

RISING STARS

GOING WEST

by Sami Noor & Zaki Wahhaj

CHRISTOPHER Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 triggered a mass migration throughout Europe which continued for over 300 hundred years... This allusion to history is made to compare its startling similarity to something occurring in Bangladesh today.

In the early nineteen eighties, secondary school students in Bangladesh discovered the prospects of higher studies in the US, and this has prompted a large-scale application for admission to US academic institutions.

Higher education in the US has become so popular today that almost every student who completes high school today is



having a go at it. SAT and TOEFL (mandatory exams to apply to a US college) have become a part of our common vocabulary and the long queues which can be witnessed in front of the US Embassy every dawn has become a common joke.

It is justifiable that students are intrigued by college education in the US. The US colleges are the only ones in the western hemisphere which not only encourages foreign students to apply but also waive a considerable amount of the college tuition fee if required. Most of the competitive US colleges, including the far-famed Ivy League institutions, offer full scholarships (or financial aid). Also, the modern facilities offered by the US institutions and the excitement of the American style of living allure our students. For those attending the secondary schools, particularly the English-medium schools, this is like a dream come true.

However, the notion of all our talented youths leaving for the US sounds bizarre. But most A Level students who possess the ability and talents to enroll into the exceptional colleges of the US (viz MIT, Harvard...) are doing exactly that and it is needless to say that few of these talents will ever return to Bangladesh. Just when we need our gifted youths to lead our country forward, we are being confronted with a very horrifying prospect of a massive 'brain-drain'.

Besides, there is also the fearful prospect of 'brainwashing'. The United States may be a multi-racial, multi-ethnic community, but it is also the nation which gave birth to the KKK (Klu Klux Klan) and has a vast anti-semitic and anti-gay population. This makes the social environment in the US quite conducive to racism and a few of our friends who went to the country returned with very ad-

Revenge

by Mahub Ershad

I shall take my revenge at any cost. Probably my bad luck. As you have become the worst.

I shall take my revenge anytime anywhere. No matter what it brings but it's my desire.

I'll always love you whether you come back or not, but I'll take my revenge. As you have broken my heart.

Though it's against my mind, I'll have to be cruel. I'll be strong like an iron and burn like a fire ball.

First Term Exam: A Confession on Behalf of All Students

by Kazi K Arafat

THE school courtyard was bathed in sunlight. Afzal was showing off some albums he brought. Khaled, Aziz, and Mushfiq were standing around him. Babu was having a discussion with Abu about the World Cup. (They resembled two peddlers screaming about their goods).

The two eggheads, Abeer and Kabir, were discussing philosophy, and Abeer even succeeded in quoting Ad Rose on the subject. Nasrin and Moushumi were asking each other questions from the text. Malha hadn't arrived yet, but of course, she's always late. Farzana and Nelly were walking together, evidently discussing something on which they had different views, for Farzana suddenly stormed off.

Suddenly this hubbub was replaced by pin-drop silence as the bell — like the bells in "Hallowed be thy name", rang. It was broken a few seconds later by Khaled singing "Sanctuary", and Aziz reciting "Now I lay me down to sleep".

The exams of Class VII were held in two small classes, classes IV and V. These rooms have interconnecting doors, and the doors were left open so that one teacher can keep an eye on both the classes, if the other goes away for while.

Yesterday, both classes had lenient teachers. Lenient teachers are an endangered species to them you can freely ask questions and have a guaranteed 10 percent chance of getting the correct answer, and a 100% chance of getting a smile, if not a response. And

the best thing is that they don't check your pockets for scraps of paper with dates and formulas scribbled on it.

Khaled checked the time — 9:45 am. Teachers may I please go to the toilet? "What have you got in your pockets?" the teacher asked.

Khaled answered: Four million molecules of air. Everybody laughed at this but the lenient teacher let Khaled get away with this smart Aleck answer.

A minute later, Afzal's voice was heard from the next class. Teacher, may I please go to the toilet?

And this was the teacher's reply — "Wait till Abeer comes back." But somehow he man-

aged to go.

In the toilet, Khaled met Abeer washing his hands. "Damn!" Khaled muttered to himself. He was supposed to meet Afzal at 9:45, and here was this nut obstructing Afzal's arrival. And he was so damn puzzled with question two!

"Oh, Mr Khaled, it's so nice to see you," says Abeer, jokingly.

Yeah, but you better clear off, or some teacher will think that we're cheating."

The disappointed Abeer, he started one of his grandiloquent and verbose speeches, but cleared off anyway, uttering wired soliloquies and keeping his hard words to himself.

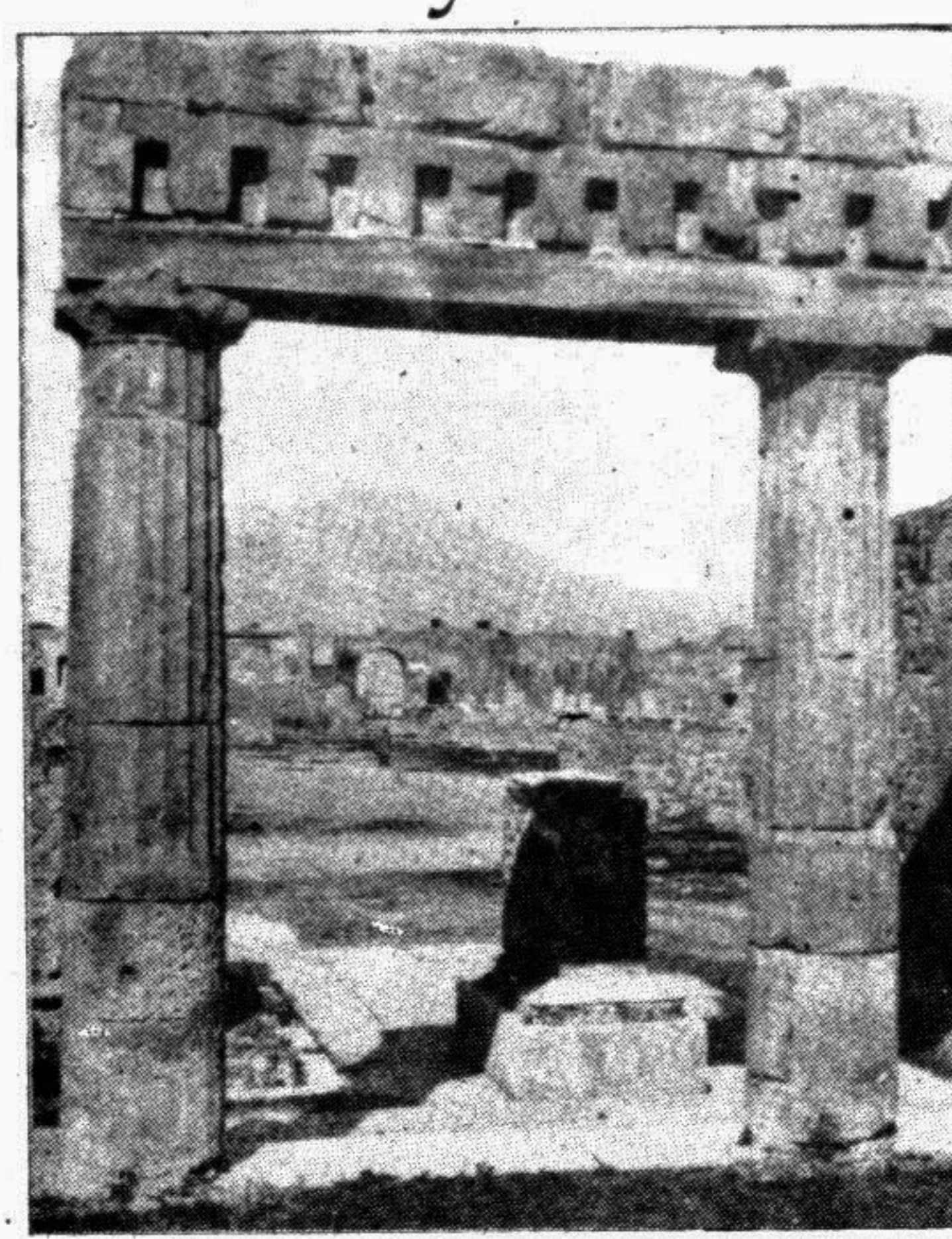


The Last Days of Pompeii

AMONG the great achievements of the modern world is the rediscovery of ancient cities which have lain buried and forgotten for thousands of years. One of the first to be unearthed was Pompeii, the ruins of which were discovered about 200 years ago. This ancient city was a holiday resort for the Romans of the first century, and it was situated on the Bay of Naples near the lower slopes of the great volcano Vesuvius.

Pompeii was surrounded on three sides by a wall, and its straight, paved streets were lined with many fine stone buildings. In addition to the private houses, temples and shops, there were two markets, two theatres, three public baths (one still being built), and a barracks for the gladiators who fought in the great arena. And this fine city was destroyed and buried beneath ashes and lava when Vesuvius erupted in the year A.D. 79. The Roman author Pliny was an eye-witness of the event and described what he saw from a boat in the Bay of Naples. His uncle, who went ashore to get a closer view, lost his life.

The city had been previously devastated by an earthquake in A.D. 63. The inhabitants of Pompeii numbered about 20,000, and included much the same kinds of people as may be found in any small English holiday resort, except that most of the labourers and servants were slaves. These people were crowding its streets on August 24, A.D. 79, when somebody noticed a huge column of smoke rising from the summit of Vesuvius. This was astonishing, because Vesuvius was believed to be an extinct volcano, and



All that remains of the Forum at Pompeii. This was the marketplace and centre of life of the ancient city. Grouped about it were the principal temples, the Court of Justice and other public buildings.

nobody had ever seen it in eruption before. According to Pliny, the column of smoke looked like a gigantic pine-tree with a black trunk and branches of fire! Lightning began to play in the huge cloud of smoke which was rapidly darkening the sky, and the ground trembled so violently that there was a crash of falling

trapped and buried alive; others were killed by falling boulders. Some managed to reach the shore — only to find that the sea had retreated, leaving most of the boats high and dry. The few still floating were quickly filled and were rowed away across the bay, but most of the fugitives were helpless in the pitchy dark and awaited their end on the beach.

From time to time the volcano sent up huge columns of boiling water, which mingled with the ashes to make a sort of scalding hot mud which fell in showers over the city. And all the time that dreadful rain of hot pumice and boulders continued to fall, and building after building tottered, fell, and was rapidly buried. More than 2,000 people were killed by falling stones, suffocated by the ashes and fumes, or burned to death. When it was all over the city was found to be covered with ashes and lava to depth of twenty feet. It had completely vanished from mortal view, and was not to be sent again until it was excavated eighteen centuries later.

Courtesy — Wonder Books of Wonders

Jokes

Doctor Sawbones speaking: 'Oh, doctor, my wife's just dislocated her jaw. Can you come over in, say, three or four weeks' time?'

A plump young woman went to see her doctor. 'I'm worried about losing my figure, doctor,' she said. 'You'll just have to diet,' said the doctor. 'What colour?' asked the patient.

A doctor had been attending a rich old man for some time, but it became apparent that the old chap had not long to live. Accordingly, the doctor advised his wealthy patient to put his affairs in order. 'Oh yes, I've done that,' said the old gentleman. 'I've only got to make my will. And do you know what I'm going to do with all my money? I'm going to leave it to the doctor who saves my life.'

Doctor: 'Why didn't you send for me sooner, madam? Your husband is very ill.' Wife: 'I thought I'd give him a chance to get better first.'

Patient: 'Doctor, I snore so loudly I keep myself awake. What can I do?' Doctor: 'Sleep in another room.'

A man had been unfortunate enough to injure his hand at work. As the doctor was examining it he shook his head and said, 'I'm afraid it'll never be right.' 'Why not, doctor?' asked the patient anxiously. 'Because it's your left hand,' replied doctor.

BAD OBSESSIONS

by Nahid Hussain

SIRAJ was browsing around the audio shops. He wanted to get hold of the latest GUNS N' ROSES album. He was a heavy metal madcap. Yngwie Malmsteen and Anthrax were also among his favourites. He did get the last copy available.

Recently he was getting rather obsessed with metal music especially the guitar work of Malmsteen and Slash. He listened intently to the music for hours. This change was a growing concern for his parents who had a lot of expectations on him. One day he brought up the subject of forming a band to his friends Zakir, Bobby and Riyadh.

'They guys, metal music really turns me on,' Siraj spoke to them. 'The skill, precision and beautiful composition has so much effect on me that is too much for words.'

'That happens to us as well,' Zakir replied. 'Really their playing has no patch.'

'I wish we could play instruments as well,' added Riyadh. 'But we are just in 'A' levels. Actually we are not the musical type.'

Siraj took full advantage of the situation. 'Its never too late to try. Its just a matter of a few years. Why don't we form a band.'

'Siraj's idea ain't bad,' Bobby chimed in. 'It will be fun as well.'

The others agreed and it was settled that Siraj would play the guitar, Zakir drums, Bobby base and Riyadh keyboards. Riyadh could manage a keyboard from his cousin but the others would have to get their parents in their favour. Siraj's parent's fears came true when he told them about it. But they answered in the negative and told him to concentrate on his studies. He was really sad upon hearing this. His personal savings were enough to get an acoustic guitar but not an electric guitar.

One day he went out for a stroll and saw a commotion grew up on the road which turned out to be a hijacker being subdued.

Siraj got the idea there and then how to get money for his lessons. Even the small voice in his mind could not stop him. Here and there he picked pockets. Though he never did it before, he performed it with dexterity each time. Zakir and the others did not face problems with their folks nor were they obsessed like him. Siraj lied to them about his parent's 'well wishes'.

He would practice a lot everyday especially after his parents were asleep. He made progress by leaps and bounds. His teacher told him that he had the potential to be the best. This inspired him to work harder.

He kept long hair to emulate his guitarist. At first his parents thought that he was joking. Later they understood he was serious. He would not cut his hair at any cost. He locked himself up for two days, infuriated. His parents finally heeded to his decision but were not amused.

They first performed during the Graduation ceremony, and this brought a lot of support and praise from the student audience. His parents, for a change of heart were also pleased. They received the award for the best performance. They were four happy boys.

Everyone continued learning but no one still knew how Siraj managed his funds. Before long he finished all courses and their 'A' level exam had approached. Zakir, Bobby and Riyadh did pretty well though Siraj was not up to his mark. Still he managed to get to the same university.

When they were in University, their first album

was released. It was a mega hit. This brought the whole group fame especially Siraj. Then he remembered what his teacher had told him about great guitarists. They would show off by smoking while playing, they drank best wine and even took drugs. He slowly took these up. He wanted to be the best.

They had almost reached stardom. One day Zakir and the others went to his house. He wasn't home. They conversed with his mother. She was pretty pleased with the results and guitar work especially as he learnt on his own (as she thought).

The others were rather caught by this expression. 'Siraj, Zakir began. Why did you tell us lies and to your parents. Aunty told us you learned on your own.'

'Okay, I lied. But I wanted to learn the guitar so much. I had to pickpockets and what not. If I did not do so we would have not been a member of BAMBANOW.'

'Look here. Being a member of BAMBANOW is not so important as being able to play good music.'

'Playing good music isn't enough. We must be the best,' Siraj retorted.

'Whatever you say Siraj, Zakir is correct. Riyadh joined in. 'I hope that you will not do these anymore.'

His girlfriend Trishna was very sad to learn about his dark past. He did confess to his parents though it was not a blessing.

One day he played a new turn for Trishna. She enjoyed it a lot. When she took his hands to her face, a burning odour came from them.

'You still smoke. I thought that at least you would give up for me.' Her eyes flooded with tears.

'I cannot just give it up. My music demands it. While he was restless, a white packet fell from his jacket.

'What is it?' 'Nothing.' 'You don't have to tell me. I know what it is. I hate you Siraj. I simply just hate you. I never want to see you again.'

With that she left crying.

That very day, Siraj was kind of restless and hysterical at home. His parents were taken aback by that. His father realized what it could be. Siraj locked himself in his room. Afterwards, his father squeezed the truth out of him. Siraj would not give in so easily.

'Let out of my house, and never come back again', belated his father.

Later when the others heard about it, they did not understand whether to sympathize or despise him. When he met them, they tried to get him out of it.

'Siraj, there is still time. That obsessions of yours' will be end for you,' Zakir said.

'Yeah, Uncle and Aunty didn't mean what they said,' Riyadh added.

'No guys, I just can't. After doing and achieving so much I don't want to change,' Siraj replied.

'If you don't, you can forget us,' Zakir said. 'I have had enough of it already.'

'Come on Siraj, its for your own good,' Bobby said.

The others left him in a dilemma. Siraj was troubled by this. He went to the beach — to soothe his troubled mind. He didn't know what to do. He felt so alone. He knew one thing, he wasn't happy with his new life style. All he got from it was pains and sorrows. He was deeply hurt. Before he knew it he was playing a new tune — a very sad one which expressed how he felt. Tears fell. He sat at the edge of a cliff, water lapped against the rocks below.

