

TWO COLOURS IN MY HEAD



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A banyan tree stood in the middle of the field, shielding the grass, earth and a weary soul from the scalding midday sun. Yet, spots of light filtered through the leaves and branches, peppering his sleeping form. As the sun grew hotter and the spots touched his closed eyelids, he slowly fluttered them open.

He would return when the sun took the colour of egg yolk, playing with his friends in the dustier parts where the grass was more stunted.

The sun doesn't shine here anymore. The skies are perpetually in different shades of grey with no blue streaks to be seen. The banyan tree still stands, ruling over grass much taller than he remembers. He wakes up to raindrops dripping from the branches and the blades of grass hovering over him. He lies among the puddles for a little longer, letting the rain soak him to the bone.

He wishes the rain would wash all his thoughts away too, especially the guilt and indecision. There's no use trying to walk all the way back to the city, because there's nothing left. It's not like this place has much to offer on its own, but there's no harm in trying, right?

He musters all his strength and rises to his feet. He must go on.

He would store the seeds of the fruits and vegetables he ate in a tin can. His little piggy bank. Once he had enough seeds to

grow a garden, he weeded out and raked the patch of land behind the kitchen. He put his seeds to sleep in their new beds beneath the soil, waiting for them to wake up into tiny sprouts.

He watered his soon-to-be garden every day, except when it rained, and looked out for weeds. He didn't trust chemicals, so he made and applied organic fertiliser by himself, despite the stench. He'd listen to the advice his family and neighbours gave attentively. Still, there was no sight of green among the brown of the earth.

A storm raged one night, the first of the season. It was strong enough to topple a few trees in the village. He was dejected as he tried to drain the excess water away, but when the sun came up again and dried the ground, green spots appeared.

That was the happiest day in his life.

He barely recognises the bamboo fence, the one he remembers his father and uncle building together. Branches of thick ivy curl heavily around the bamboo poles, causing some of them to bend or break. As he steps inside through such a clearing, he tries to identify the huts similarly overtaken by wild nature: the big one with the porch, the kitchen, the latrine, and the sheds.

He wishes he had a knife to cut through the foliage, but all he has is the wet clothes on his back, clinging to his body like a second skin. He knows there must be snakes slithering around. If he dies by their venom, so be it. He makes his way to the

gardening shed in the dim hope of finding a tool, any tool.

The wooden shelves are still there, but empty. As the situation worsened, people grabbed anything they saw, no matter if it was theirs or if it would come to use. He recalls the times he had to swallow his guilt as he raided refrigerators in deserted apartments, or make away with a pair of shoes from the outlet of a luxury brand he could never afford to set foot into.

Then, he notices a scythe and a spade tucked deep into the leafy shelf at the bottom, both rusted. Those will have to do.

He didn't like being an only child. He didn't like the feeling of loneliness that would sometimes grip him unawares. He would have loved a big brother to count on, or a little sister to play with. Luckily, he grew up in a close-knit community who were there to support him.

He had many siblings from other mothers, playing and learning together. He had aunts and uncles at every corner of the road, as well as honorary grandparents, all of whom loved him. Everybody looked out for each other. Everybody belonged to the same team. He believed, mistakenly as he realised later on, that the rest of the world was utopian like this.

His bouts of loneliness were sudden but brief, because he had an entire village of a family by his side.

He manages to cut and tear through the foliage barring the doorway to his

old room. While doing so, he discovers a branch bearing blackberries. He thinks it might be from the blackberry tree in the kitchen garden, one of the last trees he planted before leaving for the city.

The room bears no resemblance to its old self, as expected. Thick roots of two trees crack the stone floor, whose trunks burst through the thatched roof. His bed, reading desk and wardrobe have long been taken away by someone he'll never know, by someone who probably doesn't even exist anymore.

Nestled between the two trees, he eats the blackberries he's gathered. The rain has slowed down enough to not splash on his head through the openings of the roof. Reclining against one of the trunks, he wonders if there's anyone left in this place. If there's anyone left anywhere.

It's not like he's desperate for company, he's just curious. He's been fending for himself, alone, for so long that loneliness doesn't bother him anymore. The existence of blackberries seems promising, so he decides to stay here for a while. He wants to see how long he can survive in the place he used to call home, now so foreign and empty.

Right then, golden light peeps through the broken roof, shining on the remaining blackberries in his hand. He looks up in disbelief. It's the sun.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com