

DARKNESS AND HOPE

FAHMI MASNUN ASHRAF

I clean up after my demons,
And when I'm almost done,
I glance back and I realise –
I'm running in a circle.

Running like a guinea pig,
Caught in an endless loop called life.
I live like an inanimate object,
Subject to someone's mindless experiments.
The cruelty and the frailty –
I don't think I want to live
Like this anymore.

I'm living through a cyclone,
I'm living through a storm,
I'm falling in the void,
Where's the golden life they promised me?
They lied.

I'm here at the bottom of the darkness.
I look up,
And I dare to hope.
And I dare to build stairs,
Made of threads of light
And hope, in my mind.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Fleeting Memories of an Online Bound Student

NABEEHA UMAMA KHAN

The gloomy sky above me grumbled, promising
downpour.

Dhanmondi 7/A buzzed around me, full of
life, yet I was stuck on the pavement in a trance.
A rickshaw zoomed past, ringing indignantly
as I hopped away, my eyes still locked onto the
building in front of me.

My eyes took it in hungrily – every brick and
glass, rapidly renewing the rusted images that
had been burned inside my head for the past
year and a half. The world around me melted
away, my mind a time machine of its own as it
dragged me down to the past.

I was still standing in the same place, but
everything around me had changed. Things
were happier. I could hear the loud ringing of
the bell, signalling the end of the class. I could
see myself rushing out, laughing along with my
friends as we celebrated the twenty-five minutes
of freedom, impatient to get a last-minute bite
as the precious tiffin-time minutes raced away.

Soon the scene changed, and I was in class,
huddled around with my friends as we pan-
icked to get in a final revision before the test. I
could hear us cheering loudly as Miss gave in
with a small smile, saying she would just ask us
orally instead.

The first drop of rain hit my forehead and
took me to another memory – a rainy Thurs-
day. There I was, in class, with all of our eyes
glued to the storm brewing outside, praying
that the rain would continue until school was

over. Fast forward a few hours and we were
outside, laughing and twirling in the rain with
paper boats floating behind us in the water-
logged ground.

A car honk brought me out of my trance,
and suddenly, like a bucket of cold water, quite
literally, I was brought back to the haunting
present. The happiness was gone, and I was
again standing in front of a lifeless building, a
place that I had called home for half a day for
the past three years.

A painful sigh escaped deep from my chest
as I tugged my eyes away, staring off at the
dark sky overhead as the rain pelted on my
face, my drenched hijab clinging onto my
head for dear life.

A passing mother's sharp warning at her
child to not put his hand out reminded me of
my own *Ma* at home. I could almost hear her
fussing as she saw me soaking wet, nudging me
to the shower as she prepared a steaming cup
of ginger tea, all the while mumbling, "We'll see
who looks after you when you get a fever."

The thought of my *Ma* had me moving with
a smile as I walked home. Just before I turned
the corner, I turned back to glance at my school
for the final time with a promise that drowned
in the howling wind. One day I will be back
there with my friends again, laughing and
studying, and everything will be alright.

One day.

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