

The sins we are guilty of committing on a daily basis don't necessarily have to be of leviathan proportions. As with anyone around the world, the life of the average Bangladeshi is littered with sins and misdeeds, some so trivial they don't even register in our minds. However, that is not to say that we are not capable of committing the deadly sins as inscribed centuries ago. There is no respite from the horrific acts that we, as human beings, are capable of carrying out. These short stories explore the recesses of human nature where the line between good and evil is blurred beyond any recognition.

OF MONSTERS AND MEN



LUST

Mr J M Khalil was an ordinary man with a seemingly ordinary life. He woke up at 6 am, went to work, left at 6 pm, and every now and then on his way home he'd pick up some chocolates or a packet of crisps for his two children. His wife would prepare lunch for him to take to work and would have dinner ready for him in the evenings. At 8 pm his wife would bring a tray of tea and biscuits to his study – a dusty little room with tattered books piled ceiling-high – and she would often fall asleep before he retired to their bed for the night. He was never unkind to her and despite his slightly aloof nature, she felt some semblance of love. She never questioned why he would retreat into his study as soon as he finished dinner – he must be a very busy man, always working hard, even at home. She didn't really take an interest in that aspect of his life because she simply would not understand any of it. She didn't even know how their computer worked.

Perhaps if she did, she'd know that it had folders upon folders of photos of schoolgirls that he had taken almost every day for the last two years. There were girls as young as 13 and 14, in their uniforms, playing outside. She would also know that he had been escorted off the premises of several school buildings for harassing the young girls.

Mr J M Khalil was an ordinary man but in reality, he had a very abnormal life.

SLOTH

He had perfected the setup of his room so that he wouldn't have to move too much to get what he needed. In fact, the only time he really got any exercise was during his trips to and from the bathroom. His favourite armchair was positioned close to his bed so he wouldn't have to walk too great a distance to get in and out of it, and it was facing his TV, to which his Xbox was connected. His chair had pockets on either side where he kept the TV remote, a calling bell for the servants, and his mobile phone. He had an extension cord where his phone charger was plugged in, lest he had to get up and use any of the other sockets around the house. He had the A/C remote nearby too, which he turned on at regular intervals because he didn't want to get up and turn the fan on.

At home it was just him, his younger brother, and his mother. His mother turned a blind eye to his laziness once she realised her lectures fell on deaf ears. Most days it was like he wasn't even home, and occasionally she'd hear him move around in his room but that was the extent of it. They rarely spoke unless she went into his room but he was always busy with his games and she saw little point in interrupting him for small talk. She was

grateful she had her younger son for company, even though he came home from university quite late in the evening.

One day, she developed a fever. He could hear her cough from his room for a few days until he realised he had an old pair of noise-cancelling headphones lying around somewhere. He only found out about the fever because one of the maids told him about it. He decided he'd check up on her later. At one point he even thought he heard her call for him, but he figured that if it was urgent, one of the maids would attend to her. A couple of hours elapsed before his phone started ringing but he was too engrossed in his game to pause it. Whatever it was, surely it could wait. It rang about three more times until he checked the caller ID. It was his brother. Why was his brother calling from the next room? It was probably an accident. He continued his game, pausing again because he realised his phone had died. He groaned as he reached over to plug it into the charger. Once it came back to life, it began buzzing with missed calls and text messages.

The message previews flickered across his screen and he caught the words "maa" and "hospital" and "ICU". When he called back, all he could hear was his brother wailing.



GREED

The total bill came to just over Tk 5000. Although his father gleamed with gratitude from across the table, Anik merely scoffed as he handed his card over to the waiter. Still, he was willing to part with that amount of money, mere change in comparison to what he had planned. He looked over at his father. This was the first time in 25 years that they had gone out for a meal together, as a family. Tonight, however, was a special occasion. For him, anyway.

When they got home, he got the paperwork out from his briefcase and went into his father's bedroom. He had also prepared a cup of tea for him for the first time in years. "Baba," he said, startling the old man. He sat down at his feet and handed him the tea, and then pushed the papers and a pen towards him. Gratitude gave way to defeat, and a pained expression crept across his wrinkled face as he picked the pen up, and signed the various contracts. The house they lived in, all the land he owned in their ancestral village, everything – all signed over to his only son. He wondered where he had gone wrong in raising Anik, when he became so ungrateful, so impatient. He had promised all his property to him upon his death but it just wasn't enough anymore.

As soon as the last document was signed, Anik snatched them away. He didn't leave the room though. He sat and watched his father sip the tea until he had finished it. He sat and watched as his father started convulsing, and he sat and watched his father breathe his last. The house was finally his!

