

IL PENSEROSO

Kazi Abu Bakar Siddique

The day begins long before you decide to welcome it, grace it with your selfish toast, and face it from your dire straits. You wake up subconscious, dreaming of a miracle that could always come true but never did because some of the guiding stars wouldn't coincide and work it your way. You move out early, head to work, promising you'd bear it just one more day, and then you'd be home forever. On your way, you smile at the minions and at the minnows; you smile at agreeable faces and read the expressions as a sign of hope. You think you look fashionable, you look your best with your debonair gesture, you remind yourself of many a thousand innocent remarks that you ignored as a kid simply because you're polite.

The newly paved roads look more pallid than the candid half-dead trees that line along a fluttering horizon you always decide to glance at on your way home. The traffic lights blur your visions; hurt your motives but you can stare right through their significance, still unhurt by their heartless guidance. You pause! You walk instead of waiting! You walk along the never-ending building blocks again, feeling dizzy that you can't hide. Your spirits almost give up when a friendly-looking sexagenarian steps forward and shows you the way, your way.

You forget your previous night's silent prayer, open your eyes and enter into the world of others. You think you could change the world but they won't trust you. So, you toil on a joint venture and imagine your share tiptoe. You win, you ignore! Others win, you clap! Others celebrate, you follow! The jingle gets louder and louder as the camera zooms in on you. You can't hide your tears! You cry and feed on your mortal shames before sanity makes you a humble priest of necessity. Necessity! There's no escape! So, you hang on. Time flies. You stay quiet.

Your midday is a miracle! Dazed and confused you look through the glass wall, at many a thousand coarse structures rising above primal instincts, forgotten lakes and dying emotions. You stare at the skyline long enough to make it disappear, which it doesn't; rather it becomes blurry and sink beneath a purple white hazy surface. You pretend to enjoy the effect no matter how long it lasts. Your friends say you imagine too much but you think they are funny, exposed on the other side of the surface.

As you head out homeward, the rolling mists join forces with the drifting clouds. Without thunder and fury rain starts pouring. Suddenly your fatigue gives in to fear, an unexplainable anxiety, which haunts you day and night. Your conviction shakes, yet you do not flinch. You walk out and get drenched but hardly feel the rain. You notice somebody's staring at you but you don't stop. You start humming songs in indistinguishable tunes but that doesn't help, doesn't make you forget your dreams. By the time you cross the third block, the pouring recedes into drizzling, with a refreshing sun peeping through a few wanton patches of clouds. You feel happy!

Soon your gratitude increases in magnitude as you notice a playful rainbow forming over the crimson and turquoise mosaic on the northern sky. It's beautiful and you wish if you could gaze at its reflection on somebody's eyes. It freezes more, flashes less, as you find the concept of beauty puzzling and the essence, exhausting. It shimmers and shines as you stand for a while bathed in whitewashed flashbacks and ocean blue reminiscences of some distant moments, buried in the past forever.

Silence is a drifter and you have tamed it well. Owner of a lonely heart,

you know how to look at lights, the dim reflections they decorate darkness with. You shine against the signs and symbols people create to signify glory, signify fame. But you need no fame, no glory, because they mean nothing to you; you mystify limelight the way you choose. You know signs are like fancy perfumes that people wear alongside

swallowing whatever comes your way. You're supposed to be on a diet but you never quite remember that. You're open to sizzling delicacies and to left over delights, from high class social faces to unknown pretty faces, dead or alive.

The parasites on your narrow balcony or those freaky cats on the hot tin roofs cannot tolerate your sights,

you to know that down deep you are a miserable liar, you are prone to be a brute than a blessed being, you are dead to be living in this hell they call heaven.

Your conversations with 'friends' end unexpectedly. The special person you draw all your inspiration from doesn't care to answer your call. You feel angry! You feel sad. You grew up around an asylum, being derided by maniacs who thought the time itself would change to the good. But you know it never has changed nor will be! Today is just a prolonged shadow of yesterday, while tomorrow barely keeps any promise. You want to forget that 'freedom is a choice; happiness, a decision', but cannot keep these ideas out of your mind. Every day is exactly the same.

You're a living contradiction! You're dreamer of no big dreams yet count your days with misery, unable to accept your less than ordinary existence. Your brain conceives love as a piece of art but your heart feels it's a necessity. Lunar calendar has no meaning to you, still you cocoon around your window to bathe in your share of moonlight in the wee hours of the night. Your silent epiphanies wander around the darkest neighborhoods while you stare at a mute Beethoven leaning against his piano.

After several failed attempts to translate *Autumn Sonata*, you give up; you decide to retire to bed, thinking there's nothing you can do to change your tedious fate or misnomer. You wish some nameless angels would come and sing you a lullaby. As you close your eyes, the whole day shatters into pieces and disappears; you enter into a new world. A kaleidoscope of peaceful images floats around and you feel assured that you're free at last.

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Typewriter Olivetti Studio 42 designed by the Bauhaus-alumnus Alexander Schawinsky in 1936.

those white blindfolds to overlook honest hallucinations and subconscious tears.

Soon you're home! Home is where you hide your impulses and frozen flames. Home is where you perform all your sacred ceremonies. Home is where your hungry soul relishes on

your homemade lemonade turns tart because somebody just does not like you taste it. No, just a plain 'No' is all that somebody needs to break your heart, burn you beyond an old pyre's alter. You laugh! But your half-audible laughter is a bitter cry because you know it doesn't help, It doesn't help

THE WOMAN

S M Shahrulk



Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange, Yellow on White and Red), Mark Rothko, 1949, Oil on canvas.

They were sitting on the waiting area outside the doctor's chamber. She was heavily pregnant; probably on the verge. The woman with the baby bump was twenty nine, carrying her first child; rather late, some would say, for a first baby. She was accompanied by her mother-in-law. The older woman looked displeased; she was guarding her future grandchild but not her daughter-in-law. The husband of the woman with the baby bump wasn't there.

"What's your serial number!?" hollered the mother-in-law. "It's thirteen," replied the woman with the baby bump, indifferently.

She was having a difficult pregnancy; it had forced her to take a maternity leave without pay at the end of the first trimester. The doctor told her to take rest; she didn't like it but she had no choice. Her husband could not get off work on time and had told his mother to be the chaperon. The woman with the baby bump didn't like it at all. Why her husband couldn't make time she wondered, and felt enraged at his "insouciance".

She was an attractive woman who was on the dusky side; mothers would be disappointed with her looks; a keen eye would, however, discern the beauty in those sad eyes and that high ridged

nose.

A junior teacher at her department at the university became enamoured with her; she was twenty and the teacher was in his mid twenties. It didn't take long for the affair to take off, and their feelings for each other reached fever pitch. Their happiness was for all to see; their love for each other reached dizzying heights. A fall became inevitable.

He went abroad for doctoral research and she carried on with her studies. That was not the fall. She finished her graduation and his research was progressing satisfactorily. Their e-mails became infrequent but did not stop; not a massive fall either. He then called one day late at night and told her that he had fallen in love with another research student and had decided to marry her. Just like that. He apologized profusely; he needed greater intellectual stimulation from a relationship he had told her, with no attempt at solicitation on her part. She sat down with her cell phone dropping by her side and said to no one in particular, "Okay". That was it.

"What's your serial number!?" hollered the mother-in-law. "It's thirteen, I think," replied the woman with the baby bump, now lost in reverie.

She spent a whole day and a whole

night without food without sleep and without letting a tear drop.

Her parents and friends came to know her "spurned at love" status and commiserated. They were ready to console an inconsolable young woman of twenty four. But they found her in a jolly mood; ready to launch into the rest of her life. She dumped her master's course and got an advanced degree in business administration and got herself a good job; she had always been bright. The woman with the baby bump met the father of her as yet unborn baby there.

"What's your serial number!?" hollered the mother-in-law. "Well, I am not sure," replied the woman with the baby bump, still lost in reverie.

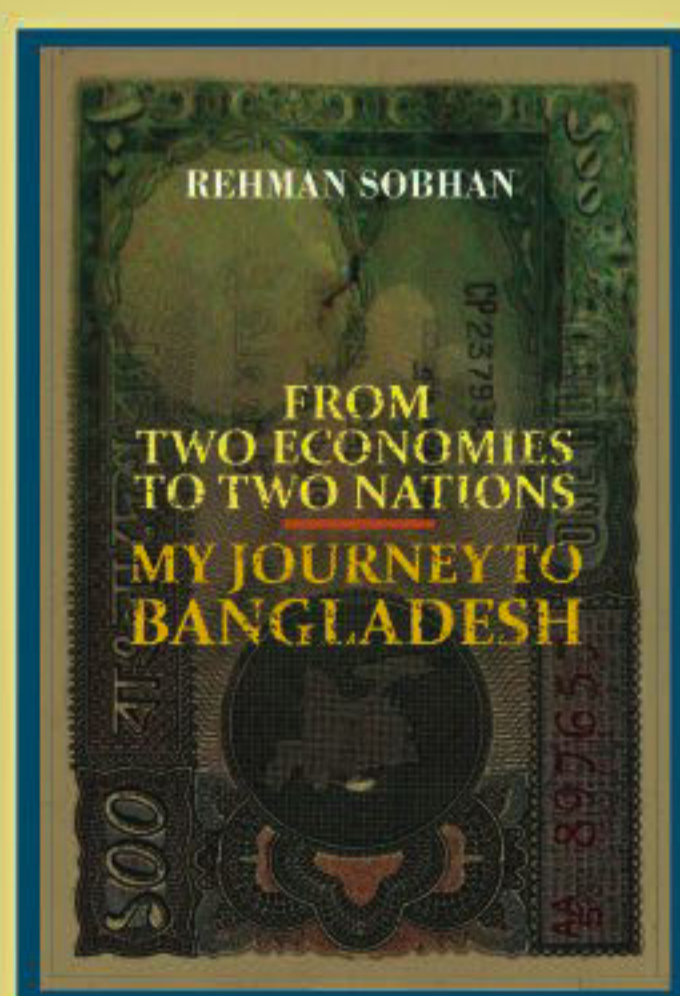
The woman with the baby bump held an entry level post under her future husband. He was very ingratiating towards her from the very beginning. She didn't pay much heed. He started dropping a poem or two in her virtual inbox and then one day she found a 'real rose' in her 'real' inbox. She felt flattered. He wasn't half bad, she thought and gave him an inch; he took a mile! She started receiving gifts, phone calls at all hours, a 'mixed' CD on her desk and finally an invitation to dinner. He wasn't as philosophically inclined as her ex-boyfriend but

he wasn't 'half bad'. She agreed to meet him for dinner one night and several such nights followed. He also got her a job at a different establishment, a better position, to avoid any impropriety within the office. She was not swept but felt good to be 'loved' and be an object of a man's desires; she decided to make the final leap. They slept together, she was not a virgin but he was, she learnt to her surprise. A thirty-year-old virgin? But he wasn't 'half bad'.

He was very loving towards her mother but who isn't? She realized the follies of her ways after taking the final leap.

The house she shared with her husband was ruled by his mother. He stopped the poetry and the love songs and jumped straight into the mundane. He was unable to satisfy her intellectually; the bed was only an escape unto pleasure for a whole of ten minutes. After the sex act, he slept with his eyes firmly shut and she lay awake in regret. A person on the rebound is the most vulnerable creature, she often thought.

"What's your serial number!?" hollered the mother-in-law. "Why don't you ask your son?" screamed the woman with the baby bump, now sinking fast in the toxic marshy bog of regret.



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