

She's Just a Dreamer

Nafina Raha

Aaruna swore up and down that she saw a woman with wings—big, feathered wings, wings like those of an angel—flying through the sky far, far above the rooftop garden on the top of her apartment building.

“She had dark skin and hair like mine, all curly and big, only it was down past her hips, streaming after her on the wind,” she spoke rapidly, in hushed and rushed tones to her uncle as he bustled around the apartment to get ready for work. It was his day to take all the children—her, her siblings, her cousins, all eight of the school-age children living in their cramped apartment—to school, and he was the least timely of all the adults in their family. “And—and she was wearing this beautiful dress, it was all blues and purples and dark greens and whites—I’ve never seen clothing like it—and her wings—oh my, her wings—they looked like angel’s wings, but they were this deep shade of maroon, or burgundy, or plum, with feathers like a bird, and I swear, she made eye contact with me from way up there, and she smiled, and—”

“Aaruna, you read too many fantasy books,” my mother called from the dinner table, crowded in with some of my cousins stuffing food into their mouths as they slung their bags over their shoulders in preparation to leave for school. “Now stop rambling and get your book bag ready.”

“I’m not making this up! I know what I saw! She was really far up, but I couldn’t have mistaken her for something else. There’s no way I could’ve mixed her up with a bird—she looked so human, just like us, just with wings, and—”

“Come on, Aaruna, we have to leave now. Everyone, let’s get moving, we can’t miss the train today!” my uncle called through the room over the racket of the multiple different conversations and the bodies bustling this way and that.

“The Winged People have to still exist! I saw one, she must’ve been a Winged person—all the history books say—”

“Oh, please. The Winged People disappeared hundreds of years ago. Driven into extinction. Everyone knows that.”

“I don’t even think they ever existed. No proof. All this nonsensical stuff about flying people—it’s got to be just a myth.” My aunt and her wife had joined our conversation, and this encouraged my cousins to jump into the conversation.

“Aaruna’s imagining fake flying people.”

“She’s got to be hallucinating.”

“She thinks we’ve reverted seven hundred years into the past.”

“She’s just a dreamer.”

“It’s because she hasn’t got anyone to talk to outside those books—except for the rest of the book nerds at school.”

“You can all shut up about my sister before I throw you through the train’s window later,” my older sister, Harshi, cut in as she breezed into the living room from our shared bedroom, shooting her death glare at our cousins—they quickly shut up after that. She turned to me, handing me my school bag. She smiled, her dark eyes like onyx gemstones, the same eyes our entire family had. “Come on, Aaruna. Tell me about this Winged woman.”