



LOVE

SHAHIDUL JAHIR

TRANSLATED FROM THE BENGALI: MOHAMMAD SHAFIQUIL ISLAM

As soon as Moula gets close to the lane of Babupura slum, he can see Hafizuddin.

"Hey, Hafizuddin, where have you taken that from?" asks Moula.

Moula is Hafizuddin's neighbour. He's a bit lean. And his appearance is slightly vertical. With *paan* and cigarettes, he remains seated under a shady deodar tree from dawn to dusk. Hafizuddin doesn't take a look at Moula. He doesn't even feel like replying to his queries.

Hafizuddin notices Abeda near the public tubewell inside the slum. A maidservant, Abeda has just returned from her master's house.

Someone is washing his face bending down to the tubewell – only a sort of special motion is seen from behind. Karam Ali's teenage daughter is washing something on a brick. With her back exposed, sitting on two pieces of bricks nearby, Abeda is scouring her body with a small piece of vitrified brick. Hafizuddin has been used to such kind of scenes. Instead of going close, he calls her from distance – "Hey Abeda, come to me, listen."

Turning her eyes right away, Abeda sees Hafizuddin going into his small cottage. She can see the thing in Hafizuddin's hands at a glance. Abeda becomes surprised. Has the man gone nuts? If I enter the room, won't he like a film hero put it on my hair bun? She quickly makes the wet hair into a bun. She feels sad about her rough and sparse hair like fibbers. Such ugly hair – do they deserve any flowers?

"Wasn't there a bottle in the room?" asks Hafizuddin as soon as Abeda enters the room.

"Yes. What will you do?" Abeda takes a bottle from a dark corner of the room. She gently lets her hair bun loose with her left hand.

"I'll keep it. Fill the bottle with water." Abeda fills it up from tubewell. With much care, Hafizuddin dips the long stalk of the flower into bottle water. Yellow colour of the huge dahlia looks a bit dim in the half-dark room.

"Doesn't it look beautiful?" asks Hafizuddin. Abeda can understand Hafizuddin's happy mood. She says, "Yes, it does. Where have you got it from?"

"College field. Everyone is plucking flowers for the Martyred Day tomorrow. I've also taken one." "You've really done a good job," Abeda gets

amazed at the gracefulness of her own voice. She asks, "Will you go out again?"

"Yes," Hafizuddin walks towards the large basket by the door.

"Since you've come this time, eat something." Hafizuddin stops and asks, "What will I eat?"

"Rice."

"Rice? Where have you got it from? Haven't you eaten?"

"No. I've had my food at Madam's house," Abeda lies. It's not for the first time that she's lying to her husband. Hafizuddin believes her and agrees to take food. He asks, "Where's Tohura?"

"Who knows? Maybe, she's playing

somewhere."

"Have an eye to her lest she should disappear!" "Where'll she go? Abeda says, "I need to go now. Close the door when you leave."

There's a little rice in the pot. Slurping, Hafizuddin takes the rice quickly. With a broken silver pot in hands, Abeda comes back yet again and says, "I couldn't take a bath for water crisis."

She replaces her half-soaked sari with a dry one, wipes her hair with the wet sari. Making part of the sari an arrow, she slaps up her hair to dry. Small particles of water fall on the floor in drops. Hafizuddin gets annoyed.

"What's the hell? You're mopping up your hair so carelessly!"

Abeda doesn't say anything in reply. Making the wet hair, she spreads along her neckline. The flower by the fence appears into her notice. She says, "What'll you do with this?"

"What? Which one?" Hafizuddin washes his hand, wipes his outer part of mouth including chin with the wet hand.

"Here, this flower."

"What shall I do?"

"That's what I ask you – what'll you do with this?" Sitting near the bottle, Abeda lovingly lays her hands on the soft flower.

"I won't do anything. It'll remain there."

Hafizuddin rises up wiping the face with his lungi.

"It'll dry up," Abeda says.

Hafizuddin remains silent, lifts the huge basket on his shoulder. Someone may steal the flower, so keep an eye to it! Hafizuddin alerts her while leaving.

"How idiotic! People will come to steal your flower?" Abeda laughs.

When Hafizuddin leaves, she takes the flower from the bottle, keeps her hands upon it with love for quite some time, and tries to stick it to her hair bun, but as the flower is heavy, it falls repeatedly. At the end, pressing the flower by the bun, she stands before a mirror to see herself, but doesn't feel happy as she can't see well since the room is dark. She feels like going outside in the light, but can't because many people are moving around the place.

Dust-soaked, Tohura enters the room just this moment.

"What's this, Ma? Who has brought this?"

"Your Baba. Beware, don't touch it. If you do, we'll beat you."

Daylight begins to die away when Abeda returns home finishing household chores at Sahib's house. Returning, she finds Hafizuddin chatting with Moula under the deodar tree. Sitting on her father's arms, Tohura keeps her eyes on vehicles in the road. Seeing her mother come back, she storms to her.

Abeda quickly prepares to cook. Hunger is burning her stomach. She's preparing bread and pulses for dinner. As she finishes cooking pulses while still baking bread, evening descends.

Lighting the oil lamp, she asks Tohura to call in Hafizuddin. As Hafizuddin comes in, Abeda offers him some pulses in a tin plate. Taking from a winnow, both of them begin to eat bread. Dipping bread into pulses, Abeda also begins to eat.

With a piece of wood under his feet, Hafizuddin eats bread with pulses keeping his head down. Tohura wastes a lot of food while eating. Abeda scolds her, "In such an age, you couldn't learn to eat!"

Raising his face, Hafizuddin takes a look at Tohura and asks, "Why have you touched the flower?"

Abeda can't understand. She seeks to know – whom do you ask, me?

"Yes you, whom else?"

"Why should I touch the flower? Such an insignificant flower, ha!" Abeda becomes a bit temperamental.

"Don't lie. Haven't you stuck it onto your hair bun?"

Abeda can understand and says, "Who told you?"

"Forget who said, but I've found hair in the flower."

Abeda realises it's of no use talking much about this, but she also feels embarrassed to confess. She says – one or two might have fallen upon the flower at noon when I was drying up my hair.

Abeda gives a sly smile. Hafizuddin takes a look at her furtively, but can't see her captivating expression. So he blurts out, "An old woman, you lie? Disgusting!"

Abeda seems to flare up, but somehow controls herself. "Scoundrel, you can't keep a single word secret!"

Hafizuddin suddenly says, "I offer you the flower, okay?"

He says so abruptly that Abeda doesn't find time to be startled. She says, "What'll I do with the flower?"

"Do whatever you like."

Hafizuddin's tone doesn't bear extra softness. And Abeda doesn't have time to think about the matter. Still Abeda's heart throbs with a ray of happiness. In a motion of trance, Abeda feels a distinct bliss to be rain-soaked just the way a parched field is showered with a swift rainfall.

Eating bread, Hafizuddin goes out again to idle away some time. Tohura doesn't know before leaving what magic her father has put on her mother. Abeda arranges everything neatly in the room. She tells Tohura, "Go to bed."

Tohura can't make her bed since she hasn't yet learnt. Putting a quilt on a coarse mat of date leaves, Pulling the quilt onto her shoulder, Tohura cringes on the bed. She says, "Ma, I'll take the flower."

Abeda finishes her household chores. She notices that Tohura is still awake. A soft glint of the lamp's faint light has fallen on her eyes. Finishing her work, she comes close to Tohura, puts off the lamp and keeps her lips on Tohura's forehead.

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UNSTABLE SERENITY

GM QUADER

I was looking at a small pond,
The water was still and no sound around,
Then I saw the bird hanging in the sky,
Just above the water possibly passing by.
Its wings full of colours moving very fast,
creating a turbulence of wonderful rainbow light.
The bird was steady and gauging below,
There was the splash when it drove to shallow.
Then the bird flew high and was gone,
Silence was broken so was the stillness of the pond.
Ripples were formed and continued to grow,
Serenity was shattered with the stroke of a selfish blow.

GM Quader is an MP and a former Minister.

MONSOON

RUBAB ABDULLAH

You scowl at the bleak arid earth
With calm gentle wind
You end the sizzling days
I smell the earth drenched in showers
That may soothe my body and mind.

Sooner or later the rain pours down in torrents
The rivers are in motion and surge in delight
Captivated by the rhythm of the ebb and flow of tides
I am enraptured by a touch of serenity
I dance for a while,
O Monsoon, I am immersed in you.

