

# Fiction of the month contest runners up

## 2nd Battery Goli

**N**OTORIOUS for its inability to accommodate the two-way flow of traffic, the smells of dried fish looming in the air and the cacophony of its eclectic inhabitants, this road was an enigma to me.

My day started off like no other. To relieve myself of the boredom of staying indoors during my summer holidays, I decided to visit a friend. Halfway there, the rickshaw puller, intimidated by the monstrous traffic jam that lay before us, took a detour. Thus, I was initiated into the infamous world of Battery Golly; a microcosm of Bangladesh.

The entrance was wide: very welcoming and hospitable. But as soon as I travelled a few metres through, I was in a bottleneck situation...trapped in the midst of all the types of vehicles known to mankind, not to mention swarms of people milling around all over the place. As soon as I overcame this initial claustrophobia, I was greeted by the wild colours of summer fruits standing out against the drabness of the rest of the golly.

The cracked open watermelon oozed redness and juiciness. The bright yellow mangoes were arranged in pyramids, and over them, inevitably hung columns of laced up apples: red, green and yellow. In a basket on the ground was the rather conceited fruit, the lychee, succulent and plump, gracing us with its presence only a few weeks a year. Grapes aplenty and pineapples galore! Coupled with the aroma, this sight gave my salivary glands their much-needed exercise, which they were usually deprived of due to ritualistically bland breakfast.

Just as I was reminiscing about

how these fruit stalls used to catch my eye when I was in school, no sooner emerged a stampede of uniform adorned school children, obstructing the already monotonous flow of traffic in the golly. Some ran, their stomachs growling, while others tried my patience by languidly strolling across the road, oblivious to the world around them; stuck in some twilight zone of innocence and synchronized giggles! Young children, smothered by their mother's saris, narrated their adventures at school and perhaps dictated tiffin preferences for the next day.

As the tide died down, I spotted a slightly different kind of school goer, markedly different by attire. With his faded and unstarched uniform he tiptoed across the road, careful not to get his shoeless heels burnt by the scorching tar. Books in his hands and head held up high, the smile on his face revealed that he was ready to brave a world that had definitely been unfair to him.

This child went into one of those all-purpose shops that the golly was dotted with and took his place behind the counter. These stores were replicas of those overcrowded shops found elsewhere in the city, selling everything from rice and cooking oil to imported biscuits and sewing thread. Nearby, samosas and parathas were being fried in month old oil. My sudden craving for such unhygienic food was similar to the temptation all of us have for roadside 'jhal muri'. Whether we like to admit it or not, we Bangladeshis are genetically inclined to enjoy bacteria-infested treats!

To my amusement, I even saw a Cyber Café lurking somewhere in the midst of hardware stores and tea stalls. This 'Net World' must facilitate



their customers, through its link however slow—to the outside world, from which they are so isolated.

The incessant sounds of people haggling, shouting and spitting were pounding in my head since I entered the golly. Just as I felt immune to the clamour, I approached the bazaar and the level of noise pollution reached an all time high. Moreover, I had to endure the smells of both fresh and dried fish. The astringent smells of spices tickled my nose as my rickshaw, thankfully, swerved away from the bloody arena of the butcher's shop.

Behind the bazaar was a network of slums, where fat-bellied and bow-legged children pranced around chasing after tires with

sticks. The gathering of people at the communal water pipe to collect their daily supply of water was yet another boisterous event.

As my rickshaw finally moved out, both bazaar and slum thinned out. Larger and stronger walls replaced the bazaar's broken walls, whilst the plague known as the bulldozer mercilessly demolished thatched roof cottages one by one to make way for more modern habitation. Those slum-dwellers would soon have to find new homes and new means of income. What good would come of houses they could never afford to occupy or shops they would never have the capital to invest in?

Observations and ruminations occupied my mind while travelling through this self-sufficient mini-

metropolis. A world of its own, Battery Golly, housed all religions, sheltered both rich and poor, was a centre of commerce for the baker, the tailor and the doctor. The day-to-day survival of its inhabitants, their communities and activities, placed in perspective, paralleled those of the city as a whole and in a wider viewpoint—the country.

I was half an hour late my rickshaw jerked to a stop at the gate of my friend's house. Irritated by my tardiness and accusing me of maintaining 'BST' (Bengali Standard Time), as she phrased it, she asked me whether I had to travel the whole country before landing on her doorstep. Grinning to myself, I wondered...how ironic...in a way I did!

By Rudmila Rahman

## 3rd Desperate Dan

**D**AN always met his deadlines but for the first time in ten years he could not deliver. He had no story and he had no idea how to break the news to his remorseless editor.

What did the editor expect? Dan had been given such little time and yet so many criterions to meet. The editor demanded a story, eight hundred words long, exactly. No more, no less!

No problem, Dan had thought.

But then the conditions had been set. Dan had to write the story within thirty minutes and it had to include the sudden death of an attractive woman in her early thirties. Either Dan delivered or he was out of a job.

That was twenty minutes ago and still he had nothing. Dan jotted down his incoherent thoughts in the notepad he carried with him everywhere. As he sat on the leather couch he looked around the large waiting area.

Just ten minutes.

Anxious that he had such little time, his mind explored possible scenarios. His gaze fixed on the receptionist near the entrance to the editor's office. She was an attractive young girl. Probably in her mid twenties though. But that did not matter, Dan could always tweak up her age.

Good! He thought. Now how does she die in the waiting area, of an office, of all places? Maybe she falls asleep while taking shorthand, and

as her chair collapses she hits her head, killed instantly by the impact. Or perhaps, she severs her fingers while closing the filing cabinet and bleeds to death.

Frustration took over again as he knew the ideas were lame. His editor would laugh cruelly at his inadequacy. Dan was sure the editor had a

personal vendetta of some sort against him. He was positive the limitations had been set on purpose, so that he failed. Dan pleading for his job was what the editor wanted to see.

The pretty young receptionist's voice interrupted his thoughts.

'Dan. The editor will see you

now.' She said beaming.

He jotted down his thoughts in the notepad before he got up and walked towards the editor's office. His hand closed around the door handle. If he could just think of an idea, he could talk his way out of it. Say he could not find a computer to get the story typed on time. But his mind was blank and he had no time left. Just eight more minutes. It was hopeless.

Dan looked back at the pretty receptionist. Noticing him, she smiled again. He graciously grinned back at her and turned around to face the door. Taking a deep breath he opened it and entered quickly.

'Ahh, Dan. Of course. I've been expecting you.' The editor said from behind the huge desk. He made his way over and started pacing back and forth.

The editor noticed Dan's obvious distress and grinned sadistically. 'Why don't you take a seat?' Dan shook his head indicating he would rather not.

'I trust you have a story for me.'

'Err. Um, n-no. I don't.' said Dan surprised at his stumbling.

The editor frowned. 'You do your best work when I put the pressure on. You can't seriously tell me that you have nothing.'

Dan approached the side of the editor's desk. 'This time it was too difficult. I tried, but my mind is a blank,' he explained helplessly.

'But you must at least have an idea for a story. You know I don't

actually need it written up.'

Dan was quiet a long moment. He made another attempt at thinking up a story of some sort. His brain worked through images and rejected ideas as they formed, knowing they would not satisfy the editors' hunger for a top story.

'I can't. You set me too many parameters and too little time.' Dan said.

The editor got angry and stood up. 'Too many parameters! Any decent writer would be able to come up with an idea on the spot. You remember my warning? Thirty minutes I gave you to deliver.' Pointing at Dan's notepad, the editor continued yelling. 'You still have five minutes to give me an idea. Otherwise you're out.'

Dan carefully studied his notes and quickly wrote some more before hurling his notepad on the desk. The editor's eyes opened wide in horror but there was no time to scream as Dan thrust his pencil deep into the editor's throat.

He mused that his editor had indeed been correct. Dan really did do his best work when he was under pressure. He looked down, as the editor fell to the floor spurting blood from the throat. Such a loss! Dan thought. His editor was undeniably a very attractive woman in her early thirties. Dan had delivered once again on time and to eight hundred words exactly!

By Masum Ibrahim Choudhury

