



ILLUSTRATION: WARDHA MORIAM

Illusion of Choice

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

With nothing left to give,
She withered away.
From black, then to white
And she faded to gray.

Putting down blocks,
She's boxed herself in.
Prison to self,
With bars made of sins.

Nowhere to go,
She's losing her front.
A shell of a woman.
A prey on the hunt.

Illusion of choice.
She's trying again.
To rewrite a fate,
That's long been ordained.

Moving them round,
On a board made of wick.
Trying to bed them
With poor limericks.

If this was a test,
She's not doing okay.
Her mind in cahoots
With a heart that's astray.

The unseen and unheard
Are what scare her the most.
Not once is she sheltered
With the cold-hearted host.

Taken away to a warm wooden shed,
Expected that, that is the life she would live.
She sets herself down in a coffin to go
And buries herself as she learns to forgive.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com

A letter to Eesa

AYRA AREEBA ABID

12/14, Karwan Bazar
Dhaka 1215
30/07/89

Dear son,
As I write to you, I pray and hope that this letter reaches you in safe hands. Sadly, your *Amma* can only do that now. I'm sorry I couldn't be the superwoman you thought of and looked up to me as. I know you must hate me now and you have full rights to feel so. I'm sorry I left you to your father and fled all by myself. I couldn't afford to raise you. Even if I had fled with you, I wouldn't be able to bear witnessing my son die of hunger. I don't care about my hunger and encountering death. I care about you. All I have is *you*. All I had was *you*. The moment you came out of my belly and into the world in that tiny tin-shed house, cramped in our little corner in Korail slum, you have gifted me nothing but happiness. Soon, we moved to a small two-room house in a hidden alleyway of Karwan Bazar hoping you would go to school and not have to grow up in a slum.

I never met my parents. I remember growing up on the streets and with no one to share my sorrows with. Until the day I met your father as a young girl, and he married me and ensured me that I was the only woman he ever loved and ever will. I was head over heels for him. Until one day he crossed boundaries. His piercing

words – "A woman is meant to be treated like that. A woman must know her position" – still ring in my ears. I rarely saw him sober. He would smell of his cheap vices every time he came near me. I had the urge to scream and fight back but I could only weep mutedly and shake endlessly until I was left on the floor, sometimes with blood and froth oozing from the ends of my lips. He spent all his money on his addiction, and rarely on food. He never allowed me to work. I stole a note or two every once in a while, from the pocket of his shirt as soon he would drop unconscious when he reached at night. I collected the things I stole from my husband and from the roads and I sent you to a *madrassa*. Sending you to an educational institute was enough for me. I wanted you to be educated and claim your foothold in this cruel, cruel world.

As for my whereabouts, you don't need to worry, *amarshona*. But I will come find you, my love. I don't care what I have to go through as long as I can earn money and get you out of that hellhole. We will live together. Sorry I couldn't give you the life you deserve. You're as precious as other children. I hope you don't miss classes. Work and be a man of reputation. Never follow your parents' footsteps. I love you. I am sorry.

Unfortunately,
Your Amma

