

ANIS

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SANJEEDA HOSSAIN

She was about to throw me along with her old clothes. Only at the last minute, she grabbed me by my nape, and pushed me inside the washing machine.

I found myself amidst a band of stuffed toys.

"Hi, I am Lalala the pink mouse. We all belong to Inu Binu," she shook her fluffy ears and asked, "Whom do you belong to?"

"Inu Binu's mother I guess," I gave her a curt reply as I felt spoons full of lemon detergent on me. Water spurts in; the lid of the washing machine comes down, and everything becomes dark inside that cave full of soap water.

I moved round and round inside the machine; it squeezed me and filled me up with water. Next, it drained out the water in such a manner as if it would pull my black button eyes out.

She used to give me bath in a red, plastic bowl filled with mild, fragrant shampoo bubbles. She rubbed me gently with a soft towel, and placed me under the fan to dry.

This used to happen in my homeland where she went for her study. She was alone at her hostel room, until I came in to give her company.



always be kept safe," Lalala sagaciously replies.

As the sun begins to set in, Shefali, the maid servant, comes up on the roof top and takes us back inside the house to settle us inside a cardboard box.

Just beside us, there was a green sack full of rubber animals.

"Who are they?" I ask the band.

"Inu Binu used to chew on them and slobber to ease his gum pain when baby teeth were erupting from his delicate gums. They are discarded now," Dino informs.

Upon that note, I rummage through my memories and wonder if there is anything darker than the darkness of being discarded, or forgotten?

It was more than two years ago.

As soon as she felt the presence of the baby inside her, she started giving less attention to me.

I was there, not discarded yet. She talked with her unborn child for hours, putting her hands around her belly, while I was sent to sit with the two gold fish, *Gila* and *Kolija* to spend time with. She left me bending over the round glass bowl and I had to remind the fishes of who I am at every three minutes.

I watched them swimming around the plastic plant rooted inside the pebbles in the bowl-water, waiting for her to come back. I could not afford to be angry. This is teddy bear mechanism: you just absorb the pain and sadness of the one who hugs you.

Gradually, the baby learnt to kick and used to respond to his mother's joy and sorrow. Inside her dark womb, he tossed and turned, sucking his thumb and eagerly listening to

his mother's voice.

Back in my country, I used to wait for her to come back from her university to her hostel room. I sat idly inside her dark cupboard and raised my ears as I recognized her footsteps approaching.

After taking her bath, she used to sit with a mug of coffee. She held me tight during her happiness and soaked me with her tears when she was hurt.

Her pregnancy was a difficult one; she focused all her attention on her baby's health and safety. As the time of Inu Binu's birth was approaching, she put me inside a drawer full of clothes.

The warm, morning sun glows upon the baby's face; he squeezes his eyes. He jumps up from his bed. He searches for something and passionately screams, "Swodh!"

It is the paper sword his mother made him last night. He has been fighting the monsters in his dreams with it. He holds it up and stares at it for some time. He is the king of his world, and must carry his sword for protection.

Before that he needs to reach his mamma? "Senanee!" he cries out.

Shefali arrives and pretends to be scared of his sword. He demands to be taken to his mother.

He is coming out of his room after three days. The fever is gone but he is still a little shaky. Where can possibly his toys be? He arrives at his mother's room to find her bending over stacks of exam scripts.

Again?

He throws the sword away in rage, and God knows in what nook it goes. He reaches his mamma, snatches the red pen away from her hand and throws it out of the window.

Aware of his regal temper, his mother turns to him. She has to return all the scripts to her students tomorrow. But she knows how to divert her son when she is busy herself.

She gently plants a kiss on his forehead and hugs him tight. She patiently eats her breakfast with him. Cheese, omelets, apple jam, bread and tea.

Next, they arrive at the balcony and sit beside the lemon trees blooming with white flowers in red clay flower pots-- the mother with her scripts and the baby along with his cardboard box of stuffed toys carried by Shefali. The mother takes me out and hands me to her son.

"His name is Anis," she softly speaks to her baby and runs her fingers through his sleek, brown hair.

He grabs me with his little hands and clutches me to his bosom.

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As Inu Binu goes to sleep at night with me, I keep my eyes open and stare at the radium stars on the ceiling above his bed. The cardboard box has remained closed for the rest of the day with the band of stuffed animal toys in them.

They are left on the balcony, and it's raining hard.

The baby snuggles with me inside his warm blanket while his mother checks her scripts. Little will I hesitate to respond to his love.

I just wish that Shefali did not forget to bring the band of toys inside the room.

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Waves

BY MITALI CHAKRAVARTY

Peach seas murmur with the colours of the setting sun. There are no peach trees here — only

coconut fronds and mangroves. We have lapped against shores of Valencia, dipped in

orange sunsets. We have touched distant realms, heard both mermaids and submarines sing.

Waves only connect. Bridge continents, civilisations, cons, touch the skies

as clouds, travel through time, air and oceans. Yet, they know—

A wave is made of tiny droplets held by an unseen force, can be part of a

tsunami or a placid swish of a peach sea. There is no resentment. They just continue to be.

Mitali Chakravarty edits *Borderless Journal* & writes for peace and harmony.



Ma's Saree

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

"The Khans are pretty generous. This year, they have distributed over 1000 pieces of clothes, all new."

"Did you get to choose your shirt?" I asked.

He laughed. "No. But they had kept the best one for me."

My ten-year-old mind instantly associated Zakat with a festival of receiving gifts. I was lost in daydreams of next Eid when I heard my mother whimpering.

"I went to collect the saree. Let me keep it, I did not get one last year either."

"You couldn't get there alone. Rahim took you along so you could bring this saree for me."

My aunt snatched away the packet from my mother's hand. With eyes full of tears mother left the room.

"Ma, why don't you go and tell the Khans that you need another saree!"

She hugged me tight and burst into another bout of tears.

I noticed that her saree was quite tattered. As she kept on weeping holding me to her chest, I didn't quite understand what was wrong. She could surely go back and ask for another one. They were rich and they could easily give her another saree. I was determined to serve her a happy Eid. So, I set forth towards the Khan House.

Halfway through the way, it started raining. I ran and took shelter under the nearest tree but soon realised that it was getting dark. I was frightened and wanted to go back home, but I could not recognize the way back. I kept on crying and walking through the rain. Suddenly, I found myself in front of a large, white house. Going near, I couldn't believe my eyes. I had reached the famous Khan House.

The large silver gate was now closed. Through the designs of the gate, I could see some children



of my age playing happily in the rain. Soon, a woman dressed in beautiful attire ran down and took them inside. I could see her wiping their heads. This reminded me of Maa and I pushed and opened the door.

"Get off, lad. What do you want?" someone barked behind me.

I did not care and kept walking across the courtyard. I could see women busy with their daily chores while a few men sat on the sofa

placed on their decorated balcony. There was heavenly aroma of food, something I had never smelt before. I entered their balcony in glee and full of expectations. I could see the unfamiliar faces stared at me.

"He's so dirty. Why is he here?" I heard someone whispering.

Before I could address the voice, a man stood up in front of me.

"Who are you? And what do you want?"

"I want a new saree for my Ma. She got one from here in the morning but my Phupu (paternal aunt) has taken it."

"We are done with the Zakat for this Eid, kid."

"But what about our gifts?"

The man took out a crisp note from his pocket and handed it to me. The others around us gasped.

"I want a saree, not money!" I threw away the note. The man now got furious and called upon a few other people.

They dragged me through the courtyard and threw me outside the gates. The silver gates closed once again.

I kept crying for a saree for ma, but no one came back. Disheartened, I started walking toward home. But the sky was black and everything appeared dark. I did not know which way to go. I sat under a tree to get some rest and also hoped that the storm would stop.

There was a loud noise and a bright light flashed through the sky. I screamed and howled in fear. Just minutes before everything went pitch black, I saw my mother running towards me in a bright green saree. She looked as beautiful as the women I just saw at the Khan House.

"Ma... You got a new saree!"

The author is a student of IBA, DU and a freelance journalist who likes reading, scribbling, and blogging.