



SHUMI

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I first started taking these photographs, confined to my home during a protracted illness. Shumi was full of life, always prancing around. With time, however, I began to notice how constrained her existence was within our apartment, how she tried to create joyous moments for herself within its confines.

In her longing for a little dribble of rain on her outstretched hands through the grills of the windows, she forces me to confront the real meaning of freedom.

One afternoon, after receiving a call from Shumi's father, my mother asked her to pack her bags. I asked my mother what had happened that Shumi was being allowed to leave the house after three long years. Ma told me, Shumi's brother—whom she loved dearly—had passed away, but Shumi did not know that yet.

She only knew her brother was ill. As she packed, I sensed two emotions—one of happiness that she'd go home after so long; the other of sadness at his illness. She even bought gifts for him.

Shumi learned of her brother's death upon reaching home. Back here in Dhaka, I asked my mother to inquire about her. Her father told us she had been playing around in the neighborhood.

Over the phone, Shumi spoke to my mother in a flat tone.

"Khalamma, Hasib mara gese (Hasib is dead)."

My mother could not understand why there was no remorse in her voice. Could it be that the joy of freedom from three long years of captivity at our house had overcome her sense of grief at losing the beloved brother she had been saving up to buy toys for?

