



Their Happiness

by Zinnia Ahmad



Happy and may feel content in their own way. — Star Photo

It was one of those hot and sticky afternoons. My car was the fifth or sixth in the queue at the petrol-pump station. I scowled at the workman up front taking all his time fitting the hose into the small, blue Towny. There was so much to do at home and here I was stuck until lord-knows-when. I looked out of the window trying to observe anything worth observing.

A girl nearby was earnestly picking up pebbles from the ground and gathering them in her frock which she had held up. She caught me looking at her. And as I feared she got up from her kneeling position, still holding up the frock, and came over to me.

"Apa phool niben? (Will you take flowers?)" and she held up a couple of small, smelly flower garlands.

I looked away, concentrating on some crows cawing continuously from the wall at the passersby. Why hadn't God gifted them with a better role? It wasn't fair, they were deprived of everything.

"Apa, nenna (please take them)! The last thing I wanted was this pest bothering me."

"Nibena (I won't take them)". I looked at her. She was probably another of those sorrowful stories. The eldest, although, she looked eight, among five-six children. Mother died or father left home. Hardly had two meals a day. Her light brown, untidy hair and emaciated limbs confirmed at least the last point. She was half covered in sand and stunk horribly. Just then a woman in a dirty, green sari with a baby on her waist came up. Probably the girl's mother.

"Kulsum, what are you doing here? I told you to be at the traffic lights," she scolded, "and what's all this?" She shook the girl's hand holding the frock up and all the pebbles fell down. The eyes that were shining a moment ago were filled with tears. "I want to take them home."

"I won't let you do that." On an impulse I decided to enter the scene. "Your daughter?" I asked the mother. The skinny face broke into a smile. "Yes."

"How old is she?"

"Ten". She certainly didn't look it!

"What do you do?"

"Work at a garments factory."

"And she?"

"Sells flowers but is not good at it."

"She can work at a home."

"Who'll take her?"

"I will."

"You will? God bless you. May your life be..."

"I'll take good care of her. I'll bring her here every two weeks on Saturdays at noon. Can she come now?"

"Yes, yes. Only too eager to send the good for nothing daughter away."

"Ma, I won't go."

"Oh, yes you will," the mother snapped back.

Reluctantly, the girl got into the back seat with me. In the mean time, my car had come up to the front and had been filled up. The girl sat stiffly as the car started off.

My mother was furious at the sight of another maid. "She isn't a maid," I explained.

"I am going to teach her manners, reading and writing and simple household chores. Not a maid in the real sense — what I would call — a personal maid."

"Personal maid!" My brother sneered. "As if you are the Prime Minister's daughter. Per-

sonal maid, indeed! You'll need one. To close the toothpaste cap after you've used it, to shut your books after you've finished studying, to tell you it's time to wake up, to tell you..."

"That's enough," my mother interrupted, and turning to me. "You brought her here on a sudden impulse, and she's your responsibility. Take her back when she wants to leave. In the mean time teach her the proper things."

Oh, yes. That's what I would exactly do. First I told our bua to give the smelly girl a good bath and put her in some clean clothes. After that it was lunch time and I made sure she ate until her stomach could take in no more. I spent the rest of the afternoon listening to her family story. Her father was a rickshawpuller but had to give it up since he couldn't pay the rickshaw owner. Her mother then took up her job. She usually scolded Kulsum because she didn't like working. She was the third child. There were three more after her and on goes the story.

Day two started off with me teaching her the alphabets. And for the first time I felt sorry for my kindergarten as well as university teachers. Progress was

slow. In seven days, Kulsum learned saying the first six letters of the Bengali alphabet and writing the first letter. Patience. I told myself and her, although she didn't seem to care.

Two days later I asked her whether she missed her mother. She shook her head. And why should she miss her anyway? I gave her good clothes, a comfortable mattress, delicious food — three times a day, she was even allowed to watch BTV, Zee TV, Channel V and everything else she never dreamt of (How could she? She didn't even know of their existence!). She played with my younger sister, who herself was learning to read sentences. So she decided to teach Kulsum the English alphabets. She had no better luck than I had.

On the evening of her arrival she had been inspecting a green box-like thing on my bed-side table. She was about to touch it when a weird, piercing sound came from it and she ran out of the room. Later, I told her the 'sound-making box' was called a telephone. I taught her now to answer it but she converted the 'hello' to 'hallow'. And that was the end of her telephonic conversations.

There are times when I am an unabashed gull, wasting away in pursuit of a good flirt, a spry laugh, never a thought for tomorrow, a yearn for the past; And I think of me and no other, me.

There are times when I am haughty, proud, full of wit and cool dignity, sophistication my guise, laughing with restraint, a wall against hurt; And I think of me and no other, me.

There are times when I am an innocent baby, a spirit free of care of the world, naive and trusting, laughing when happy, crying when sad; And I think of me and no other, me.

by Simika

Footpaths In The Air

by Labiba S Ali

There are many different types of bridges: suspension bridges, cantilever bridges, bascule bridges and many others.

Suspension Bridges

This kind of bridges have their roadways hung from thick steel ropes or cables which are swung down from tall towers and anchored securely on either side of the waterway. He also made suspension bridges, using vines to tie and fasten it on either side of the stream.

Cantilever Bridges

The cantilevers which forms the bridge are really huge brackets, each of which rests on a pier and fastened behind the pier. The outer parts of this brackets meet in the centre of the span.

Bascule Bridges

This kind of bridge have one section of it called a leaf that can be swung up to one side to allow ships to pass by. Sometimes there are two leaves.

Bridge Construction

The construction of bridges begins by building the piers on

which the bridge will stand. When this structures are to be below the surface of the water, special methods must be used. One is the open cofferdam system. An area encircling the proposed site for the foundation is blocked off by driving piling, of wood or of steel, to form a water tight enclosure. The water is then pumped out and the construction begins. Another method which is used when construction must go on a large distance below the surface of water is called the pneumatic caisson system.

Another type of bridge construction includes the pneumatic caisson system, which is used when construction must be carried out a great distance below the surface of the water. A pneumatic caisson is an inverted air tub of steel, with a hollow tube at its bottom sealed off from the rest of the caisson. The caisson, then, is towed to the site of the pier.

The air trapped at the bottom is released and weight is added to the top till the caisson sinks to the bottom. By means of compressed air water

Surprisingly, I was taking quite a fancy to Kulsum. She wasn't witty, hardly laughed or smiled, and avoided work as much as possible. All the same I enjoyed having her around and teaching her to be civilized.

I told her about washing hands before eating, never eating things left open, and never, never picking up cans or tins from the ground and eating any foodstuff left in it (I had once seen a like character do so).

Ten or eleven days later I saw her standing at my window, her hands gripping the grille rods. "Kulsum, do you want to meet your mother?"

"I want to go home."

I stared at her. Betrayal! Ungrateful creature. I had done so much for her and this stupid numskull was saying, 'I want to go home'. Home? Did she have a home? It was probably those thatched up houses in groups that leaked in rainy days, swaying in the windy seasons and boiled under the scorching sun. Here she was being treated like the queen, skipping in my room on the floor near my bed (on a thick, cotton mattress), with the air-condition on. And now it's, 'I want to go home'!

"Why do you want to go home?"

"I want to go home."

Stubborn pig! Nincompoop! Fine, I'll take you home, and you are never coming back, you horrible pest. You stink of ... Well she didn't stink lately but she will of ... garbage and rotten tomatoes. Go to hell you...I controlled my temper. "Okay, I'll take you home."

The next day I gave another new dress (so that her mother understood how well I looked after her) and some chocolates (Arabian cocoa chocolates called Wardh). We got into the car and I told the driver to take us to the usual petrol-pump station. "The car is filled," he said. "I know," I replied. "Just take us there. Cos I want to dump this stupid creature."

On the way, I thought about why she didn't want to stay anymore. I never scolded her (well only once when she tried to put on my favourite lipstick and broke it), she had more than she wanted, the other servants treated her properly. Maybe she felt like a caged bird. But I had allowed her to go to the roof. Then what was the problem?

We had reached the petrol-pump station. Her mother was sitting near the wall in the shade. She ran up to me as my car stopped.

"How is my baby?"

Grown an ago too big to deflate. "Fine," I answered. Kulsum was struggling with the window handle to get out. I opened the door and she ran out. She hugged her younger brother, probably 6-7 years old, who was hanging on to his mother's anchal. She offered him one of the chocolates I gave her. "She gave it. Take it," Kulsum said.

"Look, what I found," he said and showed her a half-eaten ice-cream cup that was obviously picked up from the ground. "Here have it," he urged.

Before I could remind Kulsum of my warnings, both of them had their fingers in the cup, extracted the remaining stuff and was licking their fingers. Kulsum's eyes gleefully shone as they had the first day I saw her picking pebbles from the ground. As the boy giggled, Kulsum laughed.

It was a laughter of happiness.

by Simika

Let Us Build the Country As Per Their Dreams

by Shahed Latif

S O Rehan was nervous and frightened, and when I

cooked at him his face was white as sheet. Suddenly I

felt I must be ready to do it

because I felt Rehan won't be

able to do it. And that is what

happened. I saw him standing

with the grenade in his hand. I

ran towards him snatched the

grenade and threw it, to my

utter astonishment I had hit

the right spot and Rehan was

saved. My instructor praised

me that day and I felt a change

in me — a change that I was

capable of doing it.

After three months in our

training camp our commander

called us again, he said 'now

you are prepared for the real

war, now you are going to de-

fend your country. He said we

will be divided into three

groups and be sent to Dhaka,

Chittagong and Khulna. Me,

Rehan, Apu and some others

were in the same group and

our operation site was Dhaka.

I remember our first mis-

sion, it was blowing up the

bridge that connected Bran-

manbaria with Dhaka. It was

a very tough job because the

enemy soldiers had their

forces there and Bramanbaria

was one of their strong bases

and their food, weapons and

soldiers cross the bridge in

hundreds everyday and so

blowing it up would be big

handicap for them. We knew

that it was a very risky opera-

tion and if we failed, it would

be our death. So we began to

draw up ideas how we would

use the explosives to blow the

bridge up. And then we came

to the decision that we would

attack on a moonlight night.

It was decided that we

would take the open road over

the bridge and then I would

plant the time bombs under

the bridge. While I was plant-

ing the bombs under the

bridge Apu and Rehan was a

few meters away with their

guns, ready for attack, if it was

necessary and behind them

were there four more as a back

ups. When I was planting the

high velocity dynamites and

time bombs I suddenly heard a

noise and saw a boat patrolling

underneath, at the very sight

of the boat my heart froze. I

saw light in the far away

corner of the bridge and I was

sure that, I would get caught

because the search light was

coming closer to where I was,

but suddenly just five to six

meters away from me, the

lights turned the other side I

continued my work and the

bombs were set for four in the

morning. Later we saw in the

newspaper that the terrorists

(that is us) had blown up the

whole bridge that connected

the capital with Bramanbaria,

and the soldiers were hunting

for them. For one week we did

not do anything else, because

the enemy soldiers were hunt-

ing madly for us, even we were

scared at their attitude and

their hunger for blood.

After a few weeks we again

began to plan for our next at-

tack.

Our next operation was to

blow up the naval base that

they had built next to the bank

of river Buriganga. We were

prepared for anything, we

came to a decision that if any-

one of us get caught we would

blow ourselves up with the dy-

namite. It was the 15th

November just a month from

our victory but even you could

feel the victory in the air, the

Pakistan's were being beaten

in every place and we knew

that if we can blow up this

naval base it would help the

Pakistanis. But we did not

get the operation done as

quickly as it was predicted.

Some one must have heard

about our operation and maybe

had warned the Pakistanis. We

had to fight with soldiers

there, we were not at all pre-

pared for that and so we had

to run and we resisted them as

far as possible. But we had to

pay the price for it when we

were fighting intensively with

the Pak soldiers one of the

bullets struck Apu right

through his abdomen. I was

sitting beside him. I could do

nothing to help him, after he

was hit, we retreated. In his

dying moments Apu handed

me a ring which was for

Prema. He said, 'I wanted to

give this to Premia, not when

you meet her give it to her, tell

her I am sorry,' and he

breathed his last breath. I sat

there looking at my best friend

who just died fighting for his

country.

I remembered so many

things of the past as I sat their

with the dead body. But we did

not have enough time to

mourn over him because they

sent a search party looking for

us. We could hear the roaring

of the army jeeps as they

passed by us when we were

hiding behind the bush. We

buried Apu, there I promised

him that 'I will not let you and

Prema down.' As I thought of

Prema tears began to roll down

my cheeks, I felt a pain deep

down in my heart for her, was

I in love with her? Who

knows?

We went back to hiding and

the next day we saw in the

newspaper that brave Pakistani

soldiers denies the Mukti-
bahinis and one dies while

fighting. Brave? I said, 'they

are a couple of chickens who

will pay for what they had done