Staring at the world through my rearview

G. Sumdany Don

IT was a dark stormy June evening at Dr. Shahin Huda's chamber in Dhanmondi when my father suddenly shouted with more power in his voice than the raging thunderstorms outside, "It's a boy!!" Immediately my uncles and aunts stopped sweating, my grandmother stopped praying, my youngest uncle stopped flirting with the nurses, and my grandfather stopped walking to and fro throughout the whole clinic and declared to name me Md. Ghulam Sumdany. The name Ghulam which means, "The follower" and "Sumdany" which means, "The prophet who swims in God's sea of love" did not impress my father at all, but he gladly accepted his old father's wishes, as I was the first grandson and the first descendant of the Azimpur Family. My father, Md. Ghulam Dastegir, thanked my mother, Mrs. Nasrin Dastegir, and told her that he was a smart man to choose such a beautiful woman like her to be his wife who presented him with such a beautiful son! As my father's name starts with "D" and my mother's name starts with "N", they together decided to add "Don" to my name. Later that night, my other grandfather gave me a gold locket on which it was written in Bengali, "28th June, 1985" on one side and "Don" on the other side.

I grew up just like a prince, pampered with toys, games, cartoon video games and a closet full of matching clothes. I was a devil in disguise and had a hard time hiding my tail inside my pants. I therefore would torture everyone and everything that came into my sight. Though I never believed in astrology, I was a pure Cancerian and somehow inherited all of its features, creativity being one of them. My mother would arrange my toys and I would creatively throw them out of the window; she would cook vegetables and I would creatively pour water on them after the cooking was completed; she would invite the next door neighbor and I would creatively slap the neighbor's little girl for wearing pink and so on. My mother was always mad at me and would occasionally ask my father, "Is it really our son?" I would sometimes get slapped by both my parents in random discrete motion. Both of them played equal roles in my life from childhood until now. It was never like I would hide behind my father in fear of my mother as I wrestled with all my father's ironed shirts, nor I would ask for a lollypop from my mother only when daddy was busy. They were both equally persistent in my life.

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My father was the eldest among eleven and struggled a lot in his life. He never woke me up from my sleep even if it was half past 10 A.M as his father never had let him sleep after the Azaan in early dawn. He made me cute and chubby by feeding me two eggs a day as his eggs were always divided into four. He was a self made man. He met this beautiful and unbelievably smart young woman during his younger sister's wedding. She was wearing sleeveless kameez and her shoulders were glistening under the bright yellow wedding lights. " You know Don," my father still says, "Nasrin was an angel without wings and I almost had a heart attack after seeing the smile she gave me while adjusting her long black silky hair". My mother on the other side saw a medium built, short, fair and extraordinary good-looking man who needed to take classes on "How to flirt". But she was utterly impressed by the fact that my father was only 25 years old and was covering all of the expenditures for the wedding all by himself!! Moreover, his charming personality captivated her and as a result they got married after a six-month love affair and Mr. Don was born just after a year of their marriage.

My parents were always free and frank with me and talked with me about almost everything from sex to science". My mother admitted me in Maple Leaf, an English medium school. In order to do so, she fought with my father and my relatives who thought English medium kids were a "bunch of hooligans". After studying A, B, C, D at home, the gigantic school was like a jail for me. Though being the naughtiest of all, I always somehow managed to keep good relations with my teachers and this trend still continues. I was an expert cheater during exams; I never liked studies and only studied because my parents wanted me to do so. However, I always stood 2nd or 3rd in class and was a good student, until I flunked my A' levels. But that is a different story.

My father was a rich man during my early years and his financial condition fell down the stairs as I grew older. By the age of 8, I had already visited India several times and tasted all the mouth- watering food, visited Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia and toured throughout Bangladesh. But I was happier when my parents went to India on business trips and left me in my grandmother's house. My grandmother, who is my greatest love, is the most influential figure of my life. She was the only one who protected me when I did the magic trick of disappearing my cousin's birthday dress. Instead of scolding me, she would cook *kachhi birani* for me and feed me with her own hands.