

Senior Division, Short Fiction

Khadija Rehman, St. John's

What Could Have Been (an excerpt)

When Kaniya got married, no one would have known from her innocent face and almond eyes hidden under the translucent red veil that she would one day be dragged, kicking and screaming, to her deathbed. That she would fix her eyes, swollen with rage on a blank wall and curse at God with her last breath and would die leaving everyone around her traumatized with her dying expletives.

“You are a dog! You are the devil! You ruined me. You ruined my life. What do you want now? You want my soul, you rascal? I don't worship you. I *spit* on you. I *spit* on you.”

She doesn't know what she's saying, they said. She is not in her senses.

But she was.

It was hard to distinguish Kaniya from her disease. I would find out later that she used to go to school with a heavy, iron padlock on her bag because she thought the children were conspiring to steal her things. Her parents thought it was childish imagination, but Kaniya was suspicious of everyone (even them). The last few months before her death, she had boarded up all the windows and locked herself in her bedroom because she was convinced that there were people out there who were after her life. She saw them, she said, through the window.

We came back from the hospital and sat in the living room to discuss Kaniya's burial. She had wanted her body to be dumped in the common burial ground in Azimpur where no one would ever find her. But Kaniya's brother was not in agreement. She was not in her right mind, he said. She should be buried properly at the Banani graveyard like everyone else. Her family, her daughter, should be able to visit her grave and pay their respects. What do you think, Roma?

He was looking at me. I turned to my grandmother for answers. I couldn't imagine visiting Kaniya's grave. What would I say to her? *Kaniya you are dead and gone. Kaniya, I am free.*