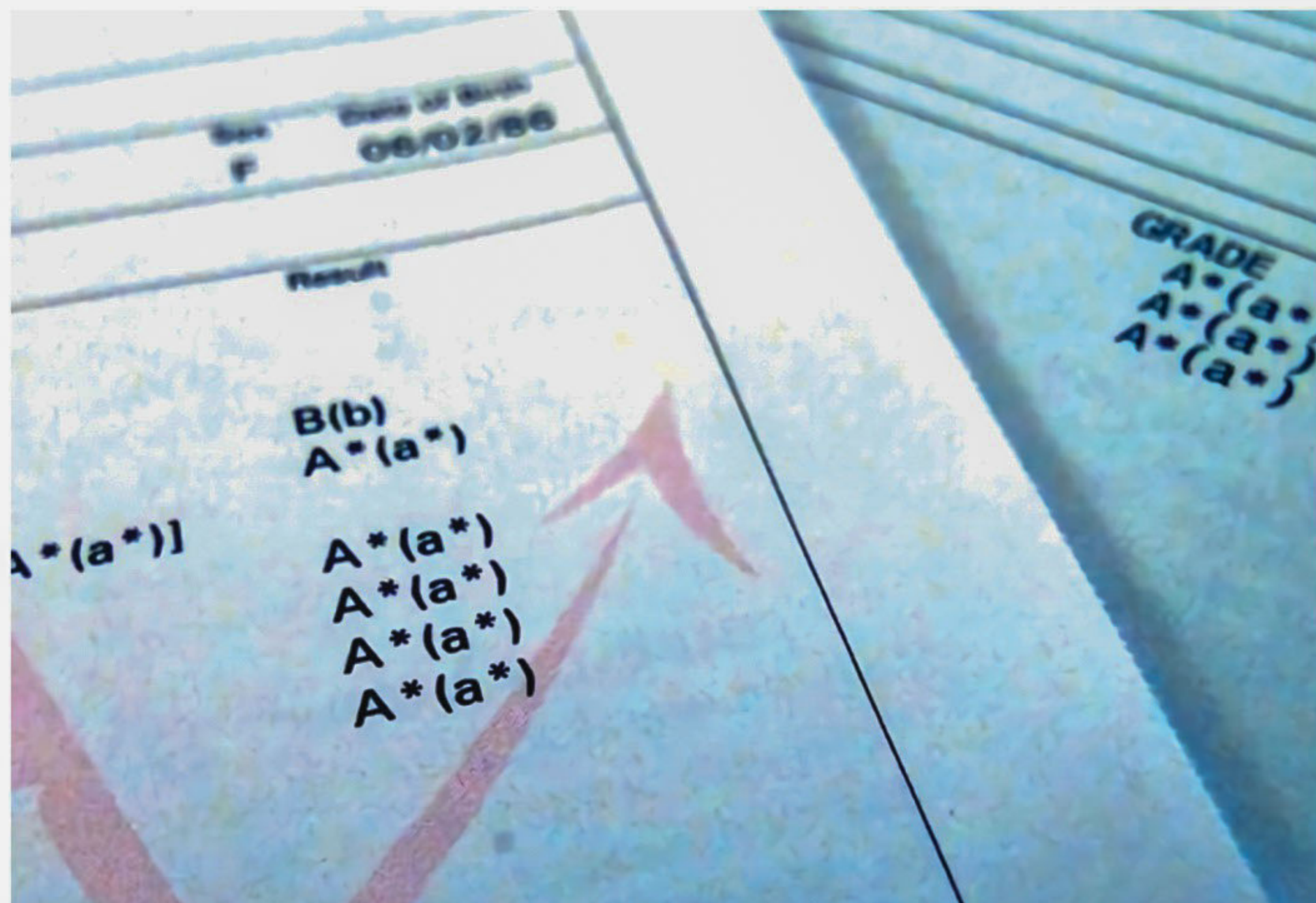


# Dear Best Friend

SABRINA SAMREEN

Dear best friend, it's been ages we met,  
 So long you have been around, months I bet.  
 Bear with me, it's no blame game,  
 But us not talking is such a shame.  
 And we could sit over coffee, sipping old gossip.  
 Not staring into our watches, schedules can wait.  
 Watch life roll by, laugh over jokes we already know by heart.  
 Name calling, just thoughts, you and me, we on our girl date.  
 I'd listen intently, follow closely  
 Catch up on the strewn pieces of your life I had overlooked.  
 Regret that I hadn't been there so long,  
 Feel rejuvenated, refreshed with you by side, strong.  
 And hey, I got loads to say,  
 Tales and stories, how long can you stay?  
 When can we meet? This Tuesday, next Thursday?  
 Bated breath, your OMGs, ooohs and aahs can follow, hear me out,  
 Tease me later, friendly banter, nag some more, just a bout.  
 And we could reminisce school days, forgotten friends,  
 So much has changed and we grew up,  
 Virtual conversations have been wearing me out.  
 And I'd halt, look you in the eye, sit back, over psychedelic pop,  
 Silent, contented to have you, and time can just stop.  
 I might hug you tight, overwhelmed much, dizzy slight.  
 Stayovers have become history, when did we last fight?  
 Dear best friend, where can we meet?  
 Window shopping, your place or mine, or just a random quiet street?  
 Cellphones aside, we'd talk like little girls, starry eyed.  
 Dreams, crushes, disappointment, joy, how life had taken a toll,  
 Play your old prank, and I swear I'm not gonna fall.  
 Dear best friend, we're meeting this weekend,  
 No excuses, deadlines, assignments, deadends.  
 Dear best friend forget ego, trace of growing resentment.  
 Tell me, would we ever meet?  
 Or, I shudder to ask, have you found my replacement?



# GRADE (and Other) BOUNDARIES

MAHEJABEEN HOSSAIN NIDHI

Minutes before the start of the exam, all Afzal could focus on was the nervous clicking of a pen by the girl next to him, 2855. The monotonous words of the head examiner before every exam sounded like a sermon his ears had become all too accustomed to. Afzal finally snapped out of the haze when the clicking stopped and everyone in the hall simultaneously flipped open their question papers, as if an ominous breeze had swept through the room.

The first question in an exam was supposed to be a warm up of more difficult questions to come but for him it was an indicator of how poorly the exam would play out for him. He let out a deep breath. He told himself that this would be over soon. Exam minutes always seemed to pass quicker.

As he looked at his Chemistry Unit 6 paper he thought of the series and sequences he had come across in Further Pure Mathematics; he pondered over how similar it was to the education system before him – all skilful repetition with longer progressions and an uncertain end.

Afzal looked through the paper with bloodshot eyes. Sleep finally ambushed him in the hall despite having lingered far away all night. In a dazed state, he jotted down 1 mark answers here, guessed the 2 marks there and weaved elaborate “smart sounding” words for the rest.

Unfailingly, in every exam and this one too, an invigilator appeared tapping on his table to verify a Captcha test of sorts on the front page of the paper as soon as he began to pick up momentum. Afzal took this time to glance over the other candidates; 2855 looked as if she would burst into fresh tears if her invigilator took another minute to fasten her supplementary sheets.

With another sharp tap, Afzal was brought back to the paper in front of him. He was almost too afraid to look at the clocks at the front corners of the hall as he struggled to force

words out of his ball point pen. Soon, rather too soon, a voice sounded, “Fifteen minutes remaining.”

As Afzal flipped through his paper, blinded by the jarring white spaces, he thought about another set of questions he wouldn't be able to answer when the time would come – “Why didn't you study?”, “What did you do all year?”, “How did I ever make the mistake of expecting anything from you, Afzal?”

The more desperately he tried to scavenge answers, the more he became overwhelmed by dwelling on his failures. He wanted to take a few long breaths but as he looked up at the red digits he realised he didn't quite have the luxury.

“Candidates, you have five minutes left.”

“Candidates, stop writing.”

Afzal could've sworn that those two sentences were spoken immediately one after the other. As custom, the invigilators of each row began collecting the papers simultaneously and the spectator sport of guessing whose candidate numbers would be taken away by the head invigilator began. Being told to put pens and pencils down once isn't enough for a surprising amount of candidates.

Soon after the invigilators did a casual second lap around the hall, column by column students left. Afzal sighed. It seemed to him that his column would always be the last to leave regardless of where he sat.

Involuntarily glued to his seat, he was left to mentally gauge the potential grade boundary by studying the facial expressions of everyone leaving the hall. He turned to look at 2855 again, he would have asked her name, offered a kind word, but she hid her face in her hand – symptoms of a bad exam.

*With a keen eye and a broken brain to mouth filter, Mahejabeen Hossain Nidhi has a habit of throwing obscure insults from classic novels at random people who may or may not have done anything to warrant them. Drop her a line at [mahejabeen.nidhi@gmail.com](mailto:mahejabeen.nidhi@gmail.com)*

