

HOW, COW?

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Ugh, this heat is terrible.

Why did I have to show up here? This is a terrible place for a *goru'r haat*. The turnout isn't that good, parts of the fence around the perimeter are broken, and I can easily count all the loose nooses from a mile away.

Loose noose. Hah, bless my wordplay skills.

I haven't had food since sunrise. My stomach is growling louder than all the collective mooing around this—

What the hell? Eww. Did I just step on *gobor*?! Who on earth decided to take *this* big a dump right behind me? C'mon, man. This is not cool.

And no, I don't want your stupid garland, kid! Get out of my face.

"Abbu, I want this cow!"

THE END

TALAT AHMED

They would sacrifice the cows at half past eight in the morning against the wall of a school. There were pools of blood and mud on the roadside. There was wet moss clinging on to the wall. It rained all morning and had stopped for just long enough. The sky still threatened. For the best really. The stench bears down on your soul if you're not careful about it. The goats huddled in their pack on the other side of the road. Climbing over one another, grabbing at wet leaves on showered branches. One of the cows was terribly sick. Everyone knew but none acknowledged it. More trouble than it's worth naturally. Six men tried to carry him outside in the rain. They couldn't get much further from the gate. They tried to pick him up but he plopped down into puddle of water. The other cows stood very quietly against the wall. It started to drizzle again. Finally my father said it was no good trying to make him stand up.

Bodies aren't meant to be opened from the middle. When they slaughtered the first cow, he was sitting down in the water with his head tucked in towards his knees. Do you know how hard it is to end a thing?

GOODBYE

AAQIB HASIB

"Komola, please don't be sad."
Masum crouched down by the door, tears streaming down his face, leaving lines to mark his sorrow.

"Komola, I promise you, it'll be okay."

She didn't reply. Not even a stern look or a scoff. It was as if Komola didn't want to acknowledge Mamun's existence.

He gathered up his lungi and sat down with his feet crossed as if he was meditating. The tears hadn't ceased to escape his eyes, but he felt more relaxed.

"Listen, I know this feels unfair, and it is unfair, but we really don't have a choice," he paused, taking in a big gulp, "we're short on money, and this is the only way."

Mamun turned away now, he couldn't bear to look at her anymore. "You've been very faithful to me, Komola. You've put food on the table for us many times before, and this is one last time that you have to do it."

The tears were starting to well up again.

Masum's wife looked on from the doorway of their house. She knew how hard this was for him. For them. Komola was the closest thing to a daughter they ever had, and come tomorrow, she'd have to bid her farewell.

"I promise to take good care of Rahim and Raju," Masum said to Komola's silhouette, the only thing visible inside the barn now.

He walked back to the house, his heart heavy and eyes red. Masum's wife looked at him, but he couldn't bear to make eye contact out of shame. It was after all his failures that had brought them to this.

"We'll dress Komola up and head out for the city tomorrow," he told his wife. "That should give us a week before Eid to make sure she ends up with a good family."

PART TIME

AZMIN AZRAN

The man standing with the edge of his *lungi* in his hand did not look like what he claimed to be. Yet, bald head, thin torso and all, he was telling me I had to be part of his team.

"Come on, man, it's easy money. We go around a couple of houses in the morning, do our thing, get paid and then you can go back home after Eid to a happy missus with pockets full of cash."

"I don't have a missus, I'm 17," I told him, not taking my eyes off the piece of wood I'd been working on that would soon become a tail on some ornamental peacock on some Dhakaiya's bed. "But yeah, I'll do it. Always up for some cash."

"Tie up its legs, you idiot!" the man shouted from 15 metres away. He seemed to be repelled by some invisible force because he was shouting and flailing about his arms yet he would not move an inch closer.

I noticed all of this because I too was repelled by a very visible flailing cow's leg. Our leader, who somehow still had the edge of his *lungi* in one hand, glared at me to get me to do some work. I only had a shrug that said, "I make artisanal wooden goods, my hands are too valuable."

"Go get a bucket," he spat.

I didn't know where to get a bucket, or even why. Nevertheless, I went in search.

Walking with my hands behind my back, I whistled the tune to a once popular tune from a Qurbani Eid themed soft drinks ad.

G.O.A.T

RUMMAN R KALAM

Past one man. Past another. A feint to the right, rush out from the left. Men in yellow and blue jerseys covered in mud came to stop him but got stopped themselves. Used to the green fields back home, his footing was still sure in the mud while others slipped with every feint. The little magician was into the final third now, seeing the crossbar, he made a beeline for it. Joynal Miya cursed his luck as he witnessed Bodi the Black Goat dribble his way to freedom.