

REMEMBERING SYED SHAMSUL HAQ ON HIS SIXTH DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Homecoming: a short story by Syed Shamsul Haq

I punched the lock. It did not help. There was a brick lying close to my feet, I took it and hit the lock hard with it. The brick broke into pieces.

TRANSLATED BY MARZIA RAHMAN

My plane landed in Dhaka at 2:30. By the time, I went through customs, it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I became restless. How long would it take to go home? No one lived there now. My house stood alone, empty. I left it one month and thirty days ago. I locked the door before I left.

By now, the house must be covered in dirt and dust. I brought a few things this time—curtains, lamps, and a carpet for my room. I bought them when I went shopping for the last time during my stay in the foreign country.

As soon as I came out of the customs, I



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found Kalam, pacing up and down the place. *Is he here to see me? It'll be most unlikely because no one knows I will be coming today. I haven't told anyone.*

Kalam approached me. "You are here?" he asked.

"Yes."

He walked with me to the taxi stand.

"How are things here? All good?" I asked, "How is everyone?"

Kalam stayed quiet; he did not reply to any of my queries. He watched me lighting a cigarette. And then, he suddenly asked, "Where will you stay?"

I felt surprised. I was about to get into the taxi. His question puzzled me. I came out and asked, "What do you mean?"

"Nothing," he fumbled. "I heard that someone is living in your house. I am not sure though. They said something like this."

"Who said that?"

"A few acquaintances."

"Nonsense." I burst out into laughter. Kalam had probably taken some stuff in the airport. I asked him if he'd like to accompany me to the town.

"No."

"Okay. I am going then." I got into the taxi.

Giving the driver my address, I leaned back. I watched Kalam going back; he slowly walked up the stairs towards the lobby. "What a cheeky monkey! Talks such nonsense."

A row of new buildings lined both sides of the road. The new roads were yet to be finished. The labours were at work. They were working in the hot asphalt with canvas shoes on their feet.

"Speed up," I told the driver.

What would I do when I reach the house? At first, I would open the doors and windows. And then, I'd light a cigarette. Sitting in an easy chair, I would relish the smoke and look all around me. Every corner of the house was familiar—all the furniture, books, wardrobes, even the top of the tree by the window. They would begin to laugh.

The house must have filled with dirt, one month old. I would clean the house first. I would hang the curtains later. I would put the lamps on the table. The carpet would go between the bed and the reading table. It would look like a new house. I could never decorate it properly due to poverty and negligence. But I could do it now. And as I thought about it, my heart filled with delight. If the house were a person, it would have leaped into my lap in utter joy. And I would have caressed it.

I reached the house finally.

I brought the key out of my pocket to

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unlock the door. I was immediately startled. The key could not be inserted. Was it the wrong key? I tried with another one. No, it did not work either. Taking the key out of the lock, I gave it a good look. It was my key. What was the problem then?

Suddenly, I felt a strange numbness, my

chest turned ice cold. It was not my lock. I did not put this on. Whose lock was this? Such a big, hard lock like a stone?

I tried with my key again. Then I went on trying with every other small or big key I had in my ring. Not a single one worked. I knew it would not work. I did not put this lock. Who put it on?

I stood quietly and thought for a while. I looked around. This was my house, and the road across the house was familiar too. And there was Hasan Saheb's house where the boys were raising a din, and the house-number hanged on the red, iron gate. And then, there was the same, old shop in the corner of the road with the same old laundry signboard.

Then? What was the problem? Who locked this door? Such a hard, strong lock like a stone?

I felt incapacitated. It felt as if someone came from behind in the dark and strangulated me.

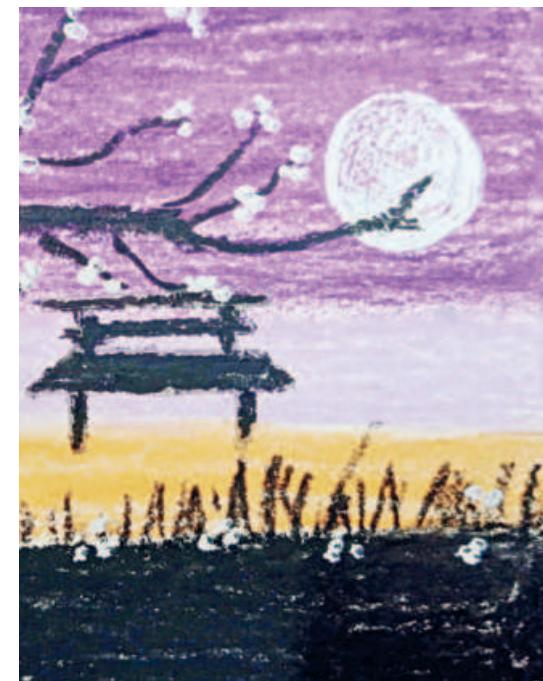
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The driver came running and took me away from the door. All my anger was directed towards him. He might have guessed it too; he held my raised hands in his and says in Hindi, "Sir, the door will not open. Have you gone crazy?"

Then he told me what I should do. I should go and ask the neighbours. Or I could see the landlord, or I could ask the police for help. I suddenly remembered what Kalam told me in the airport. He was right. But what should I do? I did not pay heed to any of the suggestions given by the driver. The curtain, the lamps and the carpet were still in the car. I saved up money from my stay abroad and spent hours wandering from one market to another to buy them. Where would I keep them? What should I do? And where would I sleep tonight? I could never put up a fight in my life. Or I could have asked the man for a brawl in the street. The man who was staying in my house. The man who locked the door. I knew one thing though. The man who was living in my house must be one of my acquaintances or a friend or maybe a close relative.

The driver asked me what he should do. Yes, what could he possibly do? "Can you kindly take me to a hotel?" I asked him.

Marzia Rahman is a fiction writer and translator. Her translations have appeared in Six Seasons Review, Writing Places Anthology (UK), The Book of Dhaka, The Demoness, and When the Mango Tree Blossomed.



That's How Poetry Is

HASAN ROBAYET

(Translated by Md Mehedi Hasan)

My mother often tells me—
What would these poems bring?

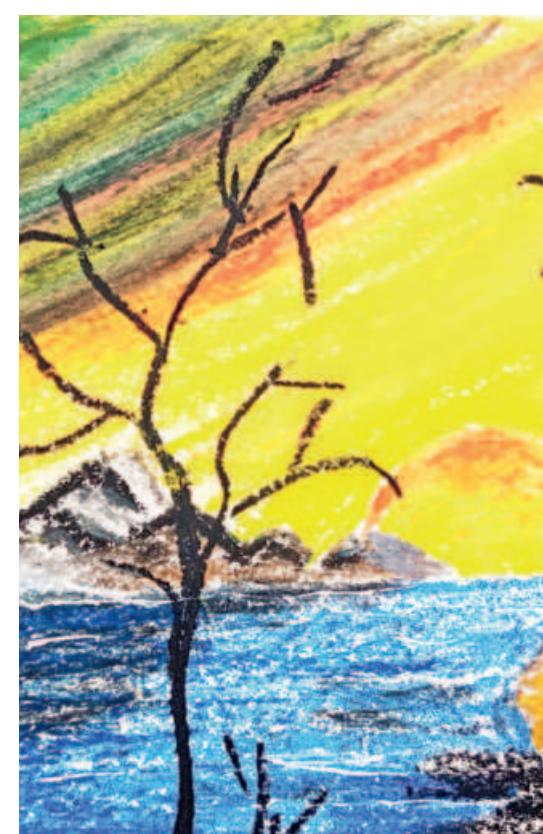
Rather get a job.
How long will you be like this!
Besides, we're getting old—
someday you'll have to take care of the family.

I brood in silence
like the leaf that comes flying
from the yellow forest—

I know, all my poems
cannot buy
a day's worth of my mother's medicine!
I know.

Hasan Robayet is a Bangladeshi poet.

Md Mehedi Hasan is a lecturer of English at North Western University, Khulna. He occasionally contributes to Star Literature.



POETRY BY PIAS MAJID

Welcome Farewell (In the memory of Khondakar Ashraf Hossain)

TRANSLATED BY LITON CHAKRABORTY MITHUN

Grieve no more—
As for Notan
The poet has amassed much grief.
Let me plant a tree of fog
In the earth of dreams;
There too, no flowers, nor fruits bloom
But in poetic symposiums of death
Three damsels recite *qasidas* to the poet.
In the blind certainty of that listening,
I have seen Partha drink shots of life
With the intensity of his shooting an arrow.
In such promiscuous times, but for a hateful
anklet—
What ornament can adorn the feet of a damsel?
Oh poet, your baul-heart is drenched
In a dissolving rain.
And see how scorched we become
By the cursed sun of survival,
Sitting amidst the ocean-like *samsara*
On the bank of the river Jamuna.

Pias Majid is a poet, essayist, and writer.

Liton Chakraborty Mithun is a faculty member at the Department of English Language Literature, Central Women's University.



The best story will receive a monetary award of Tk 10,000 (Ten thousand Taka)

Deadline to send the stories: 10:00 p.m., November 22, 2022 (Bangladesh time)

The top THREE stories selected by a judging panel will get published online sometime in December, and an award ceremony will be held at *The Daily Star*.

Please note that the staff of *The Daily Star* cannot enter the contest.