

EDITOR'S NOTE

On January 1, 2021, Maya Angelou posted the following on her Facebook:

"This New Year needs us all, all our hopes, all our good wishes, all our smiles and all our gestures of forgiveness. I wish everybody a happy New Year!"

It sent me thinking about the meaning of "new year." We all know about the Pohela Boishakh celebration: the cultural program that takes place at the crack of dawn at the historic *Ramna Batamul*, the *Mangal Shobhajatra* starting from the Charukala, a day full of colours, food, blasts of singing and merry-making. However, the way things are in Bangladesh right now, with devastating effects of the third wave of Covid-19, it is hard to call for any kind of public celebration.

We pray for all the departed souls in this pandemic and all those sick and suffering in the hospitals and at homes. We also hope for compassion and understanding from all quarters so that proper measures can be taken to get the "plague" of the 21st Century contained.



Aubade

BY MITALI CHAKRAVARTY

Each night, the sea with the moon croons a lullaby. The clouds sigh as the star-studded silver sky, embraced by moonbeams, breaks into a song. Gossamer dreams with wispy wings waft along, lulling the Earth to sleep with their honeyed hum.

The gentle notes soothing softly strum and weave into the lapping lyrics of the waves unfinished yearnings that the shores do love. And then, in the unbidden break of dawn, They sing an aubade to an upcoming morn A new day, a new hope, a new life is born.

Mitali Chakravarty seeks harmony and in that spirit runs the Borderless Journal.

POETRY

A Translation of Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Shuddho Koro Amar Jibon"

Purify My Life

TRANSLATED BY SHAHRIYER HOSSAIN SHETU

Purify my life, like dawn let me rise anew each morn. Let me be the sunrise, redefine my life; make me thrive I've been like a depressed widow, a hurtful drop from *Bakul*. Place your hand of blessing on my head so I grow like a verdant tree when the summer rain pours on my bosom. Purify my life like sunrise, so I become the waking sky.

Turn me into every child's book of first letters, and the song of early birds. Purify my life, so that I become an island; Or, childhood, or a new stream of rain; I've drowned in pain and loneliness like a *debdaru*. Purify my life like a fresh blooming flower so I wake up like a morning's sleepy eye.

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FICTION

Mostly Sunny

FAYEZA HASANAT

"This weather app is a life saver, I'm telling you! Look how sunny this weekend will be!" Ruma pointed at her phone with her freshly manicured fingers—donned with diamond rings. As her fingers tap-danced on the seven day weather chart on the phone, her listener got distracted by the new rock on her pointer finger.

"Nice ring, Ruma *bhabi*."

"Oh I didn't realize I had this on me," Ruma tried to move her hand away, but the damage was done. Lina, her listener, had already been stung by a big wasp named jealousy and was infused with rage against her husband for undermining her finger's worth. Lina's husband Zaman was also a medical doctor. Granted that Ruma's husband, being a gastroenterologist, earned a little more than Zaman, but that should not be an excuse for Zaman's frugality. "A doctor that deals with people's gut has more patients than a doctor who deals with cancer," Zaman once told her. "A Mrs. Zaman can't live a life of a Mrs. Riaz, unless she trained to be a doctor herself or found some trick to make people sick with Leukemia." Lina never understood Zaman's wry humor. Theirs was a happy marriage, and Lina, as a neonatal nurse, earned enough to buy herself a few rocks. But what would be the point of a diamond if it was not given to a woman by her husband? Lina's mind ran wild—while her face got stuck in a puddle of smile, with her eyes fixed on a three carat marquise—as Ruma went on with her diamond story.

"Riaz surprised me with this last month. We had a fight and I deprived him for a week, you know," Ruma winked. "Anyway, thank Goodness the weekend will be mostly sunny. The *Baishakhi* program will be a blast. What color will you wear? White or red? I bought a perfect white saree for the occasion. It's the exact saree that Deepika wore in *Padmaavat*. I got it from the same designer. Wait I'll show you."

"No, no! It's okay! I'll see it on Saturday." Lina almost flew into her car and drove away. The New Orleans sun glared at her through the windshield, as if scolding her for her cowardice. Lina glared back at it, wishing its brightness to be darkened by a week-long storm so that the *Baishakhi* program could not happen. "*Esho esho*," Lina hummed a tune as she drove. "*Esho hey Baishakh*." Come, dear *Baishakh* and pour us some rain....

Those who think that friendship is based on trust have not lived the life of an immigrant. In a transplanted community, envy is the true indicator of friendship; spite, its motivating force, and gossip, its germinating ground. Lina and Ruma's friendship was no exception. Lina's first encounter with Ruma was through gossip.

She was attending a party at her colleague Shova's house, where women kept talking about a Mrs. Riaz who did nothing but waste her husband's money.

"But why's that a problem?" Lina asked. "That's her money too!"

"Well, we don't give a *hit whose money she spends, as long as she doesn't rub it on our face," Shova answered.

"And she always brags about her wardrobe and her family's wealth—as if she's way above us," retorted Nilu, an engineer by profession and a backbiter by passion.

"Remember what she wore at my daughter's birthday?" said Mila, a veteran backbiter. "A two thousand dollar worth Valentino! And remember how low-cut that gown was?" Mila shivered. "God knows what she's going to show up in tonight."

But the woman did not show up; instead came a phone call from her husband. Ruma was admitted to the hospital. She fell from a ladder while doing some household chores. Ruma requested a visit from her friends, the husband reported.

"I don't understand," said Shova as she drove them to the hospital, "Ruma *bhabi* always says she has weekly maid service. How come she was cleaning the house, especially today?"

"I don't believe anything she says," Nilu said. "She's a lying bitch."

All the women agreed with her and started talking about Ruma's deceiving habits.

At the hospital, they hugged Ruma and told her how they missed her at Shova's party. Ruma's left cheek was bruised and her left wrist was bandaged. Her swollen face brightened to see her friends. "Is that a new Luis Vuitton, Nilu? I have the same purse, but in a bigger size. I don't buy Vuitton anymore though. My new fav is Fendi. Open the side drawer, and pull it out. See? That's a 5K Fendi right there." Nilu's face grew pale. "Oh, Mila, that green saree again? Didn't you wear it at Nilu's party last year?" Ruma then shifted her attention to Lina. "You must be the newcomer. I had a box of beignet from Café Du Monde, especially made for you. But..."

"It's okay," Lina cut her short. "Beignets can wait. Uh, sorry about your fall." "What fall?" "Didn't you fall from the ladder while cleaning the house?"

"Is that what my husband said? He's such a bastard. We had a fight and I got so mad afterward that I tried to slash it."

"Slash your marriage?" Lina asked. "No, silly! My wrist." Ruma lifted her bandaged wrist up and held Lina's hand.

"Don't tell them," she whispered, pointing at the rest of the visitors. "They'll start a



new gossip about it."

"I won't."

"But tell me, why did you choose to be a nurse? I'd have killed myself if I had to work at the same hospital with my doctor husband," Ruma giggled.

What a vile woman, Lina thought. She instantly hated Ruma and decided to stay away from her.

But a few months later, when Ruma called her, asking for a ride home after a car crash, Lina could not say 'no'. It was a minor crash, and Ruma was not hurt. But she was shaken and did not want to go back home right away. "Let's go to French Quarter instead, for some latte and beignet. And then we'll stop by at the mall. I want to buy you a new perfume. The one that you're wearing smells like puke."

Lina and Ruma became good friends after that. But that did not mean they stopped being jealous of each other. Ruma envied Lina's long hair and pitied her for her poor career choice; Lina had a grudge against Ruma's luxurious wardrobe. She hated Ruma's arrogant display of wealth but always managed to forgive her. But she could not let it go this time. *Pohela Baishakh* was hers as much as it was Ruma's. Lina decided to step into a brand new year with a brand new look. She went to have a haircut, got her nails done, and bought herself a pair of diamond earrings. "*Esho hey Baishakh, esho esho*," Lina sang as she drove home. "Come dear *Baishakh* and let my diamonds dazzle... at least for a short while—until Ruma destroys the day..." Lina's song ended in a sigh.

The Riverfront Park looked and smelled like a little Bangladesh. Women in colorful sarees and men in their best kurtas flocked by the food stalls, munching on some *deshi* snacks and sipping hot *chai*. The stage, decorated with banners and balloons, was ready for a renowned singer travelling all the way from Bangladesh—only for this occasion. The local performers entertained the audience in the meantime, singing and dancing gleefully.

Shova's daughter Rayna stole the show with her song sung in Broken Bangla: "*Batshaurer ahaborjia-na-a, dour hoiiye jhak jhak jhak, eishow eishow. Eishow hehe bhai shaq.*"

Lina had butterflies in her stomach. What if her friends did not like her new earrings? But they did; they even praised her red Jamdani. It went well with the diamonds, they said. The women kept praising each other until their mouth went dry.

Shova's muslin saree. Nilu's purple Prada purse. Mila's magnificent gold necklace. But where was Ruma? Everyone sat tensed, waiting for Ruma's arrival.

Rayna's *Baishakh* song was followed by another rendition: "*Baishakhi jhor, elo elo re... there comes the Baishakhi storm.*"

Everything came at the same time. Ruma came, dressed like *Padmaavati*. Then came a sudden gush of wind, and then came the rain and poured on *Padmaavati*. The canopy over the stage flew away; mothers ran to collect their children; fathers ran to start their cars; Lina's ears got deafened by a scream, "O, my saree, my saree!" The screamer then sprinted to her car—without saying goodbye to her friends.

"Did you see her face? She looked as if she was being murdered," Shova said. "Allah, Lina! Your Jamdani is drenched in rain!" Mila said.

"Your mascara is melting," Lina replied. "Allah re, Nilu, your poor Prada's ruined!" Mila poked.

"Mila *bhabi*, your b**** are showing!" Nilu yelled.

"O my God, Shova, get some leaves to cover yourself... before your muslin disappears," Mila said as she tried to cover her bosom with her rain soaked saree.

"But, did you see Ruma's face? She looked like a soggy beignet!" Shova started laughing.

Unwary of their own situation, the four of them synchronized an orchestra of laughter to celebrate *Bangla nobo borsho*, New Orleans style.

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