

## THE MAN

SM SHAHRUKH

It was midnight. The man was lying dead; his head had hit the edge of the sidewalk and then cracked open, the blood was slowly but surely making his head sink, gradually; a pool of red forming around his head. With the streets almost empty, the rickshaw he had been on was being ridden at a whirlwind speed and at a sudden turn he flew off and landed on the street; he had been dead drunk before he died. Four or five night owls gathered around the dead man; a streetwalker, the rickshaw-puller, a couple of nondescripts and a beat cop. The policeman, on searching the dead man's pockets, maybe for a quick fortune or motivated by a sense of duty, found a card on which was written, "I am an alcoholic. If you find this card please contact my wife at..."



Earlier in the evening, he was taking another rickshaw ride; he headed for the bar; it was a short distance from his apartment. Already tipsy from his daytime drinking, he was very abusive towards all and sundry. He cursed under his breath about the rough hand dealt him by life; he complained to the rickshaw-puller about the anger his wife had shown during the afternoon. The rickshaw-puller gave him a perplexed look now and then and was cursing his luck for being stuck with a drunk, as if the traffic jam were not bad enough. Pedestrians going past the rickshaw carrying him, looked at him with a mélange of emotions; anger, pity, empathy, righteous scorn, even envy. He screamed at a car that almost sideswiped his rickshaw; the people inside the car looked at him with befuddlement. On reaching the bar, he told the guard at the gate to get him a half bottle of whisky double quick; the guard grumbled but did the man's bidding without much ado; he knew the routine through and through. The already very drunk man paid the guard a handsome tip and was on his way home to continue his day (now night) of unending inebriation.

He woke up that morning feeling a slight tremor on his hands; he hadn't a drink in two days. "I'll have a few shots of whisky after office today", he told himself and felt better. He had a full breakfast of eggs and sausages and buttered toasts. He left for office, the bad traffic dampened his mood, the dull office rooms made him feel down in the dumps; he needed a lifter, he



ordered some coffee. The thought of a drink in the evening gave him the impetus to go on, the coffee helped too. He made a few phone calls, he talked to his manager, and he listened to all the problems with his business and by noon, was on his way to the bar. "Enough for one day" he thought.

He reached the bar after over an hour

of grappling with the maddening city traffic and ordered four shots of single malt. The shakes were gone after downing the first two shots and at the end of the fourth, he felt happy and relaxed. He ordered a chilled beer to keep the buzz going. He left the bar with a half bottle of whisky in a brown paper bag. He came home and kept

downing drink after drink till not a drop was left of the half bottle. The thought of having lunch never even occurred to him.

A little before midnight he got on a rickshaw and was headed for the bar to get a half bottle of whisky; he wanted to pass the night in a drunken 'bliss'. He never had any dinner either.

## LINES FROM EXILE

SHAHID QADRI

TRANSLATED BY MOHAMMAD SHAFIQUL ISLAM

See, such a beautiful sparrow is  
Chirping so poignantly today in American language at  
This overcast  
Endless noontime! O sparrow,  
In appearance you're just like the Bengali sparrows  
Does this pale, foreign language of the whites suit  
In your tongue, dear?

Rather come to me, I teach you  
O-A-Ka-Kha  
O sparrow: speak, speak Bengali.  
Bengali, I've found  
All its beauty

In the sound of river water, in the bicker of stream  
In the eyes of hilsha and trout, in the verses of Gitabitan  
And in the black hair wafting in the air of an ever familiar  
woman,  
•In her eyes and cheek.

O crow, the black crow! From where have you suddenly come  
To this racist country? You know well, this land doesn't respect  
The non-whites;

Then why here? Why in a foreign land?  
Go, if you can, fly to the land of Bengal  
Where your silky-smooth-black wings suit better.

No complaint at all if you go to Africa,  
Asia's sibling indeed – our brother  
But what you're doing at my cornice!  
What sort of awkward and ugly style? Why these cha-cha,  
Twist, hula-hoop dances?  
Don't you know Kathak or Kathakali dance?  
Then you're an American citizen? O crow, you too?  
But you completely look and sound like a Bengali  
As black as koi and catfish.

O clouds, the cumulus clouds! Will you also deceive,  
You, the traveler to the unknown?  
We can't trust anyone in this unfriendly foreign land.  
Still I say: if you can,  
O glorified clouds, come down

More dense and deep, you come down in a stream of compassion  
With the incessant downpour of Shravan month, my dear, beat  
This endless exile.

AT LAST,  
I CAME BACK

SYED ALI AHSAN

(1920–2002)

TRANSLATED FROM  
BENGALI: SOFIUL AZAM

At last, I came back.  
I'd walked through thick forests with no  
roads in there  
and down the longest circular path –  
the longest path with no footprints on it.

And here I'm telling stories –  
where was I,  
and why,  
and in which condition?  
When I turn back in the wind,  
a stir-up call echoes in my ears –  
the call of a deserted time  
when my world broke into dust  
and flamed up into an unquenchable fire;  
light scuttled far away from trees  
and there were many dead men afloat on  
rivers  
and lying down on woodlands –  
and a lot more of people were only walk-  
ing,  
ceaselessly walking on and on.

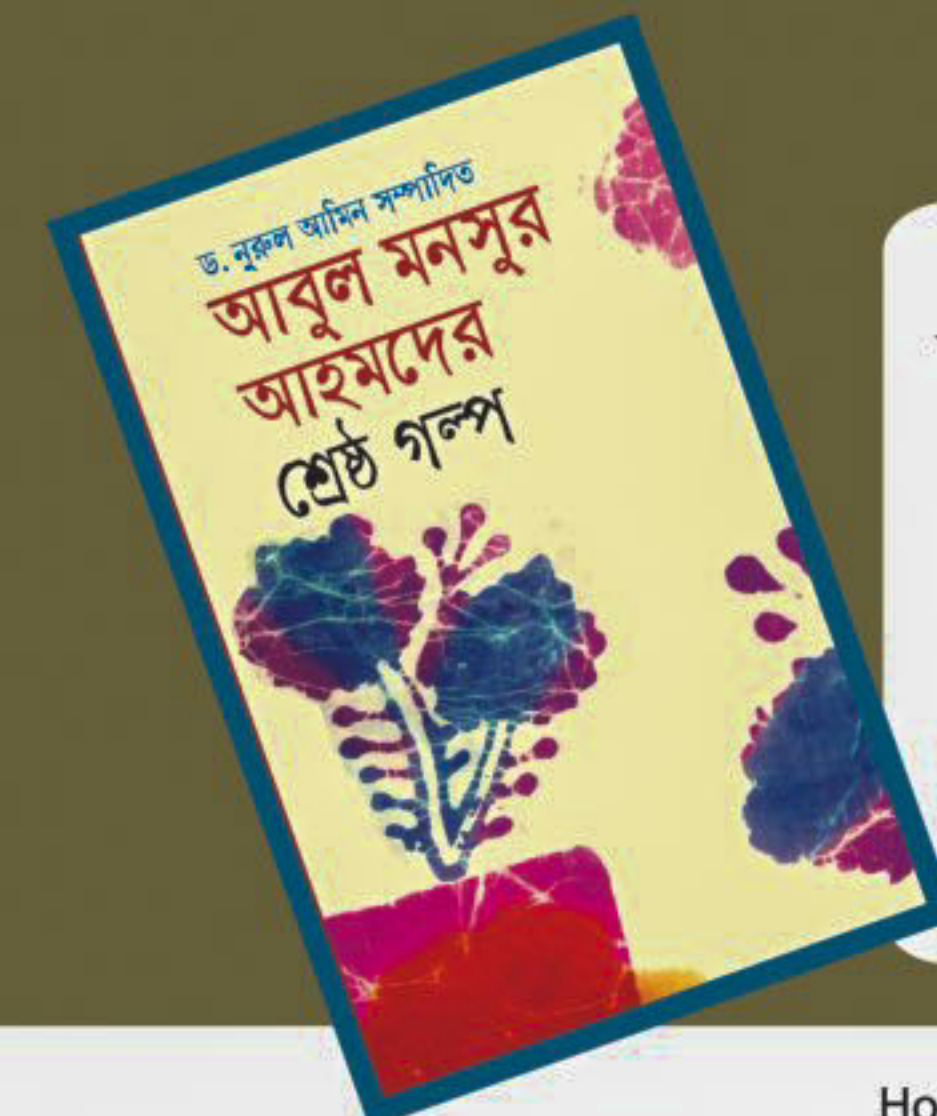
At last, I came back.  
I've got a new heart  
to keep inside it the soft trembling of life;  
here's no one around, though,  
neither you nor any other,  
but I do have everything for sure –  
diving deep into the depth of time,  
I've got my homeland.



Rembrandt van Rijn, The Return of the Prodigal Son, c. 1661–1669. 262 cm x 205 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

“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 (০১৭১৩৩০৪৩৪৪), প্রথমা (০১৭১১৬৪৯৪২২)