

RISING STARS

HERE'S a little anecdote I'll recount to you shortly to waste your time and mine, as well as for the benefit of your reading pleasure. Once upon a time (okay, so call me old-fashioned, conservative or unoriginal) there was this telephone (at the time it was cordless but with growing age it became a corded push-button and then a rotary model) which was based in my bedroom (nice place, I'm sure you'll say if you've ever been there), and once upon a time there was a tendency for a multitude of wrong numbers to crop up (hmm, haven't we heard this story already a couple of googolplexes of times?) and once upon a time I was being decidedly annoyed by one particular caller who had rang twice already, and though he had committed no sin greater than a desire to speak with some moron called "Zafar shaheb", I was fed up with the entire "affair". If this guy wanted a moron, I'll give him one. (And I wouldn't even have to try, I bet you're muttering to yourself) So I said, "Hello".

"Hello", — a string of numbers which in no way matched my phone number — "is Zafar shaheb in?"

"Yes, speaking." Of course, you may safely assume that this conversation was conducted in Bengali, and translate if you wish to the appropriate lexicon, if that's the right word. Here's a more or less proper transliteration of "Yes, speaking" to help you get started: "gee, bolchi".

"Salaam alaikum, sir." That should be "sir", but you know the way some English words are pronounced in *Bangla*. "This is Belial, sir." Actually, Belial wasn't this guy's name (Belial's really the name of a demon, God help me) but I can't quite recollect his name.

Instead, let us suppose that for some reasons, someone decides to call me. The person picks up the telephone, dials (or in our modern age, push-buttons) the number, and waits expectantly while the phone rings on the other end, usually only once before I pick it off the hook with a deft maneuver.

This is the treatment he or she can expect:

I pick up the phone, say, "Yeah?"

The person says, "Hello, Ahsan?"

"Yeah. What?"

Pause, and then, "What do you mean, 'Yeah, what'?"

"I mean, yeah, what, as in, 'All right.' You've called for something. What do you want?" After that, the person usually follows one of three possible courses of action. He/she might say, "Wait a minute, what makes you think that I want something from you?"

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Phone Calls

by Ahsan S Kabir



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"You called me, I didn't

you?"

"Well yeah."

"For around five minutes, you would talk to me about the various minutiae of life, and other pressing issues such as what I've been up to and what you've been up to. Right?"

"Of course."

"And then you'll drop the bombshell".

"Bombshell? What bombshell? Are we under attack by the Indian dudes, the Pakistani dudes, the American dudes or the Melanesian dudes?"

"Then you say, 'Oh, by the way, Ahsan, could you do me a little favour, something that would take up only a nibbling

fraction of a moment of your time, that I would eternally appreciate, please, please, please with sugar and cinnamon and vinegar on it?'

"I would not!"

"Uh huh."

"What do you mean, 'uh huh'?"

"Don't you understand English anymore? Uh huh. Standard expression meaning 'yeah, sure'."

"Good God, you're so cynical."

"So I am. Do you want to tell me that you've called entirely for a piece of pseudoedifying chit-chat, without need for any of my services or talents?"

"Well, now that you mention it, I could use..."

Some people however either resign themselves or immediately confess their demands within the first four or five sentences, and do continue the conversation; which is, I suppose, to their credit. On the other hand, a few might say, "Nothing. I don't need anything from you. Can't I call you just to talk?"

"Uh huh."

"What do you mean, 'uh huh'?"

"Haven't we gone through this before?"

"At any rate, I don't need you. At least, not today."

"Fine."

Then we'll talk for around ten minutes to half-an-hour, and then I'll say, "All right, so what is it that you want me to do? Come on, I won't chew your head off." The person either responds, "Get off it, will you?" or "Well..." and either way, I respond, "Sure," but a difference in tone should be noted.

Why do I do this, forsaking all that is good and noble and moral in the world, risking offending hosts of elders and any of a various number of celebri-

ties/non-entities? The answer is quite simple. When people call me, they'll talk for five minutes, make their request, spend an extra minute or two on cajoling, coaxing, flattery, bribery or blackmail, and then talk for another five minutes, figuring out a graceful way to hang up. I don't need this. I'll get down to business, and I'll spare you the need for social niceties.

While I'm on the subject of telephone calls, I would like to present to the world at large a law which many might take exception to, but whose validity few can deny: "A girl will not call a guy, even when she promises to do so, unless: (a) she needs something from the guy (e.g. help, money); (b) she's interested in the guy, or (c) she and the guy have some sort of relationship going." Experimentally, results have shown to tend to be (a). I could name this law after any of a number of my female "friends", and my male comrades, buddies pals (uh, wait, do I have any of those?) could probably do the same. One theorized on the reasons behind such feminine behaviour, and came up with the following hypothesis, that a girl feels that if she calls a boy, purely for conversation, the boy will not even "say", but will misinterpret this as a sign of less-than-platonic interest and she would rather that not happen. Well, maybe that's true, but then again has the girl ever considered that the guy could care less about her, that he never had any designs greater than help on a chemistry question or some other similar problem of life-threatening proportions? If a girl stopped to think about it, I guess she'll decide that's she just been insulted. Oops, maybe I shouldn't have said that. I'm kidding!

On a Quiet Afternoon...

by Prima Chowdhury

RADIV, aged one and a half, was trouble enough at 2.40 pm. He wanted 'Apache Indians', 'Boom-Shak-A-Lak' at full volume while he drank his customary seven ounces of milk, of course at his leisure — with his head comfortably snuggled into his favourite flowered pillow, and my beautiful hair clenched tightly in his fist.

NAYEF, aged three, is a tough-talking, gorgeous little fellow — with golden brown eyes framed with long brown lashes. Well on this particular afternoon he focused his irresistible charm on hearing Goldilocks, contrary to my personal favourite Snow White — the easiest to tell among the innumerable fairy tales, the Mirror, step-mother, dwarves, poisoned apple and so on. Well on his volatile insistence, I started but I just couldn't remember, why Goldi didn't like Papa or Mama bears' chairs, and had to go about breaking



ing her utmost to change channels, and Rateb and Nayef starting the sickening chant of "Where is Mama?" and slowly a tearful, "Where is mama?" followed by an ear-bursting demand to have every right to know where their Mama was!

Now, while I'm at it, I just can't resist the temptation to categorize my thirteen-year-old brother as one of the kids as well. ARVID — to me, has very little purpose in life other than being unreasonable, irritating and idiotic, especially at times like these. With the mothers' out, and the kids all at cross purposes, Arvid had to stubbornly want to watch WWF — wrestling, thereby infuriating Irum, attracting Rateb and Nayef's attention for a minute, and making me curb an innate desire to kick him. Rateb and Nayef of course had to know, whether the enormous sumo-wrestler type, YOKOZUNA, with his 550+ pound body, a bun on top and a big red bow

The Quarrel

by Nishat Hussain

S HINO walked down the deserted road. Shasha, her boyfriend, was supposed to have met her but he had not showed up as yet. Her patience was running out. It was the sixth time that week that he had not shown up.

"Wait till I get my hands on that boy!" she said to no one in particular. A gust of wind ruffled her hair. She hugged herself closer and increased her pace. Just then she felt a tap on her shoulder. She jumped out of her skin.

Shasha: Jumpy today, aren't we, Shino?

Shino: How dare you sneak up on me like that! Where are you late? Do you know what time it is?

Sho: Don't be angry...

Shi: After what you made me go through you have the nerve to say that I am angry!

Sho: Don't put words in my mouth — you know that wasn't what I had said.

Shi: Look at you. You are...

Sho: I wish I could but I didn't bring a mirror along with me.

Shi: Hah! So innocent on the outside, but underneath a two timing evil!

Sho: Darling, you know that's not true. You are the only one I love. Cross my heart.

(He emphasized by moving his hand to make an X over his heart.)

Shi: Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes, and stop that whistling of yours for goodness sake. This is serious, so stop acting the goat!

Shi: I am not acting the coffin.

Shi: What a pity!

Sho: What do I have to do to get back to you?

Shi: How about getting lost?

Sho: (Goodnaturedly) Thank ya for the suggestion.

Shi: Not 'thank ya' but 'thank you'!

Sho: (Overdoing it) from the bottom of my heart I thank you Shi.

Shi: Oh, shut up!

(She slams the door on his face.)

What did I do to deserve this?

Sho: (Muttering) Hmph! Women! Try to figure them out!

Then he walked home with long strides still muttering to himself as he went.

Shi: Look, I already apologised but you are making

things more difficult. Why don't we discuss this later over lunch at my place?

Sho: Lunch at your place? Having to eat at your place even for one day would be a fate worse than death!

Shi: What's wrong with my cooking?

Sho: What's right with it? (Silence follows).

Sho: (Thinking) if looks could kill — I'd be dead right now! Ah-er- let's forget this little misunderstanding and let bygones be bygones. How about us going to the movies tomorrow...

Shi: Dream on squirt!

Sho: Yesterday I dreamt of you twice and I fell out of bed.

Shi: Flattery won't get you anywhere.

Sho: I'll walk you home.

Shi: No thanks, I can take care of myself.

Sho: She goes home with Shasha tailing behind. After reaching home she unlocks the front door.

Shi: Well?

Sho: 'Well' what?

Sho: Aren't you gonna say good-bye?

Shi: To whom?

Sho: ME, of course!

Shi: (coldly) for what?

Sho: It seems you don't like me anymore — do you?

Shi: You took the words out of my mouth!

Sho: When will we meet again?

Shi: When pigs fly!

Sho: Great! I'll be waiting.

Shi: Why don't you drop dead?

Sho: Dad can't afford the coffin.

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