

FICTION

JISHU

Jishu's elder sister then appeared with her retired husband, expressing that their mother didn't want to leave Jishu's side. They couldn't keep her at their flat as she was very attached to Jishu and couldn't sleep without him.

HASNAT ABDUL HYE

1. After the previous tenant vacated the house, Khan E Alam decided not to accommodate any younger residents. They often chat and socialise with friends, causing disturbances during his sleep. Even after the noise subsides in the afternoon, its effects linger, disrupting his peace of mind long into the night. One day, as Khan E Alam was reading the newspaper, a young man entered the drawing room with a casual air, sporting sunglasses like a cinema hero, and inquired, "I noticed a 'To-Let' sign. Is the house still available?"

Glancing up from the newspaper, Khan E Alam replied, "Yes, but it's not available to you."

Surprised, the young man asked, "Do you know me? You've never seen me before, yet you've already declined. Please explain."

"It's because you're too young. I've decided not to rent to younger individuals."

"Why? What's wrong with them? Why can't you rent to me? Weren't you once my age?"

"I won't rent to younger individuals because they tend to make noise and disturb my sleep. Although I was once young like you, I wasn't as loud as today's youth."

work on software development, so I need ample space."

"Do you have assistants who come to your house?" Khan E Alam asked, his eyes filled with curiosity.

"Yes, they do come when needed, but I usually communicate with them over the phone", the young man replied.

"Does that mean there's a lot of coming and going?" Khan E Alam inquired, scrutinising him.

"Yes, exactly. It's like the ebb and flow of a river. People come and go", he responded with a smile. "But they don't make noise. My mother wouldn't tolerate it, and I would ensure they don't."

Impressed by his responsible demeanour, Khan E Alam decided to rent the house to him. He then apologised for not asking his name earlier.

"I'm Jishu", the young man replied.

"Jishu Chowdhury?" Khan E Alam asked in surprise. "Just Jishu? No other part to your name?"

"No, that's it. My late father was a simple man who disliked complications, even in naming his children. I'm Jishu, my brother is Sishu, my elder sister is Mishu, and the younger one is Nishu."

"Ah, it seems your father liked rhymes. By the way, where do your siblings live?" Khan E Alam

he hadn't made a mistake in renting the flat to Jishu; he believed Jishu to be a good person, and his visitors seemed to come from respectable backgrounds.[a]

One day, Jishu took Khan E Alam to his flat where his elderly mother was in the drawing room, wearing a white sari and thick glasses. Despite her imposing presence, Khan E Alam felt respectful and greeted her by touching her feet. She blessed him, evoking a sense of traditional respect.

The house help brought a plate of snacks, and Jishu's mother warmly entertained Khan E Alam. Despite his hesitation, Khan E Alam declined, but Jishu's mother insisted he take whatever he liked. He felt as if he were listening to his own mother's voice.

Khan E Alam inquired about the type of books she liked to read, to which she replied that she tried to read but found her eyes getting tired quickly.

Jishu's elder sister then appeared with her retired husband, expressing that their mother didn't want to leave Jishu's side. They couldn't keep her at their flat as she was very attached to Jishu and couldn't sleep without him.

Jishu's mother affirmed her attachment to her youngest son, stating that she needed to stay with him by rule.

The elder sister lamented that Jishu hadn't married yet, which saddened their mother, who often scolded them for not getting him married. Khan E Alam mentioned that Jishu could marry at his own discretion, but the elder sister explained that Jishu believed he wasn't settled yet and thus wasn't interested in marriage.

Khan E Alam suggested that Jishu was doing well in his software business and could consider marriage, ensuring that their mother would be taken care of. However, the elder sister revealed that they had tried convincing him, but he didn't listen.

When Khan E Alam inquired about Jishu's elder brother in the USA, the elder sister became upset, revealing that he, too, was unmarried. She explained that being twins, they shared a dramatic life, facing challenges and fears together, even death.

Khan E Alam offered to intervene and talk to Jishu about marriage, which delighted the elder sister. She shared that Jishu had a close friendship with a girl named Baani and suggested that Mishu could marry her if Khan E Alam could manage Jishu.

Understanding his responsibilities as the owner of the flat, Khan E Alam didn't feel uneasy about the situation.

This is an excerpt. Read the rest of the story on Star Literature and The Daily Star's websites.

Translated by Alamgir Mohammad from Bangla from the short story "Keno, Oi Toh Jishu".

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a Bangladeshi writer and novelist. He was awarded the Ekushey Padak in 1995 for his contribution to Bangla literature.

Alamgir Mohammad teaches literature at the Department of English, Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology, Cumilla. He has published 17 titles in both Bangla and English translation.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

The young man countered, "But how do you know I make noise? You've never met me."

"It's your age that gives it away", Khan E Alam replied irritably.

The young man persisted, "You're assuming. But the problem is, your assumption is wrong. Despite my youth, I don't make noise. And neither do my friends when they visit, because my 82-year-old mother lives with me. Are you an octogenarian?"

Moved by this revelation, Khan E Alam regarded the young man with newfound importance. A young man who cared for his elderly mother was undoubtedly responsible. After a moment of contemplation, Khan E Alam changed his demeanour and courteously invited the gentleman to take a seat.

As the young man sat down, Khan E Alam inquired, "Who else lives with you, apart from you and your mother?"

"It's just the two of us", he replied. "My mother and I."

"Only two of you? Then why such a large flat?"

"My mother enjoys reading. She has a vast collection of books. And I

inquired.

After learning about Jishu's siblings, Khan E Alam abandoned the idea of seeking references and asked when he planned to settle in.

"The sooner, the better", Jishu replied. "And about the advance?"

"Hmm, alright", Khan E Alam hesitated before accepting the cash offered by Jishu. "Bring your mother. An 82-year-old woman who reads books is no joke."

2. Jishu appeared two days later with his mother, bringing along boxes of books, several broad bookshelves, branded computers, and three laptops. It was clear to Khan E Alam that Jishu was a computer enthusiast. Khan E Alam felt elated to have such an educated and technologically savvy tenant for the first time, eagerly anticipating meeting Jishu's mother.

After some days, Khan E Alam noticed a significant number of young men on motorcycles visiting Jishu's flat daily. They didn't stay long and left quietly. Despite the frequent visitors, there was no disturbance or noise, which relieved Khan E Alam. He felt reassured that

FICTION

MARZIA RAHMAN

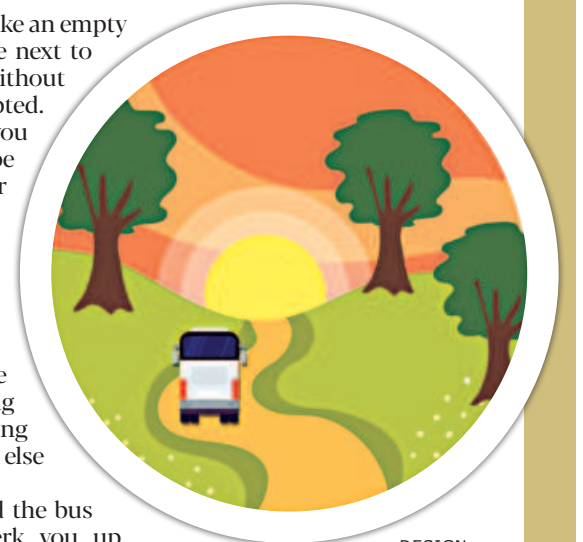
The journey

If you travel on a bus, always take the window seat. You may want to peek outside, maybe later, in more peaceful hours. But for now, you let your head, full of worries, and a throbbing heart huddle with each other. Whether or not you have made the right decision to begin a voyage you are not sure how and where it will end.

If you travel on a bus, take an empty seat with a broken one next to you; you can travel without company, uninterrupted.

If it's a window seat, you may look out, maybe later, when all your thoughts will go to sleep. But for now, you let your painted toenails rest next to your embroidered handbag. Closing your eyes, you listen to the loud Hindi songs blaring on the bus, wishing you were somewhere else before drifting off.

A sudden brake and the bus conductor's shouts jerk you up. You open your eyes, remembering only



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

A sudden brake and the bus conductor's shouts jerk you up. You open your eyes, remembering only half of the dream. The other half swirls in the sultry air before flying outside. It is then that you look out.

the dream. The other half swirls in the sultry air before flying outside. It is then that you look out.

The green countryside stretches out under a blazing sun like a tapestry. You pass coco-palms, betel-nuts, brick houses, a woman in a red printed sari with a pitcher on her waist, a few naked kids playing in the sand, peasants irrigating their fields, a hermit lost in thought under a banyan tree, a small white duck sitting on the back of a cow and a lone man in a bicycle. As you pass the small, thatched mud huts nestled among banana and mango groves in village after village, you wonder what kind of lives, what joys, what sorrows, what stories, what songs are hidden behind them. And you wonder if there are other daughters, once exiled and outcast, are going back home too?

The exiled DAUGHTER

Is it true that when we migrate, we lose a few people from our past? Is it a fact or a fiction that with migration, a new life takes shape, erasing the memories of bygone days? Can we ever cut our ties to the ancestral home?

I stand in the courtyard facing the L-shaped one-story house. I look at the tin roof where bougainvillea blooms in white, pink and yellow colours. And at night, a single moon and a thousand stars glow and the fragrance of hasnahena flowers washes over the senses in waves. Here, in this courtyard, a century old banyan tree stands still and in silence, watching over the house like a mother. And under the shade

of this very banyan tree, a very old grandmother used to lie down on a cot and grin with a toothless mouth, watching a six-year-old girl run amok, chasing a naughty cat.

I stand in the courtyard and watch life playing in flashback—a giggling child in her mother's arms, a defiant teenage girl, a young bride in a red sari. This house and this courtyard bear witness to the lives of my grandparents and my parents. Here, my brother's children and their children will be born and raised. Here, under this very banyan tree, History may come with a broad smile on her face, her pockets brimming with stories of three generations and one exiled daughter.

Marzia Rahman is a flash fiction writer and translator. Author of two books, *The Aftermath* and *Dot and Other Flashes*, she has been published widely in both print and online journals.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

POETRY

The first downpour will be my cue

TAHSEEN NOWER PRACHI

Raindrops whisper on the tin roof's drum,
A symphony that calls me finally home.
There you'll be, a shawl draped round
your form,
Lost in memories weathering life's storm.
A thousand teardrops, like the falling rain,
Glimmer in your eyes, a heart etched with
pain.
Do you know, dear one, the clouds we see
now,
Hold echoes of sunlight, a forgotten vow?
When you see me, weathered by distant

shores,
Can you speak of the laughter we held
before?
Old photographs blur, a face half-
unknown,
Is this who I was, a seed long sown?
Through the drumming rain, I'll find my
way back,
To stories whispered beneath the eaves'
crack.
"Where have you wandered?" your voice,
soft and low,
I'll say, "I sought myself, but you helped
me grow."

Tahseen Nower Prachi is a writer whose head is a koi pond of micro tales too scattered to come down to her keyboard. For more of her little pieces follow *The Minute Chronicles* on Facebook.



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA