



AFLOAT, UNTETHERED

WAZIHA AZIZ

Stranded on an estuary in a vessel that carries me
The wind whispers ballads of shores I am to reach
Some further up ahead, some past which I've
already been.
Some west, some east, and to each hymn I pay
heed.
No sail nor oar to accompany me
afloat listlessly, you best believe I'm free.
From every direction strong torrents meet
Collide, counter, and begrudgingly recede.
Upstream, downstream, what stream? Come see
me stand still and unravel in a stagnant sea
of my own making.

ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

THE ORACLE

**“Look! It’s raining
sunlight!” Ruha
pointed excitedly at
the rays of sunshine
penetrating through
the foliage. His
friends couldn’t
help but burst into
laughter at his
naivety. He was,
like most children,
easily amused.
Unlike most other
children however,
he never hesitated
to express it. He
was full of life and
energy.**

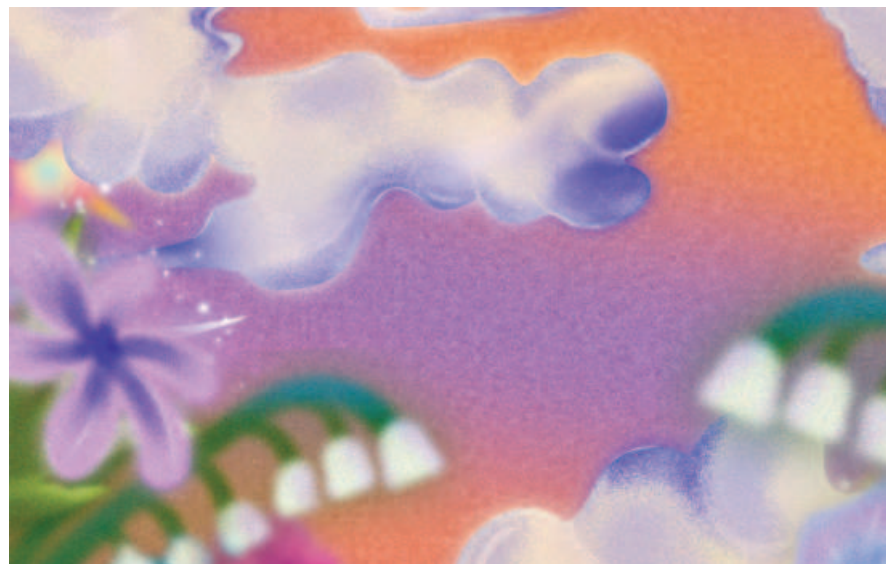


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

MAHPARA FAATIN

And occasionally, the village just so happened to embody that spirit. Men and women scuttled all over, ensuring all the decorations looked perfect. A continuous stream of smoke escaped the chimneys of the Big Kitchen where the cooks were busy making delectable dishes for the foreign envoys. To the people of the Momoku Tribe, hospitality was the one thing which they never cut corners with.

Ten-year-old Ruha took his place beside his grandfather – the village elder – to greet the oncoming envoys. His brown eyes, betraying curiosity, darted from one stall to the next. Ruha was sure that he was going to play there all night long with his friends after the banquet had ended.

The Arushan envoys exited the Big

Kitchen. The cooks followed suite holding big dishes and even bigger smiles.

“Nana, look! A bear!” Ruha exclaimed when pointing to the stout, bulky man among the envoys heading to the main table, where they were to dine with Ruha and his family. The adults around him swiftly silenced him for being disrespectful. The envoys soon took their seats, and had the dishes placed in front of them.

One of the men, taller than the rest, raised his glass to ask the elder for a toast, a mysterious grin spanning across his face. The elder hesitated.

He recalled his aide’s words from earlier in the morning who urged Ruha’s Nana to be wary of the Arushan’s king’s crafty nature. It was rumoured that the sly king deployed a spy called “The Bear” to infest the delectables that were served to them by other tribes. All this deception for a

swift victory over a battle that only one side knew about.

The elder spared a moment to think about what he’d have to do next. Despite their devotion to hospitality, he knew that this was no time for practising caution.

“Have them hand over everything in their possession,” the elder said as he pointed at the Arushan king and the stout, bulky man. In an instant, both were pushed to the floor – exposing the bear tattoos hidden on their forearms.

Ruha had saved them.

All the villagers could only think of one thing: the ancient prophecy.

“A person bearing the blood of the elder will appear, he who sees what our ordinary eyes cannot, shall be the oracle that guides our village to prosperity.”

The crowd erupted into a cheer.

Fifteen years had passed since then.

The tribe prospered under his leadership.

Dr Blake, however, was here for an entirely different reason. He entered the main hall to be greeted by the heavy smell of incense and the sight of a young man adorned in expensive jewels.

“I wish to offer a deal with your tribe to use a native plant from here to cure ailments of the eye,” the optician said. He was a man of few words who cut straight to the chase. Ruha, admired how direct he was and thus, agreed.

“Please, place your fingerprint in the small box below,” the doctor urged. Ruha missed the box but tried again only to fail once more.

A thought struck the doctor. He brought out a lens and held it to Ruha’s eyes. The doctor’s suspicions proved true. It wasn’t that Ruha saw what others couldn’t, it’s just that he couldn’t see what most people could.