



# FROM MIRPUR TO MASSACHUSETTS

PHOTO: DARSHAN CHAKMA

SYEDA ZAREEN RAFA

Most of us are familiar with the devastating occurrence of a very close friend or relative moving to another country in search of a "better future" and abandoning us for a lifetime. The most unpleasant thoughts of never seeing them again, Skype eventually getting dull, them meeting better people and forgetting old times start to build up inside you. Yet, one fine day, things take a 180 degree turn. This is the day your lost friend first says something with a hint of "I live abroad" conceit that could easily boil your blood, but you decide not to make a fuss about it,

and label it as just a phase, out of respect for better times.

For me it first began with something she said about streets in Dhaka being narrow, which my pea-sized Bengali brain failed to make sense of, because the same narrow streets of Dhaka that her stomach turns at today that did not seem to bother her the 14 years she lived here. It did not stop there, of course. On she went blabbering about how every time it rains in Dhaka, puddles and mud appear everywhere you look and her scrunched up nose told me exactly how big of a deal that was. What really blew my brains straight out of my skull though was when

she next said the words "I don't think I could ever adjust back there," which is infuriating and rib-tickling hilarious at the same time.

The next blow came in a just matter of weeks. She was casually telling me about her plans to go to Target later in the day with her friends when, on the spur of the moment, she just had to ask me where I hung out with mine. That is of course a natural enquiry since "We don't have big brands here in Bangladesh". Even though we did, it was beyond the abilities of my stupid sensitive Bengali soul to comprehend and I got triggered faster than you can say "Stop acting like you were born

in Massachusetts when it's Mirpur you are from". Inevitably, my immediate thought was "Apon Coffee House > Starbucks".

While I am the weakest human being I know when it comes to cutting people off, it had to be done this time because the things she said hit me right at my *hriday*. On a side note, if you have not met someone who says things similar to what the last four hundred something words gave an account of, you need to personally contact me and feed me some ice-cream as a form of gratitude to the universe for just how fortunate it has made your life.

## A Paradise Found

MAHERA AIMAN NOOR

Beside a small town, there was a meadow. Nobody ever gave a glance towards it. It was always part of the surroundings. Not that there was anything special about the meadow itself. It was an ordinary meadow with ordinary green trees. In the meadow though, lived a family. The father and mother had already succumbed in the pull of life. They had ordinary jobs and ordinary adult beliefs. But the two little girls were different. They were children and children had a way of finding happiness in the simplest of things. The girls didn't have a TV or a phone unlike the other kids in their school. Instead they had dreams. People laughed when they heard this, but they did not mind. They believed that they were special and different. But not in a way most people would think. They didn't want to be superheroes or anything like that. They were not odd, they just perceived things differently. They found happiness in the each other and promised that they would always be together.

The sisters didn't like the games kids in their class would play. So instead of playing on the computer they would run together as long as they could until it felt like they had traversed a thousand miles.

Sometimes they would use an old tire hanging from a tree as a swing. One would spin like a clockwork angel while the other giggled away and helped push the tire. When they played hide and seek it was funny how they always found each



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

other no matter how clever or far the hiding place was. But their favourite time was when they stayed up all night, laying on a bed of grass trying to count the stars. When they both finally lost count they would talk and share their secrets and

dreams. Sometimes they pretended that they had wings. People at their school said that they were too childish and needed to grow up. To other children it sounded like they were trying to copy their lives from some book. But they

didn't care. The meadow was their own little paradise.

But soon times changed, and it was time for the older sister to leave for college. The sisters separated. Time forced them to drift apart as they both grew up.

The older sister got busy with her new college life. When she returned, she found out that the sweet little meadow was now barren land used for construction. She also didn't find her younger sister waiting for her at the doorsteps. She looked everywhere but she was nowhere to be found. And then it hit her. She ran until her lungs burned but she didn't stop. And then she found her, sitting on a rock, face lit by starlight. They both turned to look at their beloved meadow, their little paradise ruined. And now there was a space between them as they realized how far they drifted apart. They worried if the space could ever be filled.

"1...2...3...4..." said one sister as she pointed at the stars. The other instantly understood and laughed. Then they knew that things could get better. They knew it would be different now. But relationships need time and effort. But they would put in the effort. Because no matter how old they grew, one thing would not change, they would always have each other. And when they finally looked at each other they found a new paradise. A paradise in each other.

The writer is a class VII student of Sir John Wilson School.