

A WEE BIT SAD

By CHAITANYA KALBAG

IT took me eight months to discover that I was living next door to a film person. And that too, because the chap appeared in a "daring, all-clothes-barred" gatefold in a girlie mag. Yes. My neighbour was there in B & W, in all his hairy, slightly paunchy evidence. Undressed. In disabille. There was a hitch, however. The artistic merit of the photo was marred by (of all things) a tripod-mounted camera, placed strategically, a feature several lady readers must have bemoaned.

I remembered I'd seen the Gatefold Man in a movie (with clothes on) as a young Mussalman in the Partition days. I liked the movie (Garm Hawa) and I thought the g.f. man had acted well. A few days later, I saw him near my house.

That's how I discovered JALAL AGHA was my neighbour.

So I rang him up and said I thought it was time I found out more about him than the gatefold had told me. He wasn't shocked. I said I didn't want a treacle 'n' syrup interview about Jalal the film star. There wasn't much in that, anyway, him being a sadly underemployed star.

He said meet me at my office eleven-thirty ayem sixth floor and we'll talk it over.

I EXPECTED to find him ready with a defamation suit.

Instead, I found him with his feet up on a low stool. He put his feet down, patted the stool, and said sit down here. I am a journalist, I said, is this the way you receive them? You and who else, he said. I prepared to depart in a huff. Jalal ordered a cup of tea for me and said relax. The huff began to evaporate.

Sharing the tiny office with him were four men, one of whom I recognised as Sadhu Meher, the best actor of 1974, the deaf-mute from Ankur. Jalal and Sadhu and a third man called Deshpande are running a concern called Maja Mediums. M.M. makes advertising films, documentaries, and is planning a major feature film.

So this is how you make



your bread, I asked Jalal. He turned mournful. "Some people have everything and no happiness. I've got nothing but happiness," he intoned. Turned out he'd studied with Sadhu at the FTII, and they were still very close when they graduated in '66. Then Jalal went on to his first film, "Bambai

Raat Ki Baahon Mein". He won a few awards for his role in that movie, but not many good offers in other films. Disappointed, he decided to float Maja Mediums with Sadhu and Deshpande. They started in '68, making ad. films. They've turned out more than sixty so far.

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Flashback to Jalal's office. A couple of seedy lookers drifted in, sat down, smiled at him, got up to leave, put out their palms for a handshake. Jalal complied, and the visitors left in ecstasy. Jalal told me he dislikes such displays of fan adoration. Unlike President Ford, he doesn't like pressing the flesh. "Unless it's in the right place," he grins.

But then at the other end are the people like the chap on the seventh floor who was asked by Jalal's peon how he liked saab's acting in the song scene in "Sholay" — the "mehbooba" dance sizzler he did with He-

ness and nothing else with a fiancée like this, buddy.

The scene was shot and we zoomed off to stopoff 2 — a saree shop. I got to know the fiancée. Name Valerie Pereira. Profession Model. Hobby free lance textile designing. Ex of Delhi, a Miranda House-ite. And very much in love with Jalal. Incidentally, the man will not be single after early March. So watch out for the banns.

THE saree shop shot over, we tumbled into Jalal's car and zoomed off. Jalal stopped near yet another paan man, and a giggly female threesome zeroed in.

He can say "I love you" in 36 languages. Quite a propositioner, Jalal "I love you" Agha.



"You're Jalal, aren't you?" one asked. Jalal said yes, and asked her was she from East Africa. He was right, and the girls were thrilled. So their hero said something in Swahili, and the trio was in raptures.

Valerie guessed aloud what Jalal had said, and he told her yes, he'd said "I love you" in Swahili. He can say he loves you in thirty six languages. Quite a propositioner, Jalal "I love you" Agha.

That evening we rendezvoused again at Jalal's place. This was the Childhood Days session. He had schooled at Scindia School, Gwalior, St. Xavier's, Bombay, and than St. X's College, which he thought was a bore. So into the FTII, and out of it in '66. How come he landed up there, was he trying to emulate Papa? (Papa is the well-known character actor Agha) Don't be silly, he said, he'd acted in Mughal-e-Azam when he was eleven, and anyhow, his father had left such big footprints behind, he couldn't help but follow in

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and he could not discuss the purchase of diamonds on the phone. After that propriety, he mentioned the quality and the price of diamonds which he would consider for purchase.

THE Vaidyaraj continued the examination. At the end of it all, he declared that I suffered from Amla-Pitta. For that he charged me Rs. 40, euphemistically called "consultation fees". Then he gave me some powders and pills for which he extracted Rs. 24 more. And finally, he asked me to read his book Stomach Ailments.

Five days of the treatment passed. I felt wonderful. Now I stayed away just long enough to read the editorial or maybe a current topic. But from the sixth day on, either because the medicine overacted or my stomach overreacted, I visited the 3 x 3 room several times daily. The total time spent away was the same as that spent before the Kaya-Kalpa began. But now it was in several instalments. I read the newspaper in bits and pieces. At the end of it all, I felt exhausted, physically and mentally.

Now I am confined to bed, where I'm reading a different chapter from Stomach Ailments.

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len. The seventh floor man is reported to have said, "Oh, was Jalal in that scene? I didn't notice. I was watching Helen's legs, you see."

And then a film journalist came in and asked Jalal about a reported fight he had had with a director on some recent shooting locale. She said she'd heard Jalal had picked the fight. Jalal launched on his explanation, and the young lady appeared impressed with his side of the story. That man has a way with girls.