

## BLUE AFTERNOON

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

CONCLUDING PART

Sarah has not seen Naeema since then. She had heard from her other sons that Naeema is teaching in a school and staying with her mother. Sarah has tried to recover from the loss and is now finding it easy to talk about it and one day plans to visit Azim's grave. She hopes to see Naeema and ask for her forgiveness in case she considers Sarah responsible for Azim's death. She has said many times to her sons, and nieces and nephews, "A mother's annoyance is never turned into a curse because Allah understands we love our children."

Sakina wakes up and tiptoes to Sarah's bed to check if she is awake. That is only a precaution since she knows that Sarah often spends hours with her eyes open and staring at the ceiling. She understands that her mind is full of memories, some good, some not, and she needs time to sort them out. Sakina learned these lessons of life from her mother and from the experiences she has gained working with other women since she was a child.

"Amma, do you want your breakfast now?"  
"No Sakina, First I need to have my Thankuni Pata juice. Why do you forget?"  
"Amma, I did not forget. But, I thought you might want to try some breakfast first and then have the juice."

"Oh, Sakina, you are joking with me. When did I ever break my routine? You know if I don't have the juice in the morning, nobody can make me take it later. Have you ever tried the juice yourself?"

"Amma, what are you saying!"  
Sarah takes the extract from Thankuni Pata each morning as an antidote for her diabetes which was diagnosed since she was in her thirties. Ten years ago, Sufir Maa, who worked for her as a casual help, suggested this herbal juice to keep diabetes under control. Sarah's sons were indignant when they heard about taking the leaves of a weed which is reputed to have been used for ages. She checked out with Rumi, Iqbal's niece and a doctor, who confirmed the medicinal effects of this leaf



and had seen some results on a few of her patients. However, since the paste had a bitter taste, Sarah found it more palatable when it was made into a juice and drank the liquid with lime and salt.

While this leaf is sold at the nearby market at Shukrabad, about a year ago Sakina found that it grew in the wild in a swamp behind their house. She gingerly suggested that if Amma, as she called Sarah, was willing to consider it, she would get them for free and they could try it. Initially, Sarah was reluctant to consider the consumption of wild herbs grown in a local swamp which could be quite polluted, but, Sakina was able to persuade her to give it a shot. Sarah also saw the advantage

of saving money if the leaves could be procured for free.

After taking the medication and breakfast, Sarah calls her sister-in-law Sebia to find out if she is coming to the city today. Her only brother Mukta, who is five years older, lives in Gulshan with his family, but they seldom venture out to the Dhanmandi area unless they have to, since the traffic near Mohakhali and Farm Gate have become a major headache and turned into a roadblock for all except for the hardiest souls. Sarah wants to talk to Sebia about going to see Naeema. They discussed the matter many months ago, but then never followed up on the idea since Imran and Salek were against it. They go to

visit their brother's widow on Eid and other occasions but have vetoed any plan for Sarah to visit Naeema, insisting that she should be the party to make the first move towards reconciliation.

"Bhabi, any plans to come to the city this week?"

"Sarahbu, we might come to see you soon. How have you feeling lately?"

"Well, I feel fine. I have a doctor's appointment next week for my liver. Salek asked me to see the doctor every two months before he left. I wanted to see if you had given any more thought to our plan to visit Naeema?"

"Yes, I have. Your bhai thinks it might be a good idea as long as Imran and Salek don't oppose it."

"Well, Salek is no longer here, and Imran and his wife go to visit Naeema frequently. Another factor is that if I fall sick and can never visit her, it will be a major regret for me. I will not be able to rest in peace knowing I did not try to reconcile with her. I also need to let her know that I forgave her for anything she said in the heat of any argument."

"Ok, let me call Naeema and see if she is available next week."

Sebia called a few days later to announce that Naeema was favourably inclined to a visit from Sarah. Sarah decides not to bring up the forthcoming visit with Imran. She understands the sentimentality that the news might bring up, but if he finds out after the visit, it is likely that he might have an easier time to deal with a fait accompli. Plus, while she values their opinion, they probably don't see the matter with the same urgency that she does.

Two days later, Sebia called to let Sarah know that the car is available for their planned trip to visit Naeema. Sebia had called Naeema the day before to arrange a visit on a Friday afternoon. Naeema lives with her mother in a first floor apartment. Sebia exchanged some pleasantries and Sarah watched and listened in silence. Naeema finally spoke to her,

"Amma, I have something to give you that I

have saved for all these years. It is a letter that Azim wrote the day before he died, but I did not mail it since I thought I'd give it to you in person. I held on to it because it was the only piece of his handwriting that I have."

"Naeema, I came to see you and to tell you how much you and Azim meant to me. I might have said some hurtful words, and even sounded a little uncaring and harsh. Hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me."

Naeema was tearful, and said,  
"Amma, I am the one who should be asking for your forgiveness. And if Azim said a few bad things, I ask for your forgiveness on his behalf."

"A mother can never hold any grudge against her own child. Azim was my eldest son, and I never even for a second was cross with him. I have asked for Allah's forgiveness if I ever harboured any grievance against my sons.

Soon, they had left and once she reached home Sarah opened the letter.

"Dear Amma,  
I haven't written to you in six months. I was settling down in my new house which is located in a suburb of Gaborone and am also trying for Naeema's visa. We miss you all and will call you next month after I get my telephone connection. Please feel free to throw away any items that I might have left behind in my room. After all, we become too attached to our worldly possessions and try to protect them with all our might. I hope you can also leave the door to my room unlocked and do not worry about anything that the servants might take. After all, if they were important, we would have brought them with us to Gaborone when we moved here.  
Please give my love to Imran and Salek.  
Yours affectionately,  
Azim"

## Then Again Love

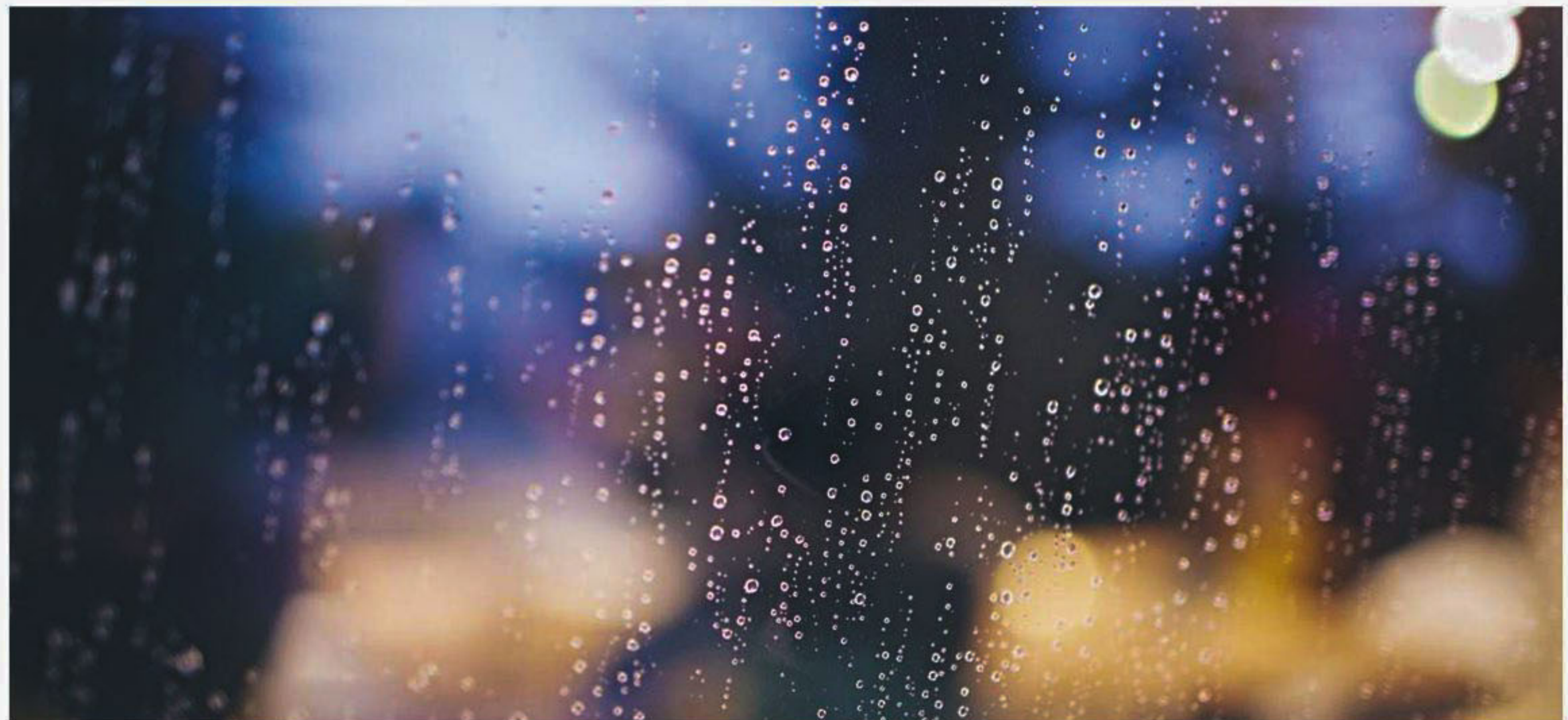
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Wild darkness of rain  
Primeval beauty  
Ferocious  
Night lingers  
The brown earth  
Locked in her arms

Passion unleashes its fierceness  
Ecstasy thunders across heavens  
Their free spirit  
Seek the ends of love's affluence

And then  
Ever so gently  
With grace  
Earth frees  
Tempests' Cimmerian rage  
Holding the rivulets full to its brim  
Leaving behind pristine green

It is a night like no other...



## In this misty field one day

JIBANANANDA DAS

Translated from the Bengali:  
SM SHAHRUKH

Nobody will find me walking in this misty field one day, I know;  
The journey of the mind ends that day- the edge now blunt, deathly cold.  
Solace will take time to come- this field here on earth  
Will take some time to forget,  
I'll keep looking with awe and wonderment at the shaliks for a while  
Lying in the bed of dark death,  
Do the golden winged kites keep coming from a distant land  
Floating with the mist of the field? Floating to barren sacred fig even today  
When the evening turns golden?  
The eyes of the field mouse in the soft paddy sheaf still looks to the heavens  
When evening comes?  
Do beehives still hang from a jambul tree's dense bough?  
Do the honey-satiated bees soar in the breeze of a misty evening?  
How far? Oh....  
Maybe someone will burn chalta leaves under the hive,  
Leaves that have fallen from the tree.  
The bees leave the hive....succumb to the ground... lie dead on the grass.



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