

FICTION |



ILLUSTRATION: NAHFIA JAHAN MONNI

voice, he asks, "How did you get out of prison? "The old man shakes his head... "I'll tell you....You are the one I'll tell, you are that boy who accepted my existence..., you are the one I'll tell, definitely."

"They were torturing me continuously for killing the child. Then, one night, I was overwhelmed with a new insight. I realized that even though my son's legs were deformed, he had two perfect arms. Thus, it was not right to think that he would have been totally dependent on others. I imagine a magnificent building, layered with sand. I see an eternity of sand, layer upon layer. All is clear. I grow mad. I think of myself as a cruel jealous killer. I think I have pushed the weight of my own failure upon another generation. Despite the physical likeness, his brain or his hands might have given birth to something new. Perhaps, I lack such vision ... I can't breathe. I tear out clumps of my hair... I feel that if I had let him live, he would not have been the only one punished with degrading abuse. All those who looked upon him and turned away in disgust would also have been punished by seeing something misshapen dangling before their eyes.... Think, what punishment! During my transfer from one prison to another, I

jumped unnoticed from the van.... Tumbling down, I fell into a deep ravine. I committed suicide."

The old man stands... and says "What good will it do to hear this story?"After a while, he starts walking down the night's moonlit path.

A terrible shudder shakes Omar, and then he is calm. He recalls clearly. Yes, yes, that is true, he did commit suicide... Omar trembles.

The old man looks back and calls out for the last time,.... "Do not believe, do not believe any part of it...." His body blends with the vast green horizon. Omar sees a broken figure gradually melting into the circle of moonlight. It is no longer visible.

Omar starts to run like a madman. The light of dawn slowly lightens up the sky. He runs wildly by the echoing bamboo grove, the rough bracken-strewn field. The moon is dim at the edge of the sky, like a faded round handkerchief. Omar takes a deep breath once he reaches the place where Tulu, Kaiser....But there is only the empty horizon in front of him. The bullock-cart is gone from the place. His friends have gone, leaving him in utter desolation.

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Then, without hesitation, I stretch my two deformed arms towards her... 'Take this...'With these words, the maiden puts forth her own arms and her hands drop something into mine. Then she melts into the green forest foliage."

"I see a deep emptiness inside my two hands. The emptiness which I hide carefully in my trouser pockets while living among men, the isolation which I loathe every minute of everyday. I learn to follow that solitary path. I learn to love desolation."

The moon is low on the horizon. The old man no longer seems rooted to this earth. He continues speaking as if under a spell. Omar is as still as stone. In a hoarse

Omar starts to run like a madman. The light of dawn slowly lightens up the sky. He runs wildly by the echoing bamboo grove, the rough bracken-strewn field.

Nasreen Jahan is a novelist, short story writer and literary editor. Her first novel, *Urukoo (The Woman Who Flew)*, published in 1993, won the Philips Literary Prize. She received the prestigious Bangla Academy Award in 2000.

Rebecca Haque is a published poet, translator and Professor and former Chairperson (2009-12), Department of English, University of Dhaka. She specializes in Twentieth-Century British and American Fiction and Drama, with recent publications on South Asian Fiction, and Film Studies. This story, translated from "Ekti Dirsho Shasher Dalpata", was first published in SIX SEASONS REVIEW, No.3, June 2015.

KOWALSKI ANALYSIS |

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Kabir himself went to St Gregory's school in Dhaka, and his experiences are reflected in many of his stories. He has a memoir called *Shadhu Gregory'r Dingulo* which is funny yet insightful. I had never read stories set in a place that was almost exactly like the school I went to, and I was delighted to find something so relatable.

I tried sharing these books with my school friends, but none of them wanted to read them. Kabir was never the most popular author among Bangladeshi millennials, with most of his works being released in the late 60s to the 90s. But his old works are still there, and they're beautifully written, so why did people forget about them?

It could very well be that there were other more popular authors like Humayun Ahmed and Muhammed Zafar Iqbal who had multiple books release every year, so no one ever went back to books from the 20th century. This is quite unfortunate for readers, because they are missing out on some of the best books ever published in Bangladesh, in my opinion.

Every year, I see multiple articles lamenting Bangladeshi readers' affinity towards Indian writers, saying how this is hurting our country's publishing sector. Yet we fail to remember some of the best writers our country has produced. Parents should pass on their favourite books to their children, and school libraries should encourage kids to borrow books because we must keep some works alive. A story can only live as long as readers remember it.

The writer particularly enjoyed Shahriar Kabir's description of food. She has found that only expert writers can make readers salivate with their descriptions of soup and bread. You can reach her at aanila.tarannum27@gmail.com.

