

It's on us to end rape culture

The ugly truths of rape and our own complicity



RAMISA ROB

THE truth is, we, as a society, have failed: we haven't found a solution to the pervasive rape culture in Bangladesh—over 630 women have been raped in the last 6 months (Ain O Salish Kendra)—because we haven't been addressing the problem in the first place. Rather, we have been aggravating it in many ways, perhaps inadvertently.

Recently, I asked Nina Goswami, a senior deputy director at Ain o Salish Kendra, "Why is sexual violence on the rise?" She responded that as lawyers see, "the culture of impunity"—as evidenced by the appallingly low conviction rates for sex offenders—inflates self-confidence of perpetrators and leads them to commit more crimes. It goes without saying that the country's legal system and sexual harassment laws need reforms. But a legal prohibition is not enough to stop vile acts altogether, especially when it comes to rape and sexual harassment, crimes that are built into the misogynistic structure of society. Put another way, rape is a cultural issue: it emerges from somewhere within our communities, and it means that individuals in society—even those who aren't perpetrators—legitimise sexual assault with established cultural norms and attitudes that give more voice to myths such as victim-blaming than the actual account of the survivors. So, it's impossible to deny that there is something wrong, not just in the legal system, but also in our regressive societal mindsets that sustain the vicious cycle of sexual violence. "But there hasn't been any substantial sociological research on why rape happens, although that would be very relevant to counter the culture," says Nina Goswami.

So, let's try a social experiment: imagine a scenario where someone gave you a duty to fight sexual violence in your community. What would you do to counter the rape culture? The rules of your assigned duty preclude joining a crime-fighting squad or a human rights group. It's rather to self-reflect on your daily actions, conversations,

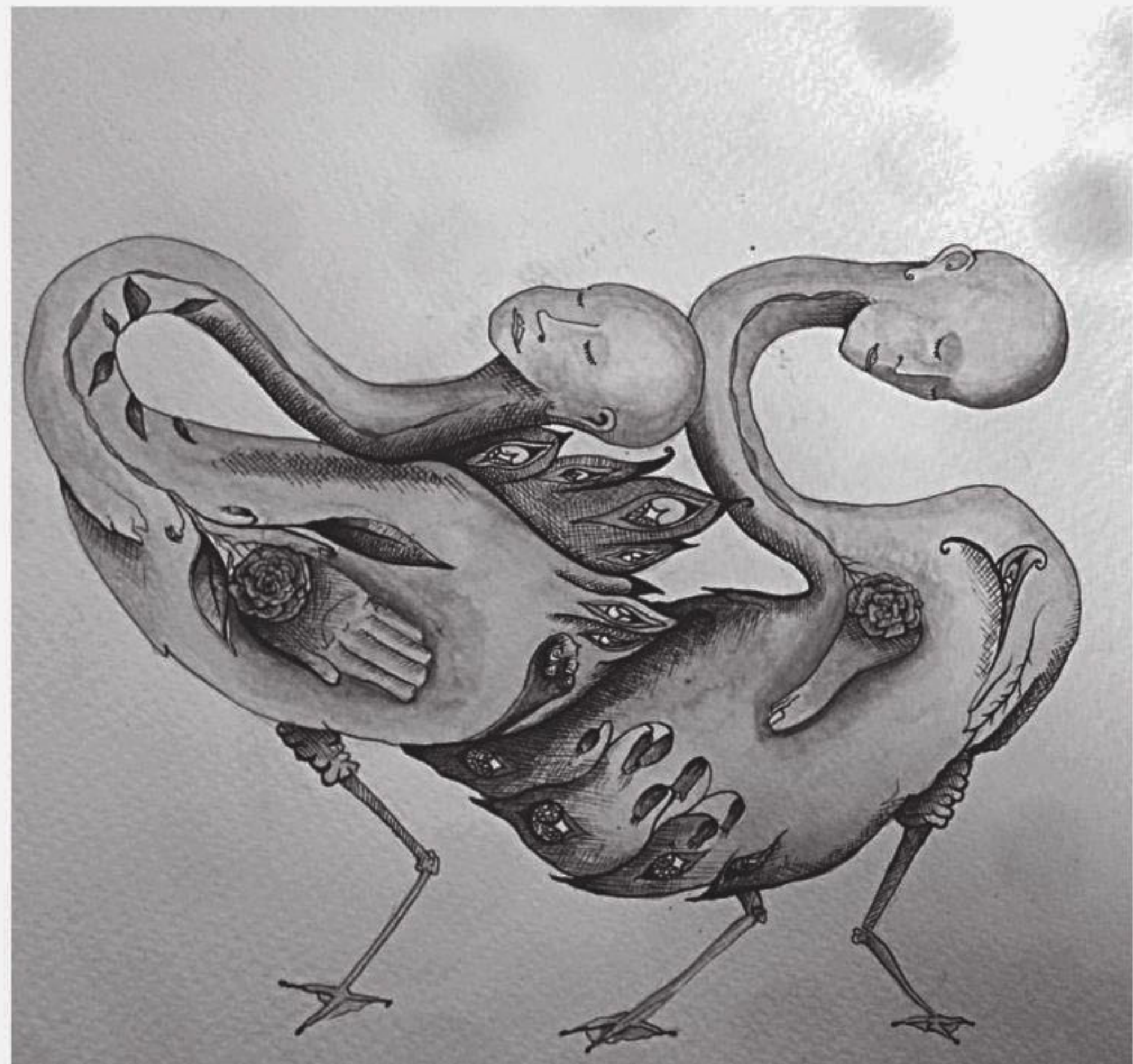


ILLUSTRATION: NIMRA BANDUKWALA

and thoughts that potentially contribute to the rape culture. Now, internalise that sense of social responsibility, as you read my interview with eminent psychologist, professor Mehtab Khanam on the shocking frequency of rape crimes against children, and the specific norms that perpetuate rape culture. Only with introspection can we truly reverse this epidemic.

How would you explain the rise in rape crimes?
Mehtab Khanam: There's a combination of factors that can explain it. Generally, it comes from the trivialisation of sexual violence in the community. And that itself is emboldened by the systemic failure of the two most important pillars of society:

education and the legal system. Regarding education, in my view, the recruiting system for teachers is faulty since a candidate's merit and values aren't evaluated in the hiring process although it is the most necessary element. Students have to be treated with care, and individual teachers who are hired should be trained to do that. In many ways, the system today has been losing the very essence of education. Punitive practices remain widespread nationwide. What we're witnessing with sexual violence in some madrasas today shows that teacher-student relationships are becoming more toxic by the day.

Why are men increasingly violating women? What does it say about our social

attitudes towards women?
 One of the main reasons for that escalation is the expansion of the Internet. In Bangladesh, most people today have access to technology and child pornography. Although it is criminalised, there isn't a rigorous system of monitoring that can prevent access to harmful content. And with the lack of education on consent and respect for women, young boys are susceptible to the misguided sexual entitlement that pornographic material imparts. In my experience, many young boys don't understand what respect for women actually means, and they aren't taught at home or in school. Currently, crude disrespect is the society's default attitude towards women. When videos of high-profile crimes are posted on social media, I observe the comments and always find a number of people who are keen on finding reasons, any reason, to blame or shame a woman. Regarding Nayan Bond, the main accused in the Barguna murder case, I noticed many people were pointing accusing fingers at Rifaf's wife who helplessly tried to save her husband. Many were shaming her. Even when I come across interviews, I see how people comment on a female journalist's clothing, mannerisms, etc. There is a normalised social thrust to view women negatively in every situation, and it's not just men who do that. Women also do it. And this lens through which the society sees women is a major source of the problem.

It seems that sexually abusing children is becoming more common. Is it because they are easier to exploit (as in 7-year-old Saima's case)?
 It's paedophilia: a sexual desire for children. Children are easier to intimidate and their silence is easier to acquire, but this is also a legitimate psychological disorder. In one of the cases I've dealt with, a father chronically abused his daughter until she reached puberty, and then it became very clear to me that his issue was paedophilia. In most of the cases involving paedophilia that I've dealt with, the abusers, especially the fathers, never came in for treatment. Most of them don't understand there's anything wrong with them. Usually, I deal with such victims and the trauma they've lived through as a result of being sexually abused by their elderly family members.

On a broader level, how do family dynamics contribute to rape culture?
 A big source of sexual violence is normalised violence. Parenting with force and violence remains common in many sections of society. The practice of parents physically abusing children has been socially validated as a method of exercising authority to enforce discipline. This shapes a child's psychology, and so they begin to replicate it: they express anger and feed their worst impulses. They grow up believing that violence is rational and so when they violate someone, they believe it is justified. Especially for boys, they take it out on women, who they feel are more vulnerable than them. In many cases, when a person has been subjected to sexual abuse in their childhood, they might feel a desire to violate children and inflict the pain they've felt in their past on someone who is less powerful than them. When someone is victimised by the abuse of power in their own family, they can feel a desire to victimise someone else. Bullying begins at home and the bullied becomes the bully outside.

Crimes are being reported but there have been no solutions. Is there anything wrong with our current lexicon on rape?
 In my opinion, the way the media has been reporting on rape—circulating images of victims especially—works like a trigger for rapists, especially paedophiles. It's becoming what we call a "copycat" situation. Rape incidents are narrated in a raw manner with salacious details, and highlighting injustice in a dramatic, elevated way discourages survivors from coming forward. And mostly, reports don't bring up any images of the male rapists and murderers. But it's important to remind people that these men are humans who live among us, who may appear normal. Reporting on rape has international guidelines because these situations are very sensitive. I think female journalists are better-suited for covering rape incidents as they might understand or relate to the situations better. But in general, when it comes to reporting on rape from a preventive perspective, it's important for every journalist to be cautious and empathetic.

Ramisa Rob is a master's candidate in New York University.

Deepening Dhaka-Seoul ties

MD SHARIFUL ISLAM

SOUTH Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon is visiting Bangladesh as part of a two-day official trip and it is expected that the outcome of the visit will be a milestone in deepening Bangladesh-South Korea relations. But how can Dhaka-Seoul ties be deepened?

It's a truism that South Korea matters to Bangladesh considering its socio-economic contributions in the country. South Korea was the largest investor in our ready-made garments (RMG) sector amounting to USD 103.05 million in 2017 (*Financial Express*, May 2, 2018). Additionally, if one looks at the volume of remittance that Bangladesh received in the fiscal years 2017 and 2018, South Korea contributed more than Japan. For instance, Bangladesh received USD 22.89 million in FY 2017 and USD 31.44 million in FY 2018 from Japan. On the contrary, Bangladesh received USD 64.71 million in FY 2017 and USD 96.27 million in FY 2018 as remittance from South Korea. South Korea also takes in a good number of Bangladeshi workers. This implies the importance of South Korea as a development partner of Bangladesh.

South Korea and Bangladesh should focus on how they can broaden and strengthen their relationship for mutual benefits through exploring new avenues. Below are some possible areas of cooperation:

Deepening economic and trade relations
 At the second Bangladesh-South Korea Foreign Office in November 2014, Bangladesh and Korea acknowledged that there is a huge untapped potential that needs to be harnessed to upgrade their bilateral trade relations (*UNB*, November 6, 2014). In that consultation, the Korean delegation

demonstrated a positive intent to import pharmaceutical products, ceramics, more jute and jute-made products from Bangladesh (*Ibid*).

It is believed that Bangladesh has a huge untapped export potential that South Korea can exploit but one of the major challenges in that regard—i.e. strict origin of market in the South Korean market—needs to be addressed first. Besides, Kabir (June 23, 2013) contended that the long-term untapped export potential is as high as 46 percent. It means that Bangladesh can increase export to South Korea significantly by removing constraints such as infrastructural and institutional barriers. In this context, to promote economic and trade relations between Bangladesh and South Korea, a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) can be taken into consideration.

Accelerating South Korean investment in Bangladesh
 Bangladesh is a lucrative destination for foreign investments. The country has several investment-friendly policies including equal treatment for local and foreign investors, legal protection against nationalisation and expropriation, 100 percent ownership, tax and duty exemptions and guarantees for repatriation of capital and dividend. According to a study by Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Bangladesh is one of the most competitive locations among the ASEAN, Far Eastern, and South Asian countries. In addition, a World Bank study on investment environment entitled "Investing Across Borders (IAB) 2010" identifies Bangladesh as one of the convenient destinations for FDI for its investment-friendly facilities.

Considering the comparative advantages

that Bangladesh offers and comparing the increased level of South Korean trade, its investment has not increased at the same pace. Hence, there is a need for increasing South Korean investment in Bangladesh which can create a win-win situation for both parties. In this case, the Bangladesh embassy in Korea needs to play a substantial role to attract Korean investors.

Increasing workforce exports to South Korea
 Along with other East and South East Asian countries, there is a shrinking workforce in South Korea due to its aging population.

Bangladesh is a lucrative destination for foreign investments. The country has several investment-friendly policies including equal treatment for local and foreign investors, legal protection against nationalisation and expropriation, 100 percent ownership, tax and duty exemptions and guarantees for repatriation of capital and dividend.

On the other hand, there is an increasing demand for labour in the booming Korean industries. Goldman Sachs forecasts that Korea will not be able to catch up with the needs for productivity and hence its economy will fall. This fall is only because of the decreasing Korean population. According to Korea statistics, its population is projected to decrease by 6.41 million. On the contrary, "about three million people are coming into the workforce every year while 2 million

out of these are being employed. About 67 percent of our [Bangladesh's] population is aged below 25 years." (Khaled, January 27, 2015) In addition, South Korea has emerged as an example for setting up a unique model of recruiting foreign workers via state mechanisms that ensure low-cost migration and better benefits and protection of migrant rights. Hence, South Korea has emerged as an important potential destination for Bangladeshi workers.

Strengthening cooperation in science and technology
 Though Bangladesh and South Korea

concluded the Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation on May 26, 1995, progress so far has not been satisfactory. In fact, in this age of science and technology, there is no alternative to technology sharing. And the reputation of South Korean science and technology is widely recognised. So cooperation is imperative to galvanise the bilateral relations on this front. In addition, it is also recognised that Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to the

impacts of global warming and climate change. In that case, South Korea's expertise in science and technology, especially in green technology, will be greatly helpful for Bangladesh.

Promoting people-to-people contact
 Significant strides have been made in promoting people-to-people contact between Bangladesh and South Korea since the beginning of their formal relations. Notably, a "Cultural Exchange Agreement" between the two countries was signed at Dhaka on 14 June 1979. Such initiatives are imperative to improve people-to-people contacts. Bangladeshi students taking higher education in South Korean institutions certainly play an important role in this regard. But their number is not high enough. Korea can increase the volume and scope of scholarship to the students and teachers of Bangladesh to study at Korean institutions.

In addition, Bangladesh's well-known tourist destinations and historical monuments need to be properly utilised to attract Korean tourists which will also bolster people-to-people connection.

Mainstreaming South Korea in Bangladesh Foreign Policy
 Considering the importance of South Korea in the socio-economic development of the country, Bangladesh needs to mainstream South Korea in its foreign policy priorities. In theory, South Korea matters to Bangladesh in many ways, but the country is not studied with great importance in the foreign policy discourse of Bangladesh. Thus, the syllabus on Bangladesh foreign policy needs to be redesigned incorporating South Korea in it.

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QUOTABLE Quote

CHARLES DARWIN
 (1809–1882)
 English naturalist, geologist and biologist, best known for his contributions to the science of evolution.

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Less foolish	33 Dopey's pal	4 Yale rooter
6 Defeats	34 Cork sound	5 Eases off
11 Sufficient	35 Hydrocarbon suffix	6 Tower site
12 Korean deity	36 Tick off	7 Angled pipe
13 Go bad	37 Smelter supply	8 Kitchen items with holes
14 Chap	38 Stately home	9 Hire
15 Derby, e.g.	40 Ham it up	10 Ream makeup
16 Cain raiser	42 Conform	17 Guest
18 Course need	43 In shape	23 Horseshoe shape
19 Cambridge sch.	44 Meanspirited	24 Soup sphere
20 Zero	45 Space of "Carrie"	26 Houston team
21 Young one		27 Early primate
22 Puts up		28 Where the Fraser flows
24 Signing needs	DOWN	30 Rich cakes
25 Wanted	1 Message on a dirty car	31 Swift
27 Sore spot	2 Damage	33 Corrupt
29 Wedding reception events	3 African scavengers	39 Make a choice
32 Settle the bill		41 Me, to Michel

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	U	I	T	S	P	H	O	T	O
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHY DID YOU YELL "THAT'S IT!"

I WAS TRYING TO DECIDE THE BEST THING TO DO IN MY LIFE

AND IT JUST CAME TO ME

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

THERE! BRAS, PANTIES AND SLIPS ARE ALL FOLDED AND ARRANGED BY COLOR!

MOM! I'M LATE FOR PRACTICE. WREN HAS YOUR UNDERWEAR DRAWER ISN'T SHE? AND THE MEATLOAF IS BURNING!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN YOUR UNDERWEAR DRAWER IS THE MOST ORGANIZED PART OF YOUR LIFE?

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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6 Defeats	34 Cork sound	5 Eases off
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