



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

Egg drop soup

Grief sneaks in your body in many ways. It wraps around your brain and controls your motion. It makes your head go crazy and not see reason.

RIFAH TASHFIA

The cream colored bowl held the steaming, almost translucent yellow broth with traces of white, garnished by an array of green onions slashed in an angle. After a long day running with kids in the playground, a tiring day at college, a long day at work, through shivers and bouts of fever, this simple soup was what made it all better. This soup was there at her highs and lows. It brightened up her day like no other—until it didn't.

The last time the cream colored bowl was served in front of her by hands that had turned wrinkly, she walked out the door with her bag over her shoulder, leaving it untouched. Maybe she would have sat on that wooden seat one last time and devoured it as her nanu watched her with kind eyes, only if she had known. That when she'd come home stumbling late that day, after 13 missed calls from the milkman,

the neighbor, the shopkeeper down the street that her nanu wasn't to be found and there was no answer to the knocks on their door, she would find the bowl as it was there—just cold—almost freezing in the temperature. Was it the weather, or just her heart that had started to turn cold, in fear of what she would find? Her nanu on her old bed, limp, eyes closed, and still smiling?

Grief sneaks in your body in many ways. It wraps around your brain and controls your motion. It makes your head go crazy and not see reason. The bowl would have remained in the spot forever if her aunt hadn't wiped the place clean before family and friends came to mourn their loss.

Afterwards, despite a thousand tries, no amount of soya sauce, salt, pepper, broth, or green onions was enough to recreate the flavour that once healed her heart. Sometimes she got mad at her nanu for being selfish; for

not leaving the recipe behind, for not slapping the back of her head and forcing her to finish the bowl before she left that day.

She gripped the edge of the kitchen counter tightly until her knuckles whitened. People leave us in many ways, but even after their exit, they linger in the air: their smell on their clothes, their bedsheet, the angle of the picturebook on the nightstand, the way their shoes remain perfectly aligned beside the bed, the empty cup of tea that must have rolled beneath the bed when it slipped their hand before they surrendered to eternal sleep.

Their phantom presence haunts us forever.

Rifah Tashfia finds comfort in down-to-earth stories that appear larger than life. She likes documenting her little life and jumping through fictional worlds at @deardiaryhyrishtia on Instagram.

POETRY

Exit wounds

RAIAN ABEDIN

Dawn. When the chorus of breaths resemble a body. Show me how to breathe without falling apart on the grass. It's too easy, some days, to open the doors. Walk out and lie down.

With spring there will be hunger and the clouds will burst open. Breathe. That's what your wounds are for. Tell me I am not a house without exits. Leave. I am used to saying things until my heart catches in my throat, spitting it out until I leave a gash somewhere deep inside. I will wait for it to heal. In summer's early arrival, we will open our windows. and I will reach out to kiss your tongue, our exit wounds shut tight.

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



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

FICTION
EXIT

YAZ UDDIN OYAN

The rain began at dusk, its cold fingers tracing the cracked panes of the house like an unwelcome visitor. By midnight, the storm had grown wild, wind howling through the trees, rattling the fragile bones of the dwelling. I stood before the door, my hand trembling on the tarnished brass handle.

The door had not been there before. Of this, I was certain.

Behind me, the room was a tomb, heavy with shadows and the stench of neglect. The walls seemed alive, pulsing with a sickly dampness, the faded wallpaper peeling in grotesque curls. I had lingered in this place too long, its silence seeping into my bones like a slow poison. Every corner bore the weight of memory—laughter that turned sour, promises broken before they were spoken aloud.

Yet, the door... it called to me.

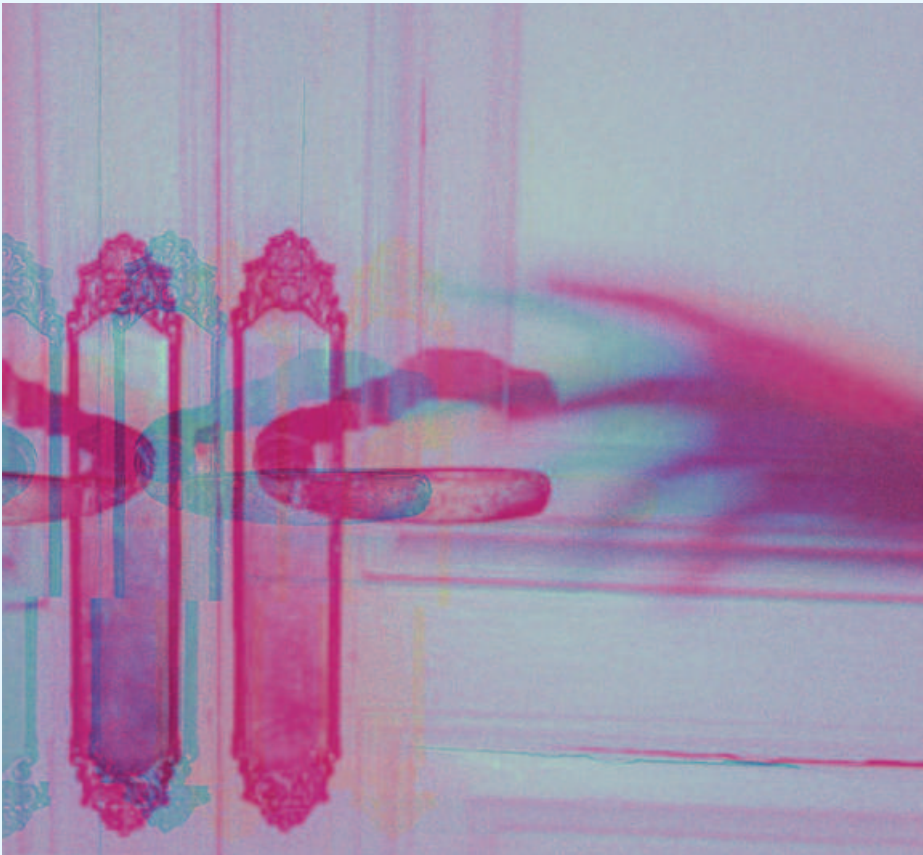
The wood was dark, marred with deep, jagged scars that seemed to writhe in the flickering lamplight. It was not a thing of this world. I could feel it—an energy that thrummed beneath my palm, a low vibration that set my teeth on edge.

Behind me, the clock ticked, each second louder than the last, hammering against my skull.

"Go," the silence seemed to murmur. I turned the handle.

The door creaked open, its groan like the lament of a dying beast. Beyond was not a hall, nor a road, but a void—a great, yawning chasm of darkness that stretched beyond comprehension. It was neither cold nor warm but carried a weight, pressing against my chest, stealing the breath from my lungs.

The ground beneath me was firm yet unseen, and the air tasted of metal, sharp and bitter. A sound rose in the stillness, low and resonant, a hum that seemed to pierce



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

my very soul. It was neither melody nor voice but something in between, something alive.

I glanced back. The room was as it had been: the chair by the fire, the books stacked haphazardly, the rain tracing sorrowful paths down the window. Yet, it felt so small, so distant, as if it belonged to another life entirely.

The door swung shut with a decisive click.

I stood there in the darkness, my heart

pounding in my ears. The hum grew louder, wrapping itself around me like a lover's embrace. My knees buckled, and for a moment, I wanted to turn back, to claw at the door and beg for the comfort of what I'd left behind.

But then I understood. This was not an escape.

Yaz Uddin Oyan is a university admission candidate from Notre Dame College.

POETRY

The melted melody of a surreal life

MOZAMMEL HAQUE RANJU

Tell me, how far you want to descend
Into your own abyss?
This dismal long exodus
Into the mind's peripheral woods is arduous.
You drag yourself forcefully
Into this alley of deluge—
And you ruefully rally round the labyrinth
Of your obnoxious, jolted life.
The savage tyrant you've become
In your own secluded realm,
You willfully turn yourself
Into a one-eyed, limping pirate
Of a rogue phantom ship
That seizes to cruise through the waves
Of the deep macabre sea.
You hardly notice the peril
Of your medieval psyche
By glimpsing down on the pixilated, mottled mirror
That will never be able to capture
The true essence of the metamorphosis
That is constantly happening inside you!
In your trance, the morbid you
Mutter some voodoo words to unfold and

engage
The covert evil power that vilifies the fallacy
Of this urban diaspora.
Your laidback bohemian mind
Unscrews the Pandora's box discreetly
And you start to hallucinate.
You raise your heavy head
From your dispersed body
And see a fog-draped nocturnal raven
At the nearby minaret top of a mosque
In the wee hours of a pathetic night.
It flaps its withered wings a few times
To shove away the stink of its injured being.
Another dubious dawn ushers
To quell the cacophony of your tortured soul—
And you continue to exist
To savour the melted melody of a surreal life.

Mozammel Haque Ranju is a marketing professional working in a reputed apparel conglomerate. A fading poet, as he claims himself to be, found an inner voice that tells him to delay his retreat.

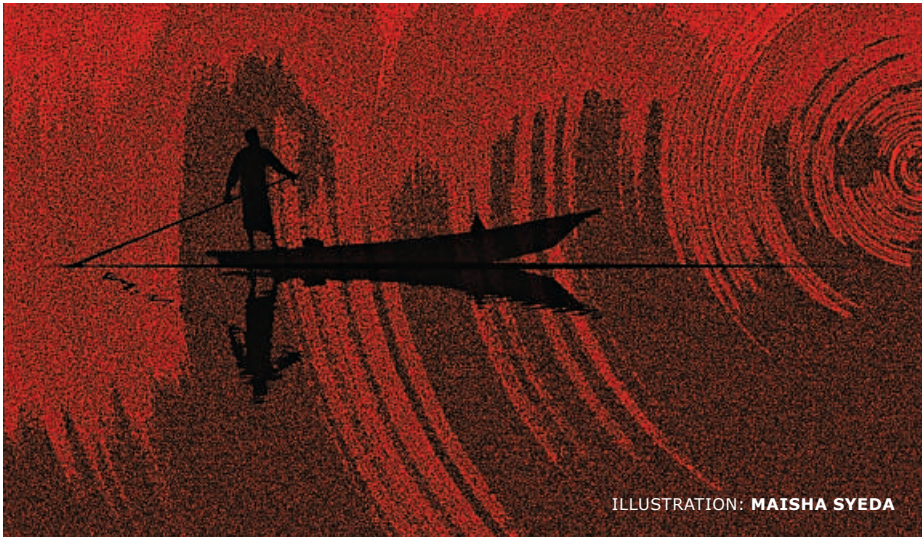


ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA