



POETRY

BY MITALI CHAKRAVARTY

## A prayer

What is the sadness that with a misty grey grief fills the world? A cry of a woman on television for a loss — an unending grief

rips her heart as endless tears roll down her wet cheeks. Her mouth remains open in imitation of the Munch-like Scream. That is

grief. The sorrow of loss is for the living. Love heals by giving. Sharing? Is it possible to share mourning? Missing? All the wounds death

inflicts on the living? With love and compassion, I hold your hand in grieving, not just for the dead, but the loss of a way of life. For

you, my friends, I can only be there in empathy, with my love and sympathy. Let us walk towards a new dawn. Dream of an aubade in a mask-free, virus-free world.

Let us write a hymn of love. And just wait... wait...



## Anointing with Love

Listen to the swish of the waves. Feel the breeze whisper caresses. See the mangroves stretch

their roots above the ground, in a siesta during lazy sunrises and sunsets. Murmurs from the

ocean come wafting as coconut fronds sing in the

fringes where the sand

welcomes the surf. It is a party at the beach with differences woven to

harmonise into a melody sung in tune. A crescendo that anoints with love.

## To Bahadur Shah Zafar

(The last Mughal emperor)

The Emperor wrote a lonely note. In exile, he wept for a grave in his Native land. Colonial

took a firm stand. That was more than a century ago. An era swept history beyond sepulchral lores. Returning

to his country of yore, the Emperor, would he win a vote? Would he be marginalised?

Would he be able to get his rights?

Sifting sands of time redefined temples, mosques and churches. Democracy on crutches dug trenches for the dead. Ghosts

continued to lean out of windows waiting to leap into the future. But the Emperor? The Emperor— could he ever return?

Mitali Chakravarty seeks love & harmony and in that spirit founded the Borderless Journal.



FICTION

# Malediction

SANJEEDA HOSSAIN

"About a hundred years ago, our ancestors used to live in the *Porir Desh*."

"What is a *Pori*?" Five year old Kitaab Ali asks his grandmother, Karimunnassa. He sleeps by her side every night and cannot fall asleep without listening to her stories.

Karimunnassa stares at the oil lamp as she enlightens her grandson about *Pori* or the fairies,

"A fairy is an astonishingly beautiful woman with a lucid pair of wings on her back. She is generally clad in pristine, white clothes. A smooth ray of light glows from her skin, and as she speaks, her voice rings like a wind chime."

"Fairies sound nice and pretty. Are you a *Pori*?" Kitaab Ali snuggles with her and touches her face with his little hands.

"No, never be fooled by the fairy's handsome appearance. Fairies never get old, and I am just another old woman."

Kitaab Ali becomes fully engrossed in her words, now. He holds her tight.

"My grandmother once encountered a fairy," Karimunnassa slowly starts moving the hand fan over her grandson.

"She saw a brass pitcher rising from the earthen floor of her mud hut, and a fairy appeared at her door. The fairy commanded her to grab the pitcher and drag it up from her floor. There were gold coins inside of it. The fairy informed her that the coins were gifts from her.

My grandmother was stupefied, and she shuddered as she asked, "What will I do with those coins?"

The fairy replied, "The coins will make you rich; you will become powerful. In return, you have to give me your little grandson who was born about a month ago."

My grandmother grabbed the broom right away and threatened the fairy to leave her house at once. As the fairy angrily disappeared amidst the ring of mist she created around her with her wand, all the family members and neighbors gathered around grandmother and howled to know what happened.

As soon as she started telling them about the fairy, her house broke down. The roof, the wall, the floor, the door of her house crumbled down under a crackling thunder. They were all pulled down to the pond and drowned.

My grandmother went mad afterwards, they said. She stopped eating; she stopped sleeping; she refused to take her bath. She died within a month, but before she died, she taught her children the tricks to guard themselves against the fairy."

Karimunnassa blows up the lamp. It all becomes dark. Kitaab Ali moves closer to her, "Tell me more."

"The neighborhood turned bleak and barren; people stopped living within miles around that scary pond which had grandmother's house in it. People say that it is now populated by fairies."

As she sends Kitaab Ali to sleep, Karimunnassa remembers the other part of the story. He will know of it someday.



\*\*\*  
According to the legend, Karimunnassa's grandmother was bestowed a hefty gift by the fairy and she could not carry the burden of it. The gift of the fairy becomes a curse for those who fail to recognize, protect and cherish it.

The pitcher still tries to raise its head within they say. People do not want to repeat the mistake that Karimunnassa's grandmother made. They keep silent about it in order to keep themselves safe. They became even more alert after Mohor Ali died a dreadful death.

Mohor Ali heard crows cawing under a bush, around the neck of a brass pitcher full of gold coins. He pulled it up without a thought. He came home with it and hid it inside the earthen floor of his cow shed.

The fairy appeared in his dream that night. She asked him to give her his first born in exchange of the pitcher. Mohor Ali refused and asked her to take her gold coins away. However, it is not possible to return the fairy's gift once you lay your hands on it.

Mohor Ali had to pay his price. The curse of the fairy fell on him.

In the next two days, he developed abscesses full of pus all over his body that looked like coins. When they burst, slimy maggots came out of them.

On his death bed, he informed his wife Karimunnassa about the hidden pitcher in the cow shed. He reminded her of the tricks to safeguard herself against the fairy.

"Strike it with broom sticks whenever the pitcher tries to rise from the floor. Always place a piece of iron under your pillow, and the fairy will stop appearing in your dream, for iron burns her skin."

Mohor Ali's last words were, "Guard our son Shohor Ali with all you have. Save him from the fairy."

He closed his eyes and Karimunnassa hugged the five and a half month old Shohor Ali tight.

\*\*\*  
Shohor Ali abhorred the restrictions imposed on him by his mother. He was barred from telling his real name to strangers, especially to unknown women. He was forbidden to get out of his village.

But Shohor Ali was now twenty-five, a full grown adult man desiring to seek adventure by setting himself out from his village. As soon as Karimunnassa had a hint of his intentions, she got him married to the daughter of her brother, her niece Kohinoor.

Kohinoor was pretty and well-mannered. She knew how to cook, clean and wash, and within a year of her marriage, she bore Shohor Ali a beautiful baby boy.

They named him Kitaab Ali. Everything was alright, for honey bees gathered nectar in honeycombs made within the wooden boxes placed in the flower garden. Bees arrive where peace and happiness prevail.

Yet, Shohor Ali felt restless and unhappy.

On a hot, humid Sunday midnight, he went out of his home in a frenzy. He came far away from his village and found a round log of a dead tree. It was the fairy ring, they said; stepping on it would take one to the fairy land, and Shohor Ali was tired of his confinement.

A beautiful woman in white with a pair of lucid wings and a silver wand in her hand appeared in front of him.

"What is your name, my dear lad?" she spoke with a tinge of honey in her voice. "Shohor Ali," he replied with his full awareness of his mother's restrictions.

"Come with me. You will be the king of our land."

When Karimunnassa opened the boxes to gather honey the next morning, she found that the bees had flown away from their hives.

\*\*\*  
Shohor Ali came back after five months. He had been to a town populated by women only. He saw the unimaginable there; ate the unthinkable and learned magic tricks people were unaware of.

Shohor Ali narrated his adventure at his village tea-stall in the afternoon.

"I asked the oldest of their women to send me back to my village. She gave me her pet tree to ride. It carried me on its trunks and brought me back within a night. Those beautiful ladies would not let me go," Shohor

Ali giggled. "Then why did you return?" the owner of the tea-stall asked.

"I have my family here. I love them. How could I live without them?" he nervously replied.

"Then why did you leave without notice?" People gathered around him and howled in multiple voices.

Shohor Ali hurriedly left the stall and walked briskly towards his home.

As soon as he reached the premises of his house, the fairy appeared behind the olive tree.

"Why did you leave my land without my permission? Don't you know what price you have to pay for that?" She shrieked in a voice that congealed Shohor Ali's blood into curd.

"I am ready to pay the price. Wait here. I am bringing you my baby. If I remain alive, I can be the father of as many sons as I want," he tried to sound resolute and firm.

He went inside the house and found his little son sitting on his cot. The baby held a rattle in his fist and chewed on it furiously.

Where could be the mother and the grandmother? Shohor Ali wondered. He looked around and when he saw none, he grabbed the baby from its cot and ran off the house.

The baby was startled at first; then it screamed. He did not recognize his father. He also smelled danger.

\*\*\*  
As soon as Karimunnassa heard the baby crying, she threw away the bowl of semolina and ran towards the baby's cot. She found it empty. She asked Kohinoor to guard the house and grabbed her pouch. She knew exactly where to go.

When she reached the fairy's ring, she found Shohor Ali waiting. Baby Kitaab Ali was crying plaintively. Far away from his familiar surroundings, known faces and caregivers, he was hungry, cold and terrified. But his father stood firm.

When the fairy descended upon the land, he was all set to hand his first born over to the magical creature. She stared upon the baby with her eyes full of greed as she took him in her arm.

"I am free then. I have paid my debts!" Shohor Ali shouted at her.

The fairy cast upon him a look of disdain. She was about to mount upon her ring when a ball of fire hit her arm. She cried in pain and dropped the baby.

Karimunnassa grabbed him instantly and beat the wings of the fairy with her iron hammer. Fire caught them, and they were turned into ashes.

The fairy screamed and sharp nails came out from her nimble fingers. She held Shohor Ali's throat in her claws and dragged him to her fairy ring.

They disappeared in front of the village people who had gathered and howled behind Karimunnassa as she returned home with Kitaab Ali.

Sanjeeda Hossain is Assistant Professor at the Department of English, University of Dhaka.