SHORT STORY

The nose pin

TULIP CHOWDHURY

When Ameena's mother put on a small, gold nose pin on her nose, Ameena felt very special. The nose pin had a sparkling white stone in the middle. It seemed to give her a place of her own among her two older sisters. She was twelve years old when the nose pin was put on her nose. Ma had invited three village women for the special day. They had sung some folk songs and then one of these women had pierced Ameena's nose. It was the first celebration of an event in Ameena'a life. Ameena often wondered why her mother had given her such special treatment. After all, she often heard Baba complaining how, as the third child, she had turned out to be a daughter. She sometimes wished that she could turn the wheel back and become a son, the torchbearer of the family. Why were there so many women in the village who had two daughters and then the third child was a son? And this gave Ameena a feeling of having failed her parents, as if being a third daughter was something to be ashamed of. But the nose pin seemed to raise her spirits a bit. Maybe her mother was not so disappointed after all.

Ameena lived in the quiet village of Bongaon in Habiganj. The village held a special place for girls after they had their nose pins. They were sort of looked upon as budding women. Ameena's sisters were teenagers and were already married. And so Ameena, with the nose pin, was shown a light, as if to remind her that she was soon going to be a lady like them. The nose pin was like a significant stepping stone to her. Ameena was a dark complexioned girl. But she had the most beautiful eyes, large and dark. The curved eyebrows seemed to compliment the eyes that had a hint of sadness. Once you looked into the eyes you felt like knowing her more, to ask her if she was happy. The wide, generous mouth with the beautifully shaped lips held just a hint of smile. And over it the pert nose with the nose pin now added a hint of mystery; a mixture of sadness and smile. A poet would say that Ameena's face was sheer poetry. The white stone on the nose sparkled when it caught light and added grace to the face. Ameena spent long hours staring at her reflection in the small mirror that hung on the wall of her mother's room. She liked her face so much more with the nose pin! Especially when the sun was pouring through the open window she would stand in the light so that the sunlight caught the stone fully and it sparkled just like a star! Why, even her father seemed to treat her with a little respect after she had got her nose pin!

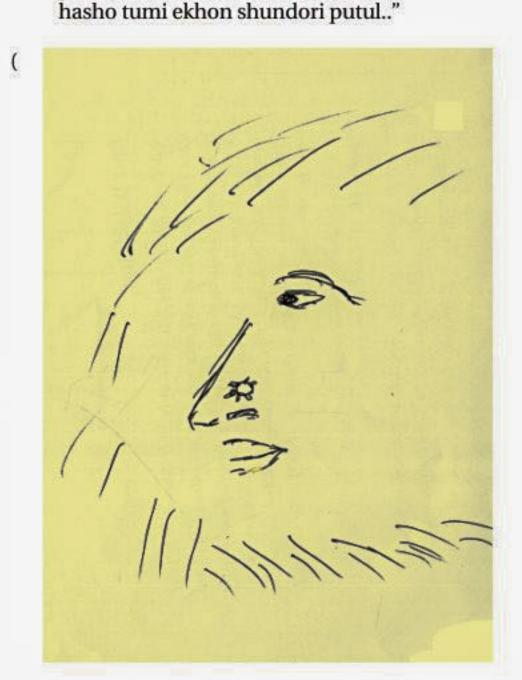
Every morning when Ameena washed her face in the pond she took special care of the nose pin, she was very careful. She did not want to lose her pin. If it fell in the pond she would never get it back. There were other girls around her in the morning. They all came to fetch water and wash their faces. Ameena felt proud of her nose pin when she looked at girls of her age, those who still did not get the nose pin. The little white stone made her stand out among other girls. She felt more loved and cared for by her parents. At the same time she felt sad for them. Maybe their parents had not been able to provide them with nose pins. She felt lucky in that sense. Her parents were also like other villagers, relying on daily earnings through selling their meagre cash corps. But her mother had saved money bit by bit, to provide her daughter with the dignity of a nose pin.

Ameena often sat under the coconut tree with her village friends. The wind would have the tree sway and the sunlight would make intricate designs on the ground. Ameena and her friends would feel refreshed as the wind blew over them. The sky overhead would loom like a vast canopy. Birds twittered on the trees nearby. Quite often the friends would remark how

beautiful Ameena looked with her nose pin. They would speculate when and how they too might get nose pins. The village lay serene and beautiful below the pond. The yellow mustard flowers looked like sheets of gold under the bright sunlight. Then suddenly Ameena's mother would call out her name and the girls would scamper and fill the pitchers to go home.

It seemed as if by sheer magic of the nose pin Ameena was soon wedded off to a rickshaw puller. Her in-laws provided her with a gold nose pin, the only gold ornament. Her own parents gave her a chain and ear rings made of silver. It would all be less significant than the nose pin. Village rites decreed it was compulsory for the in-laws of a girl to provide the nose pin for the bride. During the 'gaye halud' Ameena's mother opened her white nose pin and put on it the red stone that had come from her in-laws. Red was the colour of love and warmth for the villagers. White should not be there in matters of wedding. Ameena's mother and other village women sang folk songs as the nose pin underwent change:

shundori khulo tomar baper barir ful pindo tomar shoshur barir nak-ful



O beautiful, open the nose pin of your father wear the nose pin of your in-laws now smile, beautiful doll...)

Every time Ameena went to fetch water from the pond at her in-laws house the other women would praise her nose pin. They would say that her marriage had added to her grace. Indeed the nose pin made her look so very happily married!

"Manik Mia has got his bride with a red, gold nose pin! How lucky you are!"

Manik Mia was Ameena's husband. He was liked by the villagers for his gentle manners. He was hard working and came home to his wife at least twice or thrice a week. He was dark complexioned, just like Ameena, but very handsome and manly looking. Ameena smiled shyly every time he said "The nose pin makes you look so lovely, my wife!"

He would call her "Bou" (wife) over and over again as if to make sure indeed Ameena was his newly married

Compliments from her husband made her blush and she would cover her face with the end of her sari to hide her face. Her husband would pull the end down and hold the face, the lovely dark face and say

"Amar bou kalo, kintu jogoter alo..." (My wife is

dark but she is the light of the universe). And he would love her endlessly. Ameena, just into her puberty, had found a man in life, the very first man of her life. When Manik Mia was home, dawn would find them both lying in each other's arms till they got up to bathe in the pond. On such days Ameena would look at the face of her mother-in-law very shyly and ask her what to cook for the day. Her mother-in-law would suppress a secret smile and sigh. Her son was very happy indeed with his wife!

Ameena, happy beyond words, often opened the little box in which she kept her old white nose pin and stared at it. It seems as though it was this pin that had brought her all the luck. But alas! Good things last but only briefly.

Within a year of her marriage Manik Mia died in a road accident. A truck hit the rickshaw and he was killed on the spot. By that time Ameena was already the mother of a two-month old son. The villagers carried home the inert body of her beloved husband. She stood before it dumbfounded. The baby was in her arms. The baby cried in her lap wanting to be breastfed. Ameena just could not go inside the house to feed the baby. Her place was there in the yard where her dead husband lay. It seems as though the red marks from the oozing blood on the white cloth covering his body were like the red stone of her nose pin. She felt as though she was wearing a drop of blood from her husband. She touched the pin as if to make sure that it was there, the gift from her dead husband. Her mother-in-law came and gently took the baby from her. Some village women sat around her and took off her bangles, her chain from her neck and her ear rings. A widow was not supposed to have any jewelry on her body.

"Nakful...nakful....oita khulo" cried some women (Take off the nose pin...)

Ameena held on to the nose pin as if to say "No, no, no..." to their requests. No, her husband was there with the nose pin, this was the symbol of her marriage. Her heart cried and she seemed to feel an evil string pulling her somewhere down, down into a dark void.

Her mother-in-law came near and said softly: "She has a son and so she can wear a nose pin. Let her keep her nose pin. But let her wear a white one. Red should not be worn by a widow."

Someone got Ameena's old white nose pin from the house. And then a woman was changing the nose pin. Ameena put on the white stone. She at least was given the dignity of being a son's mother through her old nose pin. She looked at the white cloth covering Manik Mia. The white stone and the white cloth; all looked so alike! Maybe if her mother had given her a pink stone all this would not have happened! Maybe the white nose pin was not all so good after all! But then, she wondered why the red nose pin had favoured her for such a short time? Ameena stared on at the dead body of her husband. Her son continued to cry on for her milk. Overhead the sky suddenly darkened and clouds gathered. The sun disappeared behind the clouds. Crows started cawing ominously from the trees nearby.

"White nose pin, red nose pin; how did these touch her life?" A voice seemed to be echoing in her head.

Ameena just wondered as she stared at the baby's face. For this baby she was to use the white nose pin! She wondered what luck it would bring for her son! The baby in her lap, the dead husband in the yard, the changing nose pins; all these were a blur for Ameena. She kept on wondering how a nose pin so small could rule her life! The pride of having a son had blessed her with a white nose pin! Which nose pin would come next?

Tulip Chowdhury writes fiction and is a poet

A man of faith

Remembering Prof. Jahangir Tareque SYED MANZOORUL ISLAM



Prof. Jahangir Tareque with his family

Professor Jahangir Tareque-- linguist, lexicographer and man of letters-- died on June 29 at the age of 66. He was a professor at the Modern Language Institute, Dhaka University, until his retirement in 2008. But his retirement did not slow him down: he continued to do things he liked to do, in the same pace and intensity as before, such as read, write and research on aspects of language. He lived a full family life, giving time to his wife, who is a teacher at South Breeze School, and his three children--a son and two daughters. His two older children have successfully finished education, while the youngest one is expected to join a university in Hong Kong for undergraduate studies. A dedicated, loving and caring husband and father, Prof. Jahangir Tareque was an idol to his family.

Professor Tareque was a quiet, softspoken person who mostly kept to himself. A dedicated teacher, he would gladly respond to any request for assistance from students and colleagues but maintained a studied distance from faculty politics or groupings of any kind. Never a person to be drawn into an argument, he was nevertheless a forceful speaker and a skilful debater. He did his Master of Arts in three languages Bangla, English and French the latter two from reputed Universities in France and possessed a wealth of knowledge in both contemporary and ancient literatures in these languages. His doctoral dissertation that he wrote in Sorbonne-Nouvelle was a comparative study of certain ideas on prose, poetry and poetic prose in English and French. He later went to the University of Munich as an Alexander Von Humboldt Research Fellow where, in addition to doing his designated research and studies, he picked up German language. Professor Tareque was conversant in as many as 12 languages, apart from his mother tongue, Bangla. He spent a considerable amount of his free time translating, mostly from Bangla to French. His translation of Nazrul's poems in French has proved to be a valuable addition to the corpus of Nazrul translation in different European languages.

Professor Tareque was my next door

neighbor for many years. Our flats were on the top floor of a five-storey building. I often met him at the stairs, going down or coming up. He always handled the arduous climb with a smile, as if climbing stairs was among the most pleasant things in life. Indeed, the equanimity and grace with which he faced life prepared him to tackle the most daunting challenges with ease. I never saw him lose his cool even when he was called upon to conduct time consuming everyday chores like doing the rounds in kutcha bazaar, which most of us find annoying or driving children to school which, in Dhaka, is a nerve racking experience.

Professor Tareque was a man of faith and developed a Sufi disposition in the last few years of his life. He read deeply in devotional literature and came to believe that Sufi ideals are a source of joy and purity in life. Whenever I talked to him, I found him patient and cooperative, but more importantly, at peace with himself.

Professor Tareque wrote on different aspects of science and technology in Bangla, and gave years of labour compiling a comprehensive set of Bangla-English and English-Bangla dictionaries published by Bangla Academy in 1993 and 1994. I myself was briefly associated with the project, but left when I found the work too demanding. But not Professor Tareque. He had a steely determination that belied his rather soft and kind looks. This dual aspect of his character --strength and resilience on the one hand, and kindness and grace on the other-- made him truly incomparable. Professor Tareque will be missed by his students and colleagues and everyone who knew him, above all by his family. With his death, the country has lost a distinguished linguist and a man of learning, but I personally have lost someone who was always kind and helpful to me like an elder brother.

I am sure, wherever he has gone, he will find peace and grace that he always sought in life.

Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, noted critic and writer, teaches at the Department of English, Dhaka University.

DRAMA

well as her father.]

Hamlet in Love

(A play for our times)

MOHIT UL ALAM

This is the concluding part of the play. The first and second parts appeared earlier.

--Literary Editor

must be spotted anytime. I've asked Rose and Guild to choose a point where some mango trees give heavy shade. But I want to know, Ham, for one last time, was it then all acting by her in the Board Room? Iago (overhearing them, turns back in his seat): Don't

worry, if she doesn't come to the wall, I'll topple it, enter the house and knock on her window, and ask her whether she wants a live Hamlet or a dead one.

Antony (laughing): You might be caught. Iago: No, I won't. I've rubbed mustard oil all over my body,

and am wearing a loose sports jersey. It'll simply drop off my body if I desire so. Macbeth: Great Iago, you're still that greatest mischief

master. Iago: Well everything goes for a friend.

Macbeth: Anyway, if it was all acting, then I must say she's a

great performer. Hamlet: We all are, Mac. Macbeth: Yes, we all are in real life. All players, playing our

allotted times. Hamlet: You remember what you told me the other day: 'Life is a tale told by an idiot, all sound and fury signifying nothing.'

Macbeth: That one? Yes, but . . .

Hamlet: I mean we prove we're players, particularly when facing a choice.

Macbeth: How do you mean? Hamlet: The jumping over the wall.

Iago (jumping up in his seat): Yeah, the jumping over the wall. I understand that. You rub mustard oil on your body, you jump the wall or you deny your lover in front of your father. . . the same thing.

Hamlet: I'm thankful to you Mac for sending Cassio the pictures.

Macbeth: Don't thank me now. Let's get the job done first. [Antony pulls over the car near a big house in Baridhara. The main gate of the house is locked. Two security men inside the guard room snoring in deep sleep. Some dogs barking from far off. They find Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at a distance, fixing up a ladder to the wall in a dark spot. Iago gets down from the car and with catlike alacrity climbs over the wall and drops on the other side. No sound, except for the barking, is heard. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pass the ladder over the wall to Iago. Some anxious moments pass. Antony, Hamlet and Macbeth, waiting in desperate tension inside the car, whose engine is whining on a low sound. Hamlet rings up Ophelia from his mobile. But her mobile is off.]

[Inside the wall, Iago finds nobody. He silently puts off his overall, nothing on his body except for a brief trunk. He topples over the ground, but rises up and by some quick

nearby tree, he glides up the railing and softly taps on the window. But there's nothing stirring inside. By a superb technique he unlatches one of the panes, slides it open, but finds nobody inside. He intends to call up Hamlet but realizes that he has left the set inside the jumper. He's at a loss what to do. At that moment he sees a figure clad in dark materializing itself from the downstairs near the pump-house. He recognizes it to be Ophelia's. In a blink he hurls himself down on the ground, signals to Ophelia to keep shut. Ophelia gives a silent shriek looking at his naked body, Iago quickly wears his jumper, and they both come close to the wall. Iago helps Ophelia climb the ladder and on to the wall, passes the ladder over to the waiting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Ophelia climbs down on the other side, and in a moment she gets into the car and is whisked off. Nobody in the house detects anything. It remains as silent as before.]

Scene Six

Location: At Dhanmondi Kazi office.

[At 10 o'clock in the morning. Dhanmondi Kazi Office. All Hamlet's friends are present, some curious crowd too. The Kazi and a Moulavi are present in their regular outfits. Another two persons are also present whom they cannot at once recognize. Hamlet and Ophelia are sitting in chairs side by side. The others also sit accordingly.]

[The Kazi asks his assistant to bring out the marriage registration book from the file cabinet. He opens the book turns to a particular page and writes all important information on the book. Hamlet signs and Ophelia signs and the Moulavi recites a verse from the Holy Koran, and Hamlet and Ophelia now become husband and wife and shake hands with everybody. A munajat is offered. At that moment suddenly police whistle is heard, and enters the OC of Dhanmondi Police along with a warrant to arrest Hamlet on charge of elopement and seduction.]

[The Kazi stands up and says to the OC]:

The Kazi: Mr. OC, I'm as much a government officer as you are. I've supervised their marriage just a while ago. The girl is not under-aged. Her birth certificate is here. Just verify it. It's not a case of seduction or elopement; it's a pure and simple regular marriage, barring the permission of the guardians. The OC: Kazi Shaheb, whatever you've to say in defence,

say it in the court, the complaint is lodged by the daughter's father at the Baridhara Thana, and I've been instructed by the IG office to go for immediate action.

The Kazi: OC Shaheb, I'm not actually the Kazi, the Kazi is sitting over there.

The Moulavi: I'm not the Moulavi either, the Moulavi is sitting over there.

The OC: Who are you both then? The Kazi: I'm Henry Bolingbroke, a managing partner with Mr. Polonius of Ophelia Constructions. The Moulavi: I'm Richard Gloucester of Apparels

Community, and also a director of Ophelia Constructions.

OC: Ok, sirs, my honour. But what is this drama for?

Henry Bolingbroke: Well, the daughter's father is on his way here, along with our other partners, Prospero and Shylock. We upstaged this show to test the strength of the love of this young couple.

Richard Gloucester: Yes, we don't want to give away our friend's daughter into unreliable hands. So we wanted him to prove his heroism, and he has done it, so has our daughter

Henry Bolingbroke: It's all settled now, but wait for the arrival of our friends.

[Loud honking heard outside the Kazi office, and hastily enters Mr. Polonius from his Pajero along with Mr. Prospero and Mr. Shylock. The young people all stand up in reverence, and Mr. Polonius gestures at them to sit down.]

Polonius: Henry, I hope you've explained the situation to this pair of young brats.

Henry: You can actually congratulate them, because they have already become married.

Shylock: May I just take a look at the papers signed? The real Kazi (now taking his seat): Please, you do.

Polonius: Ophi, listen carefully, though you're now married, you'd better stay in my house until the time you both finish your education.

Hamlet: That's a point sir I humbly beg you to leave to us to decide.

Polonius: Then, as my gift and thine own acquisition worthily purchased take my daughter.

Prospero: But if thou stop her education or make her become a mother before she completes it, we'll not help this contract grow: but barren hate, sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew the union of your bed with weeds so loathly that you shall hate it both: therefore take heed, as marriage lamps shall light on you.

Hamlet: As I hope, for quiet days, fair issue and long life, with such love as 'tis now, I shall never melt mine honour into lust.

Polonius: Fairly spoke. Sit then and talk with her; she is

thine own. Antony: Giving out sharp whistles. Three cheers for Hamlet

and Ophelia . . . hip, hip, hooray! [Others repeat the 'hip hip hooray' and they go out of the

Kazi office jostling and singing, and jumping and dancing. But they are called back by Shylock as cartloads of boxes of sweet arrive to celebrate the marriage.]

[Another popular English song is heard, and they all eat and

dance.] The end

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jumps reaches down under Ophelia's room. Taking help of a

Macbeth: Why not. And Cassio called me from America, saying that he won't have anything to do with a girl who had a Ophelia: O, my God, why did you do that! (Still weeping)

took at the Padma Resort. out two very sharp whistles at which all the friends cry out]:

must keep the office decorum. Polonius: I don't see any further reason for this meeting to continue. You go home; we'll see what we can do to expose your treacherous act to Cassio.

Scene Five Location: Boundary wall of Ophelia's house. [In a fast-riding car. Antony on the wheel, beside him is

lago. Hamlet and Macbeth in the back seat. Around midnight. Loadshedding everywhere. But a bright round moon is shining. The car is going toward Baridhara.] Macbeth: Ham, are you sure that she will come to the wall?

Hamlet: As sure as my hand here. See, touch it. My hand, my lovesame, same.

want to destroy your career, neither am I ready to wait for you until the time you'll become eligible to start a family. [In a weeping voice] Forgive me Ham, I've hurt you much, but I won't prolong your suffering, I'm flying next week to marry Cassio in New York.

Polonius: Impractical also in an emotional sense, yet then let's

turmeric designs on both her hands up to the elbow. Her

Polonius: Ophi, my dear, since your mother's death, I

brought you up from a child both as father and mother. Now

this friend of yours, who I thought was a brilliant student, is

friends here can agree. We believe that your friend has a bright

Ophelia (in a distinct voice): I won't speak false, father. Yes,

future awaiting him, and should avoid rushing into marriage.

I loved him, I truly love him still. His memory will never be

effaced from my heart. But Ham, I won't marry you as I don't

vowing to marry you, to which neither me, nor my trusted

have the trial now, Ophelia is coming in a minute. You speak to her.

[Ophelia comes in dressed in all white, and wearing some

classmates all greet her, and she greets them back. They give

her space to stand in such a way that she is fronting Hamlet as

Macbeth: Ophi, that's not going to happen. We've sent your pictures with Ham to Cassio through Facebook. [Polonius and other directors (all looking stunned)].

Henry: What, you sent pictures! You dared to do that.

Ham, did you ask him to do that? Hamlet: Yes, hundred times! Especially the ones that we

[Suddenly Antony puts his fingers into his mouth and gives Hip, hip, hooray, three cheers for the pictures, hip, hip, hooray. Prospero: Peace, peace, young people. This is an office; you

[The young students come out of the office room in a most depleted mood.]

Macbeth: Look Ham, it's bright moonshine everywhere, we