

FICTION

The long dinner table

When the alarm hadn't gone off yet, she spontaneously decided to change the plates. Bengalis were notoriously known for storing away expensive plates for 'when the guests arrive.' But somehow, the guests never seemed to arrive. Nijhum had a euphoric realisation that using these new plates could ensue in a banter between herself and her parents—and she waited for it in quiet anticipation.

TASNIM NAZ

Nijhum felt the water trickling down from the grains of rice she washed over the kitchen sink. She had never prepared rice before, which surprised her. You would think something as staple as rice in a Bengali household would demand the knowledge of every single one of its consumers. It surprised Nijhum to think of the disrespect their nation showed to the rice they ate. She wanted to wash them properly, to discard the starch and bring from within the pearls of almost translucent rice grains. She looked into the murky water before discarding it all down the drain. Nijhum put the bowl of rice on the stove and put the lid on, unaware of whether or not the lid is necessary. If anything, it adds to the aesthetic.

She set down the dinner table, an uninformed anticipation on her chest. Running a damp rag over the table, Nijhum made sure to clean every speckle of food stains. She put down the plates, spoons, glasses of water, bone plate—with as much care as can be put into arranging utensils. Nijhum wished she could put down a label with every utensil put on the table: "this utensil right here, was placed with great care. Love, your daughter."

Nearing her phone, she set an alarm for 30 minutes, a safe time period for cooking most things, or atleast for up on them. As she waited, the tangled thoughts began to peek into her brain again, and to push them out, she rearranged the utensils. When that too was done, but the alarm hadn't gone off yet, she spontaneously decided to change the plates. Bengalis were notoriously known for storing away expensive plates for 'when the guests arrive.' But somehow, the guests never seemed to arrive. Nijhum had a euphoric realisation that using these new plates could ensue in a banter between herself and her parents—and she waited for it in quiet anticipation.

Carefully she took the teal coloured plates off the showcase and washed



DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

them by hand, admiring their uneven decorative surfaces. You always treated new things with so much respect. Drying them off, Nijhum put the plates down at the dinner table, adjusting and readjusting them, all the while thinking about that invisible label. Her alarm hadn't gone off yet, surprisingly. How bizarre is time? It seems the most lethargic at the most inconvenient of times.

But then again, Nijhum thought about how most concepts confused her, and she decided to forgive time then and there. As the alarm finally went off, she put her cooked rice—all the

while admiring its simple elegance—in a ceramic bowl, the best they had. She put the rice in the middle of the dinner table, but not before she had wiped the center clean once again with a damp cloth. And thus the feast was prepared. Nijhum laughed in her own head, "Feast, you say? More like an ordinary dinner."

But it wasn't ordinary. How could it be? She had cooked the rice with her bare hands after all. With the feast on display, Nijhum played the waiting game once more. Only this time, she didn't set an alarm. Sometimes, you just cannot measure time.

As the sun stretched overhead, and showed the faintest signs of mellowing out, Nijhum sat at the dinner table, with her bowl of cooked rice in front of her. She heard a lizard croaking in any one of the rooms of her house, letting her know of its presence. She heard faint crows outside with their harsh tunes and the faint whistling of winds through the window cracks. She ate her cooked rice, relishing each of the grains that she hand washed, all the while desperately wishing to stick that invisible label that would say "I cooked this" on each of the grains. On either side of the long dinner table

sat Nijhum's parents—lost inside their little cosmos, unaware of each other's universe. The lumps of rice that she had cooked seemed to lodge themselves in her throat, and she couldn't speak. In many ways, the lizard, the crows and the wind outside were more within reach for Nijhum—more accessible than her parents' vast cosmos.

And Nijhum sat in the middle, with the croaking, the whistling, and the grains of rice between her fingertips.

Tasnim Naz has an endless love of literature, both inside and outside the classroom in which she teaches.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

King of current affairs

SAYMA BINTE SHAJAHAN

You do not read Plath,
Nor Milton.
Or Wordsworth.
Or Shakespeare.
What do you read?
Newspapers, current affairs,
How to be great when
you're good.
How to be king when
You're already a prince.
Selfish brute.
Your TBR makes me feel old.
As if I were 40, not 20.
It drains the excitement of my youth.
Makes me feel small.
Immature.

Sad.
So very sad.
Why won't you read Plath?
You'd like how she described life.
How she described love—
One sided.
Insecure.
Lonely.
Painful.
Disillusioning.
—Like me.
Why would you need to feel bigger
than you already are?
When you already tower over me.
Do you really, that desperately need to look
down at me—and everyone else?
Do you really, really need to
italicise your views through books?

When I already, perilously cling
to every word that comes
out of your mouth?
Your choice of fiction
makes me want to cry.
There's no love in there, you know?
Just greatness.
How to pave the way for majesty.
Is your panache not enough?
Why would you need more?
Why won't you read my romances?
Because they won't make you great?
Well you're not that great, are you?
You make me cry.

Sayma Binte Shajahan is a third semester student of the department of English and Modern Languages, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology.

POETRY

Chance encounter

SNATA BASU

Soundless on my flaking wall, you
rest like a sniper in frigid fear,
I remember the last of your semblance,
Your teething temptation grows moss.
You melt into a cardboard box,
peeling by the rims bit by bit,
like an old man's torch
you flicker in the dark, then blacken away,
scintillating into some disposed echo
soaring like vapor—up and gone.
You take with you fractions of my ailing youth;
you weld with the years I have left behind.
Nobody remembers your silence but I
grow weary of your taunting summons.
I am only a ripple of who I used to be,
delicately seeping through the soils of my becoming;
weightless in my conceived aura,
I step into a cautious light.

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.

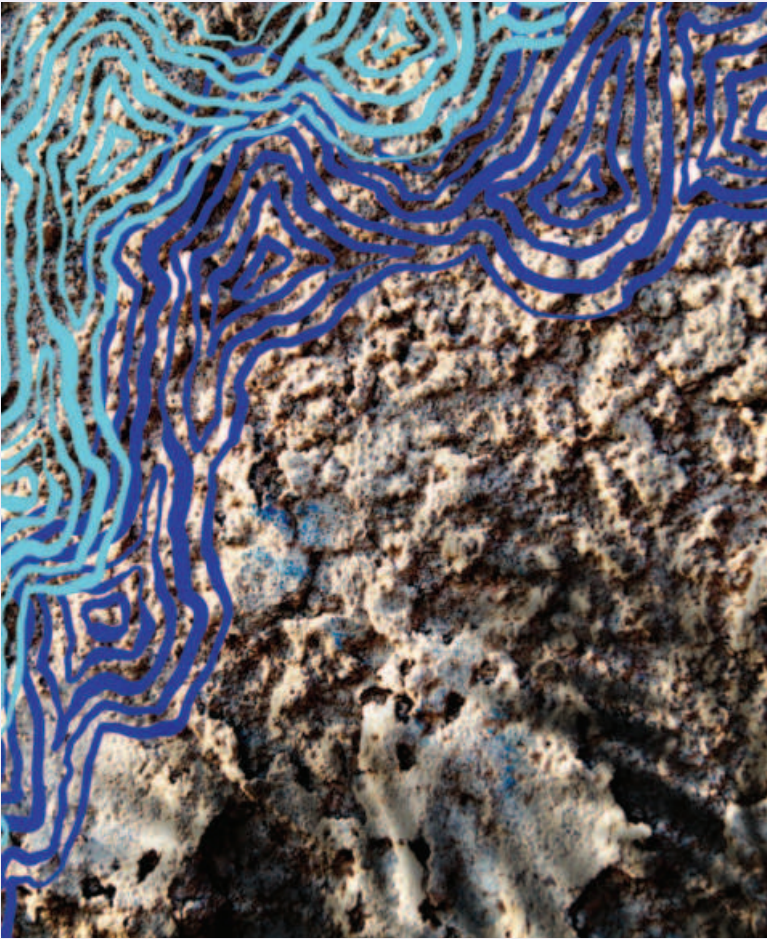


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