

supervised as Ramzan's tongue was chopped to pieces. But in reality the rebellion had been quashed and one poor girl had replaced the other, ensuring no loss of business or export for Mondal. But Shampa cost him quite a lot of money since her brothers heartlessly wanted more from Mondal and would not settle for less.

Mondal, surprisingly felt sorry for Ramzan. He reverently remembered me, his professor, your narrator. So, he sent twenty thousand takas to Ramzan's mother explaining that a goon had done her son this major disfavor. She cried an ocean and offered her prayers. Ramzan's brother, too, got a package from Mondal's people, while yours truly here was unable to expose the real Mondal even by writing as he continued to be under heavy watch of the goon squad.

Right after Ramzan's release from the hospital, Mondal had a special offer for Ramzan: he was given the choice of a clerical job, or heading back home. If he decided to opt for the latter, he would get thirty thousand takas as a golden handshake. Ramzan remained silent and seemed unmoved by the offer. Mondal, surprised by Ramzan's silence, raised his offer to fifty thousand, and then finally to two lakhs. Mondal screamed at Ramzan: "Okay, the deal is final. But after this you will be MY man. You will serve me and take orders only from me. If I order you to remain standing, you will. If I want you to sit, you will. You will eat when I allow you to. You will

starve if I so desire. Your flesh and spirit belong to me. You will breathe when asked to. You will hold your breath as per my wishes. You are completely mine from this moment on."

Mondal stopped at this point. His words were piercing his own eardrums. His goons, too, had heard him. So had the walls. But Ramzan was the only one not listening to him. He had left the room long ago. Mondal was taken aback by his behavior. He grew angrier. He ordered his goons to grab Ramzan and bring him back. Two members of the squad left to accomplish the mission. But how were they to grab him? Ramzan was in the middle of at least fifty workers. They were all excited. Their hands were raised. Their voices were high-pitched. Both goons came running back to Mondal with the tale: "Sir, sir..." Mondal inspected the scene and found the third and the fourth floors completely vacant. The workers had gathered on the second floor where the new girls were supposed to be at work - the same floor where Shampa used to work. It was where all the chaos had started. This was the same floor where Ramzan had first become the supervisor.

Mondal halted at the sight. His ears were ringing with the sound of protests.

The crowd now was facing Mondal. There were no individual voices; they had all become one; they had begun a storm. This storm had to be arrested. Ramzan was coming towards Mondal now. Hundreds of workers, including the new ones,

formed the procession. Mondal was shocked once again. Ramzan was facing Mondal now. He raised his arm and almost immediately the protests from the back ceased. There was a moment of an uneasy yet eloquent silence. Ramzan was literally hurling words at Mondal: "Grrr...grrrr...grrrr..." This noise unnerved Mondal. He clearly heard the words Ramzan was saying: "The underclass is rising up. Class enemies must die. Death to capitalism." Et cetera, et cetera...

Mondal covered his face with both hands and stood against the wall. He was a defeated man, ridden with fatigue. The workers were all brushing past him, making the same roaring noise, repeating what Ramzan had already said: The poor have risen against injustice. A new day had begun.

Let Mondal hear all that. Why should we waste our time on that? Let us rather go and queue up behind Ramzan. It's much safer this way. After all, right outside the factory, there are trucks full of police armed with batons. Some may even use tear gas to handle the scene.

By the way, what do they call them, tear gas-guns or tear gas-throwers?



The Days Go By

RANA ZAMAN

(Translated by Alipha Khan)

Hashmat Ali chuckled without saying a word.

Bashet walked out onto the road with the bundle of rice. It is dark; the fortnight when the moon goes into hiding *Krishnopakekho* is in progress. He felt quite scared to travel alone at night. Yet, he had to. In order to get over his fear, he sang out at the top of his lungs:

*"Went to your house on three different days, my friend,
And yet I failed to see you..."*

As he inched closer to the Moddhopara neighbourhood, Belayet Hossain called out from his courtyard, "Who sings there? Bashet, is it you?"

Bashet recognised the voice. "Yes, *chacha*," he said without stopping.

"Your singing voice is terrible. It sounds like a cracking bamboo stick. Why do you keep on singing?"

"I don't sing by choice. I sing to drive away fear."

"Are you free tomorrow?"

"Yes, *chacha*."

"Will you work for me during the day?"

"No, *chacha*. Tomorrow I shall rest."

"Insolent fool! Later you will face the music for wasting precious time on rest."

Smiling, Bashet resumed singing with his bamboo-cracking voice:

*"Going back and forth wasn't worth three quarters,
Three different days, my friend..."*

A grocery shop stands along the entrance of the Dokkhinpara locality. Bashet entered the shop and sat on a bench. Nobody was in. The shopkeeper, Rais, was cleaning his ears with the stem of a betel leaf.

"Is earwax troubling you, Rais Bhai?" Bashet wanted to know.

"No, but it itches." Rais answered, crinkling his nose and face as he poked away at his ears with the stem.

"Sometimes the ears itch when there is too much wax."

"Just tell me what I have to give you."

"One kilo of rice, half a kilo of lentils. Throw in some red and green chilies and some onions."

"Don't you want any oil?"

"Give me some mustard oil in a polythene bag,

Dusk. Bashet wiped off the sweat with a *gamchha* sitting on the verandah of the outer room. The *gamchha* has been salvaged from an old sari belonging to his wife. Placing it around his shoulders he lit a *bari*, puffing away heartily at it. Hashmat Ali came out from within the house. When Bashet spread his *gamchha* on the floor, Hashmat Ali poured rice onto it. Bashet scooped up the ends of the cloth, tied a knot and set it aside.

Hashmat Ali held out the money and said, "Take your wages for today, Bashet. Eighty takas. Count it."

Taking the money and knotting it into his *lungi*, Bashet said, "*Chacha*, I don't have to. You won't cheat me."

"Won't you come to work tomorrow?"

"No. Tomorrow is my day off."

"I don't understand why you keep doing this. You don't have any savings. You will suffer when there is any crisis."

"I don't worry too much, *chacha*. I can't. I have earned enough to get by tomorrow, and that is all that matters. I will worry about the day after tomorrow when it comes. I shall take off now."