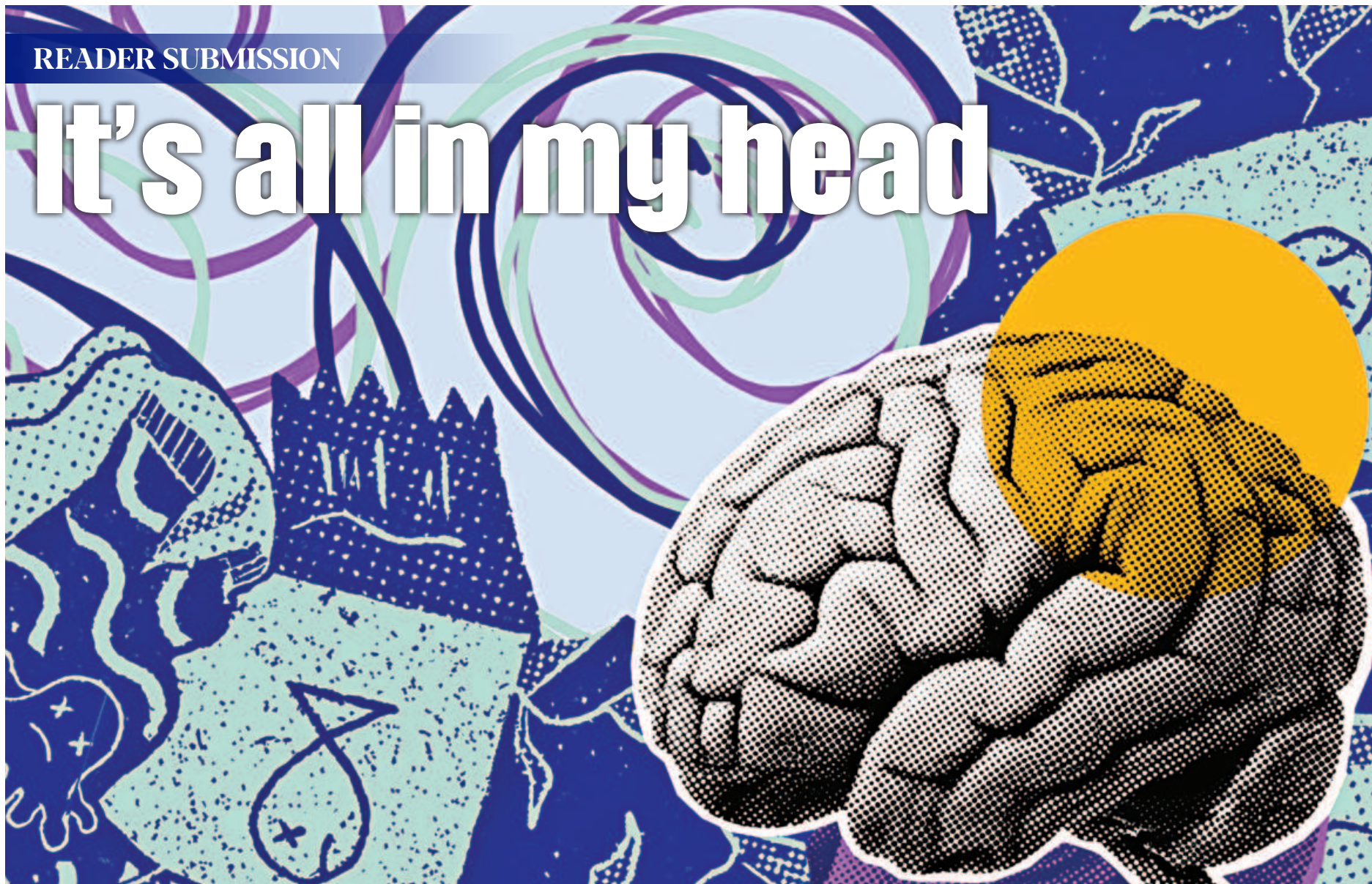


## READER SUBMISSION

# It's all in my head


ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**
**ARUNDHUTI BHATTACHARJEE**

Nila's chest tightened. She could not sleep.

"What if I am never enough? Am I doing it right? Why could I not solve the math problem? Why did it take so long?" she wondered. "Why am I not enough?"

Her ceiling fan kept creaking with a cadence. She could not see the light and got no comfort despite curling into her blanket, squeezing her eyes shut. Nila felt burdened. Although there was nothing in particular that validated this feeling, she was compelled to carry it along with her. It caused her mind to spiral into relentless loops of thoughts, each one becoming tighter than before.

The air was too stale and heavy to breathe – she could not take it. Nila felt as though she would collapse before everything else did. She wanted to cry, but she didn't.

"What would people think of me? They'd say that I am weak or too sensitive."

She never wanted to hear those words, not again. When it was quiet, these thoughts were amplified. These thoughts repeated in loops; they were too convoluted, like a noose around her sanity. And then, suddenly, the noose was undone. It occurred to her, seemingly out of the blue, that the reason for her unhappiness was herself.

Nila pressed her palms together to whisper her prayer, but her fingers quivered. To calm herself, she took a deep breath, and then did it again, and stared at the ceiling fan.

Having turned her gaze to her hands, she saw burns and scars that had been inflicted upon her. She could not wash them off because it was her fervent imagination. She did not ask for silence, but God gave it to her.

In the silence, her mind ruminated on every little detail. She hated the way she behaved in class and thought about the things she did.

"Was I showing off? Why did my teacher not reply to me

when I asked if my answer was okay? Was it because he already said so?"

Her heart beat louder than ever.

"Was I acting strange? No, I wasn't. But why does this happen?"

It gnawed at her. Unbeknownst to her, tears rolled down her cheeks. She could not refute it, not anymore. So she let them fall freely. There was no harsh judgment. The tears

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grazed against her cheeks, but she didn't wipe them. Again, she gazed at the ceiling fan. She stopped talking to people her own age a long time ago.

"Why am I always the odd one out? Why could I never fit in the puzzle?"

She failed to understand what her peers were talking about. In fact, most things felt foreign to her. She was

scared to pronounce a word. Even to breathe would probably be impertinent. Nila loathed how much she did not understand her own peers, to the point where she could not have conversations with them. It seemed a rather dire task. Making conversation with her sixty-year-old aunt seemed like a piece of cake, though.

The clock struck three.

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"I'm a good kid, right, Ma?"

Nila constantly asked.

"I want to laugh heartily, but I can't because someone has placed a stone where my heart is supposed to be, and I cannot lift it up."

Despite the heavy stone, she pulled herself up from the bed and put on her sandals. Even such a seemingly mundane task felt like a burden, but she did it anyway and went to start her day. For a long time, Nila stared at herself. As she attempted to change from her nightdress, she saw the stretch marks and felt ashamed. Hastily, she put the dress back on, brushed her teeth, and prayed to God again.

This time, she just talked to God, not in verses nor any particular structure, but she shared everything. She opted for her pen and suddenly felt her cheeks wet once again. Nila felt that she couldn't let her parents see how vulnerable she was and pulled the paper towards herself. Although she had been fidgeting, she still managed to scribble out: "Nila, you are doing great."

*Arundhuti Bhattacharjee is a fifteen-year-old student of grade nine. Besides writing, she also loves painting and is an avid reader who wishes to write for The Daily Star.*