



FICTION

A translation of Humayun Ahmed's short story, "Sourabh"

Fragrance

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Just as Azhar Kha was about to leave the room putting his shirt on, Lily made an entrance, "Baba, you promised!"

He looked at her sharply. His daughter was all grown up. To rebuke her was a bad idea even though the urge to do so was too strong to ignore. He just kept staring at her instead.

"I tell you every single day, Baba. Please, let it be today!"

"I will try the next month."

"No, bring it today!"

Azhar Kha felt a bitter taste foaming inside his mouth. Each and every single one of his kids was a pain in the neck. Not a drop of pity for their poor father — explains why at the 26th of the month they dare stand tall and demand whatever they want — with such confidence, on top of that!

Slowly he dressed himself, brushed his hair, and put on his shoes - all muddy over the laces. He took his time to rub it off as Lily kept watching him the whole time. And just as he got up to walk out of the room, Lily repeated, "Baba, is that a deal?"

It took all that he had to stop himself from giving her a slap right across the cheeks.

He said calmly, "Not enough money right now. Next month, I have told you."

Lily left silently. He couldn't understand how and why everyone just had to go on a strike against the real world, making it impossible for him to deal with it as it is. Well, he never said a word himself, did he? It was just the truth, out there blunt and flat, 'not enough money!' Why does he have to say it out loud, then? What type of a daughter

doesn't look at her poor father in the eye and understand his hardship?

Soon, he began to feel upset about all these. It was frequently happening nowadays — being fed up with things for no good reason — living a meaningless nightmare called life.

"Depression destroys all that is humane. It kills our virtues; but do have a look at me, not losing the greatest one of them all, the love and care I nurture for you! All these years, have I ever failed taking care of you? And is this how you pay me back, rolling your eyes? Why, o daughter of mine is it so difficult for you to accept that your helpless father cannot bring you everything you want? You are my flesh and blood, after all! Why would you have to be so naïve, like your mother?"

Azhar Kha was almost on the verge of crying. It was getting dark outside and he had to move. Nevertheless, he just sat on the *chouki*, staring blankly at the skies.

"Baba, here you go!"

Lily placed three ten taka notes with great care on the wooden surface of the table. Now it was his turn to be surprised, "Where did you get this?"

"It's mine. I had it with me for quite a long time. Now, is everything okay, Baba?"

"It is."

"You do remember the name, right?"

"I do."

Sensing an admixture of shame and helplessness within, he stepped outside. It had been raining apparently, light and soft. The last patch of red was yet to leave the evening sky, but the black clouds took no time to flock together, spreading their wings of dullness over the town. The all-too-familiar streets suddenly seemed strange, as if straight from an unread story.

"It's been ten years! Ten years is a long time. For all these hours, I have been walking the same walk, talking the same talk! Never did I leave you here once on your own. Just for you I had to be a cheapskate and spend each coin I got with great caution! When everyone in the office enjoys two biscuits per cup, I sit with just the tea. Why, you ask? Well, for you and you only, of course! And what did you do in turn? Just to insult me do you bring out the money you have saved for greater causes, and even that's not enough! Your mother pours her heart out to her brothers for more."

It was the life of a dog he was living, he thought. A life with nothing to wish for, nothing to dream of, nothing to fight for. He buried a sigh deep within, very carefully.

And like a wet dog, Azhar Kha made his way to the bazaar. It was empty all in and out, for the weather was not friendly at

