

# To the muse

**NOUSHIN NURI**

It's been a thousand moons  
I twisted the ink close,  
Put up my notebook on a shelf,  
And laid in its sheaves a crimson rose.

Time played away like a melody –  
Cafuned the writer into a dull slumber.  
White pillows felt like clouds of words  
The sleeping poet penned the songs of birds.

Many afternoons, my eyes rested.  
On the browning edges belted in leather  
And often in a moment's flicker,  
I supposed picking up my feather.

Basking in time, the edges tanned  
Perhaps, ink was dripping through the veins of a page,  
My rose had dried and sunk low  
I was busy keeping up with the flow.

With every spin of the earth,  
I lost some thread from my spool  
Until nothing was left to weave a word –  
I picked up the needle but my vision blurred.

After a thousand moons,  
I brushed the dust and leafed through the past –  
It glowed like a scripture gilded in gold  
The ghost-like words turned my fingers cold.

I've sipped away the afternoons  
Trying to summon the muse.  
I wait for the dictation that's revealed in a blink,  
I mix tears to drench the drying ink  
And dip my flattened rose –  
All in vanity – Muse, rebloom my dead prose!

*Noushin Nuri is an early bird fighting the world to maintain her sleep schedule. Reach her at noushin2411@gmail.com*



DESIGN: ABIR HOSSAIN



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# A Masquerade Ball

**SABIBA HOSSAIN**

Jewel-studded dresses, crystal chandeliers, blinding lights, and forced laughter. Anika stood in the middle of a strange place full of strange people and thought to herself, "What am I doing here?"

Everywhere around her, people exchanged courtesies and danced and squealed exuberantly. Anika couldn't read their facial expressions; everyone wore a mask since it was a masquerade ball. Even though she couldn't read their emotions, she guessed they must be over the moon, being invited to such an elite event.

Her appearance at this extravagant ball didn't make any sense. If her life were a movie, she would be a background character whom nobody took notice of. No, if her life were a movie, she probably would be that background character whose scene got cut out in the editing room. She didn't fit in a place that was so obviously reserved for protagonists. Anika stood out like a plain loaf of bread stands out amidst a platter of gold-flaked pastries.

She desperately wanted to put up an act, to pretend like she had it all. But she knew she could never fake it, everyone was so truly accomplished that they would whiff her out in an instant. She was not scared of being labelled a fake. After all, she had known it her whole life – rather she was just terrified of the aftermath. Unmistakably, they would make a spectacle of her. They would drag her under the spotlight and announce to the world what a con artist she was.

Thinking about the consequences made her nauseous. Anika wanted to run away before anyone in the room could figure out that she didn't belong there.

"That wouldn't be too bad. I would drift away in the nothingness of the ocean. It would be so tranquil..." she thought.

"Hey, Anika, right?" she hadn't noticed that somebody had appeared in front of her.

"Yeah," she tried to recall where she had seen

him before, but her memory failed her.

"Are you enjoying the party?" he asked with a euphonious voice.

"Um, yeah. It's terrific," she offered a smile.

He looked at her with a bemused expression, like she had said something funny.

"He knows I'm a fraud. He's here to catch me before I slip," her mind raced.

Before she could come up with an excuse to evade him, he reached his arm out.

"What's in his hands? Handcuffs?" she asked herself.

Before her thoughts trailed any further, he spoke up, sparing Anika from spiralling into her head where would conjure up at least a thousand different ways to escape him.

"Let's dance," he said earnestly.

The next thing she knew, she was in the middle of the room, dancing with a person with sun-kissed hair, sparkly eyes, and a dazzling smile. He represented everything good and happy. Naturally, dancing with such a jolly spirit didn't make any sense, but surprisingly it didn't bother her. As she moved around the floor and twirled and dipped her head, the outside world began to blur. Anika didn't care that her steps were out of sync with the rhythm or that they were too clumsy. She was giggling, flailing her arms around carelessly, breathing in without trails of thoughts in between them.

Anika felt relief. She was too burdened with everyone's expectations in her mind, too busy executing a version of herself that not even she recognized – she forgot what it was like to live in a world without worries. She soared through the air, thinking how beautiful it was to live but then the song came to an end.

People left one by one, leaving her stranded in the middle of the room, making room for her worries to crawl back. For a moment, she let herself live in a fantasy. However, that fantasy had to fade away, like all good things in the universe.

Anika wondered as she snuck out of the party, "Why did I come here again?"