



Never before had a smile wrapped me with such a fascinated grip. All the chaos of the road, the humid smokes rising from the dust and bustles of people's rushed footsteps; None could refrain his smile from impeding the heart.

ADNAN FAKIR

Adnan M. S. Fakir teaches Economics at BRAC University. Outside he directs a documentary film series called "Finding Bangladesh," writes, takes photos, does social activism and travels a lot. He can be reached at adnanfakir@gmail.com



WHITE DREAMS AND COTTON FLAKE SMILES

NUSRAT JAHIN ANGELA

Chapter 1

Hasin doesn't like winter. He hates the snow, which is whiter than his pale skin. The snowflakes that plague the streets and the trees and every other place Hasin settles his eyes on are like feathers shed by a disgraced angel from heaven. He finds no beauty in the dreariness, no poetry in the paleness. He detests how the whiteness of the snowflakes stands in stark comparison with his black shirt, his black hair, his black eyes. He abhors the idea of the soft flakes gathering at the back of his neck and tickling his skin.

For the exact same reasons, Sunerah loves winter.

Even though Sunerah loves winter, there are a few things she wishes she could change about it. Like the dry, lifeless trees, bare and desolate. And the bone-biting cold that stings. She dislikes the fact that the cold is sometimes so excruciating that it drives people inside shelters so that they cannot stand outside and enjoy the breathtaking scenery, wrapped in white. She associates winter with solitude, and she dislikes that as well.

For the exact same reasons, Hasin thinks winter isn't all bad.

The girl from the Spring Waltz

RAYAAN IBTESHAM CHOWDHURY

Chopin said the Spring Waltz was dedicated to Spring, the season of rebirths. Was he truly so naive?

Her living room had the appearance of a ballroom, it was so menacingly large. She sat at its centre, confined on all sides by her cage; her large grand piano didn't even fit inside it. She reached for it, extending her slender hands outside the cage as she started to play. I think it hurt her to reach outside the cage, it hurt me whenever I tried, but she kept going on regardless.

She was a quiet person, almost stoic in her movements. But two things always gave her away. Her eyes; vivid, deep, dangerous, terrified, alive. And her fingers; delicate, intricate and all powerful as they danced through the keys. Those two things lit up her cage. Everything else about her had the signs of a defeated individual. Her hair had gold streaks, faded and jaded, remnants of the time she was much more alive and had gotten her hair coloured blood-red. Her lips were hung almost limply, like they remembered a time when they used to curve upwards to form a smile but only remembered that faintly and would soon forget it completely.

Across the room I sat, legs up, on the sofa, watching her from my own cage. I was the writer she said she always wanted to be with, the one that would splash her names, her real one and the ones that I would give her, across hundreds of pages. I did not want to disappoint her, so I wrote all about her that I could. Truth was I



wasn't much of a writer and most of the time I just faked it, stringing a random assortment of words together and claiming there was some deeper significance to it all. But I wouldn't drop that charade in front of her. That was the only reason I got to be with her here, our cages just centimetres apart in this hauntingly large living room where the only sound was her fingers playing the Spring Waltz.

You know when you're in really large rooms, when then there's so much empty space, the distance between you and

someone else doesn't seem very far but yet you know it is, because the distance between you and the nothingness over there and the distance between you and that person is quite literally the same? It's scary but I think it's just my fake writer mind scribbling nonsense. I really hope it is just nonsense.

But why wouldn't I fake it? Here was this girl, all locked up in her own cage like the rest of us yet so much bigger than the cage's 5 inch by 5 inch dimensions. My job was simple. Take all the life she

exuded, all the sighs and all the highs, and spin it into stories. That was simple enough, no? But my pen always came to halt. She was probably a story for some other writer.

The room started to get stuffy; it always did when she reached the crescendo of the waltz. I think the honesty in that final verse always proved too much for me take, so I had to get some fresh air. I got up and walked to the windows, my cage dragging behind me. I opened the windows only for the distant smell of smoke to fill my nostrils. I knew this smell. *Dhaka was burning.*

I don't think either of us cared much for Dhaka. It was such an ungodly place, filled with filth and monsters and just a few humans. It was hard to be a human in Dhaka. I remember that her piano sounded less bold back when she was new to Dhaka, she sounded livelier. The city had made her quieter, made her piano louder. I don't know exactly how.

She looked up from the piano. She didn't say anything; her eyes just enquired 'What's wrong?' I know she could smell the city burning all around us. But she didn't stop playing. The Spring Waltz was the song of rebirths, it demanded to be played. Maybe when she, I and all this burned down, something more worthwhile would be born.

I sat back down, my pen and paper in hand, quickly scribbling down that line about her enquiring eyes and the look of longing in them.

"Nothing, my dear. Nothing's wrong at all".