

FABLE FACTORY

Dr. John, the old coaxial cable who had seen both the advent of cable TV and the internet, felt the aluminium lining under his skin crackle. Age was getting to him and his days as a marriage counsellor were nearing an end. With his big, wide head, he stared venerably at the young couple across the desk. Jack was a 1/8 (3.55mm) jack and Jacqueline was a 1/8 (6.35mm) female audio jack. John sighed at the thought. He knew where the problem lay but if he gave solutions on the first go instead of listening for an hour two, he'd be an advertiser, not a counsellor. "We're just not *communicating!*" squealed Jacqueline. "Why not?" asked Dr. John. "He's half the size he should be. He's just not big enough for me. Sometimes, I can't even feel him," complained Jacqueline again. "See what I mean? She makes me feel inadequate in ways I can't help. It's not as if she even tries!" replied a bristling Jack. "It's not like—" "How about we start from the beginning?" Dr. John cut her off. "Jack, please tell me how you two got married." "We met at a party. Everyone was pretty much randomly hooking up to devices and since we were both really glitched at that time, we didn't really feel nor care enough through all the interference. We dated for a while and finally got a shotgun wedding and later on, had a proper one with both of our mainboards present," explained Jack. "I understand that you two have a child?" asked Dr. John. "Yes, we do," replied Jacqueline. "Please tell me about your child," said Dr. John.

Jack looked away as his wife stumbled to explain the situation. "Our son is a USB connector." "Hmm, is he adopted?" asked Dr. John. "No, no... he's not. M-my great-grandfather from my mother's side was a USB 1.0 connector. One of the first," explained Jacqueline, stuttering slightly. Dr. John just nodded and scribbled a note on his pad. "Tell him the rest, why don't you, Jacqueline?" said Jack while leering at his wife. "Well, uhm, our child is not like the other kids," she almost muttered, "He's a multi-purpose USB connector. Y'know, the ones that slide to switch male and female heads. It's not something we really tell people and poor little Busby is still suffering from identity crisis. Kids like him aren't accepted by people so readily, if they know the truth." The doctor made another note and asked Jacqueline to voice any other concerns she might have. "Um... I found quite a few pictures of exposed male stereo connectors hotwiring each other on *his*" – she pointed at Jack "– phone. Some were even jury-rigged together." She looked downwards and blushed in embarrassment. Not the good kind of blushing. It's the kind of blushing that is usually preceded by a loud public fart. "THOSE WERE FOR WORK, YOU KNOW

THAT!" screamed Jack. "YOU'RE NOT A DATA CONNECTOR! YOU'RE AN AUDIO CONNECTOR FOR A FEATURE PHONE, NOT EVEN A SMARTPHONE!" she screamed back. "I AM TRYING TO WORK MY WAY UP THE CORPORATE LADDER, YOU CHINESE KNOCKOFF. I HAVE TO DO THESE THINGS!" "How dare you call me—" "Please, let's not have a shouting match at each other. I am sure Jack can explain himself," Dr. John cut in. Jack didn't want to explain himself. He got up and stormed out of the room as Jacqueline broke into tears and sparks flew around her. "I am sure he's going to connect himself to a dial-up modem and listen to the beeps until he's passed out. I can't do this anymore," sobbed Jacqueline.

That night, when they were lying together in bed, not having talked since 11AM after Jack stormed out. Jacqueline turned over to her husband and passed him a package. "Dr. John said that this will help our marriage. It can't hurt at this point, right?" It was a 3.55mm to 6.35mm adapter. "I don't feel like it tonight, Jackie. I'm going to get some sleep; I have a tough day ahead." He turned out the lights and fell asleep in seconds. Jacqueline cried silently into her pillow until the boy next door called. He was an all-in-one connector who worked part-time as a Les Paul's adapter. He understood her.

MILLIMETRES APART

STORY & ILLUSTRATION: RUMMAN R KALAM

Holler through the streets

MAHMOOD SADAAT RUHUL

*Apertures travel potholed planes
Hemorrhaging
Taut bodies.*

*Mittens fastened to bars
Steaming of haste.*

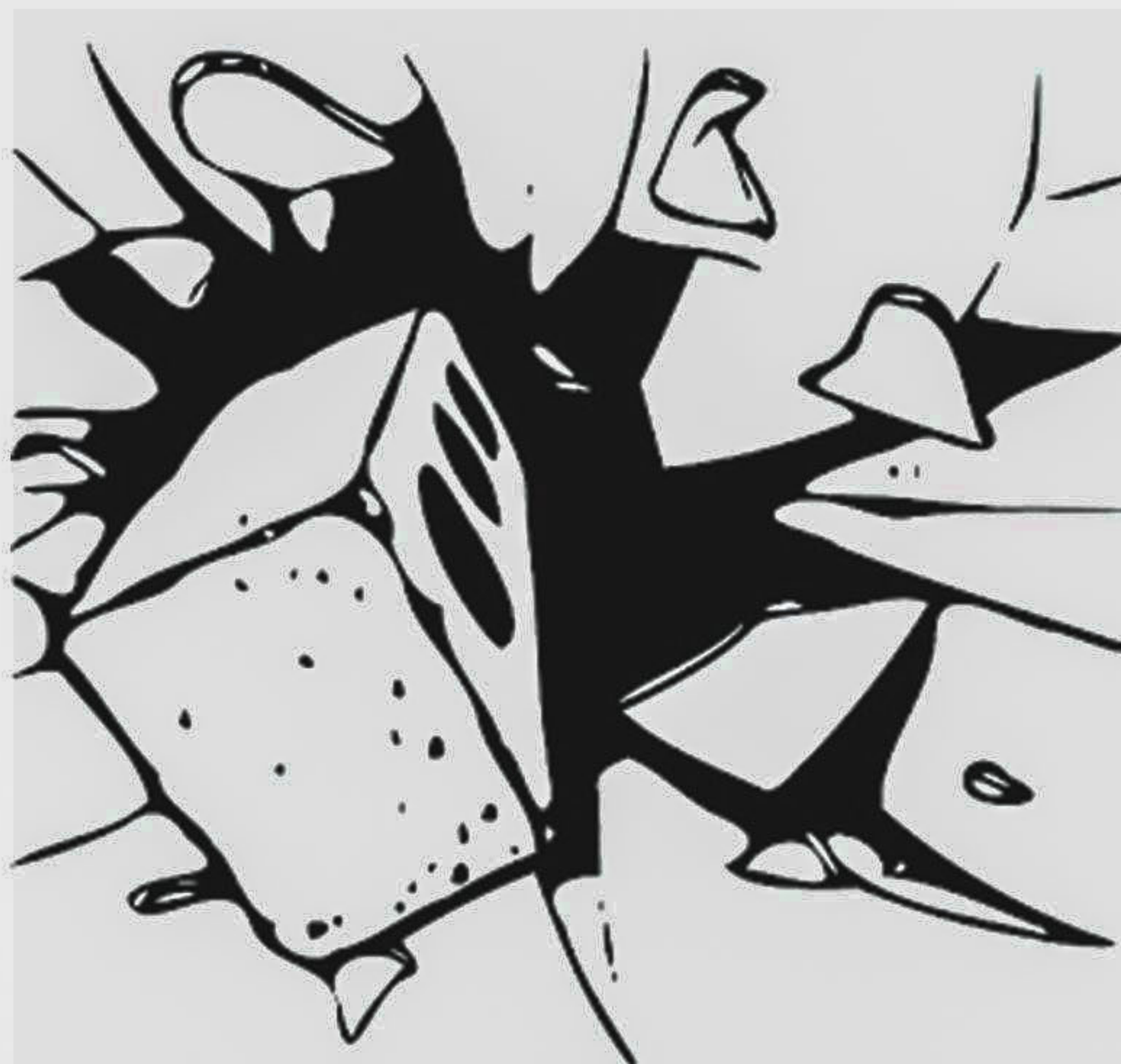
*Swinging like
The insides of a cage:
Hungry to live.*

--

*Elbows nest
On the dozen erstwhile*

Fairy tales stamped across every classroom window,

*Until
An unassuming brick sends
Waves through glass,
Cracking contemplation.*



*At once,
Entire anatomies wrestle at the doors,
Tumbling onto one another
To rhymes of fluid tarmac.*

--

*By the time,
The doorbells ring in unison,
Even the hawkers fall mum,
Only the loose-kneed beggar
Left,
Clasping notes accrued in his palm.*

The writer, 18, is a private A-level student