

ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

# The floodlights

**The cub was overwhelmed with anger, exhaustion, and agony—a destructive amalgamation. The other tigers shared his wounds; they growled furiously.**

AFIFA ALAM RAISA

Chaos. More chaos.

The cub, still half-strapped with the stretcher in the middle of the vast cricket stadium, tried to shift to a more comfortable position. He let out a sigh, his eyes still shut tight. The poor thing could feel his fellow tigers munching ceaselessly at the straps—tigers bigger and stronger than him. For that, he was grateful. More grateful than he had ever been in the past. They had already pulled out, not with little effort, the dirty cloth that was stuffed into his mouth. He licked the inside of his mouth, as if to taste his newfound freedom.

He slowly opened his eyes. From the wrinkles around them, it was certain that the floodlights were not on the cub's side.

Then he saw them: blue shadows looming over him. He had seen them before, and he knew he would see them again. Most of them were harmless; some among them even stroked his fur from time to time. Their collective presence nevertheless gave rise to an odd blend

of excitement and unpleasantness in his mind. It always did.

The cub finally spoke, his voice almost a whisper. "The floodlights."

"What about them?" someone asked.

"They are unfairly bright. My eyes hurt."

"The floodlights?"

"Yes, the floodlights."

Then he saw them coming: dark shadows looming over the blue ones. Most of the latter disappeared at once. A few remained. The cub could not see their allies, the mice, but he could hear them screeching irritably at a distance.

Chaos. More chaos.

"You talk too much," said a dark one.

"The floodlights are hurting my eyes."

"You talk too much! The floodlights? We shall open the gates and take the lights away."

"Don't..."

"We have done this before. We shall do it again."

The miserable creature had a lot to say, and not just about the floodlights. But he said nothing. He knew it would happen, perhaps

seconds, minutes, hours, or days later; it did not really matter.

And it did happen. They opened the gates, taking the lights away. Floodlights did hurt, but without the lights, they were worse.

Chaos. More chaos.

The cub was overwhelmed with anger, exhaustion, and agony—a destructive amalgamation. The other tigers shared his wounds; they growled furiously.

He knew the dark shadows. He knew the mice. They would not stop.

But he also knew the tigers—tigers bigger and stronger than him, than the shadows, than the mice. They would not stop either.

Chaos. More chaos?

*Afifa Alam Raisa is a book reviewer and an undergraduate student pursuing Bachelor's of English at East West University. Apart from being a cricket freak, she is a voracious reader and a passionate writer. She knows very little about herself.*

POETRY

Two poems by Kazi Nazrul Islam

## Jabar bela fele jeo ekti khopar phul

Leave a flower from your bun when you depart, my love. Lay your eyes on mine, behold a little delusion, my love. With a flash of smile in a corner of your lips, dispel away all the gloom deep within my mind—don't part away swaying your diamond hoops. Emit a word or an expression of love I wish to sing in tune time and again—consider me a friend, my love, and hold my hands. Leave a flower from your bun, when you depart, my love.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

## Swapane eshechilo mridubhashini

In a dream came the soft-spoken sylph, the soft-spoken and sweet-smiling sylph. To soothe a devotee, she came as a celestial beauty, the imagined damsel dwelling in my inner territory. In an assignation came the indifferent sylph, the paragon of beauty limned in my heart. In a dream came the soft-spoken sylph...



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

*Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, poet, translator, and academic, is Professor at the Department of English at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet.*

FICTION

# Dual faces of an unseen predator

NAFISA AFREEN MEGHA

In a world spun from the threads of chaos, we are born into a tapestry of shadows. We are shimmering maidens in the night, nurturing within us a fire both subtle and strong. Yet, the air around us is heavy with whispers—danger and desire intertwined.

We walk the streets with anklets that jingle like wind chimes, but each step is taken with caution. The shadows stretch long, even at noon, as if to remind us of the fiends lurking in every corner, their eyes tracing our silhouettes like hunters stalking prey. The streets twist into dark corridors, and each step seems to be followed by a shadow that isn't ours, beating with the unknown threat that chases us by day and haunts us by night.

Our voices craft a tune that could awaken the sleeping gods, yet they are swallowed by the chaos of a world that cherishes only the thunder of a patriarch's roar. Our thoughts, so vivid and chaotic like a monsoon storm, are dismissed as mere drizzles, insignificant against the flood of recognition that parches our souls. We are the Goddess of Sagacity in a world that only worships power, our wisdom lost in the ocean of oblivion. No matter how high we fly, the sky remains beyond our grip, tethered by invisible strings, held tight by the hands of those who are threatened by our potential.

The predator wears many masks, each face a vow of something unspeakable. It is the ghost of old fears, its eyes are mirrors that reflect our own insecurities, a shadow hidden in the mundanities of everyday life. We feel it in the fleeting touch of an unknown hand, in the hollow echoes of a whispered promise, in the niceties of



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

insincere gestures. Like the young girl who trusted the warmth of a father figure, her innocence shattered by the unseen face of that predator, her trust forever lost in betrayal. Or the lady in white coat who craved sanctuary in a place of learning, only to watch that shelter become a theater of treachery. Or the child who put faith in a guiding hand, only to have her expectations destroyed by deceit masked as support.

In the eternal darkness of our lives, we fight with a never-ending truth etched into the depth of our existence. Safe streets, safe homes, safe haven are only but an elusive dream in a world where danger lurks in every shadow, every corner, every

man. No matter how deeply we love or how boldly we confront the darkness, they are persistent, their faces constantly changing, their intentions hidden in the curves of our everyday struggles. In a world so drenched in endless threat, will we ever find solace or a way to mend? It's a question that will forever haunt us, like a predator we can't quite fend.

*Nafisa Afreen Megha is an aspiring writer from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work consists of her individual thoughts, carefully put into words and turned to poetry. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at North South University.*

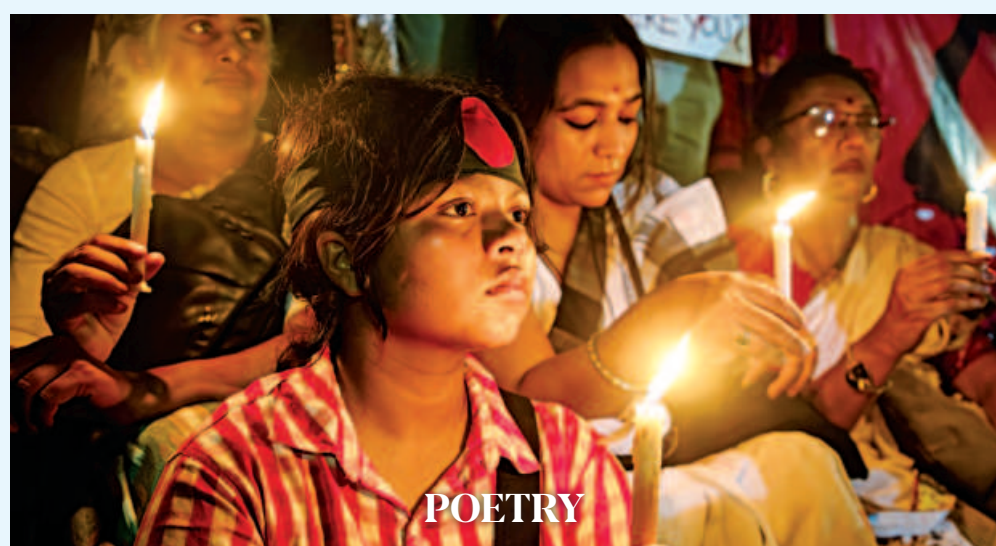


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## Survival tactics for "peaceful" protests

FAIZA RAMIM

Stay in a group, never in alleyways. Chaos is your best friend; your voice, a weapon. Your power is in your numbers.

Let people know where you are whenever you get the chance. So they know the starting point of where to look for you. Don't get killed.

But just in case, Use your name and emergency contact as your lock screen.

Wear your institution's badge as one of honour. You're a student. You're learning. Practicals on human anatomy, or the complex structure of bones.

And how to wrap the copies across your chest to protect them.

Because you're also learning to be frugal, makeshift gears to make use of everything. Practicals on the refractive indices of lens followed by the ones in your eyes.

When hit with tear gas, try not to focus on the burning in your lungs. Or the swelling of your chest,

the blinding pain, or the gasps for clean air. Toothpaste doesn't help, but put it on as a warpaint, a placating placebo. Until your student instincts kick in.

Moxifloxacin for seven days if you live that long. Artificial tears, because unfortunately the real ones won't suffice.

For 15 days (if you live that long) And Ce vit for a month if you live that long.

Cover your ears at the sight of a sound grenade. And open your mouth to neutralise the pressure.

Don't run away. The ringing in your ears will stop eventually.

Don't run away. Unless you see the bullets firing (and hope it's just the rubber ones) Unless you see.

Flash bangs, smoke grenades. When hit with tear shells, try to trade one burning in your lungs with another. And light up a cigarette.

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