THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 16, 2023, *CHAITRA 2, 1429 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

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CARING FOR STRAY ANIMALS THE RIGHT WAY

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

EDITORIAL

As I woke up one day from one of the opportune naps I am privileged enough to take during my commute to and from work, I opened my eyes to find a brown horse staring right back at me. Startled, and slightly amused, I sat up to take a proper look. There were two horses, one brown and the other white, turned ash by Dhaka's ever present pollution and soot. To no one's surprise, they were tired, clearly underweight, and suffering from malnutrition, with open wounds at the spots they were whipped to make them go forward.

I was quickly transported to fifteen years back when I would travel to my grandmother's house near old Dhaka, where horse-driven carriages were a lot more common than they are now. I remember feeling incredibly helpless and ashamed then, feelings that echoed as I continued to stare at the horses beside me stuck at the Panthapath signal. All this talk of efficiency and growth, I wonder why we haven't found better alternatives to cruelty.

– Syeda Afrin Tarannum, Sub-Editor, SHOUT

A	B
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July Bones Richard Walters	Tomorrow Comes Today Gorillaz
Animals Architects	Get Around Kenny Beats
Take Me To Church Hozier	Destroyed by Hippie Powers Car Seat Headrest

Email us at **shoutds@gmail.com** with feedback, comments, and reader submissions within 500 words.

PLAYWATCH

BOOKS

DESIGN: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

Rifqa: A spellbinding account of persecution, courage, and survival

RAFID KHANDAKER

In an age where many unfortunately view poetry as a pretentious, bourgeois pastime, poets like Mohammed El Kurd remind us of its revolutionary and political significance. Born and raised in East Jerusalem, the 24-year-old activist takes us on a visceral journey through several destinations, all rife with systemic oppression, and all united in a shared struggle for liberation, in his first-ever book, *Rifqa*.

At its core, *Rifqa* is a book about human struggles in painfully inhumane circumstances. It uses poetry as both weapon and medicine, where you are filled with empathy for the people it talks about but also enraged by the persecution they face. It does not put any of its characters on pedestals nor does it patronise them as helpless victims. Instead, it presents human beings that are so often dehumanised or turned into statistics, in all their rage, their fear and their hope, without even trying to.

One of the central themes of the book is women. The book itself is named after the author's late grandmother, Rifqa El Kurd, who is considered an icon of Palestinian liberation and is quoted in several of the poems. Mohammed speaks openly about how much she has shaped him as a person and as an activist, and so have other women like her, in a way that is both inspiring and nostalgic for the reader.

The poem, "Girls in the Refugee Camps", centring a transgender refugee, paints a striking image of the unbearable reality of surviving familial trauma and grief.

What is truly magical about *Rifqa* is how it manages to weave threads of solidarity between cultures and locations that are oceans and seas apart, both literally and figuratively, and somehow makes them all feel like home. The author speaks about his experiences in America, specifically in Atlanta and New York, where the land is foreign but the oppression he witnesses is not.

Mohammed's poetry is also intersectional, delving into a variety of topics such as refugee crises, transphobia, systemic racism, and many others, not in isolation from each other, but as overlapping experiences that are often intricately connected.

In the midst of all this, Mohammed finds the space to be personal, pouring out his heart in raw and intimate detail. In "A Song of Home", he longingly reminisces about home, despite the disagreements and fights, despite the dishes breaking being louder than bullets outside.

As beautiful and touching as it is, *Rifqa* retains its edge all the way to the end. It is nothing short of a weapon, for the impoverished Black community in America and the freedom fighter in Palestine, for the elderly woman and the single mother, for those who have been victimised but are unwilling to perform their victimhood. It is a book that glares at trees but never loses sight of the forest. Its poetry never asks for anything but compels you to do something with grit and urgency that allows no room to turn a blind eye.

Rafid is busy dozing off every chance he gets. Wake him up by sending a notification at rafidkhandaker@gmail.com.

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

Expecting productivity after long commute hours is unreasonable

RAIAN ABEDIN

It's 6:30 AM when I head out for my 8 AM classes. The world seems to be asleep as I traverse the narrow alleyways, making my way to the main road, expecting to catch a bus.

But that's where it all crashes into me.

Everyone seems to be of the same mind as I – waking up early with hopes of reaching their destination on time. The roads are nowhere near empty, even at this early hour. Around me, everyone is running like machines, focused only on reaching their destination.

My house is on average, an hour and a half away from my university. On days when someone so much as sneezes differently, the minutes go up and up. Frustration is the single word that circles my mind as I deal with my daily routine.

The noise, the heat, and the sensation associated with clusters of people so tightly packed we're left with no breathing room all become far too draining. Even in the crack of dawn, this city and its unforgivingly poor infrastructure have been the root of many of my tears. And when I am finally able to return home, it's evening. That's an entire day spent in the pursuit of academic growth. I am left with no desire or energy to carry out other tasks.

Yet, for the sake of being a functioning human being in this city, I have to keep going. I have a list of unfinished tasks that demand completion. Work is due, along with assignments and lab reports. More importantly, I have to ensure that I go home and actually manage to nourish and clean myself.

Productivity has fundamentally different definitions for everyone, but even carrying out the simplest task like taking a shower, eating, and forcing yourself to rest feels productive. The only issue is that after travelling a minimum of four hours nearly every day, your body simply loses all desire to do even that.

In a city where commute costs you all of your time and energy, it is impossible to expect people to continue being productive. How is a student expected to not only maintain proper grades but also practice any hobby or extracurricular work while living through the soul-sucking everyday routine that we've all accepted defeat to?

The more time passes, the more I am convinced that time is the most important capital of all.

Every day, I find myself with an impossibly long list of tasks that require seeing to. I breathe a sigh of disappointment whenever I am faced with a day where I must make a long commute because I know that means there is no way I can return home in time to finish most other things on that list. On days when I don't have to go out, I pray no emergency comes up and that I can stay home, away from the noise and bustle of the city that never lets on. These days are few and precious, but I cherish them. Not only for the immense amount of time they open for me to see to my non-academic activities but also for the calm. Sometimes, they are the only thing I look forward to at the end of a long week.

Raian spends his spare time staring at the roads of Dhaka City. Send him the pictures you take in your commutes at IG: @raian_is_burning

Feeling the pressure of getting older but just never wiser

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

When Taylor Swift said, "I have this thing where I get older but just never wiser," in her song "Anti-Hero", she spoke for many worn-out souls. Naturally, I'm no different. As I further approach adulthood, I frequently experience the burden of not being mature enough to make appropriate choices.

These days, however, I wonder what being mature truly means for our society's youth.

The process of growing up can be gruelling by itself. Carefree childhood days run out before we get to understand the utopia we had and soon, our shoulders need to toughen up to bear stressful responsibilities and expectations. With each passing year, time somehow feels both too little and too much. Too little time to enjoy ourselves with too much time left till we actually can.

With such struggles at hand, one of the burdens that seem to weigh in at the oddest of times is the one of not "acting your age".

"Why won't you act like others your age?" is a question people hear a bit too often, whether it comes from family, teachers, peers or even themselves. But people don't like to consider the hows and whys when they bring up this discussion. In the end, their self-esteem becomes staggered. Doubts fill up the emptiness created by trying to be someone they aren't at that stage.

Kids in our society find it hard to grasp the concept of maturity, perhaps from the lack of actual guidelines or simply from the failure of recognising its necessity. I recall how one of my friends would act more childishly than the others to cope with his hardships. It really got me wondering whether we're setting the right evaluation parameters for judging one's maturity, should we feel the need to do so.

Realistically, we can commemorate our youth in different ways. Whether it's from juvenile enthusiasm or the solace of solitude and realism, there's really no right way to do it.

However, normalising the concept of being disciplined into a specific age corners youngsters into questioning their self-worth and sense of identity. Being alluded to thinking you're not mature enough like your peers or experiencing FOMO – fear of missing out – for not being youthful enough both may stand in the way of a progressing mind.

I've seen that older siblings are more pressured to always act maturely. Undoubtedly, older siblings should prioritise showing their younger siblings the appropriate maturity level. But discouraging individuality is just another addition to the superficial burdens they bear.

When with friends, I always erupt into this bubbly ball of energy and joy. Yet, a few years ago, I would be afraid to express myself this way for fear of ridicule. Every time I did it, a part of me would squirm at how childish it was, making me feel unhappy with how I was celebrating my joy.

These fragments of self-loathing sedimented bit by bit till I almost forgot what self-appreciation felt like. Did I overcome that phase? Perhaps. But it nearly cost me my true youth.

Even after realising this, I occasionally question if I should act more mature like some of my peers. I think society needs to rethink what "acting our age" means for these concepts to be integrated.

Shaikh Sabik Kamal is inexplicably tired of the broken T-key of his laptop's keyboard. Send your condolences (avoiding any Ts) at sabik2005kamal4787@gmail.com

DESIGN: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE
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Caring for stray animals, the right way

SHANUM SARKAR &
ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

According to a study conducted by the Humane Society in 2016, the streets of Dhaka are home to some forty-thousand stray dogs and countless stray cats. Most of them spend their days roaming around the innumerable alleyways of the city, scavenging nutrition from the discarded food in the dumpsters they come across.

The mere presence of these animals is seen as a nuisance, an opinion that echoes everywhere, from the residents to even the government. Consequently, these animals live in deplorable conditions. However, in recent times, an increasing number of young people are taking up the task of caring for these creatures.

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

Azmain Fiaz Mansib, a student of 11th grade, spoke about his recently developed habit of caring for strays. He said, "Spending time with these dogs makes me feel connected to nature itself, a rare thing in this city. I love how they are loyal, how they fully accept you and become protective of you."

S.K. Abdullah Fariz, another high-school student, echoed these sentiments. He further added, "Seeing the disparity between the animals' affectionate behaviour and the cruel mistreatments they suffer, I started feeding the strays around my neighbourhood out of pity."

The sentiments motivating their actions are not only valid, they are admirable. However, what many of these young people don't realise is that there is a right way to go about caring for these animals.

"The majority of people who care for stray animals are animal lovers. Yet unlike love, the knowledge and expertise required to properly care for these animals is frequently insufficient," says Dr Md. Luthfor Rahman, a veterinary doctor and public health officer at Dhaka North City Corporation.

It's vital that one conducts research before actively involving themselves in taking care of strays. People should realise that when they choose to take care of these animals, you owe it to them to make sure they receive appropriate care.

While research can be quite helpful, young people need to be careful not to substitute quick google searches for professional advice. To make this process easier, it's useful to keep important contacts handy, such as a veterinarian or the local animal hospital.

All of the information and opinions voiced below have been cross-checked by a veterinary doctor.

First things first, even though many strays are welcoming, they still might be uncomfortable being approached by a human. Thus, it's necessary to proceed slowly and ensure that they aren't startled or injured.

Before bonding with the animal, it must be ensured that the animal doesn't belong to anyone. If it is difficult to determine whether the stray has a mother or not, it's a good idea to not bring them home. The mother often goes out in search of food and can take a day or longer to be back. It isn't a great idea to cuddle them either, as a human smell on them can sometimes cause their mothers to abandon them. The best way to approach this is to wait for a couple of days, and then bring them home.

If the animal has a collar, looks well-fed and groomed, chances are it's an abandoned or lost pet. In this case, putting up flyers and posts on social media to try and return it to its original home is the way to go. It's the responsibility of the person who has rescued an animal and is fostering it temporarily to hand the animal over to a loving home. Ensuring that the person taking care of the animal is capable and loving is vital. Giving it away to a stranger just because they asked for it is a big no-no.

Feeding stray cats and dogs is the most conventional way of caring for them. However, the choices of food must be made responsibly. For instance, chocolate is poisonous for dogs and cow milk is indigestible for cats. Salt, oil, and turmeric are hazardous for both. Dogs can be given meat and rice, but boiled protein is more ideal for them than fried. It needs to be ensured that they're fed in a place safe from contamination, far from playgrounds.

Besides feeding, there are other ways to care for them. Finding abandoned houses in the locality or a deserted corner of the neighbourhood and setting up a temporary home for these animals means that they won't constantly have to be out in adverse weather conditions. If that isn't possible, a tent made of cardboard boxes can be enough to shelter them. Providing them with blankets to make sure they are warm during the winter can be helpful as well.

There are some rookie mistakes that may turn out to be fatal, such as medicating street animals without getting the help of an expert.

When speaking of offering treatment to strays, Rahman adds, "Do not treat animals the same way we treat humans. Many believe that paracetamol will treat cat fevers, but this results in death from paracetamol poisoning."

There are certain measures one can take to treat common diseases with over the counter medications. However, it's necessary to consult a vet to verify appropriate treatment, especially if the animal isn't eating well.

At-home treatments can be used to treat minor bruises. However, caution is advised when addressing major injuries on strays, because they might be hurt further in the process. Mishandling a stray must be avoided if it isn't eating and has swelling on one of its limbs. For transportation to a vet, they need to be coaxed into a crate.

Living on the streets is no easy feat and getting into fights is not uncommon for street animals. It is, therefore, necessary to check that an animal hasn't suffered any harm. Their fur and ears need to be checked to write off injuries.

A lot of injuries they have are from vehicular accidents, some of which can prove fatal in the long run. To prevent this, street animals should be given reflective collars so that they're visible to drivers at night. Drivers need to check under their vehicle to move any animals that may be resting underneath, especially during colder months.

If the stray animal has a swollen belly and darkened nipples, chances are they are pregnant. Pregnant animals generally have a greater appetite. Providing soft, easily digestible food that is safe for that specific animal is important in this case. It also needs a safe, isolated place to give birth.

If someone is going to start looking after a stray animal, they need to make sure that the animal is properly vaccinated to protect both the human and the animal. Organisations such as Obhoyaronno can be contacted for this.

It is also a good idea to get the animal neutered. Neutering strays allows us to humanely maintain the animal population. A smaller population means that these animals don't have to compete as much.

If the animal that is being cared for keeps suffering injuries, or if they are being harmed by any of the people in the locality, an animal rescue should be contacted.

Afzal Khan, the founder and CEO of RobinHood, an animal rescue organisation, said, "Our society has a very negative perception of stray animals and if young people associate themselves with these animals, they are criticised. Instead of rescuing these animals independently, it would be better if they sought help and volunteered together."

If an animal is seen suffering on the streets, it's likely that our compassion will make us want to rescue the animal ourselves. However, it is important to not make this decision hastily.

It should be considered whether one can financially, logistically, and emotionally foster an animal at their residence, and ultimately make a decision that is best for all parties involved. It is absolutely necessary to be sure of that, or at least have a back-up foster home before one picks up a stray.

Joining a rescue organisation can help interested individuals to put their inclination to good use. Besides, animal care shelters could also help put the animals up for adoption if someone is unable to do so themselves.

Caring for an animal is not solely about fulfilling its material needs. It is equally necessary to cater to their emotional needs and to not abandon them once someone has started to care for them. When they're abandoned, they will often be fearful and confused about being left behind. In addition to being emotionally distressed, they experience severe health impacts, such as malnutrition and risk of death from abandonment.

If it isn't possible for someone to care for these creatures directly, raising awareness about their problems and encouraging others to help them can go a long way in bettering their conditions.

References:
1. Humane Society International (October 16, 2016). *Humane dog population management program launched in Dhaka North.*
2. The Daily Star (June 4, 2020). *The dos and don'ts of feeding a stray.*

Shanum and Adrita look at cute animal memes all day. Send them pictures of your doggos and cattos at shanumsarkar18@gmail.com and zaima2004adrita@gmail.com

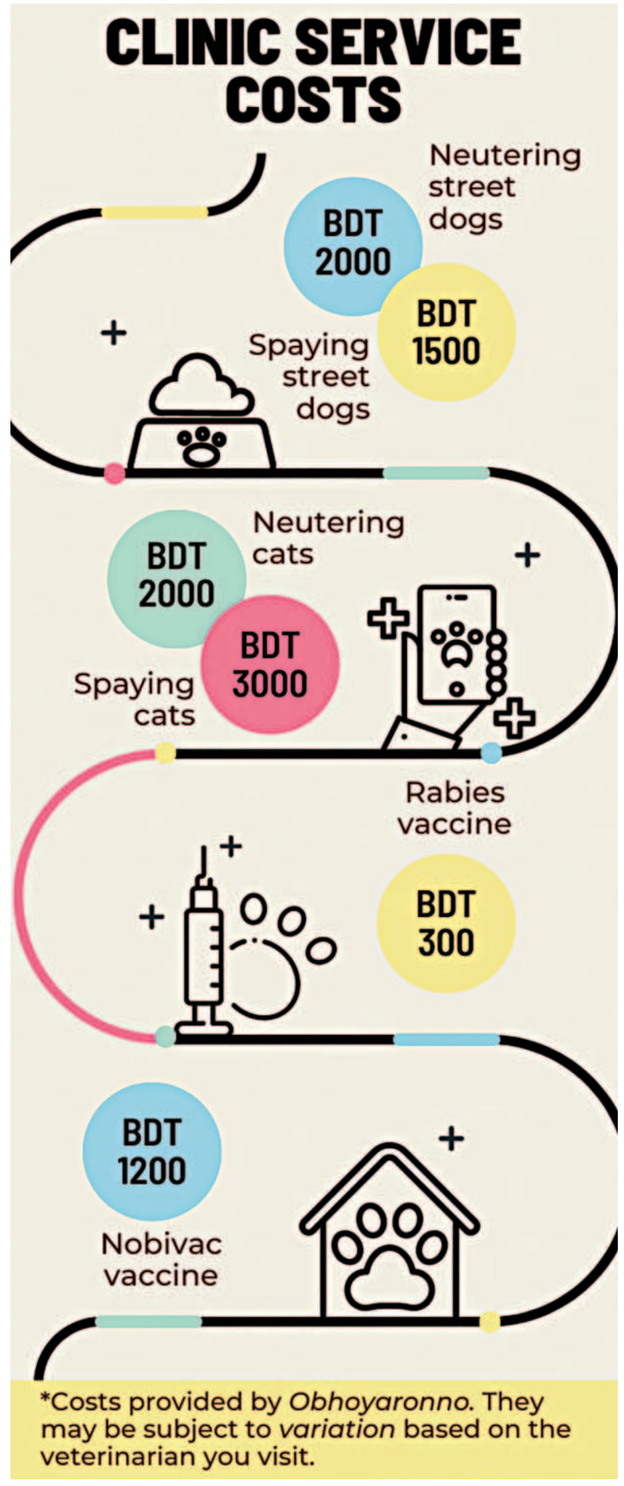


ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

The struggles of being an ambivert

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

As rudimentary as it may seem, using labels or categorising individuals based on their social preferences offers people a space for inclusion as they try to understand themselves better. For some, their personality cannot simply be contained by the labels of "introvert" or "extrovert". Some people do not completely fall on either side of the spectrum, which is where ambiversion comes along.

On the surface, an ambivert is a person who is not quite extroverted, but not completely introverted either. But of course, there is so much more to it than just being caught in the middle. In a way, it can simultaneously be the best and worst of both worlds. While you may equally feel comfort in socialising and in solitude, there will be times when you feel uncomfortable in either scenario.

As someone who identifies as an ambivert, I have been confused for an introvert for most of my life. The key difference here is, in most cases introverts do not like to socialise too much, whereas ambiverts do. It is not that we do not want to talk to people, it is just that sometimes we do not really know how to. Due to having a somewhat lonely childhood, socialising does not come as naturally to me as I hoped it would. While I do have a lot of good friends now, sometimes I still struggle to find words or say what I want to say.

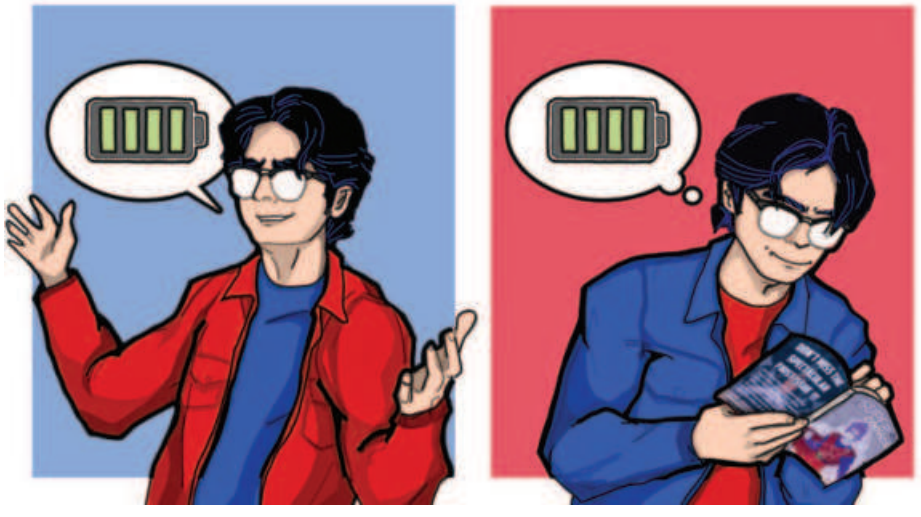


ILLUSTRATION: **SABIL SADAT ZAHIR**

Ambiverts may often need to plan how to talk to people, or have issues picking up on social cues. Sometimes it is hard to understand which is more comfortable–talking with others or being alone. One's state of mind affects the dichotomy at the root of it, so sometimes neither option might seem exciting or comforting.

My self-deprecation would make me think that ambiversion is just an elaborate excuse for covering up my social ineptitude, but now I like to think it is more of a strength than a weakness. The flexibility of this kind of personality helps to better adapt to most social situations. There is just as much comfort to be had sitting in silence with your thoughts, as there is in sitting with a friend and talking with them.

Being able to adapt to different social scenarios mean ambiverts can deal with FOMO – the fear of missing out – much better compared to other people. Throughout the years, I learnt how to manage expectations in regards to people and, coupled with the fact that I can be comfortable being alone too, ambiversion prevented me from facing that particular social insecurity for most of my life. Furthermore, I believe this also makes ambiverts more empathetic towards others, as you not only manage expectations for others but also learn to adjust and accept your own qualities.

Again, just like extroversion or introversion, ambiversion is an oversimplification of identity traits and is just a means for expression. You do not need to conform to any particular label to express yourself. In the end, what matters is how you learn to accept who you are and try to be your best self.

Sabil spends most of his time trying to stay as hopeful as possible. You can contact him at sabilsadat616@gmail.com

DEMYSTIFYING BRAIN FOG

FABIHA AFIFA

Throughout COVID-19 and after, I've heard many family members and friends complain about forgetfulness, fatigue, inability to talk coherently, and other unpleasant cognitive symptoms. While none of them knew their condition had a name called "brain fog", they did notice that their symptoms had started after a dramatic change in lifestyle and living under sheer stress.

I personally had evaded any such issue during the pandemic, but this January, as I was sending out the last of my college applications, I started feeling my own brain fog settle in. Something I said a minute ago would get lost in memory, it was harder to put simple things into words, and focusing on anything was difficult. It felt scary, confusing, and just bizarre.

After almost a month of struggling, I finally started talking to others about my frail cognitive state and looking into what this could mean. It didn't take long to realise I was dealing with brain fog.

Brain fog is cognitive dysfunction that leaves us feeling disoriented, absent, and tired. It's not any medical condition in and of itself. Instead, it's the symptom rising from certain medical conditions. For me, it was stress from almost half a year of juggling studies, work, extracurriculars, writing college essays, and preparing for standardised tests. The moment my applications were submitted, my body gave up. For others, it can be different reasons, like lack of sleep, hormonal changes, medication, and even nutrient deficiency.

To fight brain fog, it's important to first recognise the causes. Getting blood work done will help identify if it's any deficiency in nutrients, hormone imbalance, or some other ailment. If none of those boxes is checked, it could be a lack or poor quality of sleep, or stress. For good sleep, it's important to have a good sleeping environment: dark, cold, and quiet. Maintaining the same routine and avoiding blue light, caffeine, or anything stimulating before bed are great habits. If necessary, consulting a doctor for medicines or melatonin is also a possibility.

As for stress, it's always best to turn to self-care and maybe even therapy. One mistake I made as I was going through brain fog was not understanding what I really needed was rest. Whenever I saw I wasn't feeling very conscious or energised, I would panic and force myself into whatever I was doing even more. This in turn drained me more and the vicious cycle just continued. However, giving yourself downtime is only one piece of the puzzle. For people who go through brain fog due to stress, social interactions and deep thinking, like reading and journaling, can help, too.

DESIGN: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

Lastly, no matter what the cause of someone's brain fog is, a healthy diet and exercise are always highly recommended.

Brain fog is usually nothing severe and passes away in a matter of days, but it can still be uncomfortable. Since some conditions can cause lasting brain fog, it's best to immediately bring it to the attention of close ones and a doctor.

References:
1. Verywell Mind (November 08, 2022). *What Is Brain Fog?*
2. WebMD (June 22, 2021). *Reasons You May Have Brain Fog*

Fabiha is now the Martell heir apparent of Dorne, but still a secret Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance and soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com

Afternoons at the Bijoy Sarani signal

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

MAISHA SYEDA

Her bright yellow *orna* shimmered and sparkled in the midday sunlight, the soft material effortlessly resting on her head. She was hunched down a little to get a better view inside the CNG and talk to the passengers. Abdullah could only see her back.

She had been wearing her short red *kameez*, yellow *salwar,* and georgette yellow *orna* with sparkling sequins on it. That was how he had first seen her. The sun's reflection from the little disks distracted him from inside the bus. That was many months ago.

"Today is the day," Abdulllah thought. "I will go talk to her."

"But what would I say?"

"Oi! Get on the bus! Or do I have to send you an invitation? All the cars are moving," the driver yelled from over Abdullah's head.

"Okay, tomorrow then," he sighed.

* * *

Every day at around noon, the bus stopped at the Bijoy Sarani signal, going towards Manik Mia-Agargaon. Almost every day without fail for the last seven months, Abdullah had been seeing her collect money from cars, buses, CNGs, and bikes. He wasn't sure what her name was but he thought he heard one of her friends call her shundori one day. It didn't matter anymore whatever else her name was anymore. It was perfect, she was Shundori – to him.

Abdullah often wished to take a sneaky shot of her on his old beaten-down phone. It would be one way to stop trying to picture her face and instead, actually get to see her whenever he wanted. He wouldn't have to wait a whole 24 hours just to see her for seven minutes. And there were days – *so many days* – that the bus wouldn't catch the red light. It was torture on those days, he couldn't even catch a glimpse. And there was no use looking for her.

It seemed as though she would appear out of nowhere demanding money when the traffic stopped at her signal – like she owned that terrain along with every car and passenger that stopped there.

And he was scared to take a picture. What if she didn't like it?

Abdullah groaned.

"I *have* to sleep right now. My shift starts at six and it's already 4 AM," he thought. But a faint sleepy grin spread across his face.

"I wonder what she'll wear tomorrow," he mumbled as his eyes drooped shut.

* * *

"*Today*. It has to be today."

Abdullah was resolute. It had been over eight months. It was today or never.

"But what will I say?" he asked himself.

"It doesn't matter. Just ask her name. Or say whatever comes to you at the time."

He hopped off the bus, walked on towards the other side of the road and stopped behind her.

"Uh, mister?" Abdullah blurted out just as he tapped her on her shoulder.

She spun around. His heart sank.

"DID I just… call her… *mister*…?" Abdullah's insides were screaming.

"Boy, did you just call me mister? Do I look like a man to you?"

One of her hands rested on her slender waist and the other lazily by her side. Her mouth puckered into a pout demanding an answer – a good, logical explanation for an answer – and her eyebrows furrowed.

"Tell me! Can't you see I'm wearing a *kameez*? Does my face look like a man's to you?"

"No, Ma'am. Sorry… umm… I didn't realise…"

Abdullah wished the signal would turn green already. *The one day he needed it to turn green!*

"What don't you realise? Don't you realise what I am?"

"No, I mean… I *do*! I just…"

"You just what, huh?" She tapped her foot.

Abdullah's heart felt like it would shoot out of his chest, or he'd toss it away like a big, slimy slug.

"Tell her you like her," the voice inside his head cried.

"Oi! Abdullah get on the bus, you fool! Why do I have to call you every time, your highness?" Mokles, the driver shouted from inside the bus.

"The traffic's starting to move!"

Not needing a second warning, he spun around and ran inside the bus. From inside, he could see Shundori still standing there, her face contorted in a half-furious and half-confused gape. Abdullah couldn't help but smile. She was beautiful even when she was angry.

* * *

It was agonising to not see her for a few days but Abdullah knew it would be a good idea if she didn't see him either. But he would talk to her today, and explain how he felt.

There wasn't the need to look too far either. Her rather clamorous voice grabbed his attention – and half of Dhaka city's population as well. It looked like she was arguing with a policeman.

One hand rested on her waist while she waved a finger at the moustached man twice her size. The man swatted it away and pointed his sausage-like fingers at her face instead.

"He must've said something insulting," Abdullah stood at the door of the bus thinking to himself.

Before he could grasp what was happening, the policeman twisted Shundori's hand – the one with which she was pointing her finger – and held it behind her. Abdullah could make out the man's whitening knuckles and his veins popping despite his fat fingers. Shundori let out a hoarse shriek.

Some desperate urge to run was taking over Abdullah, his heart was pounding against his chest and he heard a shrill ringing inside his ears. It was getting hard to breathe.

"Hey! What are you looking at?" Mokles called out. "Don't you think I see you looking at that every day?"

Abdullah only half heard Mokles's nonsense. The policeman was trying to twist Shundori's arm further as she demanded he let go.

"I know what's going on, okay?" Mokles carried on, grinning through his brown-stained teeth. "This is not a foreign country! Do you think this is India? Wait till I tell your old man."

Abdullah suddenly felt like he would throw up.

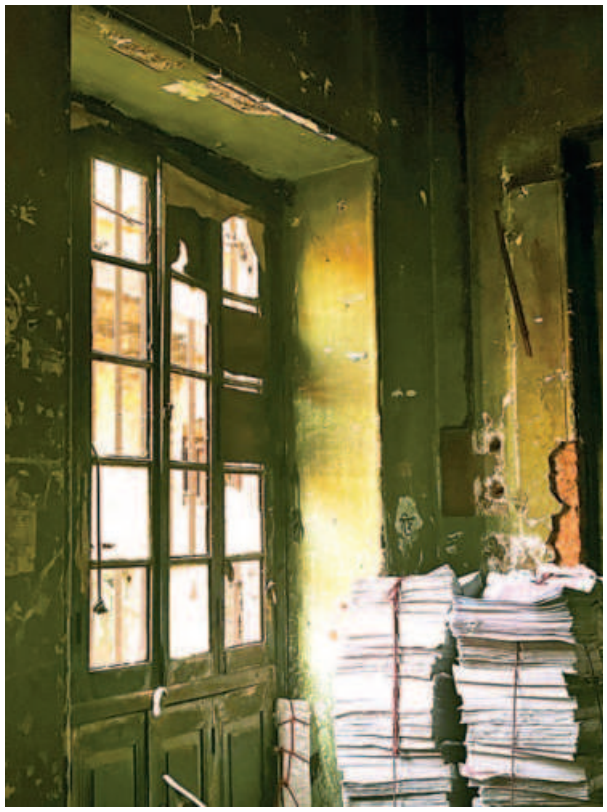
"We don't do that *Dostana* kind of thing in this country, people will laugh. What are you going to do, marry a man? Start a family?" he laughed. "Get on the bus now you moron, time to go."

He almost didn't get up, he almost bolted in the other direction.

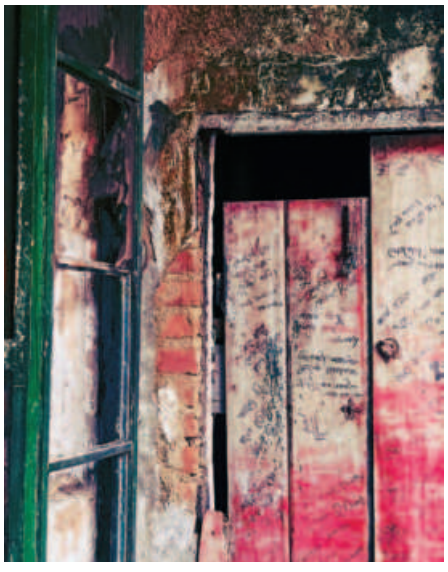
But he didn't. He couldn't. He got on the bus instead.

Maisha Syeda is a writer, painter, and a sub-editor at Daily Star Books.

Send your short stories, poetry and illustrations to ***shoutfablefactory@gmail.com***



CRADLE

If you chance upon my dreams tonight,
Crack open the window a little
Maybe lurk by the sill,
Just so I can glimpse at your shadow even if you're leaving.

PHOTOS: **MAISHA SYEDA**
TEXT: **MAISHA SYEDA**
CURATED BY: **ORCHID CHAKMA**