

LETTERS TO LOVE PAST

AAQIB HASIB

Dear Friend,

I hope you're doing well. It has been a long time since we last saw each other, yet it feels like it was only yesterday that we first met. Time is a weird thing; scientists say that it's relative, but I think it's just a trick our minds play on us.

But if I were to look at a calendar, then indeed it has been quite a long time. I am sorry if I am rambling, but I get nervous at the thought of you with this letter in your hand, reading it.

Since we last met, I've travelled the world, not on foot, but in books. I took the years to contemplate my mistakes, and to finally understand your perspective on our past.

I know it might not seem pleasant to discuss these things, but if you wish to not read beyond this point, then I will not hold any grudges.

Firstly, I apologise if I am making a stretch when assuming our friendship. But that's how we started, as friends. I always liked you, I did; but I was afraid and unaware of love.

On our first date, as we sat across the table from each other, I remember you describing to me your

hopes, dreams and plans. In turn, I replied with tasteless jokes.

You took the time out to confide in me your greatest fears and your biggest dreams, yet I had nothing to offer you. I was afraid, and while a part of me wishes to blame it on my youth, cowardice doesn't have a legal age requirement.

I was afraid to put my heart out into the world for everyone to see, for you to be revolted by the side of me I kept locked inside a box within my heart. My fear of losing you ended up being the reason I lost you.

Life isn't a tragedy, because Shakespeare doesn't write its scripts. And losing you wasn't tragic either. For I was able to witness you climb the mountain that stood on the path to your dreams.

I was immensely proud when you got into the university that you had always wished to go to, and even prouder when you graduated as valedictorian.

In our three years together, I held you down and stopped you approaching the mountain. Lest I feared that your climb to success would leave me alone. The only tragedy is how I had been part of the mountain and I am so glad you were able to make it past me too.

A little while ago I found a little kitten, sick with the flu and struggling to walk. I took him home and then the vet. His name was Haku, and as he snuggled next to me purring and coughing through the nights, I began contemplating this letter.

Haku spent his last days being loved and cared for, the kind of life we shouldn't be fearful of living.

Love isn't a game of football where you need a defence line to keep you safe. And I finally realised what you told me back then.

Going on dates, listening to love songs and holding hands wasn't what love was about. To put yourself out there, in all your vulnerability, with someone who will do the same is as close to understanding love as we'll ever get.

I don't think I'll ever really understand love, but I'd like to thank you for teaching me the little I know about it.

Your friend forever,
Rashed

In memory of Haku the cat, who lived, loved and will forever be loved.

GRANDMA

SHOUNAK REZA

You lived in a sprawling house
With a beautiful little balcony.
You sat there on the armchair
And looked for me
In the school next door.

Every child looked like me, you said,
And I came rushing back to you,
To your table, to your love,
In the afternoon after my school hours.
Those lost days were magical.
The lake flourished a few blocks away.

I learned my rhymes,
I forgot my name.
Your hair turned gray,
Your speech left you.

I was fourteen the night I got the news.
The book I had in my hands stayed unread.
The computer witnessed
Everything in silence.
They drove us to the place
You would never leave —

Far away from the sprawling house
With the little balcony.

I watched silently as you disappeared.
The cries of the banyan trees nearby went unnoticed.
You would stay forever a hundred miles away
From the village you were born in.

