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But Nauroze could not read or write in their native language which meant she would have to start afresh or from a much lower grade than she had been in back in the Middle East. This knowledge disturbed both Nauroze and her mother. She did not want to go to school in the village, she did not like the look of the classrooms, and she definitely did not want to start in a lower grade.

This gave birth to much debate in the house. Nauroze tossed and turned in bed as she heard *chacha*, *chachi*, *choto fupi* discuss over her future.

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that would moonlight as her house during the nights. And then one fine October morning, her mother and father dropped her inside the premises and walked away. Nauroze had not shed a tear all this time. But after her mother walked out of the room, Nauroze ran to the verandah and watched as Ma's frame became smaller and smaller on the walkway.

**DAYS AND NIGHTS IN CONFINEMENT**

The room had three beds, all empty except for the one occupied by Nauroze. The school was not very popular, and she was the only female residential student. A female supervisor had been assigned for the care of the female students but that lady, too, had quit just days before Nauroze moved in. On that first night, Nauroze laid out the bedsheet in the corner bed and tried to hang up the mosquito net. It was her first time attempting the task. She struggled to hook

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from family. She would stay in bed on Fridays and read endlessly because there was no one to wake her up. Nearly 15 by then, she relished these sudden bouts of freedom but she also missed home. She missed the food Ma would make on Fridays. She hated these bread and banana breakfasts and sorely missed the elaborate breakfast spreads of home, sausages, eggs sunny side up, and on special days, khichuri and lamb curry.

As the days went by, she sat in the verandah for hours, praying to be released from this place, praying to be able to see her mother, or talk to her at the very least. She did not shower for days, and sometimes, she snuck to the kitchen behind her room to try to steal the good food being prepared for the family who owned the school premises.

**PLANNING THE BIG ESCAPE**

The thought of running away from this godforsaken place came in a sudden, decisive moment. Nauroze planned the whole thing in her head. She had some pocket money left from her father's last visit which she guarded with her life. She would use it to take a CNG to the train station, buy her tickets, and go home. It was nearly seven months in that confinement, broken by occasional visits from her father and her short vacations back home, after which Nauroze made the escape plan.

She knew she had to make a run for it when the guard opened the main doors in the morning and went for his morning prayers. She would have to sneak out so that she could cover a good distance before anyone realised she was missing.

She spent the night before the escape tossing and turning in her bed, unable to fall asleep, unable to make up her mind. This is what her *chacha* and *chachis* had warned her mother against; that Nauroze would turn out to be a bad egg, one that eloped from school and brought shame to her parents.

These thoughts scared her. "What if my parents do not accept me back into the house? What if I never get to go to school again? Escaping school would surely mean I have failed."

Nauroze's thoughts spiraled out of control that night. When she woke up the next day, she realised she had overslept through the morning prayer time of the guard. She was stuck here yet again.

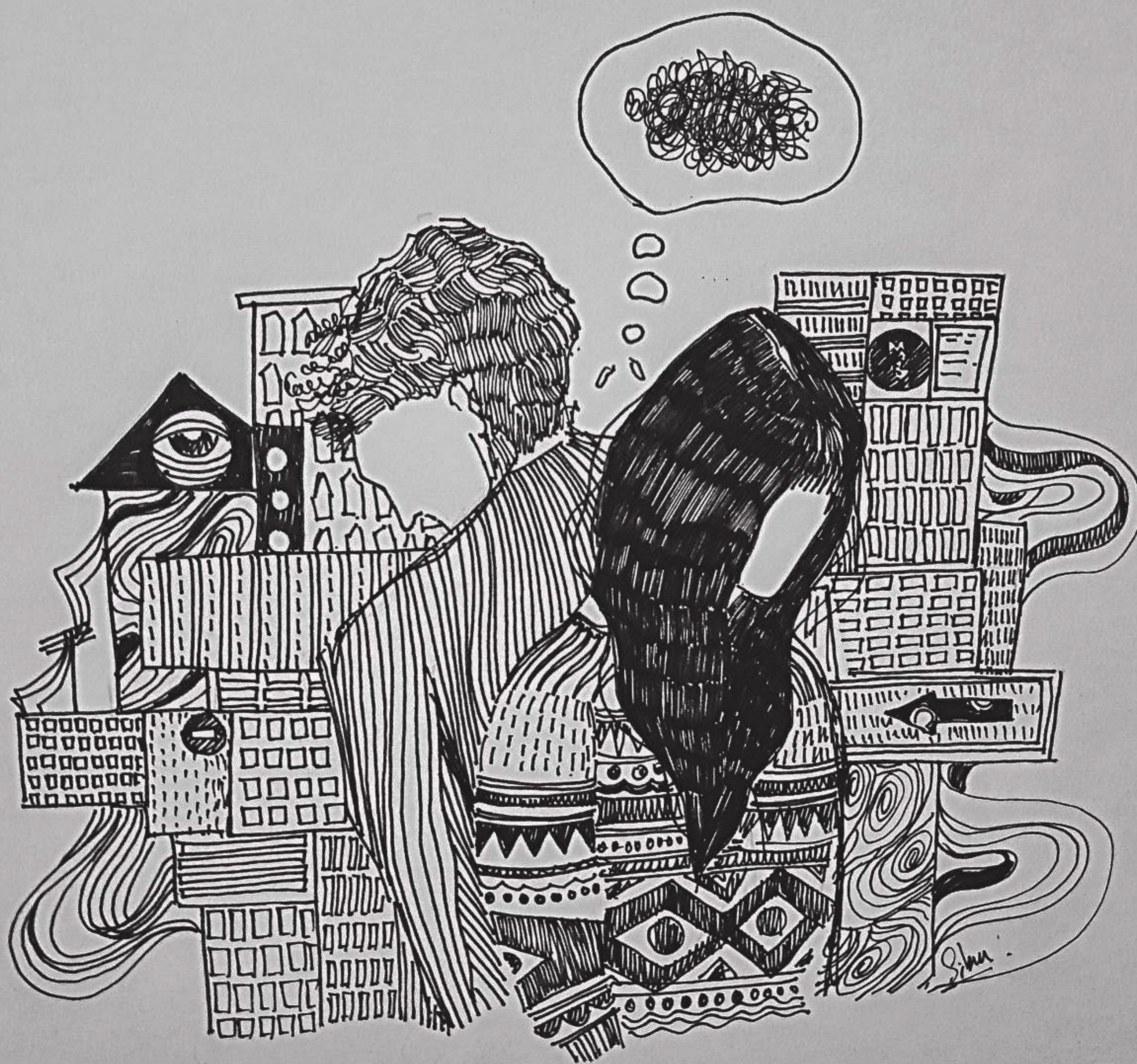


ILLUSTRATION: INAN ANJUM SIBUN

screamed *choto chacha*.

*Fupis* were not far behind with their advice. It took many more weeks of back and forth before they finally decided that Nauroze would go to Dhaka. Yet again, another fate was sealed over dinner.

And that is how, just two weeks later Nauroze found herself in a small bungalow opposite a little graveyard in Dhaka. She did not recognise the streets, neither did her parents, but they chose to get her admitted to that school. The reasons for this were simple: the school would teach in English and it had a housing option.

Nauroze did not say much, in fact, she did not say anything as they went about enrolling the 1-year-old into this school

the net the right way so that it would stay up and not fall over her face, smothering her.

Somehow, she managed to keep her cool for the first few days. In the mornings, she would be served a breakfast of banana and bread, for recess two samosas, for lunch two pieces of chicken in a watery broth, a bowl of some bland vegetable that was in season.

Classes took place in the backyard of the building. Students who did not live in the dorm studied here too and Nauroze would watch longingly every afternoon when their parents came to pick them up.

It did not take too long for the loneliness to hit. But it came in waves. Nauroze enjoyed the first few days away