

RISING STARS

House of Cards

by Sumit Roy Choudhury

FINALLY we got out of the house and mounted on the glorious Nissan Patrol. With me were Hasan - the only son of a leading industrialist of the country. Sameer and Amer - two sons of a man who owned some of the city's best restaurant, and Khaled - a cousin of Hasan whose parents died in road accident a few days after he was born. My father was a government officer earning a modest amount of money. What an irony of fate! My father was the best student of his batch in which Sameer's father and Hasan's father were backbenchers. Destiny gave them immense wealth and my father great reputation but very little money.

Although we studied in different schools, grew up in different environments, we shared a common dream - of going to the United States of America and studying in the best universities there. In us there was no real love for that nation but we all knew that the cream of education in the world was there.

I had just passed the O'Level Examinations with distinctions. Hasan was going to go to Brown University - one of the best universities in the US. He didn't have a

great academic background but just enough to be a qualifier. His career was not that much of a problem for him as he was on self finance. Sameer was already studying in Stanford University. A good student, he was also studying with his father's money. His brother was studying in one of the costliest schools in town. He was destined to turn up at a great university. Khaled had been like a younger brother to Hasan. He had grown up just in the same manner as Hasan, enjoying the same sort of rich life as his cousin. Not even for a moment did Hasan's mother let him feel that he was any different from her own son. He was sure he would also go to one of the elite institutions in the US on the finance of his uncle. As for myself I was hoping to make an extraordinary result to go abroad on scholarship. Otherwise I would have to stay in Bangladesh and go through the turmoil which

the students of our country have to suffer from.

We were going to a nearby reserve forest for a picnic. During the ride everyone was teasing me saying, "You will get 1550 in SAT and you will go to Harvard or Princeton." All of them especially Khaled was telling me, "Mr. Genius we are nothing like you but we will probably end up in the same place."

A year passed. Amer did a great result and went to California Institute of Technology. As for Khaled, he got a bad result. There was no chance of him getting financial aid. But he wasn't disheartened much. I had observed the boy and I saw that he had not given the effort needed to do a great result. If he had to go abroad he had to go on self finance.

It was time for Khaled to apply. All his life he had been taking for granted that he could lead a life similar to Hasan's. He expected that he would apply to the same uni-

versity as Hasan, but when he spoke to his uncle he felt as if a thirty foot wave hit him right in the face. Hasan's father said, "You want to go to Hasan's university? Do you know what the expenses are? It takes over 30000 dollars for one year. How are you going to pay that?"

Khaled was almost rendered speechless. "Look boy, you must realize that you are not my son. I won't do for you what I'll do for my own son. Let's face the music. What will I get in return from you? Hasan will be my care-taker when I get old and become unable to work. Can I expect you to be that? How do you expect that I will pay so much for your education?"

Khaled was not able to stand it any more. The man had torn his world of fantasy to shreds. He began to curse himself for not trying harder to establish himself in life. He realized that he was living in a fool's paradise, which was

destined to be destroyed one day. He felt very small.

There was a framed picture of his parents. He kept it on the bedside table. Lit the lamp and lay down in his bed as he gazed at it, distracted by thoughts of an infinitely dark future into which he was running. Slowly his eyes filled up with tears. The pillow got wet. He hadn't cried all his conscious life. But now that all hopes were gone, his heart was broken. If Hasan was there he would have stood by his cousin. All his life Khaled was defended by Hasan and his mother. Now that his cousin was away he was all exposed to the fury of truth which hit him below the belt.

As for his chances of getting admitted in the country, he had almost spoiled them. He did not study for the entry exams in BUET and he bunked the Medical College entry examinations.

He looked through the window into the sky. It was a moonless night. There wasn't a trace of cloud. In nights like this he used to sit with his cousin on the roof and try to count the stars. His aunt had told him long ago that two of those infinite number of stars were his parents. He used to try to locate those two special stars. But it always ended in vain and he fell asleep. His aunt used to carry him back to his room and in the night he used to dream of going into space and see his parents - from the distance who seemed to be a pair of bright, adjacent stars.

He heard his aunt and pretended to be asleep. She entered the room, kissed his forehead and left the room closing the door and putting the light off.

He could not sleep all night and as he lay looking through the window for a moment he saw the face of his parents in the sky smiling lovingly at him. But then they disappeared. He tried to find them all night but the faces never reappeared.

The next morning when Khaled's aunt came to his room she saw that he was not there and a piece of paper lay on the desk. It read:

Dear Auntie,

I am leaving this house to become somebody in life by myself. You have never let me understand the absence of my parents. But I have now realized that if I don't try myself I won't be able to shine in life. I am fed up of being a person who is dependent on others for every grain of rice. I know if I stay with you longer your love will make me helpless. So I am leaving. Please forgive me.

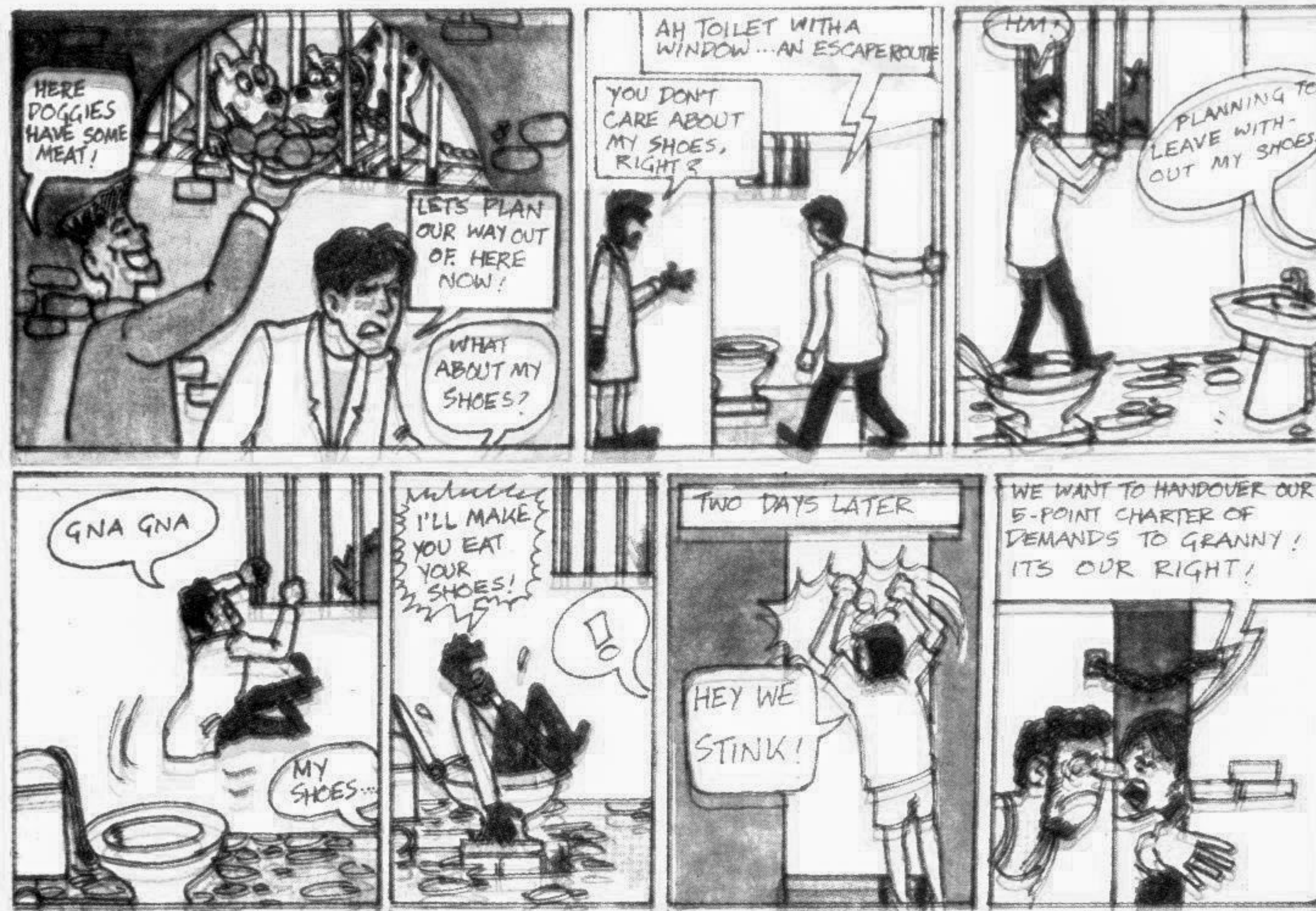
Love,
Khaled
Sumit obtained 10 As' in O'Level Examination of London University (1994-95).



Poison-dart frogs lurid and lethal: This dominated male, wild *D Pumilio* paused just briefly to lean on a snail - as if to give a motivational speech to his lethal amphibian colleagues. Courtesy - National Geographic

The Missing Machine

by Sharier



Fate Of 1 Taka Coins

ONE taka coins are quite new as our country's currency as a rule they should be found in banks and local shops. But they are scarce. If you go to a shop, buy something and the change you get is the worst looking note anyone has ever seen. Naturally, you ask for coins instead. The shopkeepers give you cold shoulder and a flat sorry Why?

These coins are pretty useful, is not easier to carry around. We don't have to worry about their condition as it always looks like the same shiny silver coin with our national emblem on one side and "good for everyone" sign on the other side. Different people will give you different answers if you ask why they are so scarce? Some people say a crazy coin collector robbed all the banks

for the coins. Some say they are being taken to foreign countries nearby for making cheap silver spoons. All these answers could be true in a way, but the logical reason seems to be lost.

I suspect that 1 taka coins are going to be extinct soon. They are so unpopular in Bangladesh. It seems that we Bangladeshis don't want to try something new, we are willing to live on with those dirty, torn notes. Are we?

by a RS member

WE were flying 25,000 feet up in the air, our destination was Kenya, we could see nothing from up here except for the clouds under us, and sometimes we were inside it too. I think the most boring journey a man can ever travel in, is the plane, you just have to sit tight in your seat with a belt around your waist.

We were five in the group Opu, Fahem, Rumi, Chayan and myself. We were going to Kenya on a safari which we always wanted to take ever since we became very good friends. By the way I forgot to mention that we were friends since our school days and over the years our friendship grew stronger.

We were all environmental science students and after we completed our formal education, we were to conduct a research and write a report about some extinct animals. We tried to find who was responsible for their disappearance from the face of the earth, was it done by man, or mother nature herself (after all extinction and creation is a rule with her). So, to do this research we were going to Kenya now, we were pretty sure to discover some hidden mysteries from nature, why was she so cruel upon her children, and why her children were so, too was our enquiry?

Our plane touched the airport at Nairobi around 3:30 in the afternoon. It was the month of May and you could understand how hot it can be at that time of the day; and the sky - it was most certainly different from Bangladesh's. We had some helpers in the airport who were also working on the environmental research of Kenya. They helped us with language as well as our luggage. But still we faced problems as with the airport se-

curity guards regarding our purpose and of course ID's. But Mr Joneo and Mr Kwarshior..... got rid of them. "You must be tired from your long journey, we will leave you at the hotel where you will be staying during your stay in Kenya, and Hotel Safari is quite secured", Fahem said; "why do we need security, I mean we are a group of researchers who are working on environment, what is the big deal about security."

"You don't seem to get the message Mr Fahem, Kenya is a very big country and we have some rare species of animals in the world today we are also trying to protect them, but you must remember that there are people who are killing these animals and doing illegal business. They will not want to have thorns placed on their way and they would do anything to remove those who come across their way. So, for your own good we have arranged for security measures, even with tight security you will have to be very careful, because you don't know what is going to happen the next moment."

"So, are you trying to say that we won't be allowed to roam freely here and do our work."

"No, we are not saying that, what we are doing is give you protection, so that nobody can cause any harm. You know you can never be sure, now you are walking with us but the next moment a speeding car from somewhere can run you down. Well then, there is nothing much we can do but accept being watched twenty-four hours a day."

"We are sorry but that is precisely the situation." After about an hour's drive from the Kenya airport we reached "Hotel Safari." It was really quite an exclusive hotel, as

Our Destination was Kenya

by Shahed Latif

far as I am concerned these hotels usually are.

After we arrived at the hotel the two men who came along with us left, and said that they would come here early in the morning and we would go to Kiswan, a village about 30 km from Nairobi. They also asked as not to leave our hotel after dark because it was too dangerous in the night, and to our utter horror and astonishment we had guards standing near our

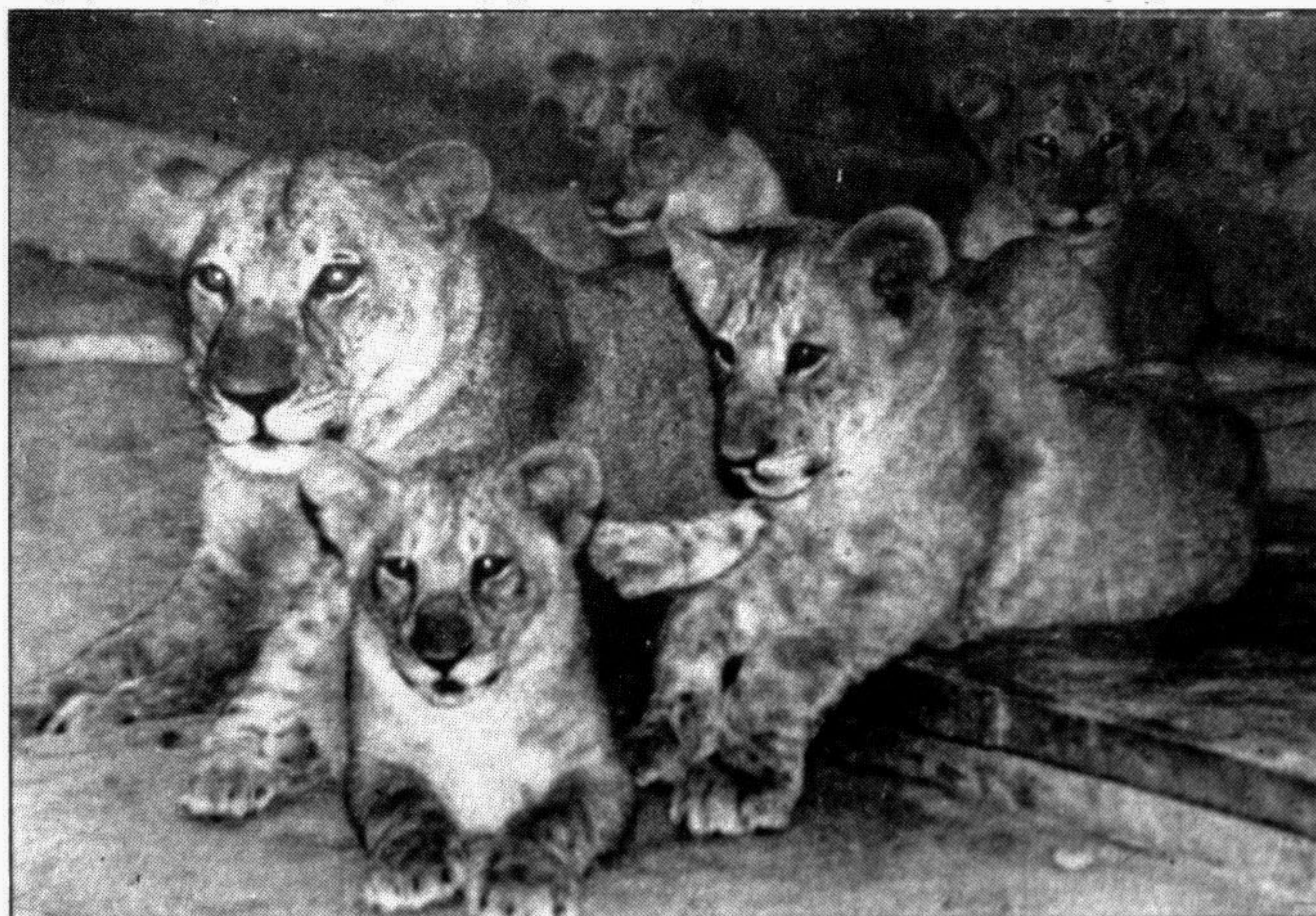
bedrooms. Opu was really frustrated at this; he came out and said, "I have to go out, I need cigarettes." Sir, what is your brand we will get it for you."

"What is that supposed to mean, why can't I buy my own thing? This is ridiculous, I mean what is this, some kind of a joke."

"No sir, this is no joke we are just carrying out orders,

you will not be allowed to leave the hotel and we will do anything to stop you, no foreigners room around in the night, it is too dangerous and you are a researcher."

"Very well then I don't need cigarettes, I am flying out of this place tomorrow morning, I can do my research from some other place."



Why are they vanishing? Who is to be blamed? photo A K M Mohsin

thing else, last night we could not see anything because it was dark and we were not allowed to go out. It was really astonishing what man can do, on one side you see the sky skappers and on the other side you can see the natures wonders as far as the eyes goes. Now it came to our mind how rich in natural beauty this African country was. When we came down for our breakfast we saw the two men who came with us yesterday talking with the manager when they saw us they came towards us with a smiling face and greeted "Good-Morning. We are really sorry that you could not buy your cigarettes, I apologies for that." We said nothing about that issue because we were not interested with little matters anymore we wanted to start our work as soon as possible. "When can we start for Kiswar," I said, "Soon after your breakfast" so, we quickly ate our breakfast. It was 8:30 in the morning. One thing I could not stop noticing was fences of strong ironrods. I could not really hold my curiosity and asked "why do you have these strong iron fences, what are these for?"

"These are made specially for the protection for the Kenyan people, these iron fences protect us from all those free wild animals; actually all round Kenya we have this fence, it is like we are the animals in a cage and they are free to do whatever they like."

We arrived in Kiswar at 1:00 pm it was very remote area even though it was thirty miles away from Nairobi. You could feel that civilization has not touched here, by the way I forgot to tell you we had to cross a gate before entering Kiswar, as because there were fences all round the main city, they also had gates from where you could enter

the safari. Actually these gates led directly to the place where you wanted to go; like we wanted to Kiswar, we came to the gate were it was written Kiswar, it was actually very simple and easy.

We drove for nearly four hours inside Kiswar and did not see a single rhino, lion or elephant. We asked Mr Jones what the reason was, he replied that at this time of the year the animals usually live in the dense forest, so we have to go for another, half a mile before you can see one or two rhinos if we are lucky enough. We drove for another two or three hours and decided to take a break, we are going to have our lunch and then keep on going until we can find something that is of our interest.

But to our utter disappointment we did not find any animal, and now it was getting dark and in Africa it is said that you don't roam around in the dark. When we returned to Hotel Safari the manager gave us a letter that some one has left for us. The letter read like this "You want to protect the rare species of this world and get hold of poachers and bring them to justice but that can never happen. If you want to go back home alive, then leave this country within twenty-four hours or you will find yourself in such a situation that you would pray to die then to live such a horrifying life."

We thought who could it be, how come they know that we have come here to protect the environment and so on? We all were so much occupied with this that we went to bed wondering what was in store for us. (To be continued)

This story is fictitious any resemblance to real incidents, names or places is purely coincidental.