

When that fog horns blows

I don't remember much about my first scream.

Back then, we used to find shapes in clouds—dragons, cities, elephants—before Noman started taking them to make wings. Every night, we'd lie on our backs and look at the stars in silence. Inside our dreams, we fought for love, and when we woke up, we drew little homes inside each other's hearts. It feels like another life now.

My name came up randomly. It came as a surprise. I was the youngest ever to do it. People whispered. They speculated. All I remember is—I wasn't afraid.

The well stood inside a square glass house, right at the center of our island. No one knew who built it. No one remembered how the ritual began. It was just... there, like the tide or the stars. Every year, during the sixth full moon, a name would appear on the black slate mounted in the upper-left corner of the west-facing wall.

That person had to walk into the glass house, stand at the edge of the well, and scream into the darkness. Then wait for a reply.

It never came. Not really. People waited, year after year, hoping the echo might return with something new. But it never did. Just their own scream, stretched thin by silence. Still, the ritual went on, as if honoring a debt none of us understood.

Sophie once told me we were part of a giant experiment, beyond our understanding.

I still don't know why Noman was chosen. He didn't speak much, just worked quietly, carefully. All his focus went into making wings from cloud-thread and found feathers. Tourists adored them. If the first attraction of the island was the well, the second was definitely Noman's wings.

Five years after my first scream, my name appeared again. I walked to the well, screamed into it, and waited. Nothing. I came back empty-handed.

The year after that, it was Noman.

He stepped into the glass house with his usual calm, but when he screamed, something different happened. He fainted—collapsed right there beside the well. He lay there for five hours while the entire island waited patiently. Everyone was anxious. Everyone was equally excited for the answer.

When he finally opened his eyes and walked out, something in him had shifted. His shoulders sagged under some invisible weight. He told us he got it. He got the reply. And he asked everyone to gather again in the morning.

But that night, Noman disappeared.

No note. No trace. His room was a mess of half-finished wings, scraps of cloud fabric, broken feathers. Some people were furious—said it was a trick. Others were just sad. They searched his room, combed the island, but he was gone. He took the story with him.

By evening, someone noticed the black slate had vanished from the glass wall. And inside, there was no longer a well. The house stood there with its newfound emptiness.

Fifteen years have passed since then. We have been living inside an incomplete story. Every day we longed for an epilogue, but in return, life gave us blank pages.

This morning, I found something outside my door—two wings. It was like floating inside a memory from a long-forgotten life. Noman. A few words scrawled on a strip of paper. He gave me the address. He asked me to come for the answer. He said there is a reason I was chosen twice.

I used to carry so much hatred for Noman. I blamed him for vanishing, for ruining the ritual, for never giving us the ending of the story. That hatred morphed slowly over the years, and now it's something else entirely—an ache I can't name.

I close my eyes and see him—with those enormous wings, floating far above the glass house, calling me to follow. And then Sophie's voice drifts back to me, like a quiet wind through an open window: *some mysteries should remain unsolved*, she had whispered once, while we were watching the stars.

I don't remember much about my first scream. All I remember is that I wasn't afraid.

I reach into myself and pull out the little homes one by one. I look at the one Sophie made—hers was messy but beautiful. She was never good at making these. But whenever I felt sleepy, whenever I lost myself under the shadow of that unknown ache, this little home gave me shelter.

I look at the sky. Is she up above, floating with the clouds? Is she still fighting for love inside her dreams? So many questions, like tides, ebb and flow inside me—pulled by moons I'll never see.

I stand there alone. I kiss the home and crumble it gently between my palms. I shape it into a small paper boat and set it on the water.

I watch it float, until it disappears into the vastness of the sea.