

LITERATURE

"PUSHPA bet, aren't you ready yet?" Pushpa sighed, she gave a last glance at her reflection in the mirror. She was not particularly pretty, and purple made her seem even darker.

"Pushpa!" Pushpa yielded to the entreaty in her mother's tone. "I'm coming, Amma, I'm coming!" All the way to Aarong, Pushpa's mother, Mrs. Rahman, talked about clothes and silk saris. But Pushpa wasn't received for a minute. She knew what all the sudden whispering in the house was about. She knew that her parents were desperately trying to get her married off for the last one year. She knew she was going to be "Shoon" to a prospective bride-groom. Why shouldn't she? This was the fourth time she was being brought to Aarong. Mrs. Rahman herded her daughter up the steps of Aarong and told her to look at the *salwar kameez*s. Then she hurriedly went back to the main door to greet the relations of the would-be groom.

Pushpa watched out of the corner of her eye. But how amazing! Where were the plump, bejewelled, sari-bedacked ladies who were to censoriously look her up and down and then later politely reject her? They were only two young men with her aunt. Pushpa grimaced slightly. This one meant business. He didn't believe in representatives. She hurriedly averted her gaze before they noticed her staring.

She studied the embroidery on the sleeve with price concentration. She was so engrossed that she didn't notice one of the young man standing beside her.

"Er...excuse me, I think you dropped your book."

Pushpa looked up and blushed. One of the young man was holding her book.

"Thank you," She said and took it back. "Did you read it?"

"Yes."

"Did you like it?" he asked eagerly.

Pushpa blushed ever more deeply, but thought to herself, does he want to marry a literature critic?

"Yes, I liked it but some of the parts seemed rather exaggerated," Pushpa answered coldly.

"I heard that his latest book has just been released from the Book Fair," he continued.

"Oh really?" Pushpa was interested. She caught the eye of her mother and swallowed back the questions she was going to ask.

"Hello Pushpa!" greeted her aunt, "Have you come shopping?"

All this pretense really isn't necessary, thought Pushpa with irritation.

"Let me introduce you to these young men," continued her aunt, "Dr Kabir and Dr Shaurav."

Pushpa greeted them politely. After sometime the young men left. Mrs. Rahman cordially invited them both to come to her house anytime they wanted.

Mrs. Rahman was in a very good mood. She hummed to herself all the way home.

"Let us go to Mirpur tomorrow to look at some *benarsee saris*," Mrs. Rahman suggested.

Pushpa assented quietly and went to her room.

As soon as she entered, the room less younger sister Priya threw down the book she was reading and looked at her face hopefully.

Priya was 2 yrs. younger than her, and was extraordinarily attractive.

"How did it go?" Priya inquired eagerly.

"Don't be impatient!" snapped Pushpa as she made her way to the bathroom.

Priya rolled her eyes. "No luck," she sighed dramatically, "Ah well, my marriage will be postponed further."

Pushpa scowled fiercely at her and shut the bathroom door with a loud bang. It wasn't as though she didn't love her sister, but when she considered the fact that has marriage was hurried up so that her younger sister could get married, tried her temper sorely, specially at times like this.

When Pushpa emerged from the bathroom, Priya was perched on the table.

"Tell me what happened? Who came? What did they say? What?"

"Quiet! Quiet!" ordered Pushpa holding up her hands in entreaty, Priya obediently felt silent.

"There were two men only, Dr Kabir and Dr Shaurav. I didn't like either. Dr Shaurav talks too much and Dr Kabir seems dumb!"

"Ah! The tall, dark, silent man who broods on nameless crimes that litter his past!"

"You copied that from Byron!" accused Pushpa.

"Well, I might be a sociology student but I'm not illiterate," said Priya unrepentantly.

"I'm feel up with all this marriage business," said Pushpa exasperated, "I hate being put on display like a piece of merchandise."

"Well it might be the best time," pointed out Priya.

Pushpa snorted in decision and left the room.

The next day Pushpa returned from the university to find her mother in a panic.

"Where have you been?" demanded Mrs. Rahman as soon as she entered the house.

"I went to the University," replied Pushpa looking surprised.

"Well what took you so long?" continued Mrs. Rahman. "Go and get changed immediately. We've got visitors," she pushed Pushpa to her room.

"But why," asked Pushpa.

"Dr. Kabir and Dr. Shaurav have been here for the last half-an-hour. Priya has been entertaining them." Mrs. Rahman explained in a voice of doom.

Pushpa gaped at her in astonishment. It was virtually impossible for the parents of marriageable daughters to introduce the prospective groom to a more attractive younger sister, in case he preferred the younger to the elder.

"Get dressed quickly," entreated Mrs. Rahman almost wringing her hands as she left the room.

Pushpa got changed as requested but most reluctantly. She was tired and hungry but now she would have to dress up and smilingly entertain those two irritating men. It was enough to make her scream. She imagined the reaction of everybody if she screamed in reality and smiled as she entered the room. Priya was looking most enchanting and judging by the expressions of both her companions they thought so too.

As she had judged yesterday Dr. Shaurav was more social than Dr. Kabir, who was doing his best to imitate a wax statue. A very enamoured wax statue, amended Pushpa glancing at him a second time. Oh, well, she didn't blame him. Priya was a thousand times more attractive than she was.

Pushpa turned to look at Dr. Shaurav. Judging by their conversation, he had seemed to have reached a good understanding with Priya.

"Your father has also not a business. Why don't you join that?"

Pushpa gave Priya a reproving look. Sometimes Priya had a sensibility at all. The next day Pushpa found Priya volubly talking into the phone.

And then she said you talked too much — Priya stopped and listened. "No! No! It's not him! She doesn't like him!" — "If you ask me your strategy is wrong — Something like that might do — Priya suddenly caught sight of Pushpa and laughed. "Oh apu, I didn't see you!" and then "Apu wants to use the phone I'll call you later!"

"Who was that?" inquired Pushpa.

"Oh that — that was um, Monica," replied Priya. "Monica is having a troubled love-life."

"She always is," remarked Pushpa. "What's the problem this time?"

"She really likes this person but he doesn't like her. It is so tragic!" Pushpa thought there was more to the story, but didn't inquire any further.

One week later, Mrs. Rahman came with dire news. "Do you know that Priya talks to Shaurav on the phone everyday?"

Pushpa wasn't very surprised. After all, Priya was very pretty and very lively.

"Does she also talk to Dr. Kabir every day?" Pushpa asked.

Mrs. Rahman's expression changed. "No, And that is another thing — she sighed and left the room."

From this Pushpa deduced that Dr. Kabir was the prospective suitor and they still hadn't sent any word which was a polite type of rejection.

The next day when she was studying in her room a servant entered bearing a brightly

The Road also Bends
A Short Story by Saifa Rashid



Priya caught sight of her and immediately cried, "Here is the person you've been waiting to see for so long! Apa come and sit down."

Pushpa entered the room and greeted the visitors. "Have you been waiting long?" she inquired politely. "I'm awfully sorry to have kept you waiting. I hope you didn't find it too irksome."

"There was no trouble at all," Shaurav assured her. "Priya has been entertaining us very well."

Pushpa was about to say something sharp but controlled herself just in time. "Yes I can see that!"

"Priya was telling me that you really admire doctors," Dr Shaurav commented.

"Who doesn't?" said Pushpa lightly. "Lots of people don't," replied Shaurav, especially patients who have been treated by me."

"Why?" asked Pushpa interested. "Do you kill them?"

Shaurav laughed. "I can't answer that. It is against the code of medical ethics." "Of course medical ethics was just created to protest inefficient doctors!" Pushpa was going to continue on this subject, but Priya changed the subject.

"I'm sure Kabir Bhai is a very talented doctor," Priya said smiling at him. Kabir coughed, choked and turned red.

"On no, he isn't," contradicted Shaurav. "Kabir hasn't touched a patient since he passed. He manages his father's business."

Pushpa looked at him in amazement. "But don't you want to use your knowledge to help people? I mean you have a social obligation to the people."

Pushpa looked at him in surprise. "Who sent me a parcel?"

"I don't know, apa. Someone sent it by car." Pushpa took it from him and turned it over curiously. Then she tore open the wrapping paper.

Inside were two of the latest novels by her favourite author. She opened one to find an inscription on the title page.

Dr Shaurav had simply written, "To Pushpa, from Shaurav." But Pushpa was as taken aback as if he had propositioned her.

How dare he! How dare he! His temerity, his impudence took her breath away. He went out with Priya and sent presents to her, Pushpa! He most probably had the impertinence to think she would favour his courtship of Priya. Well, she would not. If she would help it, she wouldn't let Priya marry that man at all. Unable to contain her feelings Pushpa walked up and down several times.

"Priya! Priya!" Pushpa screamed. "Come here at once!"

Priya appeared immediately. Pushpa looked at her scared face for a minute and threw the books at Priya.

"Tell Shaurav with my compliments that I don't want his presents and never to send them again!"

Priya picked the books up from the floor and looked at them. "But they are written by your favourite authors," she protested.

"Don't contradict me! Take them away!"

"But," began Priya.

"I said take them away!" Pushpa's voice shook with suppressed emotion.

"All right I'm take tan," replied Priya. "But you won't be able to refuse his gifts forever."

Priya fled from the room before Pushpa could attack her.

Pushpa was even more upset. To think that Priya could defy her specially for the sake of that — that —! World failed her and she burst into tears.

Maybe, mused Pushpa as she browsed through the bookshops of a New Market a few days later, she had been too harsh. She could have kept the Shaurav seemed a polite, well-informed man and was also good looking. Perhaps, it would be better to apologise. She must ask Priya if she had returned the yet.

eyes run down. The other one was much younger, fair, thickly salved around the eye. It tripped into those fathomless pits as soon as I started to step down and got out of the bus with some invisible scars.

Not much going out these days more if not in the evening. To walk up and down the roof is outing enough for the nonce. The sky is bereft of clouds, all the stars are familiar but still I'm not bored out.

The Orion resembles a plaid filigree in the southern sky. maybe it has casted far away like every thing in nature, like you, like the flowers coming out in rounds. We only count our days, in perilous and ghastly wait.

It was blowing hard with plashes of showers when I went over to bed. A small feathered creature blinded by the lightning and whipped up by the winds had found its way through the open window. I had the lights put on, the shivering uninvited guest was a tiny sparrow, small of wilder-ness was still on her wet coat, bewilderment in frightened eyes. I left her in the cosy shelter of the garage with the choice of leaving it whenever she would feel.

Nobody writes me a line, I desperately need to be heard. I squirm and gasp but don't put down a single jot. What is more to there to make us under-

stand? You told me. "We're going nowhere." I amassed enough strength to look you in the eyes. You said, "What are you looking for?"

In this world of dire necessity, selfish interests, who would rule-the-roast races there still are women to whom to love is be-all and end-all: who also hardly forget about the crow or bone whatever there was to pick with. Some passions are inborn among men like for the moon, some has to be nurtured like my love for you. How are those nimble feet and soft eyes getting along with the woman my heart once went for who could easily pass off as a girl ready to read anyone a lesson?

I don't have a near "you" or a distant "you" to choose from, for better or worse I have the only "you". You say we can never be one, so I should stop longing. Must I not writhe? Life is not worth an hour's purchase but something has to be there, whatever keeps you going. Is staying awake a remedy of dreaming? I have learnt to love you, I can't reverse it. The knowledge is simply not there, the wish nonethemore. What a terrible revelation! I would it never to be true. I love you because my brain has fallen in love with and dreams to live with that of yours by nobodys standards, in nobodys place.

The Great Twilight

(Mahagodhuli)
by Jibananda Das
The wheelcart idly rolls laden with golden straw — the late-noon sunshine fades
The birds: black, blue and brown—flap their wings in the cellar of the corn field
White dust path flies turn into slumber and mingle with the sky
As the setting sun leans upon the edges of pigeon-peas field.
Now in solitude his blood longs for the taste of sleep
The pregnant field looks so good—
fire dims and glows in its eye.
One day the smell of comely charcoal will bring relief to fire.
Whereat wastes charter pact commission plan:
Why is the uproar of envy jealousy slander exhaustion terror and blood-shed?
My heart is as answerless to time as it had shut up
Having asked the slender nun the questions when Buddha deceased

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Your Visit

by Nazim Mahmood
Your appearance springs a surprise
Of Ajanta and Elora before my eyes
My blood boils, whispers through the veins:
Drink the poison — it brings no pain!
Your appearance makes my hours dash
Like a sprinter for an Olympic cash
The more I win the more I lose
The more my lust for you doth ooze

On a surprise visit you step in
At once I take it, a lottery win
My wit's at its end
How the cash to spend
Nonsense non-stop
My talks do gallop
To amuse a friend
I am so keen.
Your visit, a gust of fun
Like the cranes flying in the sun
Flaps within a restless bird
An express train throbs in the blood.

Striptease

by Gazi Sadeq
When we see striptease
on the front stage
Like champions of morals
We express our rage.
While observing our performance
at the back stage
The striptease champion
Spits on our camouflage.

Revelation

by Helal Kabir Chowdhury
When it appeared on the sky
Of Thunderbay, it was snowing,
I was a little puzzled, no lover's
Song was sung at that precious moment.
What did it want to tell me
On that afternoon, I was aware, conscious.
It was the final toll of the bell
My fait accompli, to say good bye to the Bay.
What was destined for me was so clear
My gurus' directed me to ascend on a
Higher plane. I could not say 'no'.
My battered soul pieced together, I was relieved.
Why was it best towed on me
I cannot decipher, I was made a saint.
Divine task was assigned for me,
Could I fulfill it for years to come?
When I carried it along hence
My fault was none.
Maybe the reason is
I still live,
So pleased and undisturbed.

Heavenly Beatitude

by Golam Nabi
In a frame of mud adhesive I feel a spark perennial
It hath been burning ever and anon
Since I was thrown down on the earth of the mortals.
Over the years the flame hath remained undimmed.
Though desire voluptuous prick me
I'm burn'd with a fire celestial.
Sometimes desire lustful flames me.
Yet the desire sublime persists eternally.
In moment seditate and comfort
I'm fired by that desire exalted
I feel the pulse of fervour eternal
in my frame corporeal.
Though, very often, I desire a life full of sensations,
A soul engaged within this material frame
yearns to savour beatitude blissful.
My heart pines for a communion with the eternal
I feel a redounding grace of the beneficent.
For a time long I wander'd to find the path fulgent
That leads to the land blithesome
At long last, I've discovered the Beacon,
That beckons man to that land radiant.

Bangladesh Burns

by Faruquddin Ahmed
Beautiful greeneries have turned grey
The once picturesque land along the Bengal Bay
is turning into desert: is it to the world known?
For no natural phenomenon or fault of its own
Withdrawal of river water across the border
Had caused it all in the past and will perhaps in future.
Bangladesh dries up but none seems to care
For it's a small country and has not much power.
It appeals for water, but gets only assurances
So in the Ganges here it's sand that dances.
This time we hear they have promised to consider —
Let's hope, sense and humanity will really matter
To restore the lovely natural looks of this land
And make it again a happy abode to live and tend

THESE care worn men sulking around arbours and squirting poison under the azure firmament which no longer houses the metro birds, fall right where they belong to a niece. Yet the composition is flawed. I try to call to my mind what is wrong with it, straddling on the wall, then it hits me looking down at the waters still as dawn. I can slip off and impart my final touch on this picture before the veil is drawn completely over. Afternoon has brought me your letter, I'm a bit edgy. For the first time since you left I'm looking civilized with the haircut and all. Having suppressed the appetite all day to run over the letter I thought I had lost it. I have been out of temper until I started to go through it late at night. Now I'm more composed, more suave. Forgive me my untoward feelings I had for you, I'm truly ashamed. You've closed your letter with the beautiful word "please" six times. This is the first time someone has thought me worth addressing with it.
For Goodness's sake how did this wee girl occupy me inextricably, who isn't aware of her own elements let alone the place she covets for. Why do I feel like dying just to see her? Day by day this infatuation is on the rise, running riot in my

The Lasting Malady

A Monologue by Shakib Ahsan
Morning passes into the day while I leaf through The Morning Sun. Browsing through a book in the attic or simply idling the rest of the day is how time is generally killed after supper. Evening gets as long as it takes over a cup of tea. After that turning in is just hours away. I'm wriggling to get away from this nihilistic living. When are all the exams going to be over? When is that month of Sundays coming?
A skein of duck rejoiced at the brevity of night shredding its fog-still silence. Lazy rooks cawed its first much later. I listen to every faint twerp not yet ready to turn out. When I had got out of bed the night was still there lingering in that half blanch half dark world. Blusters of chilly wind blew stopping briskly. I could even hear bobbing sounds of dew drops on leaves. I love this serene world. If only I could take you on a walk with me!

The Lasting Malady

But this world has a life so short that it vanishes into the thin air as soon as it appears, much like yours.
I was sauntering alone in the rooms, when a girl whom I don't remember meeting with darkened the door before I took notice of her. She took me by surprise with her few muffled words. Probably she had asked my permission to enter. Her silent pose, bland voice left me shaken that long afternoon. I climbed into the attic to catch my breath. You may think, has he lost his mind? Watching at the swirl of dry leaves all day reminded me of two long forgotten hands and fingers as beige as butter. The loss of you bleeds the same way it does when it is time for the leaves to fall.
I was in the bus when two faces put me out of countenance. One was of a sad girl in rags, her carmine lips were knitted with a frozen disquiet.

The Lasting Malady

eyes run down. The other one was much younger, fair, thickly salved around the eye. It tripped into those fathomless pits as soon as I started to step down and got out of the bus with some invisible scars. Not much going out these days more if not in the evening. To walk up and down the roof is outing enough for the nonce. The sky is bereft of clouds, all the stars are familiar but still I'm not bored out. The Orion resembles a plaid filigree in the southern sky. maybe it has casted far away like every thing in nature, like you, like the flowers coming out in rounds. We only count our days, in perilous and ghastly wait. It was blowing hard with plashes of showers when I went over to bed. A small feathered creature blinded by the lightning and whipped up by the winds had found its way through the open window. I had the lights put on, the shivering uninvited guest was a tiny sparrow, small of wilder-ness was still on her wet coat, bewilderment in frightened eyes. I left her in the cosy shelter of the garage with the choice of leaving it whenever she would feel. Nobody writes me a line, I desperately need to be heard. I squirm and gasp but don't put down a single jot. What is more to there to make us under-