

EDITOR'S
NOTE

"But then fall comes, kicking summer out...as it always does one day sometime after the midpoint of September, it stays awhile like an old friend that you have missed. It settles in the way an old friend will settle into your favourite chair and take out his pipe and light it and then fill the afternoon with stories of places he has been and things he has done since last he saw you." — Stephen King

And so, today's SLR comes to you with a story within a story, a trio of poems, and the promise of breaking it down to break on through. Legendary author and filmmaker Humayun Ahmed's short story exemplifies how weather can make a difference in the climate of people's moods, depending on their priorities. Kamal Chowdhury helps us take flight on extraordinary wings beneath a divided moon across rivers that overflow with poems. Farah Ghuznavi advises on how to demolish a writer's block and get the creative juices flowing again. Comments and contributions are welcome at: DSLitEditor@gmail.com

MUNIZE MANZUR

A POET | Humayun Ahmed
(Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam)

Sirajul Islam, owner of the Town Press, is waiting in an annoyed mood. There are many reasons for his annoyance. Proofreader Jubed Ali hasn't arrived yet, and the machine man is idling without any work. Moreover, the sky is overcast; it looks gloomy all around. The weather isn't favorable at all. If the weather turns worse, Sirajul Islam will

"I'm a bit late Islam sahib. My daughter has fever."
Sirajul Islam doesn't reply; he's absorbed in other thoughts by now.
"The doctor has prescribed a lot of medicines."
"Really?"
"Yes."
"What's the ailment?"
Jubed Ali begins to describe

twice. Have your tea and then start working."
Jubed Ali begins to work; he's an accomplished proofreader. He finishes proofreading one forma before nine p.m.
"Jubed Ali."
"Yes sir."
"Do you think we will have heavy showers?"
"It's difficult to say, sir."
"Why is it difficult? Rain dominates your thoughts and activities, right? After all, you're a poet."
A faint smile appears on Jubed Ali's face.

"You live in a kingdom of happiness; you can even write an epic on the sloppy trouble of rain."
The smile on Jubed Ali's face now becomes painfully distinct. He dislikes Sirajul Islam intensely – for always mocking him as a poet.

"Sir, I need to leave a bit early today – sir, my daughter..."
"You'll certainly go; it won't take much time. Complete the work, and then go. Proofread the spellings too."

Jubed Ali carefully checks the spellings; and Sirajul Islam observes the rain. He can't unearth the clue to the mystery: why does it rain on his special days of gratification of the month?

The number of unresolved mysteries of the world has been gradually increasing for Sirajul Islam.

Binti's skin is dark; such dark girls usually seem charming. He has an insatiable desire for a dark, charming, young girl. His wife is fair, noticeably fair, in fact. Their marriage was approved because of her fair skin. He hadn't noticed her crooked teeth at that time, or maybe her teeth weren't crooked then. Her teeth are getting more warped with age and her skin is getting paler. Now she looks like a white leprosy patient.

"Sir, I want to check the remaining part tomorrow morning."

"Have you gone mad? The customer will come in the morning – finish it as soon as possible. It won't take much time. Do you want tea?"

"No."
"Take. Take tea. Hey, give him tea!" Sirajul Islam instructs. Then he asks, "So, Poet sahib, what new poem have you written?"
"Last night, I wrote a kind of short lyric."

"Oh my goodness!"
"Will you listen to the poem, sir?"

"No, it's okay, you keep working. It's not good to practice poetry during work."

Keeping his eyes on the proof copy, Jubed Ali says with a faint voice, "It'll be published in *Deshar Mati*."

"Really?"
"Yes, the Editor sahib has appreciated my poem very much."

"Good, good, then publish a book this time."

While talking to Jubed Ali, Sirajul Islam feels agitated. Binti talks in long sentences; she must be from Jessore or somewhere nearby – he has never asked her. It's not good to build intimacy with such girls. It's actually a better decision to stay far away from them.

Jubed Ali rises after finishing his work and begins to scratch his head. He has a fretful expression on his face. Sirajul Islam is familiar with this and so he says in a solemn voice, "The customer hasn't paid me yet; we have to run a business, do you understand?"

"Can you give me just ten takas? My daughter asked me to buy some bananas for her."

Clearly showing his discontent, Sirajul Islam takes out a ten-taka note and gives it to him. He doesn't feel happy to be paying in the middle of the month.

"I'd like to go now, sir."
Sirajul Islam doesn't reply. His face has turned dark as the rain has started falling heavily.

Returning home, Jubed Ali notices that his daughter's fever has gone down. She has been waiting for her father so she can have her rice with milk and banana. But Jubed Ali left office too late and couldn't find bananas anywhere in the market. He feels very sad.

"I'll definitely bring bananas for you tomorrow morning."

"Okay Baba."
"Which kind of bananas do you like, Ma – *Sabri* or *Sagor*?"

"I don't have any preference – any kind will do, Baba."

"Okay."
Finishing dinner, Jubed Ali takes out his pen and paper. After his wife's death, there is nobody to prevent him from sitting with his books, pens and paper late at night. It's raining cats and dogs outside, and it'd be sheer stupidity to waste such a stormy night sleeping.

Jubed Ali's daughter doesn't sleep either; her fever is rising again. Wrapping herself up with a quilt, she watches her father. Once she murmurs, "Baba," but Jubed Ali can't hear her.

A beautiful line arises in his mind – "How splendidly the rain falls tonight!" But he can't compose any other lines of the poem. Only this line flashes in his mind repeatedly. His eyes tear up in deep emotion.

The girl's fever peaks. She calls again, "Baba," but he still can't hear because of the storm outside. The girl notices that tears are rolling down her poet father's eyes. She doesn't understand. Children can understand many things, but some things they simply don't.

Mohammad Shafiqul Islam teaches English at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet.

Three Poems by Kamal Chowdhury
(Translated by Fakrul Alam)

THE TWO OF US

One born in darkness
The other in light

Each the other's shadow
Brothers extraordinary

One living in the underworld
The other in a palace

Beneath a divided moon
The two keep drifting away!

WINGS

Waking up at befogged dawn I dart towards morning
I beckon the sun with a cup of tea
As I sip
A shalik bird flies and lands in the dust.

Thinking of that shalik I invent
Some extraordinary wings.

Time for me to take off!

RIVERS DON'T
DISAPPOINT

From the stream of time I asked for its flow
I'm not daunted by debris; rivers don't disappoint.

I drift while looking at fish eyes—
A fishing boat; I'm a downstream man.

Just because it's night time I'm not alone
I've composed a new tune this day
To make rivers, streams, canals and lakes overflow

Only people with oil lamps for company can go with the flow,

Please don't worry though—our rivers
Overflow with poems.

Kamal Chowdhury is a Bangla Academy award winning poet and Secretary of the Government.
Dr Fakrul Alam is an academic, writer, and translator.

Q&A WITH FARAH GHUZNAVI:
The Writer's Wilderness Survival Kit

QTN: I am writing a novel and am about 10 chapters in. Now my character has come to a critical point where she is debating on the meaning of her life. I feel stuck and depressed like my main character! How do I shake off my writer's block?

ANS: As any writer knows, it is essential to get inside the heads of your characters, but it sounds to me as if you may have taken this a bit too far! Maybe you should take a step back. When you are planning a lengthy project, it is good to have the different steps worked out in some detail. In the case of a novel, this could mean having an outline of the story, with the events taking place in various chapters clearly laid out. This makes your own thought processes easier for you to recall as you are writing each section, and it also makes it simpler

for you to pick up on any flaws in your story arc, or potential weaknesses in your plot.

If you have already prepared an outline of your novel, and still find yourself stuck in chapter 10, it is probably worth remembering that you don't have to write this novel in the sequence in which you have plotted it. Look at the elements of the story that belong in some of the other chapters. If there is any part of the overall story that you feel excited about, then give yourself permission to work on that chapter rather than trying to plough your way through a section where you are stuck. You can always go back to the point where you were stuck and resume work there. But you are likely to be able to do so more successfully after you have made some progress with the writing, especially if work has been flowing

well on another chapter.

Another strategy to follow when you are stuck is to just take a break from the work. Do something completely different, and give yourself permission to enjoy that time out. Otherwise there's no point. Take a few days and spend time with friends, do some reading, go for walks, listen to music and generally try to have a good time. If you really try to relax, it is likely that your unconscious mind will in any case continue working on your story, and when you return to it, you may find that you feel more inspired.

When you do return to work, you can start by reading through the chapters you have already written. Don't start revising the earlier chapters, just do a simple read-through. This is likely to remind you of the logic of your story and perhaps give

you the impetus you need to get past the point at which you started coming undone. It's a simple strategy, but can be surprisingly effective.

Finally, at a point when you are persistently stuck on a particular project, consider working on something else: a short story, an article, a poem, or even another novel. This may sound counterintuitive, but it has the effect of taking the pressure off you in terms of working on that particular story, while still allowing you to feel creative and productive because you are working on something! Above all, be patient with yourself. Writing is not easy work, and there are always times when the process is harder. With humour and flexibility, you can usually find your way out of most creative quandaries.

Send Farah Ghuznavi your writing queries to DSLitEditor@gmail.com

THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER

This month's birthday authors at a glance and their deliberations on the creative process.

O. Henry (September 11, 1862) – "Write what you like; there is no other rule."
The pen name of William Sydney Porter, a man whose short stories are known for their surprise endings.

D.H. Lawrence (September 11, 1885) – "I like to write when I feel spiteful. It is like having a good sneeze."
Best-known for his sexually-charged novel, "Lady Chatterly's Lover", his boldness helped define modernism.

Roald Dahl (September 13, 1916) – "A person is a fool to become a writer. His only compensation is absolute freedom. He has no master except his own soul, and that, I am sure, is why he does it."
One of the greatest story-tellers of all time, his many books continue to bring enormous enjoyment to millions of children and their parents throughout the world.

Agatha Christie (September 15, 1890) – "Write even when you don't want to, don't much like what you are writing, and aren't writing particularly well."
Not only was she appointed the title of "Dame" by the Queen of England, but according to the Guinness Book of World Records, she is the best-selling author of all time.

Ken Kesey (September 17, 1935) – "Good writing ain't necessarily good reading."
This psychedelic icon gained fame for his novel 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest'.

Stephen King (September 21, 1947) – "If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that."

A New York Times-bestselling novelist who made his name in the horror and fantasy genres. Much of his work has been adapted into films.

H.G. Wells (September 21, 1866) – "I write as straight as I can, just as I walk as straight as I can, because that is the best way to get there."

Widely regarded as "the father of science fiction", Wells wrote many novels, including "The Time Machine" and "The War of the Worlds".

F. Scott Fitzgerald (September 24, 1896) – "You don't write because you want to say something, you write because you have something to say."
Well known for the way he captured the Jazz Age in numerous short stories as well as novels such as "The Great Gatsby".

William Faulkner (September 25, 1897) – "The only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself"
Acknowledged as one of the most important Southern writers of the 20th century, Faulkner wrote over one hundred short stories and nineteen novels.

Shel Silverstein (September 25, 1930) – "If there is a book you want to read but isn't written yet, write it."
His poetry collections, such as "A Light in the Attic" and "Where the Sidewalk Ends" continue to delight generations

of children.

T.S. Eliot (September 26, 1888) – "What profession is more trying than that of author?...it is one kind of agony while you are writing, and another kind when you aren't."

A playwright, literary critic and poet, his work "The Wasteland" is viewed by many as one of the most important poems in the English language.



Miguel de Cervantes (September 29, 1547) – "The pen is the tongue of the mind."

Although he wrote many short stories, plays, and poems, Cervantes is best known for his magnum opus, "Don Quixote".

Truman Capote (September 30, 1924) – "To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the music the words make."

This prolific author penned many works, including "In Cold Blood" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's."