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# BACK IN HER ARMS

SHREYOSI ENDOW

Cocooned in the soothing darkness was a lantern. Its light, mellow and yellowish, was just enough to illuminate the surroundings. Flashes of lost memories clouded Ani's vision once again: he had seen these surroundings in this light before. But he could not put his finger on the exact memory among the thousands that flooded his mind. Ani shook his head. The memories faded only for a moment.

The air bore a chill that was neither numbing nor uncomfortable, but was rather like cold water on a scorching summer's day. It bore with it the scent of sheuli, and to Ani, it seemed so familiar as if the scent had been stuck in his nostrils all these times, waiting to be invigorated again on a starry night like this. The trees whispered of lost times in the breeze that blew past him; little ripples formed on the pond ahead. The

lantern swung on the branch on which it was fixed, and its tiny light flickered.

Ani's head spun at light speed. His insides revolted and he dropped to the ground, clutching his stomach, and gagged him on the remains of a night gone wrong. His windpipe seemed to close, leaving him gasping for air and wishing he hadn't listened to the fools he had as friends. He had thought that after forty years of living abroad, he would get used to it. But he was wrong. Terribly wrong.

He lay on his back on the cold gravel and looked up. The huge canopy of an old oak met his eyes. But that was not all. Right there, on a high branch, he could make out the silhouettes of tiny, plump figures. As he squinted harder, he could see a boy of about four years of age in an off-white shirt and shorts. Leaning against him was a girl of about the same age in a dirty yellow frock with two thin braids hanging loosely over her shoulders. And

next to her was him. His own reflection, but much younger, stared down at him with a cheeky smile plastered all across his round face. As the trio chuckled at the mess that lay on the street, the truth poked Ani right in the eye, and his breathing turned into gasps again.

Could it really be? After all these years of yearning, was this how he would come across her again; on his way to some unknown place in a state that he would well regret the next morning? He had felt her inside his veins, he had treasured the scent her air bore and had captured in his mind the beauty she metamorphosed into the mellow light of the lantern every night after a tiring day. And now that he was here, he could not believe it.

Ani turned to his side and pressed his ear against the cold pitch. The drunken slur of his friends pierced through the veil of silence that had fallen over the surroundings, but he closed his eyes and focused. He could hear his mother's voice

calling him, the chuckles of his friends, the shrilly cries of the vendors at dawn, the much anticipated screech of the brakes of the truck that would bring his father home every day. And then it all stopped. With batted breath, Ani waited. He pressed his eyes shut even tightly so that tears rolled down them to the street and then he heard.

*"Barir kache aarshi nogor  
Shetha porshi boshoth kore  
Ami ekdin o na dekhilam taare..."*

The mystic voice of *Haridas Baul* who would sit on the street overlooking his house every night and sing songs of Lalon to which Ani would drift to sleep.

Ani whimpered like a child, his face distorted and wet with tears. As a friend staggered up to check on him, Ani slowly whispered, 'I'm in love again.'