

PUTRESCINE

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"I'm not going to allow slackers in my course!" howled a voice piercing through the silence. It wasn't quite silent though. Shobo could hear the crackling sound from the ceiling fan with its blades covered in soot. Eyes still blurry from the nap, Shobo stared at the rust on the canopy of the fan glaring back at him. Shobo could feel the taste of rust on his tongue, from the time when he tried licking the tarnished grills in their balcony at Basabo that faced a gutter and smelled like drain water all the time.

Shobo stood up, looking down and staring at the bench in silence. His professor didn't tell him to stand up, he just did it instinctively. He's gone through the entire routine- waking up to screeches, standing up, getting humiliated and kicked out of class and so on. It didn't come naturally though, it took years. That one time in grade 8 Biology when he didn't look down in submission while standing up, he was smacked in the face. With each slap, each scream and each punch to the stomach in the bathroom stalls, he learnt the way of the human species. To keep your head down and to keep quiet long enough to tire the other person out and give up on you.

Shobo stared at his old sneakers as the voice kept fading away. Over the years, he trained his brain to filter out all the external noises until the humans were done establishing their authority and utter either 'Sit down' or 'Get out'. Shobo walked out of the classroom. The guard at the back gate was snoring as his clanky radio kept playing the same Manna Dey song on loop. Shobo didn't feel like waking him up. It was 11 am and his quota for human interaction was filled up. Shobo walked right through the wall by the gate. As he slipped past the bricks, he could taste the fresh acrylic on the wall. The map showed his house 3 and a half miles away and he decided he was going to walk the distance. Without an umbrella on, the scorching summer heat would hopefully exhaust him enough to make his head go blank. He loved the parts of his day when he'd be too sleepy to dream or too much in pain to ruminate on his emotions.

Shutting the front door quietly on his way to his room, he almost sneaked past his mother's room when she snorted, "Back from the palazzo, are we?"

Shobo knew that voice and the face she made with it without having to catch a glimpse of her face. With her putrid gums and maggoty teeth all red from the tobacco, that face was enough to make you want to bury yourself in your father's rotting grave.

"Your majesty's semester fees are at the top drawer. Take them on your way out tomorrow. And clean your goddamn room for once! It smells like a morgue out there," she said while spitting out the Paan in steel can, "Don't sons get all se-

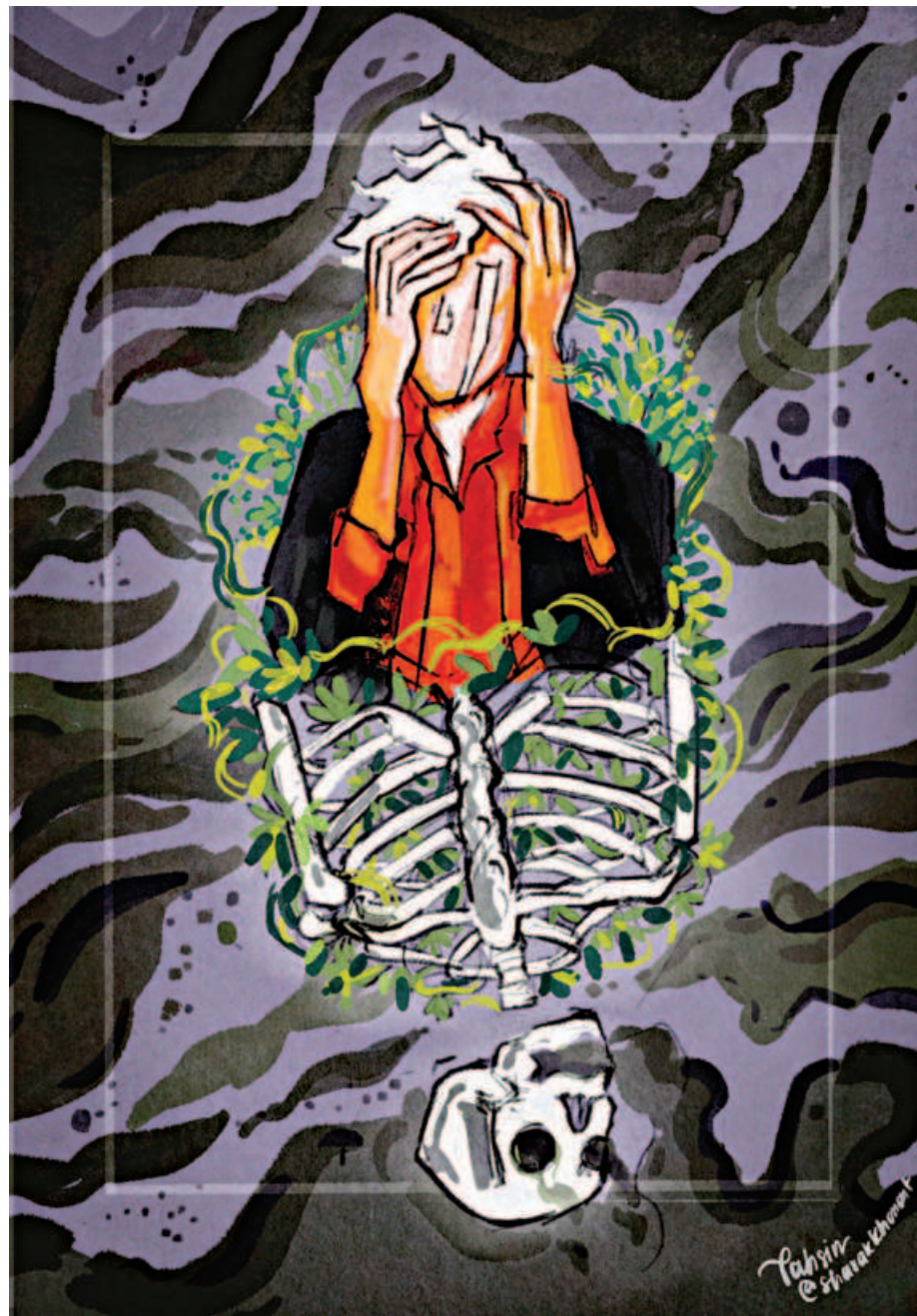


ILLUSTRATION: TAHSIN MOSTAFA CHOWDHURY

rious and mature when their fathers die? Wish he'd make you a bit more responsible on his way out. At least something decent would come out of that hangin..."

Shobo closed the door before she could finish the sentence.

He sealed the door tight. With surgical gloves on, he unlocked his closet. A lifeless chunk of flesh with hints of human

still left in it fell to his knees before he could catch it. The throat still had fresh marks on its neck. Kneeling down, Shobo picked up the corpse and made it sit against the closet wall. The cold body smelled like rust and petrichor, like cotton candy and popsicles, like a new cricket bat and spray paints. It still had Shobo's old clothes on – a polo T-shirt, ripped jeans

and Shobo's old sneakers.

"Amma's upset again. Her cold's getting worse," said Shobo as he somehow managed to find some space to sit beside the carcass. The body looked as if it was trying to raise its eyes, concerned about its mother's health. Shobo would've been worried as well if it was 2 years back and he was part of the body that sits beside him in silence.

"I got kicked out of the class again," Shobo sniggered, "He caught me taking a nap. In my defence, I haven't slept a good night's sleep in two years so microeconomics class would have to do. What else? Oh, I fed the cat on my way back."

The head lost its balance and fell against his shoulder with its eyes fixed on the cuts on Shobo's wrists. Pulling his sleeves down, Shobo hid them in embarrassment, "The guy in front of me saw them today. I felt so naked, so exposed. He didn't care enough to ask though, thank God. I need to start wearing longer sleeves."

"But don't you worry! I'm doing better," said Shobo while making it sit straight, "Not that you can worry anymore. But that's okay. You took a lot for me over the years. It's my turn to pay you back. Just a few more years. Amma will be gone too and then you and I, we can rest."

Shobo's cadaver lay gently against the pile of shirts, silent as a graveyard. It looked like it was at peace and that's everything his soul could ask for. Shobo tenderly slipped out of the closet.

"Now if you'll excuse me, I have a degree to earn," he laughed as he closed the closet doors.

Shobo could hear his mother growling in the next room. The sound of her choking on her own blood, struggling to cough it out, desperate to catch her last breath so precious and foul – he could hear it all. And he could hear the silence that followed. He sat quietly for hours in that griming silence until the smell reached his nose.

Drenched in the scent of Putrescine, Shobo's soul lay down and closed his eyes in peace, for the first time in years. He could go to sleep now.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com