



Inconspicuous

WASIQUE HASAN

I pressed the hat tighter upon my head, tilting the brim to partially conceal my eyes. The angle was just right to be able to sneak a discreet glance towards the pillars of the plaza. It wasn't that architectural curiosity was frowned upon around here, but my gaze was more focused on the average-looking gentleman leaning against the pillar. It was his attempts at being inconspicuous that made him so easy to spot. If you've observed as many people as I have, you discover an amusing paradox. The person who is the most mundane-looking has the most extraordinary features about him. Often times, the person doesn't even realise these little foibles give him away. It could be anything from a specific detail of his attire, his gait, or even his mannerisms that separate him from the crowd. And that is where our friend had faltered. He had taken every precaution to appear as average as he could. He did such a good job that everything about him

looked perfectly common. Nothing about him stood out, and that was precisely what made him so easy to identify.

Of course now that we know where he is, it would be very rude to leave him standing there. So I get up off the park bench and move along at a brisk trot. My suspicions are confirmed when, out of the corner of my eye, I see him throw away his newspaper and rush to make up the distance I put between ourselves. *The hunt begins.* I weave a winding path through the plaza's vicinity. Along the way, I take care to slow down a couple of times. I even stop to buy a hot dog at a stand.

What? A man's gotta eat, okay? He probably wanted to use me to find our HQ. Unfortunately for him, this wasn't my first rodeo. From time to time I would get people tailing me, usually because of my profession. Although this one time there was a crazy ex-girlfriend, but that's a story for another time. What I'm saying is I know how to get rid of people when they're foolish enough to think they can tail me

without consequences. Usually there isn't any bloodshed. But I think I'll deal with old Freddie (let's call him Freddie for the sake of convenience, okay?) the traditional way.

With that in mind, I turn towards a secluded alleyway, one I've favoured many a time. The sky is gradually blotted out by the high rooftops on either side of us, which is fine by me. I don't need a spotlight when I work. I count the steps till the turn at the end of the alley, 20...10...5. Eventually I round the corner, and immediately press my back flat against the wall, gripping my Walther tightly. I hold my breath. Finally I see the front of a hat, and immediately lunge forward.

What happens next is a blur, but I eventually end up straddling Freddie on the ground, my gun pointed at his throat. "Any last words, Fredd..."

I'm cut short by Freddie grabbing my wrist. I feel a slight prick. Immediately my vision starts to blur. Dammit, I hadn't seen the needle on him; hiding in plain sight. *Well played,* I think as my eyes shut.

IN MELANCHOLY

WASIF HASAN

Shahran found it hard to distract himself. He tried making eye contact with her but she wouldn't look back. She was sitting on a table with the rest of her friends, laughing away at a joke they were sharing.

Maybe I should just go home for today.

It was the middle of his midterm exams and he still had so much on his mind. He still didn't get up from his seat in the library. All the while stealing glances at her.

I could just talk to her and clear things out between us. But she already said that it was alright and she was just confused about her feelings.

He looked down at his book and thought about their last conversation on Facebook. Before she said it wouldn't work out between them.

"I love you to the moon and back," he sent "I love you beyond that," she replied.

Shahran got up then and packed up his things. The words kept echoing in his head as he made his way out the library.

But why would she even say that...?

He didn't say goodbye to her.

Now, the exams had ended and school was out for a month. It was almost time for Christmas too, when Dhaka would get really chilly during the evenings and people would go out for pithas and such.

Maybe going out with someone you loved and sharing a moment together.

Stop thinking about her.

Shahran was lying on his bed and staring blankly at the ceiling. He had just gotten off the phone with his best friend Arman. He was the only person to know everything that had happened since the beginning.

"I'm just saying I can't stay like this, Arman," said Shahran

"I'm not saying you have to. Go up and talk to her and straighten things out. Tell her you still have feelings for her and—"

"What? No! Are you out of your mind? I do that and the only bond we have, will shatter. I'm trying to appear strong for her sake."

Arman stayed quiet on the other end.

"I keep remembering that conversation," said Shahran and maybe, just maybe, he felt tears welling in his eyes.

I love you to the moon and back

"I'm sorry to say this, bud. You have to move on. I don't understand why she would say that to you if she doesn't have any feelings for you. But all I know is this, anything else she says later on will just hurt you."

What if that's what I really want? So that I find a reason to hate her...

"Yeah I know," Shahran suddenly felt tired. "Hey, Arman, I'll call you back later, alright? I'm feeling a bit tired, honestly."

...but I never will.

"Yeah of course. I'm here if you need me," he replied

Shahran hung up and let out a deep breath. He went through his messages and checked their conversation. She had messaged her why he was so quiet and if everything was alright. He replied he was just feeling a bit ill and that's all, he left it at that. He didn't bother checking if she had replied.

You have to let go.

He picked up his guitar and started to sing. Slowly strumming and finding his own beat.

What if you can't ever let go...

I love you beyond that...

"But it's time to face the truth,"

His fingers slowly plucked the strings as he sang the last line, "I will never be, with you."

Shahran closed his eyes and let his fingers rest on the strings.

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