

SHREYOSI ENDOW

The music drowned in the hustle bustle of the people at the reception. I squeezed past the crowd flocking into Reggie's and out into the fall breeze. Taking a seat on the bench to the right of the entrance, I took a quick glance at the phone screen- twenty more minutes before my table was ready. I wasn't really a fan of crowded restaurants but I had heard that the fish and chips here was worth the wait.

An elderly couple walked out of the café, hand in hand. They looked like they were in their sixties, the man in a black suit and the woman in a long flower-printed dress that went down to her wrinkly knees. She had on the brightest shade of red lipstick and her pearly white teeth flashed from between her thin lips. They looked around the place with awe as if it was their first time here. I realised they were waiting for their ride as a white car stopped in front of them and they slid inside, giggling like teenagers.

My eyes followed the car while it waited at the crossroad. As the traffic lights turned green, I could almost hear a voice curse in the back of my mind. I smiled as I remembered that voice. Car rides with him used to be a different sort of magic. We hated how Dhaka's traffic always seemed to wean down when we needed it the most. There was never enough traffic nor time, so we learned to cherish every moment we spent next to each other in the darkness of the backseat. I remembered how the street lights used to illuminate his face so beautifully as we sped across flyovers, how his hands, warm and a little sweaty, always fit perfectly in mine and how we would sometimes spend the entire ride in complete silence, staring into each other's eyes and little by little, melting inside.

As the car disappeared from my view, I looked around. I had never been to downtown in the five months since I moved to the states. Had I known before how enchanting it was, I might have come here earlier but my birthday felt like an appropriate day to explore this part of the city. The edges of the pavements were lined with small trees among which fairy lights found a home. The streets bathed in the lights from the numerous restaurants, cafés, shops and galleries on either side and the headlights from the cars speeding over them. The skyscrapers blocked half off the full moon and I felt a pang as I remembered how much he loved fancy buildings and how he would stare at them, wide-eyed, taking in every tiny detail with undivided attention.

I took out my phone and aimed the camera at the skyline. I checked the time, added twelve hours to it and realised that there was a slim chance he would be up by now. I decided to send him the photo anyway, so that he could wake up to it. A text message flashed on the phone screen. "Your table is ready," it said, and I got up and headed inside.

The inside was much warmer. A waitress led me to a corner table of two by the window and while she went on and on about the day's specials, I looked around. By the time she was done, I was ready to order. "I'll have the fish and chips," I said, and handed the menu back.

She left me with myself and an empty chair. Staring at it, I smiled. I liked the idea of the seat being reserved for him. It was as if any moment now, he would walk into the restaurant, find his way to the table and I would have the perfect birthday dinner with the boy I loved. I knew it was impossible, but the five thousand miles between us had taught me how to daydream and it had become my favourite pastime. I took my phone out of my purse and opened the chathead. "Active 7 hours ago," the line underneath his name read and sighing, I resisted the urge to call him. It was the one of the sweetest dilemmas I faced every day - Do I wake him up at eight in the morning on a weekend so that I can share this moment with him or do I let him sleep? I ultimately decided to send him some more pictures of the restaurant instead.

The food didn't take too long to arrive. It looked delicious- the fish, crispy and golden brown, the French fries, succulent, a good amount of tartar sauce and a slice of lemon on the side and yet, I did not have it in me to take the first bite.



ILLUSTRATION: ZOHEB MASHIUR

We had fish and chips on our first date. I still remembered the look of dismay on his face when he realised, once I had already started eating, that I had forgotten to squeeze the lemon on top of the fish. I realised, a little too late, that no matter how good the fish and chips at Reggie's was, it would taste bland to me anyway.

As I sat fiddling with a French fry, my phone buzzed. My heart leapt when I saw the tiny, red one on the top corner of the chathead.

"Hi," he said. "This place looks beautiful."

"Hello. You're up early," I pressed the send button, and all on a sudden, an idea lit up in my mind like a lightbulb.

"Did you have breakfast yet?" I asked and called a waiter who was passing by.

I watched patiently as the ellipses danced at the bottom of the phone screen and waited for the waiter to

bring the bill and the to-go box.

"No. I was planning on staying in bed for a while longer." He said.

"Perfect!" I exclaimed, clapping my hands. Judging from the looks I got from the people around me, I guessed that I might have been too loud.

"I was wondering if you and I could have breakfast and dinner together over Skype in about half an hour." I typed after finishing packing my food.

By the time the reply came, I was already on my way back home, hoping to have my birthday dinner in a way I never did before, but in a way that made it all the more special.

"I'd love that."

*Shreyosi Endow is a tea addict who likes to read poetry and is obsessed with plants. Send her a mail at endow1211s@gmail.com*