



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

121/B, EAST BASABO

The tenants kept saying how everyone around the old man would die but not him. Five false alarms and two admissions to the CCU later, Nana’s still here nagging his tenants for using the roof without his permission.

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

I moved in on a Wednesday. I took out all the money I had in my fixed deposit and bought new furniture. It took me a while to refurbish the entire apartment and make it look similar to how I had left it in my childhood. The hardest part was managing a CRT TV that still worked. It’s been two months since Aisha died but I’ve been planning this move since before our wedding. Imagine being so selfish that you deliberately push your only child to settle abroad so that you can move into your childhood home without anyone pulling you back.

When I left Basabo around 50 years earlier, the landlord still had his entire family with him. Although he was nearly my father’s age, I grew up calling him Nana. All this time, I kept Nana’s phone number in my wallet. I changed my wallet nine times in the last 50 years, once before my wedding and eight times after I married Aisha. And every time Aisha bought me a new wallet, she made sure she kept Nana’s phone number safely in my new wallet.

When Aisha was on life support, I called Nana, asking him if he still had the apartment on the 4th floor vacant. I told him that my wife was dying and I wanted to spend the rest of my life in 121/B, East Basabo. Nana hung up abruptly that night. 2 months later, he called me and said, “I had to

give the tenants a notice before I evacuated them, hence the delay. You can move in next week.”

Nana just hit 97 last month. I had spent a fair share of my last two years in the waiting room outside the ICU and at this point, I could just look at a person’s face and guess how many years he had left. “8 more months for you, Nana”, I laughed and told him.

“Ashfaq Mia, I lost two of my three sons, my daughter-in-law, my grandchild and my wife. And the deaths came slowly, with gaps in between, so that I could start to recover and be broken again”, Nana said, “All I’ve known is death, how do you plan on scaring me with it?”

“I don’t plan on scaring you. I’m just telling you how much longer you’ll have to wait”, I smiled. Nana was infamous for his life spirit. The tenants kept saying how everyone around the old man would die but not him. Five false alarms and two admissions to the CCU later, Nana’s still here nagging his tenants for using the roof without his permission.

Nana wasn’t like this when I left him years back. We had our separate key to the roof and went up any time we wanted to. My family had always been an exception to him. I got a spare key this time around as well. I went to the roof every evening like I did with Abba but it all felt quiet without the kids running around. I gave a copy of my key to each tenant for their kids to have what I had when I was

a kid—an entire sky to myself. When Nana got to know, to everyone’s utter surprise, he just shook his head quietly and let it go.

Things changed around 121/B, East Basabo after that. I became an undeclared caretaker of that old building. I had the whole building repainted at my own expense. People even started giving me their rent. I spent my mornings walking around the area by taking the same route Abba did in his morning walks and spent my evenings sitting beside Nana. We’d sit quietly for hours, me waiting for him to talk and him staring at the newspaper or the television.

“One monsoon, around midnight, Amma had fallen really sick”, Nana muttered one night suddenly, “The nearest hospital was two villages away. All the wives from the nearby houses came to see her one last time. I stood in one corner, figuring out how to react to my mother dying. Abba stormed into the room, ordering everyone to stop crying. He picked up my mother in his arms and ran out of the house. Drenched in water and mud, Abba ran for an hour in the pouring rain that night, until he collapsed. When he did, he found his Ambia dead in his arms. Abba came back home with Amma’s corpse and sat quietly outside as everyone else weailed. That was the first death I saw.”

“Abba took care of his only son”, Nana continued, “He died two days after I got my first

job. They found his dead body right where he had collapsed the night Amma died. What I hadn’t realised back then was that my poor Abba died that night with his Ambia. They just found his corpse 20 years later.”

Nana opened up to me after that night. He talked about everything that had happened in his life before I was born here and everything after I had left. Every day, he’d remember new details of previously told stories and tell me. As he’d relive every memory of the past 97 years, I could see his body giving up rapidly, for good this time. “I think this is it, Ashfaq Miah”, he grinned with his broken teeth, “No more false alarms. I won’t make it to summer.”

Nana survived. I died that December. It was a quiet Janaza—only Nana, some of my relatives and the tenants. After my death, Nana sent a notice of eviction to all the tenants. The last family left in the first week of April and throughout April and May, Nana lived all by himself in the building he had built with everything he had.

My prediction stood corrected. 8 months after I moved in, Nana died in his sleep. When the maid found his body the next morning, he still had the keys to 121/B, East Basabo clenched in his fist.

Hasib Ur Rashid Ifti is a writer who is currently studying at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY

Do not allow the soldiers to kill my doll! : SIX

Translated from Bangla by Anisur Rahman and Daniel Kamete from the poetry collection ‘Do Not Allow The Soldiers to Kill My Doll!’ (Journeyman Books, 2018)

ANISUR RAHMAN

Dad, do you know how to build a rocket?
Seems, you do not. You know nothing.
You are good for nothing.
Could you please, find a book about rockets?
Reading that book we get to know how to build a rocket.
Then if we succeed to build a rocket
and show everybody how to do it, that will be great.
Whenever the bad boys come here, we all will fly
In the rockets towards the moon.
We will carry camera with us
And from the moon we will take pictures of the bad boys
While they will not find anybody here to kill.
They will go crazy
and will go back.
Then we will land here by rocket from the moon and
Will give the police the photos of those bad boys.

Anisur Rahman, Bengali-Swedish poet and playwright, is a board member at the Swedish Writers’ Union. He shares his time between Bangladesh and Scandinavia.

Daniel Kamete, Zimbabwean-British translator, studied English Literature at Uppsala University. He shares his time between London and Uppsala.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

They raise their fists. Inside, I fall asleep to the sound of rain

RAIAN ABEDIN

The dumpster diver and the plastic smoker raised their fists. I was in the solemn, trapped by the sound of birds dying on the grass, I was entertained and irritated. I was not changed by the sound skin and bones make when they hit the sky—I was asleep, dreaming of the rain: you fell invisibly, and you washed the wound on the grass like god’s loudest hose as we sat and chewed loudly, on our tongues (forgive us), in invisible estates, undreaming and muffled. All was silent then the way all is silent when we speak. I was trapped by the sound of the birds as a thousand voices ungathered and amputated found their way to a corner where the rain was the rain and not the sound of dust washing away.

Raian Abedin is a poet, a student of Biochemistry, and a contributor for The Daily Star.