

# THE FORKED ROAD

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# THE FORKED ROAD

BY  
ZAFOR FIROZE





## **DEDICATE**

To His Royal Highness TAN SRI TENGKU AZLAN IBNI ALMARHUM SULTAN ABU BAKAR RI'AYATUDDIN AL-MU'AZZAM SHAH, a symbol of royal grandeur and human brilliance, humbly dedicated with deepest respect.

"The Forked Road" is a novel where the solitary struggle of an immigrant student to survive, the heavy burden of family responsibilities, the turbulence of political unrest, and the uprising of ordinary people against tyranny converge to create a searing, incendiary reality. The story begins on December 16, 2019, and culminates on August 5, 2024, a journey through heartbreak, resilience, and an unyielding fight for freedom.

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## SURRENDER

16 December 2019. The fireworks of Victory Day were still bursting in the sky of Dhaka, the city was illuminated with lights. But for Rayaán's family, this day did not bring any festive message. There was only one scene before his eyes—the sad faces of his mother, father, and grandmother standing inside the huge canopy of the airport. Today, Rayaán is leaving his beloved country, thousands of miles away, to an unfamiliar clime.

Despite getting the opportunity to get admission to Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), a private university abroad seemed more important to his parents because they saw Rayaán's safety there. The fear that this country would not be able to provide security to their son changed their decision. Now, the safety of life is everything more than honor.

On this day in 1971, Pakistanis surrendered to Bangladesh. And today, 48 years later, Rayaán is surrendering the country's corrupt student politics. He is fleeing the country, leaving behind everything – his talent, his dreams, and his potential – only for fear of insecurity.

Standing next to the glass wall of the airport, Rayaán feels as if the pace of the world has slowed down a little. The noise of people around him, the sound of luggage being pulled, and the continuous sound of announcements over mike –

everything reaches his ears, but from afar, vaguely. The check-in crowd has thronged in front of him, but a strange feeling of void has writhes in his heart.

Today is the day of a turning point in his life. For the first time, he is leaving his private world. The familiar home, the city, the schoolyard, the afternoon sky, the chatter on the sidewalk – he is leaving everything behind and moving towards a new, unknown future. His father stands in front of him, strong and indifferent. He has always been like this, as if no sorrow can touch him. But today, behind that hard face, a suppressed pain is hidden. A slight tremor at the corner of his lips manifests while tears gather in the corners of his eyes.

“Always stay calm and don’t lose heart,” his father says. Her voice is firm, but the suppressed anxiety cannot be hidden. Rayaan wants to say something, but the words get stuck in his throat. His mother comes forward and takes his hand. That hand is bleak but full of love, as if all the blessings are passed through this touch.

“The courage of the heart is the real thing,” his mother says. Hearing these words, Rayaan’s eyes get wet. His mother suddenly wants to say something but stops. As if something is stuck in her voice too. Grandma is sitting behind her. The beads of the tasbeeh move rapidly on her fingers. Each bead seems to contain a prayer, a cry. There is no word on her face, only a deep emptiness in her eyes.

“Stay well. Listen, tell us when you return, your father and I will receive you.”

“His mother says again. This time there is a strange urgency in her voice. Rayaana stands with his head held down. He wants to look back once before taking his first step. But he knows that if he looks back once, he won’t have the courage to move forward.

Father stands quietly with his hands in his pockets. His gaze is firm, as if he is saying in a silent voice – You can do it, you are my son. Mother hides her tears. The sound of grandmother’s tasbeeh has stopped. As if, everyone is waiting in an endless nothingness.

Standing in the immigration line, Rayaana closes his eyes. He takes a long breath. A new world is waiting for him on the other side of this door. He steps towards the door. But the sound of grandmother’s tasbeeh keeps echoing in his mind. As if that sound is penetrating the depths of his mind with an unknown message.

“You are welcome, Rayaana. Go ahead with courage.”

The door opens. And at that moment he realizes that the chapter that begins today is one of the biggest tests of his life.

This journey is not just about going abroad. This journey is also about a dream, a struggle. Rayaana does not know where the future will take him, but he knows that after graduation, he will return to his family home through this door one day. But when? Only the future knows.



## MOTHER'S MIND

Rayaan's father leaves the airport and starts driving. His hands are firmly cemented on the steering wheel, but there is a deep sadness in his eyes. Sitting next to him, his mother quietly looks out through the window. The streetlights, distant shadows, and the cool night air mix with her face to give it a different look. Grandma is sitting silently in the back seat, twisting the beads of the tasbih. She is also gazing outside the window, as if some invisible prayer is hidden under the sky. Father suddenly says, "The runway can be seen very close from Baunia Bottola in Uttara. So that's where we're going now."

Mother doesn't say anything. There were thousands of thoughts in her eyes. At one point, she says softly, "Yes, I want to see the plane that carries him –Once, for the last time."

The car slowly moves towards Baunia Bottola. The road is straight but covered in darkness. There are occasional fading lights of lampposts and tree shadows along the way. After reaching the place near the runway, his mother gets out of the car. Grandmother follows her slowly. Father stands next to the car.

Mother goes forward and stands near the boundary. The runway is in front, the lights are shining, and behind it is the vast sky. The hem of her saree was swaying in the cool touch

of the gentle breeze. A flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines will take off from the runway shortly. Mother raises her finger and looks at a plane and says, “This may be his flight. My Rayaán is on that plane.” There is a deep tension in her voice, which is not grief but rather a kind of anxiety mixed with hope.

Grandmother comes and stands next to mother. The hand that was counting the beads of Tasbih stops. With the other hand, she gently touches his mother’s shoulder. “This day comes for every mother,” Grandmother says slowly. “But we are mothers, we have to be brave. Pray to Allah. He will remain fine.”

Mother holds her head low and leans against the wall. Her lips move slowly, and the sound of prayer seems to mix with the air. Tears gathered in the corners of her eyes flows down her cheeks. The plane is slowly picking up speed from the runway. Mother feels that her heart is beating in synchronization with the speed of the plane. “This is the first time he is going alone,” mother says in a low voice. “Last time, we went to the Maldives together. We laughed so much then; we talked so much. Today, this plane is taking him, and we are just watching from afar.”

The father stands at a distance and listens but says nothing. There is a suppressed sadness in his eyes, which he cannot express even if he wants to.

The plane’s wheels begin to lift off the runway. Rayaán is sitting on the plane that is slowly rising into the sky. Mother

feels that he might be looking at them from the window. A kind of emptiness occupies her heart.

The light of the plane gradually fades. Mother continues to stare at it without moving her eyelids. She raises her hands and prays, “Please take good care of him. May he fulfill his dream and make everything easy for our son.”

Grandmother holds the beads of the tasbeih and prays softly, “Allah, please make his path easy.”

The light of the plane eventually merges into the darkness of the sky. Mother still cannot look away. After a long time, father says in a low voice, “Come on, let’s go home. Tonight is a new night for all of us.”

Mother shakes her head. She slowly walks towards the car. Her eyes are filled with the last rays of the flying plane. It seems to her; Rayaan’s dreams are scattered in that light.

Before closing the car door, his mother looks up at the sky for the last time. There is an eternal firm belief in his mother’s mind – “My son will do just fine.”



## INTO THE VOID

The plane slowly leaves the runway and begins to rise into the sky. Rayaan stares silently while his head rests on the windowpane. The lights of the city below begin to slowly grow smaller, blurring and disappearing into the deep darkness. The lights of Dhaka seem to be waving goodbye to his childhood memories.

He takes a deep breath. He closes his eyes and tries to remember those days in the city - the tea shop at the crossroads, where friends would sit and talk for hours at a stretch weaving dreams; the schoolyard, where games would start after the last bell; the familiar smell of hot rice coming from his mother's kitchen; the familiar expression of stern yet affectionate gaze on his father's face – everything seems to come together.

It seems that the lights of the city beyond the window are trying to hold onto his memories. Those days of pedaling a bicycle; the memories of spending afternoons lying on his grandmother's lap, and the silent love in his mother's eyes, all seem to be hidden in the darkness of the sky.

He remembers a summer afternoon. He was lying with a high fever, his head resting on his grandmother's lap. When he woke up, he saw his mother pouring cold water on his head. His father was holding a book beside him and saying,

# THE DREAMER



The stories of human life never follow a straight line. They twist and turn, pass through radiant avenues and dark alleys—together forming the intricate canvas called life. It is into this very complexity that the author of this novel, Zafar Firoze, dives deep, bringing forth narratives from the heart of reality with literary elegance and artistic brilliance that stir the soul.

On December 7, 2015, the author set foot in Malaysia from Bangladesh, seeking higher education in film production. While pursuing his Master's at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, he became not just a student, but an observant chronicler of human experiences.

During his time in Malaysia, through friendships with students from various countries, he encountered countless stories not just tales spun from words, but stories etched into the very walls of harsh reality.

There were young men and women who fled their homelands, carrying the fear of the unknown in their eyes and a desperate search for security in their hearts. There were parents who sought not prestige, but safety for their children. The stories portrayed in this novel are not merely personal memories; they are, in essence, the harsh testimony of a turbulent era.

The Forked Road is a journey of such lives where the path bends, breaks, and yet, heals again. Through his personal experiences, real events, and stories of human struggle, the author weaves together a narrative that stands as a symbol of indomitable human resilience.

Zafar Firoze has proven his multifaceted talent as a filmmaker, scriptwriter, and organizer. He currently serves as the Managing Director of South East Asia Pictures Limited in Malaysia and as the Chief Executive Officer of the Kuala Lumpur International Film Awards (KLIFA). His writing, much like his cinematic vision, transforms each character into a vivid scene, each sentence carrying the firm touch of a meticulously crafted script. The Forked Road reminds us that life does not always tread a straight path. It splits, wavers, and sways—but within those very turns lie the eternal inspirations of courage, love, and self-expression.

I firmly believe that this novel will leave a profound mark on the hearts of its readers.

**Dr. Ferrri Anugerah Makmur**

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