



ILLUSTRATION: RUMMAN R KALAM

The Other Writer

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A gust of wind rattled the panes of the window to his left. A fork of lightning appeared across the sky, closely followed by an intense clap of thunder. None of this managed to tear Faruk's gaze from his laptop. The blank white screen stared back at him, cursor blinking, waiting to be filled with words that wove together to form magical tales or thrilling mysteries. Problem was, said words needed a plot, and Faruk was struggling to come up with one.

He'd been struggling for about twenty years.

Faruk banged his head onto the keyboard, repeatedly. Gone were the days when he'd do this gently, as an attempt to make the gears in his brain turn. No, now he did it as punishment and didn't stop until he could feel a bruise starting to form on his temple.

He turned his eyes to his right, at the aging bookshelf that sagged under the weight of his many published works. Twenty years, fifteen bestselling novels. A major accomplishment, according to most people. His critics continued to struggle to find faults, and even when they did, it was always something to do with his prose, not his content. Perhaps this was because it was never his own content.

"Why are you not working on that murder-on-the-train story I suggested?" He was back. Faruk could never tell when he slipped into his study, or his house, or even his life, for that matter. But every time Faruk sat down to write and

struggled with ideas, The Other Faruk was there, with his never-ending "suggestions". He was definitely not human, but real nevertheless.

The Other Faruk looked nothing like the real one. He still had a head full of thick hair and a flat stomach, unlike the bald patches on Faruk's scalp and the gut that spilled out of his jeans. The Other Faruk had a swagger to his steps, and a lilt in his voice. However, the real Faruk had lost all of that through the years of climbing the ladder of fame. He had pictured the lavish lifestyle and all of its comforts quite accurately, but he'd failed to realise how lacklustre the life of a rich novelist could be. Though his pile of money grew larger, all Faruk really had left was constant drowsiness and an intense dislike of The Other Faruk.

"Murder-on-the-train immediately screams out Agatha Christie," Faruk decided to reply.

"Hmm, true," The Other Faruk strolled across the bookcase, running his finger along the spines of the books in an almost possessive manner. Faruk was livid, and he knew he had no right to be. That aggravated him even more.

"How about...The Coconut Murders? That was a nice plot. Do you still remember the points I told you?"

"Yes, I do, but it was a stupid idea." It had actually been a genius idea. "I can come up with better ones on my own."

He heard a snort from the back of the room. Anger bubbling under his skin, Faruk finally turned around to face the man. A smirk adorned The Other Faruk's lips. "Clearly, you've come up with some

stellar ideas over the years," he said drily.

Faruk couldn't argue, because really, which one of his bestselling novels had been written based on his own storyline? When The Other Faruk had first appeared all those years ago, full of exciting ideas and plot-lines, he had seemed like a genuine friend. Now, though...

"Write about the Coconut Murders. But maybe change the title, it sounds like some absurd parody of mystery novels." Despite the joke, The Other Faruk sounded sinister. Everything about him screamed sinister, now.

Faruk was jolted out of his thoughts by the sound of footsteps. The Other Faruk was standing just opposite him. "It's alright, Faruk," he crooned, "You can take my ideas. You and I are the same, after all."

"NO!" Faruk exclaimed. "I am not—you aren't—" There was no way this creepy, power hungry, manipulative thing was a part of him.

"Denial won't get you anywhere," The Other Faruk chuckled. His voice seemed to caress Faruk's mind. It made him believe, just for a second, that it really was okay. It took all of his willpower to wrench his mind away from the his grasp. But he knew he would succumb eventually, as he always did.

"Why do you do this? Why can't you just let me be? I'd rather lose all my fame and wealth than take your help, don't you understand?"

"Would you really?" Seeing Faruk's hesitation, the other one continued. "You struggle to imagine life without extravagant parties and lavish lifestyles.

It's taken your very sanity away from you, yet you can't let it go."

The words resonated with something deep within Faruk. The Other Faruk was talking too much, spilling out ugly truths.

"You need to go," Faruk said. The eerie calm in his voice seemed to startle The Other Faruk.

"I told you, I cannot. I am but a part of your very brain."

"You need to go," Faruk repeated, his mind foggy as he reached into his desk drawer and brought out the revolver. The Other Faruk's eyes widened. He seemed to be rooted to the spot. He could again feel the entity's touch on his brain, frantically trying to dissuade him from his actions. But killer rage had overtaken his mind, making it easier to push away The Other One's influences.

"I am you, Faruk," The Other one whispered, "If you do this—"

A resounding bang drowned out the rest of his sentence as a bullet raced into The Other Faruk's skull...but no, The Other Faruk had vanished. Pain erupted in Faruk's own head, In a split second, his mind became crystal clear. Why was the gun pointed at his own head? Why was their fire igniting every nerve in his body?

As he collapsed onto the carpeted floor, The Other Faruk whispered inside his dying brain, "Because I am you, Faruk."

Despite being a hopeless fangirl, Marisha Aziz lives under delusions of awesomeness. Contact her at marisha.aziz@gmail.com to give her another excuse to ignore her teetering pile of life problems.