

# THE GIFT OF TIME

NOX

I woke up to the sound of my phone's alarm. Squinting at the screen, I swiped my finger across the surface which read: 6:00 AM. Groggily, I made my way to the bathroom. My bags had already been packed since last night, and I had breakfast ready in a container, determined to save every precious minute of time in the morning. I was in my car at 7:00 AM, sharp. If the roads weren't absolute hell, I would hopefully get home early enough for the day's plans to go smoothly. Knowing Dhaka however, I should have probably expected a few curveballs.

Halfway along the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway, a bus broke down. Of course that led to the entire road clogging up. It's so ridiculously easy to find a hundred people to gather at any scene in this country that one is almost left to wonder whether they might be the same group of unemployed bystanders whose only job is to not mind their own business. How do people have so much time on their hands? I can barely manage to keep my job and my personal affairs afloat simultaneously. Every time I try to pay attention to one, the other seemed to go up in flames.

I waited impatiently in my car, legs shaking rhythmically, neck craning to spot any movement up ahead. I couldn't believe I had gotten stuck in this traffic despite all my planning. If I didn't get to the site in time all kinds of chaos could ensue. The caterers could delay the cooking, the decorators could arrange something completely different from what my sister envisioned, and my parents could cook up all kinds of trouble with everyone, from our extended family to the hired photographers. The entire responsibility of this event rested on my shoulders, and here I was stuck in this traffic that looked like it had no intention of letting up anytime soon.

Around 9 in the morning, my phone started vibrating in my pocket. It was my boss. What was he doing calling me today?

"Hello?"

"Hello Russel, where are you?" I heard my boss ask.

"Uh... Sir I'm headed out of Dhaka," I said.

"Out of Dhaka? What do you mean out of Dhaka? Why aren't you at the office?!"

he yelled into the phone.

"Sir, I'm going home to my family. I talked to you about this last week? My sister's getting married so I requested a holiday from the 1st of March?" I replied, confused at why he had called me on an off day.

"Yes, you requested a holiday from March, so why aren't you here today?"

"Sir, what do you mean?"

"It's the 29th of February today. Your holiday starts tomorrow!"

I was left dumbstruck. Incredulous, I quickly checked the date on my phone which I hadn't paid any heed to in all my hurry to be on time. I must have looked at that clock at least fifty times today. How did I miss the date written just below it?

I quickly got back into the conversation with my boss.

"Sir, I am extremely sorry. I mistook today's date. Could I-"

"No. This is ridiculous. Are you trying to say a grown man just forgot his work days?! You want me to believe this? Ridiculous! This is probably just some ploy to get an extra day off. You must have thought you could pull one over on me!" said my boss, sounding like he'd just clued in on some great conspiracy against him and the enormous corporation he represented.

"Sir, of course not. I know this reflects badly on me, but I'm telling the truth."

"I don't want to hear it," he said in a definitive voice, "The Ilish Corps deal goes through today. If you aren't here in the office in the next hour you might as well not come back at all."

"But Sir! I'm halfway out of Dhaka! I can't make it back in one hour!"

"I don't know anything. I can't trust anything you're telling me at this point. Are you even outside your home? Why don't I hear car noises? All I know is that you need to be here. Turn your car around if need be."

I looked around helplessly. There was a sea of cars around me. All stationary. All turned off. There wasn't even an

inch of space to turn my car around.

"Sir, please believe me. A bus has broken

down up ahead. The entire road is jam-packed. I can't turn my car around even if I wanted to," I pleaded desperately. There was sweat dripping down my forehead and a deep fear gripping my heart.

"Oh? So now a bus has broken down? After a minute you'll say your grandmother has died. Save these excuses for your school homework. After this you might have to go back."

"But Sir!"

"I didn't expect such behaviour from you Russel. You had promise. I'm sad to see you go like this," he said, before hanging up abruptly.

I couldn't believe what had just transpired. I had gotten fired. Simply because I had forgotten that 2020 was a leap year. That one extra day of February had just turned my life upside down. I checked my watch. It was 9:20 AM. That was when I realised, I had nowhere to be. My family was not expecting me until tomorrow. I was not running late anymore. I stared at my dashboard for a few minutes, a whirlwind of thoughts passing through my mind. What would I tell my family? How would I pay for the furniture I had to present my sister's in-laws with? How would I pay my own rent?

I couldn't sit still in my car any longer. I took a deep breath and got out. I closed the door shut behind me. The road on both sides of me was now gridlocked. As I turned my head this way and that I noticed a man selling *daab* on the sidewalk. I made my way towards him.

"Mama, ekta daab diben."

I waited while he prepared it, and then handed it to me. As I sipped on the coconut water I saw that the road ahead had let up. The cars had started moving forward.

I made no move towards my car. Instead, I went towards a fence behind the *daabwala* and leaned against it. I watched the traffic clearing up slowly. My car left stranded in the middle of the road as other cars veered

around it. I was in no hurry to move it. After all, I had all day.

Nox endlessly worries about hostile alien surveillance. Increase this paranoid person's online footprint with feedback at [thewriter@gmail.com](mailto:thewriter@gmail.com)

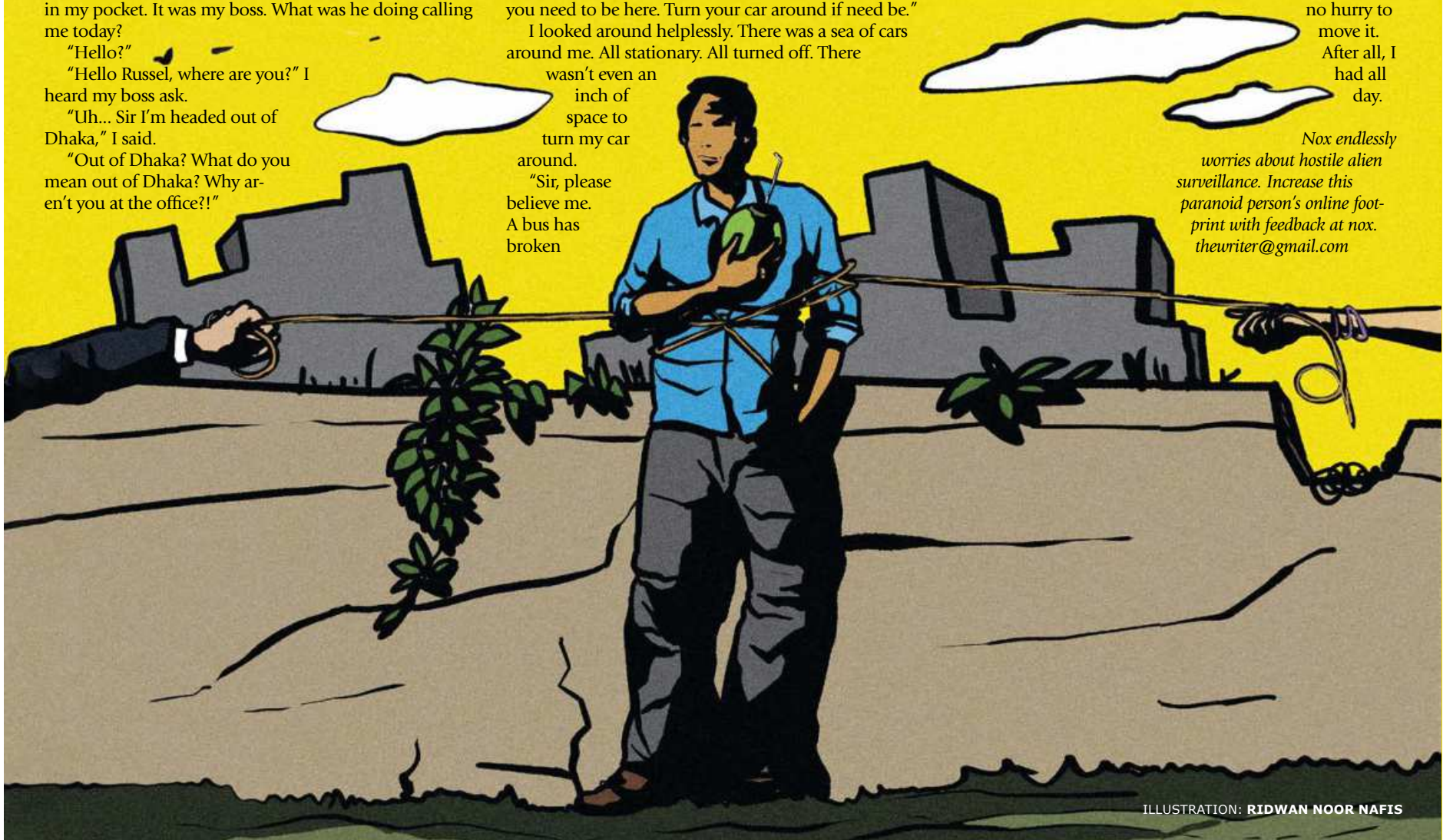


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