

fiction Hand in Hand

by Arifa Ghani

TRUST me, you say. Why should I? You mean no more to me than I do to you. You come to me because you need me. When you are done with me, you move away. You close your eyes when you wish to see something different and you come to me with those eyes closed. You do not wish to face reality. Because reality is stark. It is naked. It hurts the eye. It hurts your sensitive sensibility. It does not agree with your constitution. So you create your own reality. A reality satisfactory to your consciousness, perhaps. But not to me.

I desire a different reality. A reality wherein I alone reign. Selfish, you say? It is the nature of the world, I reply. Look for the truth in yourself. What do you see? That same selfishness bears

you down and yet you hate to admit it. Because your ego would be hurt. Your pride cannot allow you to be witness to such pettiness. It is all beneath you. You can never be party to such emotions. It is something which always belongs to someone else. Like the rape that always happens to someone else's daughter, someone else's sister. Like the dacoity that always takes place in someone else's house. Like the murder that always happens to someone else's son. You choose to stay away because it is all beneath you.

I cannot enter your world. It is a world enclosed and protected. You have created a fort for yourself. Self-sufficient, perhaps. And yet, at times, I hear a voice, crying out in agony. Begging to be let out. Whose is that voice? Yours? No, impossible! you vehemently deny its existence. It belongs to someone else.

Oh, there you go again. Always someone else's. Then what is yours? Who are you? Do you possess anything that is yours and yours alone? Your ego. Your pride. Your selfishness. Your kind of reality. A cruel reality to others but highly satisfactory to you.

I scream and shout. Only echoes return to me. I beg and plead. Empty voices greet me. I ask reasonably. What is my fault that you shut me out? Where have I gone wrong? I receive no answer because you do not even hear me. And even if you do, you do not understand me. It is as if I speak a foreign language. As if I am an alien. As if I do not exist as a person to you. I am a nobody. Invisible. Because you refuse to see me. I am a nobody. Non-existent. Because you do not wish to communicate with me. I am a nobody. Irrelevant. Because you do not

believe me capable. You shut yourself in. You shut me out.

Then I try to invite you in instead. You look at me. Bewildered. What is the meaning of this? I attempt to make you look at the world from the inside out. Not the other way round. Not in the way you are used to. You feel betrayed. I can see it in your eyes. You were not expecting this. You were not expecting me to take the active role. You were not expecting that I should suddenly take the oars. You were not expecting to be led. You were not expecting to follow. You were not expecting me to come back. Because you are done with me. But I am not done. I have not played my role yet. My part is not yet over.

Turn around. Open your eyes. Look at the new lives that surround you. Passivity is a thing of my past. It will become a thing of your past too. If you can

absorb such ego-bursting events. I do not wish to challenge you. I would not dare. You have always been my lord and master. I wish to retain the respect. But I cannot abide your incomprehension. You must understand and learn to accept. You must see there is a reality beyond your reality. Another side to the mirror. That the reflection need not belong only to you. It can be mine too. It could be ours. Together. In harmony. United. Close.

Listen to the voice which shouts within your mind-fort. Listen to the voices in your heart. Listen to the voice which speaks to your conscience. Listen and learn to accept without question, without fear. You have turned away for too long. The light will blind you for a little while. But I will lead you through. In spite of your previous demeanour. I am not as selfish as you think. I am an

individual with a heart. Something you never ventured to find out. I will not lead you. But I will not follow either. I shall travel by your side. A companion. A friend. An equal.

Look at the horizon. There is blue sky and sunshine there. It is a light that blends with the darkness, harmoniously. It is a merging of land and sky. It is beauty. It is eternity. It is a dream come true. Yours and mine. Equally. You do not owe me anything. I am not indebted to you. We have our own realities. But, like sky and land, we can merge. We can look not at the horizon, but beyond it. We can believe in the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We can share the excitement of knowing, understanding, comprehending. We can cast the selfishness away. We can give and take, without fear. We can associate. We can believe. We can trust.

poems

A Poem for A Girl

by Fazal Sahabuddin

Translated by Pritish Nandy

One day when the thirsty rains came
I met you in that cottage.

We talked for hours and slowly came to know each other:
we scattered our existence
into each other's thoughts, ideas and private selves
as we experienced each other's personal darkness
like a secret thirst.

You descended into my nakedness —
you were then as naked as a drop of rain,
as uninhibited as the scream of a storm.
When I met you in that cottage
you were only you.

There were rainclouds lurking in the skies,
a madness in the wind that blew
and a restless tremor in our eyes.
Did the winds ever speak like this before?
I have not heard this language.

You entered my lonesome cottage; I spoke to you.
Did you ever encounter such a passionate dark before?

There was an unknown peace everywhere:
an intangible, odourless, wordless, carefree silence
and from our ruins millions of sparks
like fireflies were born and destroyed —
there was peace.

The peace you gave me
when you tore from my existence those sparks of quietude.

You came to me in that cottage:
the cottage seemed like a thousand year old
small ruined island
surrounded by the passion of many storms and waves
and the darkness of our limbs
which was everywhere like the fragrance of fatigue,
an island which had seen the passion of summer,
a bitter winter and a strange excitement,
and you came with your lustful lips
and a lonesome cyclois....
you came to me, to my arms
and I remained absorbed within you
for you were you, my peace, my pleasure,
the ruined disarray of my self.
You came one day.

Slowly dusk came, the rain increased,
darkness raced across the sky like a pack of black dogs.
You pulled me close, held my hand
and dared the hidden world of the rain.
Your own passion, enchantress, drew you into the rain
and, immersed in your own happiness,
you dared its endless charms.

You came near me in that cottage
which seemed an island,
like some ancient star....
amidst the rain, we walked the green grass,
you and I,
as you took me there
where you shall remain with me forever:
in my private paradise, in my inferno,
in darkness and in light, amidst hate and amidst love,
in my primeval pleasures, my spiritual wanderings,
in sacrifice, in desire,
in my love for life and in my self-sacrifice,
you shall always remain with me.
In my jealousies and joys, hopes and despair,
in my sufferings, my lusts,
my silent meditation, my involvement with words,
in relaxed fatigue or insane desire,
you are part of my existence....
involved, hidden, endlessly carefree
you shall remain forever
like a drunken desire.

We shall walk in the rain, across the fields of grass
and we shall be drenched:
we shall walk towards that thirsty dark we own.
I shall be there and you....
and you shall remain the pleasures of this self,
the random wanderings of my free mind.



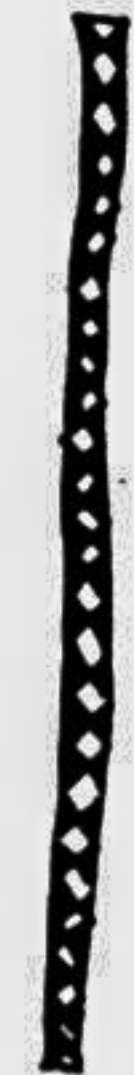
Man — The Invincible

by Ahmed Sofa

Bandits of turbulent water devour
Homes, markets, villages,
Shops and high ways with fierce rage.
Golden crop is rotting in the field.
Every thing is gone under the grip of
Devastating flood, schools, factories
Temples, churches and mosques,
Nothing could escape from the wrath of water.
The killer water dances all around
With terrible fury extending its fang,
Half dead human being, some how
could make their narrow escape.
These homeless men, old persons and children
How far can they run beyond their
Familiar surroundings?
Is human being an aquatic animal?
Who is going to feed and who will bring
Water, when they are athirst?
The rivers are no longer the same familiar rivers
In the meantime rivers turned into
Hissing snakes full of flowing poisonous liquid.
Whatever the direction you turn your gaze,
Will find the face of the earth carpeted on the water.
Vanity, shame and self respect of the village patriarch
childrens playing chambers, glamour of sweet damsels
Everything is floating and being carried away by the swift current.
Grief stricken Bangla today is like the
Image of Behula, the ballad prince.



sitting near the feet of her dead husband in a drowning rift,
I leading towards the city of deads,
With an ambition, to bring her dead husband back alive.
Just behold the reflection of full auntamnal moon.
Reflecting in the heart of water breaking into pieces with untold pain.
Then, where do the creatures shall look with expectation?
All the centres of faith, versions of prayers became useless.
Does the human sufferings are being echoed in the heaven?
Lord of heaven left his office, meaning of heaven is meaningless vacuum.
Does it mean that this festival of life,
Some total of the splendour of the particles
Shall be wiped away by the fury of the killer water?
Is life such a trivial thing can easily be
erased by water like the imprint on ribbon?
life emerged out of the womb of darkness
in the form of the particles of light.
life itself is the emblem of divinity
Runs faster and faster through ages with grace.
And there sprouts a song born out of the bitterest pangs.
It is the sound of constant battle between life and death,
consternation that comes out of the dual of void and
consciousness, promotes life in the stage of divinity,
lo, human person is a divine being.
Destruction death, sufferings are true,
But not the lost word about human being.
The real miracle of life is, hope keeps human being alive.
The human person is mortal, death cannot finish the human race.
The peal of thundering human voice reverberates in the heart of creation.
And it is the sole guide of human race.
Human being takes lesson of life from the jaw of death.
Snatch music from the murmuring sound of water.
From epidemic discovers the secret of life.
Petty losses strengthens his muscles and nerves.
His towering figure reaches the sky
And root went down deep in the core of the earth
Human creative energys will write.
Brilliant chapters in yet unveiled history.
Facing all the odds with erect backbone
Human being shall stand alone,
By the power of his inner strength



Koch and Devjani

by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

A re-reading of Rabindranath Tagore's
'Vidai Ovishap' (Parting Curse). Koch the
son of Jupiter comes down to Earth as a
pupil of a Rishi. At the end of his tutelage
he goes back, deserting the Rishi's forlorn
daughter Devjani).

Devjani : There was never anything
between us
or, so was what you made me believe.

Koch : I don't believe for a minute that you
couldn't see it in me all along
Did I make any promises? You sounded
so distant, it made me feel safe. When
you began to 'feel' that
was when I fled. I cared deeply for
something, something that needed me more.

Devjani: I thought, I couldn't have
changed much if I still 'felt'
that much. But
I chastened myself. I changed myself,
imperceptibly. I got up and moved
along to do the things I felt
needed to be done.

Koch: You looked like a zombie, then, I know.
But you did great! I believe you'll see
it in time — we would have been like a
nightmare together



Devjani: I learned to live with nightmare, to live
without that which I was missing.
I didn't... learn... however how to forget
enough. And I don't think I
found it in me to forgive
anything either.

Koch : I am touched, I am troubled that
something you saw in me meant that much
to you. I hope life gets easier
for you and that you stop hurting
even if you can't forget or forgive.

Devjani: Forget? You? That which we had,
which was something hollow and
insensible and humiliating?
But, then when I think about it
like that — how can I complain
that I miss
What I had been left with, after
you went?

Koch : I had looked at you, let me tell
you truthfully now
for no other reason, except
that I thought:
you looked like freshly cut grass,
quiet and unmessed. I wasn't
looking for anything more.
The denouement after our meeting:
one could have lived without that
but I allowed myself to forget that
easily.
Even though, I sometimes remember
there were green pools. And
some kind of fever that I did not have.
I am not saying sorry, Devjani.
I am not saying sorry because I
was able to live happily without you.
There was no deception : I know,
you knew that my memory of you would
fade fast
You knew that.
What, Devjani, one knows, cannot hurt
one that much.
If I had known you afresh, (if
we really ever had this conversation —)
I know the same things
would happen or not happen
all over again.