

Kash Mire

by Jamal H. Iqbal

You're easily amused at their inane attempts at dissecting frogs. You wait in cold anticipation of their imminent machismo, watching them swish their makeshift frog-catching gear on the edge of the Dal lake. You'd known that the moment they realized you had an endless supply of worn-out squash racquets and hi-strength surgical gauze (one stolen from the Border Security Force Officers' Gymnasium, the other, from mom's handbag as she prepped for infirmary each morning); they would ask you to make each of them a *Frogger*.

You watch with frigid eyes, as their soggy woolens squelch dark mud, even smiling a little as they make croaking frog-lure noises. You know eventually a toad or two would land in the *Frogger*. You like the word *Frogger* (in spite of them catching bull toads). You hope it will make the Oxford Dictionary of Colloquial English one day. You will be proud you created it.

You see them pull out a toad, laying it flat on the edge of the houseboat. You spy Yakub — he that's studying the art of Unani medicine at Hakeem Yahya's madr'asa — fish out a pink scalpel from under his woolen Firan, and make a clean cut into the toad's belly, presently the color of algae it was hiding in. The gang claps as the toad shudders to stillness.

You notice Zain — he's studying Anthropology at what's left of Old Kashmir High School For Young Men, Sirinagar — massage the toad's tiny heart, clasp and unclasp it, sprinkling a pinch of salt until it starts beating again. The gang collectively hushes. The toad springs over the edge, back into the lake.

You start your way back towards the shore, nursing icy bluntness on the stumps that were once your knees. Before the steel saw had hacked away at them. “As a reminder to your mom, of the perils of

continuing to heal the Indian army's men." You speculate telling Yakub it was his father's voice, not really an anonymous terrorist's that you recalled, each time you narrated the tale of your missing legs to him and his friends.

You're not sure if Yakub would then report his father to Major Rajeev of the Army R&R. You know what Major Rajeev would then order. You visualize Yakub's vanishing machismo, as he would search for the man he called "dad" all through December and into March. You hope Yakub would give him a proper burial, as he's discovered under the apricot tree, a 9mm hole at the back of his head. You wonder if that's all that shall sprout from this land, when the snow finally stops falling.

