

## My Scottish

## Friend

WHEN 18 and meeting up with an ex-friend after five years, one might have to take a prescription from a doctor because certain veins within the human body might pop due to high blood pressure. The last thing you may remember of that person would probably be her extraordinary talent on bunking classes or her award winning acting whenever her parents caught her cheating on her studies! Five years is, however a long time and though you have written to her on how much you are dying to see her, there's still a cell nibbling inside your brain asking "Why, out of all the countries in the world did she decide to meet me here in Bangladesh?"

During such circumstances you realise that your current *dostos* are not very helpful either. Some suggest that you take your *bideshi* friend on any *chourasta*. There she will enjoy God's creation of making so many faces in just one little country, be entertained with live NWF (Nation Wide Wrestling) between the rickshawallah and bus conductors and finally envy the freedom of men being able to relieve themselves near the drains whenever nature calls. Others suggested that if mummy didn't allow us to be out at dark then simply turn on any of the five National channels' News and get informed with politics, newer ways to kill someone and finally the latest sari-matching-lipstick as Khaleda Zia gives out her old speech in a newer version (thanks to the dictionary of synonyms, now we all know that there is more than one way to say the same thing).

She finally arrived. I took her places. I took her to the shopping malls; I took her to the restaurants and hangouts. I introduced her to few of my friends. It wasn't enough though. There was something very boring about it. It was too normal. Nevertheless, embarrassingly I slowly muttered to her about having to get ready to leave the next day to see my grandparents in the village. It's so humiliating, I thought.

Eventually we took off and for the entire day, not once did we stop smiling, grinning or simply laughing our heads off. It was so fun to just run barefoot across the field carelessly, to secretly steal mangoes from the neighbours tree, to run after the chicks and see who can catch one the fastest and finally to see what it feels like to milk cows! That however didn't turn out great because it kicked us every time we got close to it. At the end of the day it felt good not to care about my messy hair, my sweaty face and my dirty feet. It felt good to be just plain and hyper me!

It's been a week since my Scottish friend left Bangladesh and I miss her a lot. She misses me too but out of the five days that we spent here, she keeps saying that going to the village has been the most wonderful and care-free experience of her life! She too adds that in November, the entire class of grade seven from our old school is coming to visit Bangladesh! I am sure you all know that there are no more worries or feelings of embarrassment as to where to take them!

By Shayera Moula

## A strange encounter

1944 England. 2433 hours. During the period of World War II

GLoucester Road was desolate at the time. Every single living organism was silent under the charred void sky. The tranquillity was uncanny. The spherical, luminous moon, pale as death, unveiled itself ever so often from among the ambient, malevolent clouds, submerging everything underneath the expansive vacuum in a light that could only be described as ethereal.

Boris Rostov was responsible for disturbing the contemporary silence. The monotonous echo of his shoes on the pavement announced his arrival on the deserted road. He was forty-eight years old, a conscientious man competent in the field of espionage. Adept at retrieving information from unknown territories and an expert in covert operations, Boris was a spy working for the Nazis, transported across international boundaries to England in order to obtain and transmit valuable information to his country from behind enemy lines.

The Nazi was wrapped in a trench coat with his hands buried in his pockets, ambling down the middle of the road; the ambience suited him. A second set of echo, orchestrated by a pair of shoes coming into contact with the asphalt at regular intervals, was heard another individual was present on the road. Boris ignored the interference and continued down the road in his leisurely pace. When Boris had a visual of the silhouette of the character approaching him from the other end of the road, he put a cigarette in his mouth and browsed his pockets for a lighter. He was prepared for a contingency such as this and decided to behave in the most ordinary fashion.

The newcomer seemed to be in his late fifties. He was wearing a charcoal trench coat and a bowler hat. Most of his face was concealed among the shadows cast by the brim of his hat. The man seemed to exude confidence and had a sense of enigma around him. 'How do you do sir?' the man asked Boris when he was within hearing distance.

'Fine sir, how do you do?' said Boris in his impeccable English accent. He stopped searching his pockets for a lighter and asked the man, 'Would you happen to have a lighter with you by any chance?'

'Why yes, indeed I do,' the man replied. Although the man's facial expressions were consumed by the shadows underneath the hat, Boris could incisively make out his lips contorting to form a sardonic grin. The Nazi immediately realized what he had done wrong though it was too late. An eminent

German tobacco company had manufactured the cigarette implanted firmly between his lips. Trade between England and Germany had been banned because of the war. Surely the man must have identified Boris as the enemy?

Boris always kept a silenced USP handgun holstered to the back of his leather belt right under his spinal chord, which could be reached through openings cut into the insides of both the pockets of his coat; the unoccupied hand inside one of the pockets discreetly navigated through the artificial aperture and clutched the chrome-plated handle of the gun hidden behind his back. He would resort to using it if he had to.

The enigmatic man did not search his pockets for a lighter neither did he make any sudden movements indicating panic. He merely stared at Boris with his pale green eyes, which for the first time appeared out of the shadows concealing his face. Boris was cemented to the pavement, his one hand adjusting the cigarette properly in between his lips, pretending to wait for the man to provide him with a light, while the other, clutching the USP firmly with sweat laden fingers incase the man made any sudden movements. He did not know what to do; he had certainly not expected the man to stare at him and smile, and not panic or scream for assistance.

In an instance the intensity of the situation was shattered like a mirror smashing into a thousand pieces. The man had closed and opened his left eyelid at Boris within a fraction of a second, which caused an exiguous eruption of flames of manifold hues between the two men, instigating at the tip of the cigarette planted in Boris' lips. Boris had staggered a couple of steps back, the USP in one hand now completely exposed. And the man remained in his position, the sardonic grin on his face now replaced by a complacent one.

Boris straightened up - his entire physique vibrating similar to a tuning fork - and brought up his gun-hand, his trigger finger itching to pull back on the cold crescent metal. As he lifted the USP, he noticed that the cigarette sandwiched between his lips, was smoldering gently at the tip, emitting intricate patterns of gray smoke into the atmosphere. The man did not wait for Boris's reaction. He smiled and said, 'I hope you will keep that a secret just as I will keep yours sir.' And with that he walked past a bewildered Boris, down Gloucester Road, fading into the darkness of the night....

School Essay 2003

HAT day in August saw the end of my month-long project. It was only after submitting it to my boss that I could breathe again with ease. 'Enough', I thought. I reached home, dumped some clothes into a bag and caught the next train, away from the city, away from its chaotic, bustling life.

I was in a happy mood that day. It was one of those days when I wanted to whistle. I paid the rickshaw driver more than what was deserved. As I got into the station, I saw dirt all around me which stank horribly, enough to make one reel, but who cared? The train's long and deep whistle sounded just as I was paying the vendor for a bottle of Coke. I grabbed my bags and jumped into the train. I had a cabin all to myself, 'Great!' I thought. I shut the door to all the humdrum and chaos outside. I wanted to remain cut off from the rest of the world for the time being. I sank into a chair and putting my feet up, I gulped down my Coke which did wonders to my dry throat.

The train started with a shudder - at first creaking and groaning and then slowly increasing speed. I could not help but let out a sigh of relief. At that moment, I wanted to get as far away as possible from the mechanical world that I lived in. As I drank my bottle of coke, I looked out through the open window.

The train was passing through one of the busiest areas of the city. What met my eyes was simply another typical life in the city. I was greeted by the sight of dirty alleys, grey blocks of buildings piled on top of the other, all looking the same without any character of their own. They loomed over the busy, crowded streets with blank faces. Water from the recent rainfall trickled down over the small roadside shops that lined the street. I passed the gutters, black and smelly. If there is one that thing that makes city life unbearable for me, it is the stinking odour of these gutters. People had thrown all sorts of things into them.

There were the multi-coloured polythene bags that choke the city, there were broken bottles, pieces of cloth, wrappers someone had thoughtlessly thrown away from his car window as he rushed to his office.

People were thronging their way about; they all seemed all so alien to me now. They

jostled this way and that, their legs always in a hurry. They all wore grim, unsmiling faces from which cold and steely eyes showed. They all seemed to have irritated looks on their faces. I could not help but wonder how I had managed to live there. It was difficult for me to believe that I was one of those frowning, cheerless people a moment ago; yet, the truth gave me the goosepimples. The rickshaw pullers seemed to be at the last leg of their energy as their shirts clung to their sweaty backs.

The sky looked all grey and dismal from the clouds and even more so from the black smoke. How I hate the smoke that seems to choke the life out of me! The gloominess outside made everything appear so ghostly. The people, the cars and the trees all seemed to be uttering only one word - rush, rush. I felt they all needed a break.

The scene outside set me thinking about

the people, about what made them look like that. Perhaps it was the constant struggle for a better life and greener patches, or maybe it was the loneliness of modern life where all the rush and tireless works that it demands shuts out all forms of communication.

By the road side, I saw a broken umbrella, with all its ribs sticking out. It reminded me of broken dreams and hopes, perhaps another reason for

the despondent and edgy faces that I saw outside. I came to the conclusion that the unfeeling surfaces of these people's lives mirror a pathetic and often hopeless striving. I could have shut the window and started reading my novel but I did not. I wanted to see the city I lived in from a totally different angle.

The train chugged its way out from the drudgery of city life and soon rolled into the green, cheerful countryside. It was so refreshing! The sharp contrast between the two places amazed me. The city was now far behind me; it felt good to be away from the grips of the mechanical world that I dread. For now, I wanted to enjoy the sun, the trees and the hills. I wanted to run around in the smooth green fields, feeling the wind against my face, with not a thing to care about.

By Sameeha Suraiya

## The whirling life of city

## The happy ending

PFFT! The candle blows out. Of course it has burnt almost all night. Load shedding is very common in this Dhaka city.

And in

Aranya's area one can never think about a whole night served with the blessing called electricity. And tonight electricity hasn't showed up for once. Aranya looks around. It's almost dawn. Sun is about to rise. Some birds have already waked up, they are chirping merrily. Yes, it's now possible to write without the help of candlelight. But he can't get the energy like he had only a few hours ago. Aranya sighs: "no, I should do it. I shouldn't give up..."

Aranya is a journalist of a well-known newspaper. He has a habit of writing stories also. This year a collection of some of his stories has been published on the Ekushey Book Fair. Since he was teenaged he had the habit of writing stories about imaginary characters. His father was a story writer also. But he died in a car accident when Aranya was 14 years old. Aranya was also in that car, but he accomplished to survive while his father died just in front of him. From that time Aranya tried to be like his father, a story writer. Now that he has grown up, he has succeeded to fulfil his dream. But he can't write stories with happy endings like his father's ones. Maybe he didn't have much intellect & intelligence to give a happy ending to a story. Yes, he has been a bit mentally disordered after that accident. Some years ago after his dear old mother died he has started living on his own. As he had lack of extemporaneity his relatives also didn't give much care of him.

Tonight his harsh past has hurt him again & again. Tonight he has decided to write his own story. All his life he has written stories about imaginary characters, characters that do not exist. But tonight this thought is hurting him again & again: do those characters really exist? Or are their life confined between these pieces

of papers only? Suddenly another idea stroke him hardly: cannot my life story be a part of another story written by another writer?

Nop, Aranya thinks. I'll not give him the chance to do so. Before that I'll write my own story myself. I don't want my life to be imprisoned between some pieces of papers...but... if I write my own story, and then also my life story will be captured between pieces of papers.

Damn! Why am I taking things so critically? Aranya gets disgusted and searches for another piece of paper to start his story. But all the papers are gone. All night long he has written his story and at once has thrown the paper away and started to write on another paper again. Thus all the papers have finished now. Aranya looks around; his room has been filled with torn and crumpled papers. Suddenly a childhood memory strikes him.

After his father's death poverty became a common part of his life. Then his mother often disagreed to buy him much paper to write stories. She sometimes managed to buy papers for his studies only. Aranya smiles: if only mother could see how I am now. Now I've papers to spoil and throw away. He feels a bit contented. Then suddenly he starts to think more clearly. Why am I taking things so seriously & critically? Why should I write my story? I'm not forced to do so. Why should I write a sad and sensitive story about myself? Why should I write sad & sympathetic stories about my imaginary characters? Why should I give a sad ending to the stories of my own imaginary characters?

Ring! Ring! The alarm clock rings noisily. It's time to go to office. Aranya stands up and starts to get ready for it. He feels much refreshed. Another day starts in his life.

At last I've succeeded to give my story a happy ending!

By Fahmina Nahid