

Boy-Interrupted

ISHRAT JAHAN

The world was for the boys who wore their hearts in iron covers and for the men who looked at the world from their stage of necessary ambitions.

The men of the world. Designed for it, structured into it.

They had their seasoned beards for a cause and perfumes that embraced the air when they walked in. Their smiles were smiled for heart-breaks and flawless first-times. They knew how to walk into rooms and fall into place.

They were the makers and the breakers. God's rocks and mountains -- fierce and beautiful. They were the ones with big-names-to-be and faces that belonged with tuxedos and magazines.

But he was not so.

He was none of this. He would never be one of God's rocks and mountains. But he was beautiful.

His footsteps were awkward and his smiles were true. He wore his heart in all the wrong places and it always hurt too much. He loved and fell and loved again. It left him a little broken every time and sometimes, the pain and the humans would leave behind scars.

He kissed all the wrong girls with the right intentions. And he loved the right girls at all the wrong times.

He would sit under the summer skies for hours, looking at the clouds and dreaming in the stars. He did not hesitate to tell you that you had the pair of eyes that deserve to make a big deal about themselves. He said his 'I-love-you's like he dreamed-without caution or consequence.

He was a boy-interrupted. He put his feelings in mixtapes and never understood why his sisters fell in love with all the wrong men. The world had no place for his mixtapes and 'I-love-you's. So they put him on the sidelines and called him *just another one of those boys*.

He settled into his wallflower's silence and fell into his aloneness. He made better worlds in the stars and the books, created infinities through the tunnels and on hillsides.

He was the boy-interrupted.

He had scars and a string of past lives, half-lived, half-burnt. His broken things would always be a part of his soul. His life would be lived in fragmented infinities and he would open his heart with all its terrible things to everyone who cared enough. Who would love enough.

The thing about being interrupted was, he didn't have to grow up without his broken things, the books and the songs and his infinity. He would love too much, understand too much and care too much. He would always be a little too much for the world.

And that had to be the most beautiful thing a human being could be.

A little too much.



Jars of Dreams

NAMIRA SHAMEEM

I keep my dreams in jars hoping one day I will realize them. I count them every morning to see if they're still there, intact. I turn off the lights to see whether the jars still glow with the passion with which they were born, the same spark of brightness which gave birth to a star, a baby sun. I line them up side-by-side according to age on the 3rd shelf, at a height of 5 feet 3 inches, so that they're well within my view, though 3 inches above comfortable reach. It reminds me of how much I still need to grow.

When I am feeling up to it, I take them one by one and hurl them into the world with all my strength and positive energy converged into that one throw, just to see if it breaks. The fragile ones shatter, turning that bit of positivity from me into mere nothingness. The stronger ones persevere; I can see cracks here and there, like the meandering lines on our palms that can foretell our fate. I try to read these cracks to learn the future of my dreams, like the palmist who tried to read my sister's, for her marriage.

When the first one (called Basketball) shattered, I carefully lifted the jar up and removed it from the shelf. The 3 years of dust that had gathered around it remained in the shape of a diffused sphere, and I did not bother cleaning. I knew, no matter how much I tried to keep that spot clean, to remove the proof of its existence, dust will again gather in that corner to remind me. Dreams captured in jars are like that, they do not leave you easily, until you decide to adapt to their presence or open the jar to let it go.

Whether they land on your doorstep again, or on someone else's, that's an entirely different question.

My second jar of dreams is filled to the brim, almost. It has tiny scrolls of browned paper tied with red and white strings, the kind that people use to sew up torn books and copies. The strings look like candy canes and the scrolls seem to have childish Christmas wishes scribbled on them. But little do people know that these are not wishes, but poems, or tiny paragraphs written haphazardly on a bumpy trip to Cox's Bazaar, or to my village. Little do they know that they're the very first products of my second childhood hobby, after art.

When I tried to throw this jar of mine into space -- not empty space, but the one with millions of equally bright stars -- it couldn't stay there long. I realized that what I thought carried weight only appeared full with empty airspaces around the corners and where one scroll had landed over another and not quite settled. So I tried to settle it. When the scrolls finally aligned, I realized the jar was only half full. I

could see the cracks from the first throw too. But this jar is the one I treasure. So I kept throwing in one scroll after another, and I still do. This jar has seen many cracks in its lifetime, but has never broken. It is waiting to be thrown again.

My third jar of dreams sits on my shelf like a spoilt princess. She was born and sustained without apparent effort, so she was one of those I could take for granted in the fourteen years of my school life. She had hardly ever felt any cracks but recently, her jar seems to be made of toughened glass. Now I feel afraid for her. I feel scared that she might break, that she might abandon me and her stately position on my shelf. I feel scared that I am not doing much for her, and the time to finally test her strengths, to throw her into the world, is drawing nearer. Only three months now, and I haven't done much to train her. People don't believe me when I say I don't, but why would a ruler lie about training her soldiers?

There is one other jar, bigger and fancier than the rest that sits there in the corner, glowing every now and then, like fireflies in the dark. It has several pieces of paper with single words: cold, hunger, poverty, women, education, and entrepreneur. Some tell me these dreams are 'blown out of proportion' for a girl my age, but I silently tell myself, 'My jar can still accommodate these, it has not yet shattered.'

As I grow up, these jars grow not only in number, but also in strength and durability. When you have a dream, you need to believe in them enough to let it go, to throw it into the open, without the surety that someone on the other end will catch your jar before it shatters. I believe in my dreams, what about you?

The wrier, aged 17, is a grade 10 student at Sunbeams School.