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CREATIVE NONFICTION

Not waiting for answers

Are our bodies an extension of the land we are born into? Do footsteps over our native terrains vibrate in our insides? Do the silences of its hidden silos create pockets of voids in our lungs and minds?

IFFAT NAWAZ

How long does a corpse of a hero take to rot? 50 years or more? What about the corpses of martyrs? One week? 10 days? The 40-day mark to blow the candles of funeral fires? What if these corpses were mummified and inserted into living bodies by some strange mechanism, then does the soul of a bygone hero survive intermingling with the soul of the living? Do we even have souls? Do they also know how to cry? Do the dead leave the world at all? Mixing with the soil beneath and the air above water—do they become dark-skinned fruits, hard-pitted seeds, scentless flowers?

Do the unhealed, vengeful living misconstrue the words of the corpses they carry? Can corpses talk? Can the past's language still be relevant today? Do pasts speak only on repeat, in muted sighs and high volumes on screens to remind us how dead they are? Do these pasts ever beg to be let go? Do these pasts want to swallow whole the living which use them to survive?

What's the meaning of survivor's guilt and how many of us have it? How many times can an event be played on loop for it to lose its power? What are the dilemmas of the ones who hang in the middle? Besides shelter and food? Is it that we always have too much to lose yet not enough to go by? Is it our supposed clear conscience matched with bent spines? Is it fear of deaths and tears shed over recent corpses which have turned our clocks counterwise?

Are we stuck or are we moving forward? Is death yesterday's news or is it tomorrow's?

Can we lend courage from posterity to untie our hands, so we can hold the truth that keeps sliding by?

What's the maximum length of time we are allowed to stay in purgatories? Do limbos run out of space or give up replicating patterns of demise? Does history really repeat itself? Or are we struck by some magician's dark spell, reenacting history—painted on walls, bleeding till we fall, to become corpses in a soulless world—bulldozed, stampeded, wiped clean for a future that resembles old sorrows?

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Do we all carry remains of war-fields in our ribcages? Do we then lie down with the weight of ancient weapons, face up to the sun, and beg for mercy, for Grace to enter, to pardon us for crimes we committed and didn't, for words we spoke and that which remained unspoken, for our breaths which always feel borrowed? Should we cut open our chests, exposing our hearts and its muffled screams? Are there any tears left to shed by the clouds who stare at us cold and distant, can they break open blood-stained skies?

And then when the sky breaks, do we howl from the base of our spines, all of which we had held inside—disguised, disowned? Do we learn how to swim in mud to become lotus buds or do we get stuck between yesterday's wrath and today's shifting power? Who do we trust? Can

we even trust our own impulses, emotions? Can we grow new ears to differentiate truths from half-truths and half-lies? Or do we spend a few days in stillness to stop the earthquake and its aftershocks or have our nerves turned to steel? Is anyone working on calming our insides, banking on the overused but unignorable word—heal?

Did someone tell us that victory can also be vicious? Do we draw boundaries in our celebrations or let our joy run wild while mobs ravage our earth in the name of justice and pent-up scorn? Will we always have scores to settle, is forgiveness just a myth we were told about, are its edges too soft to carry, its voice too bold?

Do all deaths—of children, young ones, mothers, fathers, animals, objects, nations, trees, beliefs, hope, identity and foresight—reincarnate to bring us peace? How long do we have to wait for clarity? How long till the unheard speaks?

Will the world revolve faster tomorrow? Spin us out of our morbid guises and fling us to someplace fresh and high? Do we dare ask the Universe to whimper, do we dare go off orbit searching for a guiltless star's warmth and light?

Iffat Nawaz is a Bangladeshi-American writer based in Pondicherry, India. Her first novel Shurjo's Clan was published by Penguin India (Vintage) in 2022, and was shortlisted for the Best First Book Award by Tata Lit Live/ Mumbai Literature Festival in 2023.

POETRY

The children of the red storm

TAHSEEN NOWER PRACHI

You've ignited a tempest,
a crimson anger,
A defiance burning brighter than the summer's sun.
They'd armored the skies,
and paved the earth with steel,
A chilling sword of blooded power,
raw and cold.
Days bleed into nights,
as wounds begin to heal,
Yet courage persisted,
stories yet untold.
We yearned for triumph,
a rise of liberty's gleam,
But memory's echo whispered
coldly of winter's chill.
Millions of hearts restless,
Dreaming a fervent dream,
Of a nation transformed,
where justice runs its fill.
They fabricated sunshine,
a plastic, hollow sphere,
While outside, Commander Bengal Rain,
too roared in cheer.
Now, victory's dawn has come,
We'll also bring questions anew,
For power once grasped,
is hard to subdue.
Debating with questions to whoever's rule,
with youths' voices now strong,
Demand explanations,
where playing with power goes wrong.
No longer the silenced,
the fearful and meek,
Shape our own destiny,
Your future to seek.

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.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY

The color of courage

MARZIA RAHMAN

Surely, it's madness
it's insanity—that he walked on.
That he stood alone, facing
hundreds of the police with their rifles
pointing at him.
And
he shouted.
And
he showed—what courage looks like.
What youth is made of.
Right then, there, the shot was fired.
Valor lay still on the dusty street, dripping
blood, colouring the earth
with the colour of courage—RED.

RED

1. The colour that screams like police vans, the rifles, pointed at people, point black.
2. The blood stains on the clothes after the bricks are thrown, after the shots are fired.
3. After the bodies are dragged down the roads, leaving marks.
4. How the protesters with posters and banners look like in daylight!
5. How the streets filled with graffiti look like in moonlight!
6. The colour of Facebook screens on a particular day for a particular cause.
7. The colour of rebellion, hundreds of thousands of closed fists, shouting reform.
8. The colour of sky, just after dusk, heralding a new beginning, a new era.
9. The procession, carrying flags, celebrating victory.
10. The colour of freedom.

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.

MEMOIR

Days in the blackout

MALIHA TRIBHU

The silence forced upon the mass came on a sudden Thursday, as all means of communication were shut down abruptly overnight. A sense of terror rising over the nation, mothers wailing for their lost child, fathers running on the streets looking for their sons. Somewhere afar the sounds of gunshots and grenades fade behind the roaring sirens of patrolling police cars. The once scarlet-red streets and alleyways are now enveloped with dust and burnt out garbage from the past week; a rather cunning attempt at damage control, they'd say. The radios only cover their shuffled playlists on repeat, the televisions show their routinized statements and further schedules about the ongoing curfews, and a falsified hope to calm down the distressed, "the situation is under complete control", they said. When an entire nation burns and bleeds at the cost of speaking up for their rights, the general people count their days of survival under repeated internet shutdowns and strict curfews. Although, it doesn't seem to affect them as



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

much. Like a normal Sunday, the vegetables vendors hollers in the alleyways with their freshly brought tomatoes and cucumbers, the neighboring women quarreling with the vendors over the hiking prices of onions and chillies, elderly men idling away their times sitting at the street-side tea stalls, debating over their senseless notions of prejudices and superstitions—war hasn't reached over to these alleyways just yet it seemed.

Here, some sleep at night without a single noise coming out of their windows, some sleep in terror as the helicopters continue to fly off of their skylines. One... Two... Three... Ten... The child falls asleep counting the roaring choppers instead of sheeps. The mother weeps silently in a quiet corner upon the prayer mat, asking the Almighty for the impossible. Somewhere far away, far into the future where past is only a falsification deemed to be

the truth accepted by the mass; someone repeats the rhyme as a lullaby to their wailing children, to shut them up from asking too much—

"Here comes a candle to light you to bed

And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!"

Maliha Tribhu is a writer, currently an undergraduate majoring in marketing at the University of Dhaka.