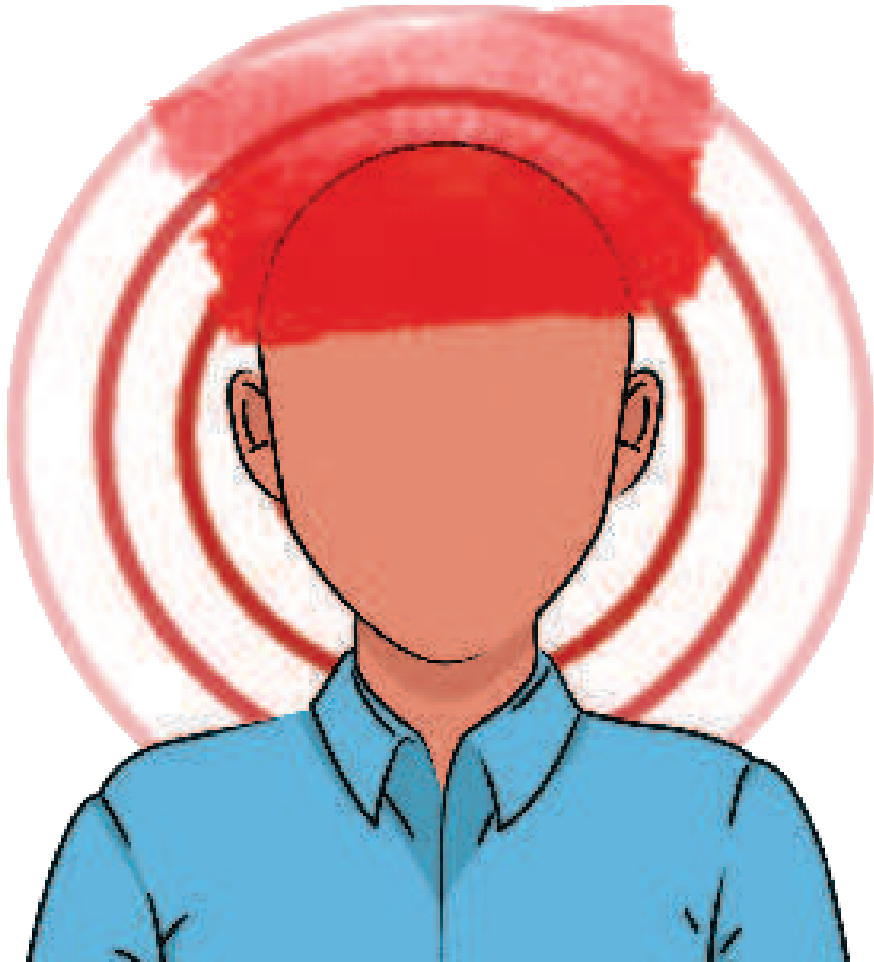




DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Migraine and a toxic boyfriend. Are they the same?

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

I have been suffering from migraine for as long as I can remember. In fact, this chronic headache has been around for longer than most of my friends, and some of my younger family members.

To be completely honest, from observing my own suffering and the perils of others around me, I have come to the conclusion that having chronic migraine is really not that different from being in a somewhat toxic relationship.

Migraine is a volatile partner, just like your trusted partner

Just as a thoughtless word or careless action may ignite a row with a lover, migraine brandishes its sharp talons at the slightest inconvenience.

A couple minutes spent under the sunlight, the overpowering scent of someone's perfume in an enclosed space, or even the weight of your own hair tied in a ponytail – it is difficult to predict which one from this assortment of triggers may become the cause of incapacitation later in the day.

May isolate you from the rest of humanity

It has caused a great many instances of strife within my own friend circle. They are not to blame, it is but a natural reaction to the elaborately made plans cancelled at the last minute, or the several unanswered calls at a moment of need.

Sometimes, my trusted partner even gives into fits of jealousy, unable to tolerate the idea of me having a pleasant time laughing boisterously with some friends.

You think you can let it go

Everyone around me always suggests ways I can be free from these shackles, without experiencing the futilities of their

own advice. Alas, despite the tribulations brought upon by this one-sided and undesirable relationship, it appears our bond is stronger than any material found on earth.

I have exhausted every home remedy, fallen back upon my trusty prescription medicines, sung "Will Ye Go Lassie Go" out loud, all to send my lover away. Yet, my faithful old migraine refuses to part from me, bound to me through the sort of commitment many exhausted hearts have given up on seeking in this century.

Migraine is temperamental

Sometimes, it exudes an aura that it will unleash its wrath upon me soon, causing me to walk on eggshells the entire day. It leads to wearing sunglasses indoors, signalling everyone around me to lower their voices, carrying an umbrella even when the sun's rays are softened by the light. All this effort goes in vain in the end, when the ever-familiar headache blesses me with its presence.

There is much resentment between us. I would have been more than happy without the occasional attacks of headaches, and I'm sure the ungodly number of painkillers I take cannot be pleasant for my migraine as well (or my internal organs, for that matter). However, at the end of the day, when I can stride out of classes and skip out on family functions and plans, it's almost impossible to not be fond of the always reliable excuse.

At the end of the day, it would be a shame not to acknowledge and accept the torturous longevity of this bond.

Zabin Tazrin Nashita is once again asking for you to stop abusing your car horns when stuck in traffic. You can present your defence at: zabintn@gmail.com

Achaar: A jar of spices, sunshine and love

SHADYA NAHER SHEYAM

At my grandmother's place, summer was defined by green mangoes, aroma of mustard seeds and the blanket of sunshine. I recall dozing off in the afternoon, lulled by the repetitive thuds of spices being pounded in the mortar.

I would look at the sliced mangoes put out in the sun and would fight the temptation to taste them. Soon they would be sealed in bottle bathing into fragrant mustard oil, and then they would wait to be delivered to their loved ones. I have become so accustomed to the flavour of my grandma's achaar that I cannot bring myself to try any store-bought pickle even though she is no longer able to make them.

One day, during the pandemic, I picked up the phone and dialled my grandmother's number to ask her for the pickle recipe. When I first started grinding the toasted mustard seeds, I was brought back to a scene from the novel *Zami* by Audre Lorde, which described a young lady emerging into womanhood while pounding various spices.

In that instant, I felt what can only be described as a raw and primal connection with my foremothers — each move of the pestle resonating over the ages. I imagined women whose lives were centred around their families expressing their individuality through the flavours of the pickle.

The aroma of the spices transported me to the familiar scent of grandmother's cotton sari, which was warm, welcoming, and full of affection. To lazy afternoons spent listening to stories about princesses and other enchanted beings who lived in thick forests. I felt a connection with her and the other women in my family who elegantly carried the tradition of spices and care forward bottled up with salt, turmeric, and a big squeeze of lime juice with an indefinite shelf life.

The cherished recollections of witnessing my grandma skilfully removing the seeds off of fresh mangoes while telling us stories about how back in the day, on hot summer afternoons, all the women in the home would gather together to make pickles. In the midst of the spices and the drying mangoes, ordinary lives were exposed. Women who were worn out from responding to their husbands and children's pressing needs would let their hair down and seek solace in the ritual of communion.

I think about those women, their regular lives, and the discussions they had revolving the pickle jars at a time when we feel the need to continuously chronicle and sell a narrative of our lives to be relevant.

We do not know precisely what they talked about, but we do have countless stories that have been passed down through the generations as oral literature about a period when they spent their time caring for families. It's possible that their hopes and ambitions had been peeled away and thrown away like so many of the mango skins.

Shadya Naher Sheyam attempts to live life like Ashima from The Namesake. Talk to her about Mira Nair films at: sadianaharsiam@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA