

The Past is a Prison

ZOHEB MASHIUR

Approaching his seventeenth birthday the boy known as Rubaiyat Karim committed an act that made him infamous. July 19, 2009. On that day the man known as Rubaiyat Karim was conceived.

Today he can be seen stalking the halls of his indifferent workplace, just doing enough to avoid getting fired. He lives life by the numbers and goes through the motions. He scowls at children at play and believes love and laughter to be delusions of the human mind.

Rubaiyat Karim the boy laughed at Le Epic Memes on 9GAG; Rubaiyat Karim the man laughs while reading about motor accidents on the highway. His laughter is sepulchral, and after he is done he slowly turns to whoever happens to be beside him and whispers: "God, I wish that were me."

In his lowest moments he looks back on the events of July 19, 2009 and thinks how different it could all have been if he'd not made his big mistake. We mature as persons when we accept that the past is immutable and resolve to focus on the present. Yet, Rubaiyat cannot shake the idea of travelling back in time to warn his younger self. That, he feels, is all he needs to be happy today.

What say you and I take him on a trip down memory lane?

Around April in 2009, Rubaiyat was enrolled by his parents into the classroom of a famous private tutor. A last-ditch effort to jump-start his performance in English before his O-Levels in June. Rubaiyat spend those crucial months at the coaching center focusing himself at girls.

He flirted exclusively with female versions of himself. Most of them had middle names. None of them wore glasses. Among their number one stood out as being more Rubaiyat Karim than any other. Her name was Nahia and he told people he loved her.

Rubaiyat did not ask Nahia out then. His sense of priorities was rudimentary but even he knew better than to start dating during international board exams. The unspoken agreement was that after June they would get things started in earnest.

Rubaiyat the man stands beside us now, watching his younger self. The boy does not know it yet but he is about to board a train heading directly into a future spent envying dead motorists.

July. Rubaiyat and Nahia were free from Edexcel's clutches to spend a glorious summer vacation passionately developing in their romance. In actuality they only had time for a few dates over the next few months and mostly interacted through their computers and phones. Yet they were unquestionably a couple, a fact that Rubaiyat decided to celebrate on their two-week anniversary by gifting Nahia a ring.

This was the ring Rubaiyat's late grand-

seriously, I'm not wearing pants right now. "Don't give her that ring, idiot," the man says.

"How did you know about that? I didn't tell anyone."

"Never mind how I know, it's not important!" This is a necessary lie: while it is crucial that Rubaiyat's past self understands who is speaking to him, there's no way he would. "You don't even know this girl, it's just been two months since you met -"

"Three months!" the boy corrects his future, defiant in only a pair of small boxers printed with Bat-symbols.

"Yeah, sure, OK, three months. Wow! Good job. Listen, that ring's important, give it to someone when you're older, please! Don't make this mistake."

"Love isn't a mistake! I love Nahia! I'm going to spend the rest of my life with her!"

"No, you aren't, that's the whole point. Oh, God, never mind, just give me that ring -!"

"Dude, no! Get your hands off me, you pervert! Help! Thief! HELP!"

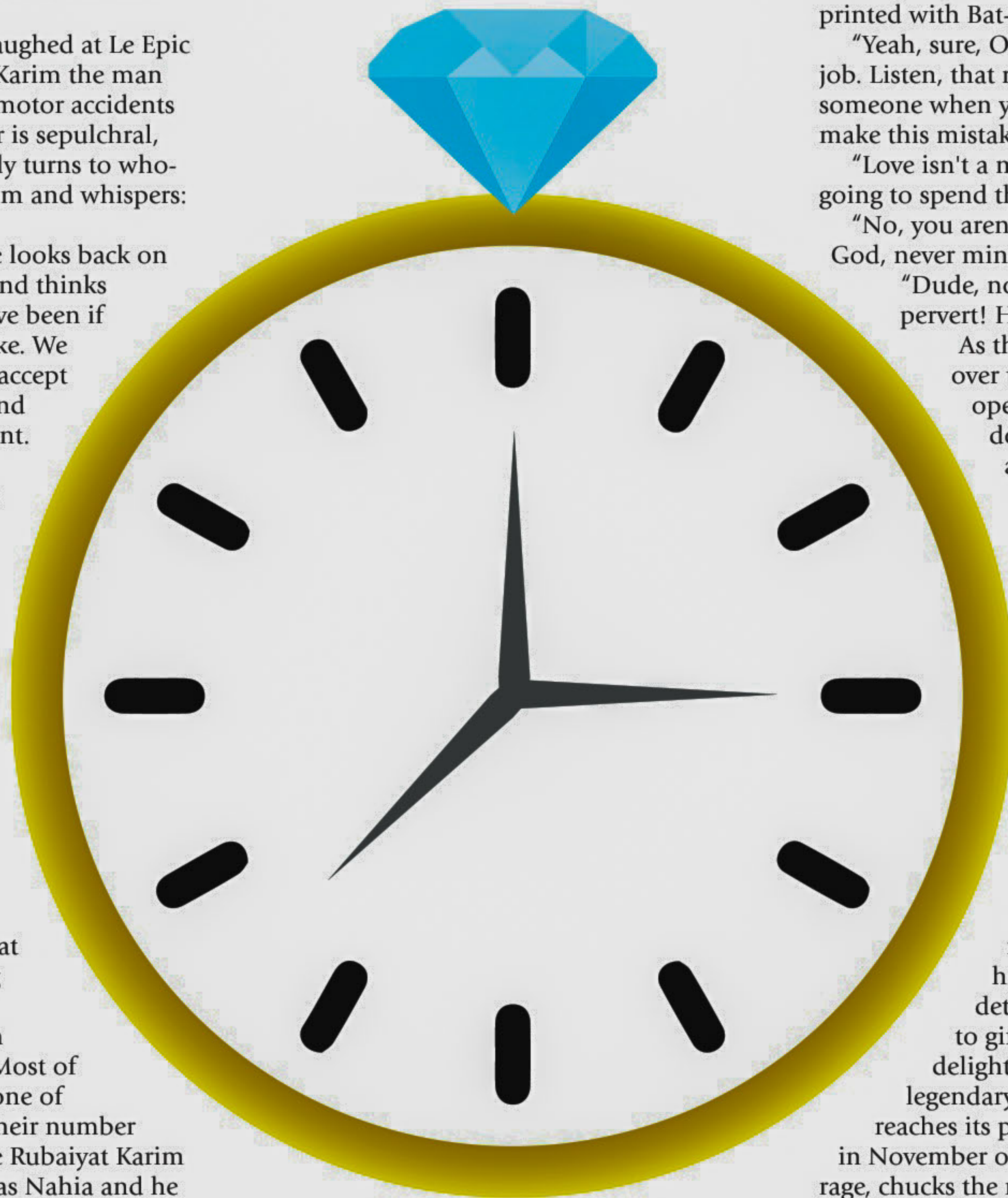
As the Rubaiyat Karims struggle over the ring, the door bursts open. Mr. Karim stands at the door. He is a simple man of action: if he sees a grown man wrestling with his naked son in his room, he doesn't stop to ask questions. Before we know it, Future Rubaiyat has had his hands and feet bound by a force of drivers and darwans and is awaiting transportation to Banani Thana.

Yes, alright, maybe I could have saved him, but I had to get you to safety first, dear reader. You are SHOUT's first priority.

The version of Rubaiyat native to 2009 is shaken by his experience, but not deterred. He carries out his plan to gift Nahia the ring, much to the delight of his peers. It becomes a legendary item of gossip, and the story reaches its peak after the lovers separate in November of that very year. Nahia, in a rage, chucks the ring into the sewer. In the future she looks back on that action with shame and regret, but accepts that it is past her power to change.

Rubaiyat Karim's future self languishes in prison. He tries to give prophetic warnings of the challenges the nation faces between 2009 and 2017, but only gets beaten up a lot.

Zoheb Mashiur is a prematurely balding man with bad facial hair and so does his best to avoid people. Ruin his efforts by writing to zoheb.mashiur@gmail.com



mother had worn at her wedding. Legally it was his to give to the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, and the idiot sincerely believed he'd already found her.

Rubaiyat the man stirs to action.

He steps into the past and confronts Rubaiyat the boy, who demands to know what this strange man is doing in his room how did he get in can't he see it's locked and wow you look a lot like me are we related and dude,