

# 1ST DAY AT MAGIC SCHOOL

MUHAMMAD MUHTASIM JAWAD

"You're a daini, Rawnak!"

"I'm a what?"

Rawnak still remembers that odd, fateful day on Shiddheshwari Lane. The bearded rickshawala suddenly turned towards her, on the passenger seat, and uttered some weird words. Everything went topsy-turvy since then.

It was her 12th birthday. Her father, apparently, had forgotten all about it. However, when evening came and he returned from the factory, he somehow remembered his only daughter's special day. He gifted her with one of the rarest smiles he possessed. Hiding his moneybag from Rawnak's stepmother, he had handed her 50 taka. "Go get yourself some biryani, Ronu."

And thus Rawnak scurried off on a rickshaw to get to a tiny roadside shop. Just as the rickshaw crossed the temple, it seemed to get lifted up in the air. Absolutely bewildered, she tried to scream but could not. It was beyond surreal. **THE RICKSHAW WAS FLYING.** The heavily bearded man looked at her with his yellow eyes and yelled, "Chhu montor chhu!"

A lightning struck the rickshaw and just as suddenly, a strange blinding light flashed in front of Rawnak's eyes. Moments later, as her vision returned, she realised she was sitting on the seat of the rickshaw, but both the rickshaw and the scary rickshawala were missing. Peering through the dark, she could only make out a road crammed with torn books behind her, while an aging, tall wall lay ahead – it had many electric blue plants growing vertically out of it and they seemed to glow! A small metallic blue signboard on the wall said "Nilkhet – what you see is not always the truth". She did not have the time to be puzzled, however. A loud crack was heard and the bearded man reappeared out of nowhere. His arms were outstretched and something seemed to

give off light.

"Here is your packet of biryani," the ferocious-looking, tiny man muttered kindly. Rawnak was still stunned but she could not keep her eyes off the generous serving of the famous Banna's Biryani, which had a floating candle on top of it too. "Make a wish and don't be shy!" he continued. But Rawnak stood as still as a log, with her big eyes fixed at his strange cloak. "Who are you?" she inquired.

"Oh well. I'm Khurshid, the snake charmer. I knew you'd be afraid, but you handled it better than the last kid who found out he's a wizard. Here's your letter from the only witchcraft and wizardry school in the country, Pabna Jadughor for Special Individuals."

As shocked as she was, she realised that things really did make sense. Her life was strange, in uncountable ways. She could talk to crows and they seemingly understood her. She has a cupboard back home full of jamrul that the crows bring her every other day. Whenever she was given a chore at home, the cockroaches and mice helped her out. A boy in second grade who tried to tug at her skirt had his hair magically shaved, which led to her being punished despite her protest. She also remembered the one time she sneezed on the street and a dog next to her barked out, "Bless you, Rawnak!" These were creepy at first but she gradually learned not to react.

She finished reading the letter from Principal Jewel Rana; it felt like she knew this was her destiny. So, that's what 'jadughar' really means! But the long list of books, the 'wizard robe', the 'tabij' and the 'chhori' that had to be bought worried her. Rawnak Shikdar did not have any money on her except the 50 taka, and her family – which had been struggling with mortgages – would surely throw her out now. She could already hear her stepmother's shrill voice ringing in her ears, "Al-

ways known she was a freak. A daini!"

"Don't worry about the money, Rawnak. Pabna Jadughor offers scholarship to the brightest of students. If you study and 'jadu-tona' hard, they will take care of your fees. This purse contains enough money to get you started!"

"What about my parents though?" asked Rawnak.

"Oh, they have been sent formalin-mixed mangoes. They won't remember anything about you till you return during the semester break."

She still could not believe this night of madness yet. But when Khurshid brought out a sugar cane, chewed on it a bit and then smacked it on the blue wall, her jaws dropped. A row of well-lit shops emerged, with some *Amar Boi* flying around here and there over a small crowd of cloaked people. "Welcome to the real Nilkhet!" Khurshid laughed loudly as he pulled Rawnak towards the magical book-stores.

She had a very eventful night running around with Khurshid and watching him bargain crazily with the shopkeepers. They had to go to other parts of the city to get several objects: bought her strange-looking yellow alkhella cloak from Gausia, her tabij from Chawkbazar and finally, adopt a pet from the streets of Katabon.

"Now I'd have to drop you off at Gabtoli. We can't fly there though; it's a no-fly zone after some doofus made a bunch of cows fly at a goru'r haat. Such a blunder, urgh!" Khurshid seemed annoyed.

"So, do we walk all the way now?"

"No, we'll use the Manhole Network."

After looking at Rawnak's puzzled face, Khurshid began to explain. The Deshi Ministry of Magic bewitches unsuspecting Moga (non-magic folk) into digging and cutting the roads all year long, improving their network of transportation. While it does cause a

little problem for

traffic on the surface, it helps wizards and witches get to different locations extremely quickly.

Rawnak, at first, was disgusted to jump into the manhole but Khurshid threw in some powder that instantly changed the appearance of the place: the stinky, murky manhole now looked and smelled like a crevice in the centre of a gigantic peyaju. Khurshid yelled "Bye!" and pushed her into it, and almost immediately, she fell hard onto another surface. She had reached the Gabtoli Bus Station.

The busy, noisy and familiarly crowded station made her feel lost. Khurshid was gone, but she found all her belongings right beside her in an old bag, while her left hand was holding a ticket. It read "Pabna Express 420: Sitting Service". After almost half an hour of searching for it, when she finally found the bus, she was disappointed. The bus was full to the brim with cloaked people and about ten people were constantly pushing and shoving each other, trying to get through the only door to the bus. She stood there, not knowing what to do. A voice on her right, however, urged her, "Don't be afraid. Get on the bus. Follow me!" She was already done with her daily dose of surprise as she saw the boy – same age as her – dive into the mass of humans. And he disappeared inside! Gathering all her courage, she did the same.

Inside it was a stunning view. She had stepped inside Westin Hotel once in her life, but the grand hall inside the bus blew her away. Like everyone else, she sat on a comfortable couch. A well-dressed luggage boy came and took her bag away, reassuring her that she would not have to pay anything for the service. She looked out of the window. The bus was leaving the station. Her journey to her magical school had begun. Rawnak smiled as the boy who had helped her a while back waved at her.

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Rawnak raised her head from the flow of water gushing out from the tube-well Pensieve and sighed. Her first day getting acquainted to the magical side seemed just like yesterday. But as the 43rd principal of Pabna Jadughor for Special Individuals said, she must not dwell on the past too often.

*Jawad is your next-door wizard who needs you to get him his wand. A bamboo stick will work too. Shout at him on facebook.com/jawad.muhtasim or jawad.mmjr@gmail.com*

