



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

CHILDREN OF RAIN

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Shirin could barely walk after the accident; her lungs gave in anytime she took more than twenty steps. In between, bed rest and medications exhausted her body but never her spirit. She was someone who could be described as being made of liquid sun – warm, radiant, bright – anything and everything people thought a differently-abled person couldn't be.

As if their entire human existence could be boiled down to what they cannot do, that they have lost the normal ability to live life. Shirin tried her best to overcome her inability to define herself. She crocheted her days away when she came home from the three-month-long stay at the hospital.

Her family gathered in the front yard as her father, with a tenderness that was reserved for handling blown glass, transferred her from the car to the wheelchair. They did not know how to approach this new Shirin. Were her hands still theirs to kiss? Would their touch be a caress or a cause of pain?

They had all been waiting for her. They looked at her face, and there was no clear sign of sadness or excitement. Rather, it was a puzzle. There were lines of melancholy etched on her face but so was hope.

There was relief in coming back home, but she was also burdened by the grief of memories, of days she could run to the kitchen to her mother, of days when her family never had to formally greet her at the front yard.

Months had gone by, and the window chair remained under the warm blanket. Shirin didn't feel the season change. Time sat beside her for bedtime stories as she looked far away in search of the future, which became a funny word to her.

In many African cultures, the concept of past, present, and future is different. Some of them proposed that the future does not exist, but the past and present do. They think the past is ahead of them; that is why they can see it clearly.

She saw the days leading up to the accident. Fire, muffled voices, reporter vans, and ambulances – everything blurred to one single scene of transition. She could feel the motion, the vehicles wheeling past her skinny body, as well as the fact that she cleared the way on the street for ambulances to reach hospitals as soon as they could.

Hours before, when the crowd had still been processing the fire and burns, she heard and responded to the call to be in the front lines. There had been so many lives in that moment in time, which were carefully balanced on tiptoes, on the verge of entering the other side.

It was a fire so close that the heat began distorting everything around it.

A strange, suffocating silence emanated from the heart of the inferno. No cries – only the roar of the flame and the groan of surrendering reality. It was this void of sound that was more terrifying than any scream. And then she ran, not as a choice, but as an instinct, toward the unfolding horror.

All she saw was the same uniforms she herself had worn, which had also been donned by children younger than her – the same ones who were terrified to be in the place where they were supposed to feel safe.

Memories of the playground and laughter, that coloured everyone's blue skies, were now melting.

Her mind refused to grapple with the scale. In fact, it could only fixate on a single, devastating detail. She

remembered the wall in the primary wing, the one that had been vibrantly defaced with cartoon shapes and the earnest, misspelt names of the artists. She pictured it not as a memory, but as a premonition of loss: the bright suns and wobbly flowers had begun to blister, the proud, crayon-written names melted into unrecognisable streaks of wax, a universe of innocent creation dissolved before it could even be comprehended.

They were not just children; they were the authors of that bright, naive art, and they were vanishing inside its frame.

Soon enough, though, water was thrown as a silent apology to the massacre of a thousand unfinished dreams. The parents cried and looked for their child in panic, and so did Shirin, who refused to be frozen by the sound of the ambulance and fire trucks. Gates were flung open before the *chhutir ghonta*.

People started to crowd the scene fast enough. Reporters had started counting the lives that had already departed. Shirin, however, knew that the tragedy was about to be made worse for those who were yet to be taken by death. She ran towards the streets, with many others, and she cleared the path for ambulances to enter. For a hasty moment, she forgot about her own safety.

The same sun she was made of now warmed her cheeks – a bold and fierce light that held no room for regret inside her. On the other side, distant kites dipped and swayed, their colours blazed like the drawings that once filled the schoolyard wall. The very wind that had once carried the smoke began to lift the kites, making them dance high against the wide, forgiving sky.

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