



# Phantasmagoria

AFRIN HAQUE ARANYA

Phantasmagoria; what I dream of.  
 To dream of your hands enveloped into mine, lying down  
 onto cream scarlet petunias.

Tonight I will write  
 a poem from honey dew.  
 A poem of sweet romance  
 And sour lust.

Tonight I will write of your crevices and carvings.  
 Tonight I will write of those  
 cloudy eyes; hints of imprisoned sunshine within them.

Tonight I will write a poem from  
 hibiscuses  
 laced  
 into emerald green leaves.

Tonight I will write of fairytales,  
 From shadows and selfish.  
 Of reality  
 and myths.

Tonight I will write of clandestine kisses  
 raindrops promise to engrave onto your skin  
 Of words I've written for you.

Tonight I'll dream of  
 you, hands clasped into mine, with a story stuck in my  
 head,  
 You'll live here,  
 Between my pages,  
 without age or misery.

Tonight I'll write of secrets  
 And famine.  
 Of wars we've fought and love we've conquered.  
 A poem from  
 moonlight and gleam.

Tonight I'll write a poem from  
 nectar

Tonight you'll live between words and phrases. Tonight  
 I'll dream of you.

Tonight I'll write a poem  
 known to only us two,

Tonight I'll write a poem of  
 Me and you.



# SET COURSE

WASIQUE HASAN

The waves crash against the side of the vessel listlessly. We spent 66 days at sea — 1584 hours. At first the hours had passed by in a blur. We were swamped, and I hardly had a moment to myself. But at least we were doing something, damn it! As the days sped by, work died down. There was only so much you could do on a ship that's headed nowhere.

Bit by bit, ever so slowly, fear crept into our hearts. None of us are prone to cowardice. All around me, the bravest men I've ever met. But this foe was one which we'd never faced. One you couldn't fight. Couldn't bash its head in with a bottle of brandy either. This was the unknown, and we were sailing straight into it.

I gripped the rail tighter as the ship crested a bigger swell. It sent sea-spray up on deck, dousing my tunic completely. Wiping water from my face, I looked out towards the never-ending nothingness extending over the horizon. The blue waters shimmered in the noon-day sun.

My knuckles were white from gripping the rails so hard. This was the furthest I had been from land. It was unnatural. No matter how good your sea-legs got you had to keep land in sight. That was an unspoken law. Even when I served in the war-vessel, land was always on the horizon. Bad luck awaits he who ventures too far from land. The connection between man and earth is a sacred connection, and the lifeblood of all mortals. Right now my connection was tenuous to say the least. No doubt I'd incurred heaps of bad luck by now. Nowadays it was tempting to smash all the mirrors in the cabin because what is a bucket of bad luck compared to an ocean of it?

At night, the crew sit huddled around the brazier, sharing stories of what lies underneath the depth in the dark of night. Some say they're averse to sunlight. Others speak of rumours they've heard from the acquaintance of a friend, how they have over a hundred slimy limbs and

were sent by the sea-gods to keep the seas free from mortals. Maybe someday the things we see will be rumours that pass from mouth to mouth. *If we make it back.* My greatest fear is that we'll hit a calm and be stranded on the ship for till we turn to dust and bones. Like an isle of flightless birds.

Once everyone is warm and giddy and as happy as they'll be on this voyage, we head back to our posts. My station is the one by the edge of the sky — the crow's nest. I make short work of the long climb. Atop my perch, the loneliness is accentuated. It seems to pile on like layers of sand on a wreck. That is what I am now, being dragged along by the waves to God knows where. For all I know, the best is over and the worst is yet to come. I was the last crewmember to throw in the towel. It wasn't worth it to keep on holding when the rest had given up.

I jolt upright and wipe the sleep from my eyes. Must have dozed off sometime during the watch. I wipe my eyes a little harder because my vision is still blurry. Then I stop. The problem isn't with my eyes. A fine mist has descended, and covers everything in the thin film of moisture. I clamber up higher. All around me the milky darkness extends its hold. The whiteness is suffocating. I can't take it anymore. I hightail it back to deck.

What I see below baffles me even more. Over to the West, the fog languidly clears to reveal a clear sight. Land. Even at that distance, in the wee hours of the night, it is unmistakable. My hands shake as I bring the horn up to my lips. On my second attempt I am able to get a lungful of air and blow. The melancholy keening cuts through the silence of the night. Within minutes the crew stand huddled around me, pointing their looking-glasses towards the horizon. No one speaks. The moment lasts for a long while. Intermittently you hear someone weeping. Finally the captain turns to us. Tears sparkle on his cheeks. Grinning from ear to ear, he delivers his command, "Set course for land, you lousy louts."