT AMIN

Roof

Well I had to die to live again. And it was strange to die.

This "Good-morning" i've been waiting for from the slowly drawn curtains, of a commoner, friend.

The roof at pre-Assor.

and later I could see, down the alley (but from here A dome higher than the ship-like windows of unfinished buildings, its flag and its steep rising stairs) my boy in long robes, getting admonished... my six year old nightingale, whose smile is ravishing welcome, weeps at the doors of his patriarch Baba Coothubag.

the river Thames and my Barcelona courtyard...bursting in the blood-blue

o level four hundred, eyes.

Seven up and downs of ragged buildings straight, gorgeous

is this a plane, are these heights? Am I taken again

Before Ajan
I stroke the vast memory of the world:
mine,
histories are thin antennae.

I sense the ghost walking past..our eyes unmeet as the time, succeeds.

I have often accosted these pavements. Sure of my heart, this protruding stride.

God's eyes rise in an ascent
the lover returns as feathers in the morne when I stop, you start

Are these the rules are ther any?

I walk a thin line love and sickness

I catch the bolstered krishnachura flame of your own world striking the ship on the mast of heralds

Pauses the dynamite, crescendo of unhidden stars.

silken clouds balk at flesh...a scarecrow of me, hanging on the clothelines gone, Gone. gone at last, alive.

we are we who we think we are not

through the pale of the air from an open window:

mishor namaj
I can not be in the dark green wet world.

Four cold birds, shiver like raindrops touching the leaves

I wince at the ocean of colors, dispersed in a grey
Of twilight newer than Mecca

Serums, hiccups, all are beside themselves
The thin-worn arbortum
The dull ship in your wake

Passing through storm, to love you.
And then again,

In the empty brushes of the open gales
Inside a house I can not live in

Breathing the gallant deaths
Of the ethereal sea...against dark knives, Phallus

Medea in silence, spliced
Between his. And her. Life.