

other boys had gazed at them stupidly.

Rashida opens the door instantly on hearing the knock. Seeing Leena, she cries out loudly and hugs her. Then literally drags her inside. After sitting her down on the sofa, Rashida says in a grave tone, "You came after a long time; you've utterly forgotten me."

"What if I tell you the same thing, that you forgot me!"

"It would be a lie."

"Not at all."

"You have yet to set up a household and run it. The day you do you'll know what it is: work and more work."

"And you think you're the only running a household, nobody else?"

"They do, but my situation's different. I'm married to an ass, he can't get by for a second without me."

"Well, that's good, isn't it?"

"Some good!" Rashida then replaced her angry expression with a more normal one and asked, "How's Uncle, Auntie, Deena and Ratu?"

"Fine."

"It's been so long since I have seen them. And by the by, do you still have that bad habit?"

Leena looks straight at Rashida. She doesn't say anything, only laughs. After a while she says, "Listen, I'm going to be here with you for some time."

"Stay as long as you like. Listen, are you thinking about marrying? Time is not standing still for any of us."

"Is marriage essential?"

"Oh, you saying such things keeps irritating me. Wait till I meet Auntie next, I'm going to fix this problem for good this time."

Smiling sweetly, Leena keeps pulling at the fingers of Rashida's hands. She says nothing in reply. Just looks thoughtful.

It's now fairly late at night, and there's still a few minutes to go before she reaches home.

The rickshaw is moving very slowly. Ma is certainly getting angry, and she'll pout and not talk with her daughter for a long time. Then later she'll get a plate of food and come to stand silently beside her.

Leena can't understand why at this very moment tears roll down from her eyes. As soon as the rickshaw reaches near her house, she wipes away the tears.

While handing the fare to the rickshaw-puller, she turns her head to see the wife of the neighboring house running towards her. Panting heavily, she says,

"Leena, have you heard? Durjoy has died; he was shot dead by some unknown people."

Leena looks at the wife in the dim, shadowy light. She doesn't say anything. Holding one of Leena's hands, the neighbouring woman says, "Do you know which Durjoy I'm talking about? That very Durjoy who killed a student last year by chopping him with a cleaver."

Leena keeps staring at her. In a desolate way. The woman becomes agitated, "Can't you place him? The one that kidnapped a girl for three days."

Still Leena does not say anything. She stares with fixed eyes at the woman, who becomes very impatient. Taking Leena by the hand and shaking it from side to side she says, "You know, that one, when you were in class ten, the boy that..."

The woman couldn't finish the sentence. Leena stops her by putting her finger on the woman's lips. Gently Leena frees her own hand from the woman's grip and quietly takes the dairy out from her bag. She used to feel like weeping before listing each dead beast. But this is the first time she smilingly writes a new number next to the tally of dead beasts: 80. Then closing the dairy and instead of putting it back in her bag she tosses it away by the side of the road.



A Life Like A Story

SYED SHAMSUL HUQ

(Translated by Khademul Islam)

All of us meet every day at Hanif Bhai's sweetmeat shop on Station Road. We've been having *addas* there for a long time now. So much talk, so many arguments -- there's so much to see on the street outside the shop. So many different kinds of people pass through there on railcars -- both known and unknown. We get to know some of them, and become wrapped up in their lives -- lives that have so

many different measures, surprises galore, so much pain and frustrations. Just like the roots of a tree draws nectar from the soil, so too in our *addas* at Hanif Bhai's we draw life's nectar, or poison, more poison than nectar, though, from morning till noon, and then from afternoon till evening to even late at night.

That day we left after watching a play on the television set which stood on shelf at Hanif Bhai's. The play's title had been 'Life Like A Story'. I don't remember the plot, and I've forgotten the faces of the young actors-actresses who lived in palatial

houses in the country's capital city - their lives sank without a trace after the play came to an end.

'Why was that?'

After watching the play a question arose in our minds, deep within our breast like drops of dew the issue frolicked and spread. We had heard for long the phrase about stories being life-like, but a life like a story was something that we failed to grasp. A life that was like a story aroused expectations of a lovely life, a life where a wish-fulfilling wind blew through it, where at every moment all desires were met.