

CRAVEN

SHANUM SARKAR

Familiarity has its uncanny essence,
Like patchwork sewn by your mother.
In swatches you like, patterns you know.

Tap across the bareness of your skin
Masked in dainty finery of affinity.
Every dot, every freckle
Resembles a birthmark: all familiar.

You're a ballerina's glissade, aching to find
ground
Forever in an effortless rhythm (you know
you will)
These grounds know you too well, don't
they?

Dig deep with claws and grasp onto hope.
You're a ballerina's glissade, aching to find
ground
Rebranded and new now.
Do you still find ground? (un)familiar.

Familiarity still has its uncanny essence:
It smells, nay reeks of home.
How long have you been here, craven?

You barely ever move now,
Roots crept in too deep.
Rest assured,
It's all still fear. No, it's familiar.

*Shanum closely resembles a raccoon, send her
reasons to cut down on caffeine at shanum-
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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The Happiest Day in Ripon Shaheb's Petty Life

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"What does the girl's brother do again?" asked the man while putting another paan in his mouth. It's his third one in 14 minutes. Business always requires his full focus and he can't concentrate without some tobacco.

"He is in the printing business, sir. Did I mention, his wife's brother is an additional secretary!" said Ripon Shaheb with his back bent over like a snail, grinning nervously. "And his brother-in-law is in Faridpur medical. Very talented bunch of people, I must say!"

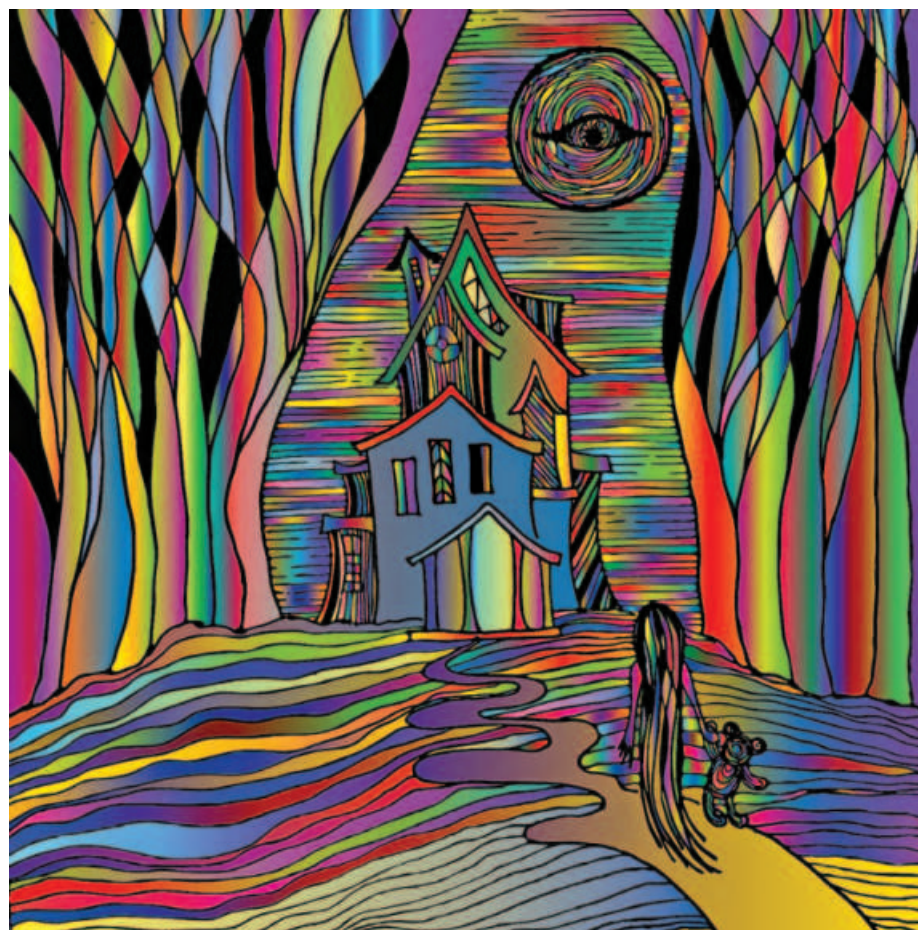
Ripon Shaheb was interrupted by a raised hand. With trembling fear, he looked down instantly, fearing he might've spoken a bit too much. A little mistake can cause an unbearable loss in this business.

"Education?" asked the man as he spat on the wall beside him.

"Just enough, sir," said Ripon Shaheb with a bright smile, relieved that he didn't anger the man. "It went to a local college. Just after the board exams, I got it out in time. Too much education gets into these girls' heads and ruins their future. Two years back, Altaf Shaheb's daughter graduated from university and got married. Guess what, sir? She got divorced last month. Can you believe it?"

The man nodded slowly. Stroking the bald patch on his head and with his eyes closed, he sighed, "The boy is from Dhaka. All kinds of girls there, you know? Fair-skinned, modern girls from rich backgrounds. Why would he settle for your daughter? He's going to need some convincing."

"I'm willing to pay any amount, sir," whimpered Ripon Shaheb as he limped closer. "It's my only daughter. If I could just get it married to a nice household, a huge burden would be off of my chest. What else can a father ask from life, sir? My wife and I



can then finally complete our Hajj and rest in peace."

"Money's not the issue, Ripon Shaheb. I know you're a man of your word. You're

not going to bargain," the man interrupted. "I'm just a bit worried about the skin. I can do with dark skin but this one's a bit rotten. It looks completely malnourished, little to

no flesh in its bones."

"I assure you, sir, it's going to be the perfect fit for your family. After my first wife died, it's been the one taking care of the kitchen!" said Ripon Shaheb excitedly. "Rice, curry, pulao, snacks – it can cook them all! It'll take care of your entire house like a good maid, sir. It'll never complain, I assure you."

"Alright, Ripon Shaheb. I'm taking your word for it," nodded the man. "Keep the money on the table over there on your way out. And do something about the skin before the wedding. It's unbearable."

Overwhelmed and with tears in his eyes, Ripon Shaheb fell to his knees and thanked the man while grabbing his feet. As the man shook him off, Ripon Shaheb went out of the room before the man could change his mind. Still shaking in joy, Ripon Shaheb called his men.

Five men dug the grave for two hours straight before they could pull Jasmine's corpse out. On Jasmine's putrefied neck, Ripon Shaheb could still see the rope marks. As they pulled the cadaver out, flesh kept peeling off of her body. Covering his nose to save himself from the horrifying stench, Ripon Shaheb wrapped his daughter's body in a red bridal saree.

"Be a good girl in that house, alright? Don't let your in-laws complain. They're your family now," smiled Ripon Shaheb as he patted his daughter's skull.

The corpse nodded gently.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com