



POEM BY JEEBANANANDA DAS

TRANSLATED BY SUBRATA AUGUSTINE GOMES

Naked, Lonely Hand (Nagna Nirjan Haat)

Darkness thickens on the sky once more,
Light's enigmatic sister— this darkness.

The one that has always loved me
And yet I have never seen her face—
Like that woman
Darkness deepens on the *Phalgun* sky.

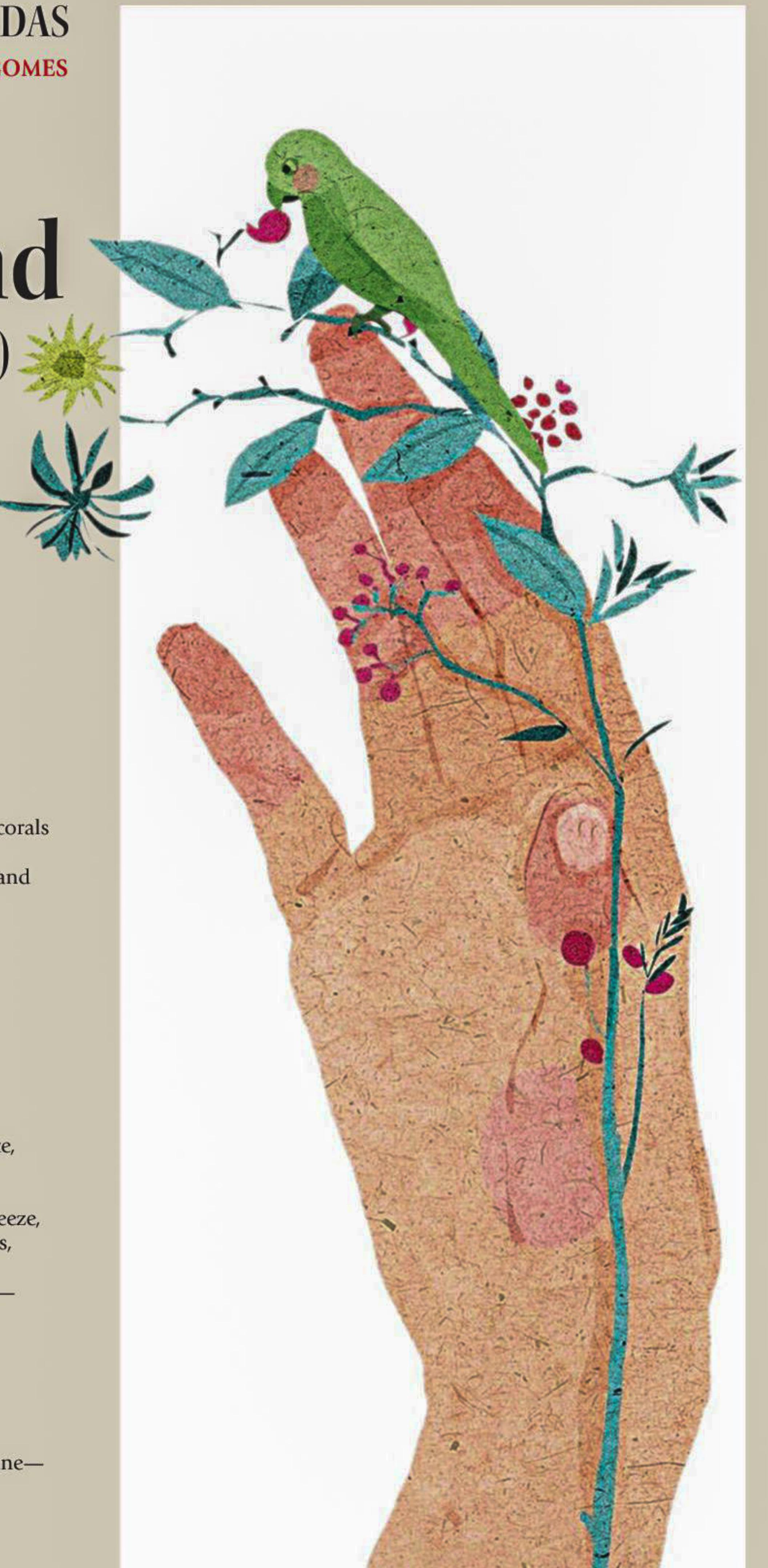
A long-lost city suddenly looms out of my mind
And on my heart a dark palace casts its shade.

On some shore of the Indian Ocean
Or the Mediterranean
Or the Bay of Tyre
There was a city one day,
There was this palace;
Full of priceless furniture,
Persian rugs, Cashmeres, unblemished pearls and corals
from Bahrain currents,
My shattered heart, lifeless eyes, erstwhile dreams and
desires
And you, woman—
All this filled that realm someday.

Plenty of orange sunlight,
Countless parrots and pigeons,
Shady mahogany foliage all around;
Plenty of orange sunshine,
A whole lot of the orange sun,
And you;
It's been hundreds of centuries since I saw your face,
Since I longed to see your face.

The maritime lore comes back with the *Phalgun* breeze,
The mournful curves of splendid domes and arches,
Scent of long-gone nashi pears,
Deer and lion parchments— the grey manuscripts—
Stained-glass rainbow windows—
And through the peacock-wing curtains
The allure of far-flung chambers
And boudoirs—
Ageless marvel, ageless awe!

Drapes and rugs sprinkled over with sweaty sunshine—
incarnadine,
In a blushing goblet— watermelon wine!
And... your naked, lonely hand;
Your naked, lonely hand.



FOUR POEMS

MASUD MAHMOOD

I
One day Poetry flirted with her fool
The fool played truant from school.
Birds and trees, flowers and a flute
Were all he had besides solitude.
Days dazzled his face with sunlight
Nights dabbed darkness under his eyes.
He was solitary and suspect to everybody
People whispered about him in the streets.
Everybody said he wasn't social, normal—
He must be examined and analyzed
For he was too dangerous and fatal,
He ought to be quarantined, put on trial.
One day he vanished to confirm suspicion
All decided he was too infectious, an alien.

II
A journey by train was an exam essay
Until my mom said good bye to me
And saw me off in tears in the rain.
Father put on a brave face as a father must
When it's required of adult obligation.
The train picked me up
And longer hours than the exam
I journeyed my essay to destination.
How time flies had never a feather
Until the present was a whir and flurry
And wind kneaded it into a winged creature
That flew into the darkness behind
Like the wizard of Oz in Dorothy's nightmare.

III
We had a thin time of it
When I lost my job
And you decided
To mother a baby
To fill in your vacancy.
I lost a job but got yours,
Pampering the lover,
Nursing the mother,
The fetus in progress.
I became the warden
Of the unbearable burden,
Felt your growing weight
By extension of sympathy.
I lived three lives:
Mine, yours, ours.
Yet we had worlds
Of our own lived apart.
We stretched ourselves to the limit
Yet suffering left a little residue in it
Something too private to transmit
That defeats or dodges attempts
Registered only in our faded memory.

IV
The prophet speaks in parable
But only fable they understand,
Morals with edifying tales
Delivered by wise animals.
(Aesop was an animal divine

While he gave a ride on stories
Instead of the drunken god's wine.)
The prophet saith, seeing
They see not, hearing hear
They not, hence the parables.
I speak, weaving meaning
Thread by thread of tales: you're
Too carnal, craving only the kernel
And cast the shells with the tales.
Seeing their perplexity, undone
The prophet teaches methodology:
Their meaning, he says, is outside,
Not in! Why do ye whine or pine for
What is not within?
Meaning wraps the tale,
And not the other way round, or ye fail;
For seeing ye see not, hearing hear ye not.
Eat the apple— stones, rind and kernel,
Till the specter of the tree rises before you
Like Aladdin's djinn, like ye see mist
Caught in spectral moonshine.
Truth isn't the parable, though throwing
The tale banishes it book, bell and candle.

Masud Mahmood is a Professor of English, Chittagong University.

THREE POEMS

SABRINA MASUD

1.
Mother,
Don't give birth
Your womb is barren
It only incubates howls and thirst.
If you can, give birth to a monster
Or two. When it tears you from limb
To limb, at least you would know
The reason why. Yet if you must,
Give birth to an orphan please,
At least you can fall down by her cheeks
In laughter, in fears.
Mother,
You aren't needed
Life knows what it seeks.
Let your hair soak up the setting sun
Let your tired feet rest by the moonlit dunes
Home is no longer here Mother,
It is no longer your womb.

2.
and am I supposed to fear drowning?
now that I have been born of water?
I try to believe in particles
they don't want to be seen,
and you tell me to live in a world
where dog Kannals echo children's cries
so I want a god or two to switch my dreams
and make nightmares more tangible;
where do I hide the guilt of knowing
how do I rationalize life without death,
do not speak to me of rebirth
I work hard to forget all that is seen.
the ocean is endless they say
I only know the waves at my feet
even then the dried salt bite the cheeks
and disappear when the wind comes home.

3.
The quite of a sleeping night
have you seen it scrounge beauty,
under the orange dome of a street light?
The moths drank of it plenty, the moths
drowned in frenzy, I ate their fluttering
wings of quest, a silent fix, of a somber
sickness, but not of a disease, sort of hunger,
not a decay, a kind of longing, for the day.
Nights are endless, but a day, lasts,
a glimpse, a flickering neon shade, a trembling
of a mind, a collapse of a temple made in Eden,
watch the terracotta army, poised, like an
emperor's eternal soliloquy, a suspended wave
in a tomb, a night curled under the lamp post,
a requiem.

Sabrina Binte Masud is a regional winner for the international BBC radio drama competition and a Fulbright scholar. She is also the coordinator of creative writing groups called Brine Pickles and Golpo-Kotha.



SIBLINGS

RUBAIYAT KHAN

As we ran up
And down
The stairs of
Our childhood home,
I remember dark,
Glistening catfish,
Livid, as they
Thrashed inside
Our pale blue bucket.

Quietly, our pale blue bucket:
It brims with murky water --
A petulant child,
Promising each time
To spill over.

Stowed away
In a corner of some
Inconsolable dampness,
Where memories remain
In our grandmother's
Red tiled kitchen floor.

Rubaiyat Khan is a creative writer and poet currently residing in Dhaka. Rubaiyat is also a loving pawrent to two sinfully spoiled cats.