Coming Home...

Saba Kabir

THERE is something about the air in Dhaka. Whether it's the pollution playing tricks on your unaccustomed body chemistry, or the dense, invisible mist of nostalgia that has you gasping for breath, you're not sure, but there is definitely something about the air. Yet that is not what's on your mind as you make your way through the clogged arteries of the city, on a deathtrap of a rickshaw, wondering how on earth the rickshaw-mama has managed to pull off his latest physics-defying stunt, with you in tow for good measure, hanging on for dear life. Having been numbed to the whole near-death experience thing by the umpteenth near-death experience over the 10 minute ride, your mind comes to dwell, with some pride, on the inhuman driving skills on display in the roads of the city. Being an F1 nut yourself, it seems to you that the insane reflexes, the mad amounts of concentration, and the crazy hand-eye coordination demonstrated by these driver-bhais would easily surpass those of the most highly paid F1 drivers of the planet, and then some, and for what? 5000 measly takas a month and lunch if they are lucky; what's that you do the mental math and come up with less than a hundred dollars for an entire month. But you forget, you who is in some urgent need for some hardcore repatriation, the value of taka. *But it is you who forget, O omniscient narrator, that repatriation is what got me on this absurd contraption on wheels in the first place* you retort. And perhaps I do, but as you come nearer to the end of your rickshaw ride, desperately trying to will away all those years of estrangement with the city, the unfamiliarity of it all still breaks your heart. Dhaka to you seems like an assortment of paradoxes and improbabilities, in its opulence and



its poverty, in its grandeur and its filth, its benevolence and its cruelty, in its mania and its depression, in its realities and its illusions.

Shut your face you twat, you and your silly words and some stupid ploy to work up the word-count. You don't know what you're on about. What who how!!! Who the hell was that and what the hell are you doing on my piece!?! *This is the Dhakaiya part of your subject's consciousness, you nitwit. Where is the omniscience now, narrator bhaiya?* No need to mouth-off, boy. But I am glad to see you there though. I was beginning to give up hope for a second there. Our hapless hero of the rickshaw, the erstwhile expat, might be completely lost at sea here, but you, dear Dhakaite, you know that there is nothing paradoxical about a slum in the shadow of a swanky, 5-star hotel, that there is nothing implausible about an entire nation being shut down for months, about going to school on the bus one day and on a boat the next, or about watching activists and law-enforcement agents taking turns to bludgeon each other to quadriplegia because somebody didn't like an adjective or two on an official looking document. Life is itself only a collection of contradictions, improbabilities, paradoxes, and what have you. It is just that it is more apparent in some places than others, and Dhaka just happens to be a place where it all boils over to the surface. We've got nothing to hide, no skeletons in the closet and we are proud of it. But anyway, now that I've achieved a respectable looking word-count, and perhaps more importantly, now that I've found you, dear Dhakaite, albeit in a slightly schizophrenic form, I guess this is as far as we go together. Its job done, repatriation complete. Welcome home. Mamu, ektu raakhen.

Words of Wisdom

Arthur Ashe was the only African-American who became Wimbledon Champion in the year 1975. He suffered from AIDS in 80s contacted through blood transfusion during open heart surgery. One of his fans asked him " Why God has selected you for such a bad disease?" His answers were:

1. The world over 50 m. children start playing tennis.
2. 5 m. learn to play tennis.
3. 5,00,000 learn professional tennis
4. 50,000 come to the circuit.
5. 5,000 reach the Grand Slam.
6. 50 reach Wimbledon.
7. 4 to the Semi-Final.
8. 2 to the Final.

When I was holding the Wimbledon Trophy I never asked God "Why Me?" And today in pain I should not ask God "Why Me?"