

# Indebted

NOX

"Hey."

"Hi," says Amreen, turning to look at me over her shoulder and then back to face the street again. In a plain white *fotua* and jeans, she cuts a stark figure against the stainless steel railings of the balcony on which she is leaning. I walk up to stand beside her and lean over the balustrade myself.

"How did it go?" I ask.

She doesn't respond and I don't ask her again. We stare straight ahead. It's drizzling. I feel a fine spray of rain meet my face. The wind whips her hair this way and that. The street laid out in front of us is devoid of people at this late hour. A cold empty street in Dhaka is a rare sight. It's hauntingly beautiful. The rays from the sodium lamps are reflected in the damp asphalt. I breathe deeply in the calm night and the smell of wet soil assails my nostrils, filling me with something that feels like more than just oxygen. After what feels like a lifetime, she sighs.

"I didn't do it."

That hurts. It physically hurts. It feels like a punch to the gut and a sword through the heart rolled up in one neat package. She didn't do it. Like I knew she wouldn't. *Why does it feel like this then?* Because you hoped, you fool. You hoped.

"You didn't do it," I say, scoffing. "Let me guess, he was being nice today. Made you believe he would change for the billionth time. I can't believe you're still falling for that. After all this time, Amreen? After all he's done? Really?"

She balances her elbows on the railing and brings the fingers of her right hand up to pinch the bridge of her nose. I stare at her as her expressions evolve.

A hitched rattling breath, a scrunched up face that almost looks too fragile to stay in one piece – the coldest ice mask one could ever don. She settles on a smile.

"I'm not that gullible, Nayeem. Not anymore. And I'm quite sure he's done being nice. I don't know if he ever was," she says at last.

"Why don't you just do it then. Get it over with? What are you afraid of? You must know there isn't a future with him," I say, exasperated against my best judgement. Again, she remains silent.

I know she doesn't need my indignation. She just won't let me be what she does need, and that frustrates me to no end.

"Mum gave me a watch today," she says after a minute.

"What? She bought a watch for you from a hospital bed?"

"Hah. It's not for me."

I raise my eyebrows. I can't believe this. I have no words. She's buying watches for this guy now? I want to punch something. Preferably a wall. Or a watch. His face will do too I suppose.

"He paid her bills, Nayeem," she says in a defeated tone.

"He didn't buy you, Amreen. You don't owe him anything!"

For the first time tonight she turns to face me fully.

"Don't I?"

When I see her split lip, my heart stutters and then stops.

*Nox endlessly worries about hostile alien surveillance. Increase this paranoid person's online footprint with feedback at [nox.thewriter@gmail.com](mailto:nox.thewriter@gmail.com)*

## An Alternate Moon Song

MOHUA MOULI

I've waited for a while now,  
But while watching the moon somehow,  
I feel and breathe in your air.  
Even if its poison,  
Like the clouds that trail,  
The car you drive home.

To someone, I don't know,  
To something that's lasting in value,  
To someplace unreal,  
To somewhere I can't find you,  
But I can hear you there,  
Like a knock on the door,  
I can never answer.

Because unlike you,  
I live where I grew up,  
With my vices  
And with a few simple choices,  
That could change the patterns  
Of my dreams and my ambitions.

To the car by my window,  
To the pottery I piled on,  
To the silent conundrums,  
That plague the looming void between our breaths,  
I can hear you sing to me,  
"Come find me on the moon  
While the world splits in two  
Right beneath our feet  
Heavy hearts and heavy beats."

