

TO THOSE WHO MAKE YOU FEEL AT HOME



MITHI CHOWDHURY

You rarely see each other anymore. Maybe on Eid or when you make a quick run to the nearest Agora. In that moment, you hasten through a ten-minute conversation, catching up on mundane events such as work. You agree to call or meet soon, knowing it's an empty promise. Years pass by, and you never give a thought to that lost word. The next day, a notification pops up: a reunion scheduled two weeks from now.

Before you know it, you're on your way. A quick text to an old friend to let her know you're coming. A CNG ride as long as the memories in a yearbook. You feel your fingers drumming away to the irregular beats of your heart. You're nervous but you're also looking forward to it.

Your friends are huddled in a corner booth of Crimson Cup. Your closest friend comes over to greet you with a tight hug and suddenly, you're home. These are the friends you passed secret notes to during Chemistry class. The friends you spent every free period with, gushing about books and heartbreaks - or not at all. The silence was always comfortable with this bunch. They complained with you about the cold *shingara* in the canteen; somehow, that conversation often inspired you to open a food cart near the school gate. You spent lazy weekends at your friend's house, sitting cross-legged in the verandah as she ransacked her DVD collection. Three movies later, you're still discussing the devastating turn of events in "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas".

During ninth grade, they accompanied

you to your first study tour to Cox's. These are the friends who sneaked out with you to the beach in the middle of the night. As you walked barefoot on the cold shore, you were transfixed by the moonlit horizon, while *Amar Pothchola* played on your friend's ancient Motorola Razr. Amidst the pressure of A Level exams, you played *borof pani* one sweltering afternoon, and whined to them, for hours, about a ridiculous tan the next day.

Now, life has taken you hundreds of miles away from one another; your relationship spans the length of a WhatsApp thread, with conversations far-flung. Yet, when you see them again, you fall back into the familiar "us versus the world" mentality. You complain about horrible bosses, unfulfilling jobs, failed relationships, creative blocks - you name it. There is an indescribable freedom that

comes with old friends that newer friendships lack. You abandon carefully fostered filters and speak your mind like you haven't in years. No matter who you become, there's a subtle realisation that your best friends will always see through you - and that is liberating.

That's the thing about old friendships. It transcends missed birthdays, and years of virtually no contact. It's the kind of friendship where everything you do - whether it's eating a bland shawarma at Star Kabab for the umpteenth time or watching *Gossip Girl* on repeat - can be painfully mundane, but with the right people, it never ceases to be amazing.

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HOW TO STARGAZE IN DHAKA

AFNAN AHMED CRYSTAL

Don't believe it? Well, think again. Urban stargazing might sound like an utterly ludicrous prospect, but as they say, nothing's impossible if you REALLY want it. Sure, we may no longer live in an era where our bare eyes could sight the aesthetic Milky Way at night - thanks to the lurid light pollution generated today - but it's also the age of mind-blowing technology and gadgets, some of which can aid in satisfying your starlust.

Bangladesh Astronomical Association is devoted to observing the cosmos straight from Dhaka. It hosts a free stargazing session every Friday, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., provided the weather is suitable. You can even become a member by paying an annual fee of BDT 2,000. The science museum in Shyamoli also arranges a similar session on Saturdays and Sundays from dusk. The charge is only BDT 10. They have everything you need: telescopes and binoculars, experts who can tell you how to use them, all within a local observatory. Visit their website or Facebook page to get schedules.

If going out isn't your cup of tea and you want to watch wonders hidden in plain sight comfily from home, that's possible too. A pair of binoculars is all you need. They're more portable and maneuverable and give a more panoramic view compared to



telescopes. You can invest in a telescope later if you want to pursue it as a major interest. Quality binoculars can be obtained for around BDT 20,000 from New Market, Science Laboratory, Stadium Market and several electronics stores throughout the city, whereas a telescope can cost you BDT 80000 or higher. It gets way lower if you can source it from countries like China or Singapore. Aperture of both binoculars and telescopes is key to good stargazing - the higher the aperture, the easier it is to spot fainter objects. Head to the shops at twilight, and test binoculars/telescopes to ensure that the view through is crisp before confirming

purchase.

Done picking the ideal equipment? Now start inspecting weather reports for a calm, unclouded, non-moonlit night forecast. Once these conditions are affirmative, you're good to go! AccuWeather.com has a separate forecast for stargazing weather, how amazing is that? The winter skies hold more bright stars than any other season. Next, choose a spot with the lowest light interference. A high-rise rooftop places you above many impediments, including trees and street-level lighting. The night can get pretty chill (pun intended) - prepare yourself with a turtleneck sweater, a folding chair to sit on, a flask of hot

cocoa or coffee (or both, mmmm) and a box of finger foods to make the most out of it. You could even arrange a stargazing party with friends, allowing you to explore the firmament with an assortment of gadgets pooled by everyone involved. Give your eyes about twenty minutes to adjust to the darkness. The process could be initiated earlier by wearing sunglasses indoors a while before leaving, so that a gradual reduction of light ensues on your eyes. (Yes, it might be *kamla* to wear shades at night, but hey, you gotta do what you gotta do).

If you need some light to avoid stumbling in the darkness (or falling off the roof), get a flashlight with a red filter. Red light doesn't affect your eyes' ability to adjust to the dark unlike blue/white light. Look for the most luminous stars and worldwide spectacles like the Hunter constellation initially, and gradually move on to hazier ones. Brushing up on your astronomy knowledge adds tons to the experience. Try to obtain a fun glow-in-the-dark star chart if possible, or excellent apps like Starwalk could be utilized if your phone has a red night-shift mode.

There you go, every indispensable detail required for mission impossible. Have a stellar experience (sorry) and try not to undergo an existential crisis in the process.