

RISING STARS

MYSTERY AT MANDRAKE MANSION

by Munazah Alam

Shivers down your spine! This week we begin a serialised story about a mansion with a difference

"You know what," I said, "that idea of yours was terrific. A picnic will be great fun!"

I was speaking to my friends, Chris Calvert, and Jean and Diane, the Wykoff twins.

Chris and I were in the same school and I was spending the summer with her in her home town, Marlow. She had invited me over and my parents had not put forward any objections.

So June found me in the small town of Marlow enjoying myself tremendously. A few days after our arrival Chris' friends, the Wykoff twins, Jean and Diane, also arrived. They were identical twins of seventeen, about the same age as Chris and me. Diane was the taller of the two at five foot six and had black hair, while her sister, at five foot five, had blond hair and green eyes in contrast to her own brown ones.

Once we got to know one another we got on like a house on fire. Chris' father was (and still is) a detective and she too, with the help of the twins, had helped the law several times. Before long they had told me of all the mysteries they had solved. Listening to them I secretly began to wish that something would crop up while I was there.

So there I was, lying in the sun with the other three, drinking lemonade and making plans for the picnic the next day. We had decided to explore the grounds of Mandrake Mansion, now an empty place, but one which had once helped many Negroes escape to the North before the Civil War.

"How far is it from Marlow?" I inquired.

"What? Oh, Mandrake. Well let's see — about forty miles."

"When do we start?" the question came from Jean. "We can't get away until after nine. What with Mum and Dad away our chores around the house have increased."

"Well," began Chris, "in that case how about ten?" and continued as Jean nodded. "It'll take us the whole afternoon to explore all of it, so we'll take some snacks with us too. You two take that and we'll take lunch — okay?"

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"Sure," answered Diane. "What a pity the mansion is private property or we could have explored that too. I'd love to have a look at those hidey-holes they used for the Underground Railway."

I agreed with her. "Yes, that would have been fun."

Jean got up and turned to her twin. "Come on Di, we'd better get moving; the groceries are waiting to be bought and I still haven't written to Mum and Dad. Bye you two. See, you tomorrow."

Groaning, Diane got to her feet. "Ick. I haven't written either, and there won't be any time tomorrow," and turning to us, she added, "Bye, see you."

The next day Chris and I got up early and helped Mrs. Jameson, the Calvert's housekeeper, to prepare our picnic lunch. Mrs. Jameson had been with the Calverts since Chris was thirteen when her parents had divorced.

At ten we picked up Diane and Jean and started for Mandrake Mansion in Chris' yellow Toyota. Chris was driving as she was the only one among us who was old enough to have a license. After an hour's chatting and laughing we reached Mandrake. Chris parked the car under some walnuts and we got out and stretched our legs.

"Wow, it sure is dark in here," remarked Chris. "I'd heard that the grounds were more like a wood now, but I didn't think it would be this dense."

It was as Chris had said — dark and dense. All around us were walnut trees which were blotting out the sun. Here and there, there were patches of grass, and in between sometimes, a flower or two peeped out at us. And it was quiet — so quiet that the silence seemed to be screaming at us.

"Let's have an early lunch," I suggested. "Then we won't have to worry about coming back to the car, and we can't carry the picnic-box if we want to enjoy ourselves."

"Good idea! Yes, let's eat first — come on twin, help me get this out."

As the twins carried the box out of the car Chris and I spread out the rugs. After the food had been set out we began to eat.

"Where shall we start?"

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Diane asked Chris through a mouthful of chicken sandwich. "Here of course; and we'll work our way through towards the mansion."

Helping myself to some cheese I asked, "Is there anyone living in the mansion at the moment?"

"None that I know of. Dad told me it's empty when I asked him."

When we finished we put everything back into the car and began to walk around, looking around us as we did. We had gone some way into the

wood and not one of us had spoken since we had left the car. It was as dark as ever and it seemed as though the silence was forbidding us to trespass into foreign territory.

Jean tried to make conversation. "Say, Chris," she began, "don't you think this would be the perfect place to start hunting for a new mystery? We..." She didn't get any further for just at the moment a blood-curdling scream rang through the woods! And then silence.

To be continued...



by Utpal Bashar

The first thing which struck me as different when I arrived at Heathrow Airport in London was the structure of the houses lining both sides of the roads. They were all of old English style and they all had slanting roofs unlike the modern houses back home.

Another thing which struck me as different was the bare and leafless appearance of the trees lining the streets. I had expected to see thick snow but of course the only thing which greeted me was green grass.

The joy of being able to walk from place to place of always being driven by a chauffeur was tremendous, we usually caught a double decker bus from Esher Gardens, the apartment complex in which we lived, every morning. Another thing which never occurred at home and which I loved was that my breath came out in white puffs, like steam from a kettle, when the weather was chilly, at that time at home I'd be sweating in the tropical heat and the change was indeed very welcome.

one is being murdered or criminally violated in the blink of an eye, we should all try and do our bit to lighten the burden of sorrow and depression. Especially for those who live life in the fast lane and the idea of a few quiet moments to oneself means moping around, well forget it. If the oppressed and the starving can manage a smile for the world, surely you can manage one for yourself. Cheer up and forget the things which make you depressed in the least bit, for you never know how far that little bit may stretch. Life's too short to be taken too seriously anyway!

1. ALLADIN'S LAMP:

To match with the speed of fast and busy modern life, man has invented fast foods too. This undoubtedly has made life easy and comfortable. But very recently a new polite computerised device has been discovered in which, when a customer places his order, it appears on similar screens in the kitchens, eliminating the need for clerks to shout and walk orders back to the cooks. Getting amazed? Well, it's simply the story of Alladin's lamp come true.

2. GOOD NEWS:

We have speed post, Skypak, DHL and what not in the name of courier service. But SKI (Street Kids' International) is a courier service run entirely by street children in Bangalore, in India and fifteen other cities worldwide. Very soon it will be extended to other cities round the world. So, next time an urchin knocks at your door, don't shoo him away but welcome him with a smile for who knows, in his dirty hands you might find a gift from someone you love.

My First Impression of London

by Shyla Sobhan (Class VIII)

Whoever said the British are mean to Asians must most definitely be insane for they're not only sweet but also extremely hospitable. I discovered this when I was travelling to London on my first British Airways Flight. Even as I walked happily on the streets of London, if I chanced to bump into people, I was taken aback when I saw how apologetic they were. The whole population wasn't exactly smiling, but then on the other hand, people didn't turn up their noses at us either.

Much to my surprise the London prices weren't astronomical and we were successful in doing an adequate amount of shopping. When I say that the prices were reasonable I am of course referring to the prices in stores such as Marks and Spencer, Elys, Boots, Miss Selfridge and so on. Harrods definitely does not enter the list since its astronomical prices cause reactions varying from laughter to tears in different people.

Another thing which comes to mind when I mention Harrods is the sign on top of the bakery shelves. We were admiring the beautiful icing of the cakes on display when it came to my mind that they were good enough to be photographed. Just at that moment I chanced to look up and saw in front of me, fixed to the wall, a sign which read, "PHOTOGRAPHY LIMITED". What an ironical coincidence!

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Close Encounter with the 'Holy Pig'

by A. M. Amin

The day I got my acceptance letter from a US university I was surprised to feel a strange sort of numbness. After all those months of hoping and praying to go to the land of 'Happy Days', Mac Donalds and Twinkies Cup Cakes but most of all to freedom, whatever that meant, why wasn't I just bursting with joy? The thought of being 'independent' just didn't seem so wonderful anymore, what would it be like, how would I fit in, what if I was questions that kept me awake at night.

But as the day of my flight date drew nearer, the

adrenaline began to flow through my veins again. It's really happening, I thought. My dream was really going to come true. A life full of new and exciting opportunities seemed to lie ahead of me and I just couldn't wait to begin it.

But perhaps my revived enthusiasm was due to the fact that both my parents were accompanying me for the purpose of 'settling me in' and my brother was already in the states going to university there. The feeling of insecurity therefore, had not hit me — yet.

The first thing that shocked me into reality as I stepped out of Logan Airport was the weather. Boston in January, though pretty with snow, was also bitterly cold and to me, quite uninviting. I suddenly longed for the hot, sultry afternoons of Bangladesh, the fragrance of 'shewly' in the morning, and the hum of crickets at night.

It wasn't the first time that I had been to the States. I had gone on a one month long trip with my mother to about 7 American states when I was twelve. But my visions of 38 flavoured icecreams and Mickey Mouse seemed to melt into nothingness as I felt the cold wind biting into my flesh and thought of the prospect of going through another 3 winters. But perhaps the greatest shock of all was seeing so many foreigners. Then I realized with a self deprecating laugh — I was the foreigner, not them!

Being a rather coddled

child I did not find it at all surprising that both my parents accompanied me to 'school' for my 'orientation day'. As we trudged over the snowy hill towards the Inter-Cultural office I was struck by the majestic churchlike buildings that formed the campus of this Jesuit College. But as soon as my parents bid me farewell after handing me over to the International Student Counsellor, I was gripped with panic. No don't leave me, I pleaded in silence, take me back home, my eyes implored.

Finding the classroom where the orientation class was taking place proved to be like going through a crazy maze. I was of course late. Unfamiliar though, not unfriendly faces looked at me as I stealthily walked in the student advisor gave me an encouraging smile and asked me to take a seat. While she bubbled on about how wonderful the school was I looked around at my fellow victims. With mortification I realized how dumpy I looked in my layers of woolens in front of those girls in their 'preppy' turtle necks and designer jeans. I had overlooked the fact that while it was below zero degrees outside, the heating inside the rooms made it seem like summer. I also realized as I looked around that I was the only Asian or to put it bluntly, the only non white.

After about half an hour of what seemed like a complicated introduction that sounded like Chinese to me (I seemed to have forgotten English in my anxiety), we were informed that we were to be taken on a tour of the campus. Now I would never get home, I thought miserably.

By the time we reached the 'sports complex' which looked like something out of Space 1999, I felt like a cardiac patient and the thought about running around in the 'gym'

made me feel positively ill. I was also getting a little tired of the continuous 'Oh Cool', 'Awesome' and 'wicked nice' from my New England companions. I asked our student assistant, a cheery Jewish girl, when I would be able to go home. To my surprise she replied, "Don't worry honey we're moving towards the 'tea' stop. I alluded this strange answer to two possibilities — either I had lost command of the English language, or she was one of those escaped mental asylum patients in the American movies they showed on TV back home.

Keep calm, I thought and meekly followed the brood towards the 'dining hall'. After meeting some faculty members and the huge stadium I was feeling almost psychotic towards the student advisor. Everytime I brought up the question of going home she told me that she was taking us to the 'tea stop'. Finally I could bear it no longer and with the determination of an obsessed E.T. I burst out, "But I don't want any tea, I just won't go home." This time the student advisor just convulsed into hysterical laughter joined by some of the other students. I could barely contain my anger and frustration. It was then that she explained, "That's why we're going to the 'T' stop which is the train stop that will take you home!"

During the rest of the 'orientation' day many such incidents were to occur with the blunders made not only from my side I had my own share of laughs when I was asked questions like 'Oh do you avoid eating pork because the pig is a holy animal?' and 'Do you really live in trees?' By the time 'orientation' was over my fascination for eating out of slot machines went off and I had almost convinced my student advisor that I did not belong to any 'tribe'. "Culture shock," I realized, could go both ways!

QUIZ CLUB



Here are this week's Quiz questions:

1. Which city is called the 'Birds of the Sea'?
2. Which ocean has the world's greatest source of offshore oil?
3. Who wrote 'The Prophet'?
4. Name the youngest elected president of the US.
5. Who was Francois Voltaire?
6. What is a trombone?
7. Where is the 'Charles River'?
8. Where is the palace of Alhambra?
9. Who made a century in the first match between Australia and New Zealand in the fifth World Cup Cricket?
10. How many bones are there in a normal human body?

Here are the answers to Feb 14th's Quiz Club questions.

1. Lucy
2. First minister of France from 1624 to 1642.
3. Poet, philosopher and artist born near Mount Lebanon 1883-1931.
4. William Kidd was born in Scotland in 1645. He was convicted of piracy and hanged in London in 1701.
5. Mauna Loa in Hawaii is 13,680 feet high, with a crater 3 miles long and 1½ miles wide.
6. Cassius Marcellus Clay
7. Franklin D. Roosevelt for 12 years and 39 days.
8. Faster, Higher, Stronger.
9. Jahangir Nagar
10. 'Khabidi'.

JOKES

- 1) Jack Rabbit: Phew, what a hot day it is today!
- 2) Mack Rabbit: Yeah, let's put off our coats!
- 3) Susan: When can't you clap your hands?
- 4) Alice: I don't know.
- 5) Susan: When you are a clock!
- 6) Billy: Here's my new magnifying glass, Harry. I can see everything very clearly when I see through it.
- 7) Harry: How 'magnify' cent!

- 4) Mary: Happy Birthday, Vicky and here's your birthday present.
- 5) Vicky: Thank you very much, Mary, but I didn't really need a present!
- 6) Mary: Then you won't mind if I take it back!
- 7) A student was clapping his hands in the class.
- 8) Teacher: Why are you clapping your hands?
- 9) Student: I'm not clapping my hands! I'm killing mosquitoes!

Compiled by Sanjida Shahmed Class-X

Bet you didn't know