

Tea of Life

JAREEN CHOWDHURY

Close to the tea of life, the steam is most visible.
Youthful.
At its most vibrant
And at its most violent.
The heat is overwhelming, scorching. Unbearable and undeniable.

The steam begins to rise. It expands. Unstoppable.
Growing
It thinks it's flourishing.
But little does it know, it's actually perishing.
Rising faster and faster, seeking naively a glory it cannot see.

The steam is at its highest, however not yet free.
Fading.
On its journey to oblivion.
It's too late, this is not what it was fighting for.
It thinks to itself, why am I even here?

Rising higher, it's now a part of our atmosphere.
Dying
Starved of warmth and starved of intimacy
Indistinguishable and diminished
Realising now it shouldn't have chased air
Should've stayed close to what it could rely
Should've stayed close, to the tea of life.

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Vultures

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

The thin man had his heart chained to his rusty bicycle. The squealing bell, rubber handles, plastic paddles, leather seat, all of them absorbed his presence like oxygen. As if it were an animal and he were a tree, both needing each other to live.

"Why don't you get a new cycle?" Anjum asked as he loaded the pickle tins onto the back of Hasib's cycle.

"The rust reminds me of the long distances I've travelled with this little guy, and it heralds our even longer connection, Baba," Hasib replied stroking his chalk tinged beard as his smile wrinkled the corners of his eyes.

It always amazed Anjum how the 60 year old man addressed him as Baba despite being the delivery man of Anjum's pickle company. It always evoked nostalgia in him and covered the hole his father had left with branches buzzing with leaves. His father was hit by a truck three years ago while returning home from the factory. To get home, he had intended to cross the highway adjacent to his factory but the wintry fog was an angel of death. When he had crossed half of the road to reach the other side, the mammoth truck had exploded in his vision, and in the next minute, he had become blood and flesh plastered to the concrete road and rolling with the tires. The truck had disappeared to the fog- the garbage heaped metal elephant had fed itself with blood.

"Here's the address where you need to deliver the tins," Anjum said while fishing out a wrinkled piece of paper from his breast pocket.

"Oh, and another thing..." he signalled right at the

moment Hasib took the paper.

"Here's 20,000 taka, and since you're going to the adjacent village, I need you to give it to Fatimah," he added.

Hasib didn't ask why Fatimah needed the money because he knew that it had been three months since they separated and he owed her the money.



The sun hid itself behind the leafless winter trees, tossing rays of flame through the ghost branches of the trees. Anjum watched the crows shoot themselves through the darkening sky. It was his favourite part of the evening. The watching. It reminded him of exploring what's beyond home and returning by the pull of home. He spent the night in the factory's embrace without Hasib's helping hands, dipping the raw mangoes into the

pickle preservatives and labelling the jars of joy that were equipped for an end.

He woke up to the squeals of stray roosters as the sun was done with its meditation under water. As he approached his squeaky clean cycle to head home, he thought if Hasib was done with his job. Nevertheless, he waited for the fog to free the vision, settle on the concrete highway, leafless branches, rusty grasses, and windows to avoid the fate that had ambushed his father.

While taking a turn to his home alley, he saw vultures hovering over the banyan tree on the spacious field that gazed at the neighbourhood for around a hundred years. It was a reunion. Of the ghost birds and the mother ghost plant. Curious, Anjum neared the scene and saw their talons and beaks sunk into a blood soaked body. The body's head was split open, and the pouring blood converged with grass. The punjabi was blood red with ripped pockets. Maybe the cloth had been white before the stabbing. It was evident that the man had met with machete blows from robbers after a few seconds of the proposal to snatch from one end and refusal from another. The tins from his factory littered the ground, the thin slices of raw mango coated with oil and spice were just lying there, and the pickles nearly mixed with the soil. Hasib's cycle also caught Anjum's attention.

Was the man Hasib? Did he fail to give the money to Fatimah? Did he fail to deliver the pickle tins? Was he also hovering over the banyan tree while gazing at Anjum for the last time before reaching the sky?

His thoughts hung in the air like the ghostly tentacles of the banyan tree.