

JAHANARA NAUSHIN'S "JADUKAR"

The Frog Eater

TRANSLATED BY MASRUFA AYESHA NUSRAT

The dark rain clouds gradually spread across the blue expanse of the sky. The earth was engulfed in darkness. The rain started pouring. It was not a storm, though the wind blew in violent gusts.

The sky weighed heavily on our heads like a wet blanket. The heavy rain streamed down like a transparent veil, like the sari *anchal* of a mad woman flapping loosely in the wind. The rain whipped the windowpanes mercilessly. I don't think anyone works when it rains like this. They enjoy the rain in any way they can. Just as I did, pressing my nose against the windowpane, watching the frenzied dance of the rain in the nearby field. The fluttering leaves of the *kadam* tree played hide-and-seek in one corner of the field. Its white ping-pong-ball-like flowers seemed to be bowing their heads in greeting. Perhaps greeting the rain, perhaps the clouds, or perhaps the earth itself!

Through the pouring rain, I noticed a

group of boys in the field – young boys and adolescents. They had gathered up their *lungis* between their legs and tucked the ends into the waist behind. They had perhaps come to play or perhaps just to get drenched in the rain.

It's amazing to play in the rain. Only young girls or boys or teenagers know this pleasure. Grown-ups have long forgotten it.

A pattern appeared finally in their frenzied sport. Still the uproar continued! I felt that the majestic grandeur of the rain had been outdone by the boys' invasion of the field. My attention turned towards them as they got drenched in the rain. The rain

water cascaded down their bodies. Their wet hair was glued across their foreheads and to their ears as they

pranced about and screamed in the rain. The noise of their shouts and laughter shook the sky.

Who would say that they suffered from hunger? That they hardly got three full meals a day? The clouds, the rain and the wild wind gave them a temporary world of happiness, far removed from the indifference and neglect of society.

But how amazing! Two boys had started fishing in the nearby pond, watching the floats patiently. They were not bothered about anything in the world. They did not appear to feel the heavy rain as they sat there fishing. Rather, they were like two stone statues devoid of any sensation, or like two sunbathers basking in the sweet warmth of the sun under an open, peaceful sky. The boys on the field were busy shouting and running around – even the sky was amused by their frolicking.

The *mutha*-grass in the field, smeared with wet mud, did not droop. Instead it seemed to grow greener, washed repeatedly by the life-giving water streaming down from the sky.

Every now and then the boys gathered in a cluster or broke up. In the midst of this, a huge frog suddenly jumped down in front of them. The tallest boy in the group kicked the frog away as if he were kicking a football. The frog flew up and landed with a splatter some distance away. The boys ran up to the frog and started passing it to each other with their feet, shouting loudly as they did so. The group of boys grew loud and boisterous. They made hissing noises and continued to kick the frog as hard as they could. At one point the frog managed to get loose and hopped away. But, in the blink of an eye, the boys caught it again and passed it to each other like a football. Finally, the frog gave up and fell flat on its

four limbs. It appeared to have expired. But the boys continued to pass it around with their feet for a bit longer.

By this time the rain had abated somewhat. The sky was clearing and looking more peaceful now. The slight drizzle formed a blue haze between the earth and the sky.

The tall boy held the dead frog high above him in his left hand. He looked like a phantom standing there in the hazy drizzle. He stood there getting drenched in the rain holding up the toad. I have no idea how the toad appeared before his eyes. I watched him in amazement! Then, bringing the frog down and holding its hind legs with his hands, he wrenched it apart. His right hand held the right hind leg. He then held the leg up briefly before bringing his hand down and thrusting the leg into his mouth. He looked straight up at the sky and began chewing. I was horrified. I am sure his chewing the raw leg must have made a crunchy sound. But, of course, I could not hear it from where I stood, far away, behind my window. The rest of the frog was still dangling from his left hand. After he had completely swallowed the raw meat in his mouth, he held the rest of the frog up before his eyes and began degutting the stomach with the fingers of his right hand. The black shadow of the frog seemed to darken the entire field. After he had finished degutting the frog, the boy slowly ate up the rest of the frog. Strangely, his eating the frog did not strike him as horrible or brutal or inhuman or abnormal. He completed the entire task with so much equanimity that it seemed as though he had just eaten a sweet and crunchy green guava. The other boys watched him with awe and fear, but their faces bore no expressions of disgust or nausea. No one even turned away from him.

The boy simply wiped his lips with the back of his left hand after he had finished eating. He stood there for some time, looking calm and quiet. Then he looked at his companions and smiled sweetly. "Ate it up," he said. He smiled amiably once again and then, leaving his companions behind, walked straight up the middle of the main road. Who could tell that this boy had just eaten a raw frog?

On the other side, the two other boys who were fishing in the pond were struggling hard to land the fish they had caught. But can the living creature of the water defeat the human being of the land? The hooked fish will be landed – now or later!

What time was it? Noon, afternoon, or evening? I could not tell. The earth suddenly lit up. The sun had emerged from behind the clouds.

Jahanara Naushin is a retired academic and writer. She received the Saadat Ali Akhand Literary Award from the Bangla Academy in 2012 and the Anannya Literary Award in 2014.

Masrufa Ayesha Nusrat, Assistant Professor of English at East West University, is at present enrolled in a doctoral programme at Illinois State University.

