



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

SISYPHUS LAUGHS

the laughter of God

Sisyphus stands atop the hill, watching the endless procession of people—coming and going, passing him by. He, too, rolls along with them, tumbling ceaselessly.

MOJAFFOR HOSSAIN

At last, God heeded Sisyphus's prayer—a plea he had been making for countless centuries. Each time, he hoisted the rock onto his shoulders, convinced that this would be the time it ascended with ease. Liberation lay just beyond the peak; if only he could cast the wretched stone to the other side, he would finally be free. Yet every time, despair greeted him anew. In the final moments, the treacherous rock slipped from his grasp, tumbling with a storm's fury back to the base of the mountain, where it awaited him—unyielding as ever.

No human had ever been so desolate. He had hurled curses at God—none were left unsaid. Yet, when he began anew, he was overcome with remorse, his tears flooding the barren earth. The people of the world marvelled: how could so much water be held atop the peaks of the mountains? Sisyphus had invoked God's name so many times that even if all of humanity joined him, they could not match his devotion. And yet, God's heart remained unmoved. He had all but forgotten Sisyphus.

At long last, Sisyphus was set free. The great stone, as if buoyed by the softness of the air, rose and disappeared. All of it was by God's will—by His grace, no less. From this day forth, Sisyphus was the sole master of his life. His deeds would bear him fruits, just as they did for any other person. Whether he accepted God or rejected Him was his choice. If he wished, he could abandon a task midway to pursue another. He was no longer bound by the rigid laws of endurance. Even time would not command him, for he was now free to defy it.

However, the god had his conditions. Sisyphus was told he had to live as a human, bound to a mortal's existence. Yet, as one, who bore a curse, he was denied the release of death. Sisyphus, without a trace of hesitation, agreed. With a strange joy, he embraced all the terms set before him. After all, was there any life more infinitely varied than that of humans? A thousand different lives awaited him, and his endless, deathless existence would unfold as he lived through them, one after another.

Sisyphus descended into the teeming world of humanity. At first, he was enthralled. Everything delighted him; every task seemed to brim with fresh vigour. He married with grand celebration, raised children, arranged their weddings, tilled the soil, worked in offices and courts, played the role of both policeman and thief—what didn't he do? Several lifetimes passed in unbridled joy. But that unending joy began to wane. He watched as people grew older, changed, and eventually faded from the world. New faces appeared, filled the spaces left behind, and in turn, they too departed. Sisyphus remained. People aged, time reshaped them, but Sisyphus stayed unchanged. His work, too, remained the same, repetitive and ceaseless.

Sisyphus stands atop the hill, watching the endless procession of people—coming and going, passing him by. He, too, rolls along with them, tumbling ceaselessly. Life, for them, unfolds in a familiar pattern: they marry, they work, they have children, and those children grow into full-fledged humans, who grow old, fall ill, and eventually die. And in between? They eat, they defecate, they quarrel, they love, they sleep by the clock, and wake up by the clock—each life confined to the same unchanging mould. From a distance, they all appear as if they were Sisyphus in their own ways.

Yet, they are far more fortunate than he was. For them, there is death—a definitive end to their suffering. Their anguish has a conclusion, their repetition a finite span. Before monotony tightens its grip entirely, life would reach its natural end. And that, perhaps, is why their lives brim with such fervour, such intensity!

Sisyphus, however, was denied the mercy of death. For him, there was only the eternal charade of playing at being human. Watching them, he felt an aching envy. Ah, what a wondrous thing it would be to live like that!

Sisyphus approached the god once more—this time, to plead for death. He craved it, no matter how harrowing or unbearable it might be. And this time, the gods were more willing to listen. But, as always, there was a condition—

nothing comes unconditionally from the gods; such is their nature. The decree was clear: after death, Sisyphus would dwell eternally among humans—either in heaven or in hell. Once he embraced death, the possibility of dying a second time would be forever denied. To live is to be born once and to die once. And the life that follows death is, like the gods themselves, eternal—untouched by decay, impervious to endings. Not even the god can undo that life with another death, for the act of dying itself is what grants that immortality.

After hearing everything, Sisyphus's enthusiasm vanished in an instant. He has no desire to go anywhere—neither heaven nor hell. What meaning do heaven or hell hold for a life that stretches on eternally, monotonously, without end? Sisyphus craves an end. He longs for his existence to dissolve, like a dewdrop in the morning sun, like a fallen leaf swept away by the wind, like the fleeting notes of a bird's song—gone forever.

But God made it clear: there is no such thing as an end. If there were, God Himself would have declared, millions of years ago, "I've had enough."

The stone keeps rolling. Sisyphus no longer prays. In his thoughts, God and he have become bound by the same fate. At the foot of the mountain, one by one, people die, and Sisyphus laughs—the laughter of God.

Translated by Haroonuzzaman

Mojaffor Hossain is a distinguished fiction writer within the realm of contemporary Bangla literature. He began his professional journey as a journalist and is currently employed as a translator at the Bangla Academy.

Haroonuzzaman is a translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. Besides teaching English in Libya and Qatar for about 12 years, he has had 20 years of teaching experience in English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

POETRY

Story of one tree

FARUK MAHMUD

When I come to you, I become a tree
Trees have roots
Trees have dreams under their barks, on
green leaves
—So have I
I stand alone on my feet like a tree
I keep standing...
Just when I come to you,
Innumerable roots emerge from my two
feet
They push through the soil deep inside
like perfect earthworms
I forget my past movement
I forget my habit of a busy day's brisk
walking
When I come to you all my twenty fingers
hold a lot of green
Your touch gives me fresh protein
Your easy companionship supplies pure
calcium
And I virtually turn into a tree



Like a tree my sight's branches bear
innumerable flowers
Bakul, sheuli, jui, hasnahena.
On the *shithan* of a light
On the turn of side pillow
Into the folds of ten fingers
I turn into a tree.
When I come to you
Innumerable roots emerge from my two
feet
All my strength to move even an inch
goes in exile
I become a tree in body and mind.

Translated by Md. Abu Zafar

Faruk Mahmud is a contemporary Bangladeshi poet. He has published more than a dozen volumes of poetry so far. His last volume of poetry *Andhakarer Utsho Hote Utsharito Alo (Kobi Prokashoni)* came out in 2023.

Md. Abu Zafar is Professor, Department of English, Jagannath University.

ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

DE MI PARA TI;

NAFEESA AFREEN MEGHA

I see her now, but not in the way I have always seen her—through the lens of service, of duty, of roles—but as a woman whose edges were softened long before I learned her name. Sometimes, on a random Tuesday afternoon, she drops a harmless anecdote, a sacred fragment of herself so small I almost miss it. A youth defeated against the harshness of an unforgiving world. An unfinished tale of rebellion folded carefully into the wrinkles of her muted life. And in those little moments, I blankly stare at her, as if I have never truly seen her before.

There is a wound that rests between us, mended together by years of words unspoken and unheard. Her confessions, when they come, are whispered through shattered glass. The air between us feels heavy, as though it could break any minute under the weight of things I have never asked her—about the things she desired, the dreams she lost, the pieces of herself she abandoned without question.

The words settle between us like a shadow, her story caressing against the confines of my carefully curated independence. The worlds we belong to

are stitched together by threads of history, so delicate and so vulnerable. I think of how I have run so far and so fast, blind to the face that paved the road beneath my feet. I wonder, how much of her life have I dismissed as mere background to my own? How many of her stories have faded, wilted, because I didn't know where to look for them? This woman, my mother, who once hoped to defy the rules of her world, who once dragged her feet on the same earth I now walk on, her heart entwining with the sands of dreams she could never fully chase.

The simplicity of her confessions breaks something inside me every time. Not a void but a truth so real, it feels blinding. It is like staring into a reflection I never had the courage to confront. And in that moment, I realise that womanhood is not just the succession of her lessons or the depth of her sacrifices—it is the slow, aching process of seeing her as she truly is. A woman who is simply experiencing life for the first time, uncertain, scared, and still falling through the spaces in between, just like me.

Mothers and daughters exist as wretched mirrors of each other. In her, I find the pieces of myself I wish to escape and in me, she sees the parts of herself

she abandoned. I am all she could have been and she is all I might ever be. With every step I take, I follow the trail she once imagined for herself. In every choice I make, I trace the outline of her regrets. I am my mother's daughter and in this life, I am both her unfinished story and my own.

And so, I carry this realisation with me everywhere I go now. Heavy. A confession I never thought I would have to make. Maybe, just maybe, this is how we speak the unspoken—the subtle acknowledgement that her life and mine are not so different after all. *From me to you*, this is both an offering and a reckoning. Perhaps it is enough to hold her stories as they are told, piece by piece, and to see her not as a silhouette but as a woman who continues to live, to learn, to ache, to dream in ways I am only beginning to understand. For in knowing her, even just a little, I am learning to know myself.

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.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA