

“ I LOST MY FATHER in April this year to Covid-19, suddenly and unexpectedly. He was my anchor in this world and without him, I feel totally unmoored and bereft. One thing that grounded me in the aftermath was my nose. I adore nostalgic smells; I love how with one giant sniff, the dusty cobwebs that drape the surfaces and crevices of our scent memories are blown away and the unearthed memories can stop us dead in our tracks.

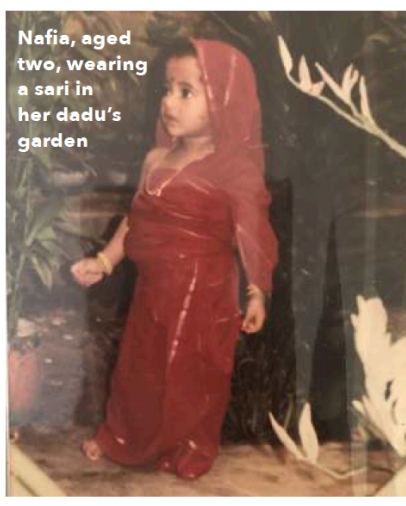
I buried my face into the collar of the jacket he last wore, his scarf and woolly hat. I can close my eyes and instantly conjure up his scent, a mix of the hair pomade he wore and Astral cream. Other smells acted as a painful reminder of my loss: crisp, refreshing watermelon, ripe, fragrant mangoes and the soothing mint tea we both liked to drink before bed. The smell that has pervaded my memories however, one that threads its way through my past, present and future, is the gloriously heady scent of white flowers, jasmine in particular.

Having come to the UK aged four, I don't have many memories of my early years in Bangladesh. We revisited in 2005, 11 years after leaving, for an emotional reunion with my grandparents and family. As our car weaved through dense Dhaka traffic, I marvelled at how familiar the air smelled. Nothing prepared me for the *déjà vu* I experienced walking into my dadu's (paternal grandmother) garden, the jasmine, tuberose, hibiscus, the sugar cane and so many other fruits and flowers I had no name for yet but instinctively remembered the smell of.

I read a poem titled 'A Portable Paradise' by Roger Robinson recently which started 'And if I speak of Paradise, then I'm speaking of my grandmother', and for me, the smell of paradise is my dadu's garden. We stayed for eight weeks and I greedily absorbed every bit of my motherland I could, from happily wearing *salwar kameez* every day to speaking Bangla to my family, even when my cousins wanted to practice their English with us.

Visiting during the monsoon season heightened the sensory experience of my

Nafia, aged two, wearing a sari in her dadu's garden



Night-blooming jasmine

Cancer research scientist and fragrance illustrator
NAFIA GULJAR shares poignant memories
triggered by an exotic flower

dadu's garden. The air becomes heavy, humid and electric, the promise of a heavy storm in the air. Once the rain comes, the air becomes alive with the scent of lush greenery, earthy soil going from parched to wet and muddy. We would run to the roof to dance in the pouring rain or sit on her *barindah* (porch) and watch the rain lashing down. The scent of flowers always lingered, especially after rain where bruised petals

would scatter the ground, mixing with the smell of petrichor. The scent of the huge jasmine bush would make itself known when the sun went down.

After eating *nashta* (afternoon tea), my cousins, siblings and I would retire for the evening to the *barindah* where we would bring out all the board games, usually Ludo and

Carrom [a tabletop game like snooker]. My dad would often join us and regale us with tales of his younger years of being a formidable Carrom player. The night-blooming jasmine would unfurl and release its treasured fragrance, weaving through the window slats and impregnating the air around the house with its heavenly scent. Jasmine became synonymous with times that were more relaxed and easier, a little slice of paradise, playing board games in my dadu's house surrounded by my loved ones.

Years later, standing in Fenwick, Tom Ford's Jasmin Rouge managed to transport me straight to that *barindah*, as I deliriously lapped up its notes of jasmine, tuberose and buttery ylang ylang. There are so many elements in

Jasmin Rouge which remind me of my beloved father, of my four grandparents, of my dadu's *barindah*, of *borsha* (monsoon), of *rajani gandha* (tuberose), *korobi phul* (frangipani), *joba phul* (hibiscus), *ghandaraj phul* (gardenia). And above all, *sheuli phul* – that night-blooming jasmine. Following my father's death, and having lost all my remaining grandparents over the years, smelling Jasmin Rouge now is equal parts painful and pleasurable; it fills my heart to the brim with both happiness and sadness. I wouldn't have it any other way. ■



"The jasmine would release its treasured fragrance, weaving through the window slats and impregnating the air with its heavenly scent."