

# Saying goodbye to the wonder years

**T**IME is one thing that never waits for anyone. It moves on...leaving you with little but memories to hold on to. You start school, and before you know it, you're attending your own graduation. The kids you used to play with grow up to become totally alien to you. The world around you changes, and you change along with it.

Why does our view towards life change, as we grow older? Some say it's fate but you can't blame everything on fate. I think we make our own destinies. Our views usually change towards life as we grow, and as our brain gets more developed we start thinking differently.

When we are infants, the outside world is an unknown place that does not exist in our universe. We are cherub-faced brats who are forgiven anything, be it breaking a priceless vase or losing an expensive object. Like the old Police song, every step we take, every move we make is greeted with rapturous adulation from the grown-ups, because we are miracles of creation to them.

Then comes the day when we bid this carefree existence goodbye and start our schooling. Thus you see many tearful toddlers being dragged off to their kindergarten classes by seemingly heartless teachers, while their anxious parents watch, pained by the anguish of their charges, but unable to do anything. This phase in life opens up a whole new world for us. We come into contact with the realms beyond our own homes. We start making friends with whom we study, bug teachers and play. To us, going to school, studies and friends gradually gain greater importance.

As we move upwards from class to class, some of our friends might change their schools; relationships might change, but the memories remain, and the good-byes are bittersweet. Think back, and you're bound to remember that one classroom you were loathe to leave, that one teacher you cried for when you moved up a grade, that one friend you wished you hadn't lost touch with.

Soon, the light-hearted school days give

way to the turbulence of adolescence. When we finally turn to teenager we start having this inner belief in us that we have grown up. And so when our parents starts scolding us for studies, irregular routine and what not, it seems to us that our parents probably hate us the most. That's when we long for the simpler times we've left behind, and the memories of those times are so much more precious because of it.

Even though this battle of wills with our parents is a sour initiation into this part of life, there are other, more pleasant sides to life. Like having the first crush, getting the driving license, and even taking pleasure in wicked endeavors like bunking classes. This is the time when we learn and take a lot of things from the world. We party...we go to concerts and we study and then last but not the least we "CHILL OUT" with our friends.

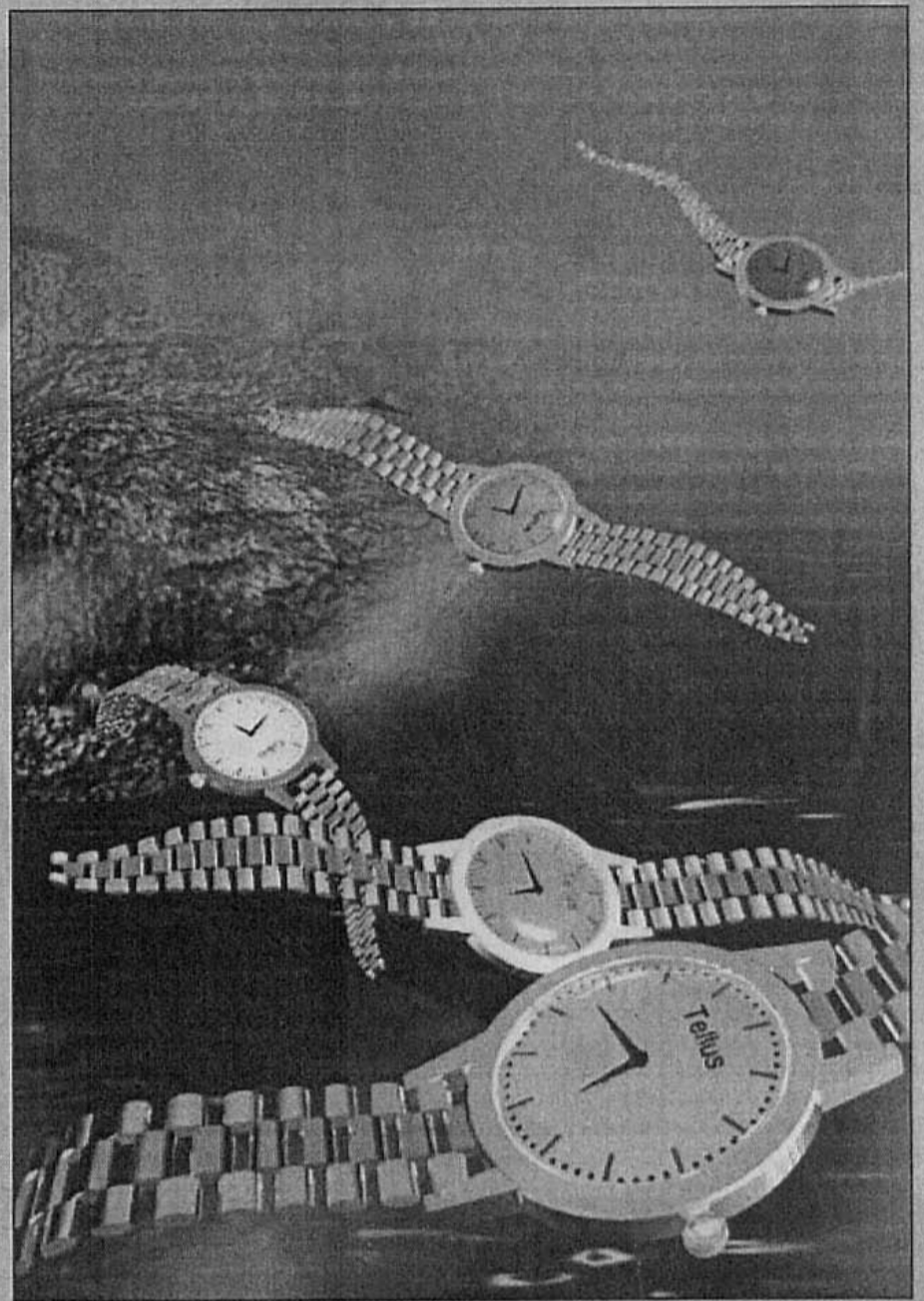
Then finally, Graduation Day arrives, filled with mixed feelings. Awe at the ceremonies, collecting the certificates and taking pictures. Euphoria because we've finally made it. Excitement at the thought of what's to come. Nostalgia because life will never be the same again. It is the same feeling that a bird probably feels on its virgin flight. Life will never be the same again.

The pictures are taken, the last bow is made. Reality crashes in, and life becomes all about moving ahead, about building careers and facing responsibilities. The ties of the old life gradually begin to loosen. 'Forever Friends' are scattered all over as each takes his/her own route, and some are lost forever, only to remain as distant memories.

But when you finally achieve your goal, you are tired...what remains are the memories of the wonder years which you end up sharing with first your children and then grandchildren.

Time runs faster than you can imagine. Be happy and enjoy every step of life because you own it.

By Tashmia Zaman



## almost hideous under the sun

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Nadia followed me to the doorway.

'Are you coming to the class tomorrow?'

'I'm not sure.' I replied honestly.

'Don't do this to yourself, Rishan.' She spoke with a softness that almost caught me off-guard. 'Uncle's accident was a big blow. But, you have to move on. You're not alone you know.'

She gave me a big hug.

Walking all the way to Dhanmondi to Komolapur on a sweltering afternoon is quite a bit of a torture. Twice in the same day, within the space of a few hours is sheer murder. Within ten minutes after I had hit the road, I was drenched in sweat. And, by the time I'd reached Shahabagh, I was literally staggering. I leaned against a wall, hoping my legs wouldn't fail me, and watched all the lavish automobiles rush by. All the good-looking cars with all the good-looking kids, grinning through the cool comfort of the air-conditioner.

I was tempted to hire a cab, but had only two takas in my wallet. *Maybe there are a few coins in the bag,* I thought optimistically. That should be enough to catch a bus. I rummaged through my bag. There weren't any coins. Instead, there was a crumpled five-hundred taka note. It hadn't been there before I went to Nadia's place.

I reached the station half an hour late, and I was still about ten minutes early. Thanks to the utter efficiency of BRTC, the train was behind schedule as usual. I looked for Mom through the obnoxious swarm of people. I couldn't see her in the beginning. Instead, I saw a four-year old girl with a lollipop in one hand, and a ragged teddy bear in another. She saw me and shrieked gleefully.

It was Suetha, my little sib. Mom was standing at a short distance from her, the luggage already put away to the respective compartment. I walked up to her.

'What took you so long?' Her cold stare that had so terrified in past looked harmless, even comical.

'Traffic.' I lied.

'Where are you coming from?'

'Chemistry practical.' I lied again, taking a mental note that I'd have made one hell of a politician. Too bad I hadn't been born in Europe, or Australia, or any other continent where you don't have to be a henchman to enter politics.

'I called your class. You weren't there.'

Ah, well. So much for being a politician.

I gave Suetha a pack of Snickers. She shrieked again.

'Your uncle dropped us.' Mom said as-a-matter-of-factly. 'There's a cricket match on the telly or something. So, he couldn't stay around.'

I looked at Mom, trying not to sigh. She'd been pretty all her life, but the last couple of months had left her almost haggard.

Mom had got married in her teens. She was still in college when she ended up falling for the boy next door. One sunny morning they went to the Kazi Office, got married, then came home and pretended that nothing had happened. When their parents came to know about it a couple of months later, they grabbed the two of them by the collar and got them married again; this time with proper ceremonies.

As far as love stories went, theirs had a happy ending. Only, twenty years later, the guy's dead, and the girl's not a girl any more. She's an aging widow with two kids and zero savings.

'... you shouldn't be bunking classes,' Mom was saying. 'Life's not easy anymore. You should be grateful to your uncle for giving you a place to leave in. You should do your studies properly. I'll get some job, and keep sending for your expenses from time to time...'

'What job will you get?' I blurted through the solemn lecture, abundant in should-s and shouldn't-s. 'You're going to stay with granny in the village, perhaps permanently. You never passed college. What job will you get?'

The words came out meaner than I'd intended. Mom looked away. When she looked back, she had tears in her eyes.

'I mean, you don't need to get a job at first place.' I shrugged. 'I'll be living with uncle, so there's no need to bother about food and stuff. I've talked to the teachers in my coaching; they'll give me a fee concession. I'll be teaching some students in Dhanmondi. So, at the end of the day, I'll be able to take care of my own bills.' I checked to see if I'd sounded convincing enough. 'May be in a good month, I'll be able to send money in the village too.' I added.

I was being over-optimistic. We both knew that.

'You've grown up a lot in the last couple of months.' Mom observed.

'Haven't we all?'

A tiny drop of tear came rolling down her eyes.

'I wish none of this had ever happened.' She said in a half-whisper. 'I so wish that he was alive.'

She tried to blink back the tears, but they came anyways. 'He's gone. He'll never come back. Things will never be the same again.'

This time, I looked away.

Dad always wanted me to be strong. He was

a tough guy himself. His friends had always been fascinated by him and people who crossed him in the business were terrified. Yet, he was always tender to his family, which made him even more special.

I always wanted to be like him. He wanted me to be better.

'When I die, you won't cry at all.' He once said with a chuckle. 'You'll be tough, and you'll inspire the others to hold on.'

I'd followed him word to word. I don't believe in all that, but if he was watching me from above now, Dad was definitely proud of me.

I looked back. Mom was almost trembling now. I stepped ahead.

'Everything's going to be fine, Mom.'

I wasn't sure if she bought that, but she at least tried to smile. Which, in turn, stopped her from crying.

'Trust me,' I smiled back. 'I'm still here.'

She ruffled my hair, the way she used to when I was a kid. Suetha gave us an uninterested look, then returned to her Snickers.

Mom wasn't trembling anymore.

I was leaning against a wall, hands in the pockets, and a wry smile on my face. The train was slowly moving now. Suetha was waving through the window. (She'd finished off her Snickers. She had ample of time in her hands now.) Mom was smiling. I waved back.

In a matter of seconds, the train would leave the platform, leaving me all by myself. I still looked rough, and perhaps felt rougher. But, for once, I wasn't scared. I was about to enter a new phase of my life. And, I was looking forward to it.

I turned away. I was ready to hit the streets.