

FICTION

The kashful story

NASEER YUSUFUDDIN

There is an artist in him. He paints or, shall we say, he tries to paint subjects that stir, touch or move his mind. His eyes open to nature, he enjoys the beauty of it but his mind habitually streams into exploring greater meanings of the apparent.

Have you seen the *kashful*? No! It is a kind of white thin fibrous, feathery flower that blooms on a species of long stemmed plant, which abundantly grows, especially by the riverside, on the alluvial plains of many streams and brooks of our country.

Have you seen the fluttering beauty of *kashful*, swinging under the balm of breeze by a river against the background of the blue sky? Let us go then with our man to the riverside.

His name is Husein Khusbu, he likes to paint, likes to put in the perspective, what comes to touch his mind. For the past few days he has been visiting a place; he has discovered a stretch of land by the turn of a streaming run of the river near his home, blooming with *kashful*. He goes there to simply sit at a height on the river bank and down the stretch of sloping land his eyes feast, and his mind reflects, on the dancing abundance of *kashful* against the light blue sky of the forenoon.

Colours of shimmering butterflies happily float among the dancing *kashful*, while the softly flowing breeze and the blue water on the stream sings a melody in unison. Some chirping birds float and dive and add to the orchestra. At a distance, country boats ply on the river. A farmer carries home the produce of the land on a thin path that fades away into the horizon. He devours the intricate living beauty of *kashful* among the splendours of nature. He listens to his yearning, his instincts say, if he can capture in water colour, on a piece of paper, the swinging *kashful* against

the blue sky!

The sun slowly turns westwards and the sunlight casts a slanting gaze upon the *kashful*, the blue sky changes to a softer tone, the breeze becomes cooler, the birds and butterflies continue to hover and our artist sees another angle to the grand beauty.

The following day he visits the same place to feast his eyes upon the waving *kashful*, by the riverside, against the backdrop of ever changing tone of the blue sky and patches of clouds. The angle of light and colour and tone changes as time progresses from the mid-morning into the afternoon. A boatman sings his way to his destination, small blackbirds twitter in orchestration with the gentle breeze while a wild fragrance surrounds the ambience.

Husein Khusbu still ponders if he can draw all these on a piece of paper in watercolour!

Another day dawns and the living beauty of *kashful* against the blue sky, the blue water beneath, the soft flow of air, the mildly singing birds and fluttering butterflies - all these go on in a series of scenic beauty. Our man, Husein Khusbu, sitting on the edge of the river, looks on, rapt in exquisite delight.

Today he has brought his easel, palette, brushes, watercolours and, of course, some white boards. With quick strokes, he sketches out what he wants to picture. He gradually and painstakingly tries to bring alive the lively *kashful* by the flowing river under the blue sky with little blackbirds and butterflies on a still, plastic surface of paper. He looks at his illustration and he looks at nature - he does not like what his art has become! He scraps it and goes home. He thinks he will come again tomorrow and try!

The following day, again our artist sits by the river bank at some distance to get what he considers an artist's view of his grand subject. He begins working on the picture that he wants to paint. He brushes out what he feels to



be his sublime desire with marvellous strokes and colours.

When he thinks that the art is done, he feels that the countenance of beauty has become nothing more than simply a fleeting moment captured in plasticity - a very transient snap of beauty of dancing *kashful* by the river that is frozen on his painting. He feels that his yearning to capture the *kashful* against the serene beauty has not been realized on his art. He delves into his mind but seems unable to fathom and understand what it is that is not there in his creation. His introspection continues. He is sad, his eyes moisten and tears fall on his painting and blur the raw colours of his art.

He feels his art has become, at best, an expression of a fleeting moment of an exquisite realism; or an impression that is created of the

beauty he has perceived in nature. He thinks some of his friends may, perhaps, admire this work as a piece of art - but he feels it is just a piece of art, nothing more. And he wanted something more to be present in his art!

By then the sun has set and the dim golden glow of evening is rapidly engulfing the place. He slowly stands up and goes home.

The night falls over the homestead of our man, Husein Khusbu. Tonight, like many nights, millions of stars are smiling through the clear yet mysterious sky upon his little rural abode. The half moon has added to it an inscrutable luminescence. Everything appears at peace and the peace is accentuated by the occasional barking of dogs and by a passing midnight train.

Dawn breaks in to chase away the last

shade of the fading darkness of the night and the homestead of Husein Khusbu comes alive. The birds of the nearby grove leave their nests, the elders prepare to go to work and the children to school.

Husein Khusbu, in his room, stands before his easel, where his piece of art hangs. He has been staring at his art, thinking.

After a while, he moves near the window and looks outside at the mid morning. He looks on. On the one side, the vast fields that run on to meet the distant river are swayed with various shades of green and yellow crops. On the other side of the fields, many varieties of large trees with thick foliage adorn the landscape. This is the Grove, as it has been lovingly called by the ancestors of Husein Khusbu. On another side, a rural highway lined with tall trees runs on to another village. This is the land which his mother bequeathed to him. Memories of his mother always streams into his mind. Often the childhood lullaby sung to him by his mother comes up from the deep memory treasure vaults and tunes into his mind. The varied bedtime stories pass through his imagination. Husein Khusbu comes out of his room and on to his courtyard. He walks by the fields of crops, enters the Grove. He walks among the tall trees on the narrow path that takes him to the large lake built by his forefathers. He sits by the edge of the lake under the shadow of a tall tree. Nature at its pristine beauty engulfs him. He thinks about his painting of the *kashful*. He thinks - let it be the art as it may, but the experience of nature is much more than an art. Husein Khusbu thinks he has greater things to do. He moves on with a contented smile, begins a plan to build a garden on his ancestral land.

Naser Yusufuddin, a businessman, studied English literature at Dhaka University.

REFLECTIONS

Recalling William Shakespeare

ABDUL MATIN

William Shakespeare, the greatest English poet and playwright, was born at Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1564. The poet's birthplace is getting ready to celebrate the 449th anniversary of his birth on April 26 and 27. The celebration of the poet's birthday has become an annual event at Stratford-upon-Avon following a tradition that is about 200 years old. Preparations are also afoot for the celebration of his 450th birthday next year in a befitting manner.

Literary and theatre fans, performers, artists, poets, writers, celebrities and tourists from around the world join the local community at Stratford-upon-Avon during the weekend close to the poet's birthday 'in a vibrant celebration of the life and works of William Shakespeare' when 'the town's streets overflow with music, pageantry and drama...' They pay tribute to the great poet and get 'a glimpse at the origins of the dramatic genius.' To his ardent fans, a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon during the poet's birthday is a pilgrimage.

Even though Shakespeare wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets and 4 narrative poems, there is no record of his birth or his education. His date of birth is assumed from the records of the Holy Trinity Church where he was baptized on April 26, 1564. It is believed that he studied at King's New School in Stratford. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582. By 1592, he had established himself as an actor and playwright in London. His plays include 16 comedies, 10 histories and 12 tragedies. It is generally believed that he died on his birthday in 1616, though many scholars consider it to be a myth.

In the absence of any record of Shakespeare's education, several critics question the authorship of his plays. They suggest the names of Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere and

Francis Bacon to be the likely authors of his plays in consideration of their known backgrounds.

The number of such critics is, however, very small compared to the vast majority of scholars who believe that William Shakespeare was the author of the plays attributed to him.

In spite of the controversy, the plays of Shakespeare 'remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.' It is no wonder that his birthday is celebrated not only at his birthplace but also at other places in the English speaking world.

I was studying at the University of Liverpool when the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth was celebrated in 1964 with much pomp and grandeur. Being an eyewitness, I am tempted to describe the great event that comes once in a hundred years. The British Council arranged a weekend trip to Stratford-upon-Avon for the foreign students residing around Merseyside. To me it was a chance of a lifetime. Without hesitation I joined the group from Liverpool for the trip.

It was a pleasant ride by bus from Liverpool to Stratford-upon-Avon through the beautiful English countryside. We arrived at Stratford-upon-Avon around noon. After lunch, we went out for sightseeing. We could practically walk around the whole town and see all the important places of interest related to the poet. Due to the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the poet's birth, the whole town was crowded with tourists from one end to another.

Stratford-upon-Avon is a popular tourist destination in England. William Shakespeare was born during the Elizabethan era, known as the golden age in English history, having a distinctive architecture with black and white half-timbered houses. Almost all the houses related to the poet

resemble similar architecture. Shakespeare's Birthplace in Henley Street is a restored house where the poet is believed to have been born. It is now a museum and a popular tourist attraction. Hall's Croft was owned by

Shakespeare's daughter Susanna Hall and her husband Dr. John Hall. The building now contains some paintings and furniture belonging to the 16th and 17th centuries. Anne Hathaway's Cottage was owned by the in-laws of the poet and it is where his wife lived in her childhood. It is believed that the poet courted his future wife at this house. The Holy Trinity Church, also known as Shakespeare's Church, is another popular tourist attraction where the poet was baptised and buried. The waterside along the River Avon provides sites for picnics, recreation and river activities.

Besides being the birthplace of Shakespeare, Stratford-upon-Avon is popular among theatre goers for being the home to the famous Royal Shakespeare Company which stages his plays throughout the year. I watched Henry IV, Part-I, one of Shakespeare's historical plays, at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre which was built in 1932.

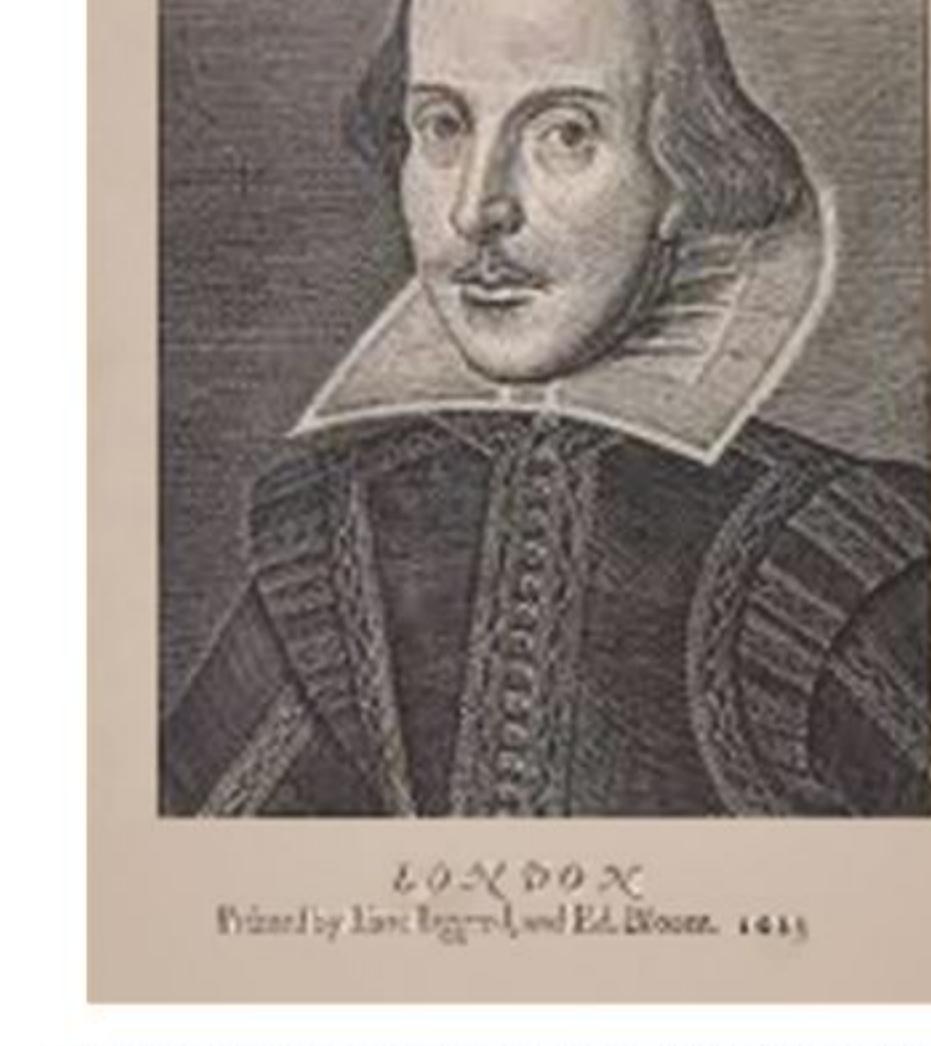
The play depicts the story of Henry IV, King of England, fighting a revolt led by Welshman Glendower and the Scottish Percies. The King considers his son Henry V unworthy of the throne. Henry V proves his worth by killing his rival Henry Percy and finally defeating the rebels.

An interesting aspect of a traditional Shakespearean play is that the actors set the stage at the beginning of each scene and carry back all the pieces when the scene ends. The stage is usually very simple and open on three sides, the decorations being mostly symbolic. For example, a candle on the stage would indicate that it is a night scene or a branch of a tree would imply that place is a forest. Needless to

say that the superb acting by the group kept the audience spellbound throughout the show. The audience gave a long standing ovation to the actors when the play ended. The actors repeatedly bowed to thank the audience.

Next day we went out again for sightseeing and mingling with the crowd. We watched the beautiful birthday parade and an open air concert. We returned to Liverpool in the evening with very pleasant memories of the 400th anniversary of the poet's birth and of watching a live Shakespeare at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Abdul Matin is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.



POETRY

Feeling bliss

MADAN SHAHU

I saw it in your eyes

I found it in your simile
It's a feeling that soothes
As bliss all the while.Wish you happiness of the
world

Always keep you adoring
All the goodness of life
Keep for you soaring.
I heard it often occurs
Despite barriers much
Time, space and distance
Mingle in support as such.
Flowers bloom no matter
What season spring or not
Fragrance pervades no
matter What weather cold or
hot.

But it happened with me
When you opened your
mind How young you let me
feel And you how mature
and kind!

Madan Shahu is a senior journalist
at The Daily Star.

LETTER FROM BOSTON

Rites of spring, love and marriage

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

On a weekend morning earlier this month, I was laboring hard to remove the snow piled a few inches high on my car when I received a text message on my cell phone, which chirped frantically from the innards of my heavy jacket. I reached instinctively for my phone with one hand while I kept lashing out at the snow sitting comfortably on my car with the other, and squinted to read the message which pronounced boldly, "Spring is here!" My first thought was, this must be a sales promotion from a marketing company trying to tempt me into buying a cruise ship ticket to the Caribbean or a prank from a neighbour watching me as I struggle with snow, a couple of feet of which were still sitting motionless on my driveway. I was thinking of sending an appropriately worded strong reply when I noticed that the SMS had originated from the 880 area code, i.e., from Bangladesh. As I went back to

my task at hand, and tried to get over the feeling of helplessness as I imagined my friends and dear ones in Bangladesh enjoying the beautiful spring-like weather in Bangladesh, while I dealt with the below freezing temperatures, my mind wandered off like "a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills" (William Wordsworth, Daffodils) into the realm of spring and the anticipation of the inauguration of spring.

While spring is not officially here until 21 March, that did not stop me from hallucinating about spring --- the daffodils and tulips in my garden, the crisp mornings, the chatter of birds in my backyard, cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, titmice, and mockingbirds, and the feeling of renewal that you observe in nature as we march from March to June when summer begins. In the US, Daylight Saving Time kicked in on March 10 and the extra hour at the end of the day meant more time to watch the sun go down, stay outside

before dinner, and fewer excuses to avoid the gym or go out for a quick jog to chisel off the layers of fat that the long winter nights and rich food deposit on your body.

One can also feel that spring is around the corner from the chatter in the social media and emails from Bengalees in this area who herald the advent of spring with a flurry of activities and celebrations: weddings and anniversaries, poetry readings, Independence Day, Pahela Baishakh, Boishakhi Mela, Boston Marathon, and all the rest. The joyous colors of spring bring out the songs and energy that was dormant during the cooler winter months.

This year we kicked off our spring festivities with a splash. Our friend Sandipan got married on the 7th day of March in a very soulful and lustrous ceremony in the historic Museum of Industry and Innovation located in Waltham, on the outskirts of Boston. It was a rainy night, but the weather did not even

slightly dampen Sandipan's spirits or the excitement that we all felt as we gathered first in the cavernous hall on the first floor decorated with various artifacts for the pre-nuptial mingling and later inside the first floor wedding room with its high ceilings and the artfully decorated rectangular stage. As soon as Tagore's "aji joto tara tobo akashhey" came through on the booming music system, we turned our head and saw Sharmista, the bride, slowly walking down the aisle accompanied by her father, Ashish. After that, it seemed like every step of ceremony was very well planned and perfectly executed. As the bride and groom, at the command of the priest, dutifully carried out the traditional vows, the various rituals, walks "around the holy fire" ceremony (which reminded me of "Shat Pakay Badha"), the "seven steps" together, and the priest periodically threw spoonfuls of ghee on the holy flame, we all sat glued to our seats as if watching an artistic performance. After the

two hour long ceremony ended, and the purohit pronounced Sandipan and Sharmista "man and wife", we all joined them in a dance to cheer them on as they undertake the journey of a lifetime.

As we were heading back after the wedding, I noticed that all the signs were good for a beautiful spring this year. I turned right where the love of my life was sitting next to me and smiling, and only God knows why. Then I heard the tune, or was it only in my mind, "Jodi taree naee chini go aji?"

If I cannot recognise her, will then she do that

On this special day of Phalgun?

Will she give the flower, the colour of her own?

Will she knock at my heart to keep me awake?

The veil of new leaves may get a sudden swing

The hidden unuttered words may come out

On this special day of Phalgun?

I don't know, I don't know. (Translation from Tagore by Giridharan)

Dr. Abdullah Shibli lives and works in Boston.