

The Shavar Chronicles-Bazar Tale

By : **Ill Buddha**

Tales of Love, Murder, and Kebabs in the Bangladeshi town of Shavar. These were written roughly 10 years ago, three months into training during my Peace Corps service in Bangladesh. If any Bangladeshi reader feels offended, please go ahead and feel offended, but do realize it's a fictional work, and meant to vent early frustration at being in Bangladesh for the first time. Bangladesh is an amazing country, one that I love and like to think of as home if only for the friends and indeed family I still have there. Enjoy, and just to be safe, stay the HELL out of Shavar, and if you can't help it, if your bus driver can't not stop by the bazar on your way north, then have a bite at the New Star. It's moja like a mofo.



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The Shavar Chronicles-Bazar Tale : Chapter 1

There I was riding back into Shavar again. Damn did I hate this place. I promised myself five years ago to never set foot here again. And for a reason. Ruma. Sweet, sweet Ruma. Devilishly charming she'd been, and more poisonous than any snake this damn country had ever birthed too. How I'd fallen for her I can't quite figure out yet, always been a sucker for broads, butâ€¦

But there I was, five years later on the back of a raggedy rickshaw, its driver smelling of rank sweat and a big mud stain on his back. Not a good sign when you know he spends most of his time riding a bike. I could have asked, but I wasn't sure I really wanted to know.

Shavar! Finally, my destination. They had this movie that came out in the early millennium, The Matrix it was called. One rip-off a movie if you ask me but judging by my location at the moment I wasn't even sure I could trust my own judgmentâ€¦ Anyway, they had this saying "some things never change, but some things do" or something along those lines. Well, Shavar sure wasn't one of them. I always thought of it as the armpit of hell's asshole, and if anything it had only gotten worse.

Overcrowded, smelly, muddy, back to back with rickshaws, buses, taxis, crying kids, muddy beggars and shady restaurants that weren't quite that bad once you got over the flies that seem to permeate the place (Morpheus would have kicked himself in the ass, and Neo taken the blue pill). And that's just where I was going.

"Bamdike! Tamun tamun!"

Stupid rickshawalla just smiles back at me with his orange teeth, and that twinkle in his eye like he just hooked the big fish. I ain't givin' him more than ten for this ride no matter how dirty he is. But sure enough there he goes.

"Na Bideshi! Na! Beshi, chollish taka deo, chollish!"

Has to make a scene. There is just no way out of this isn't there? Well I wasn't gonna give him more so I cocked my hand behind my head as if to backhand slap him, he coiled back, and I left.

I looked across the street and under the bridge where I drew some blood, and sweat, and tears. The New Star hotel. Good food once you get over the smell and the flies, and Ruma, sweet, sweet, poisonous Rumaâ€¦

"Bondoo! Aro ketchup thik ekhane!" The muglai was too hot and too bland, the weather too hot and too humid and I was in a pissy-ass mood. It had been a long week, period, and the electricity cuts made checking email impossible.

I started reading my notes when a sugary softly accented voice whispered at me:

"Morr ketchup surr?"

I damn near choked on my fried bread, and could barely manage a thanks. She winked at me and waggled her plump behind away from my table. I went back to reading and eating but I saw her glance at me from the corner of her eye. I left without leaving a tip. First off don't ever tip anybody in Bangladesh they'll just expect it from there on, two I wasn't gonna play the fool for that little hussy who was probably after my greeny green backs. Still she was fly though.

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I didn't see her for the next couple of weeks, and was starting to think that I had pushed my luck and spent too much money on kabobs when she hopped right next to me on my rickshaw. We didn't say a word until Shavar was behind us, and then, word to my lungi we started kissing. It must have been the most unexpected and spontaneous thing I had done, and, considering where we were, probably the boldest. If the rickshaw turned around to stare during the ride I cannot honestly tell you, neither can I tell you by how much I overpaid him, nor did I care. I just followed her to her door, through her door and to her bed. I learned all about the Kama Sutra that night. Should have seen it coming.

I saw her first once a week, then twice, then thrice. Then I started calling her, taking her out, meeting her family. What the fuck was I thinking? She had me hooked alright.

Back to the New Star, me and her giggling like teenage sweethearts over a milk shake when I feel a vise like grip on my shoulder. Ruma had a husband. And he was pissed. Can't blame him, I had been banging his wife silly, and her me, for the last few months. He challenged me outside. I turned to look at Ruma acting innocent as a puppy, and looking at him with adoration in her eyes.

"Two timing bitch." I thought.

I followed him outside and out of sight. I was much taller and bigger than him, so I tried to talk him out of this nonsense until I saw the flash of a knife in the husband's stumpy hand. I managed to dodge the first blow; he tripped and stabbed himself with his own knife.

Before I could react Ruma grabbed my hand and dragged me away. Fuck a rickshaw, I caught the first taxi to Dhaka and to the U. S embassy. I turned on Ruma.

"What the fuck was that about?!"

"I'm shorry, she sobbed, I'm shorry" that sweet, innocent look back in her eyes "I lav you and I didn wan you to leave me. But I got shcared when I shaw him!"

She didn't honestly think I was gonna gobble that bullshit.

"Who the fuck do you think I am? I saw that look! Scared? You're about to be scared when I throw you out this fucking car! Eight months! You couldn't have figured that shit out?!"

I was angry but she had my sucker emotions tied up like she had my hands to the bedpost the other night, and she knew it.

"I am here wiz you! Not zere wiz him!"

I stayed silent. When we got to the embassy I stepped out of the car, gave her a bundle of money, my Bangladeshi credit card, and my code.

"Get lost." I said and walked away as she stayed there balling.

I was tempted to turn around half a dozen times and go get her, but I wasn't about to turn into a salt statue. Sodom and Gomorrah couldn't have been freakier than we'd been, and I was more hurt than I thought.

Two days later I was on a plane back to the Apple. Apparently Americans had the knack for this kind of trouble and my case was a done deal. I had a whisky sour on board and cursed Bangladesh to the tenth generation, of course Bangladesh being Bangladesh what difference would one curse makeâ ˆ ˆ

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She emailed me everyday. Everyday for five years. At first I tried to give her the cold shoulder, not reading what she wrote, deleting emails right off the bat, not answering. But everyday, as sure as I'm black, there was that new mail. I could have made more money than that Tom Hanks, Meg Ryan flick for sure, and let's face it I was caught up worse than Clinton was.

Oh believe me, I got with other chicks before I started paying her virtual stalking any mind. Had been in at least two serious relationships that lasted about seven months each, but they just couldn't quite cut it. They lacked flavor, they lacked inspiration and passion, exoticism and the magic there was with her. I was in a black and white silent movie about a retirement home compared to my few months with her. And I was starting to miss the color.

One day, after I broke up with Shanikwa's ghetto, psycho ass, I read her email.

"Deerr Mum,

It hash been anozerr lonely day wizout yuu" I could just hear her sweet drawl over the world wide web "it ish raining heerr agin, I'm shurr yu shtill hate it. My gran mozerr pashed away and she ashked abut yuu. I told herr you werr fine though I have not hearr from yuu in long time. How yuu in Neyark? Mish yuu.

Ruma"

So I started writing back. A bit shyly at first, I was still shook from our episode, and had never really told anything about it to anyone. But as time went by I got into it more and more, still I couldn't get to say the magic words. Maybe I had misread her look that day, maybe she was really scared, and why wouldn't she have been? It is not always easy being a woman in Bangladesh and in eight months she had never, not once, mentioned getting married or a visa, or money. She had just seemed content to be with me despite my loud mouth foulness, and fondness for cursing. Or maybe it had just been my fondness for foreplay, but I didn't want to flatter myself.

Still I was content not visiting or making any promises, just writing and keeping her posted. There is a security in long distance relationships that I couldn't afford with these N.Y girls. I got the emotional support I needed from her there, and the dirty business from the girls here, butâ they couldn't quite cut it. I missed her smell before and after love, missed her moaning, missed her cooking, and even missed the few tantrums she'd throw when I acted like an ass to her.

Her last email was a one liner. A plea for help, as blatant a request or begging as she had ever made outside the bedroom:

"I am in trubl Mum please cal mee? Please?"

Followed by her number.

In all those years she had not once not started by a "dear something", not once, even when she would inquire about my visit in a joking, teasing way had she pleaded twice.

No, something was up, and sure enough I was on the phone with her in no time. Well, at least an hour, because I had to check calldhaka.com first to figure out the international connection number to that rotten abyss; and then actually get a connection.

But there she was her voice so close to my ear I felt as if she were right here. I found myself hugging thin air as I spoke to her until I saw the neighbors looking at me shaking their heads at my ridiculous pantomime, and

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then stopped.

She was crying, she was crying and needed to see me. Lord knows I needed to see her. I booked a direct flight to Dhaka for the next morning.

And back on a taxi, to a rickshaw, to good ol' blossoming Shavar, the cavity in the corpse's mouth, and the New Star.

I was nervous, nervous as all hell, but excited, and quite frankly intrigued by what she wanted to tell me in person.

Ruma. Sitting at the table where I had first glimpsed the infinite wonder that was her, and the words New Star finally found their meaning. I couldn't talk, she was, she wasâ gorgeous, ripened and in full bloom. I couldn't even smell the rank oil, hear the noise, or feel the obnoxious stairs and whispers of "neegrUU, neegrUU".

She stared back at me, as if unable to believe I was there. Well I was a man of my word and she needed me. But we couldn't talk. We just got up, got on a rickshaw and back to bed and the Kama Sutra.

"My family hash dishown me" she said.

Apparently, the news of her husband had leaked. The corpse, it seems, had been cleaned off the streets by organ sellers who chose whatever pieces of the body they could profit from and burned the rest. She couldn't tell for sure of course, but that seemed a very logical explanation.

A few days ago though, her parents had barged in her room. Her father was holding a knife, her mother an empty suitcase. They had thrown her out of her house along with a copy of a letter and the ring with her husband's finger. Now, I didn't ask to see the ring, nor finger for that matter, and anyway after chumping my way from New York all the way out here, I was in for the long ride, but she had kept them. She remembered my skepticism and I even felt a pang of regret. What a fool I was.

We got married a few days later and honey mooned it off in the plushest sweet at the Sheraton in Dhaka. I quit my job in New York, damn city has enough wannabe brokers to not miss me, and resided in Bangladesh long enough for her to get a visa.

Damn what an idiot I had been, I thought. That year had fulfilled the promises those fiery eight months now six years back had only hinted at. The honeymoon alone cost me five pounds as we were fully content to be feeding on each other.

A few days before we were due back to the States, (for all my loving and caring best believe I wasn't about to stay a day longer than necessary in that damn flood zone), I decided to fancy my wife with a little treat from a nearby store. Night falls early in the Desh, and it gets dark, but what did I care I was off to Narnia right? When a flash blurred from my left and caught me in the gut.

I fell to my knees, hopelessly trying to stop the flow of blood running through my fingers. I looked up to see a four fingered hand holding the knife while the other one jacked me for all I had, and what should have been a long dead, organ-free ghost grinning down at me.

When the police came, right before I exhaled my last stupid breath, I saw her sobbing over me like a broken mother. I tried to speak, but she winked at me and shut my eyes.

A sucker for broads alright, and sweet, sweet Rumaâ !

Chapter 2: The Shavar Chronicles-Hartal

I usually don't like to get up in the morning. It's just so early you know? Like all we have to do is wake up at the break of dawn sweating, take a shower sweating, and then sweat through Bangla classes. If only they made them interesting but they are like so boring, and the teachers treat me like I'm in kindergarten. Hello?!

Well any day but today really. Friday, we only get one day off a week, and I can't even sleep in. I mean I try likeâ but it's like I'm conditioned or something like that. Anyway it's Friday so I'm not about to let myself down. It's funny how things change so fast you know?

Bangladesh used to be on my long list of last places I'd go if California got drowned in that earthquake they talk about all the time. Ha! Even the mighty Governor couldn't do anything about that! My friends would always tease me:

"O.k. miss prom queen! Joining the Peace Corps! Woo!"

Funnel drinking always made people stupidâ ;

"Yeah K.C they're gonna send you to that crazy country, with all the natural catastrophes, watchamacallit? Help me yall!"

"Yeah the George Harisson country bro!"

"Oh I know, I know: BANGLADESH!"

"BANGLADESH!!!!!!!!!" in a chorus and everybody laughing. Dude, whatever!

I mean it was an easy crack, and it's true I am an easy pick: miss high school prom queen, college football team cheerleader, joining the Peace Corps. Well, it was about time I decided to do something meaningful with my life! Screw you losers!

My life had always been so simple and easy. My father worked for Microsoft and made over a hundred fifty grand a year, my mother never had to work and I certainly never had to do anything I didn't want to do or didn't get what I wanted to get. I can't believe the American Dream is getting trashed talked just because of that asshole Bush, how in hell he got elected twice is a mystery.

Nevertheless, apparently Josh and Scott were right, it was Bangladesh. Well hey if any country needed me to bring some of my American Dream and make a difference that certainly was the one. I was so totally psyched!

Hey I'm not a We Are The World chick or whatever, like let's all hold hands and dance in a circle, or some Avril Lavigne wannabe post adolescent rebel, angry at my suburban education. I just needed a change and some direction, you know? Of course I should have opted for Fiji, always had loved the water, the beaches in Cali. No surprise I was captain of my college swimming team, but I understand that Bangladesh is flooded half the year? Definitely plenty of water there.

It was really hard leaving the family and friends behind. LAX saw a lot of tears but my parents were so proud of me. We had a big party the weekend before I left, my grandparents pulled out the barbeque in the lawn and the volley ball net was set up by the inflatable swimming pool. My aunt and uncle made the trip all the way from Buffalo NY.

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Most of my college friends were halfway across the country by then, the rest who knows where, so few could attend but I got postcards and emails plenty. My neighborhood, teenage and childhood friends came though. It was nice having them with me, we had old pictures set up and Suze made a big poster to put up over the garage.

Hey, a party ain't a party 'til the west had it, so we hid the kegger in the back of Joe's pick up truck, I was twenty one but old habits die hard and my parents still see their little girl. I think they knew though and acted like nothing happened.

Three days later I was in Seattle for pre departure orientation. Hey you might think that cheer leaders are stupid, but I could easily see through their bullshit. It was three days entirely wasted but at least we got to all meet each other and that was nice, but there were no cute guys, and I missed home already.

Oh my God! I had never been on a plane for so long, I had no idea how we were going backwards through time zones and still landing two days later, I was dazed, but so anxious.

I had come prepared too. My only trips outside the continental United States had been a brief trip to Puerto Rico, backpacking Europe one summer with my family before my brother went off to get shot in Iraqâ oh! and St Thomas for Spring Break, and you know how it goes what happens in St Thomas stays in St Thomas! Anyway what I meant to say was that I came prepared, I had taken some small Bangla classes and had briefed up on the country's history before leaving.

It was really beautiful, but so poor, so, so poor. And I thought South Central was ghetto, I mean seriously like if any place in L.A had smelled half as bad it would have been quarantined, but I was happy. Here was my chance to finally make a difference and help othersâ

Training just dragged on, and on, and on. And for all my initial enthusiasm, adjusting was harder than I thought. Stupid orna!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Who on earth decided to make them requirements huh?! Talk about male domination! Still I tried my best, language was tough but I worked hard.

The people were really friendly, the men stared too hard though and got really bold at times. The only place worse had been France, they cat call you and curse when you don't answer. Duh! Like that's gonna work. Well at least they didn't try to grope you all the time. Westerners get a bad rep, and a six foot platinum blond like yours truly? Well, even in the States I didn't get that much attention let me tell you.

But today is Friday thank god, I thought, and giggled when that brought TGIFridays in my head:

"Yeah, more like TGIShukrobars." I thought.

Nice day out too, sunny, not overly hot, a perfect day to walk to Shavar, get a pineapple, or anarosh as they call them(they are dirt cheap in this country) go to the internet cafÃ© and get some food and a sprite from the New Star on the way back.

"Share choyta ashbo amma! Abar dekha hobe!"

And out the door. I had to be quick, I mean it was already twelve and my host mom is like so adorable, but she won't stop talking. I didn't want to be rude, just effective you know?

"Wassup Jill?!"

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My girl Jill was running up the main road here in Banktown. That was my girl. I love her so much. If it wasn't for her and her support I would have left probably, she was like a sister. And it was good to have someone to talk too. I felt really lonely since my brother died.

"Nothin'" she retorted in that Tennessee drawl of hers. "Jus' sweatin' breakfast auff. I could've done that just sittin' down too, but I like the exercise. You know I'm the jock girl! Whatchu up to?"

"Bayre Jabo!" I said and laughed.

She got serious though:

"Bayre? Girl you betta take out your Bangla books girl cuz this is a hartal. You ain't goin' nowhere."

She was right! Ornas are bad but I forgot the hartals! Some kind of superstrikes, we're on lockdown basically. Everything is closed or so they say, no transport or so they say, angry mobs or so they say. Well fuck them. I have one day off a week, and I'm not about to blast it, I mean there were a lot of people out, the traffic was a bit lighter butâ€¦! So I told Jill where Peace Corps staff could stick it and got on my way.

The walk was nice. There is a lake on the Banktown side of the road to Shavar. It was really nice in the light. Had me thinking about home, and John Keats' tombstone: "He whose name was writ in water", or something like that. Always loved the water and that was just so poetic. Of course it is right next to a factory so it's got to be really stinky like, but with the sun shining on it it was nice, no swimming in there though. Nope, not for a million dollars or a date with Brad Pitt.

I can see Shavar. Ew! As Shavar got closer, things started getting nastier. Let me tell you about Shavar. Now imagine a big dump with twenty story trashcans built on sewage. Add some two stories smelly shoeboxes with people cooking roaches in them, and selling them to the rest of the people, roaming around wearing tore up news papers while floating in the sewage. You might get close to getting Shavar right, but you would still be miles away. I mean there's like levels of filth that can't be described.

Well for a hartal there were still a lot of people. First thing I did was to get my anarosh. I think I'll bring it home to amma, she likes them. The dokanwalla tried to get fifty taka out of me. Always does, everybody here always does. For some reason they think that after a month of seeing you they can still pull the stupid tourist tricks. I bargained him down to twenty. I was still getting ripped off, but at least now he knew he had to start lower. Four or five taka isn't much, but it's the principle. I'm not made of gold and I am not making anymore money, hey probably less, than he did.

I walked down the road to the internet cafÃ©. There were a couple of others along the way, but PIS had the fastest service. I mean the guys were pricks but the price was the same. Only thing was the smell. I don't know what they did or how long they stayed in that hallway without changing clothes or washing but it is nauseating.

No news. Well, a few mails from my friends, but not from my parents.

Jimmy was o.k his girlfriend had broken up with him, and he was all heart broken. I mean get a life jimmy! He is twenty-three drinking in the dug out like he's still sixteen and stole a bud. Of course his girlfriend dumped him!

Leah was pregnant. OH MY GOD. Leah, I love Leah but she has a bad cocaine habit. Not saying she would be a bad mother, I just hope she can stop before the baby gets an addiction. She doesn't believe in abortion, she had only been with Geo for six months but they seemed to really love each other.

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Off to cnn.com, International Herald Tribune, People's online (I'm such a girl, just have to stay ahead of the gossip) and it was five p.m already. I had to be quick, I went back to my email account to delete whatever spam or Viagra commercial I got when:

"Dear favorite daughter in the world,

Surprise! Bet you hadn't expected to hear from me huh? Well I got news for you pumpkin, you might take a girl out of the home, but you're not taking home out of the girl. Meaning that I am on mission in Thailand and writing from Bangkok. Your mother told me you can't have visitors but I can't be this close and not come and see my baby girl! I'm flying into Dhaka tomorrow and now rush home and go get ready for your daddy. Big kiss sweetheart, I'll call you when I land.

Bye K,C

Love Daddy"

Daddy! I couldn't believe it! I mean wow, that was hysterical, I almost cried. The guys at the cafe looked at me like I had gone crazy, but what did I care. I had to get a bite to eat and off home.

The New Star wasn't bad, pretty good actually. I know Peace Corps didn't want us eating in any of those "street food" places, but I'd been there a few times already and I was just fine. I was nearly knocked down on my way in by this funny looking couple: an American looking Black guy and his Bangladeshi girlfriend. Apparently they were in too much of a hurry to apologize and besides they were holding hands in public oblivious to everybody.

I sat down, placed my anarosh on the table and ordered some nan kabab, spicy beef with sweet bread. I hear you, sounds fatty right? but so yummy. Seriously, they should have this kind of food on take out in the States the way they have Chinese food, you know?

It was getting dark by the time I was done. Now I wasn't scared or anything but there was also an increasingly loud noise and the patrons at the New Star were hurrying up with their food and leaving speedily, so I picked up my pineapple, left the money on the table, and left.

I turned around to see a mob of at least five hundred people with sticks and torch lights closing in on the New Star. On the far right I could see some of them beating a rickshawalla and breaking his bike. The poor guy was bloody. As soon as they saw me, the mob turned crazier than they already were and ran towards me.

I threw my anarosh to the middle of the road and ran up to the closest rickshaw I could find, hopped on it, waved a five hundred taka bill and urged him on. Something in his orange teeth and grin was not quite right, but I thought: hey! another greedy rickshawalla.

There was a nasty mud stain on his back, and he looked sickly but he put distance between us and the angry crowd. I looked behind at them.

"Wow that must be what they mean by hartal!" I thought.

I turned around to see the rickshawalla looking back at me, and had just the time to close my eyes before he swung something heavy right in my face, and I passed out.

How long afterwards I woke up, I don't know. I could feel my hands tied behind my back and a dirty sweat tasting handkerchief in my mouth while I was dragged by my feet through dirt and garbage. In the distance I

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could see the factory by the lake near Banktown, feel the cold tingle against my skin, and the splash of the rickshawalla's feet as he dragged me under.

I should have listened to Jill. My last thoughts went to John Keats and Daddy, he would be here anytime now, anytimeâ.

Chapter 3: The Shavar Chronicles-Rickshaw Walla

"Stupid bideshisâ !" "

That one got away easy, so did many others. And so did I. Bangladeshi police has little experience dealing with this kind of stuff. With the years it all looks coincidental probablyâ !" "

"Stupid bideshiâ !" "

Waving his fist at me like I'm some kind of scum. He got away easy, if it had been only a little darker and less crowdedâ !" or more crowded that worked too. It had before, some had not gotten away that easyâ !" "

I was safe here. Had been for over ten years. It seemed the perfect place. Major bus station. Tons of people coming in and out. Heavy industry. Bazaar. Rickshaws everywhere. Incognito as can be thank you very much. I'm only here because of their stupid laws. They deserved it. There was no reason not to. They had it coming. But no one would understand that, she should have but no one would now, so I better lay lowâ !" "

"Stupid bideshiâ !" "

Looking at me like I'm some kind of roach. Black people are always more snotty than the rest, well white people too, but they seem to realize they are more vulnerable here. Hum not all of them come to think of it. Well, they had learned soon enough.

I hadn't always looked like this. A laughing stock to the world. Ugly. Dumb-looking. Broke. Smelly. Half blinded by the liquor. My bowels pouring blood every week Not alwaysâ !" "

"Stupid bideshiâ !" "

And his arrogant air, thinking he's better than me. If only it had been a little less crowdedâ !" or more crowded that worked too. He got away easy. And so did I. Others were not that lucky. Others were. But I hadn't always looked like thisâ !" "

1984, and graduation day from Calcutta College. She was beautiful, beautiful as day. Beautiful as only nights in the subcontinent can be. She had bewitched me in no time. The little Bengali Indian boy I was had not been ready. No, not by far, but that will come later.

Beautiful as day, on what was so far the most beautiful day in my life. I was young and dashing then. I could have been a Bollywood actor had I wanted too, and her my Rani.

My family was not well off by any means but they had saved enough for me to go to school. My father had always been hard on me, taught me to never take anything from anybody and always fight for my due. He beat me half dead a couple of times. He regretted it once when I almost killed my neighbor Ranjum when I turned nine. It had been his own fault though; he had tried to steal my bike. I was made to apologize but I felt that at least I had made my own life, and it felt good.

As the oldest of eight, and by far the most promising they decided to put me through college with the hope I could reach the United States and make the family proud. Well they had aimed right, almostâ !" "

The first year of school was hard, fast paced, intensive classes. But I had loved learning then. I quickly showed signs of extraordinary achievement. That was probably what had attracted her to me. She saw

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something. Krishna. Odd thing her family had named her after the higher most God in the Indian pantheon, and I was one generation removed from the lowest cast.

Krishna. So beautiful she'd been, beautiful as our sub continental nights, songs on the windâbut it had been her fault really she should have listened.

She had approached me early that year, at the beginning of my final year. She was part of a study abroad program from America. She wanted to work with NGOs and her College apparently agreed to have her spend a year and a half in India as part of her major. She must have seen something, but she should have listened.

I didn't know what to do at first. I was shy. My parents were conservative, they frowned upon me dating girls, and probably thought they would tie me down to West Bengal and stifle her plans for me. It was too late for me now, and it was too late for them...

I was shy, but she wasn't. She kept coming to me, engaging me in conversation, debating my opinions, challenging my thoughts and inhibitions, challenging my shyness, and boyishness. Krishna, a sub continental night, and eventually a storm, and a fire. She took my boyhood away, and tossed me into manhood. Consumed me 'til the boy was no more. But I wasn't ready. And she hadn't listened. If only she had listenedâ

I was enthralled, reciting Tagore to her at night, calling her, loving her. My grades only improved with her guidance, and I obtained a scholarship and a visa for the United States. We promised to stay together, and graduation day was the most beautiful in my life.

A few days later we headed out to my family's house. I had not told them about my plans and was expecting to surprise them. It had been their fault really, why did they try to ruin my life?

The surprise was mine. My mother had been sick for a year. Cancer. They had not told me for fear of impeding my success. And now they wanted me to stay in India. They treated Krishna horribly, showing no affection, no support, only cold shoulders and outright wickedness. My heart went out to her. She kept asking me what we would do, how things could change. So I took matters in my own hands.

It had been their fault really, and she should have listened. She of all people should have understood.

I covered the house in oil one night. Krishna didn't know, but I wanted to surprise her, end our problems. Why hadn't she understood?

We stood in front of the house, and as I recited my latest poem to her, I threw a match on the porch.

The house burst in flames. She didn't move. She didn't show any reaction but outright shock. I assumed she was awed. Happy to see our solutions materialize before her eyes. But soon my brothers and sisters' screams shook her out of her torpor. She tried to run towards the flames.

"Shahajjo!"

"Shahajjo dakun!"

I could distinguish every individual voice. My brother Ahmed crying. Ritu yelling for our mother. Our mother was half knocked out from the medication and would most likely never wake. I heard my father calling for me:

"Azim! Azim! asho!"

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The house kept burning but I wouldn't let her run. She started sobbing.

"Probably joy." I thought.

When the shape of my youngest sister emerged through the door, covered in flames and collapsed on what was left of the porch, Krishna fainted. I was at a loss, could she possibly be that happy?

I spent the best of an hour attempting to wake her up. Her initial reaction was confusion as I expected.

"It's over, I whispered, they will never stand in our way again."

This time there was no mistaking the look on her face. The horror of realization. How could she not understand? I did this for her after all, it was my family anyway, and it had been their fault. I tried to console her at first, soothing words, reading my poem over again.

But as she kept coiling back, her lips moving silently a raw panic seized me: What if I had been wrong about her?

I started towards her.

" Krishna, Krishna, listen to meâ "

But the closer I got the more panic I felt, and the cold realization that I had been wrong about her. I grabbed her neck in a sudden movement, squeezing, hard and tight. She kept staring, that unbearable look of utter disbelief and god fearing horror in her green eyes. She went limp, and her emerald pupils rolled back in her head. She should have listened, should have understood. It was all her fault.

I fled Calcutta in the night. Further down the road I saw a rickshaw walla parking his rickshaw by a small dokan I knew to sell liquor. I followed him in, pushed the door behind me, and asked the dokanwalla for a knife, supposedly to fix my shoe. He shouldn't have given it to me, it was his fault as well. I slit the rickshaw walla's throat in one slash and threw the knife through the shop keeper's chest. I took as many bottles of liquor as I could carry, changed my clothes with the rickshaw pullers' and fled on the rickshaw.

Years of hiding followed. I had to be careful. I fled the country to the north so as to not leave an easy trail and knew I was off the hook when I crossed the border just south of Dinajpur in Bangladesh. For years I hid in a small cave on the outskirts of the city. By then I had been drinking everyday, crying myself to sleep over my sub continental night turned nightmare. Why had she been so stupid? She should have listened, should have understood.

I would only leave in the dead of night to steal food and alcohol, and glue that I grew quite fond of. I was scared of the Bangladeshi police, still unaware of their incompetence. It helped me in the end, otherwise I would not be telling my story now.

This went on for two years, my looks faded, my mind grew idle, my body weak and twisted. Two years, two years untilâ until my next victim.

I had only planned on robbing her. She was one of those bideshis, stumbling drunk at night. When I approached her she screamed. She shouldn't have, again her fault. Why did they keep putting me in this position? I didn't want to kill her, but she made me. I left her on the side of the road and took her bag. No money! Only stupid English teaching books, well her students would miss her by her own fault. But that sealed my stay in Dinajpur.

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I rickshawed my way across the country. Oh I must have killed a hundred or more people along the way. The stupor has affected my memory so I can't tell exactly but it sounds about right. Of course the Bangladeshi police had never put things together, and I was getting better at hiding the remains. Some had got away easy, others not. This went on for ten years until I found Shavar.

The filth, stench, pollution and promiscuity of the place screamed at me: HOME! Yes this would be home. Shavar, major bus station. Tons of people coming in and out. Heavy industry. Bazaar. Rickshaws everywhere. Incognito as can be thank you very much, and it had all been her fault.

I was a long, long way from the young, dashing Bollywood actor. She should have listened, should have understood. Krishna, beautiful as day, beautiful as a sub continental night.

"Stupid Bideshiâ !"!

It hadn't been my day either. I hadn't had glue in a few days and was feeling dizzy with withdrawal. The alcohol wasn't helping as I thought it would. I had passed out on my back while fixing my rickshaw's tire earlier on. I could still feel the stain on my back. It was still the same rickshaw. It had brought me luck. I had kept it.

"Stupid Bideshiâ !"!

There he went again. This time holding hands with a local girl. Does he have any respect?! If only the street had been darker and less crowdedâ !or more crowded that worked too.

As always thinking of Krishna had fired my mood and I started drinking large amounts of alcohol from my bottle. Night was falling. I could hear the mounting noise of the angry hartal mob behind me. If only it had been dark earlierâ ! I was about to leave, knowing full well what they would do if they caught me whenâ !

"Ki!?!"

A young panicked bideshi girl had jumped on my rickshaw. Hum pretty one too.

"Taratari! Taratari! Panch sho taka! Panch sho!"

Waving her bill at me as if I wasn't going to get what I wanted from her no matter what. I flashed her my best smile. She looked uneasy. Stupid Bideshi. That smile had won Krishna. She must think herself better than her, they always did. Well I was in the mood, and it had been a bad day. She shouldn't have got on my rickshaw on a bad day. It was her fault.

She turned around to shake her fist at the mob, I swung with my sling right at her forehead as she turned around, and she went limp. I pulled the rickshaw over by the lake near the leather-refining factory. I hadn't done this in a long time, but it had been a bad day and she had chosen my rickshaw. Stupid bideshi, she should have known better.

I think she woke up as I dragged her under, crying maybe. They always cry. Bring it on themselves and then they cry. Well it was too late for regrets, and the water was just cool enoughâ !

I felt hungry as always after the adrenaline rush. Maybe a quick bite at the New Star. Classy place the New Star. Good food. I rode back into Shavar. Drinking more. No effect. Where was my glue!?! I must have left it by theâ !The rickshaw coming to a halt was so sudden that I was projected right in front of the incoming traffic. I had not seen the other rickshaw. My eyesight was getting worse. I hadn't always been like this.

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I tried to get up fast before the bus closed in on me. But as I got up my foot tripped over something and I was flat on my face again.

I turned just in time to see the bus inches from my face and a small pineapple caught between my feet.

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