

# THE PRESUMED PANACEA

ARIHA SHAHED

It was a drizzly hour of darkness at the most fruitful province of Indonesia, which took Auboni back to the numerous lonely, sleepless nights she had spent in her apartment veranda, set in the periphery of Dhaka. As teardrops of gloom raced down her bumpy cheeks in a chain of cascades, she finally made up her mind to head back to her cut-price, yet nifty hotel. She had a perfectly mapped out day for tomorrow and was determined to keep it unblemished by setting forth early in the morning.

In the course of the past few years, her trek along life had been quite unsteady. On the whole, the stupid, orthodox, backdated society and her country infected by all those illiterate people were blameworthy, Auboni would grumble. She had been foraging for a cure, in the wake of realisation. Maybe the zesty Bali ambience was the healer.

At the brittle age of sixteen, Auboni had been diagnosed as having parasomnia. There were instants when she would seem to be awake, though having an entirely cloudy state of mind. Other times she'd, while still asleep, helplessly flail like a cast-away would upon seeing a watercraft pass by. It would then be shadowed by episodes of wailing and intense terror. She'd be grateful for getting just two hours of sleep a night, agonising memories still etched in her mind. For the past couple of years now, she had been salubriously receiving sleep every night and didn't suffer from tremors any longer. In the time of her lingering period of convalescence, she'd fantasise about going on a lone trip someday. And now in her late twenties, after ages of penny-pinching, here she was, at her dream place, with 'healing powers', at least that's what she had presumed.

The ten-seater minibus set in motion, the subsequent morning. Being the sole Asian in the huddle of day-trippers, didn't leave her stunned – not to mention, she

always aspired to be among European company. She perceived the man, seated to her left, roughly her age and staring precisely at her barbed high heels. Moments later, she was asked questions, which she found rather annoying.

"You sure you can do so much walking in these?" the man queried teasingly, eyeing her heels.

"I wouldn't have worn them otherwise," she responded with a nervous beam.

He smirked, "You're Indian, I suppose?"

"I'm from Bangladesh, no." voicing, ashamedly.

"Oh. Yeah."

Auboni knew though, that the man had no clue whatsoever, about where or what Bangladesh was. It was annoying, it was shameful, but shameful for the man too, she reckoned. Beyond the ebony toned glass, she discerned the main roadways of the tropical metropolis. Adorned with countless identical saplings on the dividers, they looked so monotonous classed with the raw, authentic Dhaka lanes where one could find trees, plants and shrubs of all shapes and sizes. She deemed unwillingly, but didn't want to accept it.

Following visits to tourist parks and local sites around, came the moment Auboni was yearning for, to savor the local delicacies of Bali, which were scrumptious, apparently. Unforeseeably her Bengali taste buds straight away rejected the food with her first mouthful. She certainly wasn't accustomed to sugary chicken curry, nor was she a fan of sweet and sour vegetable rice. That peculiar sweetness didn't merely exist in that particular dish, she ultimately learned, it was simply how the Indonesians relished their food- one of their 'idiosyncrasies' she quickly termed it. Lunch was literally gut-wrenching, an utter letdown.

Next week, a dispirited Auboni, walked down the sidewalk amid the bustling city center. It was the final day of her jaunt and surprisingly she was glad at the mere thought of it. The balmy, humid weather

was suffocating her skin. She felt sticky and unclean despite the invigorating shower she had taken prior to heading out today. She dressed in her favorite voguish green blouse, coupled with a raven skirt festooned in a wide frill. The city had so much to offer, but it occurred to her as though she couldn't grasp onto the little things she desired. As she proceeded along the pathway, a jubilant street vendor called out to her.

"Namaste, Namaste! India?"

"Not Indian, I'm from Bangladesh."

Auboni countered with sheer agitation.

"Oh, Banglaadess! Kemon Acho- Bhalo Achi? Yes, yes. Come to our shop."

"No, thank you. Maybe some other day."

And she smiled the smile of contentment. Well, someone recognised her birthplace, if nothing else.

Her oversized sunglasses rendered the panorama a rosy hue of transparent smoke. As she raised the accessory to lay it stationary on her head, the way her plastic multicolored headband used to rest over her seven year-old scalp, the sky became bluer, the barriers grubbier, the magnificent edifices shinier, and an aerial metal slab noticeable.

The slab riveted firmly on top of the main entrance of what seemed like a cultural fair, it exhibited words in English alphabets, but these were Indonesian terms, completely alien to her. Having nothing better to do, she decided to get a glimpse of the fiesta. The immediate impression of the site was fairly typical, scintillating brochures lay abandoned on the polished pathways, stalls throughout the expanse of the field separated by stained ivory sheets, quite a few open-top busses to conduct the hordes of visitors within the gargantuan fair, but a store filled to the brim with a dazzling panoply of souvenirs caught her eye.

The moment Auboni shoved the glass door of the souvenir shop, she transported

to a mismatched area. Cool air blended with the scent of newly painted floors and walls washed over her. She let the air and aroma sheathe about her damp body while moving towards the shelf occupied by carved, brightly-painted wooden masks. She recalled how awfully her living room wall cried out for adornments as she purchased the most vibrant mask from the stock.

By the time the wind started picking up in the following forenoon, Auboni was already at the airport. She was slightly late, but her flight had been delayed by two hours. The duty-free shops triple their prices of goods, which meant no shopping, to add to that, the array of couches looked so cozy that she couldn't help it. With a grimace of exasperation, Auboni resolved to catnap, assured that she'd be awake by two hours. She couldn't sleep for more than two hours each night, during her final teenage years, so she was habituated to this practice of sleeping less.

Hours later, Auboni was roused from a deep sleep by the wailing of a baby. She leisurely sat upright. With an effortless glance at her wristwatch, to her horror, she discovered that had she missed her flight back home. She had overslept.

At the beach, a bemused Auboni lied among a huddle of Europeans, who were just like her, she now fathomed, although, unlike her, they intended only to take pleasure in the tranquility. How was she going to bear the cost for another ticket back home? Where was she going to stay tonight? Perhaps in another cut-price but not so nifty hotel. How could she oversleep? Clouds of despair meandered throughout her mind. She rested motionless, as the others gaped at the sublimed vista- the sun shying off from its calm onlookers into the opaque veils of horizon. She was awake, but in a cloudy state of mind.

*The writer is a class ten student at Scholastica School, Uttara.*

