



FOREVER

AHMED ANZUM AZIZ PROTIK

I woke up with a start. It seemed to me that I was drifting between the past and the future, interspersed with fleeting glances of the present. Through my blurry vision, I could see a ceiling fan droning on with its blades, as if it was trying to suck in all the air in this little room along with the smallest wind of life that was still left within me.

I could hear a lot of voices.

Were those real? Or just memories?

I could not differentiate between memories and reality. They seemed to me like a pair of intertwined, spiral twin trees, with a lot of parasitic vines clutching the stems and the branches. I couldn't tell which ones were branches, which of them were the parasites or which was the stem.

But I knew one thing for sure; this tree would never bear any fruit or flower any more. The leaves were drying, dying, and blackening. No water or tears could enervate it again.

The leaves were numbered, and so were my days.

My vision drifted to the present. I could hear the rhythmic rattling of a chopper in a sunny green field. Some people were running, carrying me in a makeshift stretcher. I could smell the burning cordite, the sweet stench of blood, and faintly but conspicuously, the thick smell of death. It was as if life was in slow motion. Someone was cursing and telling me to keep my eyes open, someone else was holding a blood bag.

The chopper vanished; the ceiling fan appeared again. Wasn't there a way to stop it? I could clearly feel it pulling me into the dark abyss. I tried to move, I understood it wasn't possible.

Suddenly, I heard the steps of a figure approaching. I always knew that the dying get to see the taker of their souls. I saw the figure approaching, with a white cloak and a white cap like the helm of a ship. I smelled steri-

lisers. Do they wipe the soul clean before they take them away? I saw its eyes showing sympathy, or mockery even. Where was its sceptre, the one which would retch my life away? Was it hidden beneath the cloak? I felt a sense of foreboding rising inside me. I tried to repel the creature with all my strength, only to understand it wasn't possible.

Maybe this is not it. Maybe there were still a few leaves left.

Just then I heard a door opening. Were those the gates to the grave? I smelt the sweetest smell of desert flower, and I saw the most beautiful creature that has ever been created. Her eyes were sad and dark, like the leaves of my tree. She wore a long white frock, coming down to her toes. Her skin was as white as the autumn clouds, and her hair straight and black as death.

She came to me, floating, and wrapped her arms around me tightly. She whispered the most melodious tune I had ever heard in my life. She was weeping with a stony face, like a weeping pieta, without any contortion. She was sad, melancholic, and at the same time beautiful and heavenly.

She started running her fingers down my eyes, caressed my cheeks and muttered mysterious words, maybe to cure me with some arcane spell. I saw the magic ring in her finger, etched on it was the word 'FOREVER'.

Her ritual ended with her tears running down her oval, fluffy chin, dropping on my face, and soaking my blue dress.

I could feel the tree, with all its remaining energy, trying to bear one last flower of love and togetherness. I felt its deep roots touching that of a different tree.

The nurse was scanning through the files, an x-ray of what looked like a spinal cord. Some wretched soul's vertebrae were displaced. They would remain paralyzed in bed for the rest of their life.

She flipped through the report. I saw my name.

MY CRESTFALLEN NIGHT

RHITHIKA GHOSH MONIYA

A pleasant flow
 Was diving into the Weddell Sea,
 Wandering among creatures of species
 I didn't know.
 My dream ended too early.

Such a tragic smite!
 Out of the window shone a faint light.
 I glanced outside and saw,
 Along with me, it was the moon shining with a
 dim glow.

What a misery!
 A chance missed to freeze the sky.
 I recalled the story of Henny Penny;
 Annoyed I thought, "Why isn't the sky falling?"
 My Evil replied, "Not so soon, darling!"

Then came a cool breeze.
 I looked at the clouds,
 They appeared like munchies.
 So I decided to pay tribute to my incomplete
 dream.
 I went to the rooftop and had a burrito with
 jelly and cheese.

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