

FICTION

Pest control

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Geronimo rushed inside the hole coughing, somehow managing to shut the door behind him. His mother Telapatra grabbed her son, hugging her tight for an instant before smacking him across the back. "How many times did I tell you not to go out at this hour?" cried Telapatra.

"They're spraying insecticides everywhere", coughed Geronimo, "I saw it with my own eyes."

"Those are for the affected ones only", commented an unbothered Mr Telaroach, Geronimo's father.

Telapatra looked at her husband with cold eyes, giving him the signal to shut up for once, which really isn't Mr Telaroach's area of expertise. Geronimo, still in disbelief at his father's lack of empathy, burst into tears. "I was there, Papa! I saw cockroaches my age lose consciousness and drop dead within seconds. I even saw our neighbour Mr Telaowski's son lying unconscious in front of their curb."

"Oh, that little runt", Mr Telaroach sounded annoyed, "They're the ones spreading this disease and forcing the authorities to take such measures. Have you seen his face? He looks like one of those insurgents—his entire family does."

Tears kept rolling down Geronimo's cheeks as he stared at his unbothered father. He choked out a quick burst of laughter out of rage and disbelief before rushing to his room.

The situation in Roachtown worsened after an epidemic of rot disease spread across the town, affecting cockroaches of all ages and causing their skin and wings to rot within a few days. In response, the authority imported vaccines from the faraway lands of Roachland at cheap rates. The motive was mostly to rebuild a friendly relation with the town, which had been otherwise strained for years. [The motive was mostly to rebuild a friendly relation, which had otherwise been strained for years, with the town. The friendship between the two towns meant a lot to the authority and they were willing to take any measures to



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

make sure it was strengthened under the current regime.

Although the new vaccine put a halt on the rot, victims mysteriously died of other reasons within weeks. The authority put out a notice suggesting the epidemic had been successfully tackled and the mysterious deaths were completely unrelated to the vaccinations. While the authority-funded celebrations riled up the city and Roachtown declared itself a 'rot-free city', an independent study about the vaccine was leaked by a whistleblower within the Health Ministry. The study showed clear correlations between the vaccine and the mysterious deaths that followed and the authority's efforts to hide it. The whistleblower, Telward Roachden, was found dead in his home the next day.

Following the leak, protests broke out all across Roachtown as crowds numbering up to thousands gathered outside the town centre. It was unlike anything Roachtown authority had ever seen before or expected for that matter. The mayor, Julius Roacher, decided it was time to go hard and nip

the protest in its bud before it could turn into a revolution.

Mayor Roacher knew that two measurements were needed before his forces could clean house—cease all modes of communication and control what the public gets to know. For the first measure, all telephone lines were cut across the town and flying was prohibited until further notice. Now that the unregulated flow of information ceased, it was time to control and modify it. The mayor called an urgent meeting with newspaper editors: "The headlines will be sent to you right after midnight", they ordered. "You can work overnight, fill in the gaps and print them by the morning. If you don't want to end up like The Roach Times, I suggest you listen to my suggestions, stop printing misinformation and stop creating panic in times of emergency."

Most roaches knew the mayor's strategies and didn't believe the newspapers anymore. While they were still on the streets putting their lives on the line, some roaches like Mr Telaroach were gullible enough to believe wholeheartedly that everything truly was

under control. "The true cockroaches of Roachtown—as mayor Roacher had labelled them and congratulated them for keeping their trust in the republic.

To the mayor's displeasure, the situation kept worsening and he had no option but to launch smokes of the same vaccine at the gathered crowd, only multiple doses stronger, intense enough for the rioters to lose consciousness and die in under a minute. To their horror, the casualties reached thousands within a week.

"It says right here—the casualties have been somewhere under a hundred", declared Mr Telaroach, reading The Daily Roach out loud to his revolting son and an unconvinced yet silent wife, "I believe it's even less. The Daily Roach has always been a bit anti-republic."

"Just look out the window, Papa!" howled Geronimo, "They're spraying the pesticide everywhere as we speak. There isn't even a crowd out there. They're just targeting neighbourhoods now."

"It's a vaccine, not pesticide", scolded Mr Telaroach, "And didn't you read the

leaflet distributed by the mayor? These vaccines are genetically modified in such a manner that it will only affect the anti-republics. Roaches like us will be safe from its effects even if we accidentally fall in the attack radius."

The silent treatment from his wife and son angered Mr Telaroach even more. "Look, the mayor's even distributing gas masks at a discounted rate! There's no pleasing y'all anymore", he said while putting on the gas mask to show Geronimo.

Suddenly, a shell burst right through the window of the Telaroach household. Before Mr Telaroach could run towards his wife and son, a huge explosion threw him across the drawing room and against the wall.

When he woke up minutes later, Mr Telaroach crawled across piles of rubble and, as the dust finally settled, he could see Geronimo and Telapatra lying on their backs, covered in bricks and rods, presumably dead.

The attacks on Roachtown that night were the final blow on the revolution with casualties crossing 10,000 in a single night. When the bodies were too many for the mayor to hide, he wrote an emergency instruction for the victims' families to be broadcasted via flying roaches all across Roachtown.

Mr Telaroach was holding his wife and son, still in shock, when he heard the declaration in the loudspeaker, "Victims' family members are instructed not to panic. As you know, the vaccines only affect the anti-republics. If you're confident that your loved one is not an anti-republic, you're instructed to dig a hole behind your household and bury them as soon as possible. Not following this procedure will automatically result in labelling the victim as an anti-republic and the household will be issued an anti-republic certificate by our officials."

Mr Telaroach quickly rushed to the shed behind his house and grabbed a shovel. He had a long night ahead of him.

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POETRY

Bulbul pakhi

FARAH MASUD

“Attention passengers. The next train arriving is a B train traveling westbound towards Boston College. Please stand clear of the closing doors.”

Hop on, squeeze between bodies against bodies against face against bags and sweaty hands of children. Swing back and forth, catch yourself from falling into someone's lap instead, knock your head on sticky glass, tossing and turning on squeaky tracks. Taste, the tang of rusty metal, sweetness of snacks. Stop, collect more bodies. Squeeze, make space. Breathe, as little as possible. Tossing and turning on squeaky tracks. It's 8:30 pm and the sun is just setting. Back home the sun would've set long before. Right now the Isha Azaan would be blaring. But here—the final screech of wheels on the rails, bodies against bodies against stroller against doors. Hop off, breathe. A quiet lull. Gaze at the dying sun, cinnamon-lavender sky, memories of a lullaby. **Bulbul pakhi moyna tiye Ayna ja na gaan shuniye.** Birds you can no longer find—hear them sing Songs of distant forests and blue rivers, **Dur dur boner gaan Nil nil nodir gaan.** Set aside milk, rice, and shondesh **Dudhbhaat debo shondesh makhije...** Watch them go stale and forgotten—Cling to the tune of your mother's voice, guiding yours to a time trapped in a chrysalis. Your first song on stage She taught you to sing All this time you thought it was about birds in the sky, But was it really about long-winded goodbyes? **Jhilmil jhilmil jhorna jethay Kukul kukul roj boye jay Byangoma byangomi golpo shunay Rajar kumar ponkhiraj chore jay. Bhorbela pakhna mele diye tora—Eli ki bolna shei desh beriye? Bulbul pakhi moyna tiye Ayna ja na gaan shuniye.**

Farah Masud is a collector of stories, seeker of metaphor in daily life, and weaver of terrible rhymes.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY

A man walks into a bar

FAIZA RAMIM

a man walks into a bar but he looks like a little boy except for his eyes that wrinkle around the edges (this is the start of a joke) a man walks into a bar looking like a little boy but the bartender decides to cut him some slack, after all, he passed the initial inspection; and he looks like he could use a drink. his timid stance, nervous stare and jittery legs make him look out of place that could supposedly come from carrying a fake id or from being in the sight of too many people. that man of course, is you. and you are not a little boy. but it's an easy mistake to make; the way you always sleep in a foetal position or the way you feel too much but can never put them in words. a curious case; but not an unsolvable one. until your eyes speak up and apart from the rest of you they say how you almost obsessively take the longest of walks or the way you are unfazed in thunderstorms and it's the quiet you that makes you flinch. you are a monolith of contradictions, but you could use a drink. so you are offered a drink. which you unceremoniously almost immediately spit out from your mouth. So childish inside your hand there is a punchline inside the other, there is a keepsake dug out from the bottom of a well from what appears to be buttons. When you are rushed to the hospital the sound of sirens lull you to sleep.

Faiza Ramim is a final year student of BBA at the University of Dhaka. She likes to watch sad films and write sad poems.