

Move Out Day

ADHORA AHMED

Audity is moving today. From my balcony, I watch the van load up with all their belongings. The old stereo must be in one of those cardboard boxes, the one Aurko would blast thrash metal from, much to my annoyance. Once, when he was away on a trip with friends, Audity and I spent rainy afternoons sifting through their CD and cassette collection, and relaxed in his bed talking about everything and nothing.

There goes Aurko's guitar case with his second-hand Signature in it. Quite a few winters ago, Aurko threw a barbecue party on the rooftop and invited all his friends, including me. He had no ability to carry a tune, neither did his friends, yet he strummed away while we butchered Artcell and Arnob songs. I wanted to learn the guitar too, so he'd give me lessons on weekends. In exchange, I helped him with English. I only learned a few chords before giving up with bruised fingers, but at least he got an A+. As the years went by and we inched along to the busy realm of adulthood, other hobbies visited us, but nothing of shared interest. One day, I noticed the guitar was caked in dust and had two broken strings.

"I don't really play anymore," he supplied, following my gaze at the forgotten instrument. "Just grew out of it, I guess. I'm thinking of buying a DSLR, though.

You know, to impress girls. Do you have any idea which brand is good for starters?"

I can hear Rumki auntie's voice from the floor above us, telling the porters to be careful with the wardrobe. I saw her for the first time when she appeared at our doorstep with Audity and a box of *roshogollas* in tow, the picture of a proud mother. Audity had secured a scholarship under the talent pool. We sat in my bedroom with tiny bowls of two *roshogollas* each, struggling to break the ice, whereas our mothers were chattering away in the living room like two old friends. Both of us were shy back then, although Audity came out of her cocoon to become a beautiful butterfly in the years to come. Before leaving, the girl I'd just met invited me to her flat.

There goes the TV. The image of Ripon uncle watching cricket matches flashes through my mind. I can't help but remember him today. He was an ordinary man with a nine-to-five desk job. Yet, there was something endearing about him. Maybe it was the way he talked to his wife and children, with a warmth in his voice I wish my father had. Maybe it was him calling Rumki auntie on his way home from work to ask if I was over at their flat, so that he could bring extra snacks for me, like he did every day for

Audity and Aurko until they protested that they were too old to be pampered. I didn't know he used to go out of his way to make me feel included until he passed away, not until Rumki auntie said so.

Aurko was sleeping in his dorm room, surrounded by green hills and the chirping of crickets, when he received the news. The sun was beginning to turn golden when he arrived, with his hair disheveled and eyes red-rimmed. Later, when the funeral rites were done, the three of us sat in my bedroom in silence. They wanted to be away from their relatives crowded at their flat, suffocating the place with pity. After a while, Aurko started crying. Words would have been meaningless, so I scooted closer and took his hand in mine. Audity followed suit, taking shelter under my other arm.

Audity calls my name. I turn around.

"We've almost packed," she tries to smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes.

"I wish Aurko were here."

"Me too," Audity sighs. "We talked last night. He misses you, too."

"Does he know...?"

"Yes, I told him. He sends congratulations."

"I hope he's not mad at me. I wanted to tell him myself, I swear, but you know how I've been so stressed about all this and I didn't even know whether I'd get the

letter and –"

"Hey," she holds me at arm's length.

"He understands. Just call him when you're ready, okay?"

"We should meet again before I leave," I say after a brief pause.

"You think I'd let you get your master's degree without saying goodbye?"

I give in to the tears I fought to keep at bay all this time. Audity pulls me into her arms.

"I'm hoping against hope, but for the love of God, don't lose our new address."

I giggle at the expense of my forgetful nature. I have a bad habit of forgetting small details, but Audity and her brother's impact on my short life is too big to slip from memory. They are etched into my subconscious, which explains why their childhood and teenage selves show up so often in my dreams. They've shaped me into who I am today, and their imprint will linger on the person I am tomorrow and the years to come, even if I never see either of them again. I want to tell Audity all this, but I'll keep this too, for another day when my emotional baggage is lighter.

"No, I won't forget the address," I settle for this for now.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com

