



The carnival

*Lights go out and I can't be saved
Tides that I tried to swim against
Have brought me down upon my knees
Oh, I beg, I beg and plead*
[Clocks/Coldplay]

It was a beautiful, dazzlingly bright summer's day when Shaun's dad popped his clogs. It was sudden—no pain, no fuss; well, as far as Shaun knew. Then again, having never taken a bullet to the head, he wouldn't know. But his mother always strictly maintained that it was painless, more to keep her mind at ease than anything else. The one time Shaun had questioned her belief, she had spanked him raw, sobbing hysterically. He was five then, and less knowledgeable about the ways of the world and a widow's mind. He didn't have much time to wise up. His mother died quietly in bed two months later. She had overdosed on sleeping pills.

But since then, he had gotten a little smarter. He wasn't angry at his mother. Partly because he didn't know whether it was intentional, and partly because whatever stunned incredulity and indignation he had felt had ebbed away over the years. As for his father, well, you never question what you almost never had.

He didn't remember his father. Two year olds don't remember faces very well. To be honest, five year olds don't either. His mother was a vague mental photograph now, of a face inside a coffin ["the deepest sleep you'll ever have," was written on the ad for those pills in the pharmacy]. The image was blurred around the edges, smeared by tears shed since childhood.

He reached inside his left jacket pocket. Karl was still there, the last remaining strand of memory connecting him to a family. He had had him longer than he could remember. In retrospect, he was amazed that he managed to save the six-inch-long teddy bear through the long years in the orphanage, let alone the army. As he walked over the little bridge over the stream, he chuckled Karl into the water. No need for sentimentality now. He didn't look back as the current carried the worn out teddy down to an unknown destiny. But he did wonder though, what Karl would have done if he had a voice and working limbs. Would he have called out to him in despair, would he fight for his life? Or would he just heave a sigh, accept his fate and go the same way as Shaun's parents?

He stepped on to the carnival field and breathed in. Ah, the Sun shining bright, kids running around, people laughing, the smell of hot-dogs, cotton candy, cookies and beer—so this is how it feels to be a small townier! He smiled a little tiredly, he felt a little old. He shook himself. Now was not the time to be lethargic. He walked casually but purposefully through the crowd of chattering kids and adults. He even nodded at two twins who courteously said, 'Sorry, mister,' as they brushed past him, one of them accidentally stepping on his combat boots.

But at the cotton candy stand, he wavered. Wouldn't hurt to see how it tastes, would it? He bought a stick covered with white woolly candy. He took some of the sticky stuff and put it in his mouth. It disappeared instantly, leaving a sweet taste on his bitter tongue. And he was

hooked. He finished the first one in just under a minute and the second one in half that time. He was about to buy another one when he remembered why he was here. It took a considerable amount of will power to walk away.

It was then that he spotted Samantha Harris. Sam was standing next to a stall, cheering a man trying to knock off a pyramid of Heineken beer cans. Time hadn't left much of a mark on her; the same wavy black hair that he had fallen in love with, the delicate face, the dark brown eyes; so ordinary, yet so powerful. The tightly knit body that he had first [and last] made love to was just a little loose.

The 8mm jostled in his right jacket pocket. It was trying to block out his memory. It wanted him to forget the dreams, forget the past. *She didn't wait for you! She promised she would, but she didn't. She lied. She doesn't want to have a family with you. That's why she ran off the moment you went to war. She doesn't care, just like your parents didn't care. Lies, all lies. Fake promises, fake dreams.* The voice was hideous, a mangled cry of rage, hate, jealousy, self-pity and sorrow; an abomination; the dark part of God's divine dream. But it was persuasive; it always is.

Shaun started to draw the gun when the man managed to knock two of the five cans off. 'Well, somethin's better than nothin',' said the old man managing the stall, 'and since ya got two nice lads 'ere, I'll give ya these two.'

Shaun couldn't move. The two teddy bears were smitten images of Karl. *What a ridiculous thing to say! The two teddies are the same type as Karl. And when the smiling young man moved to the side, Shaun saw the twins he had seen earlier. They had two sticks of cotton candy and were grinning ear to ear in pride that their dad had won them the bears. Sam grinned too and kissed the man lightly. It was just one of those tiny moments when the world seems a better place. It made Shaun's hand sag inside his pocket.*

Did they know how lucky they were? Did they know the price of that tiny moment? Long afterwards, when the husband will get tired of his boring life and have an affair with his secretary, will he remember this moment? Would she remember? The honest answer was no. But Shaun still couldn't bring himself up to do it. He knew what outcome the bullets would result in, the gun still shouted and screamed. But it's lonely and defeated master would not satiate its thirst. He walked back to the stream. Was that a tear, trickling down his cheek? 'Karl, I'm sorry,' he said, and raised the gun to his temple. Let nothing be left wanting.

By Kazim Ibn Sadique

Dance with me



admission test, after which, if they are selected, they have to undergo courses ranging from 4 to 6 years. While the Eastern dance forms have been long since established, the Western forms are catching up fast in our country too. Places like Southern Avenue, Russian Cultural Centre and Alliance Francaise de Dacca to name a few are offering these. At the Russian Cultural Center, for example, the registration fee for getting into a class of around 30 people is Tk 500, after which you have to pay Tk 5000 every fourth month. To finish the courses, one must finish several levels. Courses as tango, meringue, waltz, tango, cha-cha and salsa are most popular among the age group of people in their early twenties and thirties who usually attend these classes. Salsa, a 4-step dance and cha-cha, a 1,2-1,2,3 step dance, are the more difficult forms whereas meringue is fun and casual and tango and waltz are the more dramatic. Classes are held sometimes with teachers and sometimes for practice with respective dance partners.

The Westerns are typically more expensive courses than the classicals, but more boys opt for the Western forms. The Western forms require people to dance in pairs where the boy gets to lead and the girl must follow, whereas in the classical forms, both solos and dances in pairs are prevalent. Why do people dance? Durdana, who's been dancing for a little over 6 months, says, 'Dancing is a very good way to de-stress yourself,' while Samia says, 'I do it because when I dance, I am truly myself; I don't have everyone's expectations pressing on me—I simply lose myself in the rhythm'. Ruhi, who's been unable to continue dancing due to increased pressure of studies, says 'I plan to finish my course as soon as possible'.

Dancing instils in you a real confidence in yourself and an agility which comes handy in real-life too. Besides, you can impress people with your unique dance moves, and isn't that reason enough to try a pirouette or two?

By Anika Tabassum

Fuel something good: part 2

FRIENDS, you know something? Last time, when my article "Fuel something good" was published, I was really very happy. Then I found out that I forgot to give my name! I actually felt like pulling out all my hair.

In my last article, I tried to show how if you have experienced something really bad in your life, you can use your experience to help others, to fuel something good. I mentioned two brilliant Hollywood actresses of different times, Patty Duke and Halle Berry, who did the same thing.

Later, I felt that the examples I had given was of two celebrities, not ordinary people. So today, I will tell you about an ordinary lady who managed to do something extraordinary, who used her bitter past experiences to help others who were in similar condition.

We may not know who Christina Noble is, but street children of Vietnam do. For them, she is an angel. They call her "Mama Tina". A highly spirited woman, she has changed lives of thousands of children and their families.

No, she was not a local celebrity or a super rich lady. In fact, she never had any connection to this land. She knew only that Vietnam had countless children who needed help, who needed to be treated with love and respect. People in Vietnam called these children "bui doi" which meant "dust of life".

Christina Noble did not have a lot of money, nor had she much formal education. All that she had was her love for these children and her wish to do something for them, to give them a chance. Why? Well, she herself was a street child.

She lived in a slum of Dublin until her mother died. She was only nine years old at the time. Along with her five siblings, she was supposed to be sent into an institution, but she ran away.

With the hope of a better life, she moved to England. But she found herself in an abusive marriage, which eventually ended. She tried again but failed.

But she was not shattered by the pain. She raised her three children with lots of love and care, which she herself was deprived of as a child. Once they were grown up, she thought of doing something for those children and that's why, on an impulse, she flew to Vietnam.

After reaching Vietnam, initially, Noble was very confused. She did not know what she could actually do. During this time, she wandered through the streets of Vietnam, playing with babies, buying them food or clothes. She even threw a party for 150 street children. She tried to help out as many individuals as she could. One such person was Le Thi Nga.

Nga was only a teenager when she met Noble. She was from a poor and populated family and had very little schooling. Her English was rudimentary. She was trying to make ends meet everyday by selling chewing gum and postcards, but she hadn't given up. She told Noble about her dream. She wanted to be one of those girls who go to office on their own bike, wearing a smart dress. Noble promised to help Nga in any way she could. She helped her by paying for her tuition and by helping her out with her English.

Nga's dream came true. She improved her English and got a job in Pfizer, the international pharmaceutical company. She became one of those office girls she aspired to be. But it was a small thing for Noble. She wanted to do something greater, by creating changes in lives of many, but she didn't know how.

Finally, she came up with a brilliant idea. She thought of building a children's center. But it was not so easy as funding became an issue. She managed to get donations, but they were not enough. She needed at least 70,000 dollar per year to run the center. Luckily, a reporter wrote about Noble on a Sunday tabloid. There was no turning back since then. Donation kept on pouring in. Noble set up the "Christina Noble Children's Foundation". Also later on, she established a similar program in Mongolia. So friends, just look at her life. She could easily have been derailed by her pain, but didn't let that happen. She gave thousands of children a chance to improve their situation which most of them used to the full. Just with her willpower, she has done such a wonderful thing. If we really want to, we could do the same.

By Shucheesmita Simonti