

UNDER THE TABLE

SHREYOSI ENDOW

"Stop rocking my armchair, Minu!"

Through the jingle of wind chimes and rattle of cutlery, I heard Mai croak. I wasn't rocking her armchair. I wasn't even in the same room.

"I'm not rocking your armchair, Mai!" I screamed. I didn't know why I screamed, but when the ground beneath your feet starts to sway like a drunken dancer, and it's not because you didn't sleep well the previous night, you don't stay in your senses.

Screams, cries, chaos -- they thickened the air in a matter of a second. I shuffled across the kitchen to where Mai was, past the table and the chairs which were clattering against each other like an old woman's teeth on winter mornings. Her face had turned dangerously pale, and as soon as I felt me grab her hand, she

wrapped her arms around me. "Under the table!" she screamed in her jagged voice.

"No, Mai, we have to leave," I tried pulling her towards the door, but she wouldn't move.

"Under the table." I heard her voice break. We dashed towards the wooden table, the ceiling fan above creaking as it went round and round in irregular ellipses. As we crawled underneath, Mai pulled me closer. I could hear her heart beat through the thin fabric of her cotton blouse. "Save my child, my lord. Save my child," she whispered and for the first time in my life, I saw a teardrop trickle down her wrinkled cheeks. I had grown to believe that this woman was invincible and whatever was happening had made her cry.

I could hear footsteps thudding down the wooden steps outside. Someone banged against our door, "Get out of

there, Minu! Get out!"

I heard my neighbours yell. "Mai," I whimpered. I had started bawling now, but she wouldn't let me go. "No, stay," Mai screamed. "It's safe here. We'll be able to survive this if we stay here." Drop, cover and hold on -- I remember how they taught us all these in school. I wondered if I could ever go to school again.

It was heart-wrenching watching everything that mattered to me, everything that we had crumble around us. We didn't own much. What did we have but this wooden house overlooking the mountains, where I would wake up every morning to the sound of temple bells and the aroma of freshly baked bread that would drift in through the windows from the bakery across the street? Who else did I have but Mai? And who else did this blind woman, who could not even walk one step without my help, have but me?

I couldn't stay there anymore. I couldn't just sit under the table and watch the showcase opposite trying to balance itself on one of its edges. It bore so many memories -- the melamine dinner set that we had bought on our first visit to the local fair, the clay pots that Mai brought back from her first pilgrimage, the medals I won at the numerous competitions in school -- every little thing bore a memory that was too precious to lose. The photo frames landed on the floor, the glasses on the windows cracked, the jug on top of the table shattered into a million pieces, the water splashing against our faces. As the ceiling followed I clutched Mai tighter. "Mai, let's go!"

Mai said it was safe under the table. Mai said we were going to survive.

I survived.
She didn't.

Utopia

FARDIN HASIN

There is nothing here, in this decaying city
Of urban fascism, hope is a last wish
We grant upon murderers on death row.
Nothing to be seen in this cobweb of coercion,
Not that you'd want to see, the air we breathe
Has become poisonous with our lies and deceit.
Ears kept shut, word still spreads of the plague
That has corrupted every grain of this seed,
And reached to the corpuscles of our very existence.
There is nothing new here in this dying arcadia
Of liberal fascists, freedom is a farce
We preach to the citizens of this utopia.
Hear the emptiness that you claim as your ideals -
The perversion of everything you envisioned
And fought to establish by twisted means.
Eyes gouged out, to prevent all the nightmares
Which let you escape from reality, witness the
Birth of this utopia that we love systematically.
There is nothing pure here, nothing holy
Not the cults, not the love, not the empathy
A celebration of madness is all it ever could be.

The writer, aged 18, is a student of electrical engineering at the Islamic University of Technology.

Electro pop sensibilities

RAFEE SHAAMS

The taciturn
sky — distant, too
distant—administers the sadness
below, where typewriters,
and inspiration await
me on my
table. Waiting for
romanticism and OMGs
where they were never needed,
and of sloppy undertones that mean nothing but a show
of normalcy,
to radiate light in parsimonious rays like a lone bulb in
the mist filled room during morning time