

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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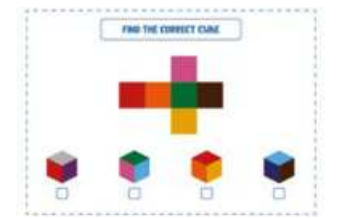


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WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS D E M E N T I A



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

EDITORIAL

When my grandmother was initially diagnosed with dementia, we were not fully prepared for what was about to come our way. The doctor had warned us that things will eventually take a turn for the worse, and that is exactly what had happened. Her health started to decline slowly. She was losing her memory, physical strength, and her ability to think. No matter what we did, she was not getting any better.

My grandmother passed away in June of last year due to dementia-related complications. She took her last breath on her bed, surrounded by her loved ones. When she was alive, there were times when she would often make life extremely difficult for us. But we never complained. We knew that trying to counter what she did or say would only make things worse. We did whatever we could to make her feel good.

A person suffering from dementia is already fighting an internal battle. The least we can do is make sure that they do not have to fight another one on the outside, especially with those close to their heart.

– Faisal Bin Iqbal, Sub-Editor & Digital Coordinator, SHOUT



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PLAYWATCH

MOVIES



Your Guide to Writing A Netflix Teen Drama

FATIN HAMAMA

When watching Netflix teen movies and shows, sometimes it becomes apparent that the writing didn't get much attention in the thought process department.

Confused? Why not try doing it yourself?

Choose your male protagonist

You have two options if you want your lead character to be a guy.

Option 1: The popular kid who's into team sports, is a star athlete and also likes mildly bullying people outside his social circle. That's it. Those are the only personality traits. Oh, and make sure to label his emotional immaturity and arrogance as boyish charm.

Option 2: The sweet, quiet kid who doesn't do much other than be somewhat attentive in school and moon over a classmate they have a crush on. Don't make him one of the stereotypical nerd kids, though. *Princess Diary*-style transformations take time, and we're too lazy to modify the already linear plotline for that.

Choose your female protagonist

Two options here, too.

Option 1: The polar opposite of the first male lead option, but make her quirky, funny, and chirpy. You may make her hate everything the male lead stands for. In that way, she can totally mark herself as safe from being like all the other girls, since she won't fall for his "charm".

Option 2: The artsy, mysterious one. Doesn't quite fit in, supposedly reads underrated classics or watches art films or listens to underground bands that totally sets her apart. You may make her act mean with everyone except the male lead she takes an interest in. More on that later.

A common thread between these two is that they MUST act as prop for the male

lead's character development, regardless of being in the limelight themselves.

Choose your side characters

Option 1: The childhood best friend who's either a pushover or an actual sensible person.

Option 2: The disaster manager friend who cleans up after all the mess created by the protagonist.

Option 3: The friend that the audience starts rooting for instead as they show more main character energy than the leads themselves.

Option 4: The friendzoned character that we all feel equally bad for.

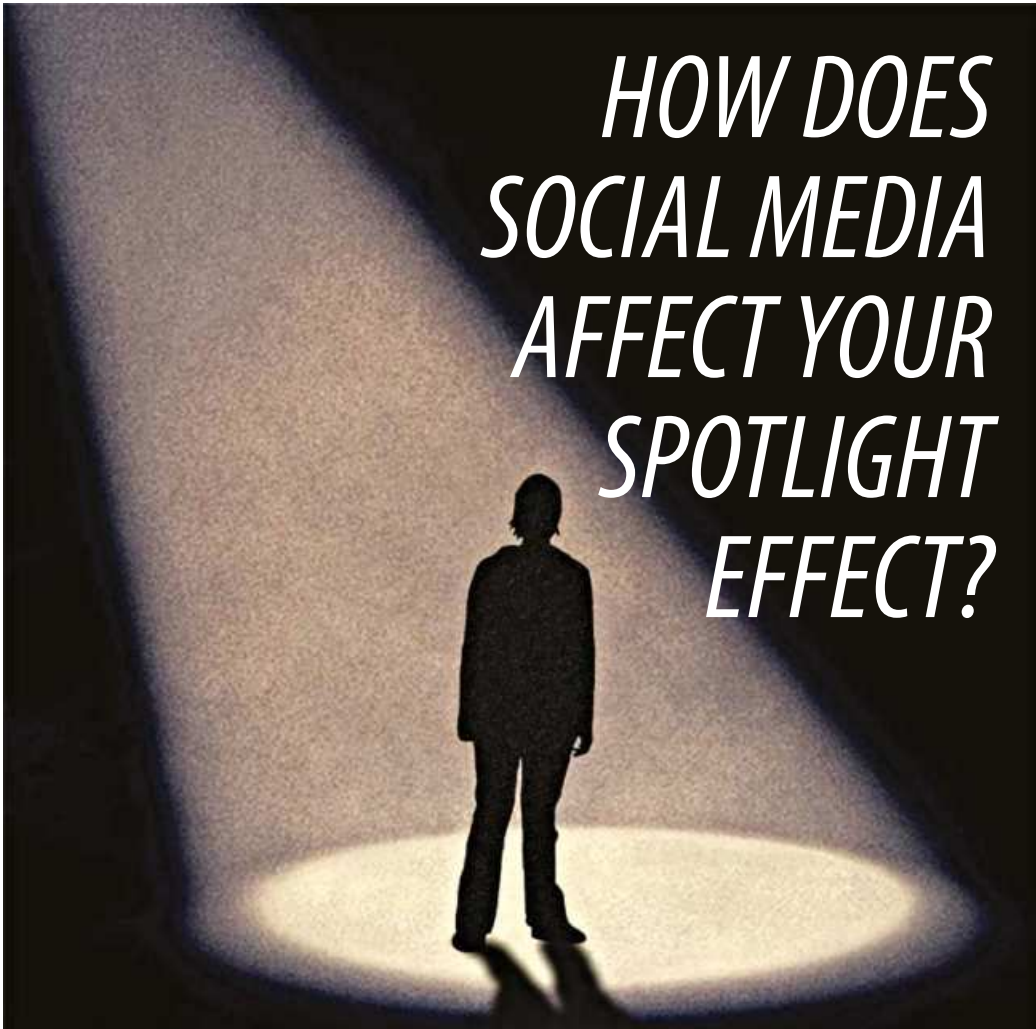
Now, your work here, after you choose your characters, is about done since teen movies are character driven for the most part. However, here's an example of a plotline using the characters we just discussed.

Pair up the polar opposite leads so that they clash frequently and, consequently, cause a lot of mindless drama that prolongs the drama and gives the audience an illusion of a plot. Throw one of the side characters into a problem concerning both the protagonists halfway through the movie, or show where they break off their friendship with the related lead character. Tons of emotional sequences involving the said lead character's newly surfaced loneliness later, introduce a prom or graduation scene. Solve the aforementioned main plot (?) twist in the very premise and arrange a bittersweet reunion among everyone.

There you have it. Your very first DIY Netflix Teen Drama that most people will watch just for the sake of making playdate edits with the cast members they find cute.

Hamama's problems smell like daruchini because she's deep into them 24/7. Send help at fatin.hamama003@gmail.com

HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT YOUR SPOTLIGHT EFFECT?



TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Anxiety that comes with expressing unpopular opinions, being hyperconscious of *one* micro stain on an otherwise pristine outfit, reliving the most embarrassing moments at 3 AM and shuddering at the thought of other people still remembering them, feeling the weight of people's judgement after one minor dip in one's grades — all of these felt normal to me until I came across the term "spotlight effect".

The spotlight effect is a term coined by social psychologists used to describe the tendency to think there is a metaphorical spotlight on us and everyone cares about, judges or remembers everything we do. A symptom of social anxiety, it causes people to overestimate the impact they have on the people around them.

It originates from one's egocentrism, which makes them believe that the world revolves around them. Spoiler alert, it does not. But it is difficult to realise that when one has social anxiety, especially in a time when social media is so prevalent. In a world where most people long for hyper-reality and try to satiate that need with validation from likes, comments, or even number of followers, it is easy to fall into the trap of the spotlight effect.

Amidst the rampant narcissists who post multiple selfies and random life updates a day with a sprinkle of mediocre memes thrown in for good measure, the social critic who gives verdict via Facebook status on the ongoing sensitive issue and the shameless misogynists littering the comment section under every post about women's rights, it is easy to believe that everyone feels comfortable expressing their lives and opinions on social media. On the other side of the spectrum, are these very people suffering from social anxiety in a real-life situation.

For a social media user suffering from the spotlight effect, the result of these two phenomena can be conflicting.

On one hand, the validation and sometimes

criticism of the hyperreality we have created on social media, serve as an affirmation of our misguided belief that everyone is hyper-focused on each of our actions. Social media conflicts, numerical presentation of how many of which reactions we got, cancel culture, being memefied for one bad moment — all of these things reaffirm this notion and generate a constant state of fear and anxiety.

On the other hand, it can help someone realise that the mob-like behaviour of people mindlessly scrolling through their posts probably does not care about their activities as much as they tend to think. If the meme about people staring at their own Zoom profile pictures rather than looking at the speaker was not proof enough, sh*tposting regularly will eventually help you realise that no one cares about that one grammatical error on your caption that took you six readings to figure out.

Like most other forms of anxiety, social anxiety in the form of the spotlight effect can be severe to the point it hampers a person's everyday life. In that case, it is important to take it seriously and seek help. However, for someone who wants to gain a bit more confidence, feel less fear in social settings and be more expressive in general, using social media can be a step towards making their experience of the spotlight effect more bearable.

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Tazreen is trying to prove her mom wrong by reviving her dead houseplant. Depending on your mood, send tips or tell her to give up at tazreenzahan@gmail.com

The Evolution of Female Friendships in Media

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

In her 2015 essay titled "*The Art of Loving and Losing Female Friends*", author Rachel Vorona Cote said that female friends are not a pale imitation of romance and rather described them to be, "... a romance unto itself."

As an adult, having experienced the romance of platonic female friendships myself, I appreciate the quote. But imagine my disappointment when mainstream media constantly chooses to pigeonhole female friendships as a catty relationship filled with cliches and antagonism.

Sure, the negative aspects I mentioned are definitely present in a lot of friendships in general, but they are not restricted to friendships among women. However, throughout my formative years, movies and TV shows continually showed me a very particular brand of female friendships. They would be depicted to be superficial, shallow, and generally filled to the brim with soap opera-esque negativity. Sometimes, sporadic moments of genuine love or courtesy were peppered in it to make it seem somewhat "deep and complex."

On the other hand, male friendships were almost always shown in a positive light. Two buddies against the world, nothing could ever possibly come between them. Even if they experienced turmoil, they would have a revelation and would always drift back into each other's arms. I will admit that I always enjoyed buddy movies but I cannot help but think about the unfairness that occurs when someone who is completely detached from female friendships chooses to write about them.

I am glad to say that the tide has been shifting in recent years. With the emergence of new female writers and directors, friendships between women have been receiving the missing elements of complexity that they have been deprived of for so long.

For example, let us consider Meredith and Cristina's friendship in *Grey's Anatomy*. One of the most iconic lines in the show involves them telling each other "You're my person." Using this simple sentence, accompanied by years of building their relationship, female friendships received their due appreciation.

This is just one example of many more recent examples of on-screen friendships that have masterfully shown the intricacies and tenderness of friendship between women. Greta Gerwig's *Ladybird* (2017) did the same, not only with the friendship between two adolescent girls, but with the relationship between a mother and her daughter.

The days of showing girlfriends being vindictive towards each other are slowly fading away. Even if the trope did not fade away completely, it is certainly going through an evolution and I personally cannot wait to see what it will show us in the future.

Fatima Jahan Ena likes complaining about capitalism and her forehead. Find her at mail2ena@gmail.com



Why the IQ Test Itself Is Unintelligent

SHADMAN MUHTADI

Have you noticed the “free IQ tests” that pop up on your Facebook feed all the time? The Cambridge Analytica scam has proven that these can only go as far as fooling your device to steal data.

However, while growing up, we’ve surely heard about IQ tests and why Einstein was the world’s smartest man with an IQ of 160 (a myth, by the way). With time, the finest details of this fabled intelligence measurement test are being unfolded. Albeit the mass appeal, hundreds of researchers have seriously questioned IQ tests regarding its legitimacy.

THE INTELLIGENCE OF IQ TESTS

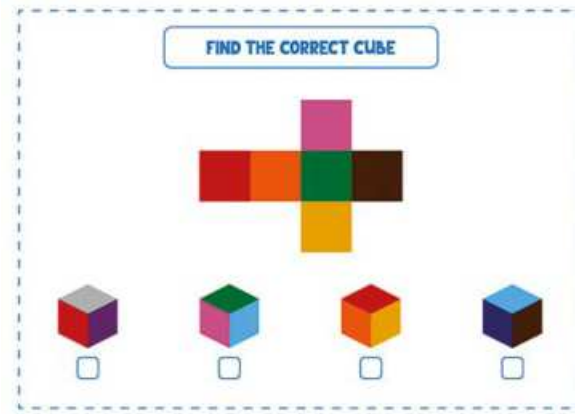
IQ or the Intelligence Quotient test, is the most exercised and well-known tool to measure human intelligence. Its metrics have changed countless times. However, today’s IQ test works on people’s working memory, verbal reasoning and visual-spatial skills.

All these metrics are combined and presented in a single score – the IQ score. An IQ score of 80-120 is the average, and statistics show 68 percent of the population to be in this range. Scores outside this range are considered exceptions, for better or worse.

IQ TEST AND ITS DARK PAST

IQ tests have passed a dark, rocky trail in its long journey. It was first used in 1905 for classifying children for academic help. Since then, the test has been used and abused by many parties.

The first confirmed mass-scale IQ testing took place



in the USA before World War I. The said experiments on children marked ethnic minorities as intellectually inferior, leading to their social segregation. In 1924, the state of Virginia authorised forced sterilisation of people with low IQ. Under Hitler, Germany took a step further and simply “eradicated” at least 5000 children with subpar IQ scores.

IQ TESTS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY DEFECTIVE

Even though IQ tests have run for almost a century, this method has a biased and faulty design. Firstly, intelligence is an abstract idea. The approach of categorising intelligence is a common complaint itself.

Secondly, researchers proved that the IQ test has low sta-

tistical validity since any individual will generate different results while taking the same test repeatedly. Furthermore, IQ tests tend to focus only on fluid intelligence (that is simply task-oriented) and overlook our crystallised intelligence (that we gather through life experience). For these reasons, the IQ test has been termed as incomplete, impractical, and partially invalid.

WHAT METHODS TO RELY ON?

After this unpopular discussion, you might ask, if IQ tests are flawed on so many levels, then what actually works? Scientists and psychologists have been putting in diligent efforts for decades to rectify the mistakes of IQ tests. “NeuroOlympics” is as advanced as a neurologic assessment tool can get and well-received by health and performance experts.

However, IQ tests can be supplemented by an array of tests that measure the different portions of human intelligence. Such tests include Social Quotient (SQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), and Achievement Tests.

IQ tests can “measure” only a fraction of the constantly evolving human intellect. Now you know – those who unironically tie people’s intelligence solely to two or three digits wouldn’t probably score very high on IQ tests.

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FUN UPCYCLING PROJECTS TO TRY

AYRA AREEBA ABID

Imagine growing up in a home which contains countless memories of your loved ones. Imagine it being destroyed slowly as you grow up and before you know, it’s gone, ravaged. Withered away like a flower, once beautiful and fragrant. In the blink of an eye, we might stand helpless, in despair, hopelessly trying to salvage the remains of our charred house.

Our earth is our home. If we want to protect what is essentially precious to all of us, we need to take measures to ensure proper fortification. Here are some fun ways to make daily life amusing and get us slowly on our way to adopting a zero-waste lifestyle.

MAKE POTS FOR YOUR HOME PLANTS WITH USED OIL BOTTLES

Do not throw away large oil bottles you have at home. Have a smaller oil bottle at your disposal so that you can refill that and wash off the bigger bottle meticulously. Take a pair of scissors and cut the bottle in half. That is plainly the lone step you have to take. Easy, right? You would be left with cylindrical and cone shaped pots and a fulfilled heart.

FEED YOUR PLANTS EGGS, BANANAS AND GARLIC JUICE

Plants require nutrition to thrive. Egg shells and banana peels can be placed on the soil. Just like human beings, florals also require potassium to ensure their leaves and fruits are well taken care of. Now, we do not want our plants to be potassium deficient, do we?

Pro tip: A solution of garlic skin, detergent, chilli powder and residue of mustard oil keeps the insects away. However, the usage should be in moderation so use this natural pesticide once or twice per week.



Residue of mustard oil can be excluded (warning: an extremely bad smell may conquer your home).

CRAFTING WITH PENCIL SHAVINGS, TISSUE PAPER ROLLS AND GLASS JARS
I have fond memories of crafting with my mother during my childhood. During Eid, we made cards which had pencil shavings decorated on top because they looked like colourful flowers. Even the simplest of residue can enhance a household object.

Cardboard rolls can also be made into

pencil holders. If one can beautify them with papers, even better. Once a jar of jam or chocolate spread has finished, reuse that jar. This does not have to be fancy; daily necessities can be stored in the glass jar. However, if you are willing to go the extra mile, you can present sweet handwritten notes to someone.

COLA BOTTLES TO WATERING CANS

Before disposing of soft drink bottles, think twice. Take a metal stick (needles and nails work just as fine) and heat it very carefully.

Draw holes with the aid of the heated stick on the cap of the bottle. Fill in as much water as required, and press the bottle down while watering home plants. Simple, right? It is fun to work with as well.

The next time you see something that may be upcycled, start working on them. Our home is calling, it needs us.

Ayra Areeba Abid's favourite word is 'serendipity' and she's a linguistics geek. Connect with her at areeba.ayra@gmail.com

When a Loved One Has Dementia

SARA WASIFA & BUSHRA ZAMAN

They say that as you grow older, you cherish the moments you spent in life; even moments you initially thought were inconvenient or insignificant. But what if you had lost the ability to do any of this?

Dementia is an umbrella term for a syndrome involved with neurodegenerative disorders which debilitate cognitive behavior to varying degrees, including severe memory and communication difficulties as well as other problems in thinking skills, according to the World Health Organization. The risk of dementia increases exponentially with both age and genetic factors, and onset may be as early as the late 20s. It has emotional ramifications that reverberate into familial life and community structures.

According to an article written by the Alzheimer’s Society, memory loss associated with dementia is more severe than forgetfulness caused simply by old age. Regular forgetfulness could involve you forgetting that you had lunch with your cousin today, but dementia could cause you to not even recognise your cousin anymore.

“Limited access to quality care and specialist physicians made it more likely to ignore symptoms rather than misdiagnose,” says Dr. Ajay Kumar Agarwalla, Registrar (Neurology), Mitford Hospital. “Dementia is a result of many underlying disorders, some treatable, some not. So, a possible degenerative cause can often be missed due to limited resources and lack of specialised investigation involving new biomarkers.”

Indeed, recognising dementia can be difficult, as expressed by Maisha Al Ahmed*, a senior-year student at BRAC University, who spoke of her experience with her grandmother and how things initially went unnoticed, “She would forget what she had had for breakfast or what the name of her eldest son was. We thought it was because of her old age.” She added how things changed when one day her grandmother approached her, accusing her mother of theft.

The accusation was regarding a stolen dress, as described by Maisha, “My grandmother continued to accuse my mother, as well as other family members, of similar crimes which never took place. Soon, my father and his siblings decided to take my grandmother to a psychiatrist and then to a neurologist. It was after these consultations that they learned of her dementia.”

For many, dementia is a reality beyond statistics and reports; it is the loss of self with the regression of the disease, and the paradox of seeing a loved one fade while their body remains. “As

a family member or close one, it feels heartbreaking to look after the person you have known for decades but doesn’t remember you anymore and see them growing weaker and more helpless with time. You would constantly feel like getting the shorter end of the stick – and powerless to make things better,” adds Shadman Muhtadi, 21, student of IBA, University of Dhaka.

Shadman also had difficulty with the initial identification of dementia in his grandfather. He recalls, “My grandfather started showing symptoms of dementia, but it took around two years to clinically announce he had the disease. My parents initially thought it was just his age showing and thought it was some common geriatric issue. The thought that it could have been dementia hadn’t crossed our minds until further neurological tests were conducted.”

Once the initial problem of identification is over, other hurdles of learning to cope with the changes begin.

Tazree Hassan, 24, a pharmacy student, recalls how difficult things were initially in the case of her grandmother.

“Frankly it wasn’t quite easy at the start. After her coma we expected that she wouldn’t come out all the same. Yet, it was still difficult, especially for her children. She forgot things to a point where she thought of herself as a child. Sometimes, she would suddenly recall people my parents didn’t know much about and forget them just as quickly,” she says.

While dementia, as a progressive illness, comes with its own set of struggles, lack of knowledge and extensive stigma has by far proven to be a bigger hindrance to raising awareness, ultimately delaying people from seeking help. Although most causes of dementia cannot be cured, drugs

are prescribed to slow decline and/or mitigate symptoms pertaining to the specific disorder diagnosed. Dr. Ajay Kumar Agarwalla has the opinion that dementia research may be more focused on replicating existing compounds and developing diagnostic tools rather than looking into novel drugs.

The internet, often the first source people turn to, is largely responsible for creating a negative impression of dementia, leading to the unfair treatment of those affected in their homes, in the community, and even in medical settings. Care systems may concentrate on dementia as a whole rather than the singular needs of individuals, effectively reducing them to distressing images perpetuated by the media, stripping them of their identity and personal history. However, this stigma rarely stems from ignorance alone.

Nevertheless, many family members continue to find ways to better understand and help loved ones with dementia, as explained by Tazree.

“It took a lot of talking and many years of treatment to get my grandmother to her current state. There are times when we would ask her questions as a way of helping her practice to remember things and sometimes, she would surprise us, by remembering hard verses from the Qur’an or Tagore’s poetry. We, as family, kind of grew to understand her better so that the experience gradually became less painful. I guess what was truly difficult was learning to accept the fact that someone is no longer the same as a person,” explains Tazree.

Sometimes, because

of concern over regarding the existence of proper facilities and the quality of training of those taking care of patients in actual healthcare facilities, family members choose to take care of dementia patients themselves.

Looking back on the days she was her mother’s primary carer, Halima Katun*, a housewife aged 44, says, “Somedays, it was like being a parent all over again. You could show her something, and then again and again. She would cry, and you would send her to sleep. You could tell her something, come back a minute later, and she would be asking the same thing again. She’s my mother; I know I love her, but I lose my patience at times. It was hard watching her getting frustrated at herself.”

While it can be exceedingly difficult for the caregivers, it is imperative for them to help those affected to accept their diagnosis, plan for the future, and stay as active and engaged as possible. Simple acts of kindness – asking them about their day, what they had for a meal, making small talk – go a long way in keeping their spirits up. Involving them in daily activities to their capabilities will not only uphold a sense of structure and familiarity, but also establish a routine to help orientate the person with dementia.

Apart from medication, lifestyle changes to stay socially and mentally active will preserve brain health and may slow the decline. When cognitive functions decline further, making time to connect with them by reading to

them, playing their favourite music, talking, even if they may not be able to express it, will support their emotional well-being.

“You’ve got to

remember how much they loved you and cared for you when they didn’t have the disease”, Shadman adds. “Even if they would forget it in a while, trying to make their situation better just for a moment would be well worth repaying them for their affection towards you.”

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.

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Sarah Wasifa sees life as a math equation: problematic, perhaps with a solution, and maybe sometimes with a sign to tear off a page and start over again. Help her find 'y' at sarahw77@gmail.com

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushrazaman31@yahoo.com



hangouts.

Full of Flavours, Straight off the *Griddle*

RASHA JAMEEL

Months into lockdown, I came to notice the staggering lack of decent fast food from all the home delivery options available in my area. I, therefore, began scouring the internet, hoping to hit the jackpot with my findings there. Eventually, I came across food blogger Nazia aka *Whatsin-mybox's* review of Griddle, a fast-food eatery operating out of their cloud kitchen located in Gulshan, Dhaka.

I quickly got down to business and ordered some of everything from their three-part menu.

Starting with the appetisers, I got myself a box of their "Assorted Appetisers" which served about two people, priced at BDT 400. The box contained generous servings of french fries and sauteed garlic mushrooms, alongside three equal portions of wings in the flavours peri-peri, buffalo, and plain fried, and finally, some cheesy chicken fingers. My favourite was probably the mushrooms, given how juicy and flavoursome they were, just the right kind of finger-licking garlicky taste. The fries, wedges, and wings were quite average. It was the two pieces of cheesy chicken fingers that disappointed me the most, considering they barely had any cheese.

Next, I reached for one of their most-recommended bestsellers: a single "Halal Snack Pack", often abbreviated as the "HSP", which was priced at BDT 350 and also served up to two people. This dish was a delightful surprise since I wasn't expecting the chicken to be so tender and well-smoked, having grown used to the taste of frozen chicken in fast food. Billed as an "Australian and Lebanese



PHOTO: RASHA JAMEEL

fusion" dish, the HSP consisted of three layers: mayo and your choice of a secondary sauce at the top, coal-smoked shredded chicken in the middle, and crispy French fries at the bottom. The only downside: excessive mayo, slathered

in heaps on top of the shredded chicken.

Getting into the meat of it all, I ordered two burgers off of their menu: the "mighty mushroom", priced at BDT 250 and the "cheese blast", priced at BDT 300. I had opted for chicken patties for both. The pricing seemed quite reasonable to me, based on the reasonably-large proportions of mushrooms and the cheese in the respective burgers. The tender chicken patties had an excellent, mouth-watering smoky flavour. The burgers came in buttery and soft brioche buns which added just the slightest hint of sweetness to complement the savouriness of all the meat and cheese.

Despite the great flavour profile, portion sizes, and the superb cook of the meat, I still contacted the kitchen with one complaint: why the burgers weren't as spicy as I'd asked for. In response to my query, the staff politely responded with a rather simple explanation: the spiciness I'd asked for would've overpowered the signature smoky flavour all of their meats tend to have. Having understood their reasoning, I have refrained from asking for my burgers to be made "extra spicy", and I advise you to do the same to properly savour everything Griddle has to offer.

If you're looking to feast on an absolutely delectable array of fast-food offerings that won't hurt your wallet, Griddle is delivering to a handful of selected locations all over Dhaka through their Personal Home Delivery Service (PHD), as well as through major delivery apps.

The author meticulously plans out her 13 daily meals on a regular basis. Drop a 'good luck' note for her overworked digestive system at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

A Beginner's Guide to Nail Art

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

Everyone loves nice, polished nails. For a beginner, however, starting out with nail art can be fretting when all the tools those YouTube tutorials call for, aren't there at your fingertips. Nail art has been a mainstream fashion trend for quite some time now, and the countless photos plastered over the internet make anyone want to choose this over a plain manicure.

Let's talk about nail polishes. For basic nail designs, you can't go wrong with crème-based varnishes. Nail polishes like this offer a variety of finishes starting from matte to shimmery to holographic. Metallic polishes are a great addition to the arsenal. Glitter or chrome polishes work great to create accent nails.

For starters, buying one of each of the primary colors along with a base coat, topcoat, and a few glitter polishes is enough to create a range of stunning looks. Applying a base coat is a must because it protects the natural nail beds from staining and makes the polish adhere to the surface better. Sealing your design with a top coat gives it a smooth finish and prevents chipping.

When it comes to tools, striping brushes and dotting tools are to you what a katana is to a samurai. Nail art brushes come in different tips and sizes for effortlessly pulling off free-hand designs and intricate patterns. Nail decals, stencils, and stamping plates are easy ways to get the perfect outcome by putting in the least effort. Toothpicks, orange sticks,

old eyeliner brushes, and bobby pins work as good substitutes to these handy yet moderately expensive instruments. Besides these, it is necessary to keep nail clippers, Q-tips, adhesive tape, nail buffer, and a nail filer within reach in case you need them. A nail polish correcting pen is a great product to invest in. It makes cleaning up the edges of the nails a piece of cake.

Rhinestones and nail stickers give life to any boring nail art. Caviar beads, metallic studs, and loose glitters add pizzazz to lifeless manicures even though they are painful to get off. Invest in good quality, moisturizing nail polish remover, and cotton pads to get a hassle-free clean-up.

Some more tips:

1. Always use a base coat. Always.
2. If you find drawing lines hard, use a toothpick in a stippling motion to form your designs.
3. Do not place tape or any stencils on your nails unless the base is completely dried.
4. Acrylic paints work wonders in drawing characters and designs. Working with polishes can sometimes be challenging.
5. Even if your designs look raggedy, don't be disappointed because topcoats generally hide all imperfections.
6. Don't forget to clean around your cuticles.

Farnaz Fawad Hasan is a disintegrating pool noodle wanting to stay afloat. Reach her at farnaz-fawadhasan@gmail.com



"There is a nail artist among us."

PHOTO: FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN



PIECES OF THE MOON

MAISHA NAZIFA KAMAL

Hello. As stereotypical it sounds, you don't need to know my name. You need to know what I do, for what I do is what I only know.

I listen to people's stories and quite literally store them. When a human needs to confide to someone some story or experience, they summon me and pour the dark snippets of their souls into me and then forget about it. As soon as the last word drips down their lips, their soul disowns a part of it and I carry it which flares, coils, disintegrates inside, like a disoriented channel that I never tune into but keep open all the same.

Tonight, the moon sighs with me, softly, as I make my way to my next guest. The previous one was a woman of thirty, scared of her own breath.

"He doesn't know that I know. He thinks I have no clue about it, that he has left no trace. But I know," she said, as if she was the one guilty of it. "And I can leave him, but I don't want to. I want to forget all that I know and start anew with him."

In my line of work, I don't ask questions and neither do I provoke my guests to say more nor do I feel anything for them. But when she said those last lines, I watched her eyes plead to me to judge her, to call her a monster, a coward.

I didn't.

I simply left when all she needed to forget was said and headed to the one who had summoned me then. I half expected it was her husband.

But my next client is a woman too. Younger, prettier and stranger. Whenever anyone needs me, I find them helpless of some sort. Yet, this one looks like she was waiting for me to come. Her bulbous dark eyes catch the glimmer in the chandelier

and they gleam with curiosity.

I take my place, sitting opposite her. We let the silence play its game as she expects me to speak. I don't. I can let the silence slice through the jangling cords of the stories I know in my head all day. But she won't.

Finally, she speaks, a laugh bouncing in between her words, "Hello. I have nothing to tell. I want you to tell me something."

Oh great, here we go again.

As I said before, most humans actually need me. But once in a while, some summon me just for the sake of their empty-headed interests.

"I know you talk. So you might as well think out loud."

"What do you want me to tell you?"

I rarely speak to this species. Oddly, the words stand tall in between us.

"You listen to everyone's stories. Do any of them include me?" her eyes gleam again.

I look at her, the shadows and lights playing over the planes and curves of her face. Whenever someone calls for me, I know their names. I already know hers.

Her name somehow glides itself knowingly onto the path of all the tales I know. It shifts through some other names and finally reverberates happily with its twin one.

"Yes," I whisper.

"Go on. I'm listening," she laughs.

"A girl once told me about you. How you peed in the sheets and blamed it on her. All the kids laughed at her, and taunted her for years. She could still smell your pee when she was saying it."

Her previous laugh now contorts into a face that looks like she could smell it too. She quickly regains composure though, "Funny. And?"

"You want more?"

"Why not," she shrugs.

Something about humans shugging

pisses me off for some reason. "Why should I tell you?" I get up to leave. I didn't need to be this elaborate but I knew there was something more to this woman who feigned curiosity.

"Wait! I have something to tell you too."

"Go on. I'm listening."

"You have to tell me first though. Please."

This time there's more than a request in her eyes. A kind of longing mixed with fear maybe.

I am tired of this already.

"Two years ago. Someone wanted to forget about you. Everything about you even," I recited the words I had been imposed to listen to. "Someone wanted to erase all traces of you from their memories. Who wanted to forget what the tea tasted like when you two stood underneath the downpour and joked about it. How tuneless and off-key your songs were. What your idea of a perfect breakfast was. How sometimes you looked like your feet were trapped in quicksand and you wanted to surrender to it. The streak of red, in your otherwise black curls which stretched down like bougainvillea, only showed up in the sun. The effect of your smiles, laughs, frowns. How unbearable your tears were. Should I go on?"

"Yes."

"How you chose your words like you were balancing some expensive crockery. Your words. Their syllables and fragments. The weight they carried. The ashes they left behind. The ashes *you* left behind as you disappeared like a puff of smoke." The words were finished, leaving a trail behind them upon her.

She was looking at me with profound attention. And after a while, she starts talking. Quietly at first, tasting the words to see if she can bear with them. But slowly her

voice got higher until she's almost screaming.

I know she's not screaming at me, but I also don't know who she's screaming at. Herself, perhaps. Either way, it doesn't bother me.

After she's done screaming she settles into a deep meditation again and without looking up says, "I'm done. Make me forget this."

"You just repeated what I said about you."

"Yeah, this is what I want to forget."

"You didn't remember all these before, did you?"

No reply.

"Very well." My job is fairly easy, just a bit of pull and slice of strings of memories and you're done. But even so, when I erase all her memories she asked for, I find something different.

Humans, after they've confided in me and forgotten about it, wake up from a heavy slumber. The kind of sleep that comes with a price. You might be able to erase something from your soul, but the gap's still there; a hollow over which other things might grow and hide it, but it'll always be there. In time, you start feeling the ache, the void and your soul gets turbulent for you to find the answer. But you don't.

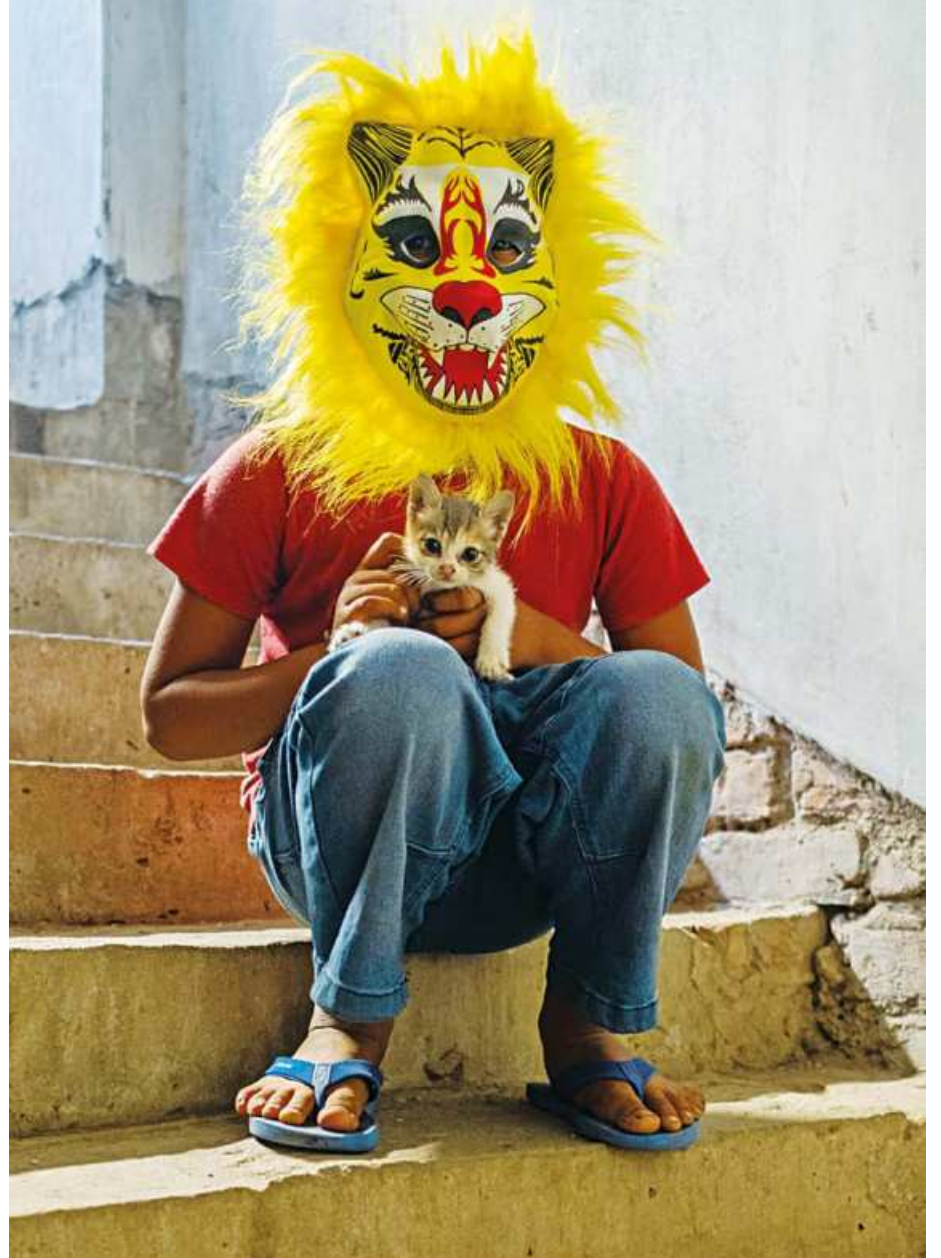
In the gap I leave her with, there's wounds, deep gashes, rust and burn holes. A gap that's been again and again filled with and then emptied out.

After all, forgetting a part of you is certainly the hardest.

As I leave for my next guest, the rain that has been pouring for a while stops and I look at the sky just for a moment.

The moon has finally come full circle.

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LAYERS

Peel back my facades,
One after another,
Until you reach the end,
And find nothing.

PHOTOS BY NAYEM SHAAN
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