

STORIES OF STARVATION

The following letters are from individuals who have suffered from eating disorders or know someone who has. Mental illness is widely ignored, especially one like an eating disorder, although they can eventually become fatal. These stories hope to push individuals into asking for help or lending a hand to someone who may need it.

LETTER 1:

Dear Farah,
Tasmia apu got married today. Her family will move in next door just after your 16th birthday, so there's about a year to go before the two of you meet. She's got a penchant for dark humour, which is why you might get along well with her. But I digress – this letter isn't about her, it's about me. Or, should I say, you.

This story begins with the boubhaat, which involved the usual jokes from various aunties (whose names I can never remember) about how my wedding would be next. I expected this. What I wasn't prepared for was what happened as they served dessert.

I'd just sunk my teeth into the roshmalai when Aunty #1 said, "She eats and eats, but she's still so skinny."

I froze, acutely aware that I hadn't taken a full bite of the sweet and that syrup was trickling down my chin. Aunty #2, oblivious, continued. "What I'd give to have an appetite like that!"

Unable to feign politeness any longer, I got up and hurried away. I locked myself in a toilet stall, and realised that I was shaking.

The aunties weren't wrong though. I am skinny. Yet they have no idea that eating full meals again is something I've only been able to start doing this year.

But you know that. You know how difficult it's been, because my body didn't always look like this.

I know you're unhappy with your body. I don't

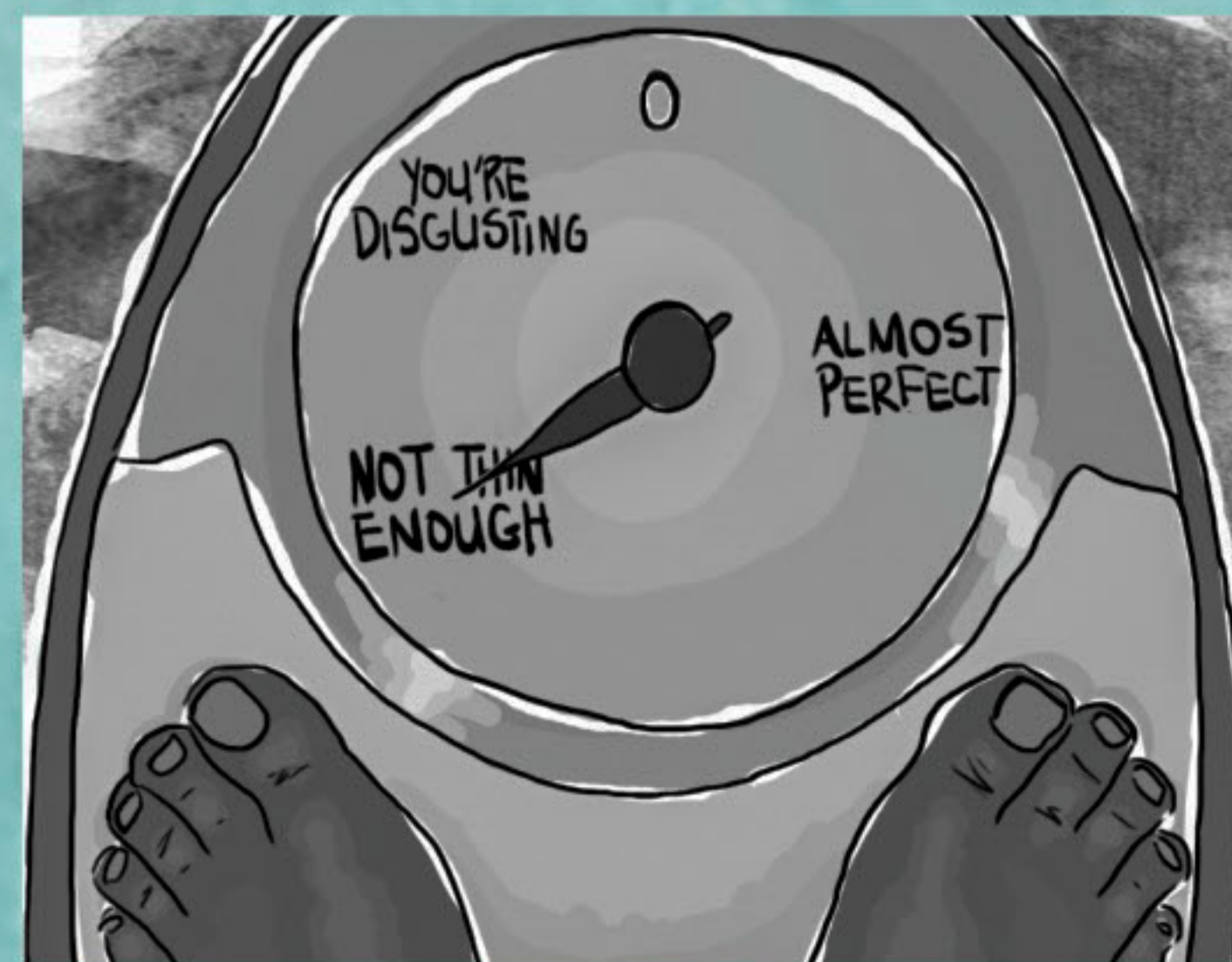


going to be a new girl that joins your class. She is going to live in the student housing that the school provides and her parents would be living far in the south of the country, somewhere in the district of Chittagong. You will get to know the person well enough, seeing as you'd be spending long hours together, tangled up in your unordinary school hours. But you'll fail to notice something, in fact you'll keep writing it off. Like, it's not

important.

Like it's an act of privilege in itself.

The girl you meet will be lean in her body shape, in fact quite skinny. Yet she would have an obsession with every muscle, and fat in her body. She'd call herself "fat", which you and your friends would roll your eyes at. You'd tell yourselves how she is just looking for attention but never wonder how it would be an odd way to look for attention when she kept secretly giving her meals away. She would even ask you multiple times whether you



blame you, especially with those "friends" who make you believe that you need to dress and act in certain ways. I also know how crushing it can be when the person you like doesn't like you back.

But you, most importantly, can't blame yourself for the things that don't work out. You do, though, don't you? So you've begun exercising to become skinnier. You'll soon believe that you aren't seeing results fast enough. Then you'll give up on rice, but that won't help. So you'll start to skip meals entirely, checking your weight multiple times a day.

One day mother will notice. She'll try to force you to eat, and that's when you'll reach the breaking point. You'll be able to give this constant shadow a name: anorexia.

I can't save you right away, because you'll think anorexia is the one helping you lose those extra kilos. But she'll leave you with mental scars and the inability to have complete control over yourself. So, I want to remind you that you're stronger than her. You're brave and beautiful, and she's a coward inhabiting bodies because she doesn't have her own. She won't be able to control you forever, but I'm hoping I can help you get away from her faster than I could.

You're still learning to grow apart from her – she'll always be a tiny voice in your head. Sometimes she'll speak through people like those awful aunties. But you don't need to talk back. You already know what to do

about her.

I'm going to go back to my dessert. Remember, revenge is sweet.

Love always,
Farah

LETTER 2:

Dear Self,

How naïve you were to fall for such treachery. I understand how you had once bred a deep seeded hatred for oneself. Having been offered the space to belong you had jumped at the opportunity. Not contemplating the dubious natures of the actions to be held. I cannot wholly blame you for this for I am you and I can say that at the time it was unforeseeable.

Life can be perilous by nature; it is to put you on trial for stealing a glance at the glimmer of happiness presented to you so promptly. Disadvantaged at birth. Only to flicker. Not to shine. It was never to be written in the stars or tealeaves or whatever might there be in the determining of fate. You, I, were never quite so lucky.

That does not mean that you should break in the face of adversity. In dealing with dire circumstances, there is always some semblance of chance. There comes a time one gets to deal with the ghost of the past in order to relinquish any such manifestations for the future.

Succumbing to gluttony and then purging. The dark

times seemed to last forever, the pain needed to be numbed. Substances abused. Body forsaken, tattered inside out. The emptiness of before was able to take a new form. The point came where you were to have no choice in the matter the illness took over. I wish it had not played out this way but there was no stopping. The gurgle of the flushed toilet, the splash of the running tap. Memories I would not like to recollect.

Don't fret though. There is still hope. The dark places were forced to let slithers of light enter. Not a task of much ease but a poignant process gestured towards the bettering of self and for which one must be able to grasp the severity of the situation without letting the misanthropes of life to convene. You will be strong and resilient in your efforts to overcome the insolent life once lived.

Your efforts may seem tireless but there will be respite. Do not give up for there comes a time when you will not be dealing with what seems like an endless cycle of withdrawal. I am here to let you know that you will come to get over this crippling disorder, bleak as it may seem. You must keep faith for it is I, by that I mean you, that sits here writing a letter, letting you know that even though it may seem that it is the end, it is not and you will be just fine. I am.

LETTER 3:

Dear 13 year old Antara,

You don't know this yet, but in about a year there is



would want to eat her lunch. (You'd say, a lot of times, actually). She would talk about how intensely she worked out, and how she can't wait to shed the fat (What fat?!).

Of course, you can't expect an 8th grader to know what's going on. Especially to a girl so far from home, but maybe you could've been a little more compassionate, a little more understanding, even worried maybe. What could have been happening for her? To fall into a place where it would be difficult for her to get out from? You couldn't have known at 14, so it's okay. But I hope you have learned from it, and I hope next time, you do a little bit more. No matter how little.

Signed,

Antara at 21 years.

Letters compiled by FATIMAH AKHTAR

