

DEFACED

FATIUL HUQ SUJOY

The class was empty. It was only me and him there. And I couldn't stop staring at him—at that face. Unrecognisable. I could only imagine what had transpired for his face to become like this.

He noticed me staring. "You can talk about it", he said calmly. I didn't know him that well to do so. I feared that I'd offend him.

But the silence seemed more offensive. So I asked, "When did it happen?"

"A few days ago", he answered quickly, as if he'd predicted this line of questions.

"Is that why you were absent this past couple of days?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"It doesn't look that bad, you know."

He smiled at that. I didn't know if it was genuine or ironic, but that smile didn't suit well on his face. It looked out of place. It looked more like a menacing grin of a serial killer after giving his next prey a sign of hope right before finishing him off. I kept that thought to myself.

His smile faded away. He looked outside through the windows and cleared

his throat, quite loudly. He was probably preparing for a lengthy talk. I don't mind being the listener.

"It's not just about the looks though", he said, still looking outside. "It's also about me, my identity, my existence."

I wanted to say, "No, you're exaggerating." I wanted to comfort him. But his voice grew louder. He became more emotional.

"It defined me" – turning to me, he pointed his finger to his face – "and now it's no more, it's gone and all that it signified with it."

"You probably didn't recognise me at first glance," he continued, taking advantage of my silence. "Do you not find that funny? We've been classmates for two years, and now that this" – he poked at his face – "changed, I am suddenly unrecognizable. I ceased to be who I was.

And what are we but the perceptions of the people around us? Do our memories matter? Our experiences? No. What matters is what people see us doing, what they believe us to be and what they remember us by."

His glance gave away his longing for a

response. "I don't disagree," I said eventually.

"Oh," he replied, taken aback.

"But isn't that actually amazing, how you got to have a new identity. We, in our flesh vessels, are trapped with just one life. We need literature and movies to escape into the lives of people who we don't know or who do not exist. But this experience is temporary and fake. You, on the other hand, have the option to be perceived as a new man, to exist as someone else."

"But I don't want that," he said, clutching his face, digging deep enough to leave marks. "I understand your point but I want it like it was before."

"You're obviously still traumatised by the event that led to this," I said in a sympathetic way, got up and proceeded to pat him on the back. "But you can't let causes bear you down nor the effects overwhelm you. Accept your fate, cruel as it is, and shape your life based on the consequences that came with it."

"You're right," he spoke after a while, nodding gently. "I need to *face* whatever comes at me with maturity, even if this is a

face I myself cannot recognise. I'm going to embrace this change. I won't let my new looks nor what people think of it affect me the slightest."

"There you go," I said enthusiastically as another classmate entered. She stopped after noticing him and looked at him for a while. Her laughter came out louder than I expected it to. I thought she would fall over, the way she bent backwards as she kept on laughing. As it turned into an uncomfortable session of wheezing, the guy hid his face behind his hands and murmured, "Shut up."

"Oh my god, let me see it please. You look so stupid!" she exclaimed as she leaned down, still wheezing.

"I knew this would happen," he spoke under his breath; the strain in his voice was noticeable, he was probably tearing up. "I should never have shaved off my beard."

Fatiul Huq Sujoy is a tired soul (mostly because of his frail body) who's patiently waiting for Hagrid to appear and tell him, "Ye're a saiyan, lord commander." Suggest him places to travel and food-ventures to take at fb.com/SyedSujoy.

