wash the streets, which they do every second Thursday of the month.

Now to come to the sight I was referring to, which has given me reason to pause and rethink the whole business of community and individual responsibility in keeping ones locality clean.

Early one morning, around five, when it was still dark, I heard a ghostly, whispering sound under my bedroom window overlooking the front street. Swish-swish, swish-swish it went. At first I thought of bats caught in tree branches or some garden insects or cats on the prowl. I looked out. The street lamps were still on, and under its eerie light I saw a woman with a broom steadily sweeping the sidewalk and the street below her apartment. She lives on the second or third floor and the street corner she was cleaning was outside her apartment block.

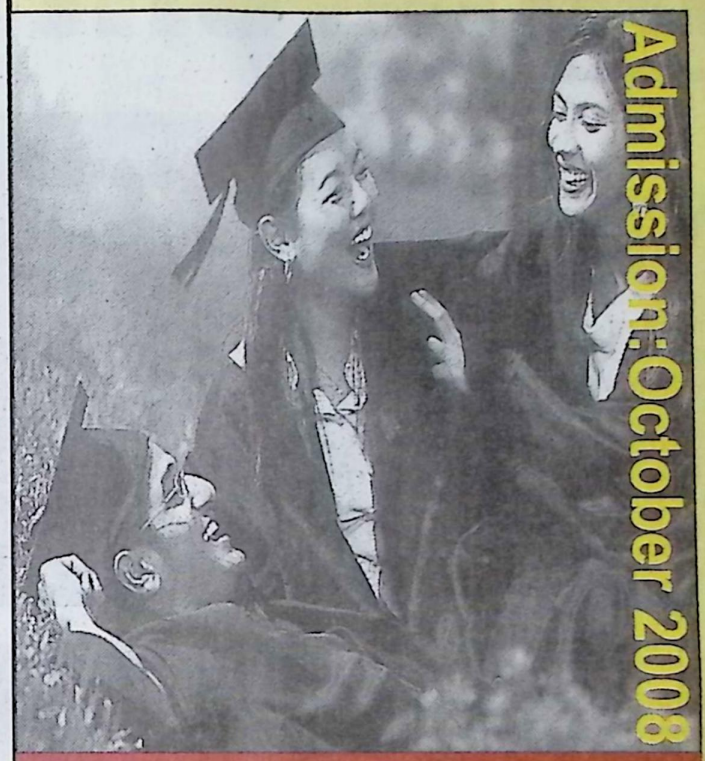
I thought she was a sleepwalker. Then almost every second or third day, in that ghostly hour of the morning between light and darkness, when not a soul stirred outside, there was that swishing sound again. "There goes your friendly witch with her broom," My husband would laugh from the bed when he saw me spring up to watch the scene below my windows. At first, I also thought of the woman's behaviour as obsessive, excessive, crazy and laughable. But during the day, whenever I walked down my sidewalk, I couldn't help notice the stretch of pavement on her side of the street that stood out in contrast to the rest. I had to salute this woman who was probably foolish enough to dream of a street as spotless as her living room floor, and mad enough to change that dream to reality.

I am sitting in Dhaka and wondering about the amount of madness required to dream of solutions to problems. Foremost is my domestic dilemma of the most efficient and hygienic way to dispose of my household garbage in the absence of proper trash bags or domestic helps, who normally carry away the rubbish. In Rome, where we use plastic garbage bags neatly tied up to be carried and thrown by ourselves, I have not had to think of garbage disposal as a major problem. In Dhaka, polythene and plastic trash bags are forbidden without any viable alternatives. No paper or bio-degradable garbage bags are available in the market. It is understood that a maid or servant will take down a pail of rotting food and debris and throw it into some designated giant pile of rotting food and debris outside.

I take refuge in dreams. And in my dreams, garbage trucks, covered trash cans, bio-degradable trash bags and weekly street cleaners have arrived in Dhaka like the rains. And the city is fresh and clean again. I wake from my nap to realise it was a dream. But the cleansing rain, at least, is real.

For the moment, let me just enjoy this rainy morning. Time enough to make my dreams come true another day. ■

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Phone : 8822729, 9891180, 8819922, 01911 342 801

Chittagong Office : IFCO Complex (5th Floor), 1147/A, GEC More East Nasirabad, Chittagong. Ph : 031-656129, 01195177022, 01818683669