



A fugitive

Nirmalendu Goon
(Translated by Rifat Munim)

It was noontime when I arrived home
the sun was shining bright,
my shadow, spinning on and on, is reduced
to a thin line.
No one could recognise me.
When lighting a cigarette on the train
I borrowed a match from someone
when boarding a train at the Mahkuma station
someone wanted to pull me into an embrace,
or when someone screamed his surprise
placing his hand on my shoulder,
I reminded everyone of resemblance between people
even when they are not related.
No one could recognise me. Sitting in front of me,
a political leader, who was a communist, kept glancing at my face; yet he too couldn't.
As soon as I alighted at Barahatta I had tea at Rafiz's stall;
I was truly surprised to see Rafiz did not recognise me
even when adding some extra sugar to my tea.
After five long years I was returning to my unaltered village;
down the same dilapidated road, down the same thin strip of dark soil
marking land boundaries

I was returning to my village after so long!
It was noontime when I arrived in my village
the sun was shining bright
the wind was whizzing by.
The house had changed a lot—
from corrugated iron sheets to pond water
from the flower garden to the cow pen
no trace of my childhood memory was to be found anywhere.
From atop a bel flower tree bending over
the veranda of the reading room
a laudoga snake flicked out its tongue to the sweltering noon.
Like stubble that grows spontaneously on a face
grass, undergrowth, pits, thickly grown forest of plants and trees
engulfed the house from all sides,
as if, mocking the civilisational foundation everywhere,
obstinate nature was ruling the roost here.
A fox was lying too close to a dog;
upon seeing me there,
one of them fled right away while another began
sniffing out a familiar smell perhaps, just like a checker along with
a cop tried to sniff out my identity at Tejgaon.

I was walking till I was rendered motionless by the sight of a tree:
An ashok tree, which was damaged in the 1962 storm—
the cool shade it provided once could effortlessly hide two people!
In the name of love, we once buried ourselves into the night
under its shade.

Her name was Bashonti, ah Bashonti!
She lived in Bihar now and bore her robber-husband four children.
The water in the pond rippled as a fish slapped the water with its tail
while a snake flashed its tongue again;
rattling the calm, placid, foolish village
an airplane flew westward
while I, knocking loudly on the door from the rear side of the house,
called: Ma.

The door which didn't open in a long time
the door which didn't hear any voice in a long time
that rusted door creaked open in the blink of an eye.

I had evaded arrest all this time; the detective branch
had failed to put me behind bars;
but under a sweltering sun in the month of Chaitra
with strong wind whizzing by



how easily I found myself imprisoned in my mother's embrace;
how easily I, that same person, became a child once again
upon looking at my mother's eyes.

Hiding me locked in a teary kiss,
crossing long stretches of feisty undergrowth,
Mother reached the pond to wash rice.
I took a look around and saw:
in the middle of two rooms
the image of Ganesh—the god of salvation and wisdom—
was replaced by Lenin; beside Father's ledger was Karl Marx
while a gap revealed by a broken portion of the almirah mirror
was bridged by a frazzled image of Krupskaya.¹

Ma was walking back from the pond, Father would return
in the evening from the district town—a bag containing provisions
would be slung over his shoulder as usual.
Hearing about my arrival, Sister-in-law would come to visit soon;
she'd implore me again to get married.
Hearing about my arrival,
from Jashmadhob would come NAP leader Yasin.
Walking three miles from Rasulpur would come Aditya,
in the dead of night Abbas would turn up from Amtala,
carrying his deadly firearm.

All of them would ask about the situation in Dhaka:
What lies ahead of us?
Where is Ayub Khan now?
Is Sheikh Mujib making a mistake?
How long will the arrest warrant hang over my head?

I'd say nothing in reply; as they stared at me
I'd just gaze back into their eyes and observe in the lines of their faces
the different futures lying ahead of us.

Darkness would descend on their anxious faces
while I, removing the pain of incapacitated desire with a scream,
would say:
"I don't know anything about these,
I don't understand any of this."

Rifat Munim is an editor, journalist, bilingual writer, translator and essayist.

¹ Legendary Marxist political leader who worked closely with Lenin, and later with Stalin and Trotsky.

Smell of corpse in the air

Rudro Mohammad Shahidullah
(Translated by Rifat Munim)

I smell corpses rotting in the air to this day
I observe death's naked dance on the soil to this day,
I hear the hapless scream of the raped in my sleep to this day—
Has this country forgotten the night of horror, that bloodied time?
In the air floats smell of corpse
With blood is smeared the soil.
Those who once touched the brow of this land with a chest full of
hopes
Have sought out forbidden corners in the pus of their tattered lives.
In love with a lightless cage, they stay awake in dark caves today.
As if it was a virgin mother, benumbed after her wretched birth,
Independence—is it then a wretched birth?
Is it then the shame harvested by that fatherless mother?
That old vulture has clawed at the nation's flag again.
In the air floats smell of corpse—
Still the curvaceous woman stirs up a deluge of flesh dancing in
neon light.
Smeared is the soil with blood—
Still bones of starving people pile up in rice warehouses.
I can't sleep a wink. I can't sleep a wink all night—
All I hear in my sleep is the hapless scream of the raped
On the river water float rotten corpses like water-hyacinth
The headless torso of a girl, eaten away by dogs,
Stings my eyes—I can't sleep,
I can't sleep ...
Wrapped up in a bloodied shroud—eaten away by dogs, eaten away
by vultures,
He is my brother,
She is my sister,
He is my beloved father.
Independence—they are the only dear ones left, after I lost
everything to the war,
Independence—they are the priceless crops I harvested with the
blood of my loved ones.
Sari of my raped sister—that today is my nation's bloodied flag.



ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

Poetry, my useless weapon

Shaheed Quaderi
(Translated by Kaiser Haq)

As bird flocks take wing at the rattle of Sten guns
the broken-winged poems crouching in my notebook
bury their faces in a dark drawer
and lie like dead swans—or is it like
an ancient rusty good-for-nothing pistol
without a bullet in its chamber? Still,
I can't get over my attachment. The day
our neighborhood, swept by searchlights,
trembled at the drilled terror
of barking voices and heavy alien boots,
this house too shook in fear
though I hadn't any hidden weapons
to give me away. But I, nervous, cowardly
though I am, boldly shielded you from shiny bayonets
and kept you safe from bonfires.
Just as a guerrilla fighting for freedom
straps a Sten gun to his thigh
or warily advances, grenade in hand,
I have evaded prying eyes to keep you concealed
as if you bore the promise of a deadly explosion.
One day, I remember, I dug a hole in the garden
and tenderly laid you down. But when
the heavy boots of foreigners trod all over you
heedlessly as they came to pound on the door
you didn't explode like a defensive mine.

O my serried words, if you still doze in silence
like bedraggled crows on my notebook pages
is it for nothing that I've put up with contumely
in my vaunted lifelong passion for you?
You are nothing but restless insomniac nights,
you've given me neither royal diadem nor
commoner's covenant—
why do I still abase myself at your feet?
Come, let us shake hands and part company,
only let me plead one last time:
If you can
at least once
roar like a field-gun.

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