

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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A SERENADE OF THE
SEDULOUS

PG 4

SEASON OF THE BLACK
LEOPARD

PG 5



fictitious

1. not real or true; imaginary or fabricated.
2. occurring in or invented for fiction.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

FALSE POSITIVE

NUREN IFTKHAR

The light that drenched the man on the rooftop had no warmth to it. The light shifted and morphed with the changing visuals on the billboard, making the silhouette of his crouching body move around like a puppet on a string. The man was shivering. His rain-soaked cloak offered little to no comfort on this rainy evening in district DHK South.

Set your synapses buzzing with the new taste of Shoc-ka-Cola

Tired of underperforming? Your life will never be the same again with the new range of implants we got for you

The billboard blared through the silence of the night. But the man could still make out the sound of the footsteps behind him.

"You don't need to sneak up on me to put me down," the man said softly. "I'm not armed."

"That's quite perceptive of you. Augmented hearing?" the voice of a young woman asked from the shadow.

"Just survival," he said, amused.

"One of those things you learn growing up in DHK South. I know what you mean," she calmly added.

The man finally raised his head. He looked to be in his fifties. The neon of the billboard flashed across his face.

"Is that who you think I am? A southern rebel hiding in your precious DHK North?"

"A rebel? You got me wrong. I'm not one of those anti-rebellion fanatics. I honestly find it quite silly, if you ask me," she replied.

"And what's so funny about the southerners waging an armed revolution against class discrimination?" he asked with a measured tone.

"The futility of it," she answered. "I'm rather more wary of the Android project. Humans are predictable when they go rogue. Androids like you, however, are a bigger worry," she mused.

The man finally turned around to take a good look at this intruder. A young woman in her twenties. The lack of a badge made it hard to tell if she was with IMCO Inc, the authoritarian corporation running District DHK. But the air of confidence in her stance and the look of death in her eyes cleared his doubts.

"So you're here to put down a rogue Android. Tell me,

stranger, what gives me away as an Android other than the beep on your module?" he asked

"Nothing physically. Except if I put a bullet through your head right now the blood that would sputter out will be a murky blue," she answered with humour in her voice.

"And mentally?" he asked after a pause.

"Empathy. And every single thing that makes us humans. Your kind serves a purpose that you are programmed for. Your talk of philosophy won't convince me otherwise," she replied with a sudden tone of seriousness.

"And have you bothered to think why the Androids have been going rogue? The sheer amount of unreported Androids in District DHK that IMCO didn't tell you about? Have you wondered if maybe, just maybe, you were one as well?"

The silence that ensued came to an end with the sound of a plasma gun. The intruder took slow steps towards the body of the man. Under the neon glow of the billboard, she realised the blood that poured towards her feet was red. She frantically looked at the module in her hand, the beep in her GPS location still present.

Unauthorized Android Nearby

She turned towards the man's still body. She could now see two eyes between his arms glowing a violent green. The tiny figure of a cat jumped towards her.

Nuren Iftkhar keeps a presentation ready to convince you that Tame Impala has been the best thing to happen to music in the last decade. Send him unorthodox food recipes at n.iftkhar18@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: FAIAZ RAFID

MASKS

AAQIB HASIB

Fifty years ago. That's when they put up the field separating the two zones of District DHK.

The prime differentiating factor between the two zones? Wealth and social status. If you lived up North, you were what some would term as the modern-day aristocracy, while all the "peasants" who lived in the South were considered to be unfit to live amongst the upper echelons of society.

The government had bowed down to the power of IMCO Inc., the sole creator and distributor of Android and augmentation technology.

Whispers in the backstreet alleys would often say that they took control by replacing important government officials with Android copies of them, but really, it didn't matter. Fifty years had passed, and this little rumour could do little to

change the status quo.

The people of the South had no power; no weapons. Even getting past the forcefield separating the two DHKs was impossible. So what could one do?

What could we do?

All rations were sold for social points, at least in the South, and the only way one could have enough points was to give their lives to IMCO Inc.

No augmentation works on the first try, it goes through a meticulous process of testing, before finally being perfected for human use. At least, for human use in the North.

But experiments needed guinea pigs, and that was the whole point of DHK South. There were a lot more of us on this side of the field, and why wouldn't we be the test subjects so that the Northerners could have one more "improve-

ment" to add to their list.

From memory retention chips to microchips that could increase your IQ, they had it all. Anything you could ever fathom wanting, they had it. But it was never enough; the Northerners always wanted more. I guess, how else could you keep yourself busy but with the latest augmentations and prosthesis. And the only way to up your status was to be the first one to own the latest model.

I'm tired of rethinking the same thoughts every time I step into this room. Every time I walked on the outer boundaries of the field to see the amazing world beyond it. Of flying vehicles, zero air pollution and unending technological marvel.

"Today we'll be running quite an interesting experiment," said the man in the white lab coat. "Instant facial reconstruction technology. I bet this will be fun."

He gave us a menacing smile, the same one he'd give at the start of every experiment.

"This might hurt just a little bit."

I don't know what happened back there. Or what came over me. But as I walk towards the field, wearing someone else's face over mine, I can't help but think.

"Name and ID?" the guard yells at me from behind the checkpoint.

"Dr. Shahid Kamal," I say, instinctively flashing the identity card from inside my lab coat.

And as I step into the outskirts of DHK North through the opening in the field, I think.

"Maybe there is something I can do."

Aaqib doesn't know what he is doing anymore. Send help at aaqibhasib94@gmail.com

A SERENADE OF THE SEDULOUS

UPOMA AZIZ

She was named Karina, but not after the popular Indian actress. She would come to know about her namesake and be compared to her constantly - which would at first evoke pride in her, and eventually a guised dismay of being aeons away in every aspect from the perfection portrayed on the silver screen.

Her name was the amalgamation of the names of her parents - Karimul and Rubina. The name of the child was kept even after Rubina bled to death within hours of the arrival of her daughter, due to childbirth-related complications. Her child was torn away from her womb and the process damaged some of her vital organs as well. Rubina passed away quietly leaving her daughter and the last half of her name as the only bequests of her brief, insignificant life. Her mother Morsheda was never the same again. It was the second child she lost.

I was there when Rubina got married. The ceremony was held in the shabby structures made of tin and wood hoisted in a piece of borrowed land where the members, ex-members and half-members of their family elbowed each other to make enough room to dance to the song being blasted from a rusty, rented speaker. Rubina was beaming as Monalisa, our neighbour, did her makeup. She was barely recognisable, which wasn't a bad thing. Maybe her life too would change, she thought; for better, and for worse. And it did, briefly. After the ceremony, she moved away to a city an hour's drive from her home.

For the first few years of her life, Karina lived with her father, who had remarried shortly after her mother's demise. Karina would oscillate between her mother's home and her father's. Her grandmother Morsheda worked at five or six households, including ours. She coddled the child, a reincarnation of her lost daughter. When she worked, Karina would frequently be seen loitering around, shrilly screaming, "Nani! Nani! Nani!"

Little Karina came by our house, and mum let her sleep on our sofa, and always pushed a ten taka note into her hand. Trying to befriend her, I would turn on the TV and find a channel with cartoons. I would initiate small talk, but get bored a while later, and then retire to my own room.

Years later, old age and sorrow would hit Morsheda one after one; sometimes like a tsunami, a hurricane at other times. The fragile woman would curb into an even smaller frame, and Karina would be her barricade. She would mother her grandmother back with a love fiercer than she had ever received.

Mum told me over the phone that she had to find a different domestic help because the people who originally owned the land asked Morsheda and her family to leave.

"Where are they living now?" I asked mum. She told me that they had moved to their native city.

"Did they cry?" I asked. Of course they did, it was a stupid question to ask, they had lived there for over a decade. I never thought I would see any of them again, but of course nothing in my life goes according to plan.

It had been raining since four in the morning and was a drab, dreary day. Dreading that I would definitely find no transportation, I began listing excuses but decided to give it one last try anyway.

A few stray dogs swam across the road. I sighed. I hoped for a miracle and made a few promises in my head I had no intention of keeping. But then a bright yellow minibus showed up, and I reconsidered my stance. The bus was surprisingly clean. I felt bad for dragging the mud from my shoe inside, and sat on the seat next to the door.

After I had settled in, I looked around and realised it was a female-only bus, probably a new entry in this route, which explained the cleanliness. The driver was a young girl, and beside her an elderly woman sat quietly, her limbs folded in.

"Zubeida aunty?" I asked, shell shocked. The woman stared blankly and shook her head no. "Oops," I muttered and tried not to look embarrassed, but the woman looked familiar, so familiar-

"Morsheda aunty?" I asked again, hoping I didn't misplace the name this time, the woman looked curious this time, and then the driver turned to look at me. She didn't look familiar at all, and I stared blankly even after she exclaimed, "Tara aunty?"

I nodded unsurely, then she smiled at me, "Aunty! I'm Karina!" It took me a while more to adjust my brain to find out who that was supposed to be.

"So how long have you been here?" I ask after exchanging a few meaningless pleasantries. "Oh, it has been a while. I worked in a garments' factory, but that

hampered my studies."

She then told me that she had enrolled herself in a polytechnic institute, and was trying to get a degree. She moved back here with her grandmother a few years after they left town, and her grandmother didn't want to keep her unattended, so Morsheda sat there while she drove.

"You know," I said, opening my backpack "Maybe I will work from here today, listen to your story and write something on it."

Karina told me that her grandmother saved up to buy a piece of land, but it was in the name of her husband who willed it to his children from his first marriage, and that was when they moved. There was some trouble with the thugs where they lived, who demanded money and would harass people.

"That's when I took up self defense lessons," her eyes shone brighter. I thought of how I still half run the dark part of the alley to my home if I'm running late. She then told me how she started supplying paper packets to shops from her school days, then the multiple times they had to change places.

"Aren't you ever scared?" I ask her. "Who isn't?" she laughs "But I can't really afford hiding away in fear."

Karina waved at a passenger getting off the bus. I tucked my pen and paper inside and watched the rain slow down to a weak drizzle.

Upoma Aziz is a slouching-crouching-grouching time bomb now, and she goes off without any detonator whatsoever. Poke her at your own risk at www.fb.com/upoma.aziz



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

Season of the Black Leopard



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

In this village bordered by a sprawling tea plantation, many say that they have seen the leopard. Mostly during the night, when the moon hangs so low you can pluck it right off the darkness and eat it like some fruit.

Black. Glossy in the moonlight. Its white whiskers asserting an implicit, involuntary dominance. Its supple body effortlessly sliding up and down the teak trees that are abundant here. A shadow - a dark emissary of the night - drifting among the plant kingdom like a fugitive.

Those who have not seen the leopard, wish to believe that it is a false imagination - one that has consolidated itself in the leopard watchers' consciousness like an unbreakable stone. They wish to believe that it must have been a civet. Or a marbled fishing cat. Or simply a black cat.

But the clawed scratches that clothe the teak trees' trunks, and the pugmarks that dot the sandy riverbank, the earth of the banana, jack-fruit, bitter melon plantations imply otherwise.

It is a matter of surprise that the leopard hasn't harmed anyone until now. The British rule came with its loud boots and left. Then a Partition made the earth wet with blood. Then a war. A new flag stirred the air. Not a single leopard attack.

Whenever Mohsin gets the chance, he tells everyone in the village how he stumbled across the leopard on several occasions during the war ten years ago. He was 20, and a fighter. If he didn't have a rifle slung over his shoulder or if he were completely alone during the encounter, he would probably faint or wet his pants, he says jokingly. The leopard's lithe movement came with no warning - no leaf rustled, no hooleck gibbon screeched, no wind blew over him and told him to run. So in that regard, he and the fighters of his crew had to remain careful when hiding from the marauding alien-tongued, olive-headed enemy in the vegetation, the thickets, around the fig, the peepal, the banyan, the teaks.

It was a cold, rain-bloated July night. Mohsin was installing a landmine, a few meters away from the enemy's camp in the forest. After finishing the task, as he took to his heels, he fell in a cave and was knocked unconscious. He woke up after an hour or so, his vision battered by the mad rainfall. Crawling his way out of the cave, he spotted the green eyes. His first encounter. Disbelief seeped into every nerve of his being. Was he hallucinating? Or was it actually a black leopard, an animal he had never seen? He kept staring at its hypnotic, electric green gaze. Until a gunshot from the camp or perhaps the main road rang in the air and reverberated through the forest, and they parted their ways.

Hamid, who was eighteen when he worked for the alien-tongued man who lived in a bungalow in the tea estate at the village's periphery during the war, is also one of the fortunate ones who have seen the leopard. Before the war, during the war, and after the war, when a new country was born with its new flag, when its people could speak their own language, dance at their own festivals. He remembers how the moon was a yellow boat in an aerial, inky, cloud-tinted river when he aided the fighters in getting inside the estate and blowing up the bungalow. He remembers how the black leopard's face was awash in gold when the bungalow was held captive by the long fingers of flame.

Just a few days ago, Asma spotted the leopard lingering around her chicken coop at night until she shooed it away with a siren scream. Krishna, the milkman, also spotted it prancing around the paddy field, in the fiery glow of his hurricane-lamp. Hasnat, the imam, saw it gracefully climbing up the banyan tree across the mosque, as he readied himself for the Fajr azaan. Khokon and his friends, after they finished killing a monitor lizard for some reason, saw it walking over the snaking rail tracks, holding a brown deer in its maw while the sun slowly disappeared, dusk crept in, and bats, crows, and kites headed home in loud mobs.

It takes the leopard five minutes to die. Five minutes. Its soul smokes out of its body. Snaking its way towards the

heat-wounded sky against the seething sun. The leopard that felt the tremor of invaders in its bones when the country was under siege. The leopard that felt the boom of victory beneath its paws when liberation came. The leopard, the silent observer, the audience from the forest, the shadow with green eyes, white whiskers, a sleek body, a long tail. They catch the leopard as it rests on one of the spaghetti branches of the banyan across the mosque. It is charged with the disappearance of three chickens from Osman the chicken vendor's compound. It is possible that monitor lizards did it. Or the marbled cats. Or the civets. But they charge the leopard because they, without any effort, find it resting on the banyan's branch, under which a few feathers remain unattended. It is a rare occasion - the leopard's effortless sight when the sun is out of the sea and up in the sky.

Only the squirrels, the rats, and the gibbons and other

primates who were present at the crime scene know that it was a small legion of civets that took the chickens. That the charge placed on the leopard was pure fiction.

The next day, the leopard-free village wakes from a slumber and perceives the crazy irony of leopard-free-ness. There are paws poking out of the coppery earth, the jack-fruit, the pumpkins. The paddy fields are overrun by long whiskers that almost look like kashphool. So are the snaking rail tracks. Writhing black, long tails wound the banana plantations and the bitter melon plantations. They also dangle from the winding branches of the figs, the banyans, the peepals, and the bodhi tree at the center of the big field. The village groans. The leopard laughs from up above.

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi is a freshman studying International Relations.

FIREFLIES

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

I wonder where the fireflies fled
And how they must lament.
Defeated by the floodlit streets
And forced to their descent.

I wonder whether the fireflies deem
We stole their precious lights.
On countless lives of their own kind
We've been lighting up our nights.

I wonder if the fireflies return
To claim their midnight reign.
I'd like this though as all I wish
Is to see them once again.

ENIGMA

ADHORA AHMED

When I first met you
I was drawn to your eyes.
I couldn't tell the colour of the irises
But they were filled with secrets
Leaking, pooling
Into the dark circles underneath.

You dipped a quill
Into those endless voids.
I touched the tip to a dry leaf
And heard voices long forgotten,
Saw places nowhere to be found.
I have no name for this experience.

A winged creature crooned melodies
Found in no song
In a tongue no one speaks.
Sparkling droplets rained on its wings,
Melting the strange angel into nothingness.
My own tears had washed it away.

The ink ran out.
It was your story,
But I had lived it.
Your dark circles were gone.
Giving me the quill, you said,
"Now write your own."

*Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her
reality checks at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com*

IT RAINS WHEN I WRITE

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

A cloud of thought looms over my sky;
The sky is a backdrop of blooming lilac,
With smoke and dandelion puffs chasing the light,
Cleaving asunder this monochromatic horizon.

Sprung from memories, another cloud nudges
That estranged, numb cloud.
Filtering its burnt down tentacles,
And entwining it into something sinister.

These clouds fight, coalesce and drift apart,
Simmering and condensing my copper sky.
For my chocolate hands and linen lips
Couldn't forge them into the carcass of my life.

It is painful when there's only infernal light,
Blinding and charring my ambivalent soul.
Feels unforgivable when the birds I chase die,
Before I can free them to chain others.
I don't know if I want them to take over me,
Or to abandon me as I did to their feathers.
I can't tell if I need them to be my voice,
Or myself to be their unfinished stories.

But my hand touches the sheaf of papers,
The rivulets of ink scarring that lilac sky now.
For light and darkness have breathed together,
To reverse back into their primal selves.
And within the shell of my existence,
Articulating in my veins, purging my eyes,
Words escape like blue paper planes,
As they morph into fireflies and die as black swans.

And so it finally rains,
It finally rains when I write.

You can reach out to the author at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com

SHOROLIPI

NABIHA NUSAIBA

Lipi was convinced: no number of adjectives would describe her pain. The term "pain" itself seemed unqualified to describe her agony. With one eye swollen shut, and her body writhing in pain, she was struggling to find her way back home. In fact, Lipi would've walked straight ahead if her sister-in-law, Mouri, hadn't been waiting at the mouth of the road leading to their abode.

"Where were you? Abed already went looking for you twice. TWICE. AND WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR EYE? OI, WHAT HAPPENED?" Mouri's voice amplified after every syllable until Lipi was sure everyone from all four corners of the village could hear them. The annoyance in her face was as visible as the strength of her grip on Lipi's arm.

Couldn't Mouri understand her plight just this once? Lipi was in pain. Did she have to grip her bruised arm tightly as she dragged Lipi home? She considered shaking her hand off and making a run for it, but kept acquiesce. She had no better alternative to get home, you see.

Amma will be gentler, she will tend to my wounds and scold this wretched woman for handling my fragile body like this. Ouch. Stop, stop. STOP!

The last word she screamed out, stupefying them on the spot. The two of them were now in their courtyard. And Mouri had her sulphurous gaze pinned at the nuisance at hand.

"What? What?! Why are you screaming? Do you have any idea what you've—"

"Bring her here right away."

Lipi had her back to the owner of the voice but turned towards it even before the third word was pronounced. Alarmed by the commotion outside, Lipi's mother, Jahanara, had sprinted out of the sitting room.

Amma.

Amma will teach this Mouri a lesson. She will take care of my wounds.

Jahanara had on one of her "special occasion" sarees. Lipi loved that particular saree, it resembled the polka dot one Suchitra Sen wore in Agni Pariksha.

Were we supposed to go somewhere?

Her eyes widened by a quarter of a fraction as she registered Lipi's current state. Lipi wanted to run into her mother's arms but Mouri's grip was still steel-bound.

"I was just going to wash her up before taking her in," replied Mouri.

Where?

"There's no time. They plan on returning by sunset," informed Jahanara.

Till what? Who?

"Come here, Lipi."

Mouri loosened her grip and Lipi dashed into her mother's arms.

"What have you done to yourself?" Jahanara looked Lipi up and down before smoothing out her hair with her bare hands.

"Some people have come to meet you. You don't need to say much. Just smile and greet them."

"Who?"

Jahanara doesn't answer. Instead, she stands behind Lipi, putting both her hands on her shoulders and ushering her into the sitting room.

Lipi was perplexed beyond reach. The phonograph at the corner of the room played the Hemanta Mukherjee record

The guests' reactions were quite different, of course. In front of them stood a filthy stripling with only one eye.

"What's wrong with her? Why does she look so... ugly?" the woman asked smugly.

Ugly?

The woman's remarks snapped Lipi back to reality.

"I'm not ugly. It was those damn bees."

The woman was amused by her insolence. Jahanara pinched her shoulder.

"Ow!"

Lipi was visibly startled by Jahanara's action.

"Very well. What's your name, then?"



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

that Kalam, Lipi's brother, saved for very special occasions. That alone would've been enough to catch Lipi on to the fact that something was off. Alas, she was too distracted by the burning hellfire on her body.

Listening to it were two bodies Lipi had never seen before. One man and one woman. The man, unremarkable; but the woman. The woman had Lipi's full attention. Her royal blue silk saree put Amma's outfit to grave shame. She had so many gold ornaments on her that her neck and wrists were practically invisible. Forget Suchitra Sen, this woman right here was the real deal.

"Lipi Meher Khatun. Who are you?"

"You'll know soon enough." The impolite lady now turned to Jahanara, "Show me her hands and feet."

Hands and feet?

Jahanara obeyed and raised Lipi's hands, followed by the sleeves of her pyjamas.

What is she doing?

"Now, walk."

Getting chased and bitten by bees is nothing compared to the ache of dealing with this woman. Who does she think she is, a thakurain?

"To where?"

"Just around this room."

"Why?"

"Because she said so," interjected Jahanara, before pushing her further inside the compartment.

Lipi was furious. Who was this woman to boss her around? And why was Amma behaving like this? No, no, no. I am no circus animal.

Lipi did not move.

"Arre, walk. WALK! She's never this disobedient, I swear on the heavens. I don't know what's gotten into her. ARRE!"

SMACK.

Hot, angry tears rushed out of Lipi's eyes.

"No, it's okay. Don't hit her. We've seen enough. She's gritty. Delowar will like her. Consider this marriage finalised."

The man had finally spoken.

"I heard they own a boat."

"Yes, and?"

"You're going to a household that has its own boat, pagli. You should be brimming with joy."

Joy? Did Mitali just suggest Lipi be overjoyed at having to leave her little life, here, at home?

"Great, I'll just trade your family for a boat, then. That'll give you something to be joyous about."

Lipi yanks her poorly-oiled hair out of Mitali's hands and stands to leave the porch, where they sat just moments ago.

"Arre, wait. I'm not even done oiling your hair!" yells Mitali.

"Maybe if you had put your mind to that instead of spewing nonsense, you would've been done by yesterday!" Lipi yells back.

"Come back. What are you being so stubborn for? Everybody gets married some day or the other—"

"Lalalalalalalala..." Lipi sticks her fingers into her ears, essentially blocking out all the noise her voice couldn't. She then turns to run out of the house, convinced that one more word from Mitali will wipe her out completely.

Lipi runs and runs, determined to get as far away from where she started as possible. She could feel all her pain infuse into her tears and stream violently down her face, subsiding that sunken feeling in her chest.

There is no point in staying for you, Amma. You didn't think twice before deciding to give me away. You only think of me as a burden. You'll understand my worth when I'm gone. Farewell.

The writer runs every day. Out of time, ramen and K-drama episodes. Send her an email at n.nusaibaah@gmail.com to join her on this rigorous workout.

QUARANTINE IN TWO CITIES

SHOUNAK REZA

New York, March to May

Nothing pierces the deafening silence
But ambulance sirens.
Once the paradise people rushed to,
Now the city nurtures the disease
That has sent tremors across this planet.
The Grim Reaper has his hands full.
There are too many souls to claim.
Memories of Manhattan and the subway
Grow pale in my mind, as I wait out
The terrible months in a tiny attic,
Waiting for the nightmare to end.
Every afternoon, I find solace
In church bells. When they stop ringing,
The sirens return.

Dhaka, May 2020 to Present

Back home, nobody nears
The places I dream of every night.
My phone brings me news
Of those I love
From the other side of the world.
The Grim Reaper travels faster than light.
He looks the weeping city in the eye.
The ever-enduring Dhaka looks on
As bodies pile up in the hospitals
And my loved ones lock themselves away
From the sprawling metropolis.
Death floats over my favourite city.
What once seemed monstrous
Has now been brought to its knees.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

THE BACKGROUND

TASNIM ODRIKA

There is a white backdrop. Scattered over it are images of people and places like pixels on a television screen. Bright little squares forming the circle of life.

I'm there too. Our picture lies rather inconspicuously among the graduation pictures. I'm sitting at a café with you by my side. It's a group picture but the other faces surrounding us have dissolved making it all about us. We had posed with big

smiles knowing that the rest of our life was out there. It was the beginning. You need to gaze in deeper now to remember the exact depth of the indentations made in my cheeks as my lips curved around the edges.

As the circle of picture outgrows its predecessors, the dissolved but familiar faces give way to completely unknown ones with your spectre in the middle remaining the only source of solace and understanding.

The fading away seemed palpable to me. It was a tangible rope on a continuous

journey of gliding away. A force pushing me back while I tried to hold on until at one point I slipped way back into the background.

From the bright pink sheets your mother had bought to the beige ones you sleep in now in your very own city apartment, I have watched you. But, I can only see you now through a blurry lens. It gets dirtier every day and more and more difficult to peer through.

There you are through storms that

felled trees and through all the forest fires sweeping nation after nation. Year after another one I sit through as my vision blurs further. It is okay. You're too busy inside to look out.

I tell myself it is all okay as I see the pixels in your white backdrop get smaller by the minute until I am unrecognisable.

Tasnim Odrika likes pineapple on pizza and is willing to fight anyone who opposes her on this. Reach her at odrika_02@yahoo.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA