

Cliff Hanger

BIPASHA HAQUE

Look at these tantalising equations of life-
Wrongly enough the heart sends the right signals,
then are interpreted altogether wrong.
Let's give these grey areas benefits of doubt.
Reclaim, reload, scrub off the deep stains,
the deep scars, the ancient wounds:
wounds that have witch-hunted you all along,
as these have exposed you to elemental basics.

I didn't sit here to brood over things that hold me back.
I'm rather here so sing that pleasant note,
that slow murmur of the release of river Xanadu
that gives life to the Silk Road,
happy to see endless summers by the salt lakes
and dye the flamingos pink.
I'm here now to play my tambourine,
sob for the golden reed that I've lost in Kalboishakhi..
Ah! my reed, you are what you are not -
Pent up emotion, my horse in full gallop.

It is now time to sing my queer summer song,
music of rustling whirling winds with loaded clouds
and greyness unbound.
My reed, I'm not here to ask for a different background,
I don't need a different beginning.

Bipasha Haque is a diaspora writer with particular interest in life-the way it is. By profession she is a university teacher.



The Cigarette (2017)

ARSHI MORTUZA

He chose me.
There were many just like me
All equally within his reach
But it's me he picked up and slipped between his middle and index fingers.
He lit his lighter and started a fire within me
Was he killing me or setting me free?
Before I could decide he put me between his lips and began to puff the life out of me
I began to grow weaker and weaker
But it was that peak of my life, a kind of high I'd never been, so I didn't care.
My soul escaped my body and filled the air with a cloud of gray smoke
Still, never had I felt so alive - right before he turned me into ashes.
He then stepped on me to put out my tiny orange flame that was no longer of any use to him
Yet you could still smell me on his breath - like I had left an intangible print on him
But he soon picked her up, placed her between his fingers, his lips..
I knew now exactly how it would end,
But I couldn't help but feel jealous.

Arshi Mortuza, a recent graduate of English literature from ULAB, is currently residing in Bangkok, Thailand.

FICTION

Breaking News and the Food Chain

A Translation of Abu Ishaque's "Abhishap"

SARWAR MORSHED

In the morning when I grabbed the newspaper, the banner headline arrested my attention - "Poor Poland surrenders to the mighty Nazis." I started to peruse. While I was going through the breaking news, all on a sudden, a spider distracted me. Surreptitiously, it was trying to catch some flies sitting on the floor to satisfy its hunger. Alarmed by the predatory chase, the flies hovered overhead for some time and came back to the previous slot of the floor. Apparently, it was their favourite place and hence they were unwilling to relinquish it permanently. Even the presence of a cross-species giant could not dissuade them from returning to their chosen place!

After some abortive attempts, the spider was laurelled with success for its Robert Bruce-esque perseverance. It managed to subdue a fly. The victor, defying all the pains and pangs of the catch, started to scale the wall with the air of a conquering emperor. But alas! Its parade of prowess came to a full stop without any notice. A lizard on the prowl for prey did not make any mistake in applying its might. The spider, now within the jaws of a formidable foe to be stomached, dropped the fly on the floor out of existential fear. The mighty reptile general on the wall now started to enjoy a cruel sport with the catch - it grabbed the spider now and ungrabbed it the next moment. Through the repetition of this grabbing and ungrabbing game, the lizard almost squeezed out the life-sap of its prey. Verily, it is in the DNA of the stronger to intimidate and to inflict sufferings on the weaker. After enjoying wanton pleasure at the plight of the dying spider, the predator at the upper

rung of the food-ladder finally devoured it and disappeared wagging its tail.

The fallen fly, though unable to move, had still the last flicker of life. A red ant on the lookout for food approached the fly and after a careful examination of the breadth and width of the insect, it hurriedly left the place and entered a hole at a distance. It was, I surmised, a food-spy of the ants. The next moment, I observed with curiosity, a marching army of red ants came out of their abode and got hold of the big source of gastronomic delight. The army with all their collec-

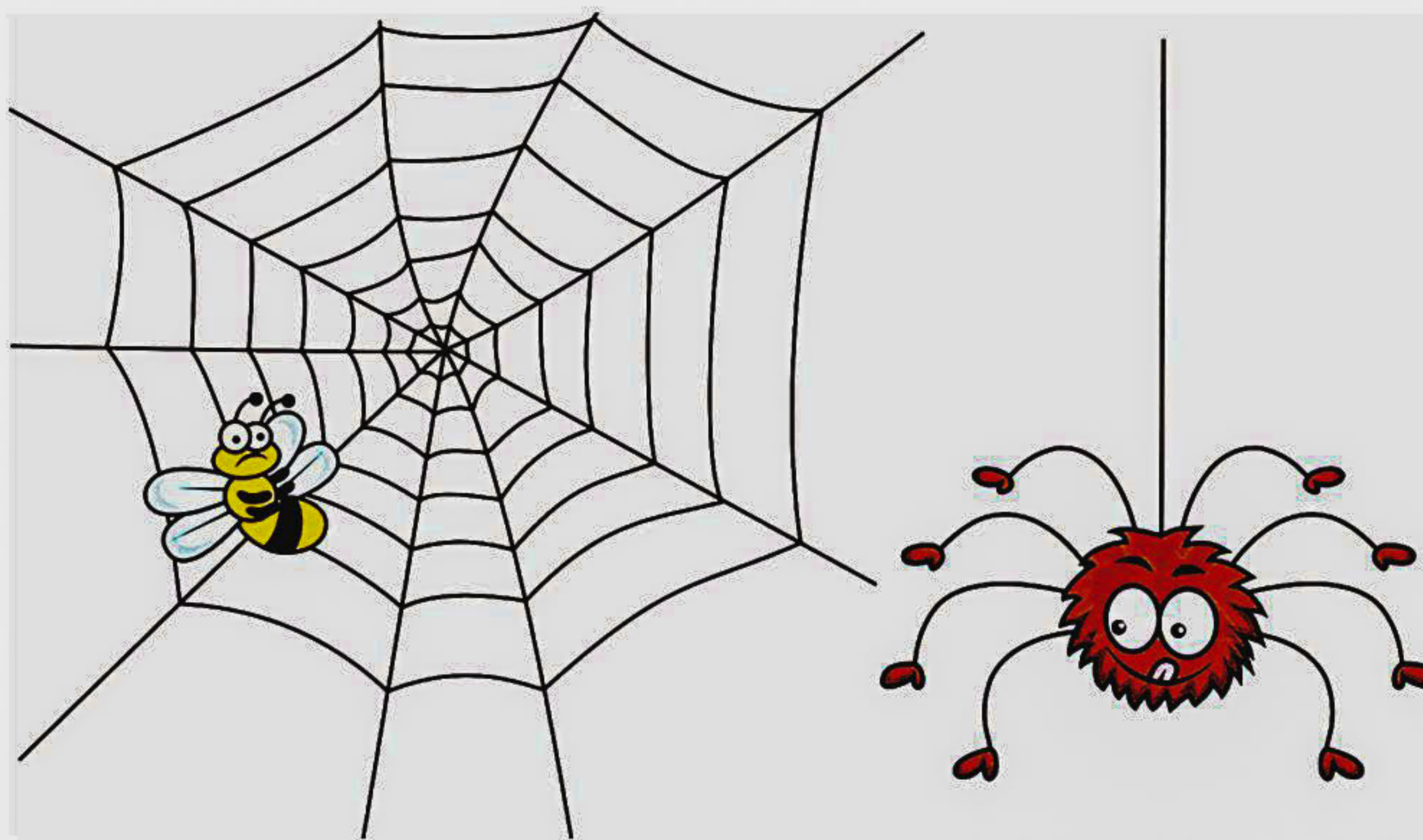
tive might embarked on the next phase of their expedition by initiating the transportation process of the huge prey to their capital.

A black ant was watching the activities of the red ants from a distance. As it was alone, the black ant could not muster courage to come near its red counterparts. When the black ant realized that the red group had captured a big food item, it did not squander even a split second. Speedily, like a seasoned military informer, it headed towards the black capital. The black ant, I presumed, must be the

detective of the black camp.

After a short while I watched with interest as a big army of black ants came out of their subterranean barrack and challenged the red army. In no time a fierce battle ensued between the black and red groups. Both armies were desperate to take the sole possession of the dead fly. The blackies were greater in number and bigger in physique than the red devils. Might ultimately established right and the red army suffering a huge blow had to give in. Many red Hectors perished in the fatal war and those inflicted with severe injuries

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had to retreat along with the unhurt but traumatized few. The victorious Black Army triumphantly marched towards their acropolis with the huge booty.

What an entomological version of the ongoing war between Germany and Poland have I just witnessed in the small confines of my room! A miniaturized form of the unbridled blood-letting practice by the war frenzy bipeds. A microcosmic, insect-level orchestration of the macrocosmic, human-level atrocities. The kind of blood lust I have just seen among the base members of the animal kingdom is more intensely and more prominently present among the *homo sapiens*! Will humans be ever able to un-yoke themselves from the all-enveloping darkness of war?

Sarwar Morshed is an Associate Professor of English at Chittagong University. Apart from academic publications at home and abroad, his creative titles include Depoeticized Rhapsody, In the Castle of My Mind and Rendezvous with Words.