

Animosity



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It was Friday and for as long as Rafid could remember, every Friday, he and baba went together to the society mosque for Jummah prayers at one. They would don their white prayer caps, each carry a prayer mat, and Rafid would carry a couple of *tasbeehs* for the both of them and they would walk the two blocks to the mosque.

Baba and he would sit on the first floor, usually around row seven. After saying their prayers, they would go to the local fruit vendor and baba would do the week's shopping before returning home. Sometimes, baba would also buy fruits for Rafid's *choto fupi* as well, in which case they would drop by at her house for a few minutes, and a cup of tea, on their way back. He was hard pressed to think of a Friday that had gone any differently.

It was twenty minutes to one and by now, Rafid had taken a shower, changed into his prayer clothes and completed his ablution. He was rummaging through the drawers of his wardrobe searching for his white prayer cap. He hadn't worn it in a while and fondly remembered the day he told baba he didn't like wearing it to the prayers.

It was maybe three years back and he had hidden his prayer cap and lied to baba that he'd lost it. Baba bought him another one and he lied again. When baba became suspicious after Rafid had "lost" his third cap in a month, baba decided he would keep the caps himself and give them to Rafid every Friday before they left. When baba gave him the cap that day and asked him to put it on, he mustered all his courage and managed to blurt out that he didn't like wearing it. Baba gave him a stern look and demanded an explanation. When he said he found it uncomfortable, baba wasn't satisfied. But Rafid persisted and his father did concede in the end. Baba

would no doubt be pleased to see him wearing the cap after so long.

Once ready, the pair left the house and strutted towards the mosque. Rafid had already talked to baba about buying a smartphone, but to no avail. Every time Rafid brought up the topic, baba said no, and no meant no. His resolve was impenetrable, no matter how much Rafid pleaded. Their last conversation ended quite badly.

"But baba, please. I can get good phones within ten thousand taka," Rafid pleaded.

"No, I don't need to spend ten thousand on a toy you don't need."

"All my classmates have one. And I'll be starting coaching classes from August, so I will need one."

"What you need is to be quiet and listen to what I say."

"Baba, even Siyam, Bodrul uncle's son has a smartphone."

Baba snickered at the mention of the name.

"You should see how he boasts about it. Gloats. Flaunts it in my face," Rafid implored.

"What they do is none of our concern." Baba's voice had risen a few decibels. "Stop asking me all this nonsense."

"Baba, if you buy me a phone, I promise I'll get all A's this year." Rafid gulped as he said it, his face apprehensive.

"First you get all A's, and then you come to me," baba yelled. "Now go to your room at once."

This happened a couple of days ago and Rafid had now resigned to his smartphone-less fate. He knew bringing up Siyam and Bodrul uncle was a stupid thing to do. Baba and Bodrul uncle shared quite the animosity.

They used to be colleagues once, before Bodrul uncle moved to a new company. This was right before the stock

market crashed back in 2011, and before he left Bodrul uncle apparently sold a lot of his shares. Baba bought a fair few. After he left, people realised his shares had very poor ratings and those companies soon went under. Baba lost nearly all of his life's savings.

And when that was over, Bodrul uncle's new company bought baba's one, and the former pipped the latter as the General Manager. Becoming baba's superior, Bodrul uncle then openly questioned baba's credentials at a meeting. Baba was soon demoted and had been stuck in that rut ever since. Now, whenever baba saw him or even heard his name, he would snigger repugnantly, and do all he could to avoid him, a difficult task considering they were neighbours.

Rafid wouldn't ever have let the name slip, but Siyam, that egg-headed son of his would never fail to shove his phone at Rafid's face any chance he got. And Rafid wanted to level the playing field but every time he asked his father if he could buy a phone, all he got was an immovable no and had to walk away despondent.

"I guess I'll just have to tolerate Siyam from now," Rafid pondered, as they took off their sandals and entered the mosque.

The prayers were over by half an hour. Rafid did supplicate for his father's will to curb, but with no real optimism. The two walked onto the side-road leading to the fruit stalls, when Rafid heard a call.

"Hey, Rafid!" It was Siyam. He was seen Rafid from a few feet away and was now walking over. Bodrul uncle was behind him.

Rafid replied with an apathetic *hey* of his own when Siyam and his father had walked up to them. Baba, however, stammered to respond to Bodrul uncle's greeting, and failed to extend a hand out.

Siyam had already taken out his phone and was showing it off to Rafid.

"See, I can set the time for silent mode

when I am praying and as soon as *namaj* is over, it will go back to normal," Siyam kept on rambling. Rafid wasn't paying much attention to him.

"Ahmed bhai," Bodrul uncle addressed baba, "I heard your company is still in deep water. Ah! Too bad."

Baba's face twitched but he afforded no answer.

"You should have just listened to me Bhai, when I told you to join us."

"The manager you selected is a puppet. No wonder we're doing badly, but we will improve," Baba retorted.

"I wanted you to be manager, Ahmed bhai," Bodrul uncle said slyly, "But where Mr. Faruq, who is much more qualified than you are," he derided, "is struggling, what could you even do?"

Baba's was red faced, fuming.

"I think we'll sell your company within this year," Bodrul uncle continued. "How is the job market nowadays, Ahmed Bhai?"

Baba's teeth were clenched like a vice-grip in his mouth by now. He grabbed Rafid by the arm and turned around to head back, yelling "The people at the top of our company are fools!" as he stormed off.

Rafid had a hard time keeping up with baba's strides and only when they had reached the corner to their block did baba loosen his grip on Rafid's forearm. He was sweating and Rafid could see a vein throbbing viciously in his neck. Suddenly, baba stopped and looked at him.

"Bodrul bhai's son has a phone, right?"

Rafid merely looked up. He didn't know what to say.

"Come on, let's go have lunch and then we'll go and buy you a phone."

Nibras is a doctor-to-be and a lover of murgi roast. He spends his free time stalking you on Instagram, so DM @niibzzz