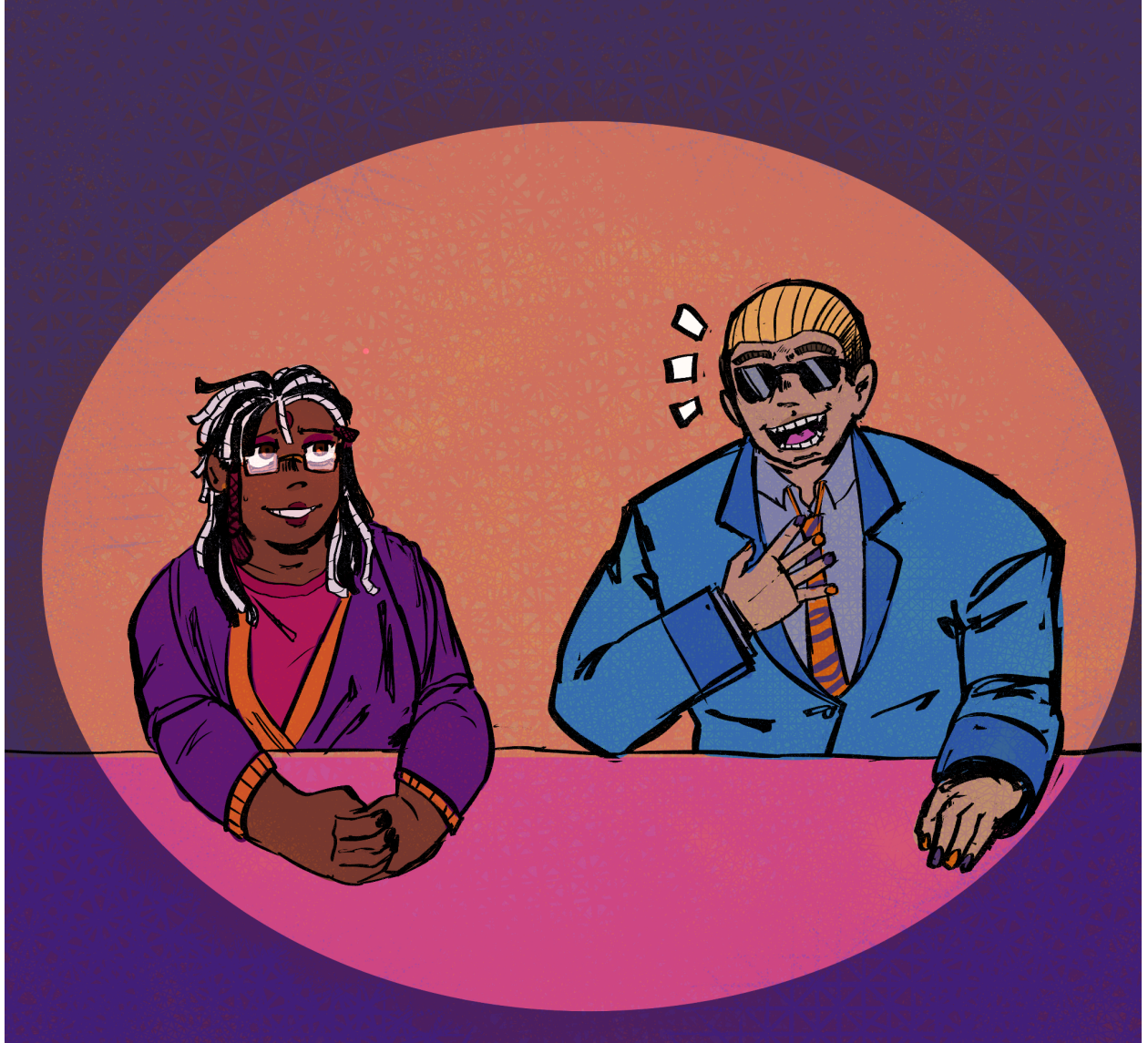




The Friendly Gossip, '**She**', is sitting there, looking like an ordinary, if beautiful woman. Next to her is a man with broad shoulders and slicked-back hair. The two begin speaking in Bengali, though there are subtitles in every major language.

'Her': "Hello, citizens of Rākinnagarh." *She folds her hands in front of her, smiling sweetly at the camera.* "And welcome to the pilot of the Paparazzi Network. I'll be your Announcer, and--."

Co-Host: "I am your Co-Host!" *His voice is earnest and cheery, leaning on slightly grating.*

'Her': "Our wonderful city has so much happening, it's hard to keep track. So, please do use this Network as a resource, learning all the local news--"

Co-Host: "And all the hottest gossip!"

'Her': "--All for free." *She gives a sly smile.* "We keep our journalistic standards high. The Network has a **one hundred percent guarantee** on all information you get from this little operation. While we maintain independence with what we decide to air, on occasion, as more news happens than we could cover ourselves, we will take suggestions for segments from our listeners."

'Her': "Oh, but listen to me prattle on, huhuhu... we have a lot to get through today!"

Co-Host: "And for our pilot episode, looks like of the who's-who, with current events to keep an eye on!"

'Her': "The theme today is 'contracts', the nitty gritty of who builds what and where. But don't touch that dial, listeners, there's enough dirt to fill a foundation."

Co-Host: "It looks like the first item on the agenda is a social story."

'Her': "Indeed." *The camera zooms onto her, and a picture appears on the screen. It's six men in a sumptuous room, wearing nice, but understated suits. All look cheery, like they're among old friends. Five are standing around a sixth, an older man with a rosy face being handed a large bottle.*

'Her': "Now, these aren't men who the average person could recognize! But like any good reporter could tell you, it's not enough to know; *communicating* what you know is the other half of your job."

Co-Host: "Well said! Now unless I am mistaken, these are some of the highest-profile individuals in all of Rakin city's booming construction business! That man in the center? He's the primary zoning commissioner for the entire metro area! And that bottle... a 1900 Chateaux Margaux! And that interior looks like the smoking room in the mansion of one the gentleman in the green suit! What a party! They sure seem comfortable with each other, don't they?"

'Her': "Indeed they do. Such good friends, and such friendly contracts for new developments. It's a shame that the contracts they signed outside the biggest boomtowns haven't been so kind. That they can't manage to keep electricity going consistently south of the mountain, or clean up quickly after mining runoff gets in the drinking water. Or make a real dent in the housing problems, even rebuild homes that are falling apart."

'Her': "Well, I'm sure that there's just so many things in the way to get all that work done. Maybe some of their other friends can give them some help."

Co-Host: "Spicy! I wouldn't have guessed anything interesting could be found with zoning! Why, that commissioner must be a real socialite, given his popularity."

'Her': "Mm! You'd be surprised what lies just under the surface if you know how to *dig*. Mind moving us onto our next story?"

Co-Host: "Works for me! Speaking of digging, we've got a nature story packed for all the folks at home today too."

'Her': "Mm. I'm sure everyone gets a good view of the mountain- and that includes where a project has been clearing out space for a whole new suburb."

Co-Host: "Always seemed like kind of an eyesore to me, but hey, what can you do?"

'Her': "Oh, we would not need to do anything at all. The mountain's doing that, huhuhu.... Things are chaos. People come out of tunnels they didn't go into, equipment gets crushed by very localized rockfalls, millions of dollars are down the drain, and they barely have a subdivision built."

'Her': "It's almost like it's alive."

Co-Host: "Creepy! I just hope it's not angry at *us*."

'Her': "We can only hope."

Co-Host: "Moving on back to civilization, we've got a story I want you to handle!"

'Her': "Mm, if you insist. As some of you might have heard, we've got a new movement making waves in Khandarabhatt, the Khandara Movement for Fair Growth. It's been calling for more housing, better access to the rest of the city, and more oversight of who builds what."

Co-Host: "Wow, they must really be making some of those developers hot under the collar! That's a lot of ambition, where's it coming from?"

'Her': "Oh, the most troublesome place it could. The people." *She shook her head, making sarcastic tutting noises.* "But it's rallied around home-grown community organizer and public speaker as the face of the movement."

Co-Host: "Someone to keep an eye on then?"

'Her': "Certainly."

'Her': Now our last segment for today is 'Candid Camera', where the people of Rākinnagarh speak their mind on the latest news. Why don't you give a bit of background?"

Co-Host: "Oh, I'm flattered! This segment is from a few junior members of one of the up-and-coming gangs of the underworld, VULTURE! They've grown from a small-time drug runner operation to become *the* dominant force of BEDTOWN within just two years!" *He laughs.* "They may seem to be off the theme, but they still command who gets to do what in the area. Someone needs to keep things in order there, and with the lack of interest by the city in doing so, it falls to other groups to keep things in line!"

'Her': "Focus up dearie, you almost missed a detail."

Co-Host: *He gives a somewhat pained smile, shuffling his papers.* "Right you are! Most of this growth is due to the influence of their enigmatic leader, who's torn apart everything in her way to the top. She's even the next best candidate for Queen of the underworld! Thing is, nobody knows anything about her! She's extremely reclusive, even if she certainly has the skills to keep her position."

'Her': "Her reputation certainly precedes her. Let's roll the clip and learn a bit more."

The screen flickers into static for a few moments, regaining its focus in a new scene entirely. A handful of youths loitering in a long abandoned alleyway. They look a bit battered and bruised, likely coming out of some sort of confrontation. All three have all identifying features blurred out. One of the older ones, with a busted lip, attempts to light a cigarette, to little effect. They sigh.

"It's been worse, recently, hasn't it?" Another one, clearly around 15, speaks up. "Way worse. Feels like we're fightin' every day now. Wasn't like this a few months ago."

"So it goes." The oldest gives up on the lighter and simply places the unlit cigarette in their mouth, letting it rest there. They didn't look quite old enough to smoke.

"I heard it's cause they don't want the boss on the move." Another chooses to speak. "Least from what I've heard. All the other groups are gettin' antsy, or somethin', so they're having everyone work super hard so the boss doesn't have to. The higher ups, I mean."

"That's dumb." The shortest one rises to his feet, spitting on the ground nearby. "Boss should be working just as hard as the rest of us! This ain't a fucking company, this is -"

"No." The oldest speaks again. Their gaze is cold, and their voice is stern. There's no budging it, or them.

"E-Erm, what they mean by that, is, uh... Well, y'know, if the boss gets worked up, it's..." The speaking child pauses, staring into space for a few seconds before they continue. "You're new here, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Why." The shortest glowers.

"Then I guess you wouldn't know... Er, we don't really *want* our boss to work. It's... Well, whenever cold weather rolls around, they usually start getting worked up, and... er, well, it gets a little -"

"Don't worry about it." The oldest spits out their cigarette, and moves towards the front of the alleyway. "If you're lucky, or you're smart, you'll quit before the monsoon season ends, when cold air from the mountain comes down here. Cold enough to freeze. Got a while before that, after all." They turn their head towards the other children, expression unreadable.

"You just ought to pray it never snows in Bedtown."

It cuts back to the two. The Co-Host is wiping his forehead.

Co-Host: "Wow, that was intense. I would *not* want to be on her bad side, or be caught up in any storms down south! Do you have any tips for our viewers on how to stay safe?"

'Her': "Oh my... well I certainly wouldn't go there looking like an easy target." *She chuckled.* "It may be best to not go out in fancy clothes, with lots of jewelry... unless you're looking for a fight. Beside that, I always think discretion is the better part of valor, huhuhu.... It may be best to leave sleeping tigers lie, or at least poke them with a very, *very* long stick."

Co-Host: "Golly, I'll certainly be taking that advice to heart! Anything else on the docket?"

'Her': "Huhuhu... that's all the stories I have to share today, but I'd like to reaffirm the aspirations of this little network." *She looks directly to the camera, smiling. It's a perfectly pleasant smile.* "We're hoping to be a lovely little fact of this city, and we'll be on air anytime that

there's news to tell... and oh, will there be news to tell. Rain, sun, snow, *nothing* will stop the Paparazzi Network from telling you listeners the greatest and latest scoops."

'Her': "Knowledge is power, and we hope to put power in your hands. To understand, to learn about this city. Who's who, what's what, and what to pay attention to. Learn more than you ever thought you would, and more than anybody would have ever wanted you to."

Co-Host: "Whether you like it or not!" *His tone is joking, but canned, the words right off a card in front of him.*

'Her': "Until next time, I'm your Announcer."

Co-Host: "And I'm your Co-Host!"

'Her': "Signing off."

The broadcast ends with a short outro of the two of them talking, fading to a simple, classy logo.