

Clash of the generals . . .

Syed Badrul Ahsan revisits a murder and its fallout

GENERAL Ziaur Rahman's capacity for cruelty has never been in doubt. The number of Bengalis -- and they include men in the army and air force -- who perished in the five years of his rule as Bangladesh's first military ruler has remained at an all-time high. With as many as eighteen eventually abortive coups launched against his regime, Zia clearly felt that all those involved in those conspiracies needed to be swiftly dispatched. And they were. But, then, this insensitivity in the man was to first manifest itself in the mid-1970s, when the murder of Khaled Mosharraf, obviously a more brilliant officer than he, through the misleadingly named sepy-janata revolution, did not move him at all. Mosharraf became a non-person. And so did the political architects of freedom. In Zia's five years in power, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the leaders of the Mujibnagar government remained airbrushed out of national history. In July 1976, Zia felt little or no compunction in sending his 1975 benefactor, Colonel Abu Taher, to the gallows.

And yet history has dealt with Zia in the way it always deals with those who transgress it. That is the basic meaning you can draw from this rather revealing account of the assassination of the military leader in Chittagong in May 1981. Ziauddin M. Choudhury is certainly well qualified to reflect on the subject, given that at the time he was deputy commissioner of Chittagong and had, only hours before the tragic incident, received the president at the airport. Zia's trip to the port city had been necessitated more by a need to put his Bangladesh Nationalist Party, riven as it was by dissension in the ranks, back in order than anything else. Late in the night, he was shot down by a band of soldiers who, as many have gone on believing, were led by

Major General M.A. Manzoor, general officer commanding of the Chittagong region. As Choudhury narrates it, the right side of the president's face had been blown off. The only proof of the body sprawled out on the floor being that of Zia was part of his moustache hanging from the left side of the face.

Zia's body was, amazingly, left lying where it had fallen for hours together. Choudhury cannot resist spotting the irony in a soldier of the Presidential Guards Regiment keeping watch over the body of the man whose safety could not be assured when he died. Beyond and above this work being a retelling of the story of the Zia assassination, though, is the writer's focus on the politics that the military ruler cobbled into shape in order to consolidate his hold on the country. There is the matter of the referendum Zia organized in 1977, soon after taking over the presidency from Justice Sayem, as a way of seeking legitimacy. The result was an embarrassment, reminiscent of similar experiments in third world nations giving their dictators close to a hundred per cent endorsement of their policies. General Zia was clearly proceeding along the path set earlier by Pakistan's Ayub Khan. The Bangladesh military leader hoped, as he stoked his political ambitions, that a good number of Awami Leaguers would join him in his endeavours because of his role in the War of Liberation. In the event, only a handful (Professor Yusuf Ali being one of them) obliged him. The others spurned his overtures because they held him responsible for Bangabandhu's assassination.

Choudhury comes up with anecdotes about Zia that only reinforce the public feeling of the military ruler being a harsh, unemotional individual. On a trip to the south-east of the country, Zia

expressed a desire to meet the Pir of Kutubdia. He expected the pir to come calling on him on his arrival on the island. It did not work that way, for the pir made it clear he expected the president to call on him. After all, spiritual authority held greater sway than temporal power. Zia obliged. After addressing a public rally, he walked down to the pir's home, shook hands with him, spent some minutes there and then left. But where Zia saw little

devotees that even the head of state had to wait for him. Choudhury then sternly told the pir's family that unless the pir turned up to receive the president (he had invited Zia to lunch), the latter would leave in five minutes. The firmness worked. As the writer notes, "The Pir appeared in less than five minutes, and sat beside the President."

A major portion of Choudhury's narrative relates to the tragic end of General Manzoor. Known for his intellectual prowess in military circles, Manzoor nevertheless appeared a shambolic figure soon after Zia's murder. He had the writer and Saifuddin, the divisional commissioner, to his office and reeled off the reasons why a 'revolutionary council' had taken over. Not once did Manzoor describe himself as the leader of the coup. He repeatedly stressed his role as the spokesman for those who had carried out the act, without at all revealing who he spoke for. As Choudhury and Saifuddin made to leave at the end of the meeting, Manzoor asked them to touch the Quran (a copy of which was in the room) before going out! His remarks before assembled government officials at the DC's office the next day were rambling and clearly had no focus. He had ordered all road, air and rail links between Chittagong and the rest of the country cut off as a way of forcing the government in Dhaka, now led by Vice President Sattar and backed by army chief General Ershad, to capitulate before him. It did not occur to him that minus the port city, the country could survive. By 1 June 1981, however, Manzoor cracked. He fled with his wife and two young children. Eventually traced and arrested by police, he was taken to Hathazari police station, where he begged to be allowed to stay there. Choudhury's

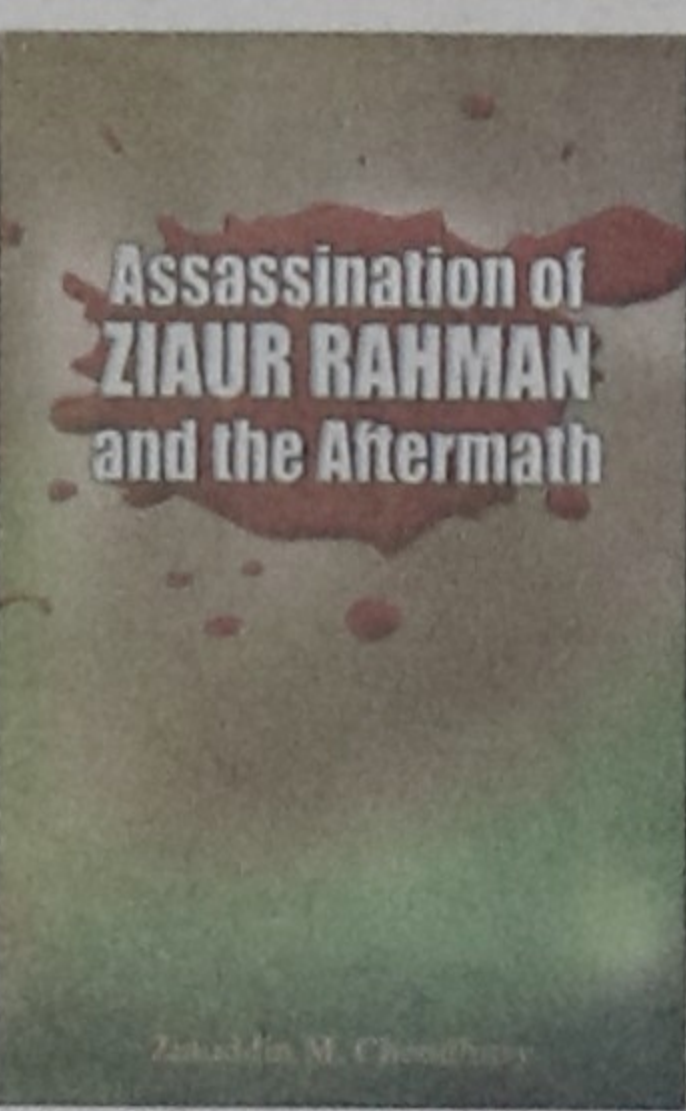
recapitulation of events at this point hints at the huge conspiracy that surely was then going on in Dhaka to eliminate Manzoor. A captain arrived at Hathazari police station, demanding that Manzoor be handed over to him. Frantic calls to Dhaka followed. Acting President Sattar, contacted by the Chittagong civil authorities on the issue, kept stalling, kept telling the officials that he would discuss the matter with General Ershad. Eventually, Sattar and Ershad ordered the police to hand Manzoor over to the captain.

What followed was barbaric. Once out of the police station compound, the captain floored Manzoor with a karate move and then had the general bound hands and feet before being flung like a common criminal on to the back of a pick-up. A wailing Mrs. Manzoor and her two children were placed on the front seat of the vehicle. The rest of the story makes the heart crack a little more. Imprisoned in Chittagong cantonment, General Manzoor was visited by a brigadier sent from Dhaka. The brigadier pulled out a pistol, shot Manzoor in the head and coolly walked away. It was later given out that Manzoor had been killed by irate soldiers!

The aftermath of the Zia assassination, as the writer notes, was to be unimaginably gruesome. Thirteen officers were to be hanged on dubious charges. Manzoor's murder was never to be explained.

This book is a powerful argument for a full, comprehensive inquiry into the circumstances in which Major General M.A. Manzoor died. It also could spur demands for an investigation into the killing of Major General Khaled Mosharraf and his fellow officers on 7 November 1975.

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Assassination of Ziaur Rahman and the Aftermath
Ziauddin M. Choudhury
The University Press Limited

that was wrong in the Pir of Kutubdia's stance toward him, he was mightily upset when the Pir of Chhunati let be known that the president, who had stepped into his home, would have to wait until his meditations (zikr) were over. You do not keep a president waiting, even if you are a man of God. It was for Choudhury to realise what machinations the pir was up to. He was keen to demonstrate to his

Media and the public interest

Mohammad Delwar Hossain finds a lot to think over in a critical work

THE business and economics of media are extensively discussed. Scholars and professionals are concerned about increasing corporatization of the media. In spite of this fact, the topic lags in well-researched books. Sociologist David Croteau and William Hoynes's work provides an introductory discussion on concerns about business and economics of media with socio-economic perspectives. The authors were awarded the prestigious 'Robert Picard Award', named after world renowned media economics scholar Robert Picard, by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (EJMC) in 2002 for their outstanding contribution in the field of media management and economics.

Croteau and Hoynes examine the recent changes in media and their effects on society. In conclusion, they explain their trepidation regarding the future of the media and propose several policy guidelines for the media to serve the public interest. Readers who have studied their other book, *Media/Society: industries, images and audiences*, can recount their arguments about 'structural constraints and human agency'. For example, like any other business, media organizations have to be profitable to stakeholders (shareholders; on the other hand, media organizations have a social responsibility that does not permit profit at the cost of the public interest.

There is an unending tension between profitability and public interest of the media. The central thesis of Croteau and Hoynes's book is to underscore this tension and,

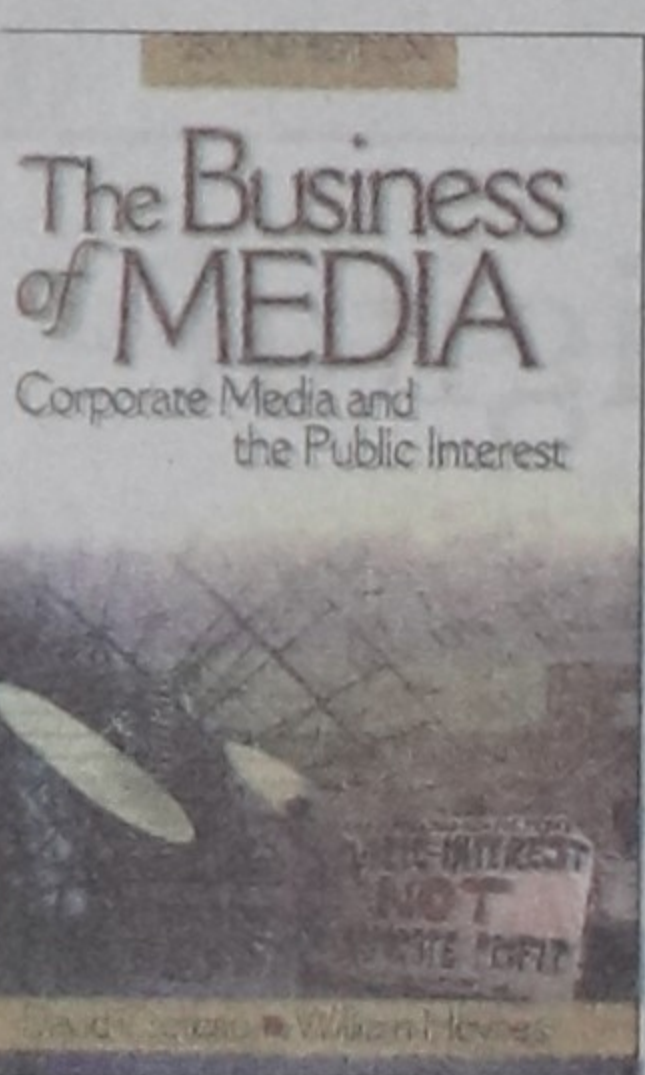
after careful and critical analysis, to offer policy recommendations. The writers appraise the issues with two models: 'market model' and 'public sphere model'. They argue in favor of a media industry that serve the public and also earn profit. With this notion, they talk about partial governmental regulations in media business to guarantee responsibility of media. In other words, they advocate for an equilibrium between profitability and public interest of media.

Croteau and Hoynes set their discussion with three parts. In the first part of the book, they underline the theoretical and historical dimension of the media business.

In chapter one, they discuss the reasons for changes in the media industry. In this way, they provide an assessment of present business patterns in the industry. They point out two models of business and economics of the media. According to the market model, media organizations are like any other business and should be run for revenue. Croteau and Hoynes say, "This model treats the media like all other goods and services. It argues that as long as competitive conditions exist, businesses pursuing profits will meet people's need (p. 17)." They reveal that promoters of this model think that the inclination for profitability is essential for competition and creativity.

According to this model, audiences are customers of the media as with any other product. Again, according to the 'public sphere model', profitability should not be the main contemplation of the media. In fact, this model is generated from German philosopher Jorgen Habermas's view of the 'public sphere.' Croteau and

Hoynes state, "profitability cannot be the sole indicator of a healthy media industry. Instead, other public interest criteria, such as diversity and substance, are used in the public sphere model to assess the performance of media. (p. 22)."



The Business of Media
Corporate Media and the Public Interest
David Croteau and William Hoynes
Pine Forge Press

According to this model, audiences should be considered as citizens rather than as consumers.

Chapter 2 deals with the historical background of the expansion of the media as corporate organizations. Croteau and Hoynes point out the relationship between media business and different government regulations. The authors mention a remarkable and exclusive meeting of media owners, which has been

held since the 1980s in Idaho's Sun Valley. Media owners, including Bill Gates and Ted Turner, attend the meeting to plan strategies. Newsweek magazine termed it a "Mogulfest." Croteau and Hoynes depict the case study of conglomerates Disney and Cap Cities/ABC. For the authors, concentration of ownership is not new. The trend started with an expansion of the commercial press in the 19th century. They cite regulations and de-regulations that facilitate media mergers. As an example, they indicate an easy-ownership rule and sympathetic treatment throughout the Reagan administration.

In chapters 3 and 4, Croteau and Hoynes look at mergers and other changes such as growth and globalization. Like other businesses, media companies spend \$ 40 million to lobby for the 1996 Telecommunication Act. Croteau and Hoynes say, "The restructuring of the media industry has allowed media conglomerates to pursue a series of strategies aimed at maximizing profits, reducing cost and minimizing risk (p.151)." Chapters 5 and 6 explain how media business influences media contents and how the media have become socially and politically powerful. The authors identify characteristics such as homogenization, imitation and loss of localism. One of most fretful topics to them is ever-increasing control by advertisers and how audiences have become confined to those advertisers. Croteau and Hoynes refer to the example of Channel One television that was particularly designed for children's education. The authors note that in terms of political influence the media have also been playing an important role not only

with content but also with financial contributions. They recall that in 2004, Time Warner gave nearly \$ 25 million to the two presidential election campaigns. Croteau and Hoynes have criticized Rupert Murdoch for his conservative campaign through his media companies.

Chapter 7 deals with apprehension concerning the future of the media. The writers review different perspectives on the shifting picture of the media. They worry about a broader issue: the missing public interest in the corporate media. In the public interest, they advocate some sort of regulation. They say history shows some sort of regulations were useful to defend the public interest. They point to the First Amendment to the US constitution and the Communication Act of 1934. Recognizing the difficulties in defining the concept of "public interest," they also recommend regulation to clearly explain the term "public interest" and its principles.

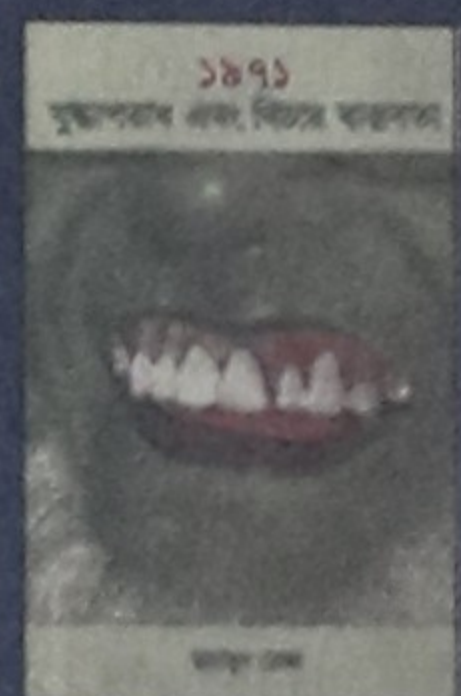
In this book, the readers will get wide-ranging reflections on the business of the media. But Croteau and Hoynes talk about the entire subject from an American media context. One of the major limitations of their book is that their argument is not based on theoretical foundations of management and economics. However, as one of the pioneering books about media business, it surely recommends itself to readers.

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AT A GLANCE

State Against The Nation
The Decline of the Muslim League...
Ahmed Kamal
The University Press Limited

A needed study on the gradual decline of a party that was instrumental in the division of India in 1947, this work will surely be important to researchers involved in historical studies of Pakistan as well as Bangladesh. And having also supported the Pakistan army's genocide in 1971, the Muslim League deserves close study.



1971
Juddhaporadh Ebong Bichar Bastobata
Humayun Reza
Justice for Bangladesh Genocide 1971

If you are in need of real background information on the war crimes committed in Bangladesh in 1971, here is one work you must not miss. The writer not only narrates everything that has happened in relation to the war criminals since the mid-1970s but also reproduces the actual documents relating to the criminality of Pakistan's collaborators.

The Motorcycle Diaries
Ernesto Che Guevara
Verso

In his youth, before he became the revolutionary world was to fall in love with. Che Guevara took to his motorcycle and with friends went travelling. But it was not tourism as we know it, for along the way he observed people and the miseries they wallowed in. It was those moments he recorded. And they were to be a hint of his future.



Lucky Girls
Nell Freudenberger
Picador

Freudenberger lived for a number of years as a teacher in India. That afforded her a rare opportunity to observe India as it portrays itself in the lives of its common people. Her interaction with people eventually led her into writing fiction, short stories in fact. It is these stories that come here, to make you wonder.

A mind of her own

Nausheen Rahman is drawn to a book for children

CHITRA Banerjee Divakaruni, the author of novels like *Sister of My Heart*, *Vine of Desire* and *The Mistress of Spices*, has bestowed a literary gift to children in the form of the book *Victory Song*.

Victory Song is set in Bengal in the pre-partition days when zealous freedom fighters, the Swadeshis, were carrying on their crusade against the British colonialists. The story revolves around Neela, a twelve-year-old girl, who sets out on a dangerous mission.

Neela's father's not returning home even three weeks after his departure for Calcutta to take part in a protest march makes Neela very anxious and she goes to look for him. Never having been to Calcutta, she embarks on this journey disguised as a "wandering minstrel." Her adventures will keep readers glued to the pages and eager to read on.

The story is told in such a simple and appealing way that young readers can sail across it while savouring every page. Children can get to know historical facts through a tale of valour, patriotism, friendship and family ties.

The very young, very spirited heroine loves being outdoors, and has a mind of her own: "But why can't a girl choose her own husband?" she thought. "What's wrong with that?"

Neela is very good in her studies and tries to be obedient to her parents (but often gets into trouble). She rebels against the discrimination against women and is appalled by the injustice of the dowry system. Even at that tender age, she realizes that prejudices exist: "It's unfair that the girl's parents should have to pay so much. After all, aren't Usha's in-laws gaining a new and valuable member, someone to help them at home, for free, for the rest of her life?" She questions, "Why does a bride have to go to her husband's home after getting married? Why does she have to make all the changes?"

Neela appreciates the fact that "prospective in-laws" look for girls who can "sew, embroider, make mango pickles and sweet rasogollas" but wants to know, "Aren't other things important too?"

She is dutiful, but resents always being told what to do: "Why does great-aunt feel that she has the right to tell me what to do just because she's older? It's not fair!" She believes that her mother's supporting her great-aunt is "The Conspiracy of the Adults." Young girls will feel that the writer understands their emotions perfectly.

It is this same child who goes out on a quest that involves a lot of courage, intelligence and responsibility, a quest on which the book's plot is based. As the story proceeds, we see how she matures. She becomes aware of the conflicts between Indians and their British "masters", and the significance of the demand for freedom.

An experience she has with a white man (who is very rude) and

his driver, make her very angry: "How dare he speak to me like that! This isn't even his country!"

Neela also gets very annoyed when she happens to hear a lady's comment (about her): "But it's hard to imagine her sitting quietly like her sister even at her own wedding! Whoever gets her as a daughter-in-law will have trouble controlling her!" She wonders, "Why does everyone feel that they have to control girls even after they're married? Why are women expected to sit quietly and silently, embroidering and making pickles, while men get to make all the important decisions and go to all the exciting places? Why can't a girl be a freedom fighter?"

The male characters are portrayed masterfully. Hari Charan is Neela's indulgent father (who is firm when needed) and to whom



Victory Song
Chitra B. Divakaruni
Puffin Books

the leader of the Swadeshis says, "You're a good man, Hari Charan. You should join us. The motherland needs men like you."

Samar is a young, brave and fervent freedom fighter who would be an inspiration to all young boys.

A baoul who teaches Neela singing believes that because he has "his staff in his hand and faith in his heart, he'll be fine."

In the Author's Note, Divakaruni says that she had read Bengali novels by Sarat Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra to "get a sense of Neela's daily life what people wore and ate and how they thought". These writers had all written about the lives of girls and women, and how they were not given much education, but made to stay home and look after the family.

The writer adds, "Some of the impatience I felt reading these descriptions found its way into Neela's character. I chose the name 'Neela' because in Bengali, it means 'blue', a colour that symbolizes infinite possibilities both for Neela herself and for India."

Nausheen Rahman is a teacher and reviews books.

Dancing in graceful rhythm

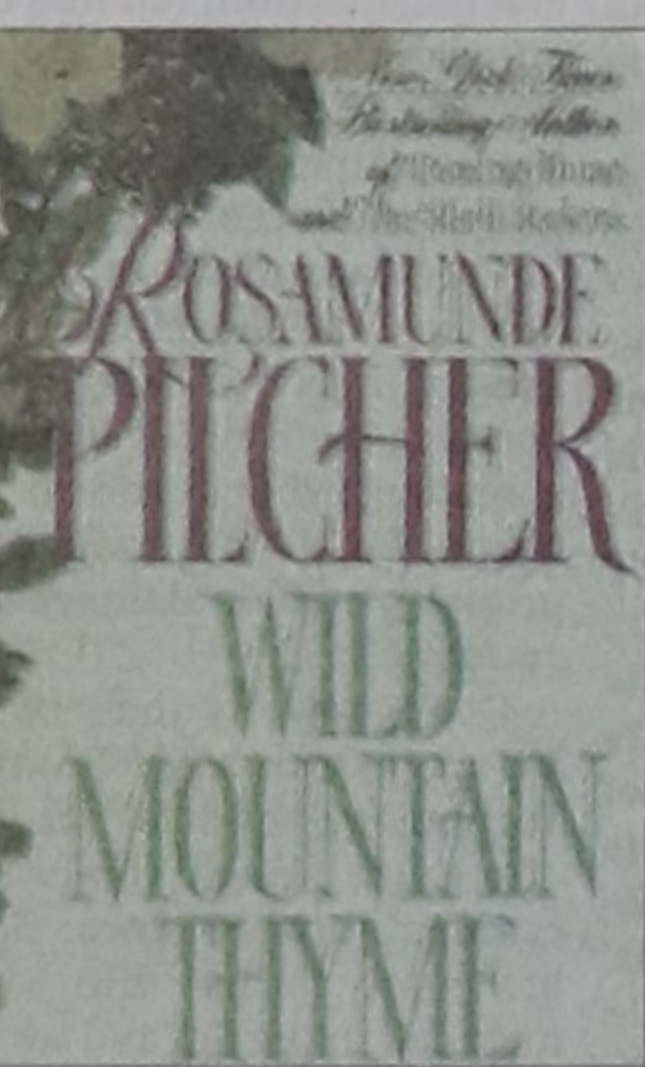
Tulip Chowdhury is in love with a love story

VICTORIA Bradshaw, just eighteen, falls in love with the playwright Oliver Dobbs. He comes into her life as if in an interlude and suddenly disappears. After two years Victoria reads the news of his play being put up for a show in London. As she is wondering about Oliver, who should appear in person on her doorstep? One morning she opens the door to find Oliver standing outside with a little boy. Victoria invites them in and from then on Victoria finds herself wrapped up in Oliver's life along with his son. Oliver is selfish and egotistical and yet Victoria is unable to get over him, the first love of her life. And soft hearted as she is, she finds herself standing up in a mother's place, for little Thomas, Oliver's two-year-old son.

Oliver confesses that he has kidnapped his son from the grandparents and wants Victoria to take care of him. At that moment Victoria is unable to refuse to

accept the child, who looks so helpless in his father's care. Victoria, rather alone in the world, finds her emptiness filled up with the appearance of these two people in her life. She hesitates at first, wondering if Oliver will get into trouble with the law. But as days pass and little Thomas is settled in with her she finds it impossible to let go of the little boy. Her motherly instincts are roused as the little boy gets attached to her.

Victoria is in need of a holiday after long months of work at the dress shop. So she welcomes the possibility of a break when Oliver decides to go off to Benchoile in Scotland and spend some days with his old friend Roddy. In Benchoile, Victoria finds John Dunbeath, another writer. She had met him once at a party in London. John takes more than casual interest in Victoria. He is touched by her motherly love for Thomas. But he does not hide his dislike of Oliver and his haughty ways. To him it is



Wild Mountain Thyme
Rosamunde Pilcher
Dell Publishing

obvious that the playwright is using Victoria for his selfish reasons. But Victoria is firm in her love and support for the only family she now

knows. She is blind to Oliver's apparent selfish motives behind his keeping up his relationship with her. She is certain that Oliver wants to settle down with his son and her as his family.

The story, which moves smoothly, takes a turn and soars into its climax as life starts taking roller coaster rides in quiet Benchoile. The house in which little Thomas is sleeping catches fire while both Victoria and Oliver are away. And then Oliver, who is supposed to return from a trip to Woodbridge, fails to turn up.

While the reader feels in tune with the happenings of the story, the gripping plots unfold with twists and turns that take the reader to the heights of enjoying a story that is remarkably well told. The mastery of words seems to build up intricate tales in each chapter as it comes with unique characterizations. Though at times Victoria's innocence and kind-hearted acceptance of Oliver seems too bland, it becomes

understandable considering her need for love and connection. The modern day Scottish settings are so true to life that the story pulsates with the reality of living.

Reading Rosamunde Pilcher is an incredibly relaxing experience. Her poetic description of nature is very evocative in all details. The characters dance in and out of the graceful and precise rhythms of minuet. The story is set in late winter, at the beginning of February. The descriptions of the weather do not fail to accentuate the reader's imagination. The reader is caught in the trance as if living in the very moments. The ending of the story is remarkably satisfying, giving the reader a feeling that there is after all some justice in this world and happiness is there when one looks for it. If you are a fan of happy endings, grab the book with the assurance of some superb reading hours!

Tulip Chowdhury teaches and is a regular reviewer of books.