

FABLE FACTORY

What do your eyes see?

A.M. FAHAD

I can see well with my eyes,
Captive in their dreadful sockets. Unaware of the existence of the other.
Desperately taking in all they can, in their hunger –
A gentle ray of sunlight passes through my lenses,
The sun and I are both alive and well.
I am aware of the softly beating heart inside of me
That I often think of, and sometimes long for, but do not entirely miss.
But I like this newer version of me.
A paranoid android. Waltzing at 84 bpm,
A brain that does not work, a slab of odd chemicals and meat. A voice that cracks more often,
Fingers that can't strum the guitar the way they could before.
Proximity. The reason why
My hands shake, and the metal strings pass through my fingers
Like dandelions on a windswept field,
A soft breeze on an anxious night, or a dreamy Thursday afternoon.
My eyes are afraid of meeting yours.
Afraid of peering into your skull,
Have these lights twist and bend, to my horror, and illuminate the outlines of
An infinitely flawed version of me –
Bones and Flesh.
There's an endless space inside of your eyes,
Vast. Like a magnificent ocean.
I am paralysed. Waves crashing onto me.
I am drowning.
When you are not looking.

Fahad is bad at expressing his thoughts. Send him tips at www.instagram.com/fvehed/



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The lies we tell at funerals

RUBAMA AMREEN

Death has always been there. Over the mountaintops, on the other side of the river, in the room with you right now. You just never notice it. It stands there silently, not watching, but just being. Death has always been, and will always be. You only see a part of it – the human interpretation of it – at funerals.

Nishi didn't see death either, not even at funerals. All she saw were people putting on a facade. Weeping women with dry faces, a funeral conductor prattling on about the deceased when really, all he cared about was the payment he'd be getting. No, funerals were not an honest place, but of course, which place was?

The earliest funeral Nishi could remember was her brother's. They had been a team of five, with three sisters and two brothers, Nishi herself being the second youngest. Except they had never really been a team, had they?

Anyways, there were four of them now. Nishi didn't even know him that well. There was a gap of seven years between them but what she did know about him was not exactly pleasant.

Passing at only eighteen is a tragedy, most would agree. However, what happens when that tragedy is one you model with your own hands? Giddy at receiving his driver's license, Imran had gone on a long drive in his car – so long that he'd never come home from it.

His family later learnt that he had been driving a good measure over the speed limit, and crashed head-first off a bridge. The remains of his body, when taken for post-mortem, reported traces of intoxicants in his system. They were let off from paying any charges, as their father had contacts higher up in the police department. Boys who ended up dead usually complicated things anyways.

So, he was gone, and while the incident greatly shook the entire family, Nishi and her younger sister

were more or less unaffected. They were the youngest after all and had never been deemed important enough to be given enough attention over their ever-egoistic brother. But just like the rest of the women in the family, they adorned themselves with white *kameez* on the day of the *milad* and covered their heads with a white cloth as the *imam* recited verses. After the ceremony was completed, tea was served, and everybody shifted back to their usual spots on the plush sofas.

Then began the pity talk. A distant aunt whom they had seen maybe once in five years shrilled on about what a loss it was, to lose Imran at such a young age. He had been so bright. So full of potential to achieve great things. Everybody nodded their carefully practised faces of sympathy in place. Nishi was ignored, so she slunk off to a corner and contemplated what she was hearing. Imran had never been exceptionally clever, nor did he have ambitions of becoming a pilot or an engineer as the woman was insinuating. So why was she saying those things?

It was then that Nishi realised that the dead were treated in a more dignified manner than the living would ever be. Lies were told in the name of respect – lies spun to be as smooth as silk, lies that felt like honey on your tongue, all because the unknown circumstances surrounding the death were a cause of irrational fear. Speak ill of the deceased and, who knows, maybe they will hear. Maybe they will crawl into your bed at night and take your soul as collateral.

Shuddering away from her suddenly dark thoughts, Nishi nudged her sister's arm and pulled her away to the roof to play. Nishi was eleven. There would be more than enough time for internal monologues in the future.

Rubama Amreen functions with only two working brain cells. Donate a few more at rubama.arahman@gmail.com.

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