

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.



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

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 millen-
 nia. I'm not as old as time, but I remem-
 ber 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 height-
 ened, 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



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

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

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 shoul-
 ders, 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 chil-
 dren 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 well-
 fed, 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 cow-
 ered 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*