

Iqbal and Atiya Begum

ZAFAR ANJUM

CONCLUDING PART

Arnold invites her to Cambridge for a picnic. Again it is a gathering of scholars but this time the location is scenic. The picnic has been arranged under a tree by the banks of a river.

When the conversations ramble on in the spirit of relaxed picnicking, Arnold tries to give them some direction. He asks everyone to offer an opinion on life and death. This is a grave topic and when the arguments become hazy, Arnold turns to Iqbal to ask him his opinion on the topic. Iqbal has been silent until now, patiently listening to all the remarks being made. A cynical smile emerges on his face. 'Life is the beginning of death, and death the beginning of life,' he puts it coolly.

This suitably brings the discussion to an end. Another week passes by. On June 9, 1907, Iqbal and Atiya meet again at Arnold's place. Professor Arnold starts talking about a rare Arabic manuscript in Germany. It has been recently discovered and needs a scholar to decipher it. Instead of going to Germany himself, he opines that Iqbal go in his place. 'Iqbal, I am going to send you there and you are the right man for the job,' he says.

Iqbal tries to excuse himself from this assignment. 'I am only a novice, Sir,' he pleads. 'You are the expert for this job.'

'Don't worry, Iqbal,' Prof. Arnold says, 'In this case the student will surpass his teacher.'

Iqbal acquiesces but adopts a slightly cynical tone which is his trademark style. 'If this is your conclusion, Sir, I accept my teacher's idea, and obey his commands.'

The next day Iqbal goes to Atiya's place with some German and Arabic books on philosophy. This time a German professor accompanies him. He reads out from those books and starts a discussion with Atiya. He is referring to Hafiz as a point of reference, comparing his thoughts with those of European philosophers. Atiya is already aware of Iqbal's fascination with Hafiz from their first meeting. Now that Iqbal is arguing and comparing notes with others, Atiya is convinced that Iqbal believes in Hafiz more than any other Persian poet. He keeps on comparing the ideas and ideals of Hafiz with other philosophers. The discussion goes on for three hours. It is not a futile discussion but a method Iqbal adopts to sharpen his arguments. He acknowledges at one point that 'by reading and discussing in this manner my ideas expand and convictions become firm.'

On June 23, 1907, Iqbal is invited by Atiya for a party at her place. The guests include both Indian and English notables. Atiya's friends play some entertaining music which puts Iqbal in a good mood. He composes some extempore verses that are clever and witty 'referring to almost every important guest present by making exaggerated remarks about their peculiarities', sending the attendees into roars of laughter.

A few days later, a German woman named Miss Sholey invites Atiya to an Indian dinner on June 27. It is not everyday that you get to have an Indian dinner in London, Atiya thinks. She gladly accepts the offer. When she goes over to her place, she finds Iqbal present and discovers that he is staying at Sholey's and had requested her to invite Atiya.

Atiya enjoys the meal which has a 'real Indian touch and flavour'. Over dinner, Iqbal tells her that he can cook nearly any Indian

dish. Dinner with Atiya is not all Iqbal wants from her. He wants to go over his thesis with her. Atiya sees no problem in this and Iqbal reads out his thesis in its entirety. Very clearly, his thesis demonstrates

a vast and deep amount of research. After Iqbal finishes reading, he invites her to make comments on his work. Iqbal listens to her carefully and makes notes for improvement.

As soon as they are done with their discussion, some of Iqbal's friends walk in. A quick plan is chalked out and together they all march out to attend the annual party of the Imperial Institute. Iqbal is not very excited about attending this event but he accompanies his friends reluctantly. He does not want to be a spoil sport.

Some members of the British royal family are also in attendance at the Institute, however, Iqbal looks bored.

'What a delightful waste of time,' he keeps muttering throughout the evening.

'What?' Atiya quips, 'Not a very original observation!'

By the end of July 1907, news reaches Atiya through a student named Parmeshwar Lal that Iqbal's patriotic songs published in Makhzan have become so popular that they are being sung in the whole of northern India: 'houses, streets, alleys resounded with Iqbal's national songs, which created a feeling of nationalism unknown in India before.'

Barely two days have passed when Iqbal and Atiya bump into each other again. This time, the meeting happens at the house of Lady Elliotts, a society hostess. She has thrown a party, and frankly speaking, she does not expect Iqbal to be there. But he is in attendance and they both begin chatting.

While they are having a conversation, Miss Sarojini Das⁸ rushes in, 'dressed in the richest garments, outrageously bejewelled, and incongruously decked.' Atiya sizes her up, remembering 'this specimen of humanity' who had travelled with her to England and 'regarded herself as a paragon of all that is desirable'. Excited to see Iqbal, she ignores Atiya and everyone else and 'bubbling with copious sentiments' she takes Iqbal's hand. 'I only came to see you,' she gushes. 'This shock is so sudden that I shall be surprised if I am able to leave this room alive,' Iqbal replies.

This was original, Atiya thought.

By July 4, 1907, Iqbal tells Atiya that he has

finished writing the history of the world, a topic he undertook for his German examination.

When he reads out the manuscript to her, she makes some comments on a few historical facts. 'Each person has his own particular angle with which he approaches facts, and I see the history of the world in this particular light,' he says.

Atiya can hardly help but be impressed with Iqbal's depth of knowledge and his remarkable memory, both of which could be gauged from the facts he had collected for his work. Miss Sholey offers her a delicious Indian lunch again, prepared under Iqbal's guidance.

Seeing her interest in philosophy, Iqbal proposes that Atiya and he hold two-hour long reading sessions on the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth of July. Iqbal and Atiya, along with Prof. Herr Schaccent, who had completed his doctorate in Germany, read and discuss poetry and higher philosophy on the assigned dates.

During the discussions, Atiya observes that Iqbal had a very high regard for German knowledge. 'If you wish to increase your understanding in any branch of learning, German should be your goal,' he tells her.

Iqbal also reveals to her one of his key methods of knowledge gathering: 'By discussing with others, a new world opens, and it is with this method, that I acquired all that I know,' he declares to her.

The following day Iqbal presents her his original manuscript of *Political Economy* and also the thesis that secures him his degree.⁹

Iqbal leaves for Heidelberg in July 1907. He moves to Heidelberg to learn German for the oral examinations of his dissertation in Munich University.

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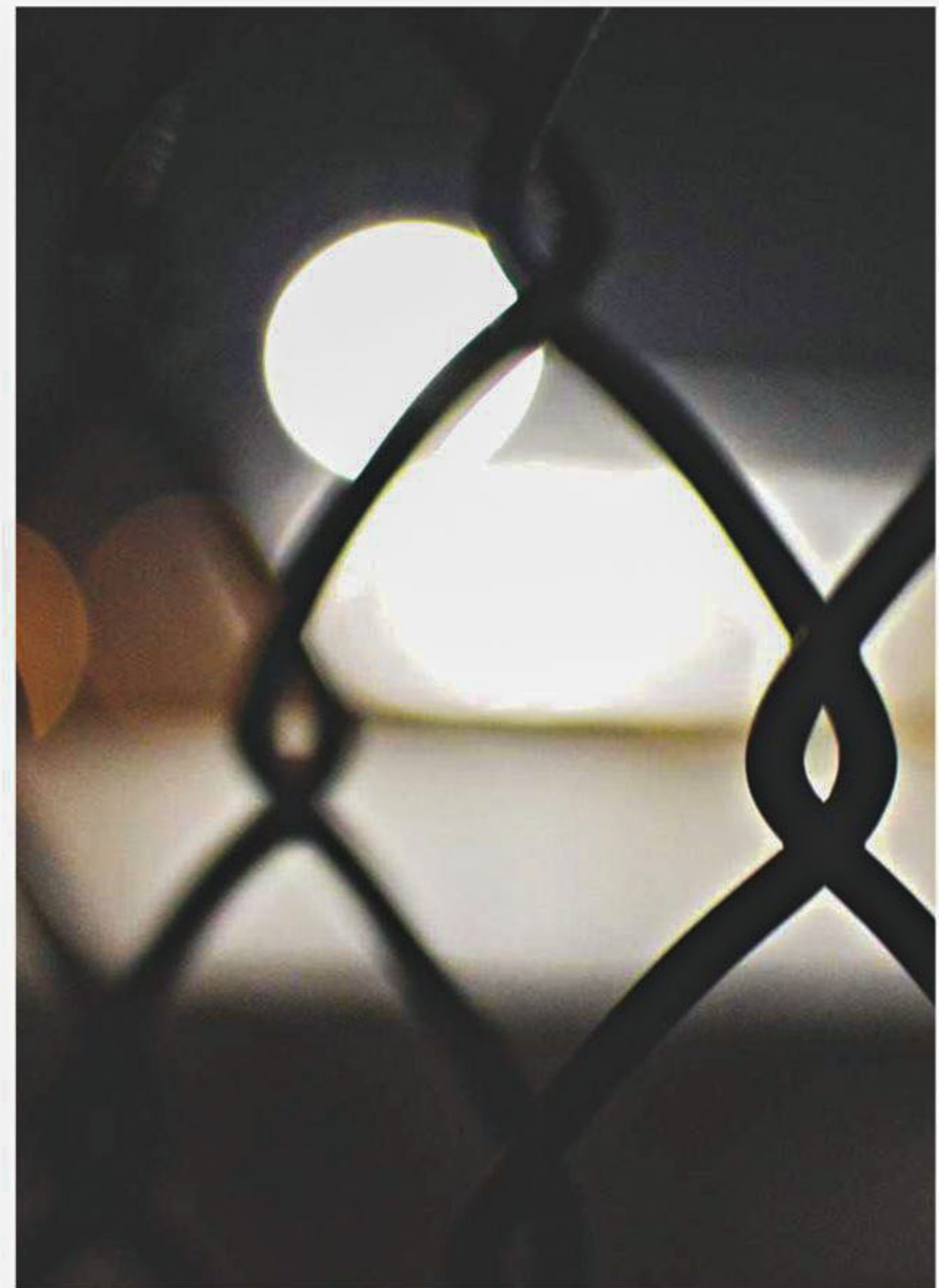
A delighted Atiya wants to share this good news with Iqbal but by now he is already in Germany.

On August 16, Atiya goes over to Wimbledon at the invitation of Prof. Arnold. She tells him that she is thinking of going back to India after wrapping up her work in London. Arnold pleads with her that she should spend a little time in Germany, especially Heidelberg, and that the experience there could broaden her intellectual horizons. She decides to visit Germany with her brother Dr Fyzee, who is conversant in German and is desirous of visiting Germany a second time.

When Iqbal comes to know of her visit to Heidelberg, he starts collecting books for her to read. He duly informs her about this in a letter on August 6, 1907. Atiya, in turn, messages Iqbal that she will be visiting him in Germany on August 19, because by then, her responsibilities in London would be over.

Muhammad Iqbal, one of India's first patriotic poets whom Sarojini Naidu called the 'Poet laureate of Asia', is a controversial figure in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

Zafar Anjum is an Indian-born writer and journalist. He lives and works in Singapore. Iqbal and Atiya Begum is a chapter his book *Iqbal: The Life Of A Poet, Philosopher And Politician* (Random House; India)



The Tale of a Slave

SHAFIQUE ALAM MEHDI

Translated from the Bengali: Helal Uddin Ahmed

It often happens nowadays
That I do not find my head
Spine, is now a distant memory!
A question crops up constantly, at birth
Was I a human child?
Or an animal akin to reptile
Bereft of head and spine,
Who are not touched by
Any other feeling except hunger?

As far as I remember
I was born a human
At one time the Himalayan peak
The steep height of the Kanchenjunga
The infinite sky and the bottomless sea
All these were within my reach
I was then a human!

Poverty, distress, hostile fate
Or the middle-class qualms
Could not make my parents deviate a
hair's breadth
From the firm resolve of making their
son a human
They sought for their son
Not the kingly pleasures of feet-licking
slave
They desired for him an open life
Of a worker, peasant or fisherman
Working from dawn to dusk
Oh my luckless parents
I could not materialize your twin-dream

Please forgive my failure.
I have learnt from experience
A man with vision concurrently exists
With a blind lifeless slave in humans
A courageous lion resides
Beside a helpless scared donkey
What we term as
Modern education high profession
Or affluent living
Gradually devour the
Inner being inside humans
In secret grows a slave
The lone and powerful
The lion loses to the donkey at one
stage
Due to incredibly peculiar rules
I am now a
Meticulous slave, a fine donkey
In simple words a successful bureaucrat!

Now I do not have any head
Nor any spine
Like the animals crawling on their trunk
I pass my days in corrosive sin
I do not live like a human!
Seeing me now
The birds turn away
The flowers fall
The rivers forget their root
Ah life
Only one life
You have slipped away from my grip!

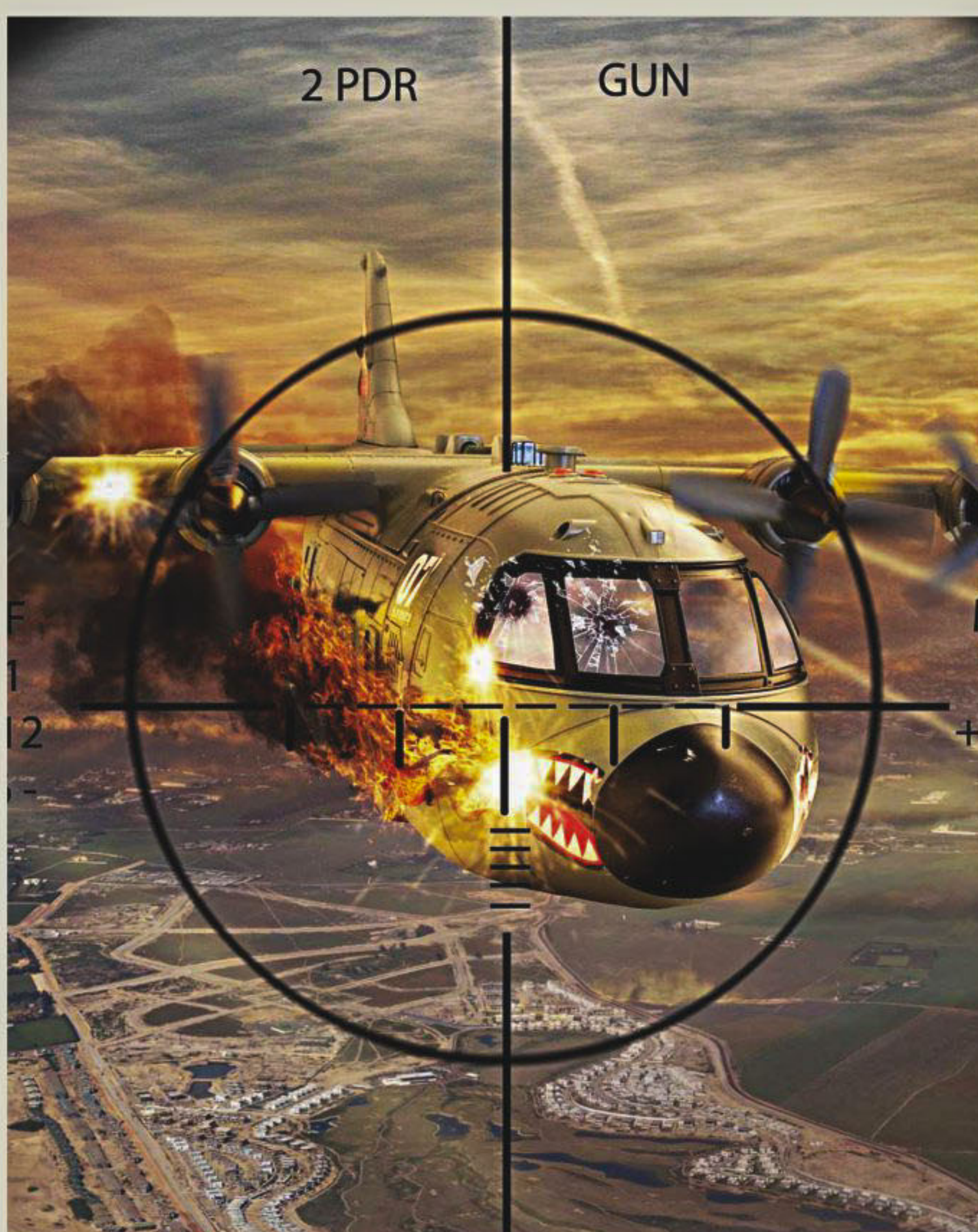
I Need to Believe

AINON N

In the name of justice
We shred the limbs of children
In the name of righteousness
We bury the house of beliefs
In the name of identity
We dismantle borders

We reason with hatred
To right the wrong
To wrong the right
Shattering humanity
Naming it compassion
Us, the intelligent species!
Yet, I need to believe

in Love
Care
Peace
To create a roadway to unshaken trust
Where I may find a small niche
To call it my own
Is it too much to ask?



“ব্যঙ্গ-সৃষ্টিতে অসাধারণ প্রতিভার প্রয়োজন। ... বন্ধু আবুল মনসুরের হাত-সাফাই দেখে বিস্মিত হলাম। ভার্যার কান মলে রস সৃষ্টির ক্ষমতা আবুল মনসুরের অসাধারণ। এ যেন পাকা গুস্তাদী হাত।”

-কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম



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চট্টগ্রাম: বাতিঘর (০১৭১৩০৩৪৪৪), প্রথমা (০১৭১১৬৪৯২২)