


**POETRY**


## When She Misses Him (2009)

**DILRUBA Z. ARA**

A sudden stillness!  
A caesura - splits the line of thought, broken  
Connection.

Mind flying in ambiguous  
Directions. Colours and laughter  
And dreams  
Chopped up. Two halves!

An embryo of pain  
Drops  
into the bunker of feelings. Multiplies,  
Like a platoon of tombstones in a nocturnal graveyard  
For unidentified war heroines - erupt out.

Deeper and deeper,  
Further and further, higher and higher,  
Burrowing, sprawling, turning.

The core, encompassed.  
The sign drips blood, black turns red!  
Thoughts darken.

Slowly she turns. Stillness knows no bound,  
Swallows up the purest child of feelings,  
All that she knows.

*Dilruba Z. Ara is a Swedish Bangladeshi writer, novelist, artist, educator and translator.*



## Two Poems

**MASUD MAHMOOD**

I  
I was led to delusion,  
From belief to deception.

I never doubted your honey  
But you treated me to poison.

I put my heart in your trust  
But you sold it off to Lucifer.

You greeted me with false embraces  
And I was pierced bloody with icy nails.

Your smile was a glinting knife  
Beneath you hid my lurking fate.

I followed you in good faith  
But was brought where innocence dies.

II  
Your promises were sham  
And you hid behind word games.

I trusted you beyond measure  
But what you did wasn't fair.

You wove my trust like fine gauze  
And tore my delicate faith with claws.

The wounds bled without a tongue  
Your schadenfreude was without conscience.

*Masud Mahmood is a Professor of English, Chittagong University.*

# Angels and Monsters

**SOHANA MANZOOR**

One late afternoon, dragging his injured leg Kamal finally stood in front of a particular door of a shanti. For some strange reason, he could not enter the house as he used to even five months ago. He called out in a trembling voice, "Nuru! Where are you, my son? I'm home."

After waiting for a few seconds, he called again, "Momena, aren't you home yet?" There was no response whatsoever. Where had they all gone? A door next to theirs cracked open and the creased face of his elderly neighbor Kulsum Khala peeped out. "They don't live here anymore. Rashid Chacha has taken up that place."

Kamal groaned, "What are you saying, Khala? Where've they gone?" Kulsum Bibi shook her head in negative response. "That I don't know."

Kamal's face took on the look of a lost soul. He did not have a single paisa on him. Where was he supposed to go now? When he had walked out of this slum six months earlier, he was confident and sure that he was making the best decision of his life. Now his head reeling, he asked in a hoarse whisper, "O Allah, what will I do now? Where will I look for them?"

Kulsum khala hesitated a little and then opened her door wider and came out. "Where were you, Kamal Miah, all this time? Why did you just disappear like that?"

Kamal looked blankly and then broke down, "Khala, I made a huge mistake. Now how will I undo it?"

Kulsum's creased face displayed little emotion and she only said, "Oh."

The truth was she had heard the whole story from Momena's mother—how Kamal had left his wife Momena along with his son to marry a sprightly and younger woman named Joba. Joba worked at a garments factory and earned a good amount of money, whereas Momena worked as a *chhuta bua*. She worked at two houses and did not earn half as much as Joba did. Joba had been married before but she had no children. Kamal was a rickshaw-puller, but more often than not, he preferred to be idle. He worked two days and then slept at home and ambled aimlessly the rest of the week. The yoke of running the household and everything else was Momena's responsibility. Nobody knew how Kamal got to meet Joba who lived in another slum, but one fine morning Kamal just announced that he was leaving Momena. He just left like many men do in search of a better life. A poor wife and a son are easy to replace.

Another neighbor appeared. Salam was a distant cousin of Kamal from his old village and he was a mason who earned quite well. He was hard working and never approved of Kamal. Now he raised his eye-brows at Kamal. "Look, who's here. Don't tell me you're back for Momena!" he jeered. "She's gone. Manu Khala took them both to live with her. Where to? Who knows? Perhaps in Lalbagh, Mirpur or Hazaribagh. But wherever they are, they're better off without you, you scum bag."

He paused and added with spite, "Momena is still quite young and good-looking. Manu Khala said she'll have her married again."

Kamal actually started bawling. "Don't talk like that, Salam Bhai. I made a big mistake. And see," he pointed at his injured leg. "I've been punished."

"Ah, so that's why you're back?" Salam was merciless. "Did your pretty wife throw you out?"

Kamal did not reply. He did not know how to describe his ordeal. He just wept.

Salam relented a little. "Come inside. Sufia has gone off to village. Eat with me."

Kamal gobbled down the rice, *daal*, *shutki* and *bhaji* that *Salam* procured for him. It felt like food from heaven. He had not eaten anything since the night before.

"What happened to you?" asked Salam.

"I had a rickshaw accident," mumbled Kamal.

What had happened indeed? He had worked on a regular basis for two months, but then he grew back to his lazy self. Joba earned ten thousand taka per month. Did he need to work? He went out, but worked half the day and then spent time with his buddies—all lazy bums like him. They occasionally smoked pot, watched girls at the bazaar. Life was good. It was good until Joba announced that she was pregnant.

"I plan to leave work," she said. "You better find something steady. I can't feed you. What kind a husband are you?"

"Good kind. Do I ever beat you?" asked Kamal. "How did you get pregnant so soon? It's been only three months since we got married."

When Joba did not reply, he said casually, "Get rid of it."

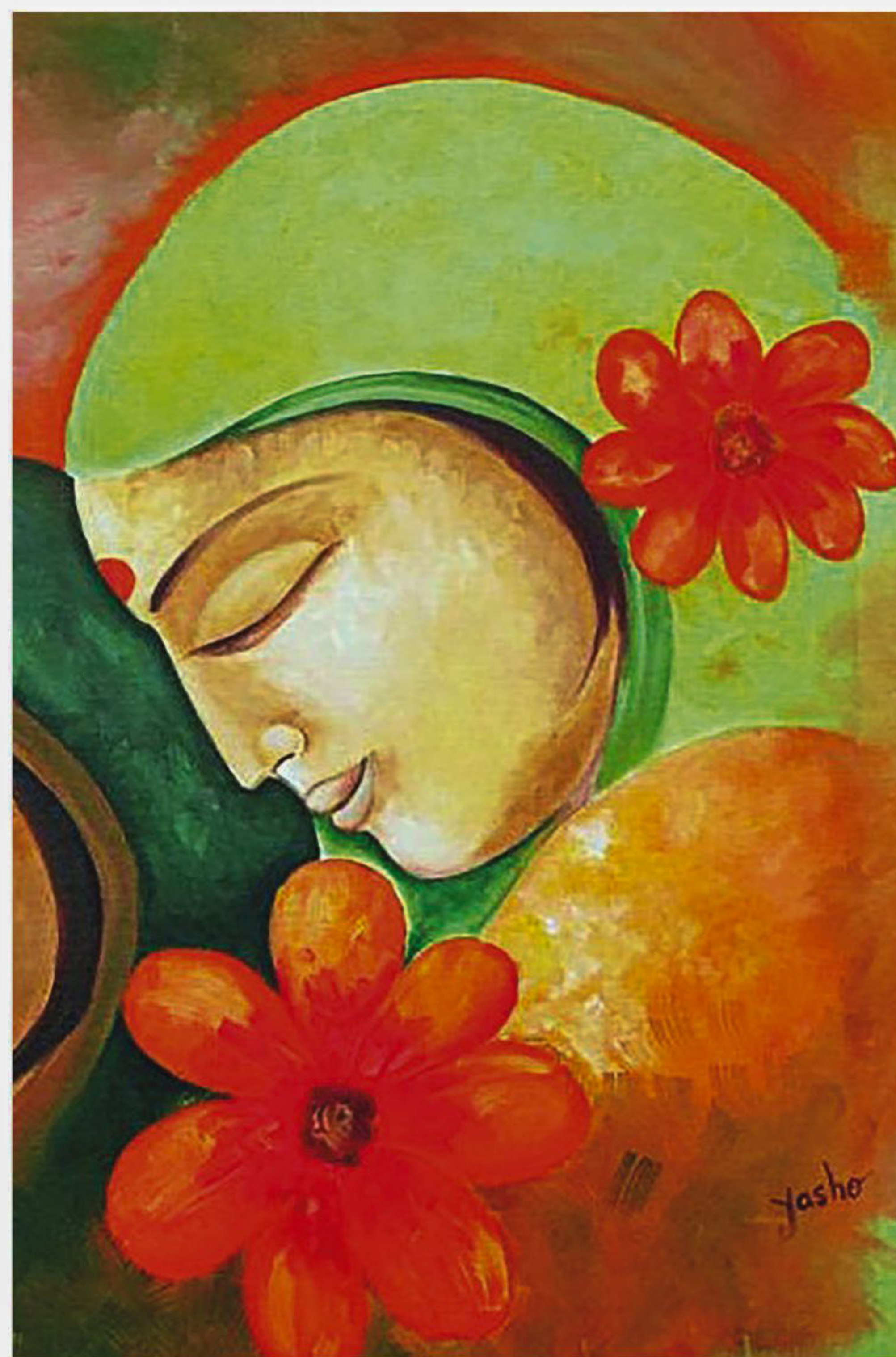
"What?" screamed Joba. "Am I a whore that I'll kill my baby?"

"Why do you get mad? We've just been married. Let's have some fun. And trust me, babies are no good. They start nagging as soon as they grow a little older."

Joba's eyes glinted dangerously. "I'll keep my baby. And you better find work."

Kamal did not pay heed. And Joba started to change. She had little interest in love-making-

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all she thought about was the baby. Then, one fine morning, Joba said she had left her job.

"I've had enough. You go out and act like a man. I didn't marry you to live on me," she yelled.

"I told you to get rid of it," replied Kamal who was half asleep. The next thing he knew was that he was swimming. Joba had thrown a pail of water on him.

The hussy! Momena would never dare to treat him like that. Kamal jumped up and pulled Joba by the hair and started beating her up. He was blind with fury and thrashed and kicked her like the mob beats up a thief. Joba cried just once and then went mute. He stopped only when he saw the blood leaking out of her. He cursed, "I hope that's the baby!"

And he stormed out of the house.

He walked around the bazaar and then sat glumly at the tea-stall. Throughout the day he kept on fuming. Women should act like women! How dare she raise her voice? Momena never did. Yes, Momena's mother was a shrew, but Momena was quiet and caring sort. Even when he beat her, she never complained. But how did he treat his good wife? Perhaps he should pay them a visit? Taking some sweets for Nuru would not cost too much. He would stay there for a few days. That would teach Joba a lesson. He smirked at the thought.

In the evening, when he reached the small shanty where he lived with Joba, he could smell rice being cooked and curry too. So, the bitch was up. She had not been not beaten

enough, it seemed. Kamal pushed the door open and stopped. Two men were sitting inside and a woman was cooking. He recognized one man as Joba's elder brother and the woman as his wife.

He cleared his throat and asked, "When did you all come? Where's Joba?"

The other man who was sitting at the corner of the room, cocked up his head to take a good look at Kamal. "So this is Joba's new husband?"

Kamal felt irritated, "Who the hell are you?"

The man stood up; and Kamal noticed even in the dim light that he was quite a musclem.

"You think you can just beat up our sister and kill her baby as if she's a street-hooker?"

"I can beat my woman any way I like," replied Kamal angrily. "Get out of my house, you mother-fucker!"

"Not so fast, you sister-fucker," replied the man and Kamal raised his hand. The next moment, he was lying flat on the ground. The man shook him and pummeled at his side. "Now you'll know how it feels to be licked, bastard. No one hurts our I'll sis."

The two brothers of Joba practically beat Kamal into a pulp. Then they dragged him to the dustbin by the roadside and dumped him there. Jalal, Joba's younger brother, Kamal was able to recall the name at long last, whispered in a threatening voice, "If I see you near my sister again, upon Allah, I'll castrate you."

Kamal lay senseless through the night. In the morning, two of his pot-smoking buddies discovered him and took him to a nearby dispensary. They gave him first aid but he felt bruised all over and he had fever too. He stayed on the veranda of a friend for a couple of days. He learnt that he was not Joba's second husband, but fourth. Her first husband had died, but the other two were chased away by her brothers. The neighbours advised Kamal to leave. "She's no good. Monster woman! What kind of a woman induces her brothers to beat up her husband?"

Momena's face glowed and beckoned to him in the dark. He would never beat her again, he promised. He would work four days instead of two and give her half of his earning and keep only the other half for himself.

But now nobody seemed to have any clue where his Momena had gone in this monstrous city of sixteen million people.

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Miles away, Momena was cooking in the veranda of a room. Her mother was inside, talking silly to her grandson, Nuru. The lady her mother worked for was very kind. She ran a school and agreed to let Momena work there as an ayah. She even had let them live in a room at the outhouse in the large compound of her house. For the first time in a long time, Momena's face shone with hope. The oppressed angel had finally flown to a life away from the monster of a man she had been chained to.

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