

of scolding from Ammu for the act. Her only supporter was her brother, Kabir.

*"Areh ma, bujhona keno ora to bhitore dhuke jabe ek shomoy!"*

Rehana carefully goes up the dust coated staircase. The stairs are littered with banana skins and the unpleasant droppings of the primates. She hears them screeching inside her parents' bedroom. As she steps inside, they run away through the giant rectangular opening that greets the Verandah. Here, the sunlight feels almost blinding. On holidays, Ammu used to polish Rehana and Kabir's hair with oil on the Verandah. They abhorred it. Ammu paid little attention to how they felt and more attention to the necessity of it. It is the same Verandah from where the soldiers threw down the six-year-old Kabir on 25 March. The Black Night.

Her bedroom, like all the other rooms, is devoid of furniture as well, except for the broken bed and the horrors it holds like gemstones. It smells of piss. It has a hole in the middle. There, the monkeys seem to have relieved themselves and stored bananas, nuts, oranges, and bits of what look like pomelos. She eyes the banyan tree's winding branch which is right across the window. It seems unchanged. Her left arm was firm on the branch when the soldiers caught her and pulled her back inside the house. Although the Banyan was a potential saviour, she was late. Her hands were tied with an *Orna* to the head of her bed. They took turns in raping her. The *Orna* is not there anymore. The bed is laughing at her, mocking her vulnerability, her sorrowful return, flashing before her the months of captivity. The months she spent without the comfort of a bed, among the fellow captive women, sweating and shivering, curling into a ball to fit into a little space on the mucky floor for sleeping.

The house is old and new. She is discovering and rediscovering the oldness and

newness. She is a tourist, eyeing the familiarity and warmth of the villa's corners and the hostility of its history. She is a rightful resident who knows the house like the back of her hand and also a reincarnated, a broken person who is familiarizing herself with a reincarnated, a broken villa. She is a seed who was once taken away from its pod, and now, it has come back crushed to its crushed pod.

Harmonium tunes permeate the hopeless atmosphere. It's Ammu playing. *Sa re ga ma pa*. Her eyes are closed, her muscles drooling from her arms. She is beautiful as she always was. Her skull isn't smashed. It's glowing in heavenly light along with her sandalwood skin. Her voice is exactly the same. She knows the voice. The highs, the lows, the sweetness. She is settled in her musical recess. Among the Sitara, the Flutes, the Tablas, the Sarod. Rehana is hearing her after almost a year. In the music room, only the musical instruments and Ammu are appearing tidy. Everything else appears destroyed. *What a scene. A tidy musical recess around the remains of a tragedy.* On the white wall, some names are written with coal.

*"Sector 1. Muktiyuddha (Freedom Fighter)-1.Laila, 2. Ramisa, 3. Shehrezade, 4. Anjum, 5. Tripura, 6.Kabita, 7.Pooja— Farmgate, Villa 35. Amra edike chilam shoinnoder akromon korte."*

In the backyard, Kabir is playing with Mohsin, his friend from next door. He was killed with his family on the same night as well. They both have feathery wings now. Mohsin's ones resemble those of a Shalik. Kabir's ones are like those of a Kingfisher. They are both jumping from one tree to another. They are climbing swiftly. Chasing the primates and behaving like one. Mohsin shoots a Frisbee with great speed. Kabir catches it as he drifts towards the direction, his wings flapping in full glory. They peek from the depths of the burnt

garden, uproot the long blades of grass on the backyard, form loops in the sky with their other *feathery* friends and the neighbourhood kites, crash into the soil, and resurface again. Her father is racing with Uncle Masood. Both in their Plymouths. Teal and red. Swirling in the air. Like roller-coasters without tracks. How handsome they both look in their golden shades, the sun reflecting ceremoniously off those. The Plymouths emit blinding light with the sun smiling on their polished bodies. Asma Khala is swimming in the backyard's pond. She has gills, fins, and a tail. The silver scales on them are glistening. She indeed looks like the queen of the pond, as the one she once described to Rehana, as the one she once saw in her dream. The way she is swimming now doesn't match the way she used to swim before, like a mere human. Now she's a half-human, a half-fish. It truly aligns well with the fact that she used to love swimming. Rehana recalls how she would jump into the pond whenever she got the chance. It was Asma Khala, who taught her and Kabir swimming. A few more ladies with gills, fins, and tails emerge from the pond, gasping for breath. In a while, they start swimming with Asma Khala as well. Rehana recognizes them. Sabita. Josna. Hamida. Maya. Neha. They all used to be house-helps in different houses of the neighbourhood like Asma Khala was in Rehana's. They had a close-knit circle. In the camp, Rehana spent many nights talking to Neha and Maya, telling them of her family's and Asma Khala's death at the hands of the military. They eventually perished in the camp before liberation. Maya died of Pneumonia. Neha killed herself.

The melodic voices of seven women join her mother's harmonium tunes. Rehana counts them. 1,2,3,4...7. The tunes change from *Sa re ga ma pa* to a well known song which often blast from the speakers. *Purbo Digonte Shurjo Utheche*. All the women are singing enthusiastically, glowing in heavenly light. Rehana feels a sudden rush of happiness drift through her body like a speedy mongoose. When Ammu was alive, Rehana never saw her sing this enthusiastically, buoyed by other voices who sang with the same intensity. The women have rifles slung over their shoulders. Some have grenades lining their waistlines. They must be those seven women who fought the war from here, Rehana thinks. She recognises one of them. Pooja. She was brought into the camp in November. She was kept alive for a week inside the bunker where Rehana and other women stayed. One night, the soldiers pulled her out of the bunker and bayoneted her to death. It was the price she paid for being a freedom fighter.

After the singing slows down to a glorious halt, one by one, the seven women take flight off the rectangular window as green wings tinged with circular patches of red emerge from their backs. They whoosh towards the sun, their wings constantly fluttering, the circling kites making way for them respectfully. The women soon turn into Bangladesh coloured 'V's whose arms constantly flap against the backdrop of a fiery sun.

Rehana and Ammu stare at the scene. Armoured birds in flight. Daughters of the sun.

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