



DESIGN: RUMMAN R KALAM

# HEART

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What are you supposed to feel when you're holding a heart in your hands?

When I say heart, I'm not using it as a lame metaphor for love or whatever. A real, human, heart, all muscle and sinew, is sitting on my trembling palm. Its living counterpart is pumping furiously inside my chest, and my mind is tangled up in a host of emotions. How did my life even lead up to such an extraordinary moment?

The day had started badly. To be honest, when you have to attend 8 am classes despite being a university student, almost every weekday starts badly, but that morning had been especially terrible. I hit snooze three times before remembering that class was due to start in twenty minutes. It took me a few moments to make that crucial decision we all have to make every morning here at med school: what to prioritise—getting to class on time, getting to class not looking like homeless, or getting to class with a full stomach.

I decided on the former and dragged myself off to the bathroom before discovering that the water supply had been turned off at our block of the dorm. Cursing under my breath, I joined the throng of girls on the hunt for water. As I

stood in line for my turn to brush my teeth, a friend did the courtesy of reminding me of that one exam that I'd completely forgotten to study for.

It's moments like this that make me question all the life choices that led me to this place. Out of all the subjects in the world, why did I have to pick the one where students are under such intense pressure from both educational and external sources? Why study the subject where the majority of students have slipped into depression? What could possibly have compelled me to pick a road so full of hardships and obstacles?

These questions kept hounding me as I rushed to get dressed. The one thing that had been drilled into us the moment we set foot on campus is that impressions matter. But when you're already late for class and still in pajamas, you have no choice but to don your creased apron and silently pray that your long nails are overlooked.

The walk from the dorm to the Anatomy department usually took five minutes (ten on rainy days), but halfway along I got sidetracked by a young child. He looked no more than seven years old, but he had the maturity of an adult as he told me about his illness that required constant blood transfusions. "I'm short by

500 taka," he informed me gravely. I frantically pulled out the two crumpled hundred taka notes from my pocket and handed them over before hurrying along. My brain took a few extra seconds to register the fact that this was a seven year old, younger than my little sisters back home, asking for financial help from whomever he could just to survive an extra day. I'd be facing patients like this in a couple years on a regular basis. How would I deal with that? Would I completely ignore the humane side and view the patients as "cases", sacrificing my own humanity in the process? Or would I look at them as humans, and completely fall apart because of all their heartbreak stories?

My head was buzzing by the time I finally got to class. Thanking divine providence that our lecturer didn't notice me sneak in, I took a seat near the back. I then noticed the topic of the morning's discussion: the heart. And there, at the very middle of the teacher's table, sat a reddish-brown structure. From afar, it looked nondescript, but everyone's attention was fixed on to it nevertheless.

And as our lecturer held up the fist sized organ, my breath seemed to get caught in my throat. He described the parts and each of their functions, and

though I was too far away to see it all clearly, I was mesmerised. There were replicas of this seemingly simple structure all around me, keeping us students alive and alert. A few seconds' delay in its rhythmic action, and a life could come to an end. The heart was at the root of everything, spreading love and starting wars and changing lives.

Once the class was over and the students dissipated, I cautiously approached the table. My eyes stung from the formaldehyde as I picked up the organ. And here I am now, holding this beautifully crafted structure, and I have the answers to all my questions from the morning. All the struggles, and the hopelessness, and the death that surrounds me in the field of medicine, it all fades in moments like this. Moments where I realise the magnitude of the work we're being trained to do. Moments which fill me with nothing but wonder.

So, yes, I guess wonder is what you're supposed to feel when you are holding a heart, a real heart, in your hand.

*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.*