

Dreaming Of Reality

MASTURA TASNIM

First, they grabbed her long hair. ("Long hair," her mother said while she brushing it out, "My daughter shall have the longest hair of all, I told them." She beamed. "And look it's true!" Turna blushed. "Mom you've been pouring oil down it since forever and I haven't seen a scissor in ages. Isn't it about time I got a haircut?" "Nonsense, you're beautiful." She scoffed.) They took hold of her long hair and pulled her along with it, like a dog on a leash. Her hair was soft but strong and it pulled at the roots and even the slightest jerk sent her reeling. She grit her teeth and tried to pull away.

The men surrounded her on all sides, but oddly, she couldn't see a single face. Amidst the blur of colours and shapes, all she saw were black eyes and sharp teeth. All she heard was laughter. "*Dekh dekh*, she's wearing a *teep* as well, *ki dhong!*" ("*Ki dhong*, baba, I don't wear *teep* anymore," she protested as her father handed her the packet of colourful dots. He bought them from the park during his morning walk -- *boishakhi mela* everywhere. "But you used to love them!" "Yes, when I was like six." "Well you could be sixty and still be my little girl," he looked at her sternly. She centred the *teep* on her forehead and sighed. He smiled.)

They played with her, pushing her against each other, watching her squirm to be free only to be shoved into another pair of questing, pinching, clawing hands, while the vuvuzelas blared from all sides, masking her screams and their cackle. She fell face first on the gravel, her broken bangles cutting into her wrist, drawing blood. As they yanked her up by the *anchol*, the safety pins fell off, baring her blouse. She pulled at the cloth to cover herself, tears and cries and ragged breath all in one, but they wouldn't let go of her *sharee*. ("So yellow. So pretty and yellow," she grinned at her reflection in the mirror. "Your face ruins everything," her brother snickered from the side. She glowered at him before looking down at the price tag, and then nodded her head. "You're right this doesn't suit me." As she was placing it back on the rack, he reached over

and rapped his knuckles across her head. "Go take that to the counter." "*Bhaia*, it's more than double your budget, I can't..." "You can and you will," he shooed her along. "And besides, clowns look best in yellow.")

"Ouff pink lips, such a sexy *maal*," a man yelled from the side. Her *sharee* was off, trailing in the dirt with the men. She felt hands everywhere and anywhere. Sticky hands brushed her face. "Please, please!" ("Please take me with you." Dadi wouldn't budge, "It's not the place for you, loud and crowded

tried, she could still smell the hay. It was a pity that it was the first day she was attacked.

Two boys as old as her brother found her roaming through the grain stacks and led her into a dark thicket with the promise of returning her to her grandmother. She was a lost child, scared and crying, when they took off their clothes and tried to rip off hers. A woman stumbled on them on her way home and her eyes widened with fury. She beat them bloody with a cane, scooped up Turna in her arms and delivered her home hours after

She punched and kicked and scratched at anything that came near, not caring about her state of undress anymore. The tears ran hot and her hair swung wildly. It was nearing sunset, the world grew darker and Turna slowly lost all sense of time and space, locked in a never-ending torment. "Help me..." She croaked. "Somebody help me..."

She woke up to the sound of her creaky ceiling fan. The lights were off and for a moment she almost cried out in panic. It was just a nightmare, she breathed. Her cuts and bruises said otherwise.

Her family was supportive. Her father brought several physicians home, though they all said the same thing, "Lots of rest and fluids. It's lucky she didn't fall on her head." Yes, very lucky. Her mother prayed by her ear, and held Turna close, hoping to comfort her when she cried. Turna didn't. She didn't talk much either. In fact, she had no reactions for a while. One of the exceptions to this was when one of her younger cousins brought over a vuvuzela. Turna ran out of her house and into the streets. When her brother found her she was standing on the pavement, in the middle of a crowd, screaming – her eyes closed, her body shaking in convulsions.

They consulted a psychiatrist. All the while the TV was turned off. And yet snippets of news filtered through to Turna: a group of students had found her lying unconscious in the middle of a gang of men and rescued her, her cousins and friends had begged forgiveness, she was one of nearly twenty women who were sexually assaulted that day, there were protests nearly every day, the authorities were playing the blame game on each other, the auntie next door thought Turna's lack of *hijab* had led her astray.

She didn't care. She flinched at sudden touches, ate nothing and lay in her bed, trying to block the world out.

On April 14, 2015, twenty or so women and girls, from ages ten to thirty, were subject to vicious sexual assault. This fictional account may or may not resemble the unspeakable horrors they faced.

like that." It was the first day of the harvest and the village home was alive with the colours and sounds of people rejoicing a secure future. Dadi was heading out to the main fields where the paddy was gathered before being sent away to the refinery, and Turna, a city-bred 9-year-old, couldn't bear to miss the festivities. "If you don't take me, I won't speak to you. Ever again." Dadi looked down in amusement, and gave in.

The fields were golden that day, bathed in the last rays of sunshine and speckled with farmers hard at work. The scene was etched into her eye lids, and sometimes, if she really

sunset. Her family never talked about it, hoping she would forget.)

She couldn't forget, and couldn't understand. This is not a quiet field, this is not an alley, she thought frantically. While the blare of vuvuzelas muffled her cries for help, a distant part of her brain couldn't help but notice the people outside the circle of her attackers. Why had they made no move? This was TSC, the hub of Dhaka, with thousands of people milling about seeing her, if not hearing her. Her friends were somewhere in that throng, along with one of her cousins. Where was everyone, what was taking so long?

