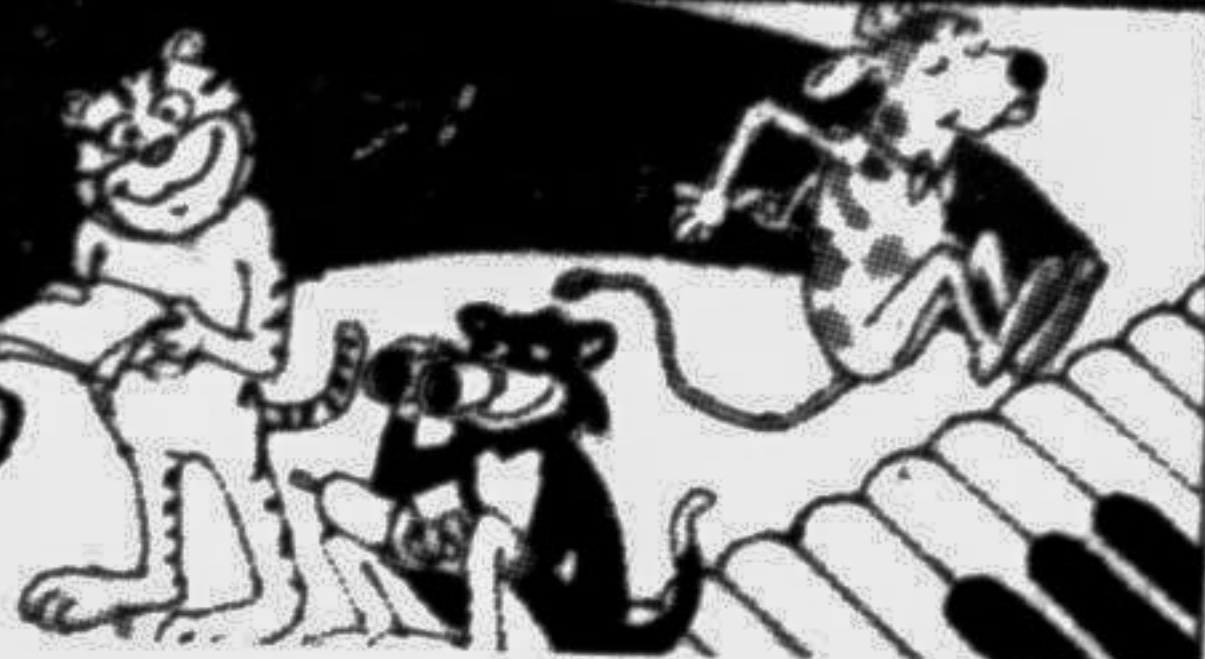


ARISING STARS



Adventure in Sylhet

by Chowdhury A A Quaseed Bin Husayne

THE murky gloom of our surroundings was not pleasant. The skies were black, heavily clouded. There were no stars. Nor could the moon be seen. Against its blackness was marked out the blacker silhouettes of the densely forested hills of Sylhet. Other than the few lights left on inside our bungalow, where we had taken up lodgings, the only other light was in the garden — a weak tuff at the centre of a small circle of illumination.

It was our first day in Sylhet and we had returned to our temporary residence at half past eleven in the night after a whole day's wanderings. Strangely, the bungalow had seemed so much livelier during the day. My mother took my two younger brothers and my grandma along the veranda to their rooms while my father dismissed the car. As I watched the tail lamps snake its way down the hillside the feeling of isolation deepened, the housekeeper had come up but before he could speak my father asked to be led to the telephone. The keeper looked up regretfully and informed that the line had been disconnected a few weeks earlier. That was the final stroke. Both my father, and I were immediately precipitated into worries, especially when we were further told that there were no human settlements within a few miles, and that the only other people in the bungalow was the housekeeper himself, an aged gardener and a cook all of whom lived at the foot of the hill on top of which was our lodge.

my father asked his name. he replied enigmatically "we share the come surname — Chaudhury."

"Where are you settled?" probed my father.

"I have wandered a lot — for the time being I am checking Sylhet out."

"What do you do?"

"I have done lots of different kinds of things in my life — now just this and that."

My father was losing his patience and his anxiety mounted as the man asked how long would we stay — to which my father said "just a day or two". The man seemed to know we were all alone and that, indeed more of our relations were supposed to have come. Finally father decided it was enough. "I am sorry but, but I am exhausted and I don't think I

it?" but there was no reply. We all stared at the curtains, only thin sheet of glass stood between us and some unknown peril.

"Guard, guard" cried out my father. The housekeeper hurried up to us, for he had been sleeping in the corridor outside as instructed. Together we searched but found nothing. With a lingering sense of discomfort we came back to spend the rest of the troubled night when the light tapping was heard once again, this time louder.

I dived forward and pulled up the bed cover that was hanging over the side of the bed and there lay our little boy servant snoring away through his congested nose which was amplified by the stillness of the night. And our minds, already



could quite place you." The man rose with that same grin, put on his overcoat and his hat, but paused "would you care to come out for a walk" he offered. "No thank you" declined my father.

The man strode out to his jeep parked in the shade of a tree where we had not seen it and drove away.

Much perturbed by the peculiar experience and the full-size glazed windows without grills, opening out into the jungles, we shifted our beds into one huge room and retired for the night.

About 2 am, came a faint tapping — a shift tapping. My parents arose and so did I, it was faint and came on after long intervals but it was there. My father thundered "who is

moved to suspicion, had assumed such formidable proportions.

What a hilarious joke the event was in the whole family afterwards.

Even the stranger was accounted for. He was a friend of the bungalow's owner from whom he had learned whatever information about us and thought he had known my father. Even when he saw him he thought it was only the effect of the difference and he was being vague because he was trying to find out whether the person whom he had thought my father to be had remembered him or not.

What a ridiculously pathetic incident it was — I realize as I recount it.

"There is someone here to meet you" the keeper told my father who was totally bewildered. Who in Sylhet could have known we were here? he wondered aloud. As we entered the drawing room we saw a head projecting over the black of an armchair. Smoke was curling up all around the stranger as he sat watching TV. As he heard our approach he rose to greet us, displaying his burly physique, heavy whiskers, twirling mustache and heavy eyebrows, a pipe clenched between his teeth. He grinned "welcome to Sylhet. I nodded and continued on my way to my room but concealing myself behind a partition began to eavesdrop upon the suspicions man.

It was clear my father did not know him though he did not admit it to the stranger who insisted upon having met my father 20 years earlier. My father was trying various links but none seemed to ring a bell. Even when he asked questions the strangers answers were surreptitious and evasive. When

UFO in Daylight

by Mahjabeen Hassan

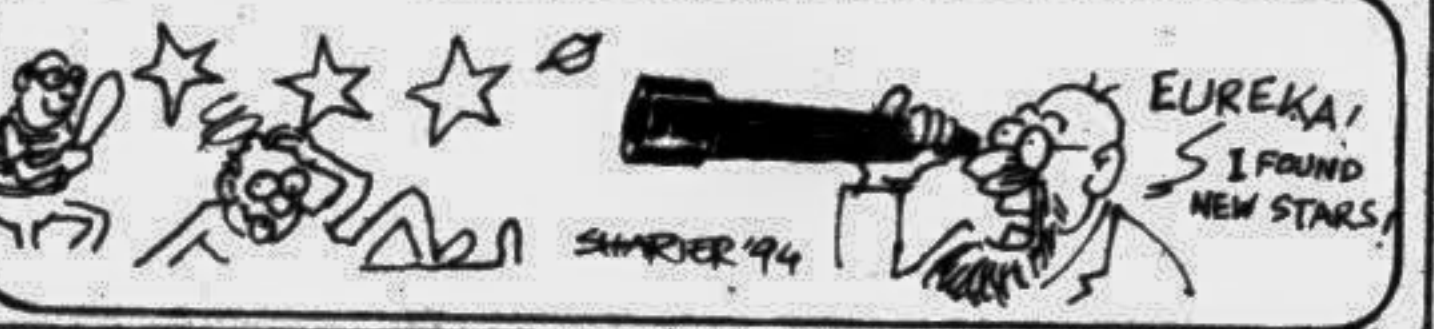
I was very curious about the new girl in our class. She was also our neighbour. Her name was Lucy Dolds. She was a little strange. The subjects she took in High School were also strange. She took Trigonometry, Elective Maths, Geology, Ornithology, Philology and Sociology. She was a bug in astronomy too. Sometimes at night she would go to some park to study stars.

Soon we got to be best friends. She would always take me with her on holidays to do some bird watching as she studied ornithology, we were friends but she never revealed any sort of secret to me. One day when I went to her house I found her writing something on a diary. I sat down beside her. Just then Mrs Dolds came and said that there was a phone call for Lucy. When she went out of her room I saw that she was writing her diary in some other of language, but not English. I guessed it to be French. As she studied Philology she knew a number of foreign languages. Anyway, I went home an hour later.

One day we both went to Samson's Park with Lucy's telescope. As she was watching through the telescope she suddenly gave a little gasp and backed away. I too looked and backed away. We had both seen a UFO in broad daylight. We quickly went home.

That night, when I sat in front of the TV set hoping they would announce the sight of a strange thing, much like a UFO, I was not only surprised but also shocked to find out that today a spacecraft had been launched into space. So we only saw a spacecraft and thought it to be a UFO.

The next day both of us were laughing over this imprudent matter.



The Chaos Destroying the Entire Universe

The Chaos

by Sharier Khan

CROUGHER came in. He was fine and smiling.

"What happened to Steve?" He screamed from far away. Steve replied like a robot. "I am through."

Crouger came to a halt only five feet away from Shamir but 15 feet away from Steve. "Where are we?" Shamir asked Crouger. "Are we inside the dark abyss and hallucinating?" Crouger promptly said. "We are at a place where my radiation measurement gadget does not work. This place has a radiation level equivalent to that of three suns I guess. I wonder if we live at all."

"You are living. I am through," Steve said.

Shamir and Crouger laughed. "Yeah, we are kind of living but how come you are talking if you are through?"

"I was simply suspended at the moment I was dying. I would continue talking as long as you want me to." Steve nonchalantly said.

"How did you die?" Shamir asked him.

"In the great tunnel of chaos."

"Whats that?"

"I don't know how I came to know that name, but the abyss should be called the tunnel of chaos."

"Whats that?"

Steve did not reply at first, then paused and said, "Others could not come with us."

"Why, where is Sean, Tomy and Morris?" Crouger asked Steve, right now, a know-all. They were burnt to ashes right at the entry point of chaos. I was mutilated but I came through. Both of you, survived quite well I believe." Steve said and tried to move his hand. "My whole body, excepting my head has been crushed into billions

of atoms."

"You seemed to have gathered a lot of information, tell me where are we?" Crouger asked.

"Inside chaos," Steve said. "The womb of the universe."

"My god! what are you taking about, Shamir said, "if you had said we were at the core of Earth, we would have had found it much more of a logical answer."

"But we are not," Steve said. "Both Crouger and Shamir, stunned, remained silent.

with your earthly perception. But actually this is nowhere. There is no soundwave, but we are hearing each other — because, the chaos wants us to see each other and talk to each other."

"But why?"

"Better ask chaos, if you can. But before asking, make a perception of chaos — imaginary, so that may help us further."

Crouger suddenly said, "hey look, a window over there." The three of them looked

of the window. Their hands did not go through.

"You cannot go through," Steve seemed to chuckle, mechanically, "because, there is nothing or nowhere to go... there is no space anywhere, no earth or sun to go to."

"What do you mean?"

"First, you recall a form of chaos, let's imagine its a human being."

"Ok, hey chaos!" Crouger screamed and laughed. "They chaos come and help us."

Suddenly, there was a massive change in the environment. The colours drifted towards a single point. There were illuminating glows all around and there were sudden sounds of thunder.

"My god! Whats happening?"

"Chaos is trying its hand to create perception for us so that we can see," Steve said.

There was a huge blast. The sound roared but made no impact on them — nothing pushed them, everything became dark. The colours stood at a certain corner and began to take shape.

It was a gigantic head of a bald man. It looked unclear and the head appeared to be changing its shape, but it looked alive.

"My God! What is that?" Shamir murmured.

The thunders roared again. This time with perceivable sound "you fools! don't you understand what you have done to nothingness!"

The three human figures remained silent.

"You have reversed the whole order of the universe!" the voice said.

"What do you mean!" automatically asked Shamir.

"You have destroyed the whole universe" it said in a monotonous, emotionless voice.

To Be Continued

ahead. A window in the mist. Open. Beyond that they could see darkness. Stupid darkness.

"You are looking at the outside of chaos."

See, there is nothing out there."

The window came nearer. Or they floated to the window, was not comprehensible Crouger and Shamir reached for the exit



"Go on talking, I want to be with you," Steve said, "if you stop talking to me, I shall disappear."

"Why?" Shamir asked.

"I am here because you and Crouger called me. But if you stop communicating, I will be shifted to my obsolud state."

"I don't understand."

You don't need to, just keep

have a room in our brains to understand the existence of chaos. Chaos does not exist."

"I am confused."

Steve coughed. "It is the unknown dimension of space. I only understood — it has no space, which means we are not floating anywhere right now."

"But we are floating?"

"That's what we think we are doing. You came to your senses

To an Unknown Destination

by Shahed Latif

ANTHANASIA was sitting at the top of the hill and was looking at the evening sky. The sun has just set and the sky was light red. She was thinking about happy days of the past and her frustrating present. She just could not believe that all her dreams of owning lovely cars, riches, ornaments would just stay a dream.

Suddenly she thought of her father and brother. Where were they now? Were they alive or are they dead. When they were driven from their home she was only 16 years old. Now ten years had gone by since she had seen her home. The quite lane, the neighbours, the friends. Time had washed everything away she thought as she wiped her tears. When her father left she had promised him that she would never cry, and she had kept that promise all these years. But to-day suddenly she remembered the old times. She had been staying in

this refugee camp for the past 10 years. What kind of life was this? This was not supposed to happen? Then why did this happen? Who was to blame for this, the people, the leaders, or was it just hate?

She thought to herself why can't the crisis stop. Their country was a big one with lots of opportunities for everyone. Then why this war? Then this destruction? Can't they live together in peace again in the same country? May be not. Everyday new refugees were coming and life was becoming more and more disgusting.

Rahimov, where was Rahimov now? He was also sixteen when they were torn apart. She was in love with Rahimov. She was never able to say that though. She did not mind whether they were of different races, and she was sure that neither would Rahimov have

great grandfather did not talk to people of other races, and they always talked against those people so wrong or right I have to agree with it, no matter what. How can my family members be wrong? This is exactly what millions of people of her country of men of all races, thought, and now they were fighting against each other.

Killing each other, destroying homes and separating families. What have they earned? And what can they earn from this bloody war, she thought — nothing probably!

She thought everyone had a place called home. But what about us, the refugees? Where

is our home? We are staying in a land which we cannot call ours. We are being treated as some kind of epidemic. I sometimes think whether I can ever go back home if I can then I would never again leave my country even if I have to die. It is better to die in your own country rather than live such a miserable life. A lot of things have been changed in this last ten years but nothing for us." For the past ten years life has been nothing but a living hell."

Suddenly Anthanasia saw, that it was quite dark and she began to walk back to her camp. As she walked she thought whether she would ever see home land again? Will I ever see my father of brother again? My brother must have grown up into a man by now, when he left for the war he was only 17 years old. Now he would be 27 years. I wish I could see him only for a moment. My father he was 40 years old when he left for the war. He must have gone a bit old at 50. Are they still alive?

It was the new year now. Anthanasia thought to herself. "New year was something we always celebrated. The last new year that we celebrated was fun.

For the last couple of days her mother's health is not well. She is now in bed and only one thing she talks about is of her little sister who mysteriously died two months back. Anthanasia felt that something was wrong with her mother, she felt as if her mother was going to die. Anthanasia just could not control tears and ran out of the room. Anthanasia's health was also deteriorating and she felt very weak and tired. She was tired because of the war which reached a point of no return and as each day passed by her dream to go back home was dying.

She just could not believe that her life would turn out to be such a horror. Anthanasia thought about her childhood, how her mother protected her how much she cared for her. But now when her mother needs care, protection and help there was nothing that she could do. Her mother was the only family she had now. Two and a half month later, Anthanasia's mother died. She was sitting alone in the tent thinking "there is no use of my staying here, if I stay here then I would go mad." So she decided that she would escape." Can't this hate for each other stop. We are all humans, then why this hate? Why this enmity against each other? Why? Why? She slowly walked towards an uncertain future to an unknown place. — as the war kept on plundering. Even if she was not successful, there was no harm in trying. Anything was better than this



THE MOST IMPORTANT RABBIT IN ALL THE WORLD

by Elizabeth Lane

IN September a small brown rabbit in a blue jacket celebrated his hundredth birthday. Created by Beatrix Potter in 1893 in a letter to entertain a sick child, the Tale of Peter Rabbit has been reprinted 250 times since its publication.

From Icelandic to Japanese, the story of Peter's adventures has been translated into 23 languages, even including a Latin edition.

While satellites beam Ninja Turtles and Arnold Schwarzenegger round the globe, Beatrix Potter's stories promise a haven where children in the guise of rabbits, kittens and mice are safe to enjoy adventures.

Beatrix Potter's lonely childhood in London, where she was born in 1866, was enlivened by a menagerie of animals. The first Peter Rabbit was a schoolroom pet.

Mainly self-taught in art and natural history, she became an accomplished watercolourist and botanical illustrator. The enchanting and detailed illustrations to her animal stories show an exact observation of natural life, especially of England's scenic Lake District where she spent many childhood holidays.

Beatrix Potter turned to sketching pet animals dressed as human beings to amuse her ex-governess' young children. The original version of Peter Rabbit was an illustrated letter to a sick child: "My dear Noel, I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits..."

When her manuscript was rejected by publishers, she decided to publish Peter's story

at her own expense, printing 250 copies in 1901. The publishing house of Frederick Warne then took on the book, which was published with her own colour illustrations in 1902.

By the end of the following year, 50,000 copies of The Tale of Peter Rabbit had been sold, prompting her to remark: "The public must be fond of rabbits! What an appalling quantity of Peter!"

She was not slow to capitalise on this, taking out a patent on her own Peter Rabbit doll in December 1903. This started a whole industry of puzzles, toys and crockery, that continues today.

A long and productive relationship with her publisher had a personal dimension. Beatrix became engaged to her editor Norman Warne in summer 1905, though sadly he died only weeks later.

Like other authors and artists inspired by its natural beauty, Beatrix Potter made the Lake District her home, buying Hill Top Farm in Sawrey in 1905 with a small legacy.

This was no romantic escape but a working farm. Not only did she use it as the setting for some of her most famous stories but later made a new name for herself as a breeder of Herdwick sheep.

Hill Top was but the first of the 15 farms Beatrix Potter bought, making her into an important local landowner. She devoted herself to the preservation of the Lakes' natural splendour.

On her death in 1943, she bequeathed to England's National Trust over 4,000 acres

of land and Hill Top farm, to be kept just as she left it. There, children of all ages can see the farmhouse exactly as it appears in the jewel-like illustrations.

Altogether she wrote and illustrated 23 books. She insisted that they should be sold at a price that "little rabbits" could afford.

The books may be small

enough to fit into a child's hands but the stories nevertheless encompass a moral universe. Most of the stories are about children exploring the boundaries of the adult world, discovering the consequences of defying adults' warnings.

Peter ventures into forbidden territory, Mr MacGregor's kitchen garden, where his father had already "met with an accident" (he was put in a pie by Mrs MacGregor). He narrowly escapes this fate but loses his new blue jacket and shoes. His reproving mother puts him to bed with camomile tea. He nevertheless repeats the misdemeanour, with his cousin, Benjamin Bunny, in the sequel of that name.

In The Tale of Samuel Whiskers or The Roly Poly Pudding, Tom Kitten neatly gets made into a roly poly pudding by the rats, after climbing up to play in the chimney.

In an appreciative if gently satirical piece the writer Graham Greene considered this story to be Beatrix Potter's masterpiece while American author Thornton Wilder once told his Harvard literature class that Peter Rabbit was the definitive English novel.

Strictly unsentimental, the stories often show nature in the raw, as when the hounds who rescue Jemima Puddle-duck from the fox devour the eggs she has foolishly laid away from the farmyard.

Few children's books or programmes today use such sophisticated language, yet words like "soporific," describing the effect on the Flopsy Bunnies of eating too many lettuces, have a magic and music

for small ears that lasts a lifetime, encouraging a wide vocabulary and a delight in language. When Peter Rabbit was caught in a net, the sparrows "implored him to exert himself."

The publisher, Frederick Warne and the Beatrix Potter estate have been committed to upholding this high quality in words and illustrations by guarding the copyright of her characters. While they feature on a huge variety of goods there is strict control over how they may appear and the reproductions must be faithful to the originals.

In the centenary year the publishers have authorised what will surely become the definitive animation of the stories, shown on BBC television. Reportedly one of the most expensive animations ever made, they have achieved an almost perfect translation to screen of the original. Although copyright may end this year, it is hard to see how any other version could match it.

Television has brought the world of Beatrix Potter to an even wider audience. The popularity of Peter Rabbit and friends has drawn over 250,000 visitors to a special exhibition. The World of Beatrix Potter, in the Lake District since it opened in 1991, an attraction rivaling Wordsworth's Dove Cottage.

Many would claim that Peter Rabbit is no unworthy successor to that great poet, though Beatrix Potter herself wrote: "I have never quite understood the secret of Peter's perennial charm." — GEMINI NEWS



The world of Beatrix Potter