SHORT STORIES

LITERARY EDITOR'S NOTE

This Saturday we continue on with the Writers Block interpretations on beginnings.

And thus we begin on A New Day, dealing with Doubt, till we find Room 301 where stands Kalika warning us against the Fairway to Hell; encouraged so we make the necessary Transformations and prepare for new Beginnings...

A New Day

M.K.AAREF

HIS is it.

The suitcase is filled with three saris and two sets of salwar kameezes. The rest are all her daughter's clothes. As soon as he leaves for his office, she is going to leave too. For good. He has hit her for the last time. Her body has enough evidences in the form of stitches, bruises, healed bones and a broken ego that will take years to rebuild.

Last week he had slapped the five year old daughter that left his hand imprint very visible on the cheek. Afterwards they had to pretend to be the happy couple and it was her, not him, who got blamed for that visible injury. It is always her, apologizing to his sulking frame to break the screen of silence that follows his

bouts of violence. No more.

She has to get out of here while her sanity is still intact, still has the strength to do so. She has to ignore the nay-sayers who keep reminding her of the 'sanctity' of marriage and the fact that it was a 'love' marriage. It's a pity the future cannot be foretold, otherwise she would have chosen to remain a spinster rather than go through this ferocity.

The daughter is everything. She is the reason she, as a mother, has kept herself alive and smiling. She wants her to grow up to be a determined woman who speaks her mind. At this tender age, all she has seen is her mother being verbally abused, followed by slaps, then boxing and kicking and then being dragged to the bedroom, holding on to her through fistfuls of her hair, where more beating continued. Then he comes out and calls her 'Mamoni'. She will grow up either hating men or believing that this is the lot of woman, neither of which is pleasant.

Only five years old and so much wisdom brimming out of her. It totally un-nerved her when she addressed her and her father together after one of those episodes, "How much more of this?" She had broken down in tears, and the father scowled and then gone out for one of his 'walks'. Why can't she think like her daughter?

This is it. She will leave for a small town up north where her distant khala lives, and a job as a primary school teacher is more or less lined up. The rest? She will take that a day at a time.

Doubt

SRABONTI NARMEEN ALI

begin where I end.

I seep into the cracks and crevices of peoples' minds and stick to the back of their thoughts like honey. I drip through their veins and reach their hearts, spreading my stickiness all over.

I infected a bored housewife the other day. She was watching Hindi serials and drinking sweetened tea with lots of milk, laced with cardamom, while waiting for her husband to come home from work. He didn't show. She tried calling him, but he didn't answer. She became restless and I honed in. I drizzled questions all over the under-stimulated part of her brain. I took a picture of her husband's attractive, young secretary and slithered it from the back of her mind to the front. I left her staring blankly at the TV screen, with visions of her husband and his secretary in her head.

I caused a fight between a man and his brother last week. I came in the shape of his wife. Together we slithered around his brain, slowly convincing him that his brother was cheating him out of the property that was rightfully his. It wasn't hard. I planted greedy dreams in his wife's head, with images of the Jodha-Akbar bangles that she had seen on her sister-in-law's wrists at the last family dawat. She sank her teeth into the dreams, and slowly worked her way into her husband's thoughts. We erased the happy childhood memories of him and his brother from his mind, one by one, until he let his wife's greed consume him.

An old lady came to my attention yesterday. She will be my next project. She sits in her rocking chair, neglected by her children, shunned by her grandchildren who cannot stomach the sour smell that emanates from her wrinkly skin. She is alone except for the two women who work in her house. They cook

and clean for her, rub her aching arthritic limbs, massage her long stringy hair with hot oil every morning. Like all old people, she is possessive about the few trinkets she has left from her past life. She has mislaid an emerald brooch in the back of her drawer, its red velvet casing now faded and hidden in the dark, musty corner. It was a gift from her dead husband on their first anniversary. I will remind her of how the two maids admired it. I will bring up past instances of bazaar accounts that never quite added up, using her aristocratic prejudices of the lower classes to my advantage. She will fire both women, and she will be left

alone, with only me for company. I begin where I end. I am doubt.

Room 301

LORI SIMPSON

Cool blue sweat soaks her tied back hair. Salty ocean swells fall in raindrop tears Sweet voices to calm her overriding fears.

ED hot screams still the humid night air,

Pushing, pushing, with all her might Moaning; panting hands that hold on tight. Doctors, nurses, and saline drips Hard painful contractions, her body it grips.

Fortitude and Anticipation all bearing down Courage and Hope wear a green hospital gown. Thunder! Lightning! A white light room; The infants cry, a harmonious boom.

Restless feet that paced and tread the halls Come to a halt, and rejoice to the crying calls. Teddy bears, flowers, blue or pink balloons, All carry announcements that life is abloom.

Moon and sun join together in colors of a new dawn Bundles of joy wrapped in a flowery babies breath yawn. Life is beginning in room 301 With the birth of a daughter, the birth of a son.

Kalika

TISA MUHADDES

Y journey began with a death. My mother's. I was the cause and effect of her death. Her death imparted upon me a power. A secret power. When I shared the secret with the other children, they all ran away calling me pagol

But I knew better. I was special.

So I nurtured my clandestine power. I use it now and then, just to test it out. I've used it thrice so far. On a bird with a broken wing, a toad, and once on a dog that had bitten my friend's sister. A tap here, a tap there, and they all fall down.

Once I inadvertently used it on our gardener. Badal khalu. I confess, it was a mistake He was a good old man, he used to give me pony rides on his back. He was weeding the rose bush, and I was playing nearby pretending to zap evil goddesses when I accidentally bumped into him. One small tap on his shoulder and he dropped to the ground. And he didn't wake up. I was so frightened that my father would know it was me, he would know of my secret power, and that he would punish me. I hid in my room for days. I pretended I was ill. He left me alone. He was too busy figuring out what happened to Badal Khalu.

I should have known better from that mistake, but now I've gone and done myself in. You see there's a bully named Shagor. He always picks on us younger kids. He's also the one who coined the label 'pagol kali'. I try to stay out of his way. But today I couldn't.

I was walking back from school, almost nearing home, when I heard yelps. I followed the noise and saw a young boy surrounded by Shagor and his cronies. Shagor held the boy by his hair. His friends were laughing and pointing at him.

Ordinarily, I would have minded my own business. But today I felt so bad for the young boy. I saw that he was pleading to Shagor. I couldn't help but notice the puddle gathering around his shoes. Without thinking, I ran towards them, shouting "Let him go!" and caught them off guard. I quickly circled Shagor and his friends, tapping each of them. Tap tap tap tap. They all fell

The young boy stood transfixed. He smelled funky. He looked at Shagor and his friends lying motionless, and then at me. With

a sudden jerk, he yelled 'pagol kali' and ran away from me. I ran the other way towards home. So much for using my

secret power for good. I hope my father doesn't find out.

Fairway to Hell

SAMIR ASRAN RAHMAN

HERE was a global media frenzy about the latest golf publicity stunt. On TV, reporter Trish McNeilie said: 'The world is abuzz with the news that Golfing Pro, Desmond Adams, is going to be making the world's largest golf drive, from space.' The footage cut to a sea of protestors, outside the Kennedy Space Center, who were holding up signs like "Space Junk Must Go and "Don't Pollute the Universe". Then it cut to an interview with Tiger Woods.

'It's cheating,' he said. 'Out there in space, there's no gravity. The ball can keep going on and on forever. This shouldn't be allowed in the record books."

'As you can see, everyone isn't happy about it,' said Trish. 'Detractors say that this is a frivolous act that only adds to the garbage we've left out there, from our space missions. Nevertheless, it marks a new beginning in cross-galaxy promotions. Let's hope Adams doesn't lose his cool as he looks down at us.' Adams was looking up at Earth, actually. Perspective was so relative in space. It depended on where you were standing. And he was clamped onto the hull of a space shuttle with magnetic boots.

'Damn!' he swore as he hooked his shot. The ball knocked over a distant satellite and Holland lost its TV feed. 'It's hard to swing properly in this blasted spacesuit. Edit that out, will you?'

You've only got one ball left,' said the cameraman, recording the moment. 'Space regulations say we can't make too much of a mess out here.' 'Please,' sneered Adams. 'What possible harm can one tiny golf

ball do?' He got off a good swing and watched admiringly as the ball smoothly sailed into infinity and beyond... ...Some millennia later, on the planet Fala-Fel, the scientist

Oberon was trying to convince the Council of Elders about their impending annihilation. 'My telescopic scans have picked up something heading our

way,' he fired up the holo-projector. 'Look at it's dimpled surface. The craters are too polished for this to be space debris.' 'What else could it be then?'

'It is made up of unknown synthetic materials. And there's the matter of the strange alien script on its surface. I am certain that it's a weapon, sent to destroy us'

'You speak folly, Oberon,' said the Elders. 'This spheroid object is tiny. It will most likely burn up in our atmosphere.

'It has been traveling for a very long time, and will have a catastrophic effect on our planet, when it hits us at its current speed and velocity.'

Spare us your paranoid delusions.

'You must listen!' he cried as the guards dragged him away. 'We must vacate the planet. Whoever sent it knew that it would remain undetectable, until it was too late to do anything to stop

But the Elders wouldn't listen. And in the ensuing days, when they realized that he could be right, it was much too late. Fala-Fel was destroyed in a cataclysmic explosion, in an attack that nobody could have expected.

Transformations

FARAH GHUZNAVI

ean girls are everywhere! Seriously. They're an inevitable part of school life; as ubiquitous as pimples, bad LV L canteen food or forgotten homework. It's best to stay below their radar; and crucially, not to let them realise you're smart. Unless you also happen to be pretty and popular, it can be the kiss of death! I'd managed the task reasonably well until I transferred schools.

My parents wanted me to have better educational opportunities. But I just wanted to move because my best friend Layla had started here last year. We'd been inseparable since Nursery, so she was as excited as me when I gained admission here. Honestly, I'd been amazed at how Layla had changed over the previous year. We were both hitting fifteen - teetering on the edge of that metamorphosis whereby Bangali girls magically shifted from the 'clunky glasses and generous hair-oil look' inflicted by merciless mothers, to suddenly-svelte, glossyhaired, doe-eyed beauties. The transition was effortless for Layla, but I trailed well behind.

The girls in this school weren't particularly friendly - with the exception of Adiba, the debate-team star. But she was clearly a smart girl; I couldn't afford to hang out with a possible geek before settling in. I felt bad, but that was the reality. Besides, I already had Layla, and she didn't like Adiba. She disapproved of her indiscriminate friendliness. So I remained

noncommittal towards Adiba. Though I had to give her credit

for persistence; she kept trying.

At our old school, Layla and I had been considered similar; good students, but not social superstars. Simultaneously changing schools and transforming image meant Layla was hugely in demand here. I was stupid enough to imagine that it wouldn't change anything between us.

Until the day I overheard her telling her adoring hangers-on about how "embarrassing" it was that I just "didn't get the message"; that because our parents were friends (not true), I'd had the temerity to assume that I could hang out with her, cramping her style. She'd had her back to me, but the others saw me, relishing the added spice of my humiliation. Unwilling to display the extent of my hurt, I turned away sharply, brushing past Adiba. She shot me a look of such understanding and pity that I almost started crying right there. Layla later concocted an explanation about how she needed to spread her wings and 'be herself'; something that I apparently held her back from. This school was a new beginning for her, she said, an opportunity to "move on". I didn't really understand what she was talking about, but I knew it was an excuse.

I was the one who needed to move on. But before that, I reminded Layla to think twice before badmouthing me again. After all, I'd been keeping her secrets all these years. I understood that I just wasn't "cool" enough to be Layla's friend here. But that was ok - I didn't need her anymore. She was now officially a mean girl.

Beginnings

SAL

ELL of all the meanest and most selfish of the people I've ever seen you really take the cake," V v said she vehemently.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Wonder, you don't do too good

yourself. I've had my fill of you" he replied. "You have, have you? I decide who gets to have the fill of me.

And you ain't anywhere near the top." "But why is that? Weren't we once real special? You know, got

all the news together." "Yeah I suppose. But you're the one who became a jerk. Like I

said you're always thinking about yourself. Whatever is good for you is what matters."

"But maybe that's the same as it being good for everyone?" He was deliberately obdurate. "I take everyone along with me." "All this big talk! What are you doing about even the littlest

thing I asked you? Did you talk to my sister?" He was gloomily expecting this. "That's really asking something. You know how hard I find it to deal with her. Is it really necessary?"

"That's just typical of you. Always trying to get out of doing what I ask. So she's a bit over the top. So what? Don't you have to talk to people like that all day at work?" "Yeah but at work I've got the whiphand. You should see how

they cringe and clamour when I threaten to cut off their credit." "Speaking of credit I'm going to need an enhancement. You have to see this new dress I'm going to get. It really sets off my figure." She rolled her two hands tightly down each side of her body while rolling her hips suggestively.

"I don't see why I have to get involved in your money problems. It's not as if we're even exactly married. Every time we're together it's 'gimme this, gimme that'. Besides I'm saving for the new IPad.'

"Saving, huh! Don't think I don't know how you're getting along, cadging loans from your mum, which you're never going to repay. How about thinking of me for a change? You certainly don't forget to do that when you're hot for it!' "I told you not to bring my mum into it. She owes me big-

time for everything she's got," he said stretching his legs on the ottoman, "You should a seen the look on the dumb bastard's face when we caught him cheating."

"Well, if that's the way you're gonna be..." "Don't get mad. I didn't mean to say I didn't care what hap-

pens with you.' "No, honestly I've got to look out for myself it seems."

"So you're mucking about with Jimmy Payne again? He's even more of a deadbeat than me!" "Will you get the hell out of here? You don't know the first

thing about all the things I got going for me. There's lots of people who know how to do right by me." "Yeah, yeah and you're finally going to get your act together

and your head straight". "I'm better than you'll ever be anytime soon. I've stopped

drinking, and even eating right these days.'

He gazed at her ample form with undying light. "I think the rock has reached the very bottom of the hill. Should we start all over again?"

"Guess so."

REFLECTIONS

RAANA HAIDER

HIS eminently sound advice was proclaimed by Richard Ford in his book A Handbook for Travellers in Spain (1847). Darkwood elaborates: "Unless you are particularly agile, my recommendation is: If your eyes need massaging, then try rubbing them with somebody else's elbows instead." The chapter on 'Hostilities and Personal Security' cautions us as follows: "No amount of prowess shown at the fathers' egg-and-spoon race at the school sports day can prepare you to outrun a cheetah, for example." Well, current perception of what constitutes 'hostilities and personal security' and the ensuing terror - is more likely to present itself in the form of today's body search and tomorrow's body scan all in the name of war on terror. This purchase left me CA\$6.99 out of pocket versus its original pricing at CA\$24.95.

Jon and Rumer Godden's evocative memoir Two Under the Indian Sun (1966) of a childhood spent in Narayangunj, East Bengal in the 1910s was retrieved in a long and narrow, comfy second hand bookshop also on Yonge Street, Toronto that is run by a devout book lover who could easily pass - I imagine as one of the sisters themselves. The delightful read in the mode of Ruskin Bond's writings is a remembrance of times past and it cost me CA\$4.50. Their father was posted with one of the steamer companies that navigated throughout Assam, Bengal and Bihar and the two sisters spent a memorable period of five years growing up in a bungalow lost in the midst of a sprawling compound, climbing trees, eating raw mangoes, exciting excursions into the bazaar across civil lines and visits to Dehra Dun, Kashmir, Musoorie, Nilgiiris and Shillong hill stations..

A perfect bargain at US\$1 is my purchase of *The Peacock* Spring (1975) by Rumer Godden in the summer of 2004. The purchase was made in a book-shed (not bookshop) within a parking lot in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Already enamoured by her writing, the bargain bin find was a happy discovery. Set in New Delhi in the 1970s, once again two children join their British diplomat father on his posting. The presence of an Eurasian woman in the household (their tutor and their father's companion) reveals the delicate undertones and complexities that surface between various castes, communities and social relationships.

However, my bargain hit is a copy of National Geographic magazine (June 1984) that I bought at the same parking lot book-shed for the princely sum of US 25 cents. The striking cover of a black steam engine juxtaposed before the pearly white Taj Mahal led me to read the article caption: 'Pakistan to Bangladesh: India by Rail: How a 38,000 mile lifeline grew.' With text by one of the Grand Masters of travel literature, Paul Theroux and photographs by the legendary global photographer Steve McCurry, the account of the gripping adventure on rail across the body of the Indian subcontinent is a researcher's dream material and remains a collector's item. We travel by train from Peshawar through Lahore, Simla, New Delhi, Varanasi, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Chittagong and Dacca via a Herculean network set up during the British Raj which to this day remains one of its lingering legacy.

BARGAIN BIN BOOKS: Thrill of the Find

Getting off at Marble Arch tube station in London, windowshopping past Selfridges, I was heading for Daunt Bookshop on Marylebone High Street. Recommended by a resident friend, Daunt Bookshop remains a ritual destination. An original Edwardian bookshop with long oak galleries and graceful skylights, it has been declared by Daily Telegraph newspaper as 'The most beautiful bookshop in London designed for travelers who like reading.' Browsing the shelves and tables laden heavy with bestsellers, classics and dreamy coffee-table books that entice one in a sensual manner, an hour or two of heavenly pursuit just breezes by. However, only new titles are to be found here.

It was the search for Daunt Bookshop that per chance landed me at the window of Oxfam second hand bookshop a throw away from Daunt Bookshop. A literary pilgrimage destination, it is now one of my early ports of calls in London. Oxfam, the traditional United Kingdom-based charity outlets dealing principally in second hand women's clothing, shoes and accessories has zeroed in on another commodity as much in demand as wearable items. Hand me-down books, dvds, posters, recorded music albums are all in search of a new owner and a new home.

Here is the ultimate venue for bargain finds and the heady sense of satisfaction that accompanies it. A best-seller in hard cover The Hall of a Thousand Columns: Hindustan to Malabar with Ibn Battutah by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (2005) priced at 20 pounds sterling was bought by me for 8 pounds sterling only two years later. In a mesmerizing travel trail tale, we accompany Mackintosh-Smith who lives in Yemen in retracing the 'Prince of Traveller,' the Moroccan fourteenth century global nomad's journey across the Indian Ocean, to Surat, Delhi and down the Malabar coast Goa, Cochin, Calicut...

Always on the lookout for reading material relevant for the research and writing I was doing on a travel literary book on India, my eyes fell on Younghusband: The Last Great Imperial Adventurer (1995) by Patrick French. The paper back issue cost me 2.75 pounds sterling at the Oxfam bookshop. The riveting account of the Great Game power play acted out between England and Russia in the northwest frontier, Central Asia, Himalayan regions Bhutan and Tibet and northeast India is an historical eye-opener. Francis Younghusband born in Murree (hill station in today's Pakistan) was an English rogue adventurer along the lines of T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) and initiated the British invasion of Tibet in 1903. My single, most prized purchase remains The West in the

East: from an American Point of View by Price Collier. It is the Oxfam bookshop that has topped my source of bargain buy. I am the proud possessor of a red cloth-bound, hard cover book with title and author's name embossed in gold colouring that was published by Duckworth & Co. in London in 1911. This archival book bought close to a century later, I purchased for the ludicrous sum of 5 pounds sterling in 2009. In impeccable condition, the binding remains firm with no yellow markings that stain paper of far more recent provenance. The goldrimmed stack of pages remains untarnished despite its antique age. For every one of these reasons and more The West in the East: from an American Point of View remains the jewel in my

collection of second-hand books.

Bringing to mind the often quoted line by Rudyard Kipling 'East is East and West is West and never shall the twain meet' as well as the recent ideological duel 'Clash of Civilisations' coined by Samuel Huntington; Collier analyses the global mantle that America could play early into the twentieth century. In his words (highly prophetic): "Should Great Britain lose India, lose the Suez Canal, lose the supremacy of the sea, become another Venice, Spain, Holland or Denmark, the one hundred millions inhabitants of the United States would find themselves with new and far heavier burdens..." Was Collier in a time-machine, when in 1911 he declared: "The attitude of our great democracies that everything which is different is therefore inferior, and fair game for ridicule, is the attitude of the small boy in a village street, who laughs and jeers at a new figure or a strange costume. It is sheer intellectual hooliganism. It is the business of those better informed, and therefore more sympathetic, to persuade our great unwieldy mass of ignorant voters that the wave of mastery and influence from West to East is now on the wane. The East is rapidly becoming strong enough to be an independent, and to make terms, instead of having terms dictated, as from a superior to an inferior." Collies foresaw a New World Order- with American paramount in its influence. Much traveled in India, China and Japan, Collier recognizes in particular Japan's imperial reach in the region in the early years of the twentieth century.

The epitome of every book lover's idea of a second-hand bookshop is Tea and Tattered Pages on the Left Bank in Paris. A miniscule literary hideout, the tiny cavern has yielded many a treasure. Not to be dismissed is the resident wolf-whistling parrot that delights in disturbing one's equilibrium. Refocusing my search, one of my literary treasures is Mission to Civilize: The French Way by Mort Rosenblum (1988). In his own words: "This is a reporter's book on a passionate subject." Who can blame him? One of his memorable one-liner reads: "The Gaullist view looks at history, not headlines." The book is entirely engaging, replete with humour of oh-so French ego and eccentricities. Finding out what makes the French tick is Rosenblum's mission. Few foreigners are less qualified. Rosenblum lives in France, has been nominated three times for the Pulitzer Prize, served as Associated Press Bureau Chief in Paris and Editor in Chief of the International Herald Tribune.

The hard cover Paris in August by the Englishman Adrian George at 40 francs was a steal. Any alternative cash down would have involved 30 pounds sterling. This purchase was made at Brentano's, the American bookshop which opened in Paris in 1895 and remains to this day, a fine repository of any and every book on France. Combining a languorous text and charcoal drawings to portray the city that acts as his muse, George leisurely strolls us though his account of Paris in the late summer of 1993. Everyone has their own version of the City of Light. Here is George's vision: "Sunday, 1 August. Silence. From my window, the rue Dauphine tapers like memory. The sun falls softly, baking walls, drying tearful grey to cream. Fine cracks in paintwork, floury like the dusty crust of bread. Paris, with its filigreed lace iron balconies, is once again the most southerly of northern cities. August is a kind month.

Paris is emptied, Parisians pack their cars with their wives, children, grandparents, dogs and cosmetics and drive to the

sea or the mountains or the great rich countryside...."

Literary treats on Paris, the French and France have turned up everywhere. Cairo in the mid-1990s yielded a sepia-toned copy of a book in French Paris by Jacques Carton that was published in 1960. Iconic black and white photographs of the most beautiful city in the world accompany the brief historical text. In London, for 60 pence, I have bought The French on Life and Love (1969), a selection of aphorisms ranging from cynical to philosophical to witty are all to be tasted and savoured as in the art of fine French living... 'Frankness consists in always telling the truth, but not always all the truth' (Mme. De Stael). 'If the husband provides the strength, Nature requires the wife to provide the style' (Montaigne). There are successful marriages, but no blissful ones' (La Rochefoucauld).

For the grand sum of 150 rupees, I am the owner of the 17th edition of All-Asia Travel Guide (1995) published by Far Eastern Economic Review Publications in Hong Kong. It was originally priced at a hefty16.95 pounds sterling. This selection was made at the bookworm burrow that is Das Gupta & Co. at College Street, Calcutta. Since 1888 have book lovers been flocking to this old-world outlet in the search of an elusive book or like me - the luck of the find. Every salesman looks like a Writer's Building babu clerk. The appearance is deceptive. Each man is a walking literary encyclopedia giving credence to the dictum that a bookshop is as good as the man on the shop floor.

Covering 32 countries of the region, the book covers not only South Asia and Southeast Asia but also a unique category of countries and some of their regions labeled 'Northeast Asia.' This includes the Central Asian Republics, China, Hong Kong, Japan, North and South Koreas, Macau, Mongolia, Russian Far East (ie. Siberia) and Taiwan. Targeting business travelers in the region, the overview still retains every caption heading (a-z) accommodation to shopping to trekking in the Himalayas. This is my first read for any new destination in Asia. And should I ever travel light, this is to be my handy accompa-

niment. My eyes zeroed in on the bold black caption section heading 'Travel Books' at the second-hand book sale in 2008 at the American School Dhaka. A bold sweep of the arm and the following books were mine: Lonely Planet's Hong Kong, Macau & Canton (1992) and Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei (1994), Thailand, Indochina & Burma Handbook (1993), The Rough Guide's Vietnam (1996) and Thailand (1998). With every brief now available for future forays into these Far Eastern lands, my considerable investment stood at the grand sum of Tks. 500.

Only last year did I fall upon a page marker that accompa-

nied my purchase at Crossword bookstore on Elgin Street, Calcutta of the English translation of Sankar's Chowringhee (2007), an obligatory read for any Calcutta city aficionado. In a wonderfully reassuring manner, the marker read: 'Wear the old coat and buy the new book.'

The first part of this two-part article appeared on 17 April.

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