

# ANJUM

## Surfers & Co.

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

*A constellation of kids formed around Roop as she collected the seaweeds that were washed ashore, an offering from the ocean. The sun lit orange in the sky, wiping all trails of last night's storm. The kids observed Roop as she minded her business, but when she stared at them, they disbanded and ran away. A constellation, breaking into separate stars, they travelled their own ways. Every kid in the neighbourhood was afraid of Roop.*



They thought she was possessed by her son's ghost. The sand coloured saree that she wore far too often, and her curly, greyed, short hair added to this belief of theirs that settled as sediment in their hearts. She always talked to the neighbourhood women about her son. The conversations had always started as casual and then strayed to her son's death, boring the neighbourhood women with the same words spilling out of her mouth since Anjum's death. Hence, everyone tried to avoid her. She passed her days repairing surfing boards on her rooftop, walking on the beach, collecting seaweed, sea shells, and even cleaning them sometimes.

"You will see, my Anjum will return one day. Yesterday, I saw him running out of the ocean, all drenched, and I ran to him with a towel. But this morning, he was gone. Maybe he has gone to a distant island, to ride the waves," she would say to anyone. The sentences formed rust. They grew tired of being used all the time. She would find solace in the words she always repeated as though they would swim closer to being the truth with every repetition.

Since he was a child, living by the ocean, Anjum's interest to ride the waves grew. With each passing year, it swelled, until one day it flooded his will, making him pick up a surfing board and try riding on his own. Roop had enrolled him in a surfing school, run by a foreigner, who refused to take anything more than a nominal fee.

When asked about the fees, he'd always say, "The kids have potential. Why let it waste because of heavy fees?"

Roop took great pride in the fact that Anjum had mastered the art of surfing quite earlier than his peers.

Roop cared about his passion that moved with the waves more than his academics. Ever since he got into surfing, Roop made herself familiar with the skill of repairing surfing boards. Surfers would come to her to get their surfing boards repaired. When Anjum had entered the age when everyone realises they need to take responsibilities, he decided to start a surfing school with his mother. They would sell surfing kits alongside teaching. Roop had believed it to be a great source of income. Eventually, their dreams took a shape, and the school opened by the ocean side, drawing popularity in the region. They had named it "Anjum Surfers & Co". Everyone wanted to go to that school as the trainer was "the prodigy" himself. The words formed in everyone's mouth,

"Anjum is the trainer. We must pick this place for lessons."

The poor kids and teenagers were trained free of cost. Anjum and Roop had adopted the ideal of the foreigner who had trained Anjum and made his dream become visible from something invisible.

Anjum was always confident on the ocean, as if the waves spoke to him, undulated at his ease, built a rhythmic connection with each movement of his body. He loved surfing alone when the sun beat down and the egrets came in herds, their voices becoming one with the waves'. Roop was never afraid of her son being out in the ocean. It was one afternoon, when fear covered her body like many floating sea anemones. The horrible news reached Roop with the waves breaking on the rocks, spilling on the beach. Anjum had gone missing

that afternoon. He was not to be found for the next two days. The word spread throughout the village. Two days later, when the boat moon peeked from the sky like a boat shaped eye, Anjum's body had washed ashore, like seaweed after a storm. And Roop had fallen into the depths of her own hallucination, where Anjum rode the waves.

Things changed after Anjum was swallowed by the sea, betrayed by his confidence, and returned by the sea, not so gracefully. Roop's grey, long hair turned short, with stray strands of hair that dangled over her eyes. Her careless attitude towards herself was visible by everyone. She wore a mournful face and talked unusually at unusual times, forcing Anjum into the context of whatever discussion went on, in an attempt to make sure no one forgets the prodigy. The mothers warned their kids about Roop. "She is not the same Roop anymore," everyone could be heard saying.

As usual, Anjum came for a walk on the beach, driving the kids away, without doing anything. She collected seashell, some were crushed under her feet as she walked towards the ocean. Waves pushed at her feet, lodging salt between her toes. When they pulled back, her footsteps were visible only to be wiped away after a while. She saw Anjum in his black swimsuit running from the depths of the ocean. He was gasping for breath and smiling. "Ma!" he screamed, and the winds made his voice their own and spread it everywhere, making it echo. "Anjum," Roop said spreading her arms open to clutch him in a hug as the seashells fell from her hands to be swallowed by the sea, as Anjum had been.