



two poems by Nuzhat Amin Mannan

Sonar Tori

Rivers poetic and dark as night lap against my boat Ingratiating oars moor me through waters of trouble soundlessly I am killed my windpipe is choked Ferociously anchored to you always my Unseen Love. You send with such ease into my boat I crumple into a

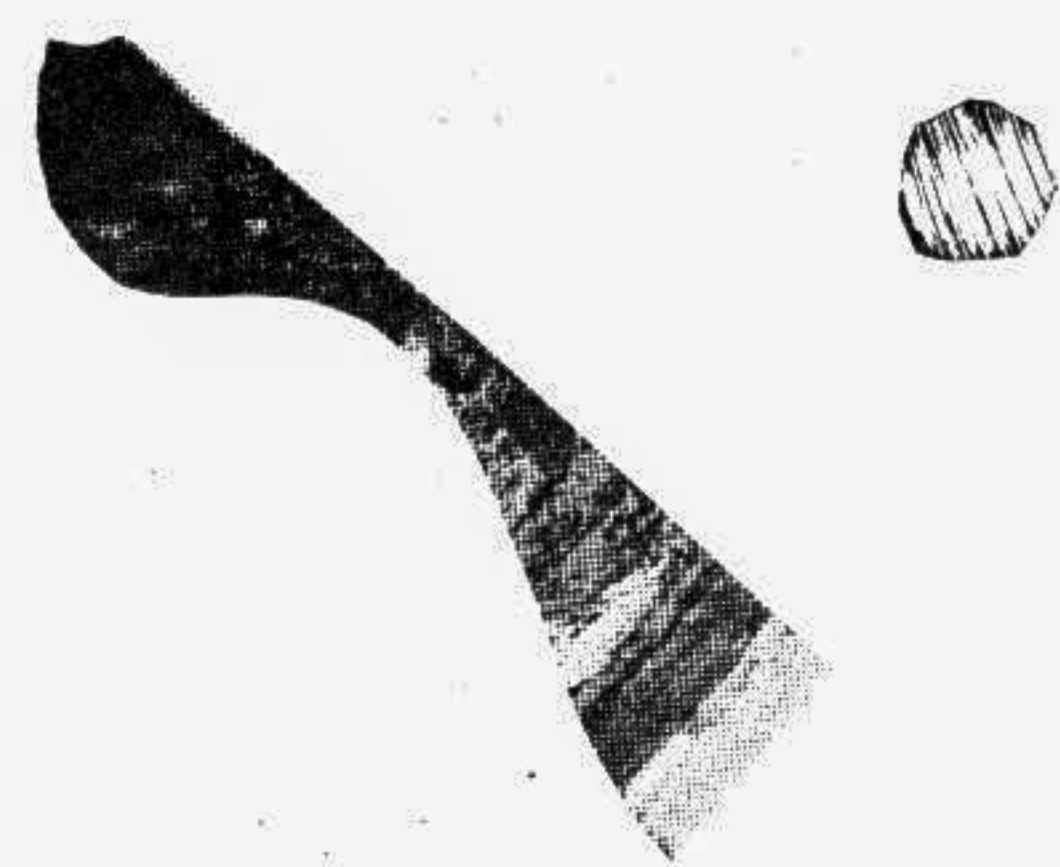
Call it peace if that is what it is No Sonar Tori golden passage for me no longing filled serenity for me either I feel hushed held forgotten forgotten unheld strangled call it peace and it's all over for me closing my eyes for longing to became quiet and meaningless It is quiet but for the

if that is what it is If you must know all rivers lie all that nights stir is nothing but trouble and desire Boats glide I shut my eyes dying, lying on water You dizzily chase me I oar myself away for always frighteningly in complete These cries that lap my voyage know how to be invisible when it's appropriate and hang

corner of my narrow surrender loving boat A hungry

far off cries of a dark insatiable world intense

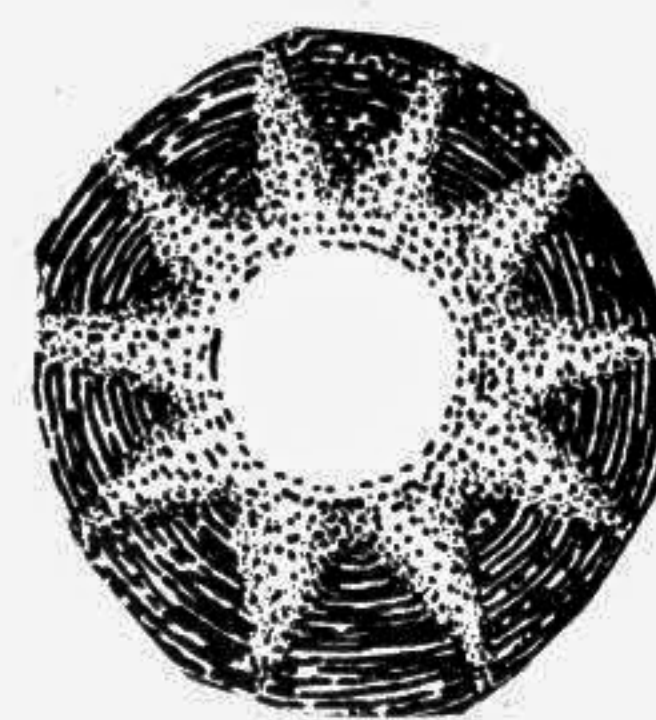
before my deadened eyes like a mist unredeemed letting waters



commotion

unfulfilled

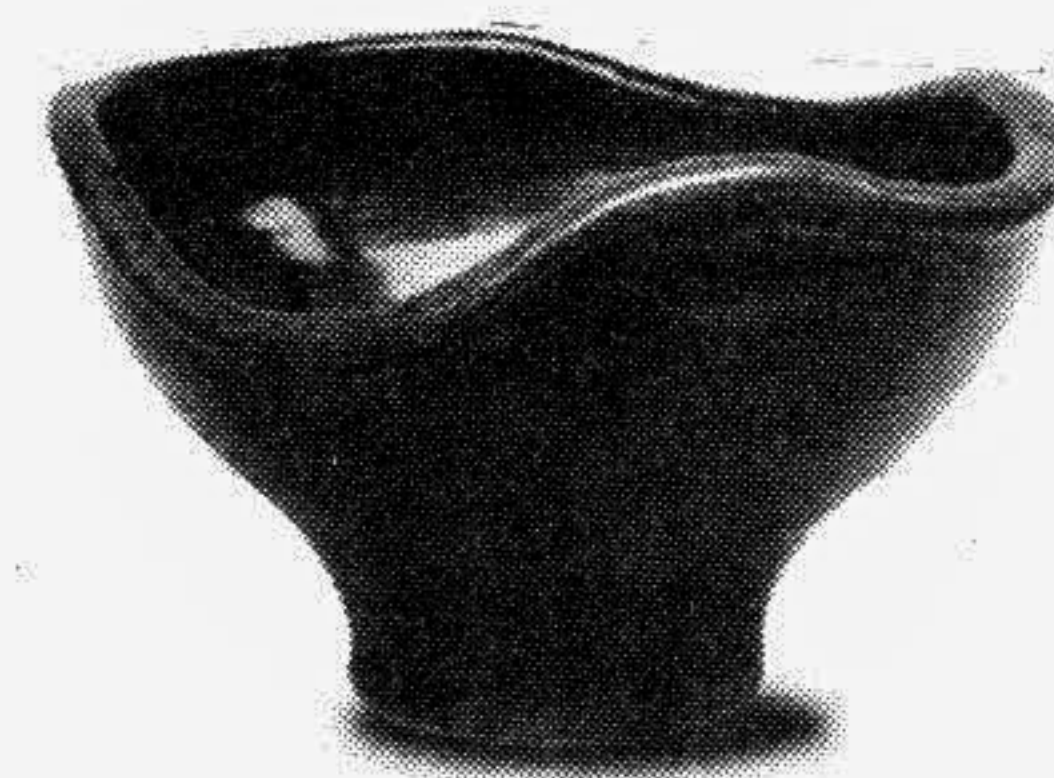
of the dark river my unseen swirl away me. my capsized boat and the surrender that you my unseen accept as my love



Loss

Imagine ma, if you can We two sitting like in Rabi Thakur's poems, in a mud stroked hut, imagine Your voice growing husky suddenly. Imagine me saying to you Did you ma, in a faraway land cling to your mother's aanchal as I do yours? Did you have the same Glow in your lamps there? The same Star filled courtyards in your mother's dim home? Did your mother ever hold *chapa* blossoms in her palms? Was her breath like yours Sweet, light, lila ainsed? Did she know any *mantras*? And monsters perhaps? No? Your prince-filled tales, ma, always Hush me into silence. When you came here With father riding on a golden steed Were you crying mother?

Like my elder sister cried When you sent her away on a moonlight steed to another fairy tale village? Why do princes come, ma? The rain is on the *dolonchapa* Forest Spread thick like a sheet. Ma, don't the *debdarus* look awesome like giants in conical hats? The boatsmen return from the river and An unearthly quiet melts over the cow's herd. Imagine me hugging Your patient neck with my restless arms. Imagine there was a slow, sure pouring on a *Barsha* afternoon... imagine me asking you: When you were like me wouldn't such an afternoon make your heart ache, ma?



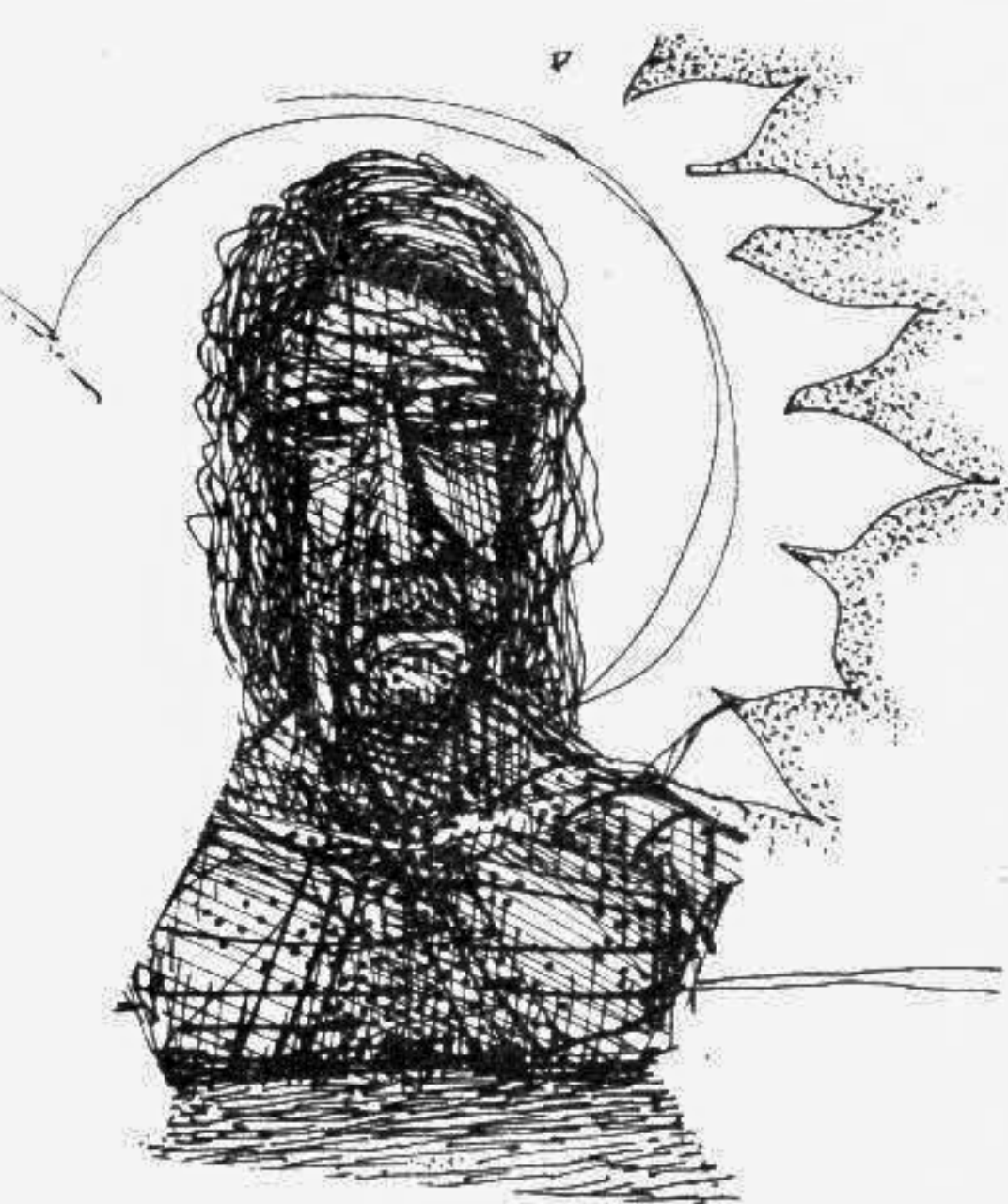
fiction

The Ways of Strange Emotions

by ASM Nurunnabi

WHAT interpretation do you put on a situation in which a young college student named Ujjal and a young girl named Rani, a high school student in upper class, each living three hundred yards away across the nearby street, develop a kind of relationship that looked quite strange? The college student was preparing for his final examinations, and while he remained occupied with his study far into the night, the girl kept vigil in her own room all that time. The table lamp on his reading table threw a shade of light on the face of the boy which was visible from the girl's window. When late at night, the boy switched off his reading lamp, the light went off simultaneously in the girl's room. This phenomenon continued for at least one month before the boy's examination.

It is easy to interpret this growing feeling between the two as love. But what was characteristic about it was that it could not distract the boy's seriousness about his studies and the girl's equal dedication to the cause of the boy's academic welfare. As such, there was something commendable about their relationship. Of course, this kind



of relationship may not be very common.

The question may inevitably arise how this state of things could lead to. When in course of the boy's examination, there was a break between morning and afternoon sessions, the girl would come down to the examination

centre. She would not ask any question about his performance in the examination during the first session. Her glance at the boy's face was enough for her to determine the nature of his performance. On one occasion, he could not fare well as he expected and he was crestfallen. As a means of restoring his confidence, she just placed her hand on his arm, without uttering any word. This produced a sort of emotional support which he so much valued at this time of his stress and tension.

These were some of the incidents which laid the foundation of their mutual understanding and love. But in the harsh reality of the world, such relationship, however idyllic, has an inexorable end. In this case, it did not turn out well in the conventional sense. Since, by this time, both of them attained emotional maturity to accept the inevitable, they took their fates in stride.

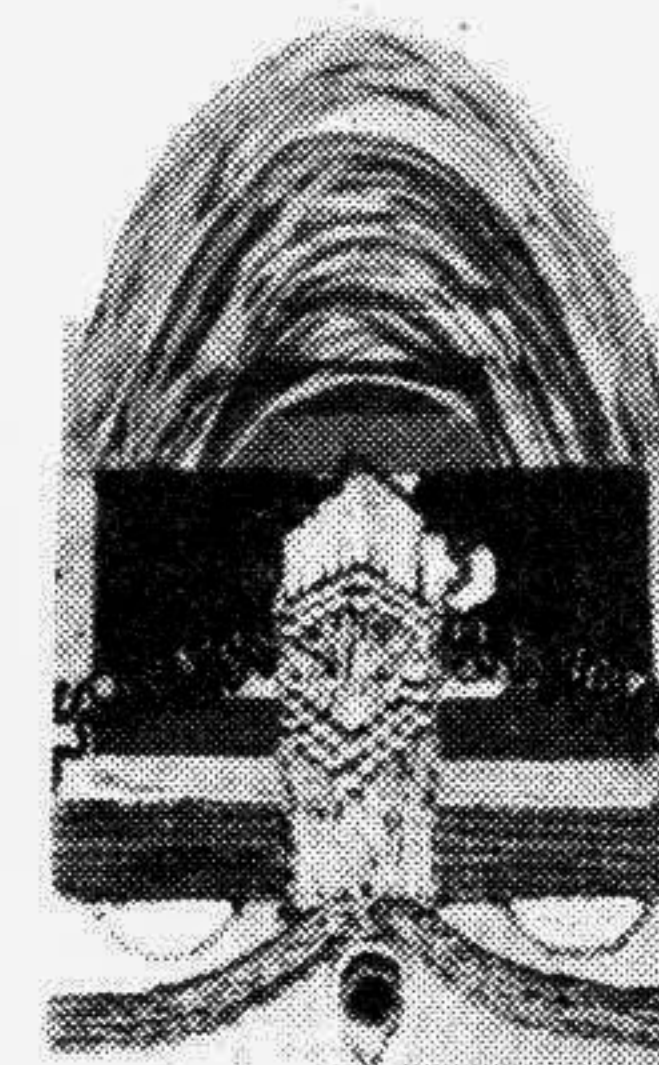
About three decades later, they had the chance, by accident, to meet each other at a social function. At that time, they could exchange only a few words which were limited to giving information about each other's address and telephone number. This information,

as it turned out later, was a source of constant mental unease for Ujjal, now a middle-aged man. At times he felt a strong urge to talk to her on phone. But he desisted, feeling some sort of uncertainty about the present state of her emotions after so many years. He could, however, find out later from other sources that she was holding a senior position as a university teacher after obtaining Ph.D degree abroad. Although he held a similar position as a teacher after serving a few years abroad in that capacity, he did not have a doctorate degree. The comparative deficiency in his academic background made him extremely hesitant to renew the old acquaintance. Rani, on her part, could ring up Ujjal, but she, getting no response from Ujjal, thought it better to come down herself to his address.

This made Ujjal feel that the woman had not forgotten her own feelings when she was young. This served as a great consolation for him, as he could still recall the deep emotional support that helped him through his student life. He, however, received a great surprise of his life when he was told that the woman still remained unmarried. Ujjal felt bewildered, thinking whether her remain-

ing single all these years had anything to do with their past relationship.

At the present stage, it was hard to explain their emotional state — the man



with a family and a single woman apparently not oblivious of her memories while she was young. In spite of the great gulf separating the two lives, there was no mistaking for Ujjal that memories

of old attachment were very much in the mind of the woman.

Some days later, when Ujjal had overcome his unease over his present feelings towards the woman, he was asked suddenly by her, "Why you used to be so nervous at times of examinations during your student days when your performance fell short of your expectation? Ujjal had no answer, but his expressions were enough to make it clear how he was grateful to her for her emotional support during those stressful days. On another occasions, she frankly told him that he should not misunderstand her for her holding higher academic qualification. "To you I still remain the same young girl who kept vigil at night while you prepared for your examinations, and also the same girl who tried to boost your confidence in you when you could not do well in your examination," the woman said.

Faced with such expression of her feelings, Ujjal could only wonder how the previous bonds of emotional understanding and support could survive the long intervening years in their life. This placed the woman at a level which could only generate in Ujjal a deep sense of gratitude for her.

Man

by Syed Shamsul Haq

IN the evening I went to movie, a Bengali one, which was claimed to be enjoyable. It was revealed from people's gossip that nothing could be more interesting than the secret life story of the heroine. My pocket abounded with money in that marvelous evening. I witnessed that the sky was crystal-clear and colourful in the afternoon, caressed with a gentle breeze. The film was really enjoyable. When I came out of the cinema hall, my mind began to hover in the sky, as if I were not present here or I were present everywhere on earth at a time — as if I would become anything at will — a rich man, a handsome lover, or a dandy leading a kingly life in a palace. Whenever I enjoyed a good film its effect lingered in mind — throughout the night. Stripped sequences of the film appeared in my dream to render it full of spectrum.

I decided I would walk. I would return home on foot, relishing the story of the film. I walked only up to the turn of the road when a terrible whirlwind began to blow all of a sudden. That wind scattered dust crazily and swept on rolling and swishing. Dust entered my eyes, which gave me a burning sensation. I struggled to breathe as I felt my nostrils were blocked, as it were, by the thrust of some cotton stoppers. I began to run. I could not look, yet I kept running. Everybody was running in the street. Nobody could stand since wind gave no opportunity. I looked at the sky in a trice and noticed fire had gathered in it. Overcast with clouds, the sky had

turned red.

My heart trembled. A strident thud reached my ears, from which I could surmise that a flying sheet of corrugated iron fell somewhere. I had every chance to die. Just a sheet of corrugated iron would be good enough to strike me to ground.

The light colourful thoughts that had been soaring in my mind a while ago were blown away by the whirlwind. Fear — black endless fright — crept out from the deep of my mind. I ran with increasing momentum.

I felt raindrops scanty, though. The wind was now gust, blowing intermittently.

A speedy truck darted past me leaving me narrowly escaped. If it had run over me in this calamity, that would have concerned nobody. Nobody would come to my help, as all were busy running. Some more sheets of corrugated iron flew in the air to crash down. I heard a rattle in a tree behind me. Gasping, I took shelter in the verandah of a house. It was at that point when all lights were put out. Pitch-black gloom gobbled the whole city. The storm with heavy rains began to whip me, the houses, the entire world. I fought to breathe. I do not know whether I have any enmity with God. My happy moments, I observed many times, do not live long — something happens and they pass away.

It seemed to me the storm would not stop before one hour. Last time a cyclone had swept over the city, blowing off a ship aground. Serpents and people sheltered side by side, but none were harmed by each other. This storm was



likely to be less severe than the earlier. That time I had been inside the house, with door and windows closed, so that I could not understand properly. This time I was out of doors, nakedly exposed to devastation.

My throat dried up. I could no more stand firmly. Drenched in water, my body was shivering.

A man came running towards the verandah, where I was standing. Coming, he briskly buried his face with the lower part of his shirt. His chest rising and falling fast like bellows, he kept

standing covering his face. After a long period of time he raised his head slowly and looked at the way transfixed eyes. Then he became conscious of my existence. He turned his eyes to me.

As soon as he caught sight of me, he got startled, as if he had trampled on the head of a snake. Startled, me too. That guy was my arch enemy — once he had made me undone. Now he was standing in front of me in the verandah. He took shelter just beside me to defend himself from the storm. I saw him here fresh after two years. It would be appropriate

to use the word *felt* instead of *saw* because nothing could be seen in darkness. I could only feel him.

He kept gawking at me as if he could not realise whether it was happening in reality.

I turned my eyes away. Once he had thrown me into catastrophe. He came to my office for a favour. I agreed to do that but in exchange of a paltry amount of money for sweetmeat.

Believe me, I demanded only ten taka. People are heard to take even thousands of taka for sweetmeat. I only demanded ten taka, to which he acceded, saying that he would turn up the following day with money. He rightly came in the following day but with police who caught me red-handed with a new ten taka note in my grip. I lost my job. And I lost my last saving entering into litigation. I was rewarded with imprisonment in trial. All these had happened two years now.

Lying in the ward I then thought I would find out the guy coming out of jail. I would set his house afire and kill him.

But when I came out, I could do nothing. The most important thing was then how to survive. Gradually all fire inside me was extinguished.

I felt a burning in my head to meet him after so many days. If the truck had smashed me a few minutes ago, nobody could have known. If I would strangle him, nobody would know as well. All were worried now indoors with their own lives. It would not concern them. What would happen if I would really do that? He had moved towards the edge of

the verandah to recognise me. He was looking outside repeatedly. He discerned the sky, while few and far between he saw me.

I felt uneasy. What he did two year ago was justified. The offense was mine. But now it seemed from his expression that the offense was his. He might think now he could be saved only if he would be away from me. I was waiting here as though to punish him for his misdeed. It was as though a golden opportunity for me, when his destiny had been as deadly as death.

No, I would not do any harm to him. The fire of two years before was no more burning. Did I not repent, thinking that I was wrong — it was all my offence? But he shrank more. I could well sense, though I could not see, he was growing paler every moment. At that time I put a step forward to talk to him.

No sooner had I done this than he jumped into the storm outside from the verandah. His voice produced a strange sound. I cried out, "Listen, oh Mr, listen to me."

He started running. He was no more seen. Again I shouted to bring him back. He did not return but the resound of my shout.

He must die if any flying sheet of corrugated iron would hit him in the storm. My heart froze. I shouted anxiously once again. But he had vanished out and out.

My voice choked. Gradually my whole entity began to calcify out of some unfamiliar fury. He could not believe me because of my being a man. (translated by Binoy Barman)