



MUSINGS

The Story of Sounds

AINON N

Life is an art, the art that has the magnificent capacity to preserve itself. The challenge is to discover the beauty of that *how* of those aesthetic principles set apart unperceived that lay the foundation of preservation. Perhaps, such canons reside in the mundane sounds of a household: the sine qua non of stories that can tell about the extraordinary endurance of life. When others were around, each sound's distinctive style would tell me the identity of the person. I assume the commotion in our hearts become attentive to those audible vibrations when a home goes quiet. It depends on one's perspective, of course. They say it can be bitter sweet. An acquaintance once said she hated the clink of the spoon her husband made while making tea for her every morning; to a point that she had to divorce him. Indeed, a pragmatic approach to an annoying sound? Perhaps. So much for love's unique expression!

Years ago, when my son grew up and



When I pulled in she ran downstairs and waited by the door to greet me with a gratifying meow, then followed me around for many long minutes till I could settle down with a cup of tea. It was then her turn to jump up on my lap and snuggle.

left home to explore the wonders of the world, we inherited his pet cat. She loved to occupy the space upstairs. I was intrigued by her sagacity. Every time cars pulled in into our garage she knew who it was by its sound, and she moderated her behavior accordingly. If it was a visitor her ears twitched for few seconds, then she would lose interest, and continue on with her nap. When my spouse walked in, she ambled on to sit by the banister to receive an occasional rub on her head as he came upstairs. When I pulled in she ran downstairs and waited by the door to greet me with a gratifying meow, then followed me around for many long minutes till I could settle down with a cup of tea. It was then her turn to jump up on my lap and

snuggle in my arms with happy purring. She certainly was a maestro who composed the perfect purr of unconditional love which makes a household extend in time.

For now, pause and listen. Hear that familiar knock on the door, those quiet footsteps, the sound of folding clothes, the swish of turning the crisp newspaper pages? I bet you will be able to tell who it is without gracing the space. Yes, these few sounds, and more, of daily life are the parable of every *shongshar*. All these sounds are an ensemble of countless homes. In each reside a great number of stories. Stories to be understood, heard, felt, appreciated, and owned!

Ainon N writes from Chicago.



POETRY

AN ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE TO ANNISUL HUQ (1952-2017)

Muri-Makha -Pherey-Asha

RUBANA HUQ



Conversations end with half nibbled canapés,
Strewn all across the coffee tables
Signs of half hearted consumptions
In a space where food matters the least
And discourses the most
Of attempting expected, yet redundant discourses
Including grief and distress;
Somehow, condolences come in strangely familiar
forms of...
Conveying what a man he was!
Or, things never being the same without him.
Worst is the 'this too shall pass' bit
When of course, time shrouds grief,
Delegitimizes desires,
Throttles thirst.
Only the stubborn strong knots of longing
Wait for the whiff, the blue and the canvas footwear
To dash through the door
Smashing obits and *ahareys*
Along with the curses of consolation
To indulge in a bowl of *mochmocha-muri-chanachur*
mix.
He's here this minute.
Wiping his *muri-makha* hands in the pockets of his
kurta.
I can see him; you can't.

Rubana Huq is a poet and writer. She is also the Managing Director of Mohammadi Group.



FICTION

Seeking a Story

RAHAD ABIR

Nineteen ninety-nine. Dhaka, Bangladesh. My college is over and I am having the pre-kingly hours of my life—waiting for results before applying to a university. This is when I find myself looking for a story. In the monsoon air, I look here, I look there, I look everywhere. I look up, I look down, I look all around. Where is the story? I bump into some, though. If one has a head, it doesn't have hands. If one has fine legs, it appears to have an ugly face. Will I ever find a full figure—an exquisite full form of a story? My enthusiasm, strong as the nor'wester storm, deadens by and by.

I need a plot to write a short story. This is my first fiction writing attempt. I had started reading voraciously since I was in the seventh grade. Within this time I have had read some good number of Bengali classics. Writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and Manik Bandopadhyay. And I have learnt by heart many poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh.

So it's time to write my own stories. And I am desperately looking for one plot to work on.

Then, one cloudy afternoon when a crow is incessantly cawing for no good reason, I hear of a death news from Maa. The news strikes me as an interesting tale to pen down- that a neighboring woman of my Fupi has killed herself. The next day I make my way to her house, sensing a tincture of hope slowly making its way through the dark corners of my mind.

Narinda, Begumganj is a poor, packed part of old Dhaka. Children always run around in the streets. Women always carry water-filled pots towards home. Cassette players always play movie songs at the top volume. Ghetto houses every now and then burst out in shouts and quarrels. And above all, folks here always swear like exchanging greetings. Even a three-year-old boy showers his anger against his playmate: *You son of a bitch, I f__ your mother.* Also, when two women are at a verbal war they use the

phrases mechanically.

This part, down south in Narinda, is populated by Dhakaiya Kuttis—a community that evolved during the Mughal period and has their own dialect. From our home up North in Gurudas Sarkar Lane to Begumganj, it is a ten-minute walk. Two areas are divided by a wide road—the main road of the neighborhood where two rickshaws can pass without problems.

My arrival surprises Fupi a little. I don't visit her often even though I pooped and peed and grew up in her lap until she got married. I have no memory of that time. But I have heard that her wedding was not a typical one. Her husband saw her in the street and sent someone with the marriage proposal. My father, the chief earning member of the family, declined it. The suitor then threatened to steal her away. Panicked, my father learned that the man had a family house and was not altogether a bad man, in fact. But, he gave his consent because of that house. If someone has a place to stay, food is not a problem—was my father's opinion.

Fupi is now in her early thirties, slim and slender with large eyes and even after giving birth to two children, still preserves the smile of her teen years. Her husband is caring; even these days he is unwilling to let her go out on her own. In the early years of their marriage, I heard, her husband would pick a fight if he found someone staring at her on the street.

In my school days, I flew to her whenever I needed one or two taka to buy a new top or some marbles. As my voice got deeper and dark hair sprouted on my upper lip, I discovered, along with my peer group, a fresh attra

ction: girls. That was when I began to visit her less and less.

Finishing the snacks—*bakharkhani* with milk tea, I move uncomfortably to the edge of the bed. Finally, I come out of the cocoon and ask her about the suicide incident, about that woman. Fupi speaks very little, then she narrows her eyes, looks at me intently. Why are you asking these things, she questions, why do you need to know? Just curiosity, I say and try to bring a smile. She seems unconvinced.

On my way back, I think about weaving the story. All I know is the husband of the woman was abusive, she had a family feud and subsequently murdered herself. How am I going to write this now with such scanty information? Yes, I have a great ending, but what would be the beginning?

A week later, mother quizzes me about my visit to Fupi's. Did I go there to inquire about the suicide? I turn pale and stammer. Telling her the real reason will cost me my books. Too much of an obsessive pursuit has spoiled my brain, she might say. Somehow I avoid the crisis.

Nope, I can't be a writer, I think to myself.

My brain is not rich enough to erect a viable, workable story. A sliver of hope, however, crosses my mind. Maybe I should do some travelling or venture into a bohemian life like Srikanto—as in the autobiographical novel of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Srikanto*. To write one needs genuine experience, I begin to believe.

Yet I lack the guts to play with fire, to have a tantalizing floating life. For weeks, I agonize over this. Then one fine morning I wake up, sit at my desk and set the pen to paper. I know what I am going to do. Eventually, in less than a

month, I complete a short story, not about suicide but about family violence.

Rahad Abir is a writer and is currently finishing a novel.

