

Maung Htike Aung
A Bird-Human

Feathers flew out of my mouth. One after another. A burst of colourful ones as I kept speaking. I walked around the room, touching walls. I touched my throat. I stood before a mirror. I spoke.

One more feather fell. I stopped.

I picked it up. Still warm.

"Whose is it?" I whispered. Another feather slipped from my lips.

Days passed. I spoke less, but it didn't help. A single sigh loosened feathers. They gathered in the room. Under my bed, under my shirt.

I went to the Chinthe who lived at a junkyard and told him the story.

He said, "I've been here so long and couldn't remember who I was before. Whenever I roar, only a bark comes out."

Silence fell.

"I wish I had the answer for both of us," he said.

When I got back to the camp, I lay on the bed of feathers, trying to remember. Not my name. Not my work. Before that. Before these camps. Before this language.

I couldn't.

"I—"

I forced the words out. "Who am I?" A feather fell—larger than the rest. I held it in the air and listened.

A call.

Not in my language. Something in me answered. Not with words, but longing. My arms lifted. Something resisted at my shoulders. I let the call rise again. Bones shifted. My hands thinned, lengthened, feathered. I stood there long enough between two selves.

I chose. I did not speak; I chirped.

The feathers on the floor stirred, rose, and one by one, returned to where they belonged.

WHY A MAN DOESN'T TALK OR DO ANYTHING

He stopped breathing. A breath felt like confession. He locked himself in his room. He neither spoke nor did anything. Days turned into months into years.

He was different. He had spoken and done so many things. Words of love, care, wisdom, doings for the good of others. He remembered; words returned as weapons, sweat as blood.

Many things stirred in him. However, when he wanted to talk, his soul came out of his body and shut his mouth. It also held his feet not to move.

The body asked, "Let me talk." His soul softly told, "Please, don't do that."

"Why? At least, let me do something as I always did."

His soul went quiet. Later, it whispered, "I don't want to feel guilty anymore."

And so, they stayed that way.

TAKE YOUR HAT OFF

It has been a long, long day. And there is always something to prolong it. When the sun goes down, I look at the to-do list stuck to the tarpaulin wall.

“Daddy, you should go find some food,” Terra says. “We have nothing left to eat,” she continues. I turn my inner self into a sigh, and get a hat to go out for a tedious search, without being decisive where to go. Terra demands she would love to join me. Grabbing her bag dirt-stained.

After hours walking down the murky river, we see a bunch of people circle around something, heads down. We drag our legs there. Their scream terrifies us.

“For God’s sake. Bloody, take your hat off. It is a stump.”