



LEFT FACING ARROW

UPOMA AZIZ

"You won't believe what happened today.

I deem myself a deeply uninteresting person with an almost uniform detachment from the mystic and mundane events occurring periodically around me, so when my mother tried to lecture me on the importance of going out for some fresh air, and later on, the importance of vegetables, I wasn't too amused, for I knew this was one of those things that didn't end well. So she had to switch the air conditioning in my room to make me notice her. Then she handed me some money and told me she needed groceries. ASAP.

I had initially planned on dumping the entire chore on my younger brother, but he was the smart one and had already fled. So I'd started for the grocery store, cursing silently.

Since my mom didn't tell me what vegetables she needed, I made a point of buying a family sized packet of veggie crackers, veggie canned soup, and a few packet of chips. Broccoli infused.

After I was certain I'd had my revenge, I stepped out, my head high in victory. You could almost hear an anthem playing in the background.

And then I saw you.

The same mop of golden brown hair, tousled over the temple, faded jeans rolled above the ankles, and a sliver of yellow and black striped socks visible from underneath sepia trainers – it had to be you.

Except, six years had come and gone in

between, time longer than enough to alter a person entirely. I do not know what you look like now, perhaps your sneakers have been replaced with moccasins, your hair cropped closely, your hazel eyes no more dreamy, but distant, with thoughts and anxieties and uncertainties that tomorrow brings.

But all I remember is, you, from six years ago; you, stopped in time – seventeen and carefree; you, the you I wished I knew.

And though it was a random teenager on the streets, I couldn't help the bolt of lightning that hit me with such intensity that I forgot to breathe, to blink, to do anything.

After the longest few seconds of my life, I landed back to reality, walking away calmly without a second glance at the boy, because, what was the point?

What if it had been you? What would have changed? What could I have done against the inevitable fate that I couldn't tell you that what I'd been rehearsing for all these years? What could I have done against time?

Time might be the greatest healer, as they say, but what they don't know is the scars that time itself leaves are the deepest.

But I do."

I close my eyes, my fingers sliding across the glass surface of my phone. I do not need to look to know where my fingers are headed. From the myriad number of times that my fingers have maintained the same syntax of digits, it's almost like my fingers know the

number better than me; the melody released upon me hitting the keypad is all too familiar.

"Sending message failed."

I shake myself out of my trance and stare at the screen, my words still half visible; my fingers still frozen midair over the "SEND" key. But my finger collides, like the most natural thing ever, with the arrow that faces left, the backspace key.

I watch as word after word vanishes from the screen, unsaying the said, covering the revealed, disintegrating into oblivion.

"But what if he doesn't use this anymore?" I'd enquired, as a friend of mine had presented me with his number, four and a half years ago.

"You'll have to find out, I guess," she'd shrugged. "Or do you want me to call him for you?"

"Oh, no," I'd said. "No, I'll manage."

"The number you dialed in currently unreachable."

I knew I couldn't bear to be so near to be so close to this opportunity, and yet so far, and I could not, ever, bear to see or hear these words.

And ever since then, I'd known I couldn't do it. I wasn't strong enough to risk losing what I never had, neither was I brave enough to try and have it either.

Before slipping into the comforting unconsciousness of sleep, I see the stark blank white screen slowly fading into darkness.

Upoma Aziz is a walking, talking, ticking time bomb going off at versatile detonators. Poke her to watch her explode at www.fb.com/upoma.aziz