

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Thus begins 2015. According to Plato: "The beginning is the most important part of the work." That being true, we decided to let our SLR readers start us on what we hope to be an exciting literary journey through the year.

For the first issue of 2015, we bring you the winners of the Third SLR Writing Competition on the theme of "Beginnings". You will find a wide interpretation of the theme, reflecting our resolution to continue to publish a variety of literary opinions, ideas and expositions.

Entries have been edited for formatting and grammatical purposes. The panel of judges credited them for their originality, command of language, expression of thought and new perspectives.

Wishing everyone a prolific and happy new year!

MUNIZE MANZUR



WINNER (SHORT STORY)

## RUNNER-UP (SHORT STORY)

# A New Dawn

Marzia Rahman

Two tiny sparrows fight over a piece of grain. A line of ants move briskly, meaning business. A grey pan; broken, forsaken. In Pongu Hospital, Rubina watches through the window. As scraps of sunlight fall on her face, it brings back a memory.

After three days, when such a light came through a tunnel, she thought it a divine one. Had the angel of Death, Jibrail arrived? Why did he bring other angels? But they looked like humans in uniforms. They were shouting: "Alive! Alive!" "Ambulance! Oxygen!"

She heard all but comprehended nothing. How could she? She was in a semi-conscious state when they rescued her from the collapsed Rana Plaza factory. She thought the army personnel of the rescue team were angels.

It brings a smile to her face now. That surprises her. Is she laughing?

"How are you today?" Nurse Bela asks giving her medicine, "Have you had a good sleep?"

She thinks of her nightmares:

They were in the factory, working. A terrible, crushing sound. Something hit her on the head. Everything went blank. When she came to, it was a different scene. She was alone with dead colleagues, wounded friends, fear, agony.

Every night it is the same nightmare. Every night she wakes up, screaming. She feels still trapped there. It takes a while to realize where she is.

Ma scolds her, "So ungrateful! You should thank God." "Should I? Exactly why should I be thankful?"

She makes a mental chart like those advertisements which feature a woman's figure before and after using a product:

BEFORE	AFTER
A garment worker	Unemployed
Wage earner - but not enough	Crippled. Earning zero.
Poor	Poorer
Dreams	Nightmares

"Crying again?" Ma sits beside her and wipes her tears. "Have some patience! God doesn't like ungrateful creatures."

Rubina looks at her mother and smiles. Ma smiles too. Though both of them know it's fake. They pretend to be pleased. They have nothing in this life; they can't risk annoying God, thereby losing a chance at the next world - that which holds the illusion of Paradise.

"This is your destiny. We can't change it. Think of the others. They are dead. You are alive."

"What do I do with this life?"

"If you talk like this, I won't come again. Have you ever thought if anything happened to you..." Ma stops abruptly and cries.

Rubina feels sorry. They make peace.

"Once I get the wheelchair, I'll buy you a sewing machine. You are so good at it. We'll fight together like we did before, back when your father died, when your brothers left." Ma says with considerable enthusiasm. "Let's start afresh! Can't we?"

"Yes...we can try."

Rubina smiles. Ma smiles too. This time they feel real. Ma leaves.

Rubina looks outside. The morning light glitters with hope. Aren't all creatures - humans to tiny insects - struggling for a better life? Why can't she? For her mother's sake, she needs to try. A new beginning, a new dawn has to emerge.



# HOW IT ALL CAME TO BE

Lori Simpson

I began life here, in the middle of strangers, staring at me with their hungry voyeuristic eyes; in the middle of a humid, sweat-the-DNA-out-of-your-body kind of day back in June '96'. I was wearing a red Lehenga, a pearl choker and matching earrings (given to me by my sister-in-law who I had met just two weeks before); standing outside of Dhaka airport following my husband's instructions of giving "Salaam to anyone I meet". I was waiting to meet the rest of his family.

Dhaka airport was much more chaotic back then. People pushed and smashed up against glass windows and iron gates, looking, waiting for their loved ones. The

sound of shrill whistles cut the air followed by shouts of airport guards as they chased laughing beggars with their batons. Police walked past with guns bouncing up and down on their backs. And I must admit...I was terrified.

It was the beginning of many firsts for me. In that first month I saw three men urinating in public. A thief was caught stealing from our house, beaten and kicked by the public while the police stood and watched. My first close encounter with poverty, which left me crying almost every time we went out.

By the time the year ended, I had experienced my first ride on a massive air-

plane, my only move to the other side of the world, and my first time in a foreign country. The one and only time I had been away from my parents for more than two weeks in my twenty years of living. It was also the first time that I was the minority and considered a 'foreigner'. It was the first time I realized that I was a tiny speck in the universe and how big the world was. While I was asleep in Dhaka, lives were being led in other parts of the world.

I experienced the uncomfortable feeling of being stared at; the spice of chicken tikka; the sting of people commenting on my weight like we were talking about the

weather; the joy of being welcomed into people's homes and their delight when I spoke a few words of their language; and the shame of realizing that I never felt that same joy when someone spoke in English.

I look back at the eighteen years that have passed since that hot and humid day way back in June. I am so humbled and blown away by the love I have received from Dhaka, Bangladesh. I look back at where I began as an outsider, and at where I stand today as someone who feels like a local, someone native to Bangladesh. I can't help but feel ever so grateful for that opening chapter of my life. My beginning.

## RUNNER-UP (SHORT STORY)

# Autobiography of a Tea Cup

Nargis Sultana

the order of Mr Patwary, owner of 'New Moon Crockery'.

After that, we were brought to this shop, situated on a busy road. Mr Patwary's savings is entirely invested in this shop. This makes him a fighter. Rather than throw me away, he tries to catch the attention of customers by displaying our beautiful design and keeping me obscured from view. He has put us in a suitable place where people can see the set easily. We all await a better future.

It upsets me that people come near our tea set seeing the beautiful design but their interest dies down as soon as they notice me with the other five cups. Today however, I feel optimistic. This new boy can be my saviour. He is too young to handle fragile things. I am bound to be broken into pieces very soon.



## WINNER (POETRY)

# Sundarban Dreaming

Samia Tamrin Ahmed

A late afternoon, with sweet sunlight  
Staring at the peaceful sky, transfixed.  
We sit on the deck  
Sipping our cups of tea;  
At some point we stop talking,  
Ending the laughter and gossip.  
The sensation of silence  
Engulf our minds.  
In the light of a soundless moment  
We weave dreams,

The boat resting in the heart of the stream;  
Perhaps it is also lost deep  
In its own thoughts.  
The water shimmers with a new look,  
Golden light on it.  
On two sides are dark forests.  
In the midst of such deep green  
Winter flowers are lost in their dreams  
Following the sweet call of bees.  
A little far off, between the bushes

Deer scamper along  
Chasing new thoughts  
Eyes full of wonder.  
Flying around, on red wings  
Birds spot the tranquil sky.  
Embracing our vision  
Dreaming of life's new calculations,  
Striving to widen our consciousness.  
At the end of the peaceful afternoon,  
In the show of light and shadow  
All dreams come together  
In the form of a kite,  
Flying up towards a peaceful sky.

## RUNNER-UP (POETRY)

# Life and Beyond

Abu Tarek Md Tahsin

It begins with your first cry.  
It is the solitude of spring.  
It is like the first of a monsoon rain  
After the drought of summer.

It is in the wails of a mother.

And the heartbreak for a Beloved.  
It begins with life  
And lives as memories after one is gone.

It is what we call love.  
Beginnings,  
Without an end.

## RUNNER-UP (POETRY)

# Dawn

Mohammad Shafiqul Islam

The sun rises, reddening the blue sky  
Shining on millions of faces singed in hunger.

Bringing smiles to the starved as they  
Go to fields and factories to earn, to douse

A burning in the stomachs of children and  
Live the next day. They don't demand any

Skyscrapers, only a little sunshine, an azure  
Sky that has been overcast for so long;

Controlled by evils. Rickshaw-pullers are  
Happy going out early, day laborers smile

At the bright day imbued with promises, for,  
No work now means to starve the full day.

Urban crows, stray dogs, and slum dwellers  
Looking emaciated, wearing grimy clothes

Wander with eyes so red, sleepless night  
After night, in search of food among trash.

Officers, businessmen, politicians haughtily  
Talk of their happiness over steaming coffee;

Hour after hour, showing off their property  
Compiled at the expense of sweat and blood

Of workers and peasants. How can the poets  
Write immortal lines at dawn when the birds

Sing soft notes as if the nightingale soothes  
The weary travelers? Yet they start the day

Writing poetry inspired by dreams; to inhabit  
The world of humans; and I begin at the end.