

Money for magic



THE classes for the session of 2002-2003 had begun, and our freshman batch had started feeling overwhelmed by a combination of homesickness, awkwardness at the novelty of being in university, and stress over the demanding schedule of classes and assignments. To ease us into campus life, our Department decided to hold an elaborate Orientation programme that comprised of several cultural events. The arrangements were so charming, I don't think anyone in our batch will ever forget it. One incident in particular, sticks out in my mind.

After classes one day, the newcomers were summoned to a room by the seniors. When we

went inside, we were each handed a piece of candy, and a card, which wished us good luck, and bore instructions for us. Some of the cards asked the recipients to sing a song, some called for a catwalk, and some even asked for dramatic role-play. Mine asked me to perform a magic trick.

I was pretty nervous. In my head I was picturing all those fabulous magical acts by 'real' magicians, the hypnotism, the card games, and I felt my stomach grow cold. I didn't know any of these things! So I stood there watching my batch-mates perform their required roles, and I grew more nervous by the minute as a desperate plan formed in my head.

Finally, it was my turn. I stepped up and said, "For my trick, I will need an Apu to volunteer to help by giving me some money." I didn't dare ask the senior boys, because I doubted they would be sympathetic to my needs, and I didn't want to get into trouble with them after I had done what I was planning to do.

One of the senior girls had a fifty-taka note with her. With a touch of reluctance, egged on by others, she handed it to me, although I could tell that she didn't really want to part with the money. I accepted it, and put it in my right pocket.

"Observe...my trousers are a mobile factory. I put some money in one pocket, and it transforms into something else and arrives at my left." With that, I fished in my left pocket and retrieved a cheap piece of lozenges that couldn't have cost more than a taka. This I handed to Pushpa apu, the girl who had volunteered the money, while everyone clapped. Then I quickly got off the stage and ran off to spend the money she had given me. She stood there, shocked at being cheated.

I had a great time at the canteen, squandering the fifty takas on food, but later I felt guilty. So when we had another campus event celebrating the New Year sometime later, I gifted her with a beautiful pen. She seemed to have forgiven me, and treated me with a smile of unparalleled sweetness.

I still have the piece of candy I had been given on the day of the Department Orientation. I didn't eat it. It reminds me of all the fun I had, and of the sweet Pushpa apu, who helped me perform my magic trick.

By Shamal Das Jony

Things fall apart

AN inevitability of being an army brat is that you have to move around a lot...and change schools a lot. For me, every time I changed schools I thought *how can I leave? How can I leave my best friends in the whole world?* And then, as I had my friends meticulously fill in my slam book, I would make a secret vow to never forget the friends I leave behind, to remain best friends. Once I even decided to not make friends at the new school because I thought that it would be like betraying my other friends. Suffice to say all my vows have been broken time and again.

Not only that, we've all just grown apart. We've fallen apart. I still love them, they're still my friends...but it's strange to see how different we've all become. The tight knit group in which every one of us liked the same music, the same movies, the same food, the same everything, couldn't now even be imagined to have had the same hairstyle back in class 2. I've had plenty of experiences where I've told people *oh yeah I*

know her and got the most incredulous of looks as a response, as if the only way *she* and I could be friends would be if hell froze over. Now that I think about it, I would do the same in that situation because even I do wonder sometimes how we ended up so differently. What happened in that time that we were apart?

We lost contact. I had resolved to call them everyday...every week...once every two weeks...at least. But I'm just bad at that: keeping in touch. My only excuse is that I am a lazy ass. I forgot to call, then I missed birthdays. I remembered all their birthdays but by the time I got around to picking up the phone, the day was over. How could I have called then?

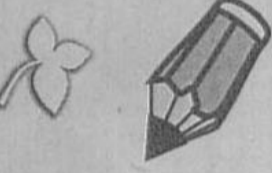
I'm in my final year at school and all my classmates will be at varsities at home and abroad in a year from now. By now I know that I'll lose touch with them somewhere along the way and it pains me to think about it. And I know I am a horrible person to just let it happen but who knows...maybe I'll learn from my mistakes.

A few months back a few of my friends from my previous school and I got together. The last time we'd all been together was when I was a pre-teen. And the last time I'd had *that* much fun was when I was with them as a pre-teen. I thought I'd feel out of place because we were all different people but that get-together made me realise that people don't change, not really. Inside all of us were hidden our ten-year-old selves and those ten-year-olds came out that evening.

It was like old times and I know that's a cliché but it really was. We all spilled our guts, caught up on all that we'd missed, listened to songs from eight years ago that made us nostalgic and the best thing was that I felt like I really belonged. In the real world I probably would never approach or be approached by the girl who personified the word 'cool' or the one addicted to Indian soaps but in that one evening nothing like that mattered. There was nowhere we would've rather been.

By Verity

Beneath the earth



There's a large patch of disturbed earth in the middle of the yard
And the weeds haven't grown over it yet.
There are no stones to mark who lies there,
But we know it's you.
It's not like you're dead just somewhere, someplace we can't be, too.
We think of you when you used to smile and laugh
And your eyes to twinkle with some secret joke
We think of all the times you used to visit and chat with us
And in our head, you're not really gone.
You're just someplace unreachable beneath the earth
Stretched out in your eternal sleep
The white shroud wrapped around you.
When I go there
The patch of brown earth does not remind me of you
I think it's someone else lying there.

To me, you're still very much alive.
When I think of my birthday, I still think you'll be the first one to call and wish me
And say that someday I'm going to be as tall as you.
And I secretly look forward to what you're going to give me this time, now that I'm a year older
An inch taller,
A bit smarter,
And a little bit more like you.
All the time that I'm at the yard, that patch of brown earth means little to me.
But when I leave, and I look back over my shoulder
I see a large rectangle of disturbed earth,
And I picture you lying ten feet under.
And then it hits me
You're never coming back again.
I think I saw you smile
It was late in September when we last met before you went away
You weren't going for long so I thought I had no idea that a year later you would be leaving us for good.
You were happy then,
Happy as you always were,
And I think I saw you smile.

I didn't feel sorry to see you leave
Because I knew that you would be back again.
You brought my favorite sweets.
I remember, because you always knew how much I loved them.
And though you were eleven years older than me,
We could've been one and the same.
We were cousins by blood, but sisters by heart.
Sometimes we thought on the same plain,
And it was as though our hearts were beating as one.
We shared an intimate, sisterly relationship
That transcended the bonds of cousinhood.
We were a little bit of friends, and cousins
But more than that, you were the elder sister I never had.
And I never will have, ever again.
Because now you're gone,
And you're never coming home.
Even then, even though you are gone from this earth,
We haven't forgotten you.
We never will.
You will remain in our hearts forever
And in my mind,
I think I see you smile.

Book review

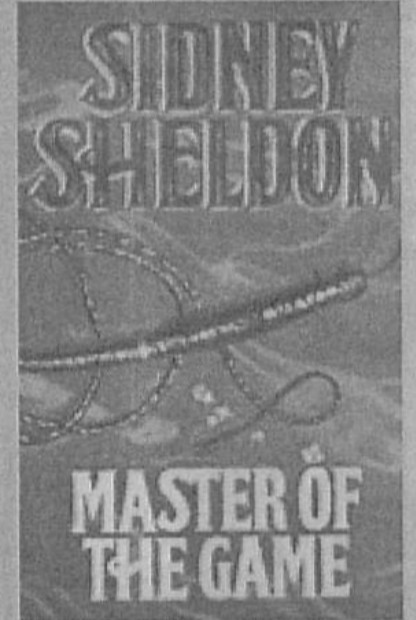
Master of the Game

MR. BESTSELLER'S back, people, and he's finally back in form. After the rather uncharacteristic *Are you afraid of the Dark?* Sid Sheldon seems more like himself in *Master of the Game*.

The story is about the remarkable life of one Kate Blackwell, an unruly, willful girl born out of a loveless marriage. It opens at Kate's ninetieth birthday, where she looks back on her life, and the twists and turns she's seen. At this venerable age, she is at the pinnacle of success; the feared, revered and respected, not to mention very rich head of a sprawling empire. The rest of the book follows as a sort of flashback on the events that led to this birthday, a flashback that spans over four generations.

The flashback begins with Jamie McGregor, an Irishman who came to South Africa during the Diamond Rush, dreaming of untold wealth like so many others. He is cheated, beaten up, and left for dead by a crooked Dutch trader. Rescued by Banda, an African local, he plots and exacts his revenge.

As he rises to riches, Jamie's enemy is slowly, cruelly destroyed. The man's daughter, whom Jamie had impregnated and then abandoned as part of the



revenge, bears him a son, and Jamie realises he is not invulnerable to the ties between himself and the baby, so he marries the mother. A second child, the daughter Kate is born. Jamie suffers a stroke and dies soon afterwards.

The story shifts to Kate's own life. A woman who knows what she wants, and is determined to get it at any cost, she is as manipulative as they come. Starting from the man she loves, whom she hoodwinks into marrying her, to the son who dares defy her ambitions for him, to her twin grand-daughters, one as evil as the other is good, she manages to meddle in everyone's lives. Does she emerge as the master of the game? You have to read to find out.

From the diamond mines of South Africa to the art studios of Paris to the new and glittering America, the story flies from location to dazzling location, peopled by complicated and compelling characters, taking dramatic turns when you least expect them. Definitely a page turner.

I saw a whole bunch of roadside booksellers waving copies, and I daresay you can bargain your way to a copy for Tk 100, although you could hit any of the local bookstores for a copy of the real thing for around Tk 3-400.

By Sabrina F Ahmad