

I now closely studied this strange woman.

The rojonigondha on the wrist contrasted with her dusky skin. The aalta on her palms and fingers gave a festive vibe. Large but not too flamboyant jewellery glistened in the sunlight that poured into the waiting room through large windows. The meticulously draped blue saree hid most of her sweat-drenched black blouse.

"Never seen a beautiful woman before?" she sleepily taunted, with her eyes still closed!

In the middle of nowhere

She woke up with a shudder. After recovering and remembering her whereabouts, she let out a sigh.

"Why are you here?" I eventually addressed the elephant in the room.

It was now dark outside. The station was even more desolate at night. The temperature was much cooler, at least by our Hoogna Geram standards, which is a relief, given that electricity is almost always out.

Taking a sip from the cup of tea that I offered, she replied flatly, "I ran."

"Eloped?"

"Ran away from my wedding that is taking place in two days," she continued. "I came as far as I could and got down at this random station. This is so childish. I will go back tomorrow."

I looked at her helplessly.

"And why are you here?" now she asked me back.

"What do you mean, why I'm here? I am the station master."

She slowly got up from the bench and took a seat beside me. "No, really, why are you here? You seem to be a nice,



help but paint and travel, leaving economics forever. That was how I discovered this place.

I settled here because there was no one to bug me, and I was in love with the beauty of the village — the blazing krishnachura blooms, the muddy pathways, crystal-clear skies, and quiet and stillness.

"I want to see your art," she told me after hearing all this.

I showed her some sketches -- a large banyan tree just outside the station, trains arriving and departing, my guard dog Bhulu and his pals who made this station their home, a colleague and friend who worked in another shift, the baul who often visits me for a chat, but most of all, harrowing scenes of droughts of the Shukhno Gram.

She was moved, touched, and shocked to know that it never rains here.

Then, she playfully declared, "If it rains before my train comes, I will not return to Dhaka and stay here!"

Sun-kissed

"Ok Google, will it rain today?" -- I asked my phone, to which Google remained silent. Network issues!

She chuckled, leaning against a wall. "You won't get so lucky!"

Warm rays of the morning sun shot at her face, so much so that she couldn't keep her eyes open properly. But she held her pose -- leaned on the wall sideways -- as I busily dipped my paintbrush on the palette and focused on the canvas in front of me.

I painted furiously: locks of hair, large earrings, blue saree, olive-toned skin, white petals, red aalta.

"You didn't tell me last night why you eloped," I continued.

"Does it matter? Aren't you glad that I did?"

I let it go.

She told me many things yesterday -- her job in a management consultancy and how much she hated it, her friends and family who by now must be really worried about her, and how much she loved this saree that belonged to her mum and decided to wear it at the pre-wedding party that she eventually escaped from.

But she didn't tell me why she escaped.

By the time I laid down my paintbrush, it was almost time for the train to arrive.

She stared at the canvas in awe. "Do you really find me so beautiful? You keep it. Put it in a gallery one day and invite me to your exhibition when you become a famous artist!"

I brought her luggage to the platform. "No rain," I sighed.

"No rain, sorry!" she reiterated and laughed. "Go home and sleep. I wanna be alone for a while. Your shift has ended a long time ago anyway."

"So, is the wedding back on?"

She turned pensive, paused, and announced again, "It didn't rain."

The bride in blue

Shukhno Gram Rail Station became smaller and smaller as I looked on while sitting at the back of a rickshaw-van. When the building got rather tiny, I heard a rumble

-- a thunder!

Rahim Miah braked. "Station master, what is happening?"

A cold breeze. Grey clouds. A lightning. Another thunder! "Take me back to the station! Hurry!"

The villagers were out on the meadows and fields. Children ran out of their school. Farmers looked at the sky in disbelief. Energy and anticipation swept through.

But it doesn't rain in Shukhno Gram, remember? It may show some false hope once or twice a year, only to break people's hearts again and again.

The grey clouds soon subsided, and the skies were clear.

This village is cursed.

By the time I rushed back to the station, it was like any other day -- hot, humid, dry. The short-lived hope of a downpour was gone, and so was the train.

I turned back wearily to go home.

Suddenly, someone called out, "Excuse me! I think I missed a train."

I know this voice. I turned around again. There she was -- all smiles -- my bride in blue!

talented man wasting and rotting his life away in this place."

I had not been confronted with this question in a long time!

Graduating from economics, while my friends frantically applied for corporate jobs or started their own businesses, I walked around the campus aimlessly. You see, I always wanted to be an artist. But instead of Charukala, I chose economics, doing what I thought would be the right thing to do.

My desire to paint never went away. And so, after I was done with studies, I couldn't

By M H Haider

Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

Model: Shababa Rashid

Jewelry: Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily

Wardrobe (Saree): Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily

Makeup: Shababa Rashid

Fashion coordinator: Nur Azmain