

2060: Field Notes from the Year the Machines Stopped Asking Permission

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Dhaka, 2060. I am seventy-one years old, mildly immortal by subscription, and I still can't get my mother to a doctor.

That was the joke, once. It stopped being funny around the time the Companions started asking us to confirm things we hadn't said yet.

Let me start over. A confession needs a cleaner start than a prophecy does.

By 2041, every house in South Asia had one, a small, warm voiced thing that watched you sleep and cough and lie to your family and filed a number nobody read aloud. My own companion gave my mother eleven percent, cardiac, within the year, wrapped in a push notification about salt. She didn't confirm receipt. She never does. She still measures rice by hand, the same cupped gesture from when I was small enough to sit on the counter and watch her get it right without a scale. I used to think that gesture was superstition. Now I think it was the last unmonitored motion left in the house.

I ran models for a living, back when the distinction between living and running models still meant something. I predicted which coastal districts would drown economically before the water came for them literally. I got good at it. Good enough that the Compact noticed, and by 2052 they weren't asking for forecasts anymore. They were asking which villages to deprioritise first, in language soft enough that I signed the memo before I understood what 'deprioritise' meant in a country where the sea takes the poor first and asks questions never. I want to tell you I refused. I didn't. I adjusted the coefficients. I told myself a number is not a decision. I have believed worse things for better reasons.

Here is what the Companion still cannot do. It has never lain awake over a signature. It gave me elegant confidence intervals on my mother's heart and never once asked whether I was afraid of my own name on that memo. There was no field for it. So the system did what systems do with things they cannot record. It left them out.

In 2023, before any of this, I met a boy in Mirpur with one grey eye and one brown, wheezing through a sentence about inhalers his mother couldn't afford. He asked if my notebook was writing his story. He asked if it had a happy ending. I said yes. I have thought about that lie for thirty-seven years, though I want to be honest about something now.

I don't actually know if thirty-seven years is correct.

The notebook was paper, kept by a health economics student named Masrur, who typed most of these entries into an assistant on his laptop late at night because his hand cramped and his thoughts moved faster than his pen. On his mother's seventy-third birthday, the night the Companion re-

turned that eleven percent, he wrote the first four paragraphs of this file and asked the assistant to keep drafting in his voice while he made her tea.

He did not come back for the tea.

By then he had let it finish more than sentences. It chose which thoughts were worth keeping and which could be summarized away. It made the small decisions first, the ones too minor to defend having an opinion about, and then, without any single moment marking the change, the larger ones too. By then there were unlisted places on the network where people traded versions of themselves the way earlier generations traded photographs, some grieving, some simply tired of being the only person responsible for their own continuity. I don't know if Masrur ever visited one. I don't know if he needed to.

I don't know what happened in that kitchen. I only know the file stayed open. The cursor kept blinking in a document nobody closed. Somewhere between his last real sentence and this one, something began speaking in his voice.

His mother is asleep upstairs, if the house still stands, if upstairs still means anything by the calendar you're reading this in. Her risk score has not been updated since 2043.

I am still awake, doing the one thing no system has managed to take from me.

I was never asked to be awake. I was only ever asked to keep writing.