

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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A TOAST TO THE
TEA TOWN

PG 4

LOST IN (SYLHETI)
TRANSLATION

PG 6



ILLUSTRATION: TAHSIN MOSTAFA CHOWDHURY

EDITORIAL

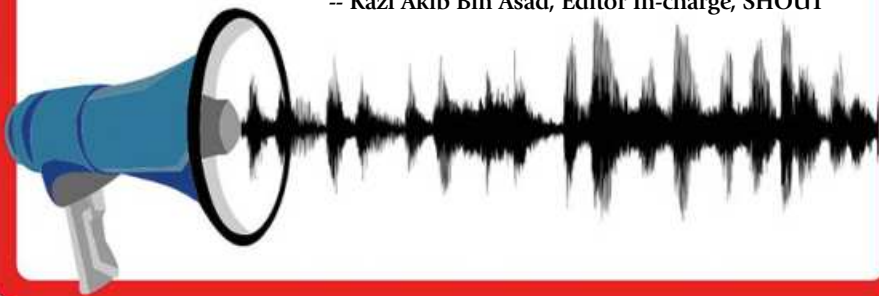
Sylhet. Synonymous with tea and blessed with some of the most serene natural sceneries this land has to offer. As part of our constant efforts to take SHOUT beyond the boundaries of the capital, we took a night bus all the way to the northeast of Bangladesh to experience, and bring you, Sylhet. Yes, we did it. We strolled around the SUST campus, enjoyed meals of *shatkora* beef and paid our respects at the *dargah*. If only we could speak the local dialect, it'd have been even better.


The youth of Sylhet hold a lot of promise and potential. They grow up in a city where a day trip can cover marshy wetlands and hills covered in clouds. They also live in a place steeped in age-old traditions, and a sense of spiritual integrity in "the land of 360 *aulias*".

This week's issue is all Sylheti. The articles, stories and illustrations have been contributed by the youth of Sylhet, or those who hold a strong connection to the beautiful region.

Welcome to Sylhet, on SHOUT.


-- Kazi Akib Bin Asad, Editor In-charge, SHOUT





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TALE OF THE TAPE



panshi
restaurant



panch bhai
restaurant

The breakfast at Panshi has everything. The usual porota-bhaji-thick creamy cup of tea works, but everyone swears by the khichuri. It's... beautiful.

BREAKFAST

Will the kolija and paya at Panch Bhai slow you down at the beginning of the day? Yes, but it's worth it. Order the "tondul" rooti; it's underappreciated.

Shatkora beef at Panshi has the slightest hint of shatkora, the way it should be. The big piece of bowal maach will excite most diners, and also burn their wallets. If chicken is your jam, the grilled chicken ticks most boxes.

REST OF THE DAY

The begun bhaji before lunch is deep-fried yet soft, and perfect. The pabda maach comes with a sweet and thick bean gravy. Can't miss the sweetened yogurt that has hints of sour - a delightful palate cleanser.

Outdoor seating at Panshi is a definite plus, given the chaos indoors. The warm glow of the shifting LED lights at night give off party vibes.

AMBIENCE

Lunch service feels like iftar here; the chaos is insane. They provide different sections for any configuration of dining parties - comfort over glamour.

FROM LONDON TO KANIHATI

ISHRATH CHOWDHURY

Years of overhearing my parents' conversations with relatives and aunts telling me "Ze sikhon oiso!" had led my naïve young brain to assume there was only one way to speak Bangla. Little did I know that once I'd arrive in Dhaka, at the tender age of 7 years old, there was a whole bunch of dialects for me to find out about.

Many (non-Sylheti) people usually associate Sylhet with the fancy tea resorts and hotels that are popping up left and right in the division, but my mind always brings forth the picture of one of three possible places -- our home, my *nana bari*, and a house in Moulvibazar.

The beauty and charm of Sylhet can be found at every turn and my mum always made it so that we'd get to experience as much of it as we could. Like many others, I've been captivated by the enchanting and tranquil views of "Madopkondo" and "Bisnahandi", collected curiously beautiful stones in Jaflong, became mesmerised by the sunlight peeking through the towering trees of Lawachara and, of course, ventured through the infinite evergreen shrubs of tea gardens.

However, hidden behind those hilly tea gardens and down one of the many twisty roads, is the enchanting kingdom



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

we call Kanihati. Now, I only say kingdom because (forgive the cheesiness) my parents always referred to my sisters and I as their "Kanihati Princesses", and my younger brother was later dubbed the little Prince. However, you can trust me when I say we certainly did not maintain the etiquette of royalty once the soles of our little shoes touched the ground after a 4-hour long car journey from Dhaka that had commenced at dawn.

Sylhet was always a blank page for my siblings and I to make new adventures and stories for ourselves. We could be anything we wanted – warriors or pirates with our swords made of bamboo and rope, explorers in the jungle on an escapade to find some vague treasure with a very poorly-drawn (but definitely colourful) map, chefs making a spectacular and very filling meal of starfruit with salt and chilli powder, or even the proud

little builders of a house made up of mostly bamboo and banana tree leaves (which probably didn't follow any health or safety rules).

Then there was all the swimming, fishing, hours spent jumping around in mountains of hay, mud fights, walking our "pet" goats like we were the most refined little Parisian ladies with poodles instead, making fires and following about our almost-nannies Zee and Murgi Zee – we call her that even to this day because of her very chicken-like mannerisms – who would ask us "Kita koro re go, mai?" before going about their tasks and telling us how we should eat rice rather than "aloo siffs". A specific memory never fails to make me chuckle. The local kids following me around and shouting "laal saathi" because I always used to carry a small red parasol.

Looking back on those times, I had always felt like little Mary Lennox with my secret garden. And when I'm feeling homesick, the memories continue to comfort me. The last time I was there, it was nearly a year ago and in these difficult times, it's so uncertain when I'll be able to return to this place that I hold so close to my heart.

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Tale of Tea and Friday Addas

MAISHA ABEDIN

Tea for us Sylhetis is more than just a cup of tea. It is a daily ritual. It is an emotion. The romance of Sylhetis and tea is eternal and hence Sylhet, having most of the fabled tea gardens of the country, is called "The Land of Two Leaves and a Bud".

There are 135 tea gardens sprawling in Sylhet district to give the nation its caffeine fix. Interestingly, if you are a local resident of Sylhet city, I am sure you have come across the infamous Bacchu Tea Stall on the Airport Road. When weekends arrive, it's hard to miss the prominent role that this tea stall plays in wiping away all the exhaustion and stress of our daily routine. A hot cup of tea with mouth-watering *piyajju* is a quintessential part of every Friday.

Most of the time, these *adda* sessions are a manifestation of rants, gossip, debates and rebuttals. There would be break-up stories, chats about shopping sprees, and political conversations. Last but not the least, to add the fundamental fuel to complement the sessions, there would be tea.

If you are yearning to take a walk in the hilly areas and sip on gallons of tea, you definitely need a trip to Sylhet. The Malnicherra Tea Garden in Sylhet was



PHOTO: SYED TALHA MUHTASIM

established in 1850. Four years after that, the first commercial tea production in the country started in these gardens.

Along with milk tea and black tea that both the young and old consume regularly, the seven layer tea is also very well known

in Sylhet. It is prepared in a special method so that it has seven different layers of seven different colours – and seven different flavours. When served in a glass, the seven different layers remain separate and do not mix. If you ask the *tong er mama* how he

prepares the seven layer tea, he will hesitate to reveal it to you because the recipe is a trade secret of Sylhet. But I can tell you the main ingredients are condensed milk, cinnamon, cloves, green tea from Sreemangal and three types of black teas.

Tea blends into the lives of the Sylheti people as smoothly as the cloud kissing mountains blend into the winding rivers of Sylhet. Be it the cold winters or the hot summers, one thing that stays constant around the streets of Sylhet city is the consumption of *tong er cha*. Dipping in a piece of dry cake into the simmering hot cup of tea, exchanging stories with the afternoon light pouring in – ah! The perfect *adda* session.

A cup of tea brings out emotions of happiness, pain, sadness or longing. So, the next time you are in Sylhet, don't forget to stop by for one of these *adda* sessions in Bacchu Tea Stall. Regardless of whether you decide to take an interest in the discussion or just wish to sip tea, it will be an incredible experience to cherish.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

A TOAST TO THE TEA TOWN

ASGAR ASWAD

Here's a toast to the holy city. The city of beautiful rain, the beautiful city of rain. The green city.

To the places with memories.

All the times we fiddled with our phones a little too much and had to take them to Karimullah Market, only to be lost in the sea of a thousand tech-shops, and all the times the same thing happened when we were looking for RAM sticks at Planet Araf. The smell of newly printed books and leaflets at the libraries and publishers of Raja Mansion that we can only sniff but rarely buy. I can't forget to mention Baatighar. The times we went to Al-Hamra, not to buy anything, but begging our parents to buy us a yo-yo or that remote controlled car. All the times we pretended to be interested in the food of Spicy Restaurant, only to catch a picturesque view of the whole city from the top of City Centre. All the times we went to Latif Center to buy CDs from that one shop in the entire city.

To the city of rain.

The beautiful smell, just before it rains. It doesn't always make us feel the same way. Sometimes, we'd just like to watch and hear and smell it from the balcony, or maybe even read a book while doing so. Other times, we can't help but go to the rooftop and let it drench us. But then again, there are times when life isn't so gentle to us, and the rain is just there to ruin our days and we have to do three hours of classes in wet clothes.

To the food.

All the lunchtimes at Panch Bhai restaurant, trying out all the unknown *bhorta*, the only way of distinguishing between them being the taste, while we waited for the *begun*

bhaji. All the afternoon snacks at Panshi, ordering the beef *chaap* after waiting so many hours. All the evenings, getting hot *jilapi* from Foyez Snacks after the endless cruel hours of coaching, or the hours we spent at the lawn of Palki, just enjoying the glasses after glasses of lemon juice, maybe give some people the look for smoking in public. *Doi chira* from Sufia, *khichuri* from Bhojon Bari, Nuru bhai's *choptoti*. Artisan's hot chocolate, and President's *biryani*. How can we ever forget Arcadia's food court?

To SUST.

All the times we walked the 1 Kilo Road with someone special, knowing that they liked us back, but never having the courage to actually admit it to each other. And all the times we hung out at New Zealand and Australia, two places named by students who felt stuck in this small town, a way to tell themselves they were travelling the world every day of their lives. All the times we bunked classes in the name of extracurricular clubs, only to share *shingara* from Central Cafeteria, and *fuchka* from near the campus' Shaheed Minar.

To the holy land.

All the times we went on adventures, trying to find all 360 of the shrines scattered throughout this vast maze, while a secret chamber of our heart knew that we'd never catch them all. All the visits to the *mazars* of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) as children, the beautiful hours spent feeding the birds and the fish. All the hundreds of different mosques we prayed in, and running out of them after prayers when the elderly tried to make us stay for another hour to attend further religious discussions.

To the rides.

To all the bicycle rides to Temukhi. The



ILLUSTRATION: NAZNEEN MEEM

group tea parties at Bacchu Miya's tea stall after a long ride to the airport. Maybe even Baishitilla, if we'd been still yearning for a little more adventure. All the while gazing at the tea gardens at both sides. The long-awaited rides to Bypass that we never eventually went on. All the time we spent doing downhill biking competitions and making compilation videos of those. All the biking groups we made, that we no longer use now. All the slow rides inside the city. If this isn't the best city for cycling, which is? The city is big enough to feel like a ride, and small enough to have cycling as an actual method of transportation.

To the tea gardens.

All the times in childhood we thought we could just pluck the tea leaves from Malnicherra, Lakkatura, Tarapur, and make tea

directly from the leaves. And all the times we got lost in each of the tea gardens.

To the walks, the roads, and the bridges. All the traffic jams in Ambarkhana Point. The regular protests and movements of the youth in Chowhatta. To the lonely, quiet walks in Housing Estate. To the hangouts in Eidgah, be it during the day, the night, or the afternoon. How much time have we spent at Eidgah? Then there are the romantic walks in Eco Park. And yes, I saved the best for last. Who can ever forget the midnight walks in Chanchal Road? All the first hours of the day, standing there by ourselves at the Keane Bridge, with a cup of *rong cha* in our hand, feeling the trembles of the bridge. The last hours of the day spent at the Kazir Bazar bridge, having *jhalhuri* with our closest friends, watching the sunset. All the afternoons at Temukhi Bridge going to the outskirts of the city and calling it a day.

All the tours to Bisnakandi, Jaflong, Sreemangal, Ratargul, Shadapathor, Bholaganj, Tanguar Haor, Hakaluki Haor, Baikka Beel, Madhabpur Lake, Tamabil, Jaintia with friends that we'll never forget no matter where we end up in life.

Then there are times it feels a little too cramped and small. As if you want to get away. Like all small towns, a part of you wants to leave, to fly away, and a part of you wants to stay forever. A paradox, like all cities.

But then it gets better. All the known faces, and their smiles of familiarity. We don't just have sincerity, we exude it. Something about this city makes it feel so safe, so cozy. This is home. Here's to Sylhet.

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SYLHET IN SPIRIT

AISHA HAYDER CHOWDHURY

Think up some facets or concepts that are intertwined with the name "Sylhet". There is a very good chance that the term "Sufism" would cross your mind at one point or another. Bricks of worn out buildings in Sylhet might gradually transmute to powder but the ambience created by Sufism is far from fading away from the minds of the people living here. Interlaced with the history and faith of Bangladeshi Muslims, Sufism has been never stilted or pockmarked with implausible notions. Rather it has played a crucial role to weave cocoons of harmony among different religions.

Sufism can be construed as a Muslim philosophy which has a different ambience compared to the legalistic, formal Islamic theology of the ninth century. Its rudimentary preaching consists of forming a unique spiritual relationship with the Almighty instead of clinging to the worldly aspects. Sufism is synonymous to mysticism and encourages a person to glean the true essence of one's religion.

The advent of Sufism in Bengal dates back to the mid-11th century and it began to permeate a huge portion of lifestyles of people living in the region. The Sufis were assiduous in spreading Islam to the different parts of Northern India and they had no qualms about enlightening the people about humanitarian values. As time went by, Sylhet became a sort of epicentre of Sufism due to the arrival of a large number of Sufis here. The Sufis played a significant role in shaping people's repertoire through constant preaching of Islam and humanity. Sufism never entertained the notion of demeaning other religions; the Sufis were always parting knowledge on how quintessential it is to live in harmony.

The waters of the river Surma had been stippled with the arrival of great Sufi scholars including Hazrat Shahjalal (RA). Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) expunged the atrocious rules of the then ruler and acceded to the hearts of people as the benevolent propagator of Islam.

While talking to the present Mutawalli (Supervisor) of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) *dargah*, I came across some interesting stories. Fateh Ullah Al Aman, the current Mutawalli of the *dargah* was recounting the story of how Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) rescued the people from the burden of paying unconscionable revenues by abolishing the corrupted tax system. It's believed that he wrought miracles which inexorably drew people to accepting Islam. What's more, the *dargah-e-Hazrat Shahjalal (RA)* is an exemplary embodiment of harmony as people from different religions visit this place throughout the year. The roads of Sylhet are usually packed with unusual traffic on Thursday owing to the fact that a large number of Sufi proponents set out to pay their weekly visit to the *dargah*, on the threshold of the weekly Jummah prayers. People seek out solace here as they offer prayers and recite from the Holy Quran. Some insomniac visitors even claimed that a visit to this place helped them with their peace of mind more than their regular dose of sedatives. It all comes down to the beliefs and perspectives of people. The Sylhetis are mostly tuned to the spiritual essence of religion and they crave for spiritual tranquillity.

Sylhet is dotted with many shrines; shrines can be even found on the outskirts of the town. People visiting the Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) *dargah* usually make a mental note to pay a visit to the

shrine of Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) as well. Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) is believed to be the nephew of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA). The face of Sylhet changes by a wide margin during the time when Urs (death anniversary) observations begin at the shrines. The two-day programme is carried out with a plethora of arrangements including prayers and distribution of food. Schools are often declared closed on those days as it's a well-known fact that the traffic would skyrocket, providing little to no scope for students to reach their respective institutions.

Now let's come to the perceptions and thoughts of Sylhet locals revolving around the notion of Sufism. A large number of the Sylhetis are devoted to respecting the preaching of Sufism as they believe it paves a path for them to connect with the Almighty. Many of these proponents are dedicated to supporting the overall maintenance of the shrines through financial means; some even put away a share of their monthly income to contribute to the maintenance of the shrines.

However, there is another group of people who think differently about Sufism. Some believe that while the philosophy itself is free from errors, it's incorrect to assume that all rituals and practice carried out in the name of Sufism are valid. Some even go as far as to voice out their suspicions on how people are straying away from the main concept of Islam by clinging on to the belief that the shrines alone can help to mitigate their problems. They express their contempt that the funding process related to the maintenance of the shrines is neither satisfactory nor convenient.

Albeit Sufism is an intriguing philos-

ophy, its misinterpretation can lead to severe ramifications. For instance, people with little academic qualification end up ignoring medical emergencies. The reason behind this is their misconception that a visit to the shrines alone can solve all their problems. While prayers can go a long way, one must not stick to such erroneous concepts. Therefore, people must keep some points in check before delving into the world of Sufism. Sufism should be a key to accruing tranquillity; it doesn't encourage adding condiments namely exaggerations and innuendos to its interpretation.

Overall, Sufism is a riveting way of perceiving the world. Its kaleidoscopic preaching can surely lead the way to a placid and focused mind. The teachings can go a long way in helping us to take portentous decisions. However, one must not breach the line between right and wrong interpretations surrounding Sufism. Obnoxious interpretations could only lead to travesties – the exact opposite of what Sufism stands for. The amicable people of Sylhet should address these problems with tangible approaches so that the essence of Sufism can continue to thrive with utmost clarity. Sufism and Sylhet are intertwined, indeed.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Lost in (Sylheti) Translation

FARHAT AFZAL

When people discover that my family originates from Sylhet, the first question they ask me is if I speak the Sylheti language. The regional dialect of the Sylhet division is so distinct from the typical Bangla we speak, that it is often considered a separate language. On such occasions, I would give them a coy reply, "Thura, thura." A little bit of Sylheti is what I'm capable of speaking.

But I don't tell them the truth. I don't tell them that when they make fun of the language by enunciating each word distinctly, I'm reminded of the fluency with which my grandmothers speak. I don't tell them that if needed, I too can perhaps hold entire conversations in the language. I don't tell them any of this because in certain social circles of a metropolitan city like Dhaka, regional languages have gradually lost their footing. I don't tell them all this because to them, Sylhet is a mystical land where all its inhabitants are somehow connected to the city of London and where they speak in a strange dialect that makes outsiders laugh.

It is astounding to think how aptly Sylheti can express certain emotions in a rather specific way. "Kita kita khorer" can be the inexplicable feeling related to a wide range of emotions from heartburn to heart-break. Any kind of physical or mental suffering can be described as "beesh", meaning poison, while a severe kind of bodily pain



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

becomes "baedna". After a particularly exhausting day, nothing expresses how utterly broken you feel physically than by saying "Shorir bhainga forer". Perhaps one of the strangest word usages in Sylheti language is that of the word "Bengali". A non-Sylheti person is referred to as Bengali, because prior to the partition of British India, Sylhet was not a part of Bengal, but was made a part of the Province of Assam in 1874.

In my family, my grandparents' generation and my parents' generation conversed

among themselves effortlessly in this language of their ancestors. But when it came to interacting with us youngsters, they made a conscious effort of switching to *shuddho* Bangla. This resulted in a strange predicament where we heard a language being spoken, but weren't given the opportunity to speak it ourselves.

I understood the reasoning behind this. Bangla was taught at home and English was taught at both home and school. Additionally, there was also this fear of developing

a habit where we end up speaking only Sylheti and English languages, a practice prevalent specifically among British Bangladeshis living in London, and a fate our elders desperately wanted us to avoid. In between learning and perfecting these two languages, the practice of Sylheti dialect rather lost its importance. It remained in the background, like an old piece of family heirloom. Valuable, yes, but not really contributing to our daily lives in any way.

As I got older, the language continued taking a backseat in my life. Sure, I kept hearing it being spoken at home. And just for fun, I myself would infuse random words in between conversations with my elders. A little "jee oy", or a random "bala" – meaning "yes" and "good", respectively – is the extent to which Sylheti had a presence in my speech.

And yet, these little bouts of expression filled me with a lot of joy. Speaking Sylheti made me feel more connected to my loved ones, in a way that is different from how it did when I spoke Bangla. It makes me anxious to think one day this language might completely disappear from my life. If that happens, I will lose a certain part of myself, as Sylheti is very much ingrained in my identity and the person that I am.

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OPINION

Youth, elders, and the weight of tradition

SADIA SHYRA CHOUDHURY

Sylhet is a city where the majority of elders are always preaching traditions. Maybe you are familiar with parents boasting about their own childhoods, forever uttering statements like: "I would always listen to my parents when I was your age, but kids these days are disobedient." Or "We never questioned the choices our parents made for us. They knew what was best for us." So on, and so forth.

This is where the conflict begins between the traditional minds of Sylheti elders and the modern and ambitious young citizens who foresee vast opportunities ahead of them.

Sylhetis are known for being conservative and traditional, even secluding males from females in the fear of the females turning "bad" or having their "reputation tarnished" because of the opposite gender – which all boils down to lack of freedom and choice of an individual. Embrace tradition. Climb up the social ladder. Respect, pride, honour. That is all one needs to think about. The idea of protecting generational "pride" and "honour" is implanted into most children's minds.

Where is our individuality? Looking left and right, there are many, many opportunities for us. The modern world provides us with everything we could ever ask for. Why can't we embrace ourselves and enjoy life then? This conflict between Sylheti parents and children is ongoing and continues to be a tug of war for many. While many want to pursue their dream careers, they have to face the consequences and hurdles of constant black-

mailing, guilt-tripping and emotional manipulation from their strict and conservative parents and elderly.

The hurdles are greater for females when it comes to freedom of choice and what they can do and how they can act, speak, or even move. Parents and elders live in fear that their daughters will not find worthy suitors in the future if they do not act a certain way and accomplish certain things in life. Because of this fear, heavy restrictions are placed upon women. Autonomy and agency is taken away – though, they deny this when confronted because of a lack of broader perspective and their backdated mindset. They don't know what autonomy and agency is, let alone understand its importance.

This is very problematic for young females with dreams, as they constantly battle their parents and elders to achieve them and become independent individuals rather than depending on a man for the rest of their lives. It's almost as if they forget that women are human too. Women are treated like accessories for men to this day, and it is a very common scene in Sylheti households and society here in general. Dehumanising women has never been uncommon; the wider world is doing something to change this.

We need to communicate more. Be open minded and open to change. After all, there is no progress without change. And there is no change without cooperation.

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PHOTO: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

You Cannot Go Away after Overstaying in Sylhet

MALIHA AKHTER

Every once in a while,
Like needles, rain crashes on my windows.
But today, the city is slowly dropping off her misty cardigan.
You may ask what season runs in my heart,
But please don't ask about the season in my city right now.
Because nobody knows, and those who know won't tell.
Why isn't it raining already?

In the distance,
I can see the lights of Shillong, on top of its hills.
Their houses, bazaars and city lights,
Seem so close that I always feel like,
I'm living in two cities, two countries.

You know, my city sleeps early, wakes up late.
There's no rush to catch a breath.
Peace follows so much like a shadow in my city that,
Sometimes, one dreams of chaos and it aches.
It's the kind of peace that makes you feel guilty,
And you wish to run away.

But can you really leave?

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ILLUSTRATION: TURNA NISHITA SINHA



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA RUAIDA ISLAM

RAJA MANSION

FAEEJA HUMAIRA MEEM

I snuck out of school again today. If my parents found out, I would probably be grounded for life, but it was worth it. I had to see him.

I took a brief glance at my wristwatch, it was almost noon but one wouldn't be able to tell looking at the overcast sky. To my left, a boy of about my age ran past a van on which a middle-aged man in a typical worn-out checked shirt was selling fruits. To my right, two girls in matching black burqas walked out of a shopping mall holding hands and suddenly came to a standstill and burst into giggles, as a motorcycle carrying a man and a little boy in pre-school uniform passed in front of them, probably on their way home. As I moved through the road on a rickshaw towards the old run-down building ahead, I was suddenly overcome by a strange sadness, and as if on cue, the sky thundered and a downpour began. I asked the rickshaw puller to stop, paid him 20 taka and dashed through the narrow entrance into Raja Mansion.

"Come inside Apu, take a look at our collection!"

"What are you looking for?"

I lowered my head and started walking, ignoring the calls from the store owners. Climbing up the stairs carefully that were now damp from the rain, I reached the floor where I most wanted to go.

"Mamoni, do you want to look at these new books?"

Ah, here we go again, I thought, but it was somehow slightly better than the level below. The entire floor consisted of only bookstores, one of my favourites was the first one, *Bondhu Library and Publications*. Even the calls from the store owners were far more decent up here. I pondered the reason for a minute, then remembered why I was there in the first place. I rushed past all the stores and read out their names as if committing them to memory – *Bismillah Library and Stationery*, *Icon Library*, and spotted *Maloncho Library* and *Nahar Library* in the distance, and while I really wanted to visit all of them and check their latest book collections, I had my priority straight. The place I needed to go was *Boipotro*, and there it was, with its distinct large blue frame and its name boldly written above, in all its glory.

I came here for the first time with my elder brother last month, who was the only one that took me out at times to show me around the city. I took off my shoes and entered.

It had a serene atmosphere, as expected, and there was only the receptionist behind the counter reading *Iliad*, and my brother, sitting on the floor with his back against the shelves, with his head buried inside a book. I beamed at the sight and tiptoed towards him, pulled out a book from the shelves – *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth* – and sat beside him.

"Hey, you!" he looked startled but had a grin. I took a quick look at the receptionist, who seemed to have not heard my brother, then hushed at him. "Bhaiya! Sshh!"

"You're not supposed to be here!" he exclaimed.

"I know! Ma warned me not to come back here after I skipped school last time but I couldn't help it," I whispered. I caught a glimpse of the woman behind the counter shooting a glance at us once again. My brother seemed sad, but did not say anything else and went back to his book, and reluctant to argue, I started reading too.

I had not realised how much time had passed until...

"Maisha! There you are!" It was my father.

I forced myself to look up and saw both my parents gasping for air. The clock read 4:38 PM and I realised I was supposed to be home over three hours ago. My father was in his raincoat and mother had an umbrella and they were both dripping with water; they must've been searching for me in the rain. I should have been worried about being scolded, but oddly, I was seething.

Why are they here? They're making the floor wet.

Why do ma and baba have to be so worried even when I am with bhaiya? I turned back to my brother, who was gazing at me, and cried, "Please ask them to leave!" My brother smiled with his sad eyes and nodded at me with reassurance.

Before he could say anything though, my father tugged hard at my arm and started pulling me out of the room. I yelled something unintelligible and tried to break myself out of his clutch but my mother got hold of me. She was crying, her tears streaming down her cheeks and making my shoulders wet. I heard my father trying to explain the situation to the woman at the counter, "My son passed away in a road accident last month. She is still in shock so please understand."

"NO!" I cut him off and started sobbing, howling, "He's right here!" I pointed at the corner.

There was no trace of my brother.

Traitor.

The ringing in my ears and the lump at my throat felt too heavy for me. I was still bawling my eyes out and I barely made out what the receptionist was saying; an apology and something about *bereavement hallucination* and *psychiatrist*.

"You think I am crazy!" I snapped, trying to pull myself out of my mother's embrace. My father immediately came towards us and patted my head. Ugh! I looked at my mother and shouted through my tears, "I met him! He was here! Don't you believe me?" Both my parents then urged in unison, "We do. We believe you."

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PHOTO: NAFI SAMI

CAMPUS

Shahjalal University of Science and Technology holds a place of adoration and reverence in Sylheti hearts, especially the youth. The campus sprawls for what seems like endless acres, the students roaming about with an air of homely comfort, doused with a lazy beauty that is easy to get used to.



PHOTO: GOURAB SAHA



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