### FABLE FACTORY



## Will You Be?

#### ZAHEEN TASFIA ZUHAIR

My town is in ruins, Can't believe I was born here. The neighbouring city in shreds, Can't believe I once wanted to go there

On the dirt lay the corpses, Forever frozen in fear. No one can think straight, A river of blood and tears.

The grown-ups have gathered, "We must fight or it's too late." It tore me to see you go once, Don't think I can do it again.

Will you be okay? I don't know. But I can't bear to watch you go. What's in the other end? Only god knows, But I can't bear to watch you go.

Can't sleep, the howls at night, Howls of mothers with nothing to lose "The fear haunts me all the time..." When will they begin to shoot?

"I'd rather die than live this way!" "I'd do anything to keep you safe." You're a soldier in every way, I wish I was more like you.

Will you be ok? Give me false hope. No, I can't bear to watch you go. I'm on my knees, please don't leave. You turn away. Ignore my pleas. Will we meet again? I don't know. It tears me to see you go.

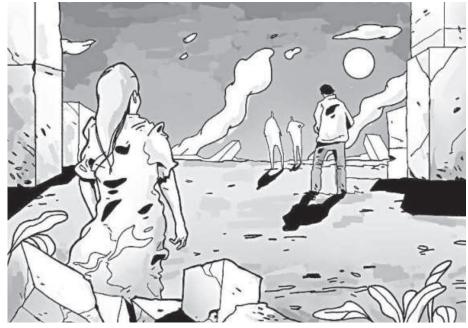


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# SYMBIOSIS

#### **UPOMA AZIZ**

"Are you still there?" I ask. "I'm here," I hear a voice that's my own.

I mean, it does sound like my own voice but, after what would be called aeons in units of time in the ancient worlds – aeons, of hearing nothing but my voice and the other, the two seem to converge and diverge at the same time.

I know them. I think I do, as well as one entity could know itself, or the other, when they have been together for millennia. I'm not as old as time, but I remember the parts of it I've been around for. I remember seeing them and so I reckoned they came before me. But they said they saw me when they came into existence, so it must have been like looking into a mirror, in a sense. Maybe it was a mirror, after all. We just possessed the ability to skip through at will.

It's been another few millennia – an obsolete term in a place where time does not exist, but I say it ironically, that I have gazed at something. The senses I was used to using are disabled now, my emotions and thoughts are much heightened, and there are things I can feel and do but I can't really explain. I can't see, touch, taste, or smell anymore. I suspect I have been stripped of the rights to do so because I am now deemed to be above such mundane needs.

I do miss being human.

I miss posing as a human.

Human lives are short, to say the least. Eventful, but short, like a fever dream, that starts and ends with a jolt – you'd be feeling that you're falling through nothingness and wake up to find yourself completely fine. And a lifetime happens



to have passed within.

Many fever dreams ago, I saw them, and they never left my side. They were there for me, they were there with me, and at some point, they were me.

I charged into battle with them, side by side, spears in our hands and our horses in our reins, our blood ebbing in ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

our veins and calling for bloodshed for each drop of blood shed from our kin. I walked the grounds with them, as

brothers do, with weights on our shoulders, the plough swimming through the lumps of dark flesh of mother Gaia, preparing the grounds for the soft green shoots that would yield bountiful crops in months' time.

I stood the ground with them, like a sister would, hand in hand and our children strapped to our backs, long sharp weapons dangling by our hips and the nails of our bare feet bleeding into the grounds that could only be as stony as our faces – we would not give our lands up without a war.

I cried into their chest as they held me close, and kept me warm, clean and wellfed, being nestled away against them was the safest feeling in the world.

I clutched them as firmly as one could hold a blossomed magnolia and cowered under rubbles, the ominous sound of monotonous buzz of bomber planes approaching sounded overhead.

I felt their gaze on me as I held their hand and vowed to be next to each other, in life, and beyond, as lovers.

I lived a million different lives with them, as different people with different names, and in these fragments of the mirror we came from, we were the only constants in the facets of reality reflected in the shards.

And in the never ending pit of watery nothingness, I had them with me. If they were but a variation of me, or a creation of my imagination, or if I was born of their thoughts, it didn't matter to me. They are here and so am I, and this is my reality.

"Are you there?" a faint voice calls out from somewhere to my left.

"I'm here." I assure them.

Upoma Aziz is a slouching, crouching, grouchy Goblin with a hoarding problem. Tell her to declutter her desk and her mind at upoma.aziz@gmail.com