



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

Mother saves her corpses before lunch

At first, it was barely noticeable, like a firefly lost in the mist. But as they traversed further down the river, the light grew brighter, floating just above the water's surface—pale and wavering, like a candle burning low in the night.

ZAREEF DAIAN

Mother woke before sunrise with the weight of the house pulling at her bones and moved against the cold floor, the chill biting at her ankles. In the corner hung the gutted rabbit, its blood pooling on the floor. Her fingers trembled, as she bathed herself in it, coating her skin red.

She walked through the forest towards the blackthorn tree. With a sigh and aching muscles, she swung the axe. The tree groaned and fell, collapsing inward as if too tired to resist. Mother dragged its corpse back to the house.

In the kitchen, she dug her hands into the earth until her fingers bled. She laid the blackthorn's corpse inside, doused with kerosene, the sharp smell filling the air. She struck a match, watching the flames consume it, casting shadows that twisted and flickered against the walls. She chewed on her hair and walked away as it burned.

Today would be like every other day. She had her children to tend to.

They lay still in their beds, wrapped in death's quiet embrace. Their pale faces unbothered with the world they'd left behind. Mother knelt beside them and kissed their cold ears, biting gently until her teeth left marks. She cut her palms with an obsidian blade and with the black blood flowing, drew symbols of 'revival' on their wrists.

The children's ghosts were there, swirling around her. They laughed, their voices sharp and mocking, pulling at her hair, pushing at her shoulders, playing games with her as she worked. Sometimes they took control of her body, forcing her to dance or sing foolish songs, their laughter ringing in her ears. Yet, she never faltered.

They needed her. And she *loved* them.

She dressed their corpses in white, warding off the death that clung to them. With frail movements, she placed green cloth over their eyelids and stitched them with olive thread to keep death's stare at bay. Their flesh smelled of rot, seeping through the layers of lavender oil she rubbed on their skin, but she didn't mind. By noon, the bodies were arranged carefully

around a pentagon. At its centre lay the smouldering remains of the blackthorn, dark as midnight. A broth simmered on the stove, thick and viscous with bits of indifferent flesh.

She chanted the spell and felt the familiar weight of centuries of motherhood pressing down on her. She ladled the soup to the children's mouths, her voice low, steady, unwavering. One by one, their limbs twitched, their fingers curling as life crept back into them. Their eyes opened, dull at first, then gleaming. They would laugh and run through the halls again, filling the house with their voices.

But life always came at a cost.

The rules of the ritual demanded human sacrifices before lunch each day. It would tire her to no end but that's what mothers do. They tend to their children, even when no one sees. They carry the weight, bear the burden, and make sure *everything* is done—before lunch.

Zareef Daian is a writer based in Uttara, Dhaka. He once dreamt he was a rabbit hanging on a clothesline in a witch's cottage.

The ghost of Arun Das

AFIFA ALAM RAISA

Raise no alarm, if on a night dimly lit,
In a village far away, an apparition flies past.

The silhouette brews no evil; it never did.
It's the ghost of Arun Das: lean, petite, and hardly eight.

Every now and then,
He flees the crematorium and stops by a grave.

Be brave, if on the street dark and grim,
You find a second soul by his side.
With the ghost of Ali Asad, he illuminates the night.
Slowly they glide

To the remnants of a burned house.
Don't shift; they always come back.

Stand still
Till you watch them bolt through the back door

With sweets in each hand, stolen from the altar:
A devotee's indifference, a small price to pay.

Find the imps in the forest next,
As their giggles fill the air
Just like old times.

Laugh along; God took no offense.
With the days in flesh gone by,
Let the ghosts rule the night.
Soon their wails will shred the sky;

They will mourn the murder of a million smiles,

The lost days of sweet mischief,
Knowing no harm and yet being killed.
Be afraid now,
Be a little afraid,
As from mosque to temple they run
To find which god the rioters pleased.

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



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

FOR THE CURIOUS WRITER

Writing the end of the world

The genre of post-apocalyptic fiction continues to unnerve and excite the reader in equal measure. If you fancy experimenting with this style, consider digging deeper into exploring human emotions and sentiments. You can break the boundaries of realism—such as using the absurd in expressing a character's grief—to express the intensity of human emotions. Remember, even in the apocalypse, human beings are equipped with the same handful of emotions: love, passion, outrage, jealousy, conflict. Consider also taking the same human crises from the world around us and using them in your fictional world. Remember, this is a world you've created, and your choices are limitless.

Hasib Ur Rashid Ifti



Bangali ghosts vie for the fishes

SABRINA SAZZAD

That night, the wind howled like the wolves as Shyam and Alameen rowed silently, their boat traversing through the misty air and the water rippling gently beneath them. Their nets were full, heavy with the night's catch, both men were excited to go home and consume a nourishing meal after days of barely good catches—when suddenly, a faint flicker of light caught Alameen's eye. At first, it was barely noticeable, like a firefly lost in the mist. But as they traversed further down the river, the light grew brighter, floating just above the water's surface—pale and wavering, like a candle burning low in the night.

"Bhoot." Shyam breathed, as Alameen shook, anxiously.

The light danced closer, and as it approached, the mist curled unnaturally, as if alive. A woman



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

emerged, her skin translucent, robes tattered and wet. Her hollow, red eyes bore into them, and her voice came in a whisper, carried by the fog. "The fish... they are mine."

Suddenly, a loud thud echoed from the other side of the boat. A slimy figure crawled aboard, his bulging eyes gleamed as he reached for the nets. "Fish! I shall devour!"

The woman's glow flared, her eyes narrowing. "They belong to the marsh, mechho!"

"They're mine, widow!" he croaked, stuffing a fish into his mouth.

Shyam and Alameen were shaking, when a tall figure appeared at the boat's bow—an old man, dressed in white. "Such vulgar behavior," he scolded. "Have some dignity, Mechho and Shakchunni."

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"Oh, old brahmadaitya, you are Brahmin. You can have all the fish you want, leave some for us," said the slimy ghost.

Shyam and Alameen clasped each other's hands, anxious. As the spirits continued bickering, a giggle echoed through the mist. A child-like specter danced on the boat, flipping the nets and sending fishes flying. "So many fish! Let's play!" he shrieked, tugging at Shyam's shirt. Shyam had shrieked back too—clinging to Alameen in fear.

Just then, a foul stench filled the air. From the shadows, suddenly emerged a pishach, his red eyes gleaming with hunger. "Forget the fish, I want the flesh."

Shyam and Alameen froze, terror gripping them as the spirits surrounded them. Suddenly remembering a tale his father told him—that one could fool ghosts and save their lives—Shyam desperately cried out: "Why not have a contest? Show us your powers, and whoever impresses us most will take all the fish!"

The ghosts paused, as if intrigued. The woman's mist swirled violently, the mechho bhoot commanded the river to erupt with fish, brahmadaitya stilled the waters, and pechho bhoot flew around, giggling. The pishach glared with red eyes when he lunged for the men, but brahmadaitya's hands glued him to the boat. The old man winked at them, as if signaling they could leave.

As the spirits showed off their powers, Shyam whispered to Alameen, "Let's go. Now." Quietly, they slipped into the water, wading to safety, leaving the ghosts to argue among themselves.

Sabrina Sazzad is a contributor to Star Books and Literature. Reach out to her by email for spooks at sabrinassazzad07@gmail.com.