



FICTION

The Phone Call

TAZRAN RAHMAN

One

Aum impatiently held on to his phone, hearing it ring without being answered. He hated having to start the day without hearing her voice. Then again, he also hated going to bed without talking to her. It was going to be a bad day.

The past few months have been rough for him. Since his father died last year, Aum had to take up on the family business. Running a shop in a forgotten part of Old Dhaka was not only challenging to maintain, but also required a lot of time and commitment, which at the age of 22 he wasn't quite ready to handle. He wished he could blow off his responsibilities and enjoy the carefree life his friends had the luxury to celebrate. But with the mounting debt of hospital bills and a younger sister to look after, Aum hardly had any time for child's play.

Having her beside him, made life easier. But even their love came with its own complications. His name was Aum, which meant the union of three gods; A for Brahma, U for Vishnu and M for Shiva. Her name was Alif; the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. Once her mother found out about their relationship, she took Alif away to Sweden. She belonged to a conservative political family and there was absolutely no way her mother would have allowed them to make their relationship official in the society.

But this kind of forbidden love increased their attraction for each other even more. They continued to talk everyday unknown to her mother. Three months had passed by since she left, and it was becoming difficult for Aum to deal with all the stress of filling in for his father. He wished he could see her, not



just on the screen of a phone but in front of him, so that he could embrace her and forget all the worries of his life just for a minute.

Reflecting back on life's circumstances and heaving a deep sigh, Aum started to get ready for work. She must still be asleep. They can talk later.

Two

Alif suddenly woke up from her sleep. Her dreams usually didn't have an effect on her, but this time she woke up to sweat dripping from her body that felt as if she was on fire. She tried to recollect what she saw, but all she could remember

was seeing Aum's face and then waking up to a feeling of her body burning.

The sunlight had just started to stream in through her window as she searched frantically for her phone. She had a sudden urge to check up on Aum, regardless of their timely conversations. It should be lunch time in Dhaka by now which meant she could talk to Aum for at least five minutes before her mother woke up. She finally found her phone and saw fifty missed calls and about twenty text messages. Her stomach gave a lurch. Something wasn't right. Aum had only called once, but the rest were from their friends. She

immediately called Aum first, but there was no response. She tried a few more times but the call kept on ringing unanswered.

Alif opened her inbox to check her messages. The first was from Aum reading "Good morning. I love you. Have a beautiful day." The rest were all from their friends, asking Alif to call them back. Maybe Aum, lost his phone. Maybe he was asking all their friends to message her and let her know.

Alif dialed Farhan's number. Farhan was Aum's best friend so naturally Alif thought he would know if Aum had misplaced his phone.

"Hello Alif?" Farhan answered.

"Hi Farhan. Sorry I missed your calls. I just woke up to a bunch of missed calls. I called Aum too, but he's not picking up. Is everything okay?" Alif asked.

"Alif, I don't know how to say this."

Her stomach gave another lurch and her heart started beating faster.

"Farhan, what's wrong? Tell me.

Where is Aum? He never misses my calls. What happened? Is he okay?"

"A fire broke out in Old Dhaka.

An entire chain of shops caught fire, including Aum's. He didn't make it Alif. I'm so sorry."

"What? What are you saying?"

"We don't know what caused the fire but it spread quickly and everything went up in flames. By the time the firefighters came, it was too late. Aum was already gone."

The phone slipped from Alif's hand and fell onto the floor. Her body became numb as she felt the entire world around her shatter to pieces and saw her life come to a standstill as the horrifying reality that she would never again see Aum, sunk in.

Three

"It's been taken care of. You don't have to worry about the boy anymore," the voice on the other side replied. A twisted smile crept upon the woman's face as she put down her phone.

"Alif, come have breakfast," she called out to her daughter.

An English graduate of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Tazrian Rahman is a short story writer who plays with different forms of fiction and tries to address important issues which are often ignored in the society.



POETRY



Separation: A Soliloquy

BIPASHA HAQUE

Doesn't anyone get that my soul cringes for a call?
Who'll call me to chitchat this and that,
(With whom) I can eagerly share my melancholy?
When we talk, Autumnal mists get straight into my heart!
Kura chirps kub-kub-tullut-tullut in the paddy field..
Air starts gathering mist for upcoming winter,
inviting migratory birds from the furthest end of the globe..
Milewed paddy field sleeps aslant in the bosom of lukewarm sun...aah!!
A single throw of harpoon catches ancient boal from haor!
Is there anyone, such a loving soul?

Then I asked them to send a photo of the railway station,
In this photo a goat with droopy ears
would munch some Nabisco chocolates from her hand
one after another, then languidly lick her palm.
The girl will freeze in fright-
A tiny dark hand - clutching her Nabisco chocolates
ramchagol's droopy-long ears, a bell dangling from her neck,
the ramchagol's liquid soft eyes,
the station's immemorial dusts, crispy dry leaves of Ashar!
-- this photo will look such classic! Its filter would be sepia.

Then, then I moved away from all of it

though it didn't happen overnight- it's not such simple, you see.
Still, I'd like to know how much grass might grow on a grave in a waqt!
But hush! No worries! I won't demand for its answer.
(Stealthily, in whisper) I'm asking you about them—my folks!
They had maya – some kind of surreal, unearthly maya
casting maya's spell, releasing black pigeon
in mid- stream of a flowy river
and conjuring necromancy, they harped on maya's beguiling tunes.

As I'm looking back today, I sense
the air is mingled with some sort of insanity
that loots all...and this is how I moved away—
On my way befell the lapis lazuli rivers
came empty terrains, I met the zero-hour of time.
Fluffy mist draped on top of it, nomadic clouds floated away,
the ground moved away from under my feet
and with it parted the path itself,
furlong to furlong, further and further away...
but still I wonder, was it me who escaped, or was it Them?

*Bipasha Haque is a diaspora writer with particular interest in life-the way it is.
By profession she is a university teacher.*

Late Night Love Note to Self

FARHANA HASAN

Things are dark and bleak?
Because you think you lost someone?
Perhaps your older self?
Glitz and glam surrounded; picture perfect, but
Only smile because you have to?
Only drive by the head, and not the heart?
Only abide by the rules of the road?
The crowd thins out, the noises fade away
The appeasers take a bow;
And it's only you and your thoughts now? Alone?
Flashbacks of happier nights and sunnier days haunt you?
Of different cities?
Of walks by the Thames with warm wine in your hand?
Of lounging on park benches before the city wakes up?
Do you cover your ears when
the graffities scream "Listen to this wall?"
Do you ignore the signs of "rewriting the stars"?
Don't grieve though -
In a parallel world, in a faraway heart,
Nothing changed, and you should
Never forget to love yourself
Never let that workout routine fall off your plate
Never ignore that pledge of eating right and kicking bad habits
Never stop singing wistfully in your raspy soothing voice
Never stop clicking those random Insta shots of bejeweled fingers
Because Life is too short to not wait
Because WHAT IF

She reemerges....
Your lost self,
And melts your smitten soul once again?

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