



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Walking Without Earphones

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"Ah, damn it," I muttered to myself as I stood a few feet from my home, on the sidewalk, patting down the pockets of my pants in search of my earphones.

I glanced over my shoulder, debating whether or not to turn back to go grab it. I glanced at my watch.

"8:15 AM," it read.

Well, there goes my being on time for my 8 o'clock class.

I turned back, resuming my tedious journey to university. I walked with my head hung low, my eyes fixed on the cracks on the sidewalk, like always, trying to avoid stepping on them. As I stepped onto the busier road, the sound of the horns, and the endless buzzing of the crowd flooded my ears. I instantly began missing music and its miraculous ability to drown out the sounds all around me, leaving me in a bliss of an almost hypnotic pattern of beats and a combination of instruments playing together in harmony.

I scrunched up my nose in annoyance as I pushed past people, treading my way through the overpopulated streets of Dhaka city.

The sound of a wailing woman made me frown as I searched for the source of the sound. My heart seemed

to pound against my chest as I anxiously looked around, something in her voice making me feel uneasy. My eyes finally landing on an old woman, sitting on the street, with newspaper laid out under her. The pained expression on her face made my heart ache. As I approached her, I realised I had seen this woman before. But I never really noticed her. Then again, I never really noticed anything. My journeys almost always consisted of me getting lost in my own thoughts and being completely unaware of my surroundings. I saw things, but I never really noticed.

I took a few short steps towards her as my eyes observed her frail body hunched over a small bowl containing a few measly coins. I then looked up to see how nobody else had seen her. Upon looking up, I saw a swarm of people, most of them either with earphones in their ears or a phone held up to their ears, their eyes seemingly looking through everything, as if nothing and no one existed.

I pulled out some spare change from my pocket and dropped it in her bowl, exchanging a few kind words with her before I took off again.

I stepped onto a slightly quieter road, letting out a sigh of relief at the soothing silence that instantly engulfed

me in a warm hug. A cold breeze blew past me, making my skin sprout goosebumps as I pulled the edges of my sleeves over the palms of my hands.

I had barely felt the occasional breeze that would cool us from the almost suffocating heat.

Bored of the same sight of the cracks on the ground and curious as to what else I may notice on the path I travelled everyday, I lifted my eyes, beginning to scan my surroundings.

There stood a woman in the window of a coffee shop with a cloth in her hand and a pair of headphones over her ears. An involuntary smile made its way to my face as I watched her joyously spin around in the empty cafe.

The sound of water rushing made me turn my attention to my left. There stood a garage where a man was busy washing a beautiful red car. The water made its way onto the very street I was walking on. The water travelled in a perfect stream, dividing into several smaller branches, approaching the cracks. They all travelled at uniform speed, and almost identically as they calmly flowed past me, as if they were leisurely strolling the streets just like I was, I suppose.

The chirping of the birds paired

with the sound of the water was a completely different kind of music to my ears.

Two playful children ran across the road, the sound of laughter now filling the street in a sort of a dull echo, making me smile yet again. The two little boys, ran around with sticks in their hands, holding them out in front of a puppy that couldn't have been much older than a few months. They giggled excitedly as they chased each other around, without a care in the world.

They were all things that I had been seeing everyday. The same coffee shop, the same garage, the same homeless woman and the same streets. But they all seemed different. It was a whole new kind of world that I'd been missing out on.

Of course, upon glancing at the time again, I was forced to sprint the rest of the way if I wanted to make it to class at all. My heart raced at the newfound curiosity that lit up inside me, as I thought about what I may see or hear the next day.

Maybe leaving my earphones at home wasn't so bad.

Syeda Erum Noor is dangerously oblivious and has no sense of time. Send help at erum.noor1998@gmail.com