

LIVES

That Christmas Eve, Santa did not come home



DESIGN:MAISHA SYEDA

Friendship was the most beautiful emotion to him perhaps, and without a doubt, he was my friend—my partner in crime, my confidante on bad days, and my advisor who never looked to judge my decisions as he believed in me more than I did myself.

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Christmas comes every year with joy, gifts, and sweets. But the Christmas Eve of 2016, for me, was nothing like the usual. The milk and cookies that my then 11-year-old cousin, Neil, left on the dining table were left untouched, the Christmas tree bore no new decoration, no cupcakes were baked, nor did we find surprise gifts in our socks.

December 24 had always been one of the most awaited days of the year for us. The grand birthday cake for Jesus' birthday, the roasted sausages and meatloaves, and finally, a house-favourite, narrating the story of the *Three Wise Men*—that is how I had spent Christmas Eve for as long as I could remember.

Things changed when we lost the “kid” of our gang who would be the most excited about Christmas—my Dadu (grandfather)—to cancer on December 6 that year.

I always admired Dadu's courage, especially the manner in which he embraced the doctor's words in 2014, when he first heard he had leukaemia.

He took it better than the rest of us, including myself. I was a sophomore at Notre Dame University Bangladesh back then. Not a day passed that I didn't get his call at 6 in the evening, asking if I was done with my classes and whether I had plans with my friends after classes.

While my parents only inquired about when I would be home, Dadu always asked me to set my burdens aside for a while and enjoy

my youth, to feel the romanticism of young love, to build bonds of friendship, absorb new knowledge, and most importantly, adapt to the customs of the fast-paced world before having to override my innate innocence, simplicity, and sense of judgement.

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Christmas was our day, always, as he would be our Santa and we would be his little army of elves, with lots and lots to arrange for the big day.

I still remember how, after we all were done with the arrangements for the Christmas Eve party, Dadu would disappear for a while and only return after Santa had left. How I always fought with him over his absence during this period.

That year, as I turned nine, I realised that the red-suited merry man who knocked on our door, the man with a huge tummy, and long white hair and beard, was none other than my Dadu, William Biplob Samaddar.

I was not used to a Christmas where we only got to see sorrow in the eyes of my Thaku (Grandma), sadness and disappointment in the faces of my brothers and sisters, and tears rolling down our parents' cheeks when saying grace at the dinner table—this was how we celebrated Christmas eve in 2016.

After dinner, when we all went to bed with

the worst feeling I had ever felt, I knew that no one was going to wake us up for the church mass the morning after, as Dadu always did. In fact, most of us had snuck into his bedroom when the night grew darker as the excitement wouldn't let us sleep.

We knew he would be waiting for us with his big CD player and his collection of Christmas movies. We knew that he would not have gone to bed as a thin beam of light peeped at us through his unlocked bedroom door to welcome us into his mega-sized blanket.

This was probably my first Christmas night when I did not sneak out of my room to climb up five stories of my Dadu's house in blinding darkness, with the other kids in their pyjamas joining me as I passed by their houses.

The next morning, however, with the morning dew glowing in the sun's spotlight and as the breeze grew warmer, a soft whisper made its way into my left eardrum as I was loitering around Dadu's rose garden in the lawn. “Smile”, said a familiar voice, but my puzzled mind was unable to recall the stance where I had heard it before.

As I went back to my room, took a shower, and decided to put on my new dress for

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church, I looked at the wall from where Dadu was looking at me with a big grin on his face. The joy in his eyes compelled me to ignore the garland of white lilies that was cradling his face with its soft petals.

Looking at his face, within a split second, SD Burman's song, “Tumi Ar Nei Shey Tumi”, started echoing in my ears. The voice I was hearing did not belong to the singing legend. It belonged to one of *his* biggest fans, my Dadu.

In that one moment, I knew where the whisper came from...

Years have passed since that Christmas and we have almost gone back to Dadu's ways of celebrating the big day. But since that day, I have not missed my early morning Christmas walk in his rose garden, only to hear the wind's whisper again, but never did.

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POETRY

TIME

SNATA BASU

For Bapi
Pinned between two distant arms, I,
run empty houses in distant dreams,
In a distant memory, I turn the key
I lock the door as I leave.
We shop for plump mangoes and stock bananas,
Father, you drive us to the petrol station
I sit buckled, as if on a coaster,
With my small hands wrapped around the seatbelt
I am safe as you pay our bills.
I am safe like a little doll in her ceramic house,
I shift between places, you carry me through;
One day I fall asleep on your blue couch,
I wake up and I am 22.
It's June—the first day of Summer,
You have never come home empty-handed,
And I stand by our apartment door,
Eye the lift as it totes between floors.
Father, you have come home with me ever since
and never left because I do not know your absence.
There is this stinging weight I shoulder,
I stomach it the way a daughter would,
Voids in the house, your empty glass cases,
Ashtrays outnumbering my soiled grief,
Dreams of you jolt my sleep awake,
Is this how it used to be?
I do not resemble your arms any longer,
I take your shirt, I fold it clean;
So Bapi, I have to ghost you
You see, it has come to this.
You will always be 58 and next Summer,
I will be 23.

Snata Basu is an aspiring poet from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work mostly centers on passionate, personal bindings. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at North South University.



DESIGN:MAISHA SYEDA

CREATIVE NONFICTION

A fairytale ending

AAQIB HASIB

Football, bloody hell! Like the chapters of a book, slowly unfolding towards the eventual climax, this edition of the World Cup has been nothing short of breathtaking. From gorgeous goals to late drama, with a few major upsets sprinkled throughout, this year's World Cup has probably been the most spectacular iteration of football's greatest tournament.

As we have turned through the chapters of this World Cup, we have found countless moments of greatness that the current generation will retell over the years. However, no other match—over the almost one-month long tournament—could hold a candle to the finals match between Argentina and France.

That isn't to say that every other match on the path to the finale was lacking in any way. Rather, it's a commentary on how absolutely insane the final was. The goals, the stories unfolding with each kick of the ball, the fireworks, the fans, Peter Drury's iconic commentary; all of it combined together is what made the finals a spectacle for the ages.

As Lionel Messi finally lifted the trophy over his head, many of us turned off our TVs, almost burned out by the euphoria we experienced in the short span of just three hours. But as most of the world finds a way in their hearts to rejoice Messi finally capturing World Cup gold, I think it's important to understand all of the little stories that led us here in the first place.

See, when we read the book of this World Cup, we forget all of the prequels and spin-offs that have been stacking up in the shelves. We might just see Messi lift the World Cup trophy and think that this was destined, but there's so much more behind Argentina's iconic victory.

While each and every player, on both teams, had their own journey to the finals, I want to highlight just three that will forever have their names written in the history books: Angel Di Maria, Kylian Mbappé and of course, Lionel Messi.



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

July 14, 2014. This was the day of the 2014 World Cup final. As Argentina prepared to battle Germany, one Angel Di Maria was waiting to learn what fate—or in this case Argentine manager Alejandro Javier Sabella—would have in store for him. Di Maria had torn his thigh muscle during the quarter finals and was unsure of whether he would be able to play in the final.

In his article for *The Players' Tribune* (2018), Di Maria wrote how, with the use of painkillers, he could run without feeling any pain. While he knew that Sabella would oblige if he asked the manager to him in the

starting line up, Di Maria would ask Sabella to go with his gut.

“If it's me, it's me. If it's another, then it's another. I just want to win the World Cup. If you call on me, I will play until I break,” Di Maria would say to the manager, before breaking into tears.

I would recommend everyone to go and read the entire article on *The Players' Tribune*'s site. Unfortunately for Di Maria, he was not able to play a single second of the final. The Argentine winger would go on to write that this day was the most difficult day of his life.

So, when Di Maria promptly broke into tears after scoring Argentina's second goal in the final, it truly encapsulated the eight years he had to wait to get here. When Di Maria would eventually be benched, and France would go on to score two goals back to back, in under two minutes, it was heartbreaking to see how the player began to cry once again. For almost an hour longer, Di Maria would sit there, clutching at his heart, fearing possibly for the worst as he no longer had any control over the game. To see the joy on his face, as Argentina finally lifted the cup, was like nothing else.

The final was billed as a battle of Lionel Messi vs Kylian Mbappé. Experience meets youth, the GOAT going up against someone who will someday try and dethrone him. And my oh my, did they both put on a show.

Messi's brace, followed immediately by Mbappé's hatrick. It kept us watching at the edge of our seats. While the latter was able to steal Messi's Golden Boot, he could not force the passing of the torch moment like he had hoped to do.

However, if we look back at the 2014 World Cup and the one of this year, we can draw even more parallels between the two. In the former, a younger Messi carried his team to the final, only to be beaten because his teammates were not able to push the team over the final hurdle. This Sunday, a 23-year-old Mbappé experienced a similar situation.

It was only eight years after that final, that Messi would finally find himself in an Argentine team that could take his greatness to the next level. Mbappé on the other hand has already claimed the World Cup once, but sadly, this time, his teammates would fall short in being able to do the same.

See, stories repeat themselves over the years. Legends come and go, the game itself changes. But really, while the comparisons we can draw between players, matches and World Cups might sometimes align, it is the moments that stay unique.

As someone who I was watching the match with so eloquently put it, “You can't script that.”

And that is but the beauty of real life. It's the stories we see unfolding on and off the pitch, sometimes over decades, that truly make events like the World Cup so memorable.

In the decades that follow, the story of this World Cup final will become a story told over and over again. That is probably the most glorious part of it.

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