



DESIGN: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Origin Stories

Street Signs

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There are signs in this city that we sweep past every day. We read them purposelessly when stuck in traffic with nothing better to do. Have you ever wondered how they came to be? Here's how I like to imagine some of the most common ones came about.

HANDWRITING IMPROVEMENT

In this age of technology, everybody would think him a joke. However, he was sure of his calling. Calligraphy would have to be his life.

He travelled far and wide to perfect his skill. He learnt from the greatest masters. When he came back to Dhaka, he was a changed man. However, Dhaka was not a changed city, and his skills were in no more demand now than they had been three months ago when he started his life altering journey. He was confident that once he had reached perfection in his art he would be rewarded with the greatest riches this nation could offer. When he realised that such was not going to be the case, he crumbled.

As his long-term friend, she knew she must help him out. Together they scoured the city looking for employment. However, he considered his mastery over the practice to be far too superior for the jobs offered to him. Helpless, she decided to pitch him the idea of his own handwriting "school".

"A school? And waste my skill on infants who cannot surely know its value?!" he cried at first.

"You spent all of three months on this, you doughnut!" she wants to say, but that might not be the best idea at the moment.

"It's not as you think. You will be shaping the means of written communication for all future generations of Bangladeshis. Accolades will be sung in your name. You will be heralded as the Supreme Provider of the Letter," she said with passion instead, while bursting on the inside from having to refrain from laughing.

"Supreme Provider of the Letter, you say. That does sound fitting. Alright then, I will sign on for this endeavour."

The posters went up. The rest is history. **TAAK "SHOMADHAN"**

The first time it happens, he is at work. Hunched over the quarterly report, he runs his fingers through his hair. As he pulls his hand back, he notices the clumps of hair that have departed their roots. He ignores it as a freak accident.

But then it keeps happening. As weeks go by, a shiny patch has begun to form, and he feels eyes starting to follow it everywhere. Paranoid, he knows he must speak to someone, but everyone just tells him of all the different cures out there.

"Why do I need a cure? This mutation is in my genes! It's not a disease!" he says.

They just don't understand. And that's when he realises that what he needs is a support group!

Fast-forward two years, and they're holding monthly meetings, and sometimes even seasonal retreats. Their adverts are made purposefully "misleading", because

they know it's the best way to avoid media attention. Everyone who calls is told what they're in for, and they always instantly feel at home. They aren't ashamed here, they are accepted. Here they are beautiful. Here they are "Balding and Proud."

PASSPORT UN-STICKING

"Sir, we've got him!" says the officer into the walkie-talkie.

"Good job. Boy, do I have special plans for this one," says an excited voice from the other side.

The detainee in handcuffs is led away in the police car and taken into HQ. As the dark city glides past him, he wonders what kind of horrors they have planned for him. Will they lock him up in a dark cell and let him rot there? He would deserve it, for what he's done. Passport counterfeit is no joke.

What he discovers however is beyond anything he might have imagined. Once his case has been dealt with, they subject him to the worst possible punishment he could fathom. They place him in front of a desk, and put him to work! He toils away at his new nine to five "job", his immense talents reduced to un-sticking passports.

He hears that the business is going well, especially boosted by the advertisements all over town, but of course he hasn't seen a single penny of the profits. He spits in disgust at what they have turned him into. He used to be a master, and now he's no better than the common blue-collar worker. What a disgrace!

PEST CONTROL

As the beads of sweat collect over the scientist's eyebrows, she carefully adds measured droplets of each chemical into Compound-54. Her lab is dark and dingy, surrounded by glass containers housing all kinds of creepy crawlies. But this is her life's work, and she knows its value. If she succeeds, and she knows she will, no Bangladeshi family will ever have to kill a telapoka with a sandal ever again.

She wipes her brows with the *anchal* of the saree she's wearing under her lab coat, and continues down the extensive list of ingredients that she has developed over the course of the past decade.

As the last ingredient is added, the concoction fizzes and solidifies. Transferring the final product onto a Petri dish holding a single test subject, she holds her breath. She smiles sadistically as the creature approaches the powder with interest. The bait works...now for the poison. Patiently, she watches as the creature starts squirming when the instant the powder comes into contact with it. With the terrified screams of her children ringing in her mind, she doesn't look away until every iota of life has been extinguished from its disgusting body. Compound-54 works. Chemical N is ready.

Now, onto advertising, she thinks, and then she laughs and laughs and laughs.

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