

Midnight is approaching. The pungent smell of medicine again reminds me that I am in a hospital. I look up. My head has drooped on my chest in exhaustion; from morning to afternoon I was on the move in search of a rare medicine and finally found it in a small medicine corner in Old Dhaka. The expiry date sealed on the bottle was only a month from then. I hesitated. But there was no option. I came back with the medicine at around 3:00 pm when the hospital itself seemed drowsy and less crowded.

My mother got admitted to this hospital in the morning today. She suddenly fell ill yesterday night, as her blood sugar level was fluctuating every now and then. I called up her physician. The phone was switched off. In the morning I brought her to the hospital. She was given a strong painkiller, which caused drowsiness. She spent most of the time today sleeping. Some of our relations, distant and close, came to see her. None of them waited for more than twenty minutes; some waited even less than ten minutes. She did not wake up. They left with a sour face. Maybe because they came and killed their valuable time but the patient was sleeping unobtrusively. Disease-free ones want to talk to the diseased ones in an artificial voice full of transient sympathy. They go out and heave a sigh of relief thinking how beautiful it is that they are still breathing and not attacked by any disease.

My uncle came in the afternoon. He was a gentleman of around 55. Immaculately dressed, he walked into the female Ward and approached my mother's bed with steady steps. His first query was why she was kept in a ward. We (my father and I) should have been more concerned about my mother's comfort and should have managed a cabin, he added. I said that she always preferred a ward as the doctors and nurses were always available there. On the other hand, a cabin isolated the patient and confined him to a room, where the doctors went only on their rounds, though it offered comfort for the attendants and visitors. Hearing this he kept quiet but did not look very satisfied. He was staring at the patient wearing a grave face for a minute or two. Then he asked about my career plans.

I am an English graduate from a private university. My decision to study literature at a private university appalled all my close relations including my parents and uncles. They commented that it was nonsense. After I

had come back from Rajshahi, I did not have any choice but to get myself admitted to a private university. Though, I was a student of the department of English, my admission was cancelled for not attending the classes for the first two months. The rule was that if any student did not attend classes for the first two months without any information, his or her admission would be cancelled. This rule came into effect in that year and put me in jeopardy. Momen, a student and myself were the first two victims of the rule were a myself. Momen had an operation in his waist and I had been suffering from jaundice.

At first I applied to the Chair of my department, Dr Antor Ali, informing him that I could not attend the classes as I had been suffering from jaundice for two months and was not yet fully recovered.

Moreover, I added that I had informed the department about it after two weeks of my illness. The Chairman told me that he did not have any role to play here as this was a new rule

implemented by the administration. He told me to apply to the registrar. I requested him to recommend me but he refused. I applied to the registrar and it took him four months to tell me that he did

not have any intention to meddle in such a complicated matter and I should apply directly to the Vice-Chancellor. I did so and the VC, suspicious about his order's coming into effect, told me that without the chairman's accepting his order, he was helpless. Then the honorable VC took five more months to decide that he would like to talk to Dr Antor of the department of English to resolve it.

After two weeks the much-awaited meeting took place and two of them talked for half an hour to decide our fate. Momen I and had been sitting in front of the Shaheed Meenar for the whole night. We were told the following day that it was a 'no'. I produced the application I sent earlier informing of my illness, which reached the department and was received by the chair after two weeks of my illness. I had not posted it. I had sent one of my relations to the university to hand it to the chair of English department and collect one copy of the received application. The Chairperson received it putting the date below his signature.

On hearing everything, Dr Antor told me darkly, "How dare you charge me like that! The decision has already been made. Now get out of my sight."

In response to my uncle's question regarding my

A Helpless Moth

RAJIB MAHMUD