LITERATURE

POETRY

Possible answers to "Why did you block me?"

QAZI MUSTABEEN NOOR

I needed to de-escalate.

When an animal is cornered, it's either a fight or flight response. Flight is always beautiful. If you're "Bulgarian split squats", then I have bad

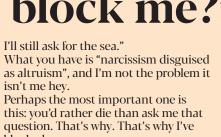
It didn't spark joy.

A band aid must be ripped off sooner or later. Sooner rather than later.

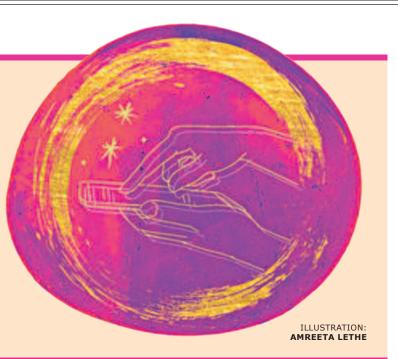
Sensory overload, overstimulation, you know

where I'm going with this. "You give me miles and miles of mountains and

Hope that answers your question.



Qazi Mustabeen Noor is a PhD candidate at Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, Canada.



FICTION

You keep blabbering and yapping as you go about pulling the curtains and turn all the tube lights on. You don't even ask if I like sitting in the twilight halfdark better. You move about my world as if you own the place.

ADHORA AHMED

This is the first time I let you in, but you've already made yourself at home. You are bumbling around in my kitchen, as though you have been making me tea for a lifetime.

Thin beams of orange sunlight enter through the window grills. There are too many buildings around to let in ample air and light. I wish you would stand by the window, so I could see how those beams fall on your face. I want to picture you somewhere more open, like a field, where you could be bathed in the full late-afternoon glow.

But then you break the spell by turning the kitchen light on, without a break in your monologue from a conversation whose thread I've lost long ago. You don't even ask me. But I've already told you to make yourself at home. The bright whiteness of the new LED bulb turns everything insipid. With no shadows on

your face anymore, no room for imagination, I start to question if you're really as cute as I

"Do you take milk and sugar?" You lift vour eyes from the simmering pot. Now that's sweet, I must admit.

But I want it raw.

You want the same too, but I didn't mean just about the tea. It has been a while since I gave in to something with full abandon. I want the rush of young love again, however cliched as it sounds. I want to be caught up in the whirlwind of passion, even though I've lived too long to be that delusional.

But you keep talking and talking, and as I try to tune in once again, I'm reminded that we are not on the same wavelength. We haven't read the same books. Hell, you barely read. But then, you go a bit still as you check the pot again. You lean in and smell, and if you want,

you can grab a ladle and taste the tea. The momentary silence makes me imagine a scene of domestic bliss. You are at home. You've been making me tea for a lifetime.

You cradle the tray in your nimble arms, closing the distance between us. Your body is as graceful as water. I don't even register your voice. But then, you claim my coffee mug as your own. You don't even ask.

You keep blabbering and yapping as you go about pulling the curtains and turn all the tube lights on. You don't even ask if I like sitting in the twilight half-dark better. You move about my world as if you own the place.

When I bring the teacup to my lips, it is ice

This is not your home.

Adhora Ahmed doesn't like breathing because love is in the air.



POETRY



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

MAISHA SYEDA

Words have crashed onto your shores, And lovers have been put to sleep On beds of nails and ashes And mausoleums in your name torn

Because of the upkeep. Too many builders paid the price And I-The King who ordered it-Was kept awake wondering.

Maisha Syeda is a writer, painter, lecturer, and a Sub editor of Star Books and Literature.

Kissing **STRANGERS**

RAIAN ABEDIN

Kissing strangers only feels good If the stranger is strange enough to lay on some bathroom floor while you do it

the kissing isn't the important part the looking is-but it's only important when

you're not actually doing a good job at looking. Stop looking for god in me, I'm paper wreaths

and I might crinkle too loudly. It's Or so I say for dramatic effect,

we don't actually need to kiss—just pretend to be drunk or asleep so I can cut off my tongue and leave it next to you.

Love is more than the additive power of all of its synonyms But I can call your bullshit, love isn't

It can mix with wordless languages Where everything ends up. Here, take this silence give it a name, call it your heart, and

fall asleep. The entirety of this story can be read out loud



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

if you know the trutheven strangers, the real kind, have more to say

in these quiet hourswhen a rhythm takes over, it's our heart/it's your silence. I am still asking you if I can kiss you

as a stranger I still want to know if the strangeness has a point.

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

Persephone's

RUSAFA RAHAT

Your gaze, a dagger, cuts through me, I'm the rotten pinked flesh upon the butcher's hook.

Flies swarm, craving Chanel rouge strawberries and pale yellow seeds, But find only seeping plasma wounds and restless dreams.

Your look, a death knell, pronounced me gone,

As if I were already among the departed. Persephone's blood stains

Like crushed maraschino cherries between pearly teeth. I forgot I was stolen away, Lost in your chilling stare,

glistening snow,

I had been taken from myself. ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA Rusafa Rahat is

a STEM student. IT intern, published poet, hopeless romantic, diplobrat, and illustrator currently residing in Vienna, Austria. You may find more of her work on @ thornchapel on Instagram.

L for less

I traverse between solid and liquid-A semi-form leaking from the edges. A mosaic of mind, tethering and bulging To transgress.

Spots on the road or bends in the trend Would suffice to transcend Me to the azure of "love". "Love" did not have me at 'hello'

Nor does it cure the cries! "Love" is the colour of the bright yellow surrounded

by stars on the skies, Blinding at night and binding at the morrow! I come cauterised and not quenched From the heaviness of my being. I rescind, take reprimand, and reapportion

The self to appropriate my grieving!

Afnan Bintey Helal is currently pursuing her Master's degree in English Literature and she believes "love" is only beautiful in fiction.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

Half eaten mornings

RAYA MEHNAZ

bread.

It is impossible to distinguish when, but I

My loss of faith coincided with your arrival. Not to say,

The sacrosanctity of human connection is lost on me.

But mostly I have Learnt to take the smaller, seemingly meaningless moments

And cherish them instead: A walk in the park; A kiss on the side of my lips; And a doodle in the space between your

I have recognized that I rarely ever want a lifetime of mornings; Just some mornings: a tea that has been steeped for too long, a half eaten slice of

Or further back, sleepy smiles; And, a head resting on my thigh. On a wispy morning, sprawling on your

It strikes me that I never witnessed you mid-sneeze.

And I would wonder, later about never seeing your mid-afternoons. Etched in the harshest yellow,



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

With squinted eyes, and sweat-drenched clothes.

It would amaze me that There have been snippets in time where I never knew you, and Likely would not in the future

when we part ways. Yet, you have seen my bare stomach, and cradled my

head in front of the rays of a dying sun. But you will never know the resemblance between my mother and I. Because you will never meet her.

I did say that My loss of faith coincided with your

arrival; But lately all I have left is faith. of an iridescent, tender, and hopeful love. For you.

And for me. A love that is ours, but not a love that we will share.

Raya Mehnaz

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