

EPHEMERAL LOVE

KHASHRUZZAMAN CHOUDHURY

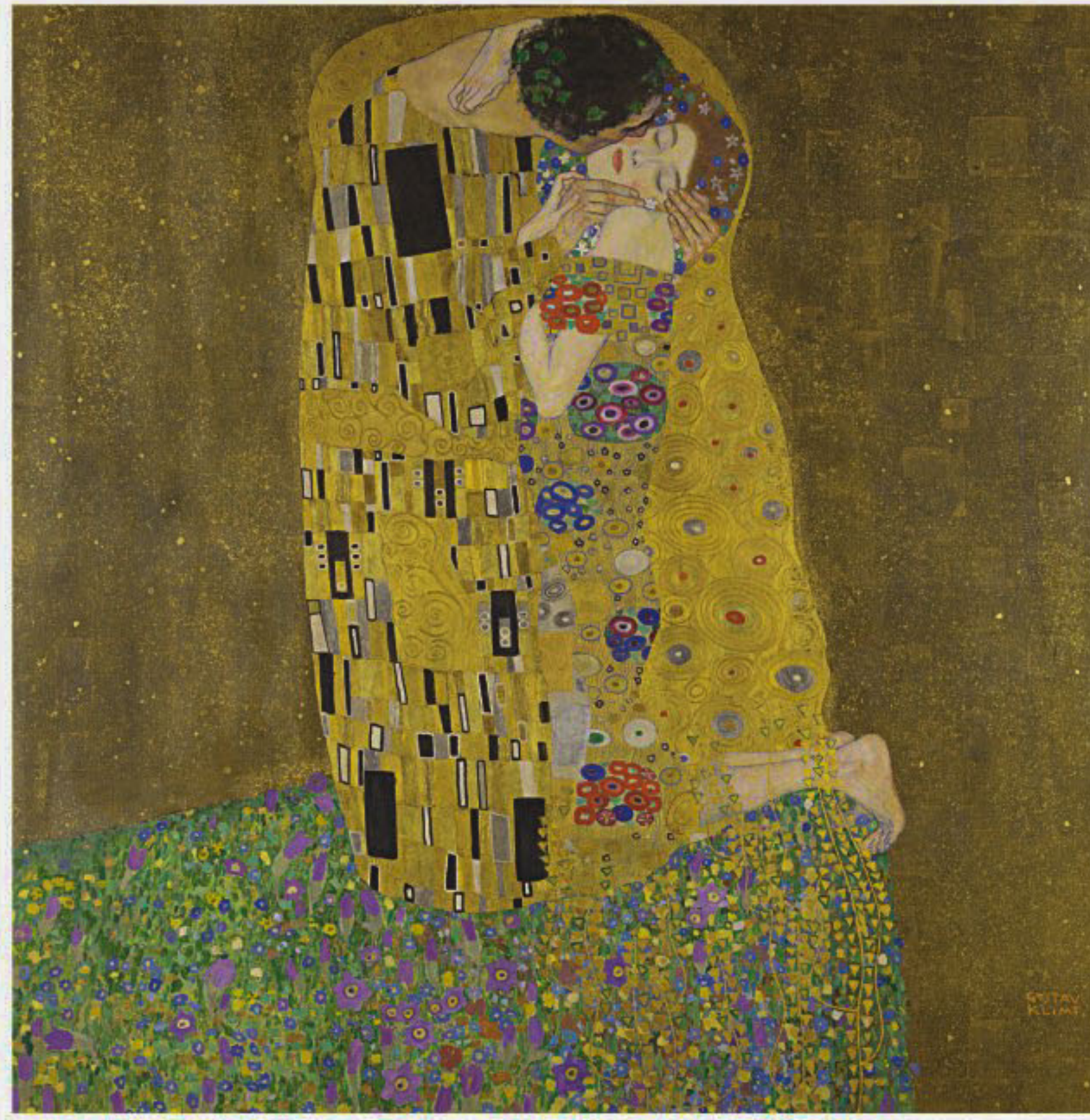
Translated from the Bengali: Ziauddin Muhammad Choudhury

The news took us all by great surprise. Some of us were shocked, and others were very upset. One friend Mahbub, who stammers when angry declared "I w-w-ould l-l-like to k-k-ill that s-s-on of a b—".

And what was the news that shook us all like that? The news was that Imtiaz, a good friend of ours' was getting married to Reena, a student from our former college. Now this was unthinkable. Unthinkable because we all knew that Khalil, a friend to all of us including Imtiaz had been dating Reena for a long time. It was well known that Reena and Khalil were in love, and would get married one day. Imtiaz knew that.

But we did not want to let go of Imtiaz so easily. After all he was poaching a girl who was kind of betrothed to another friend. How could he do that? Was there a dearth of girls in Dhaka that he had to go after Reena? There are plenty of fathers with girls of marriageable age who would be delighted to have Imtiaz as a son-in-law. He was good looking, from a good family, and had a good job. All he had to do is choose from any of those available brides. Why go after Reena?

Munir was the most level headed among us friends. He suggested that we go and persuade Imtiaz to give up on his plan to marry Reena. So we all went in a delegation to Imtiaz and asked him to rescind his decision. But it was to no avail. Imtiaz was adamant as a bull. His parents had already proposed to Reena's parents and they have all agreed on the match. This marriage will



The Kiss (Lovers) by Gustav Klimt, oil and gold leaf on canvas, 1907-1908. Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

happen. So we appealed to his conscience. "How can you marry Reena when you know she is in love with Khalil?" we asked. Imtiaz smiled and said he was not bothered at all. "This is transient love," he said. "Everything will be OK after I marry her," he added.

So the inevitable happened. Reena and Imtiaz were married in one fine evening to the dismay of Khalil who spent the evening morose alone in his house. Out of sympathy to Khalil and dislike for Imtiaz none of us attended the wedding, although we heard it was

grand. There was no report of any attempt by Reena also to wiggle out of the marriage or her falling apart at the wedding night.

Time passed. Our friends circle shrunk as several left the country for jobs overseas. Others got married and started lives of their own. Even Khalil got married and moved out of Dhaka.

It happened four years after Reena Imtiaz wedding. A common friend Nasir met both of them at a dinner in a relative's house. Both Reena and Imtiaz were very happy to see him. Imtiaz enquired about all of us and wondered where we were. It was at that moment that Reena interjected and asked Nasir if he could give her the phone numbers of Imtiaz's friends who were in Dhaka. She would like to have a get together of all old friends of Imtiaz. "I have heard so much about them. I would like to meet them". Nasir gave her our contact numbers.

Sure enough, in a few days Reena called old friends of Imtiaz who were still in Dhaka for dinner at their house. There was some hesitation in some of us to go, but we all yielded. There was after all no enmity between us and Imtiaz. We had an emotional reaction that time.

The dinner was very lively, and the get together of so many old friends was great fun. We reminisced about college days, and little pranks that we indulged in that time. However, we were all careful not to mention Khalil and his affair lest we upset the host. Khalil's absence who was away overseas was also a blessing.

What we did not know that that the topic we were trying to hide was a subject deep inside our host's mind. A few of us were having a smoke in the veranda of Imtiaz's house when he joined us with a drink in hand. "So, are you enjoying your selves", Imtiaz asked us. We nodded. Then suddenly, in almost a whisper, he asked us, "How do you find Reena? Does she not look very happy?"

We were a bit taken aback by his rather frank question, wondering where he was leading with this. I fumbled an answer saying something to the effect that Reena seemed extremely happy. But why ask this, I also enquired. Imtiaz replied with a smug smile, "Oh, I remember some of my friends sage counsel four years ago to not to marry Reena because she was in love with someone else." Before we could say anything, Imtiaz added, "I told you lot that time that this so called love is temporary. It will vanish before wealth and stability. I provided that. I could tame any wayward girl" he said. "It is easy to hunt down a caged deer, but quiet challenging to hunt a wild one", Imtiaz gave a loud laugh at his own remark.

We did not want to spoil an otherwise good evening by responding to his flamboyant speech. But Reena heard her husband laugh and joined us in the veranda. "What is this hunting you are talking about?" she asked Imtiaz. "Are you planning to go deer hunting?" she innocently asked. Imtiaz just laughed again and walked away. And we did not have an answer for Reena too. We left her slightly puzzled, but not enlightened.

THE BLACKBIRD

REHNUMA SIDDIQUE

On the beautiful wings of the Blackbird,
I've travelled the universe
Slowly, sometimes like the strange tide
Swiftly, sometimes like an injured animal.

The wings trembled and flapped
Shrouding an entire pathway like the transient clarity
Of a foggy winter evening
Like the sparkle of a shivering morning dew
Or the dust of minced glass
And as the mirrors turned themselves into little devils
With the voluptuous raindrops as their glorifying crowns
My heart started smelling of iron.

I watched them
Men, women and children of apocalypse
Eating like animals- flesh of their victims.
Chewing on with greed trickling down their pale yellow mouths
Hunger screaming vengeance in their blood shot eyes.

I wanted to give them rides on my Blackbird
One at a time, slowly and swiftly
To cover a magical wingspan of time
But each time, the Blackbird swiftly took them on her wings
They scratched her, pulled her down
Some plucked out her feathers
Some even bit onto them.

But the Blackbird flew,
Still high up in the waves bouncing her up and down
As the crimson sky filled with the stench of owls.

With the broken wings and golden heart
The Blackbird flew with her undefeated poise
Until one day, the beautiful wings broke loose
Fell and diffused into the iron dust
Like crushed pearls.



HOPE

AINON N

The pale colour of an exhausted day
The hush of twilight
To home they go
Mother and son, hand in hand
By the railway tracks
Under the bridge
On the grass-green land
They spread their mat
Lay down the rags.
Peace, a moment's peace
Calmed by scent of protection

He watches a lark seek its nest
Stars crowd the sky
The moon doors open to dreams
But hunger roars
He turns to the face of love
Eyes questioning.

Sitting face to face with night
Fistfuls of anger dissolve her mind
Rice that melts and a pinch of salt
Is all she gathered
They share, half full.

The winds howl
I am here she says
Warmth of trust she is
His entitlement
Her mind contemplating
I can neither be near nor far
Let today become obsolete yesterday
We are born and reborn again
Into the grace of hope
We will to live.

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

-কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম



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