



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

## POETRY

# THREE SONGS: Kazi Nazrul Islam

### Tumi jokhon eshechile

I was still sleeping when you came, when you sought, flowers were yet to bloom. When my skies darkened, dawn broke at your end. A bright youth, when you came, my mind was yet to mellow; the window was closed, when the full moon peeped. Now in a dark room, I keep awake alone— when will you come again, the

moon? Nowadays I cannot sleep, flowers have bloomed in the garden, and with the garland you left, I've knotted my splendid plait. I was still sleeping when you came...

### Kaveri nadir jole kego balika

Who are you, O damsel, in Kaveri waters Absentmindedly floating magnolias and jasmines? Languidly coming to bathe in

the morning, She plays the pitcher with bangles; The wind plays with flowers in her plait. The sun rises in the horizon, The water implores empathy, By the bank of the Jhelum river,

The angel looks for you, The dark beauty of Karnataka.

### Rohi rohi keno shey mukh pore mone

Over and over why does the

face I ignored Heartlessly and pointlessly come to my mind? In a forlorn summer noon, The mind craves to fly far away. In the guise of a beggar, eyes wet with tears, He aroused empathy in the woods— His heart had thirst, my pitcher had water. Failing to get water, the thirsty singing bird Fell down fast at the early morn. I scattered flowers of his garland on dust

But can't let slip the agony from memory. Why does the one whom I didn't own forever Weep furtively in deep anguish from heart.

Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam.

**Mohammad Shafiqul Islam**, a poet, translator, and academic, is Professor in the Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet. His third collection of poetry, *On the Other Side of Silence*, is forthcoming.

### POETRY

## The companion

SHIBLEE SHAHED

Here I see my shadow  
The only childhood companion of this life.  
As it happened at the spring fair—  
I walked, it walked; I walked not, it ceased to walk.  
All the letters that people wrote to me  
With the hue of thumping heart,  
My shadow would read them too,  
And say, "See, the unspoken words  
Only fit in letters."  
When I cried out in despair,  
Seeing the worries of people  
Heading to their destinations,  
It said, "You've brought a return ticket with you friend  
Remember, people are not meant to be held onto."  
I have lived by this truth, and etched it in my heart  
Thus, no friendships have ever bloomed  
With human souls.  
My shadow and I...  
After one sea-full moon,  
At long last my story will fade away.  
Sitting by my grave,  
My only childhood friend,  
With a hand on its cheek, will ponder—  
'Might such a bond ever form  
With anyone else in this world?  
Ever?'

**Dr Shiblee Shahed** is a public health specialist, essayist, poet, and translator. His debut poetry collection was published in 2013 by Shuddhashar Publications. His poems and articles have appeared in numerous national and international outlets. He is a regular contributor to The Daily Star, The Business Standard, and The Daily Observer.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

### FICTION

# Vivisection of a cat

MOJAFFOR HOSSAIN

### Trigger warning: Animal abuse, violence

Our Ullash is quite the curious young boy, brimming with boundless energy and an insatiable thirst for discovery. We had always believed he was destined to become a great scientist, someone who would make groundbreaking contributions. Once, he caught hold of a cat and embarked on an experiment so peculiar, it left us speechless. And that wasn't the only time—his antics extended to countless other endeavours. If I were to recount just the cat episode in detail, you'd easily imagine the rest of his escapades. The cat was more than just a pet; it was part of our family. It had been with us since birth, growing up in this very house. With a quiet sense of duty, it took charge of the kitchen, ensuring no other feline dared to trespass while it stood guard. When Ullash decided to choose the cat for one of his experiments, our borobhabhi, Ullash's mother, didn't raise a single objection. She simply said, "Why not? It's been with us for so long. If it proves useful, let it be. But make sure no harm comes to it."

Our elder brother, full of pride in Ullash's inventive streak, promptly hired a carpenter to craft a sturdy cage. He couldn't contain his delight, often bragging to his friends, "You know, our Ullash is always up to something! He's done this, he's done that!" And as his uncle, I'm no less guilty of spinning tales of his ingenuity.

The cat was placed in a cage, and what followed was nothing short of royal treatment for an entire month. As per Ullash's instructions, we dutifully fetched all manner of delicacies from the market. Lounging in comfort, the cat grew so large and imposing, it began to resemble a miniature tiger. Inside the cage, it roared and raged as though the jungle itself trembled at its might.

One day, Ullash gathered us all and said, "Do you believe now that the cat is the tiger's little brother?" We'd always entertained the notion, but now, staring at this ferocious creature, it felt undeniably true. Hearing our awe, Ullash added with a sly grin, "But do you know the cat has a special connection with mice, too? I'll show you that next. For the coming month, it won't be fed."

Aghast, his mother cried out in a trembling voice, "What? It'll die!"

"Ma, if you don't understand something, don't bother speaking about it," Ullash declared sharply. None of us argued further; we each retreated to our own rooms in

silence. Meanwhile, he continued trying to convince our elder brother and sister-in-law, "Listen, nothing will happen to the cat. And even if it does—so what? Sacrifices like these are nothing new in the name of discovery. Haven't you heard the story of Laika? That dog was sent into space with just a week's worth of food. Yes, she died after a few days, but do you have any idea what her journey accomplished? Laika's name is now immortalised in the annals of history. Imagine that—immortality for a dog! Can you or I hope for such a legacy?" That's

own lives, Ullash with his. My Borobhai worked in customs, earning handsomely with both hands, so no one worried about Ullash's future. Now and then, when I had a free moment, I'd stop by Ullash's room. Sometimes, he'd greet me with, "Kaku, come in! I have something new to show you." Other times, he'd dismiss me with a wave, saying, "Kaku, not now—come back later."

A month later, he arranged to exhibit the cat. Just seeing it alive filled Borobhai with an almost boundless joy. But what sort of life was this? The cat's body had withered to

"Oh, stop babbling, ma. Just go. You've done your part."

One morning, about a week later, Bilur ma let out a shriek that could have brought the house down. When I rushed over, I found her wailing, hands on her head, her face a picture of despair. She had opened the deep freezer to move a packet of meat, only to discover the frozen, solid form of the cat—icy and unyielding, like a chunk of meat itself. Bhabhi immediately summoned Ullash. It turned out the cat had been trapped in the freezer for five days. Five whole days! What a disaster! Ullash,

The cat stared with a peculiar, piercing gaze. Its body was devoid of fur, resembling a plucked chicken. The scars crisscrossing its skin suggested it had undergone multiple surgeries. Without being told, one could hardly believe it was a creature of this planet. The shock on everyone's face wasn't merely due to its transformation, but because it had managed to survive at all.

With wide eyes, Bhabhi asked in astonishment, "You starved it for two months, froze it for five days, then roasted it on the stove for an hour—and it's still alive? What on earth is going on?"

"How could it die? This is my invention!"

We were all dumbfounded. What kind of hair-raising discovery was this? The room erupted in chaos, filled with a mix of awe and uproarious chatter. The cat's photo, alongside its newfound fame, was splashed across newspapers. It even had a new name now—Ulaika", a blend of Ullash and Laika. Ullash had become a celebrity, and so had the cat.

One day, we went to Ullash's room and asked, "What's the big secret? Come on, tell us. We swear we won't tell anyone outside."

Ullash thought for a moment, then burst out laughing and said, "Die? How could it die? It's already dead! I've been killing it, bit by bit, haven't I? Has Bilur ma died? You torment her much, though. Bilur baap beats him every day. Kaku, being drunk out of your mind, sometimes you...! And that day, I saw you too, baba!"

Bhabhi clamped her hand over his mouth. We slipped out of the room as quietly and quickly as thieves.

"Wait, don't you want to hear about my discovery?" Ullash shouted after us.

Translated from Bangla by Haroonuzzaman.

**Mojaffor Hossain** is a distinguished fiction writer within the realm of contemporary Bangla literature. He began his professional journey as a journalist and is currently employed as a translator at the Bangla Academy.

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ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

when our elder brother had a sudden flash of inspiration: the cat needed a fitting name. If Ullash truly achieved something remarkable, the cat's name would be celebrated alongside his, immortalised in the glory of his success.

"Tell me, won't Ullash grow up to be someone great?"

"Of course, no question about it," replied the elder brother, his deep voice affirming his wife's hopes and adding to her enthusiasm. Soon, the two drifted off to sleep, chatting happily about the future.

The rest of us remained busy with our

the point of resembling a stiff wooden frame. Its legs were as thin as a sparrow's, its skin barely clung to its protruding bones. Anyone unfamiliar with its earlier appearance would have mistaken it for a rat. Even its head drooped forward slightly, like a rodent's.

"Have you given it no food or water?" Bhabhi asked, her voice sharp with disbelief.

"The mouse experiment is over," he replied flatly. "For the next 15 days, it won't get a thing to eat. After that, I'll begin a new experiment with it."

"But will it survive?"

unfazed, pulled out the frozen cat and said, "Bilur ma, heat some water on the stove."

"What on earth are you planning to do?" Bhabhi asked, bewildered.

"It'll be fine with a little boiling. You'll see—it'll start moving again," Ullash replied, with a confidence no logic could penetrate.

He boiled it for about an hour and then set it out in the sun to dry.

By the afternoon, Ullash called everyone up to the rooftop, beaming with pride. "Look closely," he said, holding up the cat. "Can you recognise it now?"