



Training Wheels

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The little girl had a mixture of bewilderment and relief plastered to her face. She had swerved herself and her bicycle out of the CNG auto-rickshaw's path at just the right moment, narrowly averting the head-on collision. "Please. Drive slowly," Tasnim implored, distressed. She peered out from the green box and saw the girl still trying to recover from the shock. The early morning roads were deserted, something the driver was taking advantage of.

It was on this road that, a decade and a half ago, she had learnt to ride her own bicycle. It had been a pink and black "Lightning" cycle, the best back in those days. Abba had gifted it to her for her ninth birthday, although she vaguely remembered asking for a water-colour set. Tasnim didn't mind though; once she'd seen the colourful ribbons tied to the handlebars and the cartoons on the seat cover, she was sold.

There was just one little problem. She didn't know how to ride a bike.

"What do you mean you can't ride a bike?" Abba chuckled, when Tasnim shared her concerns.

"But Abba, there are no training wheels," a nine-year-old Tasnim complained.

"There is nothing that my Tasnim can't do," her father smiled back.

The very next day, Abba, Tasnim and bicycle went to Seanson's Road for her first lesson. It went disastrously. After almost a minute of struggling, she managed to get onto the bike with Abba's help, only to realize that neither of her feet touched the ground. Craving for some earth beneath her toes, she started hopping from right foot to left, wobbling side to side like a weigh-

down toy as she did.

That's when Abba came in and grabbed the bike from behind. He steadied it and kneeling down, lifted her right leg onto the pedal.

"Look straight ahead and move only your feet. Just pedal."

But before the instructions registered on Tasnim's mind, she felt a push from the back. She had only gone a few metres before she started swaying violently, and then thudded onto the tarmac, underneath the metal. Abba slowly ambled towards her as she picked herself up.

"Very good," he exclaimed. Tasnim was nonplussed. He helped her back onto the bike and pushed her to a second crash.

After ten or so more crashes, the trio returned home. Tasnim's ankles were unable to reach the pedals at the bottom, and scrapping for them had left her ankles cut. She had a deep, bleeding gash in her right knee. And on the last attempt, she had managed to keep her balance, albeit slamming into a tree on the roadside. The crash rammed the bike into her abdomen and she felt like puking. Abba thought the lesson went spectacularly.

Every day after that, Abba would return home from work to find an eager Tasnim waiting for him. They would have their lunch together, and once Abba finished saying his afternoon prayers, would take the bike outside. Tasnim wasn't one to give up. After a plethora more of crashes, falls and bruises, on day twelve, she finally managed to ride perfectly, with Abba jogging behind her, cheering her on. He was always a proud father.

"We're here, Miss."

Tasnim was abruptly jolted back to reality. She paid

the fare and got down, taking in the surroundings; they seemed so alien. She walked into the house she had grown up in, before she'd left to study architecture in Dhaka, and was welcomed by Tanvir. They exchanged a quick hug and then, she made way for her parents' room.

Ammu was sitting on the sofa, with Tasnim's *fupi* beside her. They looked up at her as she entered but she went and knelt down straight by the bed. Abba's eyes were closed, his breathing heavy. He had had a mild heart attack last night.

Tasnim held Abba's hands in hers and started stroking his forearm. He fidgeted.

"Is my *Ma* here?"

She leaned forwards to his question, and looked into his eyes. She was amazed by how much he had aged in the last few years.

"Yes, *Abba*."

"I am so sorry *Ma* that you have to see me like this."

Tasnim's eyes watered. "*Abba*, do you remember when you taught me to ride a bike?" she struggled. "How we would walk back home every evening and sometimes you would even carry me on your shoulders."

"Yes *Ma*. I remember." He paused, his words fragile. "But as you see, my batteries are weak now. Let me have a quick recharge," he whispered, "and then we can go for a ride again."

Abba smiled feebly, his lips barely forming the shape. Tasnim squeezed his hands in hers. The first tear drops began rolling down her cheeks.

Nibras is a doctor-to-be and a lover of murgi roast. He spends his free time stalking you on Instagram, so DM @niibzzz.