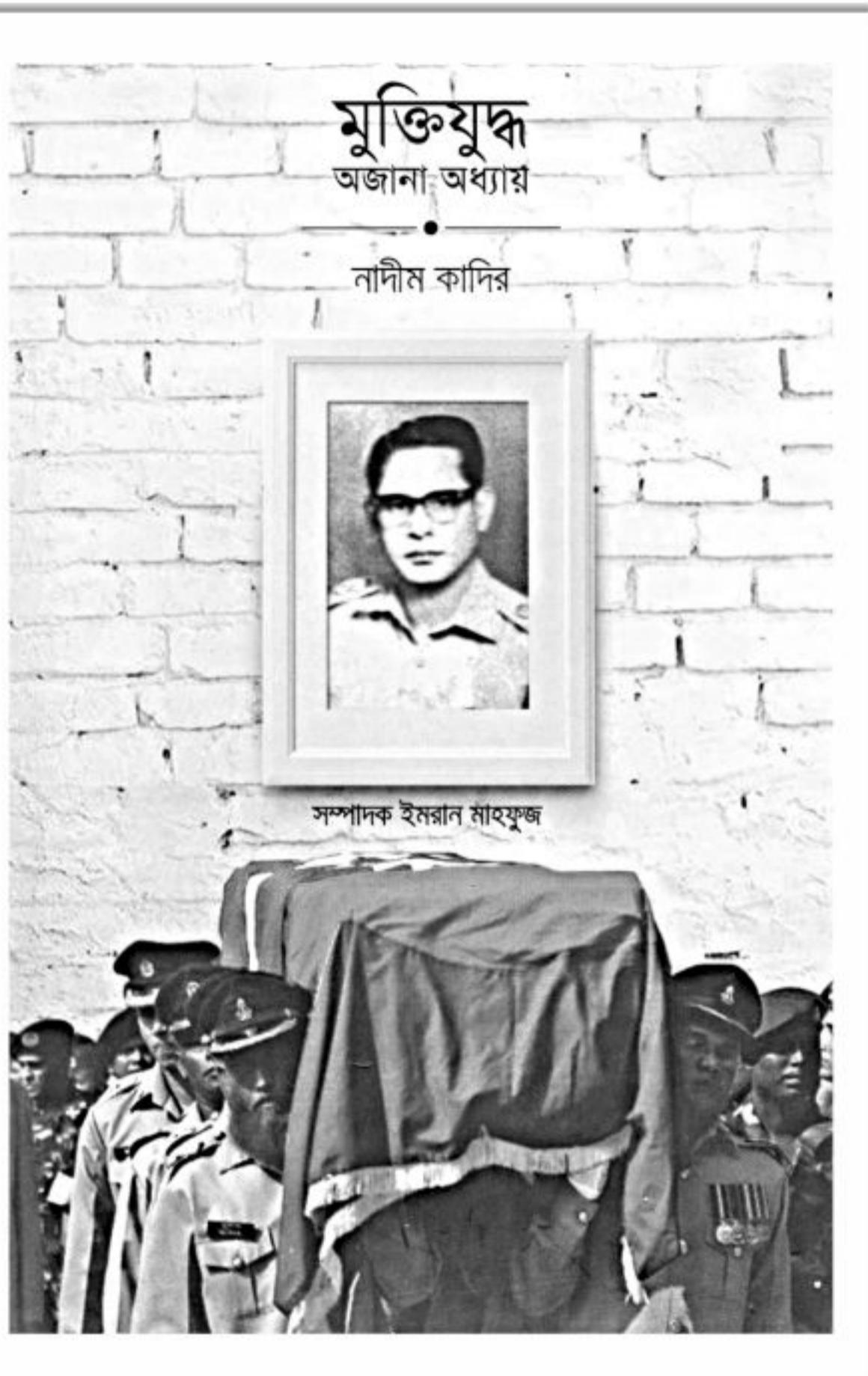


A son's desperate search for the whereabouts of his martyred father,  
**Muktijuddha: Ojana Oddhay**

Jagriti Prokashoni, Price: 200 BDT

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA



Soon after I met journalist-writer Nadeem Qadir in Dhaka, way back in 1991, I heard about his being the son of a senior officer in the Pakistani army who had opted for an independent Bangladesh during the 1971 Liberation War and had gone missing, presumably killed either by Pakistani occupation forces or their collaborators in the then East Pakistan. The truth was not known then. During my five-year posting as a journalist in Dhaka from January, 1991, I became close to Nadeem but it was only after reading his latest book that I could fully fathom the extent of the huge personal tragedy of a son's desperate search for the whereabouts of his martyred father, Lt. Col Muhammad Abdul Qadir, who was taken away by Pakistani troops from his house in Chittagong, never to return and of the pain of locating his mortal remains and getting due state recognition for him. It was not just the wait for Nadeem alone but also his family, especially his mother Hasna Hena Qadir, that makes the account so tragic. As the book tells us, she could never reconcile herself to the killing of her husband.

*Muktijuddha: Ojana Oddhay*, running into 110 pages, is structured mainly in the form of Nadeem Qadir's own accounts of his father, from 1968 when the latter was posted in Rawalpindi, down to his killing in Chittagong's Paanchlaish area on April 17, 1971. It narrates how he ran from pillar to post in the corridors of power in Bangladesh to locate the mortal remains of Lt Col Abdul Qadir and relocate them at a proper place with full state honours at a cantonment in Natore, which has now been named after the slain army

officer. A part of Qadir's book is derived from what he heard about his father during the turbulent months of 1971 from Hasna Hena Qadir since the author was merely ten years old at that time. The book also contains a seven-page write-up by the veteran journalist Samaresh Baidya, who is based in Chittagong, and who assisted Qadir in looking for his father's mortal remains in Chittagong. Nadeem Qadir, now Minister (Press) in the Bangladesh High Commission in London, tells the readers that he began his search for his father in 1977. He also narrates how he got the main lead to the place where Lt Col Qadir was buried along with others from the book *Bangalir Jatiyotabadi Sangram, Muktijuddhey Chattogram* by the eminent doctor, Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, who has done extensive research on the Liberation War. Qadir also reveals how during his painstaking search for his father's mortal remains, some people, whose role during the Liberation War was controversial, tried to divert him from the whole effort. One only wishes, he could name these people! Qadir's book informs the readers how his father, on taking a voluntary transfer to Chittagong in 1970 from Rawalpindi, started working clandestinely for Bangladesh's Liberation War by meeting like-minded Bengali military officers and writing a letter to Awami League leader A H M Kamruzzaman, who was assassinated in a Dhaka jail on November 3, 1975. Lt Col Abdul Qadir, the book suggests, was convinced that an independent Bangladesh would be born. He went about doing work for the Liberation War, defying the words of

caution uttered by his wife and threats from local non-Bengalis who watched him unfurl the Bangladesh national flag. Abdul Qadir was already under the scanner of the Pakistani army for this gesture.

Recalling what he had heard from Hasna Hena Qadir, one of the founders of Ekattor Chhatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, Qadir writes that Ziaur Rahman, then a Major, and his wife Begum Khaleda Zia, had come to the house of the Qadir, either on March 21 or 22, 1971 and had discussed the course of events that could then unfold. While Begum Zia and Hasna Hena were seated in the dining room, Abdul Qadir and Zia conversed in the drawing room. "My mother told me that Ziaur Rahman had disagreed with my father on the Liberation War. That day, Ziaur Rahman had told my father that there was no guaranteeing that an independent Bangladesh would be born," Qadir quotes his mother as saying. According to Qadir, his father had told Hasna Hena that "Ziaur Rahman was a very good officer and it would have been better had he been with us."

Qadir's book gives us a gripping account of how Pakistani army captain, accompanied by 10-12 soldiers, virtually barged into Lt Col Qadir's house in Chittagong on the morning of April 17, 1971, took his father away and put him into a Pakistani navy jeep. Lt Col Qadir, a Bengali officer of the Engineering Corps of Pakistani army on deputation to the Oil and Gas Development Corporation, had supplied the explosives which were used to blow up Subhapur bridge in Comilla, thereby affecting the movement

of the Pakistani army. An interesting nugget of information Qadir's book gives quoting Maj (Retd) Rafiqul Islam (Bir Uttam) is that Lt Col Abdul Qadir could have had the distinction of reading out on the radio Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's independence declaration had he been able to come out of his house on time. Instead, it fell on Ziaur Rahman to read out the declaration.

Qadir notes that his book is not an autobiography but that a large part of it consists of the life of the Qadir family from their move from Rawalpindi in 1968 to 2013. It describes their struggle to live in Dhaka and narrates how Hasna Hena tried to secure a government job to bring up her two sons and a daughter and the stress in the relationship between the author and his sister over property. It also reveals how Qadir struggled against all sorts of odds to find his father's mortal remains. The racy style of Qadir makes most of the accounts riveting and the book unputdownable.

What makes *Muktijuddha: Ojana Oddhay* a valuable addition to the compendium of literature on the Bangladesh Liberation War are the two messages it sends out: (1) that there are still many unsung persons whose contributions to the independence of Bangladesh need to be given due recognition; and (2) that there remains influential quarters in Bangladesh who would like to thwart it. It is on this note that the book leaves the readers to ruminate on the future of the country.

Pallab Bhattacharya writes for The Daily Star from Delhi.

## If Only Job Charnock Knew!

*The Job Charnock Riddle*, Victor Ghoshe, ISBN-10: 1943730520, Rumour Books India, 2015.

SHAHID ALAM

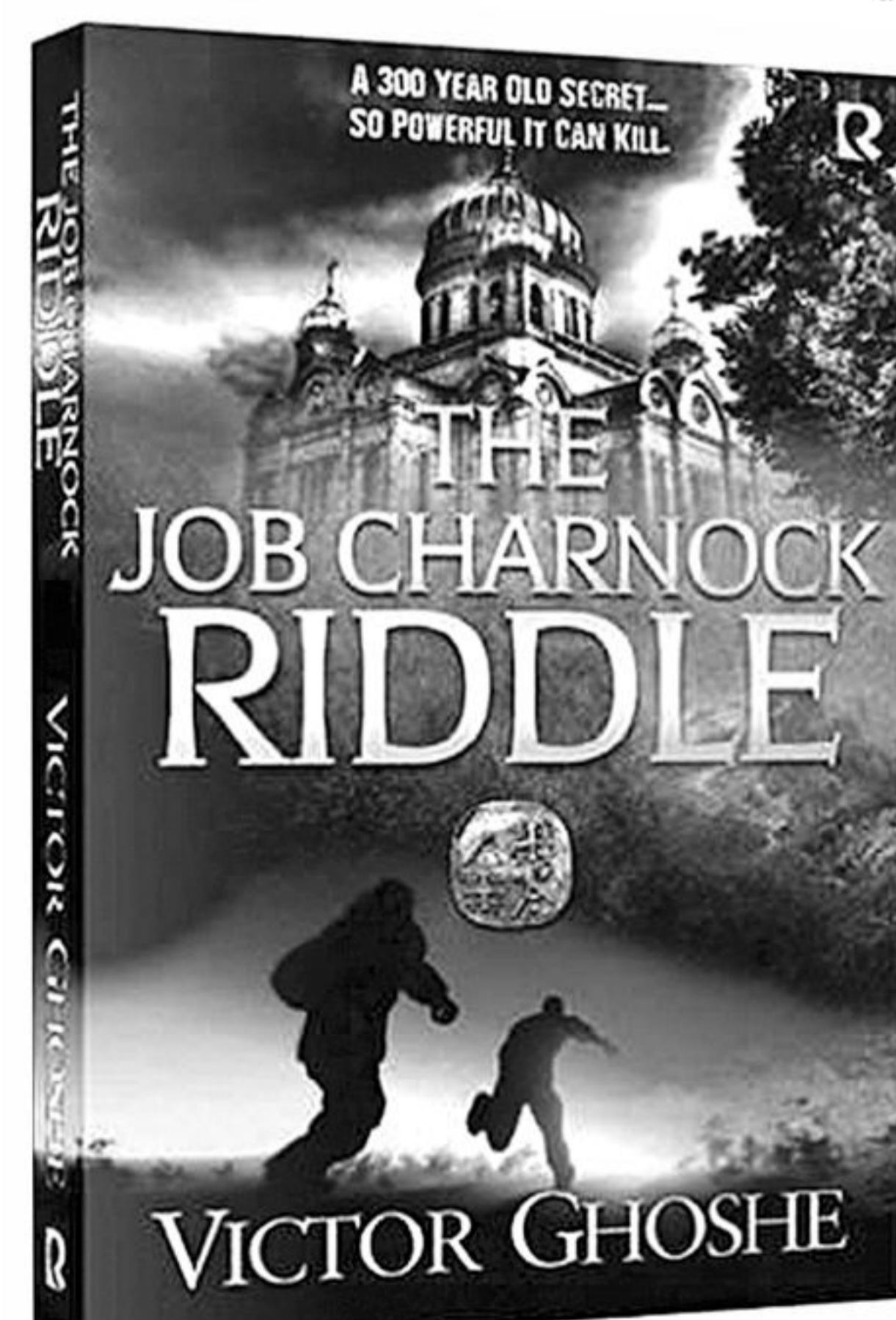
If only Job Charnock was prescient enough to know that some three hundred years after his death a thriller would be written based on what he had supposedly done, and that, in 2003, the Calcutta High Court would reject the longstanding myth that he had founded the city of Kolkata in 1690, he might not have even set sail for India in the first place! Other things about him are disputed as well; for example, when did he die: 1692 or 1693? But such a dispute turned out to be a key ingredient of Victor Ghoshe's thriller, *The Job Charnock Riddle*. It is more of a "spaghetti" thriller, really, with trite cool tough guy images and actions of good guys and nasty villains battling each other in the mould of American works of the genre. The good guys are mostly Indian, and there are a smattering of British acolytes, and the villains are from various European and Asian countries. There are shoot-em-ups, all manners of special force tactics in operation, and clichéd parting shots. There is a generous dose of tough guy one-liners and overflowing hackneyed expressions as well!

A fantastic thriller first to last? Well, not quite. The story interweaves history and fiction, thereby inducing the inquisitive reader to dig for the facts. The author has declared that the research contained in *The Job Charnock Chronicle* is accurate, leaving the reader to wonder just where fact and fiction blur. The author has left open this possibility for the interested ones to explore, and invites them subtly to add appreciably to what appears to be docu-fiction.

*The Job Charnock Riddle* opens in Kolkata on 21 January 2015, and focuses on an avid young British researcher, Jenny Roberts, who "had actually dug out a great secret from the pages of history. A secret unimaginable; a secret which was hidden deep inside the layers of time and unwritten history; a secret which was powerful enough to claim several lives."

She was trying to track down a treasure of seven chests reputedly filled with gold coins looted from the Governor of Bengal Shahesta Khan's treasury to be taken in the ship in which Charnock was sailing. She felt that it was now lying hidden somewhere beneath Charnock's tomb in Kolkata and so she had travelled to that city, only to be kidnapped by a formidably bad guy.

Enter the forty-year old tall, lean and angular Bengali Eric Roy, formerly an Additional Director General of the Archeological Survey of India. At present a lecturer in History at



Along their adventurous path they encounter a key piece of the puzzle relating to the lost treasure, the tomb of the Armenian Khojeh Johannes, who had died in 1697, which was located in the compound of an old church whose beautiful tower, in Ghoshe's lyrical eulogy, "glittered in the moonlight like a suspended staircase to heaven." But the author also draws the reader's attention to that enigmatic and fascinating figure of Indian history, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Eric lionizes him, following

thereby in the tradition of his grandfather who till his dying day, "believed that if Netaji could have brought freedom to India with the INA (the Indian National Army), the face of today's Indian sub-continent would have been positively different." Here is food for thought and addas since all kinds of conclusions could follow.

The author, through Eric, offers other apposite comments on contemporary happenings: "Kidnapping, rape, murder --- everything in the name of religion and politics... and not because a section of the population is weak and another is powerful, but because the powerful section is methodically working things out so that the other section remain weak and poor. It's simply greed, greed, and more greed!" There is a dig at the Scottish through Sarah, and mention of the unobtrusive work of the cleric Father Smit, who is quite pivotal to a story with many ecclesiastical references, cryptic lines, tablets, and the Sword of God with which Archangel Michael fought Satan, mythical demons, dragons, and sea monsters. And, then, there are the Angel Warriors, a secret society founded in the ninth century with "the vengeful mission to abolish evil from heaven and earth."

Given the diverse characters, Gothic buildings, documents, secret societies, religious overtones, and lost treasure, *The Job Charnock Riddle* is a fast, easy and fascinating read. The denouement is not a surprise, although enough researched materials are strewn all over the narrative for the serious seeker of truth to go off on a tangent to further explore bits of colonial history. However, the narration is marred by multiple instances where events are foretold at the expense of suspense. An example: "Miraculously her prayers were to be answered in less than an hour." There are even more egregious examples of such foretelling that sap the kind of suspense desirable in works in this genre.

Nevertheless, for those who relish such thrillers and are interested in colonial history, especially the part of Bengal history that has to do with the coming of the East India Company to Bengal, *The Job Charnock Riddle* will surely have some attractions! (With thanks to Waqar A. Khan, Founder, Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies, for bringing this book to my notice!)

Shahid Alam is an Actor, and Professor and Head, Department of Media and Communication, IUB.



## Unprincess

Manjula Padmanabhan

Puffin Books, India ISBN13: 9780143334958, 28 January, 2005

REVIEWED BY TS MARIN

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Unprincess* is as feisty as its back cover suggests it to be. This petit book is a collection of three short stories, each centring around an "un"princess who smashes all traditional, patriarchal, quintessential idea/s of ball gown-wearing, waiting-for-Prince-Charming, swooning-and-screaming damsels in distresses. Unprincess Kavita from "The Giant and the Unprincess", "Sweet Fantasy"'s indomitable Sayoni, and Urmila the Ultimate from "Urmila the Ultimate" prove that girls do not necessarily have to be royal and/or married to royalty to solve their problem/s, that a "damsel in distress" can take care of herself (as well as others). *Unprincess* has every appearance of being a children's book - with its rather small size, Ms Padmanabhan's quirky cover and illustrations; but a reader will only have to reach the second page to realise that it is as much a children's book as *Gulliver's Travels* or *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*! Its multi-layered messages make this book a perfectly light summer read for readers aged 6 to 106. Last but not least, Padmanabhan's illustrations may fill readers with an urge to colour the lovely, lively cartoons of *Unprincess*; so, keeping a box of colouring pencils handy is highly recommended for those relishing this book!

TS Marin teaches English at Primeasia University and enjoys writing flash fiction.