

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