



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA ERUM NOOR

POETRY

# The House With No Clocks

SYEDA ERUM NOOR

There are no clocks inside this house. The walls are quiet, the windows loud. The absence of time, prevalent through every thread of fabric, every drop of paint that covers the walls. Like stepping out of the world and into time in-between. There is life in everything in this house. In the clothes strewn over the couch, the shoes that pile at the door and the crumpled bags of mint and books, keys and pens, stuffed animals and a bag of chips, that wilt. Cleaning days seem to strip it of its soul, as though pulling back its warm embrace. The mess, that's where all the life resides. The mug with chocolate milk that sticks to the bottom. The one with coffee drops that stain the outside. The one that's left no trace of its drink, almost like

it was never even used. The only sign it was, is that it sits in the sink. The socks that sit in a basket, unmatched, promising an adventure everyday. A promise to keep you there for a moment, lingering for just a little longer before you disappear in a whirlwind of noise. The broken mirrors in all the odd places, ensuring that you bend in uncomfortable directions to get a look at yourself. Each crack a story for another time. The lamps of light, only half of which work, just barely light some rooms while others burn so bright, every inch of the room seems to glow. The chairs and couches in the living room, each its own shape and colour, like

patchwork. There sit boxes of all ages and sizes. Going from holding oreos to sugar free vanilla cake, from homemade cookies to medicine wrapped in plastic. Posters that hang limp on walls and odd drawings that stick to the fridge. Grocery lists and reminders plastered on windows and on doors, speaking of deadlines at work to middle school exams. Dialogues of a play and whispers of encouragement. Gaming consoles and old remotes, books that tell stories and those that teach photosynthesis. Scribbled notes of dreams unsaid and scratched numbers of weekly bills. There is no date, no time in this house.

Only whispers of those who live. And even the walls and windows grieve at the thought of losing them. Picked off, one by one, as time moves on outside. The boxes creak at softened oreos, the mugs crack at curdled milk on the small nightstand, the coffee stains like tear drops, now part of the ceramic and the books screech, now eaten by live bookworms. There are no clocks inside this house. But time prevails in loss and grief. And the house, once full, now sits empty. Once someone's safe haven now its own purgatory. *Syeda Erum Noor is devoted to learning about the craft of writing and is an avid reader who can talk endlessly about the magic of books. Reach her at @syedaerumnnoorwrites.*



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY  
**Circular**

RAIAN ABEDIN

In abated breaths in freshly-packed, measly-charged tin can rides across the city, two lovers held hands, as if they were born that way. I shopped for groceries and produce where an old man selling overpriced tomatoes talked softly into a button phone kept together by a thread so vibrant it robbed the tomatoes of their life. There's a tea store that stays open until 4 AM, but only at the fraying ends of December when winter drapes like a blanket of desire around us. Quietly, lovers gather to smile over the steam of hot tea that makes this life worth living. You can't see it unless you get too close. In the cold, I couldn't make your face out but your hands were warm, and you held me as the light dimmed around the park. We kept walking in circles and finding each other and with each restraining breath I wished there was less between us. How do you cross the ocean for someone? I ask when you tell me, it's as easy as making them breakfast. I think I would make you breakfast every day until we burned up if that brought me any closer to understanding the space you kept as your own, like a graveyard, like a garden. I would wash your feet and hold them in the same circular rhythms that hold this universe in its place—like a prayer. A tin can rides away at night—another prayer. The circular rhythm of the wheels give it meaning as it sinks into the city. In the morning, it'll follow the same route it follows every day, and there will be a melody to celebrate in it when two lovers find themselves holding hands. In abated breaths, in stolen, tender glances—like a prayer, like longing.

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



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

FICTION

# A Solo Exhibition

KHAMA MAHMUD,  
AMREETA LETHE (translator)

Never in his wildest imaginations had Aniket thought that everything would come together so well. Nearly everyone he invited had come. There was a buzz about the gallery, filled as it was with guests, all discussing his photographs. Interview after interview for the numerous press personnel had really begun to wear him out now. The big names in media, both print and TV, were all here. His first solo exhibition had created quite the stir. Inwardly, Aniket heaves a contented sigh. "Ani, I've been looking for a chance to talk to you, but you seem to have interviewers queued up and waiting for their turn. One exhibition, and you're already famous!" Raima says with a smile. Aniket finally laughs. "Uff, truly, it's been such a crazy few days!" "Hmm, all the papers are going to be printing your name in big block letters tomorrow! I'm sure the TV channels have all aired the news by now, too", Raima winks. With a satisfied laugh, Aniket says, "Yes, this has been a dream for a while, and now it's finally seen the light of day." "You sure showed everyone! After pursuing photography as relentlessly as you have, and for so long at that, everything is finally paying off. But where are Diya and Reshmi? I thought I'd get a chance to see them today. It's been ages." "They didn't come," Aniket says, caught off guard by Raima's question. "Which class is Diya in now?" Raima asks. Aniket laughs, "Seven, I think...honestly, I don't usually get the time to ask after these things." "Areh baas, so that's how it is? Far too busy with ourselves as is! Anyway, your photos are stunning...oh no, I think I see another TV camera headed your way. I'd better leave. We'll catch up over the phone sometime." Just as Raima leaves, a familiar young man from Rongdhonu TV walks up to him and starts talking. As their conversation comes to an end, Aniket sees Turjo, a university friend, heading towards him. "Uff, Ani, you killed it! The lives of indigenous women came through so meaningfully in your photos. And the messages are superb! These women are truly tireless, working away and taking care of everything by themselves." "Yes, that's what I wanted to bring to the fore, too. Women take care of matters inside the house and out as if they have 10 hands, and we barely want to acknowledge it. I really

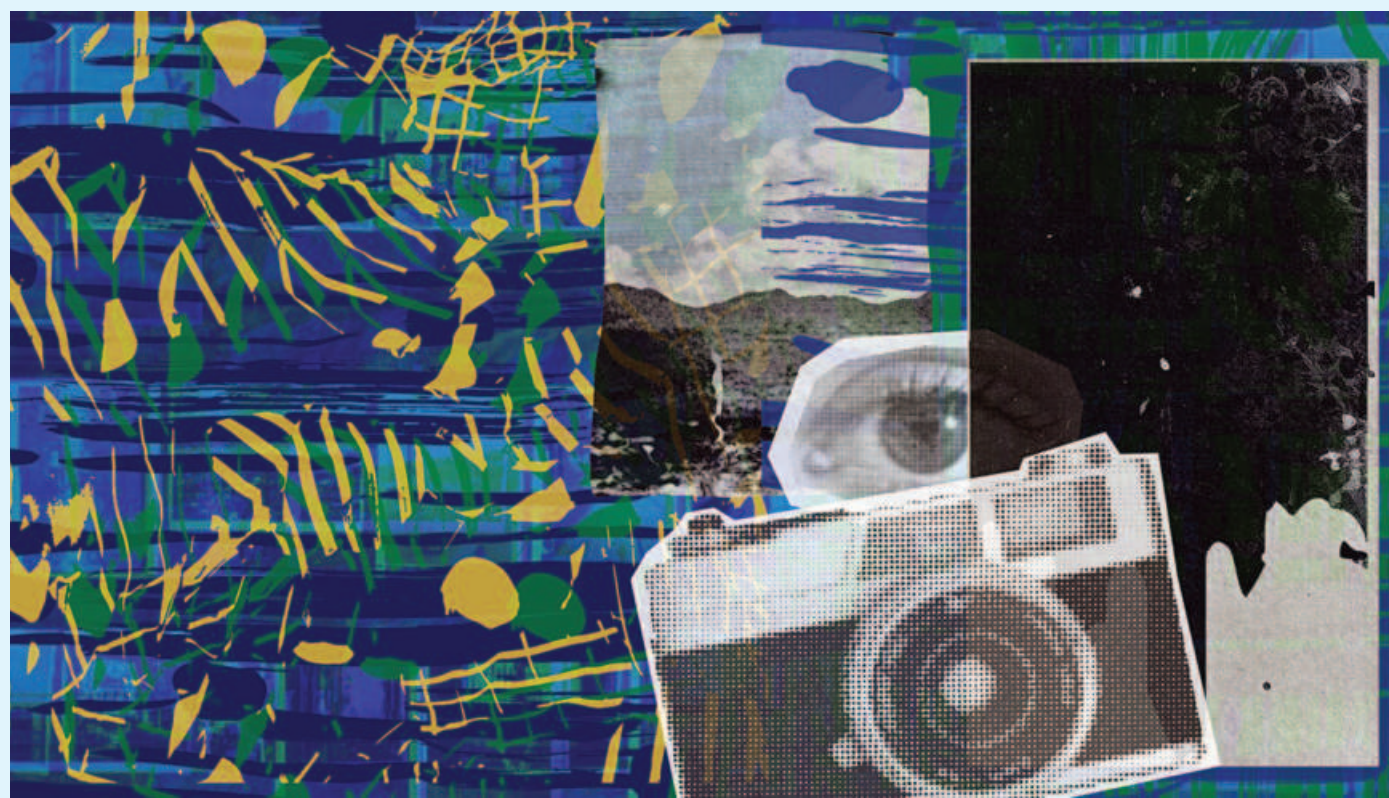


ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

want to expand on the idea and continue working on it. Let's see how far I can get." "Keep going! I'll head out for a moment while you finish up here. We'll see each other later at night anyway. Hope you didn't forget that Tamim's keeping aside a whole bottle of tequila for you. Don't miss it!" As Turjo leaves, Aniket sees a journalist from the Doink Bortoman newspaper—what was her name again? Ah! Taposhi Roy—looking at him with a smile. "What a show, Aniket bhai! Excellent work, as always. So much thought and care seems to have gone into your portrayal of women and their labour. And stellar photographs, of course! No doubt the result of a long and arduous journey?" "You could say that, Taposhi. Women's lives, their endless obstacles—it was all a part of the idea behind this series. All that labour expended, and yet there's no recognition. Sure, work outside the home has some form of monetary compensation, but in the domestic sphere it's an entirely thankless job. That's why I didn't want this to be just another photo exhibition. I wanted to tell these women's stories through my work," Aniket says in one breath. He's lost count of how many times he has had to rehash the

same story since morning, changing up a few elements here and there each time. "Incredible! I'm an enchanted listener, please continue", Taposhi says as the recorder keeps rolling. After the drawn out interview, Aniket sighs with relief. He checks his watch. It's 10 PM already. With the crowd beginning to thin, it's time for the gallery to close. There's work to be done after the closing, too, so it might be 12 by the time Aniket gets home. He hasn't found the time to let Reshmi know. So much has been happening. Perhaps she'll see the news in the papers tomorrow. Aniket missed the TV reports himself. Even once the event ends, he has to meet Turjo and the others for half an hour at least, to wind down and rid himself of the day's weariness, if nothing else. A sense of self-satisfaction takes over him. With everything taken care of, the three friends sit down at their usual bar. By the time Aniket manages to reach home, the clock strikes 12. He'd found some time during their adda to call Reshmi and let her know, "Might get back a bit late today. I'm at an office program." The lying is all but habitual now, but what's a few white lies to keep the peace.

He rings the doorbell and waits. Perhaps he's had too much to drink tonight...hard to leave an adda when Turjo's so insistent. The maid opens the door, and Aniket enters to find Reshmi still helping Diya with her school work. "What, still studying?" He asks cheekily. Reshmi glances at his face and frowns. She knows that he's come home drunk. Wordlessly, Aniket makes his way to his room. Better to not draw this out any further. After finishing up on Diya's studies and feeding her, Reshmi says, "Hurry up and go to bed. You have a quiz at school tomorrow", before sending her to her room. Aniket comes to the table as dinner is served. "So, what did you two do today?" Reshmi continues to eat without responding, before finally breaking the silence, "Saw your exhibition on TV today. So much happened, and you didn't feel the need to tell me about any of it?" "N-no, it's not that", Aniket stammers, "I mean, you're so busy all the time, so I didn't think to mention it. Besides, you know more than anyone how long I've been working on this. Oh, and I put up a few of the photos

you took at the exhibition, too. You know, the ones you took of the indigenous women at Rangamati that one time? People loved them! I sent a few of the exhibition photos to a photography contest. Let's see what happens." "Not only did you put on an exhibition of this scale without telling me, but you didn't even think to ask me for permission before showcasing my photos there? Under your name? How could you?" She tries to stifle her screaming. Despite her rage, Reshmi has to keep Diya in mind so that her parents' arguments don't reach her ears. "Aha! You don't photograph as seriously anymore. Those pictures were all gathering dust for the past half decade, and it's not like you were going to make any use of them. So, I did. Where's the harm in that?" "Do you think I have the time to be putting my photos up at exhibitions and sending them to contests like you do? Day in and day out, I'm toiling away at the office and then holding the fort down at home single handedly—have you left me any time for me to pursue my passions? Do you care to take responsibility for a single matter at home? You weigh me down while you frolic about with your own interests, and then have the nerve to come and ask me this?" Reshmi asks, breathless. "I thought, you know, since it was an office day and all, that you wouldn't want to go", Aniket says, trying to save his skin. Aniket's phone rings. It's an international number. As he picks up and speaks to the caller, his face begins to light up. He puts the phone down and yells in excitement, "Reshmi, I've won the first prize! This was a really prestigious competition, and the prize money is a huge amount, too." He looks at Reshmi. "Don't you get it? The photo you took at Rangamati—a foggy winter morning, with the woman carrying a child on her back and a pot stowed against her waist, walking to a hill stream to fetch water", Aniket tells her, ecstatic. Reshmi stares blankly on at Aniket. *Khama Mahmud is the author of the debut short story collection Shomudrer Kachhe Joma Rakhi (Anupuran Prokashon, 2023). She is a Bangla short story writer whose stories have appeared in several online and offline publications. She has an MA in English Literature from the University of Dhaka.* *Amreeta Lethe is a writer and translator. She is currently working as a sub-editor at Star Books and Literature.*