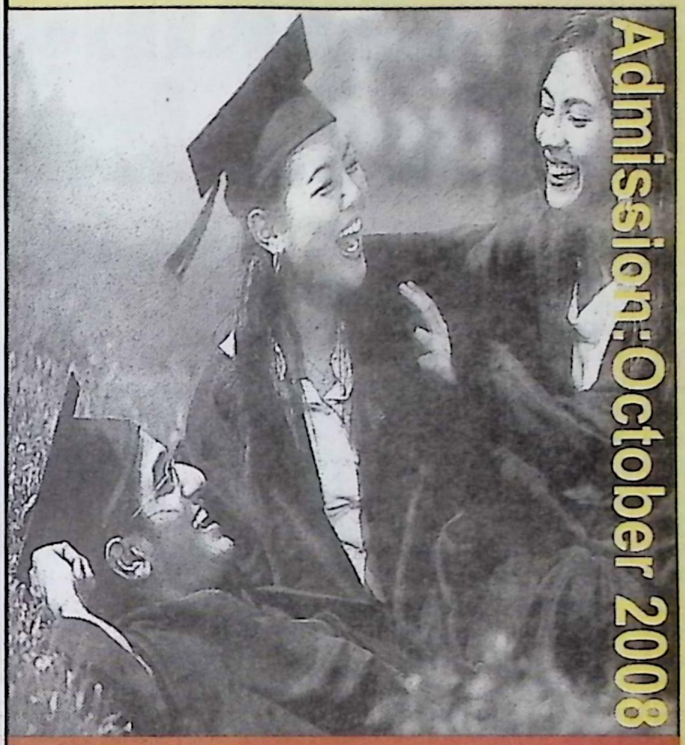
him; and as I made my way out of his quiet home in the cantonment, he stared at me, at nothing, at pointlessness. Seven months later, he was dead. And then his sister, the beautiful Kaniz Fatima, who had taught me history in school and who too wept that day at seeing me depart again, died of a broken heart. It was a month after her brother had passed into the great beyond.

There has hardly ever been a time when I have not remembered Professor Shamsuddoha. There was much civility in him. He knew the meaning of respect, giving it away in plenty to his students and getting much more from them in return. At the English department of Dhaka University, he instilled encouragement in us about Swift's Gulliver's Travels. He took his time to explain the salient features of the work, the satire that it was, sometimes leaving many of us wondering if ever we would be able to finish the text. But we did finish the text. And we ended up loving our teacher intensely. When he died, I was not around to pay my respects to him. But I still see him, every time I go visiting my old department at the university, walking slowly, a smile playing on his lips, back to his office. He was a thoroughly polite man, so much so that when he spoke to us, we were too embarrassed at knowing that we could not match the gentlemanly in him. And then there was Suraiya Khanum, of whom I have already spoken on an earlier occasion. There was sheer energy about her, a dynamism that breezed far ahead of the social circumstances she found herself in. I was always afraid of her and summoned up all sorts of excuses to stay away from her classes. But there was always this huge respect in me for her intellect, for the rapidity with which her imagination worked. When she died in America sometime ago, it was a beautiful, self-assured and rather excusably haughty teacher that I remembered. She was always the tempestuous heroine of the tragedies we have had reason to go through at university.

In school, at a very young age, Mrs. Rouf guided me gently through a course in English spelling. On the first day I met her, she asked me to spell the word 'my'. Trembling in fear and shame of what might come my way, I wrote 'mi'. She asked me to look up and look into her eyes. I did, almost weeping as I did so. To my amazement, she did not scold me. Taking my little hand in her big one, she led me into my new class and let the other little boys there know that I was their new friend.

I went looking for my teacher in my greying forties. At my old school, the youngish-looking administrative officer gave me a copy of The Grammarian, the annual school magazine. I turned the pages, and then stumbled on a picture of Mrs. Rouf. She had passed away after long years of dedicated service to the school. ■

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