

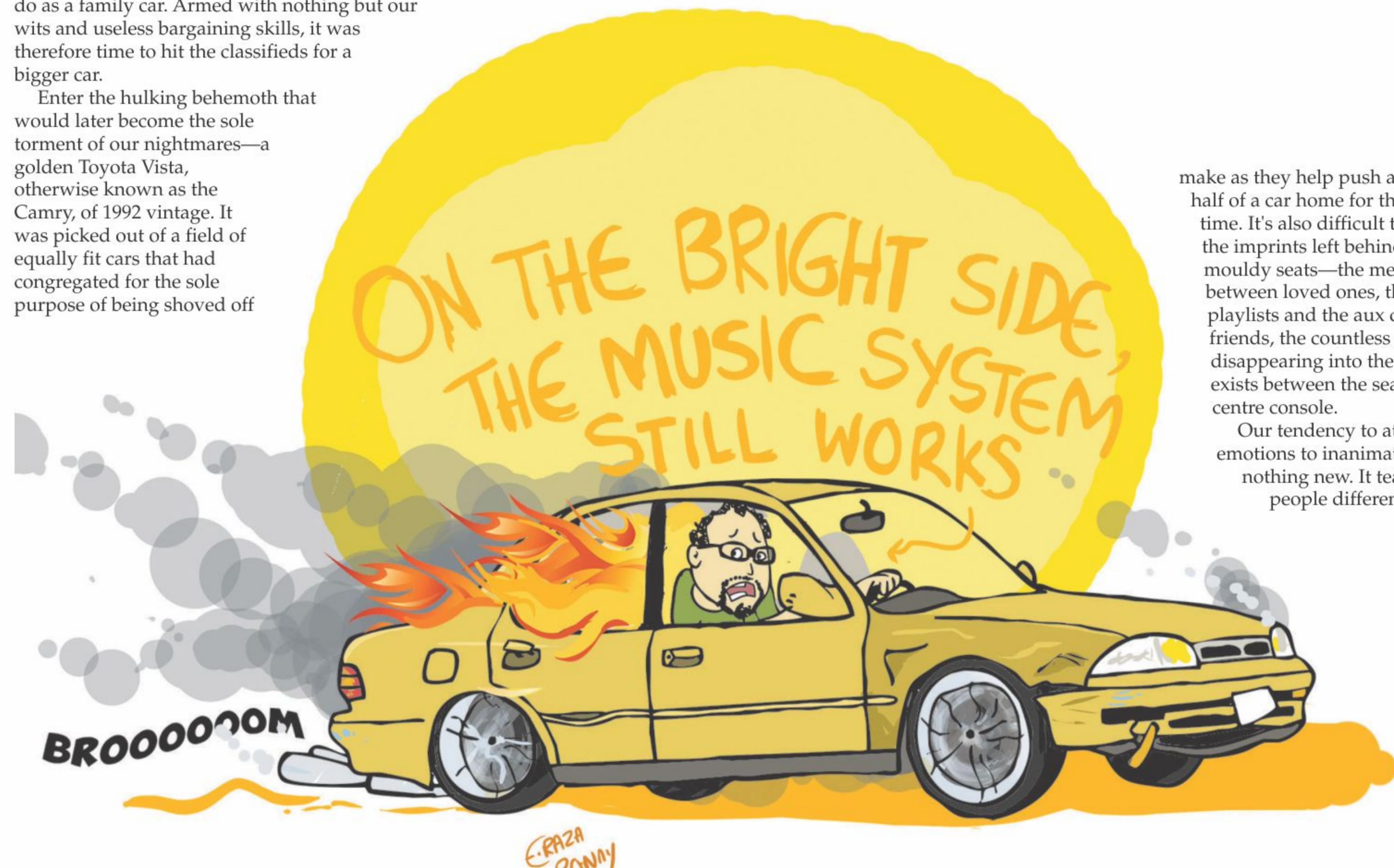
In the summer of 2011, my elder brother decided, (disregarding the hard-hitting logic of "but why" presented by yours truly) to tie the knot and give in to the life of baby-vomit, sleepless nights and seemingly endless *dawats* that accompany a married life. Somehow, that decision also bore with it the folly of upgrading to a bigger car and ending the long-running and supremely satisfactory service of our beloved little Toyota Ceres.

To say that the Ceres was a saint among cars, would've been apt—it ran for years with just basic maintenance and came with a sleek body draped in red that was revolutionary for its time, since it looked like a two-door sports car despite having four doors and a tolerable trunk. It had very little headroom and rear passengers would occasionally need the use of a hacksaw to fit inside if they were particularly tall—thus my brother's fateful decision that it just would not do as a family car. Armed with nothing but our wits and useless bargaining skills, it was therefore time to hit the classifieds for a bigger car.

Enter the hulking behemoth that would later become the sole torment of our nightmares—a golden Toyota Vista, otherwise known as the Camry, of 1992 vintage. It was picked out of a field of equally fit cars that had congregated for the sole purpose of being shoved off

THE TALES OF SONALI A 1992 TOYOTA VISTA

SHAER REAZ



to some unlucky sod at a weekly bazar of used cars. Bower birds and magpies are famous for picking out brightly coloured trash in order to attract mates come summer—pretty much the only explanation for why my brother sought out this golden heap of metal against all my protests. We ended up buying it, and what seemed like a decent purchase at first brought out all the stops in trying to prove me right merely two weeks after it entered our driveway.

Pre-wedding celebrations were in full-swing as my brother's entire posse of friends, with myself in tow, ventured out one night for some tea. Instead of sticking to the basics, they decided the then-newly constructed roads around Mirpur DOHS would be a great destination for a drive. After nearly an hour of sitting about getting bitten by mosquitoes and enjoying mediocre tea, it was time to head back... except our old-new car refused to start. Far from home and covered in a million red protrusions that itched like hell, we decided to call for help from a friend who always carries a tow rope. That night should've been a wake-up call, but we endured.

Over the next half-a-year, the air-conditioning failed, the windows occasionally developed their own twisted

intelligence, the starter motor seemed to think it needed a break from duties at the worst of times, the windshield decided it was time to start letting the elements in and the hateful automatic gearbox leapt up and down its ratios without any prompt. Despite our best efforts, it kept sliding downhill like a petulant child refusing to respond to positive reinforcement.

Few years down the line, my brother decided Bangladesh wouldn't cut it and promptly left with my sister-in-law, deciding to start a family in the US and ultimately rendering this whole exercise pointless. Left to my own constantly-financially-challenged self, the Vista kept gathering dust and mould, neglect pushing it further into the money-pit. The few times I tried fixing it up resulted in my thoughtful colleagues nicknaming it "Sonali Bank" since it kept swallowing up all my money, and surreptitiously enlisting the help of friends, random passer-bys and family to help push it home.

I won't let it die, though. Once you've been forced to push a car home at 2 am on the eve of Eid, in the middle of a thunderstorm while wearing pajamas and an undershirt, you form a sort of hateful bond that makes you want to see the whole relationship through. The same applies to all the groans and jokes your friends

things—some learn to value what they have, others find solace in the fact that maybe there is such a thing as permanence in an impermanent world. For me, I learned a valuable lesson that will stay with me for life—never get married. Especially if it means selling off a bright red Toyota Ceres.

Shaer Reaz is in-charge, Shift, an automobile publication of The Daily Star.

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ANIMAL FARM IN THE MAKING

The healthiest form of democracy in the world is now being threatened by treasonous mutterings of an uprising.

The ramblings of the disenfranchised may collectively lead to an avalanche of disgruntlement that buries us before the earthquake, affectionately titled, The Big One.

Animals in and around the country have been raising allegations of discrimination, squarely levelling the blame on the government and its actor for propagating a harmful and hateful narrative.

"Twenty-five trees go missing and suddenly it's our fault?" a representative of the Association of Blue Whales asked at a press conference organised by the Rat and Blue Whale Association of Bangladesh.

In the northern side of the country, under the jurisdiction of the ruler of the North, 25 trees recently "died by suicide". That was the conclusion authorities reached when they were unable to explain the fate of the possibly "illegally logged trees."

"Yes, there was a contractor working at the time of the incident, but I am sure he did not do it. In fact, we found etches on the barks that seem to be shaped like a whale," one of the investigators said.

A recent spate of suicide of teenagers has also been linked to the Blue Whales. The latter deny the association outright.

"We had nothing to do with this.

Teenage suicide isn't an uncommon phenomenon. Plus, what is the evidence we had anything to do with this?" the Blue Whale rep asked. "Where is the evidence that this game of ours even

exists?"

"Also, what about the CORPORATE media that is so hungry to show off their knowledge that they keep writing about what each level of this so-called game encompasses? How are they not culpable?" he queried.

Investigators point to the "blue whale" markings that occur frequently in such cases. "Some of it isn't really a blue whale, but it's a fish, right?" the investigator said in equal parts stupidity

exists?"

The Rat members also highlighted the government's unfair treatment. "We were invited in and now they treat us so badly. Last year, they claimed we ate BDT 700 crore taka worth of rice. Now, they claim, we ate their dam and caused the flood in the haor areas," a member said. "What were they doing when we were eating all these things?" she asked.

Experts though agreed that rats can eat dams. In regards to the trees, this

us? Because we use their toilets," a ragpicker rep said.

Indeed, the threads of disharmony seem to be tying themselves in an unbreakable knot. But citizens of this city, so irritated by the traffic and rain, know that the coming election means things are about to change. And by change, we mean basically the same thing and maybe, just maybe, done by different people (but probably not).

unnamed expert, who lies to fit a narrative, added that storms may have damaged them.

In good news, ragpickers, or street urchins as we dismissively call them like it's the 1500s and we are back to having the English Poor Laws, joined the animals in their protests. "Because our university has a problem with free-mixing, they make this rule and blame



footpaths and drains." This sentiment is echoed by Sharif Uddin, also superintending engineer for the entire DNCC. "You will see a drastic improvement [like seen in the tri-state area] by this December," he promises.

Improvements notwithstanding, jurisdiction remains a problem. DNCC may install drainage networks but other organisations, including Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), are responsible for maintenance. Though inequality in Dhaka's roads are something the DNCC says they are addressing, it remains to be seen whether others choose to address it. It also remains to be seen whether the repairs and new infrastructure hold up under the relentless stress of Dhaka city or whether they're just another facelift, especially for upscale areas. ■

roads are terrible and show no results," adds Bashri. Roadworks happen year-round, but offer little relief to residents in areas where they are needed the most.

and befuddlement. When informed that the whale was actually a mammal, he had no response.

"Yes, kids are under a lot of pressure today. Yes, there is growing inequality that can aggravate feelings of inadequacy. Yes, there is too much homework. And alienation. But if it wasn't for the Blue Whales and smart phones, all this could have been

In an interview to *The Daily Star* in May this year, Mayor Annisul Huq proclaimed, "By the end of 2018, there will hardly be any dilapidated roads,