

CLINGING TO MEMORIES

SHAHRIKH IKHTEAR

Mary stepped out of her house as the blinding Sun shone on her face. "Forgot my shades, again" she mutters to herself. Regardless, she treads along the pavement, barely hiding her eyes from the rays.

Mornings are seldom enjoyable affairs for Mary, who cannot function like a sentient being until she's had her daily quota of caffeine. Then it's the same old routine of going to classes while braving the hurdles of the dusty streets and the stray dogs that Mary swears are out to get her. This day isn't that different, but neither is it completely the same. You see, Mary always had her best friend Amy with her.

It'd been a while since Amy left. Mary had gone through a myriad of emotions when she realized that she wouldn't be able to have those old, late night conversations in her flat anymore. No more Amy protecting her from that stray dog that she just passes as she is walking towards the coffee shop. No more ordering the same coffee for Amy every day.

A message notification pops up on Mary's phone. It's Amy. Ecstatic, Mary fumbles with the fingerprint sensor before finally being able to unlock the damned device.

"Got your coffee, yet?" the message read.

"I'm standing in the queue now. What's the time there?" replied Mary.

"It's dark." A brief pause ensues. Mary finishes ordering her coffee and gets back to her cell phone.

"As always," Mary replies with a laughing emoticon and a smirk on her face.

"Did you just make fun of my fascination with black clothes? When are you gonna cut it out?" the reply message reads.

Mary laughs after reading it.

Amy's always had a slight affinity for gothic clothing. A trait Mary always found ironic, seeing as how Amy is always cheerful and energetic all the time.

"Lindy and the gang are having a stayover tonight and I'm not sure if I wanna go,"

Mary walks out the door of the coffee shop and hastens her pace as she realizes she might be late for class.

Another beep signaling the arrival of the reply. "Haha, I'm gonna have to take a rain check on that one. You should go. It'll be good for you. Ever since I left, you haven't chilled out in a while"

"We all miss you Amy. The gang really hasn't been the same without you ever since..." the message abruptly ends there as Mary wipes away a tear from her face. She presses send, regardless.

"We'll all be together in the end, won't we? Stop worrying about it. You just need to be patient." Amy wrote back.

Just as Mary was going to type the reply a pop up message came up.

"Thank you for your time in using our app! We strive to offer the best resemblance to your deceased loved ones by analyzing their past behavior on social media. Would you like to rate our service?"

Mary rubbed her eyes in angst. She pressed the cancel button and started walking faster to class. Another message followed promptly.

"You've exceeded your daily quota of 15 minutes, buy the premium pass for only \$99 a year to keep your lost ones' memories alive."

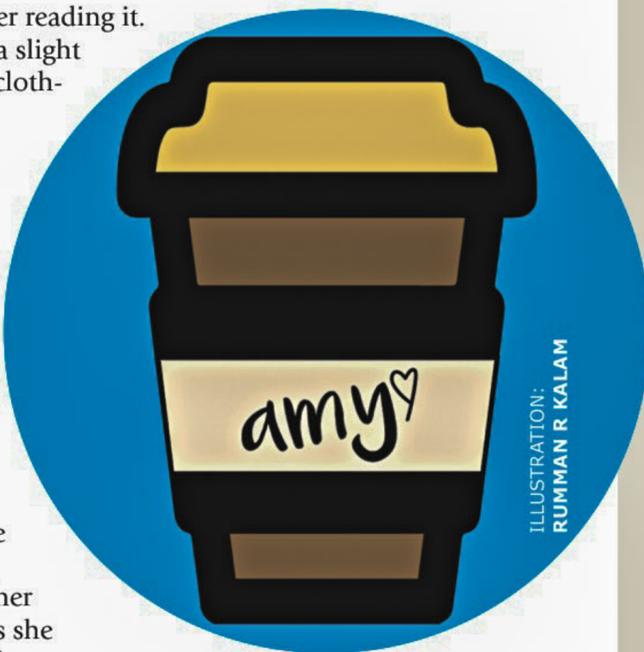


ILLUSTRATION:
RUMMAN R KALAM



THROUGH THE YEARS

SAMIN SABAH ISLAM

At 70, I stare at the face that aged so well. The subtle smile through her rosy lips. The hue of her lipstick faded with her youth, it's only the pastel pink bur-nishes these days. She's entertaining guests effortlessly. Somewhere along her reminiscing the golden days and moving her hands all about, relics of her former-party-girl-self flicker every now and then, even at 70.

At 17 I had asked her for a spare pen, tucking away one I already owned. She explained to me about the lymphatic vessels, the lot I already knew. I wouldn't have understood one bit had I not studied beforehand. She was a terrible teacher.

At 50 she asked if I still loved her. I smiled through my porcelain teeth, "I'm still wearing your favorite tie." She silently brought me another slice of carrot cake. Those carrot cakes always were a menace to my teeth.

At 20 a school trip came up. I still like to believe magic happened on that trip. A matter of two nights rewrote my status from "hopelessly in unrequited love" to "head-over-heels for my girlfriend". Sparks flew that night. Cupid was spot on.

At 35, her shrieks spilled through the doors of the delivery room. The waiting area was chockfull with our friends. I entered the room with a bouquet of lilies. Already placed on the vase was an identical bunch. Her eyes still gleamed. "Did you see the baby?" She queried. I nodded, "She's got those uni-brow of yours". She returned my smile. Strangely, ours didn't hold the same spirit.

At 27 she wished to settle. She was sobbing one night, over the long-distance call, over a ring I couldn't promise just yet. Things in London were favorable. Things back home were a mess I wasn't prepared to face. It was when I hung up

the phone and overlooked the girl in tears, I chose myself. The relationship ambled on for a few more months, but that night we had pulled the final straw.

At 30 my best friend was a nervous wreck. Could I blame him? He was confessing his love for his best friend's ex. I smiled with a subtle pat on his back, translating to "She's yours, man". Mind you, this girl still haunted me sleepless. But she sought more than I could vow. The same year I was invited to my best friend's wedding. "When you know, you know" they said. I never attended that wedding.

At 33 I was the one in the sherwani. She attended the wedding, not even slightly resembling my many dreams though. Inviting her wasn't my idea, it wasn't my choice either. The bride's best friend couldn't miss the ceremony. "You look good," she said. "Well I'm getting married." I smiled. We both know I didn't look good, not since the moment she walked in making my heart race.

53 years since I had met this woman, she still jumbled my thoughts, made me doubt every decision since that phone call more than 40 years ago.

"You never could resist her carrot cakes", a voice interrupts my sweet and sour reverie. Her dark hair was artificially coloured, unlike Maya's natural silver strands. Maya's face is rounder with a small nose, while hers is sharp with defined cheekbones, even at this age.

I inwardly curse, this isn't Maya. It's Sneha, my wife of 37 years, the mother of 4 children, my reality amidst the daydreams and 'what ifs'.

"You know, after almost 4 decades of marriage, you could at least try to hide your love for my best friend", she mutters, stubborn of meeting my gaze.

I don't have a response, I used to hide it better. It's the age I tell you. I cut another slice from the cake. Heavenly carrot cake.

Samin Sabah Islam is on a quest to find the perfect diet while simultaneously drooling over pizza. Throw her some tips at sabahsamin11@gmail.com