

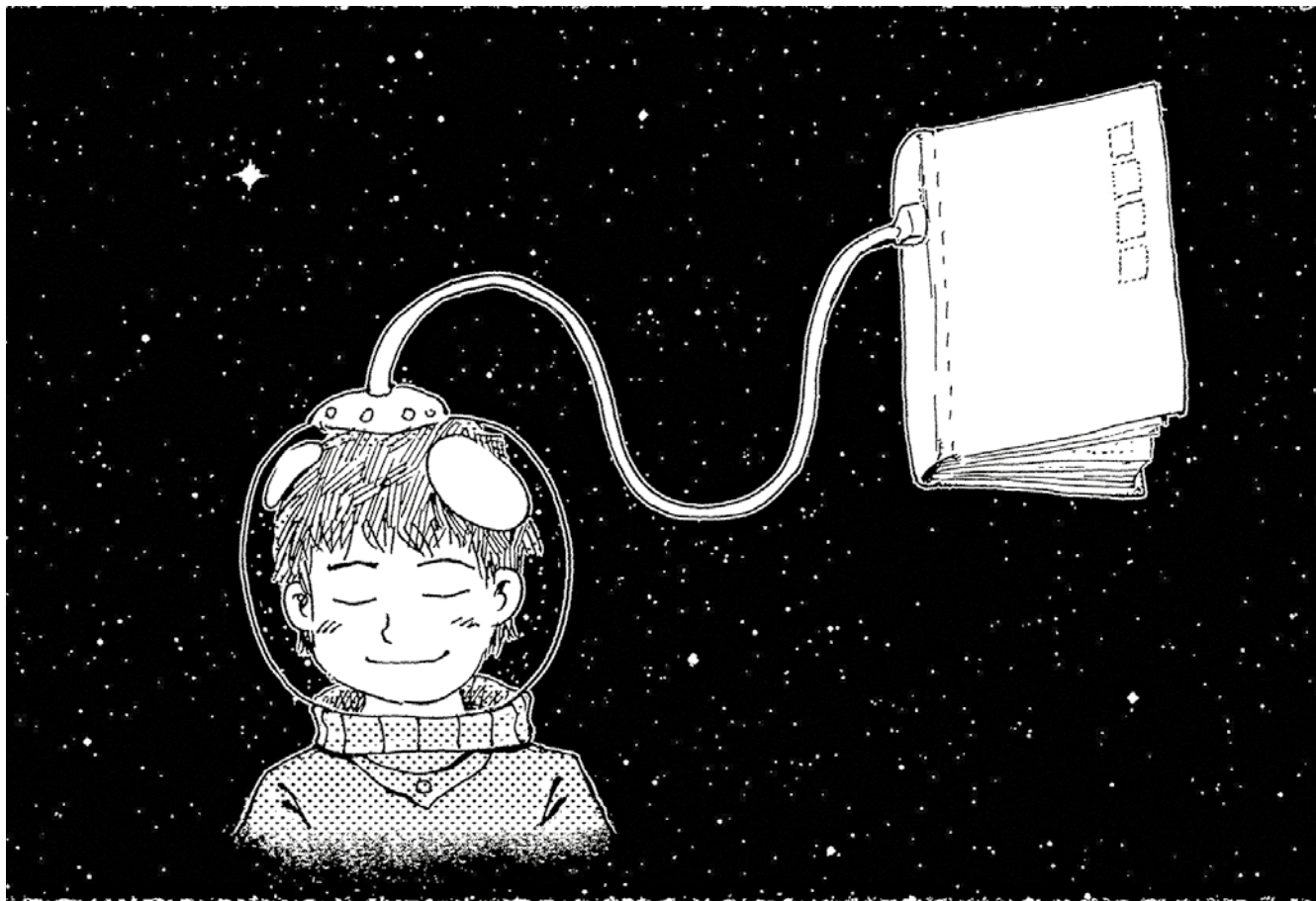
FABLE FACTORY

ABOUT TIME

LILIA HASSAN

She saw something one moment
And nothing the next,
Although she knew
For hours she had slept.
That something she saw
Felt like it lasted only a moment,
No less.
That something she saw
Felt like an ecstatic memory,
She never knew she had.
As the sun washed her face in golden light,
She felt oddly calm and blithe
Only to realise,
She had woken up.
It was about time, she thought
Bits of her dream should start fading away now,
To a place called who knows where;
A room with a locked door
And the key thrown away
Never to be found again.
But these dreams may come back
Later in life, at arduous times,
Reminding her of the dreams she used to dream,
Back when everything was simply fine.

The writer is a class 8 student at Dhanmondi Tutorial.



ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER DOLLAR

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

Munni bit her nails as she awaited her next appointment. Bare feet dangling from the concrete slab, she prayed a silent prayer to be able to grow as tall as the other girls in the compound.

The day my feet touch the ground from here, she decided at that instant, is the day I finally become a woman.

In the world of dingy alleys and darkened gazes, being young was nothing short of a curse. But this maze-like world was the only one Munni had ever known. It was the only one she knew she'd ever know.

She didn't have time to recover from the reverie before

Dili *apa* surged towards her like a tsunami without a warning, ready to devour her whole. How she managed to move as stealthily as a mouse with the frame of a gorilla was beyond Munni's comprehension. Years of practise meant Munni could easily dodge her. Once she had retreated to a safe distance, Munni blurted out a string of apologies for mistakes she didn't know she committed, but must have done so if that was what Dili *apa* believed, because Dili *apa*'s words were law in these streets. With a slap and a shove Munni's offence was revealed – she had not reported to Dili *apa* when her customer was an hour late, and was idling around like her majesty, instead of working to earn her dinner.

"We are working women," Dili *apa* said, picking up Munni from the ground and smoothing her dress. At fleeting instances like this, Dili *apa* looked almost approachable, almost tender, almost considerate. Almost. If not a mother, she could be passed for at least a distant aunt. Yes, that's who she was to the girls here – an aunt who found them work, two servings of dry *rooti* a day and a pillow to lay their heads and dream on.

"We work for every grain we eat," she explained. "I can't take money from someone else's work to feed you, can I?"

Munni nodded, obediently, anxiously. She was then instructed to take over Pushpo's appointment. Pushpo, one of the choleric middle aged older *apas*, was taken to the doctor this morning after complaining about stomach ache for the past week.

Munni headed towards Pushpo's 4 PM appointment and found the man of the hour casually leaning against a wall. Munni cleared her throat to declare her arrival.

The burly man with a thick moustache eyed her intently. For a moment he seemed taken aback, perhaps at her immaturity, perhaps in indecision. If he felt any remorse, it didn't haunt his features for too long. He dropped the half burned cigarette and stomped out its flame.

Munni decided he was in his late forties, at best early fifties – the same age she had assigned to her hypothetical father, wherever he was and if indeed, he still existed. This could be her father, she mused. He wouldn't know, she wouldn't know. The walls of the dimly lit, pungent smelling, eggshell-walled room wouldn't know. The tragedy of it would diffuse into the thin July air, unnoticed and unacknowledged. The cruelty of this notion didn't trouble Munni much, at least not as much as it once did. It was one of those things that came with both the nature and time spent doing this job.

She quietly followed the man through the ragged greenish curtains.

Before she entered, Munni closed her eyes and prayed another silent prayer.

Please let this end before darkness falls, so I can play bou-chee with the girls today.

Samin Sabah Islam is currently torn between starting a new book and starting a new anime series. Suggest both at sabah-samin11@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS