

To An Aurora Smile

ARCHI ANANYA

"Maa,

Look at the colossal sky above, when you are drowned in sorrow. Remember that humans too can be as great as what you see. Search for the seamless horizons of the sea when you feel lonely, understand how it became great on its own, conquering the hindrances.

Baba
8/8/04"

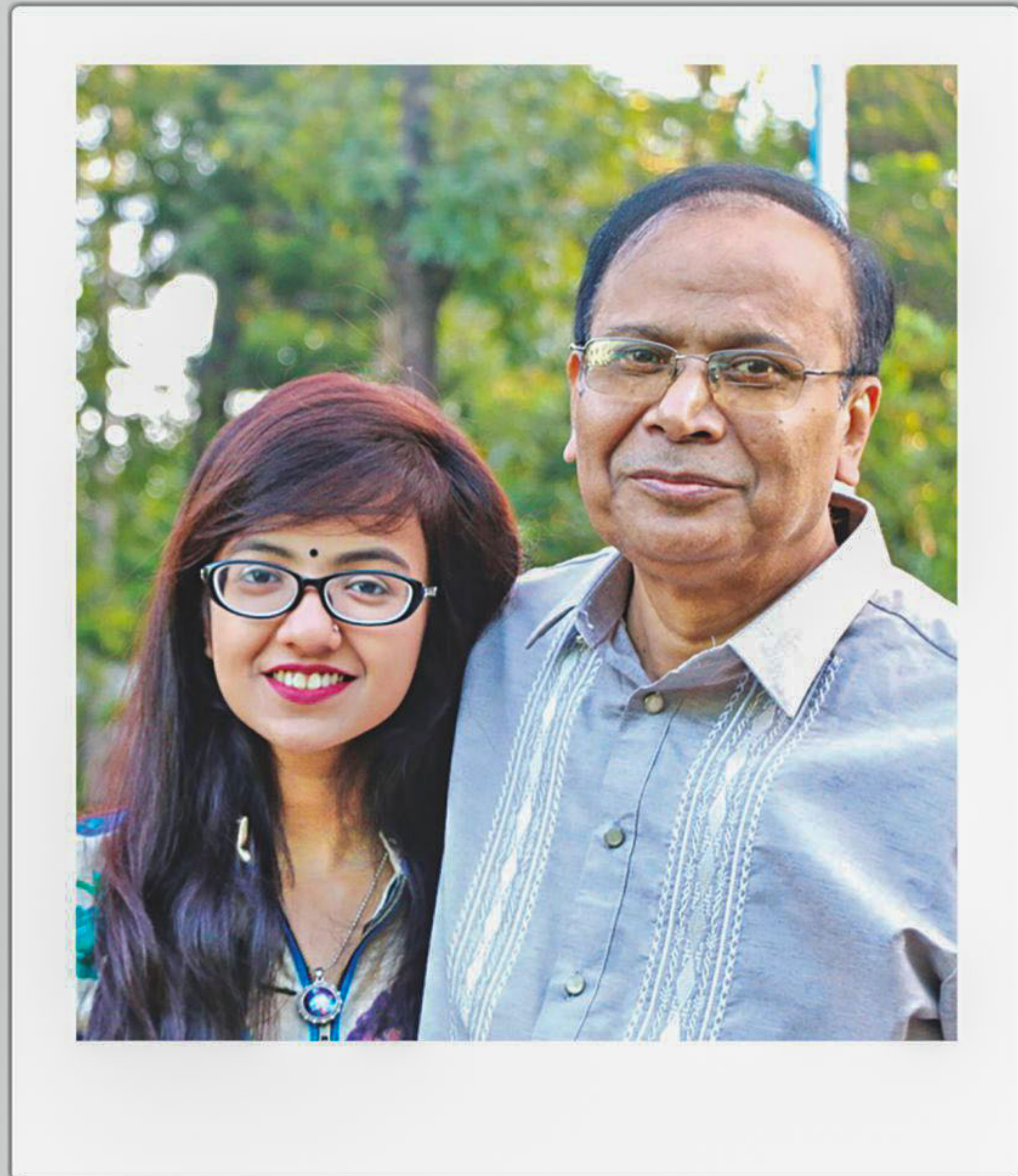
You wrote this on the first page of a notebook I got as a second prize for winning a music competition. It took me 15 years to finally comprehend what you meant, ironically, at the time of your passing. At a time when the entire country mourned with us: leaders of the nation, your fellow journalists from the media industry, your numerous friends and the hundreds of well-wishers who you crossed paths with, some of whom met you just once but for long enough to find you imprinted on their hearts. The starry midnight sky tonight indeed reminds me how humans too can be as great. Because you, Baba, you proved your words right.

I remember falling asleep every night to the beautiful melodies of Tagore, cradled between you and Maa. But what I remember more vividly is falling asleep to you humming "Oliro Kotha Shune" or "Agun'er Poroshmoni". You would sing these even when you bathed me and later swung me on a towel.

I remember spending my after-school hours at the *Prothom Alo* office with you, shuffling through the newspapers pretending to be you, occasionally taking my glasses off just like you did. You would buy me ice cream on the way back home despite Maa asking you not to, leaving me ecstatic like I had just won a million-dollar lottery.

Fast forward to my post-teen life: I remember taking you to Starbucks in Chennai one evening after your visit to the doctors. Over cappuccino, we dived into a conversation that lasted for more than two hours. A discussion revolving around the films *Ghuddi* and *Bicycle Thieves*. You admired Suborna Mustafa's elegance in the film, paused and smiled like a kid who had just been caught reading a story book behind a geography textbook. When I smiled back reassuringly, you continued to tell me stories of how you would sneak out of school to watch films at the theatre.

You made sure all of us visited the Boi Mela every year when we were kids. As *bhaia* and I grew older, the ritual became obsolete. But last year, somehow, I decided to accompany you. I remember how frustrated I became at a point, when you were being stopped by a well-wisher every 10 minutes. I also remember how awestruck I was seeing you respond to all of them with a smile. You seem to remember their kids' names, their moms being sick and where they



worked, and asked about their wellbeing.

On the night before your birthday this year, the time all of us have tried to "surprise" you with a cake, flowers and a card on all the previous years, I left you in the emergency unit of a hospital. You still managed to smile at me from beneath the oxygen mask.

When you were admitted in the hospital during your last few days, when you could barely muster enough strength to speak, you proudly introduced me as your only daughter to everyone who came to visit you.

Our house soon filled up with over a hundred flower bouquets, in contrast to the muffled cries. Everyone spoke of your humility, your honesty and your impact on their lives. I found out that you, in your school years, drew posters to be used for protests during the Liberation War. I found out you never addressed a guard, a rickshaw puller or a mail man as anything but "apni". I also heard how you stood up for injustice against your fellow journalists, resigning from your job instantly, at a

time when we were facing financial turmoil. I have learnt you are not a father that I can claim only for myself, because countless individuals around the world think of you as a father figure.

Do you see what you have left behind, Baba? Do you feel the warmth of the undying love from so many? I hope you do. I hope it makes you smile. Because that smile, alone, makes the sky a little brighter, gives the strength to fight a little harder. Here's to a someday where I will meet you again, as a person who has lived up to the name that you gave her at birth. A day when I can fall asleep to you singing again. A day when I can finally tell you how much I have loved you.

Love,

Maa Moni.

Archi Ananya is currently in her last semester of studying Journalism at Independent University, Bangladesh. She is the only daughter of the late eminent journalist, Md. Shah Alamgir.

