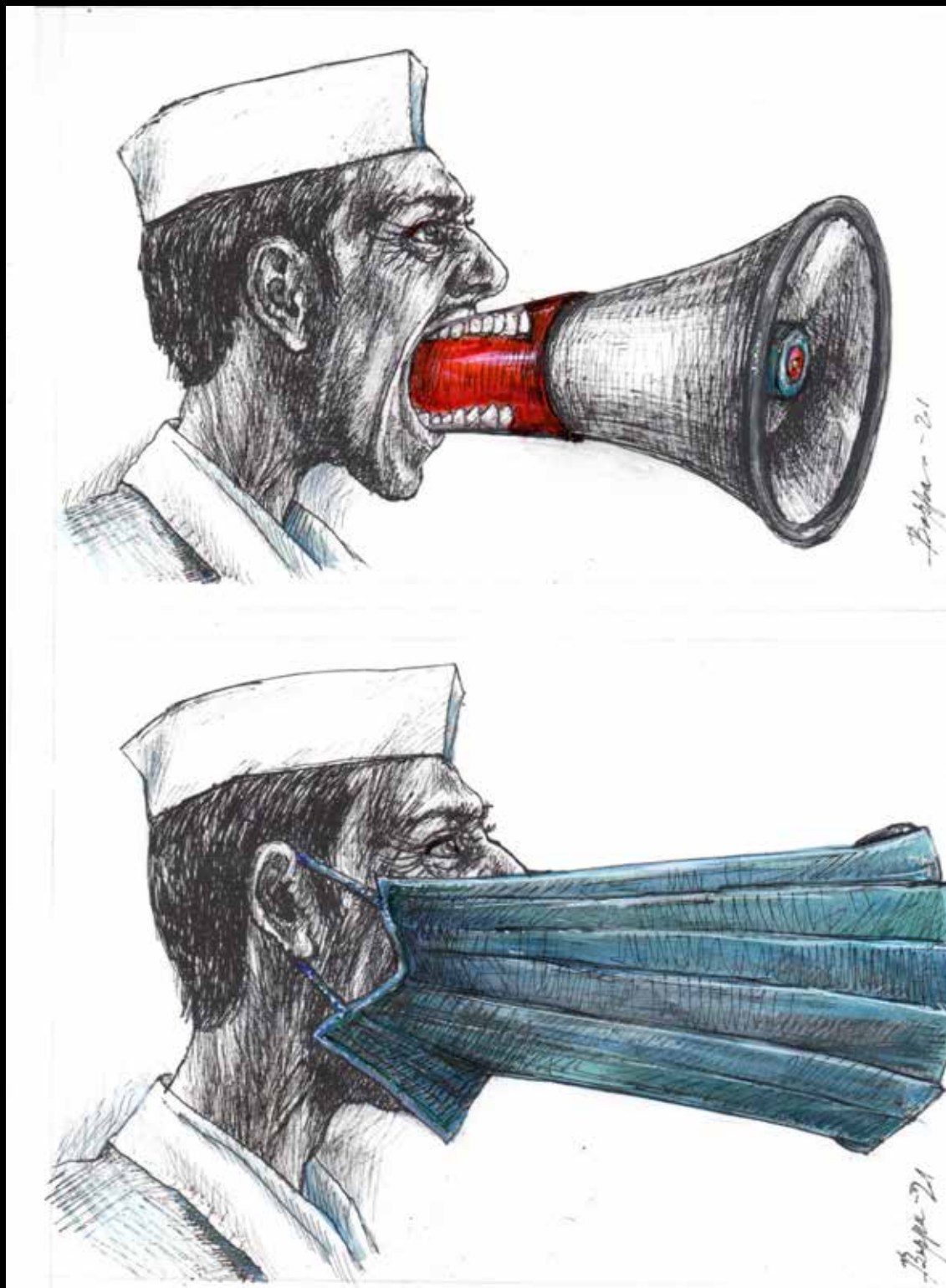


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O Tempora, O mores

There has been a decent interval since the Editor of this magazine stepped before you, its public, and passed some brief remarks on the preferences expressed in a then-recent general election. The conclusion then was that Comrade Wurzel (Corbyn & Co) had done a little better than expected against Lord Grummage (ex-Cameron & Co), but the result was close and the Voice of The People hadn't chosen anyone in particular to perform the sacrificial scapegoat task of presiding over the U.K.'s *Demos*.

Oh, how times change! In fewer months than it took to turn a Europe of Monarchies in August 1914 into a Europe of Anarchies in November 1918, the following events have been presented to us, not always for our delectation. Brexit has been argued over, first between Tweedledum and Tweedledee in Westminster, then at the UK/EU border posts over ham sandwiches and now, from one bank of the Foyle to the other over sausages; a Royal Engagement inflated into a Royal Wedding and has now disintegrated into a bad-tempered farce fit only for wrapping in supermarket hand-outs; statues have been raised and toppled; knees (is it the left one? The right one? But not both, apparently) have been grounded; a noisy American President has been defeated noisily; a Chinese President has hugged his enemies in Hong Kong so close that they no longer remember what happened where on June 4th, 1989. Wiggery-Wokery has played its Jiggery-Pokery with the terrified liberals who believe in it; genders have bred like rabbits; #MeToo has swollen into #EveryoneAsWellButNotThem; Piers Morgan's voice has been raised, silenced and raised again; careless hugs have cost wives; magic money trees have been shaken and Fool's Gold has showered from the leaves, transmogrifying into digital will-o'-the-wisps that flicker in computerised wallets only to disappear down password-locked worm-holes. Even the climate appears to have taken leave of its senses and there are few who would echo Browning in cheering, "God's in His heaven – All's right with the world."

And that is not to mention the Virus. This is such a weighty subject on which everyone has at least one opinion – and often two contradictory ones – that it



is best to take Basil Fawlty's advice concerning the Second World War when meeting Germans: not to mention it at all. Suffice it to say that though four million are reported to have died from the virus in the last eighteen months, that is the rough equivalent of 20 days' global net population increase.

So, for a representative measure of how far we have all come since the 'strong and stable' days of Mrs. May,

EDITORIAL

it is worth recalling the recent tale of secret defence papers left near a bus stop in Kent. "Classified Ministry of Defence documents containing details about HMS Defender and the British military have been found at a bus stop in Kent," reported the BBC on June 27th. The Ministry of Defence said it is investigating "an incident in which sensitive defence papers were recovered by a member of the public". The MoD employee concerned reported the loss at the time, it said. "An investigation has been launched."

Rarely can anyone have come across so many McGuffins in one short story: the bus stop, the pile of discarded papers, and - most laughable of all – an unidentified member of the public handing these things into the nearest BBC studio (not a police station, note). The scenario seems to derive from an early 1960s thriller with some touches from the contemporary Hancock's Half Hour series. As a piece of trouble-making, it is quite clever - a smart twenty year old might work up something like this as a Media Studies project for a course at a minor university (formerly a driving school on an arterial road). As a tale which warrants belief, it is cretinous. Who on earth prints out secret or even confidential material these days – and to pass to the Russians, those chaps with snow on their boots hanging around Bayswater railings? As if the Russians haven't worked out how to get electronic versions of any state secrets they care to obtain. It is only remarkable that a battered (but unbowed) leather brief-case has yet to be "found" near the papers and that the buses on the route did not have conductors whistling the latest Lonnie Donegan hit as they tooted past the stop.

This comedy does have a slightly sinister underbelly. In whose interests is it that the U.K. Government should appear to be discredited by this little tale? And who is it that rates the intelligence of the general public in the U.K. so low, that they think the tale will be taken seriously enough by public opinion as to damage the standing of the present administration?

For all the farce in this tale, it is not so funny to realise the depth of contempt with which we are all treated by

those who would have influence over us; contempt in the form of Wiggery-Wokery 'compassion'; contempt in the form of the blustering bossiness of the Park Bench police and the No-Hugging patrols; contempt for those forbidden to pray in a church or mosque or temple and left to die alone in body warehouses labelled, with the grimmest of humour, as "care homes" – one of this age's deadliest oxymorons.

A recent issue of this magazine had a Latin title. So does this. The earlier one was a quotation from Alcuin, warning Charlemagne in 798 that "the people should not be listened to who keep saying the voice of the people is the voice of God, since the riotousness of the crowd is always very close to madness." This issue quotes Cicero, speaking eight centuries before Alcuin at the trial of Catiline who was conspiring to bring down the Roman Republic. "O times! O morals! The Senate understands these things, the Consul [Cicero] sees them; yet this man [Catiline] still lives. He lives? Indeed, he even comes into the Senate, he takes part in public debate, he notes and marks out with his eyes each one of us for slaughter."

These last years have supplied ample illustration of both the madness of crowds and the tyrants who rise up from them, marking out those whom they would slaughter (or cancel) to roars of approval from their tame mobs. Roughly a century ago, a similar four-year period taught precisely the same lesson, one that has been taught, learned and forgotten about twice every hundred years in Europe for the last two millennia. A pessimist might argue that this demonstrates with astral clarity that we are condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past. An optimist would retort that these are mere blips on the high progressive road to the sunlit uplands of the future. A sceptical realist might abjure both these foolish extremes and conclude that mobs and tyrants come and go, rather like the weather, and that another Latin phrase attributed to Hippocrates (quite appropriate in this age of pandemics and vaccines) gives the lie to all such blustering brouhaha – *Ars longa, vita brevis*, a notion with which this magazine wholeheartedly agrees.

RICHARD BERKLEY

NICOSIA SEPTEMBER 2018

Returning to the Island of the Scammed
- By euros, roubles and, above all, themselves -
You'll see the shops' effronteries full crammed
And jostling for your lust on busty shelves:
The headlines tell it all: "We're back, we're back;
We're back in business, money and the rest;
The cash machines - our banks - are in the Black;
We've passed the Flying Dutchman's Final Test."

The fascias tell it all, too; hip-hop bubbles
Froth up façades and burst in black-fringed weals
As pained and painful as the city's troubles
Coiled in its rubbled wounds where no cash heals;
And thus they mar the house whose mirror once
Reflected scenes that now are merely fronts.

RICHARD BERKLEY

CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS

Oh, the rabbits in the their burrow
Fleeing headlights in the night
That track every flimsy furrow
Till they get them all in sight;
Then the rabbits stand bedazzled
By the glint of silver beams
Till their bodies all lie frazzled
And in pulp lie all their dreams.

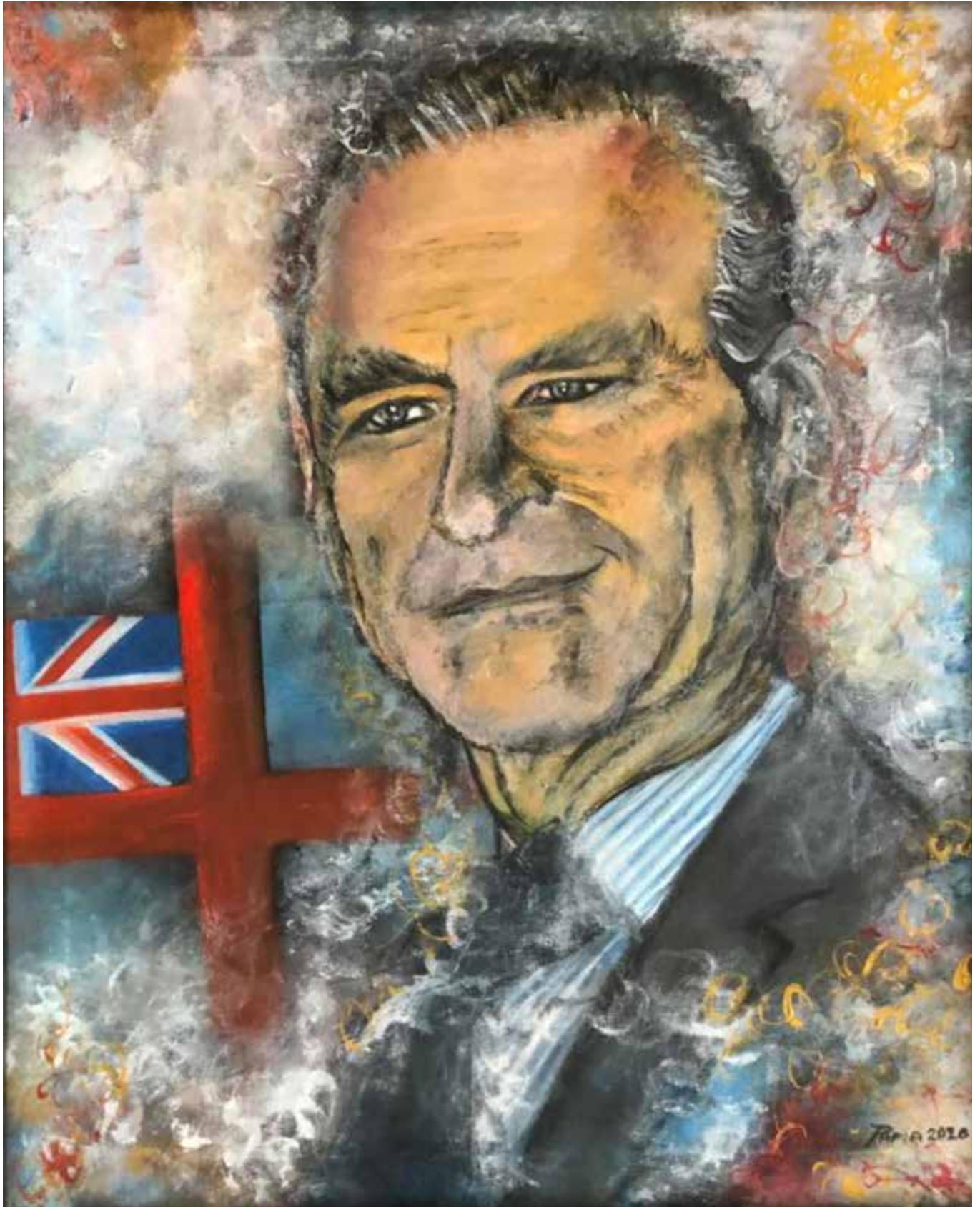
TRAVELLER – THEN!

At the gate, about to go under the yoke
of obedience to the rules of the uncompliant
he shrinks to a passenger, another "bloke"
to be let alone, or put into restraint
if there is turbulence in the air or heart:
he's with the shufflers forward, journeyers
each to a future, a welcome, a slap in that part
most vulnerable to pain and shrivelling - there's
the point of prayer, the multi-faith meeting room,
embarrassing all but the needy eye
as if these passengers were at the threshold of their tomb
and this were the last they'd see of this day's sky:
tomorrow his sky opens elsewhere; he
is shrunk no more, but in that world springs free.

RICHARD BERKLEY

ON THE DEATH OF HRH THE PRINCE PHILIP,
DUKE OF EDINBURGH, 9 APRIL 2021

'Sic transit Gloria mundi' - this the phrase
Now flickering through the twilight of a mind
That wanders back to broad and spacious days
When all was well with Britain and her kind;
When Queen and Consort, still three steps astern,
Trailed to the supermarket crowds their glories
And shook the hands of names they had to learn
No matter they be Socialists' or Tories'.
Those days, as out of circulation now
As a half crown, as sepia as the past
Made heritage, must take their final bow
And exit. Their play's done and a new cast
Comes hustling down the click-and-comment stage
To show us, in their mirror, our true age.



HRH PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH
Papua Ghoshal

EKRAM ALI

MY WOOD

1.
Light enters, light made of stars
Women frolic, women made of flesh and blood

.
Light, stars, women, flesh-and-blood
Are mere arrangements

In the light, I see your withered bra
The wrinkles in your skin
Your hair that you used to blow away playfully
Is now thinning
Deeper still lies the dry and blind womb

Why is it getting so bright?
Fire?

EKRAM ALI

2.

I will make a move, I thought many times
One day I will go away somewhere or other

The documents are turning yellow
Letters getting fainter day by day
And the stars around my head
Are coming closer, getting brighter

The way you and I have
Locked each other in our little piggy bank
O my dear, with the black spots on your body
Someday, I will smash that piggy bank
And release you
Then we will take off somewhere

You will turn silvery again flying in the wind of the
creek

EKRAM ALI

3.

Suspicion is a whim, yet
I am suspicious of you lying next to me

Intense gaze – will burn you
Smouldered in suspicion, slowly you die

My suspicion knows, however,
That you have a heart, although burnt
That you will find a new tune bumbling in it

Perhaps you would be lying next to me, perhaps
You will go far away past that canal, to another city
And think of all the sparkling old Suspicions

Perhaps someday you will find
A new you

EKRAM ALI

4.

A hand, flawless like a hand
Arm, wrist, palm and sleek formation of
fingers
And movements
The wind understands it

Only through her sky-blue nails
she desires to be something else

The wind, alert
Touches all that is transient

The hand in excess of a hand
The lip in excess of a lip
The intense black of the eyes
She too longs to be more transient

Because her ever youthful man is not here
either

EKRAM ALI

5.

No. The ants brought some news
On the other side of the window, something
Remains unseen
Even through the transparent glass

Like you, it has now been years
We are seeing each other
Yet only today
I noticed a newborn mole moving on your lips

Like brass plates under the water
I see you
Chewed out celery, remnants of rice on your body,
And my delphiniums float
Covering up the old body of brass

EKRAM ALI

MY WOOD

6.

My Wood

Advices me to dry up

My wood

Suggests me that I burn to ashes

Ashes that blow in the wind

And who trusts the wind? The wind?

Laying on the ground, like a wizened wood

Mistrust drying me up

Still.

(Translated by Luna Rushdi & Ashique KhudaBukhsh)

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LOCKDOWN PANDEMIC WORK IMAGE

Bappa



LOCKDOWN PANDEMIC WORK IMAGE

Bappa



LOCKDOWN PANDEMIC WORK IMAGE

Bappa

CONFUSION

Guy Thomson

The duvet smelled of old socks. There was nothing new about that. I felt many sorts of awful. There was nothing new about that either. The bedside clock read 7.05 am. I had to see my probation officer that morning, which was always a laugh. I threw back the duvet and got out of bed. My head was still running the Cole Porter song 'Anything Goes' that had been driving me mad for the last two days. The Harpers Bizarre version from 1967. I couldn't get rid of it. I must have picked it up from an advertisement or something. My slippers were nowhere. The room was a mess. There was half a month's worth of newspapers on the floor. I peered in a mirror. Yech. I turned back to the bed. There was an empty wine bottle on the side table, but no glass. Good. One less item to wash up.

I shuffled to the kitchen and looked in the fridge. There was nothing there except for a can of beer and some stuff I wouldn't have eaten in a nuclear winter. Food was not important; it never was with me. It was the hair of the dog that I was after. Coat of the dog, more like. I grabbed the can, pulled the ring and gulped it back with the passion of a legionnaire. The shock of the cold liquid hitting my throat gave me a bracing jolt. I saw a packet of smokes and shook one out. I sparked it up as I filled the kettle and then returned to the bedroom, clutching my beer and cigarette.

I ran a bath. More mirrors. As if I needed to know what I looked like: a tense, middle-aged man holding a can of beer and a fag first thing in the morning before a nine thirty appointment at the local probation centre. I turned off the taps and lobbed the rest of the cigarette into the loo. I got into the bath and put my head under the water. The bliss. After all my years in prison I still hadn't got used to the peace of living in my own home. To talk in my own voice. To think my own thoughts. Heaven. I lifted my head out of the water and folded a flannel over my eyes.

There didn't seem to be anything exciting or auspicious about that particular spring morning, and yet somehow it marked the start of a chain of events that were to take me on an unexpected journey to an

unanticipated destination. If a butterfly's wing was fluttering to some climatic consequence elsewhere or fortune's feathers were being ruffled by an incoming breeze, I was not aware, at that point, of anything other than my normal routine.

I removed the flannel, washed, finished the beer and gently got out of the bath. I dried my bits, dressed becomingly and went back to the kitchen. I hit the kettle switch and waited for the water to boil. The previous night's entertainment had been a solitary affair, as usual. I was contemplating my lack of a social life just as the kettle was reaching orgasm, when I remembered I had a party to go to that evening. It was the first communal event I'd been invited to since my release from jail. My hosts, Wally Barker and his French wife Anne-Marie, didn't live far away. We'd only spoken on the phone since I'd been let out. Wally and I had worked together many years before and Anne-Marie had written some uplifting letters of encouragement to me while I'd been in the clink. I wasn't too concerned about the evening, in fact I was now looking forward to it, but I wasn't sure what to expect. There had been considerable outcry about my transgression at the time. Although it had all happened more than a dozen years before, not everyone had forgotten, even if my release had mercifully, until now anyway, passed largely unnoticed. Culturally, I was coming in from a pretty low base. To have gone to prison might be mildly interesting. To have gone prison for murder might, at a push, be considered thought-provoking. But to have gone to prison for murdering one's own girlfriend, never mind how unintentionally, well, that was just a downright conversation-stopper.

I looked at my watch. Shit! If I were to walk to the probation service's offices, I'd have to leave soon. I poured out half a cup of coffee, adding a large dash of whisky to cool it down and knocked it back in one. I grabbed my jacket and hastily made my exit. There was a letter for me in the previous day's post at the bottom of the main stairs. Yippee! It was a giro cheque from the benefits agency. I slipped it into my pocket and closed the front door behind me.

CONFUSION

I sauntered towards Kensington High Street, stopping briefly to look in the shop windows. Everything was so expensive. I made it to the probation service's building just off the main drag in good time. I announced the miracle of my existence and the beauty of my objective to the woman on reception and was told to take a seat. I thumbed idly through a copy of Probation Today before Mrs Balakrishna, my pleasantly plumpish probation officer, greeted me and ushered me into to her office.

"How are you, Mr Mallet?" She enquired with cursory indulgence as we took our respective positions at her desk.

Mr Mallet. That was me: James Mallet, former bank employee and now ex-jailbird.

"I'm fine, thank you," I replied vapidly, looking with suspicion at the clipboard in front of her.

"And how have you been keeping?" She asked, warming up to something more specific.

"Fine," I repeated, knowing from the form on her clipboard that there would be several boxes to tick before I could walk away as a free man.

"So how is the job situation?" She questioned, picking up a pen.

"Not brilliant at the moment, Mrs Balakrishna," I replied, shiftily.

"No job yet?" She probed, shifting her clipboard before getting down to business.

"I've been to a few recruitment agencies and the Jobcentre, of course," I responded, truthfully.

"What did they say?" She asked, starting to tick a box.

"The recruitment agencies were pretty down about

me ever working for a bank again, and I was turned down for the two positions that the Jobcentre put me up for."

"What sort of positions were they?" Mrs Balakrishna queried, growing worryingly inquisitive.

"One was to be a security guard and the other was for a night watchman's job."

"So what did they say?" She quizzed, sounding hopeful.

"They went a bit philosophical when I said I'd just got out of prison and never called me back," I replied, attempting not to look too unsurprised.

Mrs Balakrishna regarded her clipboard forlornly.

"I'll have a word with the council and see if they might have something that you would like."

"Thank you, Mrs Balakrishna," I said, having heard her mention the council on previous occasions, "but I must warn you that they are an equal opportunities employer."

"What's wrong with that?" She challenged.

"I'm English," I replied, casually.

"Mr Mallet, are you saying that by being a British citizen you cannot have a job with the council?" She demanded.

"No, Mrs Balakrishna, that's not what I said," I returned, trying to sound reasonable. "It's just that I'm not, at the moment at least, in a social minority. This puts me at a disadvantage with an equal opportunities employer."

"What nonsense you talk!" She protested, giving me a withering look. "I think you're the one who's prejudiced; you have the problem, not the council."

CONFUSION

Anyway, I have taken the precaution of making enquiries on your behalf with the Jobcentre. They have the Jobclub that I think you will find most useful. I have taken the initiative to arrange a meeting with them for you at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

"But... Mrs Balakrishna," I spluttered, struggling to think of an excuse not to go. But she wasn't taking any prisoners.

"Mr Mallet, you cannot go on receiving unemployment benefits forever," she explained, patiently. "You must take all the necessary measures to obtain a job. The Jobclub has the excellent 'Restart' program which they will discuss with you and if it is suitable they will arrange to enrol you for the excellent one week 'Restart' course. Then all your problems will fly away!"

Arbeit macht frei! And rejoin the sausage machine of life. She proceeded to tick all the remaining boxes with a flourish and then looked at me with a smile as wide as the Ganges.

"Two o'clock tomorrow, Mr Mallet," she reminded me. "At the Jobcentre. Ask for Mrs Huang. She is expecting you."

"Anything goes," I sighed, before I had time to check myself. Stop it!

I got up to leave, but not before Mrs Balakrishna seized the chance to cram a leaflet about overcoming post-natal depression into my fist.

Although Mrs Balakrishna's command of English was excellent and her conversation all the more interesting for it, there were times when I couldn't help wondering whether something was amiss. Perhaps she'd confused 'post-coital' with 'post-custodial'. It was an easy mistake to make.

I left the building feeling annoyed that I hadn't thwarted Mrs Balakrishna's attempts to turn me into a

model citizen. I couldn't understand why she'd become so uptight about my unemployment benefits when she'd been the one who'd put me up for them in the first place. It wasn't my idea. Was it my fault that she'd been in such a hurry to write 'a few mortgage arrears' when what I had in fact said was that I had very few budgetary considerations beyond 'a few more beers'? After that there'd been no stopping her.

Thinking about it reminded me that I needed to go to a bank to pay in my giro and buy some money. I headed towards the high street to look for a PABS sign with its inevitable ever-assuming tag: "Your friendly Bank". I didn't have to look far. They were everywhere. I was surprised they hadn't set up a branch in my lavatory. ('Do come in, Mr Mallet! Take a seat!') But gone were the glory days when I was in its employ when it had traded under the mighty moniker of 'The Pan Asian Banking System'. For the staff members it was simply 'The Bank'; always with a holistic big 'T' and 'B'. Capital letters were encouraged wherever possible.

I found myself in front of a large branch. I pulled out a hundred pounds from the machine outside, knowing full well they wouldn't last a hundred hours. I went inside to the stately banking hall and joined a queue to pay in my giro. Only one till was open. Half a dozen floorwalkers were wandering about, looking helpful but useless with their hands behind their backs. I glanced around. There was an assortment of promotional literature on display, including a pile of The Bank's annual accounts. I picked up a copy and glimpsed at the figures. They were too big to make any sense. I moved onto the Chairman's statement. It had a familiar blend of corporate self-congratulation and big company irreproachability. There were pictures of the members of the board of directors, all looking faintly embarrassed in their PABS logo ties. One of the faces rang a bell. It was Leonard Fawcett. Leonard Fawcett? What was that dink doing there? I used to share a house with him when we were colleagues in Saudi Arabia, some twenty five years earlier. What had he done right? I remembered him as a bully and a bullshitter who was heavily into trafficking his own homemade hooch to the

CONFUSION

locals and expats. I grudgingly recalled he'd been quite good at his job, albeit in a somewhat bombastic fashion. It had obviously worked for him. I put the report down when it was my turn to pay in my cheque and left.

I wandered outside again. I looked at my watch. Great! It was bang on opening time! I walked along the street until I spotted the cheery tell-tale hanging flower baskets of a pub further up the road, which from a distance appeared to be called The Angry Masturbator, but on closer acquaintance was, in fact, The Ancient Mariner. Except for the barman, the pub was empty. I ordered a pint and had a go on the one-armed bandit machine lurking behind some nautical kitsch in the corner. I didn't know how it worked, so I gave up after going through a pocket's worth of change and finished my drink in resentful silence.

I stepped back out onto the street and went for a mooch around the shops. I was in no hurry; there was nothing to go home for. I dropped in on a glass-and-concrete retail cathedral specialising in electronic gadgetry and marvelled at all the wizardry on display which had been either miniaturised beyond my comprehension or supersized beyond my wallet. I abandoned the shop and made my way to a Pret a Tentious to purchase an overpriced ham and cheese baguette, then ambled along to Weirdbins to inspect their wine racks. I selected a sensible bottle of Australian screw top to complement my baguette for when I got home and then bought some breakfast beers for future use. I continued to wander down the street until I came across a turd-spangled alleyway I'd forgotten about, which took me back home in less than ten minutes.

I looked at the day's post as I let myself in through the main door and sifted through the various envelopes. Who'd have thunk it? Two letters for little me!

Emigrates Tours had thoughtfully sent me a copy of their latest brochure of holiday breaks in Dubai at either the five-star Al Sharmouta Hotel or the six-star Manyouk Palace, all for a shade under three thousand pounds for five days, if I promised to fly in their 'Fakir

Class'. How nice. Better watch out for those hotel mini-bars, I forewarned no one. Touch those and it could double the cost of the holiday. I didn't know where they'd found my name. They must have mistaken me for a high roller, but I wasn't that sort of high roller. I opened the other envelope. It was a mailshot with some 'exciting opportunities' from a recruitment agency I'd been obliged to contact. I tossed both letters into the communal bin and carried on up the stairs.

I dumped the nutrition on the sideboard. The flat was depressingly quiet. I put on a tape to liven things up. I still hadn't made the technological leap from tapes to CDs yet alone downloads. The tape got caught in the machine and went 'ziff'. Naughty Mr Hitachi. Mr Sony would never have done that. I switched on the TV and set my princely banquet on a tray. I found the squeazy under a cushion and clicked through the festival of afternoon television. There was a soap with some shouty teenagers having a go at each other in Australia. I switched over to a fifties safari saga with an assortment of people running around in panic, then a programme about a boring couple trying to buy a prefab in Spain, then some fat slag telling me how to ice a cake on Five, and finally another kids' soap on Freeview with yet more adolescents getting worked up over nothing, this time shot in the millionaires' paradise of Romford. And of course there was always Friends to be found somewhere. They were the only friends I had that afternoon but there were only so many reruns a grown man could take, so I plumped for the fifties safari number. This was living!

I'd missed most of the first half, but I knew the form. I took two large gulps of wine straight from the bottle and tore wildly at my baguette to get in step with the mood of the movie, while menservants darted about in wide-eyed consternation as a lion looking like its arse was on fire sprang out of nowhere. I chewed my way through the rest of the baguette and took another swig of wine. Eventually an English geezer turned up with a rifle, shot the lion and everything was all right. I looked at the wine bottle and wondered whether I should have gone for the Cabernet rather than the Shiraz. I reminded myself of my social obligations that evening

CONFUSION

and screwed the cap back on the bottle. I felt tired all of a sudden and decided I owed myself a siesta. I went to the bedroom and fell on the bed, fully clothed.

The phone woke me up two hours later. It was Pete Divis, an old friend from my pre-prison days who was in the recruitment business. He was offering me a lift to the Barker gathering as he was going too. I accepted willingly. He told me to be ready at seven. I went into the kitchen, fixed myself a stiff whisky and felt, for a moment, a sense of misgiving. I'd tried to put my doubts about the event to one side, but they were now more of the lingering kind.

'Confusion' is the first chapter of Guy Thompson's novel 'The Flyweight', published by Longcross Press 2014.



PRADIP RAKHIT

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Indian College of Arts,
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He is nature mystic and believes in delineating the poetry that is dormant with landscapes and the environment. He works mostly in Acrylic and Oils. The images refer to the representational world but as he works they transform into a non-representational format. Frequently fragments of the figurative world make an appearance. There is a subtle nuance in each work that builds us as the colours and shapes communicate with each other. As the painting grows, he gets more and more involved. Finally, he gives himself up completely. There lies the charm of his work.

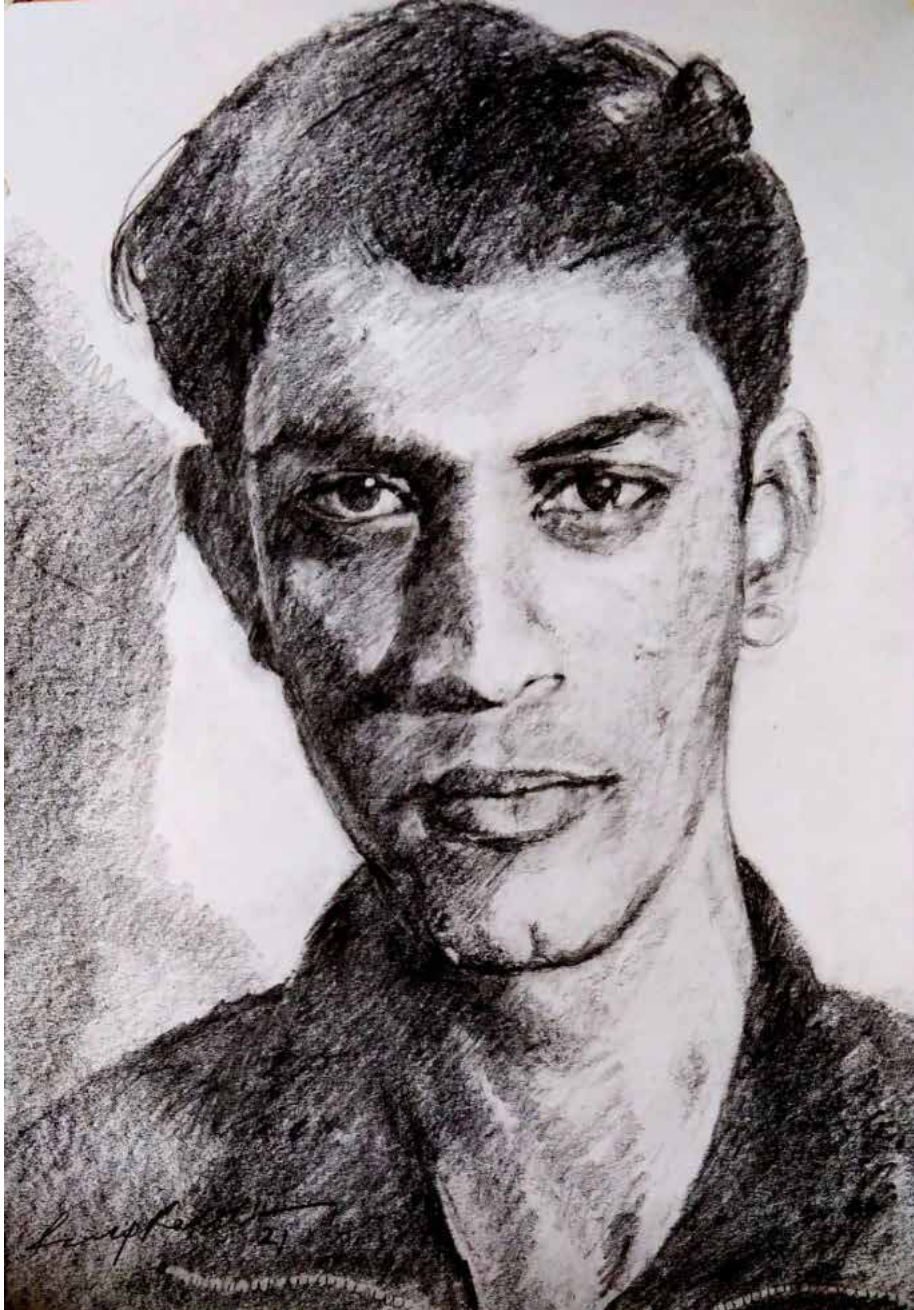


SATYAJIT'S SKETCHES
Pradip Rakhit



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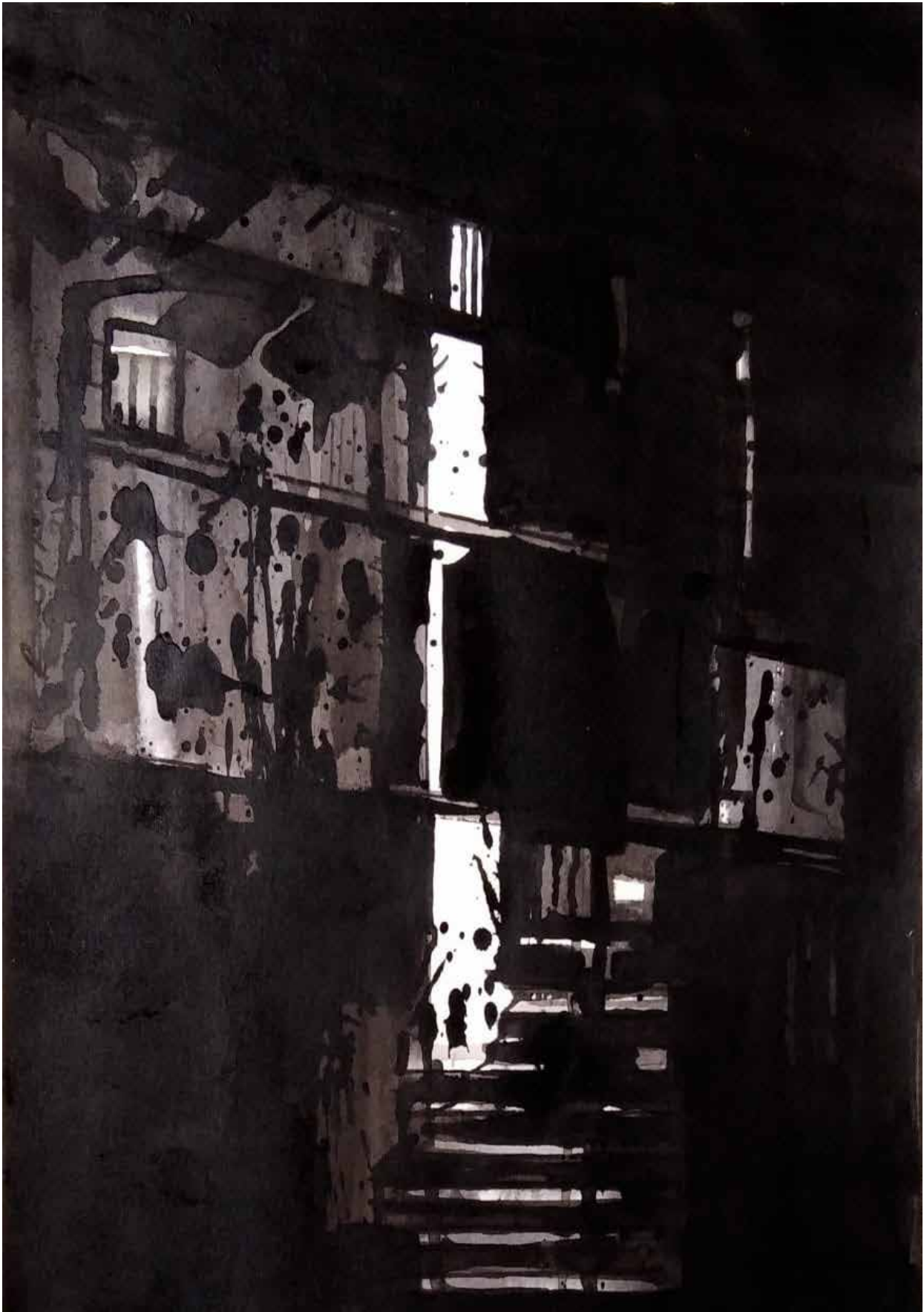
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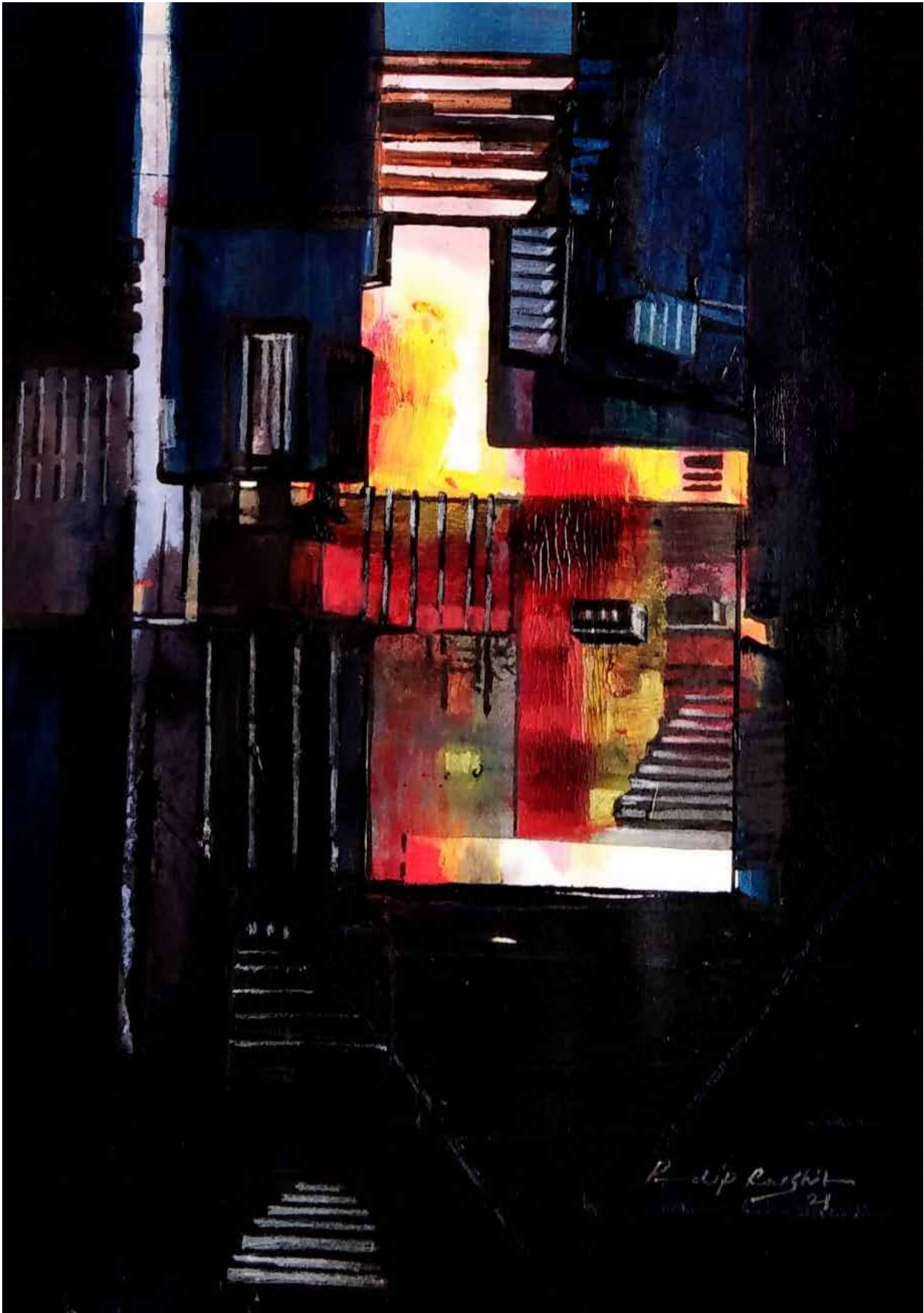


SATYAJIT'S SKETCHES

Pradip Rakhit



CHARKHANA
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NARRATIVE DISJUNCTION IN THE CINEMA OF SATYAJIT RAY

by Ashoke Viswanathan

ATTACKING THE STORY

In cinema, the story has never been pre-eminent; as this most modern of media is very different from the other art forms, it doesn't wholly depend on the narrative elements. Filmmakers like Ozu and Bresson have often de-centred the storyline, opting for more unique cinematic constructs. Like emphasizing context over content. Or using a deliberately distant style of camera placement to reduce the element of manipulation in various scenes. Even filmmakers famous for their absorbing stories have often subverted the straight narrative. Satyajit Ray immediately comes to mind.;

In 'Pather Panchali', the text does not, in any way, follow the patterns of a classical dramatic narrative; it is, in a sense, linear, but also rambling; and the faint linearity is not always consistent because the narrative gallops along, in an episodic manner. The structure seems distinctly more pyramidal than linear. The events seem to be piling up, one on top of the other until the final denouement which is more of an anti-climax: a gradual disquieting lapse into a second start, a start of a new journey into the unknown.

Satyajit Ray's choice of this Bibhuti Bhushan text and, indeed, his cinematic realization of the same, clearly reveal his penchant for the disjunctive narrative. While many critics and scholars have stressed on Ray's 'masterly' storytelling quality, it is my humble submission that in several of his films, he has demonstrated a propensity to subvert the narrative in an original manner.

If we take a close look at 'Kanchenjanga' (1962), it will be apparent that the text is driven by ideas and not by action; the mood is existential and a feeling of urban alienation is predominant even though the setting is the hill station of Darjeeling. While maintaining the classical concept of unity of time, the structure embraces distinctly modernist elements like the use of a 'rondo' ¹ like flow in terms of the episodes. A mélange of parallel synagmatic episodes emphasize a near 'Waiting for Godot' like situation wherein that which was anticipated does not happen. There is also a hint of postmodern

feminist constructs as the remarkable bonding of mother and daughter, Labanya and Monisha, works to thwart the designs of the domineering patriarch, Indranath Roy.

The film is constructed in elegant passages and while the primary plot relating to the probable engagement of Monisha and Banerjee involves several characters flitting in and out of several scenes, the secondary plot relates to the rescuing of a disintegrating marriage. While the secondary plot shows a modicum of development, the primary plot is even fraught with uncertainties and ambiguities. Here, too, the narrative is often de-centred to allow for specifically cinematic constructs like cloudy scenes epitomizing a 'wasteland'² like world and more sunny spaces symbolizing some sort of hope in an earth weary with the worries of nuclear testing.

This work seems to pre-date even Antonioni³ in that the viciousness of the upper middle class is depicted in a fairly realistic manner; and yet, the so called bourgeois class is not unnecessarily vilified. Banerjee's closing dialogues are exquisitely composed: "Here in these idyllic surroundings, you may feel that love is much more important than security. But when you go back to Calcutta, if ever you feel that security can be more important than love, or that love can grow out of security, then call on me."

'Kanchenjanga' is not a straight narrative by any stretch of imagination; its use of motifs and aural signifiers serve to create a polyphonic milieu, full of resonant discoveries. The Nepali boy and his wonderful ditty has a choric quality, tellingly commentative and bewitchingly expressionistic in tone. The entire film has a fresco like quality, an amalgam of different pieces of great aesthetic significance.

The other film that eschews the straight narrative and seeks to explore uncharted territory is 'Aranyer Din Ratri' (Days and Night in the Forest – 1969). Here the first half appears to be linear but in the second half, a discursive pattern sets in and the film assumes a distinctly syntagmatic structure.

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The film begins with a bang, as it were, with the pre-title sequence dramatically merging into the titles⁴. This beginning seems an introduction of sorts with the four principal characters quite different in their attitudes and proclivities. The story moves along in episodes and the women characters, Duli, Aparna and Jaya also present a range of varying attitude. If Duli, the tribal girl, is a subaltern with a feisty temperament, Aparna is more of an upper middle class woman of an intellectual disposition; while Jaya is of the same milieu as Aparna but less cerebral. Among the men, Hari is a sportsman, slowly recovering from being jilted in love. Ashim is a confident soul who needs to have his smugness shaken, somehow, by the enigmatic Aparna while Sanjoy is a curious mix of Bangla Culture^(ibid) and middle class morality. Shekhar seems the ubiquitous buffoon, the court jester, as it were, but his inner self, albeit unashamedly thick skinned, is genuine in its gregarious quality. If the first half uses key episodes to convey the 'Calcutta chromosome'⁶ in an alien environment, the second half is pointed in its eschewing of the traditional narrative idiom. Here too, motifs and signifiers abound like the famous 'sand flowing out of the hand' shot that serves as a metaphor for time. The 'memory game' itself is a remarkable narrative construct; it is like an analytical microscope weeding out elements of milieu and Zeitgeist from mere names. The characters are unmasked and decoded while the narrative becomes distinctly discursive.

If the track involving Hari, Duli, Shekhar and Hari's nemesis is an episodic roller-coaster ride of love, lust, revenge and awakening, the syntagma involving Jaya and Sanjoy is exceedingly subtle in its playing out Sanjoy's hesitant withdrawal in the face of Jaya's explicit overtures. The dialogue between Aparna and Ashim is the most ambiguous and intriguing of all the interactions as the vulnerability in the one seeks to unmask the guardedness of the other. The private and the personal shakes hands with the outwardly and the superficial.

As in many of Ray's texts, 'Aranyer Din Ratri' ends in a bitter-sweet zone with no victories and no defeats;

nothing is achieved but all is not lost. In this delicate tapestry of eroticism and soul searching introspection, the city slickers return to the city. It is this lack of a traditional climax, this steering clear of catharsis that makes Ray's texts uniquely disjunctive in their narrativity.

In 'Nayak' (The hero – 1966) it is a journey – a kind of spiritual sojourn, apposite to a dream (and fraught with dreams) that is most arresting.

The structure is reminiscent of Bergman's masterpiece, 'Wild Strawberries' (1957) wherein the journey of Dr. Isak Borg played adroitly by the spontaneous Viktor Sjöström, is symbolic of his achievements and insecurities as a doctor. And yet, there is something uniquely Indian about the Ray text. While the structure effectively de-centres the narrative in favour of several strands of psychological and philosophical exploration, the array of supporting characters create a magnificent tapestry of moods and morals. The journey is, in a sense, a framing device that encapsulates various streams of episodic narrativity. The principal text is, therefore, constantly interrupted by flashbacks, dreams and the conscious recounting of incidents from the past. This dynamic depiction of time serves as a signifier that seeks to scratch below the surface of the matinee idol, gently probing into his areas of insecurity. Coming from a lower middle class background, the protagonist, Arindam, is a product of the collective consciousness of the Bengali but also is a rebel of sorts in his career choices. Opting for cinema while eschewing the call of the theatre, he goes against the wishes of his mentor, Shankar Da. He is also an exception as he does not totally conform to the traditional definition of an actor, he is a thinker and gently appreciative of Aditi (the pseudo journalist) and her faintly supercilious appraisal of so called "superstars".

The flashbacks reveal that Arindam, for a time, did have his feet firmly on the ground. His friends were his theatre comrades as also his man Friday not to mention his kindred soul, the trade unionist whom he had to betray. If one were to compare with Dr. Isak Borg,

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Ray's *Arindam* is slightly more flawed although both characters undergo paroxysms of guilt.

The dreams in '*Nayak*' have often come in for a great deal of criticism. The first one, in which *Arindam* sinks into a quicksand of cash has often been denigrated as being too literal, too obvious. While this accusation may be somewhat true owing to the directness of the presentation, there are other elements in that selfsame dream that are worth mentioning. The soundtrack is very interesting for one. The phone rings and faint ambient sounds serve to create an atmosphere of menace. The skeletal phones, too, are artistic and fearsome. The reference to Shankar Da and his appearance are ingenious and his made up face is distinctly disturbing. The second dream seems more assured in its realization albeit the influence of Fellini's '*8 1/2*' (1963) is distinctly palpable.

The point here is that the structure of the film is in the tradition of narrative disjunction with the dreams and the flashbacks running parallel to the main track; moreover, the parallel syntagmas often impact the main journey and disturb the linearity, thus building moments of stasis.

The text of '*Pratidwandi*' (The adversary-1971) is full of cinematic elements of varying efficacy. Apart from the use of negative shots to convey a feeling of disorientation, the screenplay uses various kinds of motifs and flash forwards that serve to interrupt the fabric of the narrative. Siddhartha often sees the world through the prism of a medical student, analysing the anatomical features of people whom he sees or meets. At times, his mind, possessed by a blinding fury, races ahead in a screeching climax where he shoots his sister's boss for attempting to take undue advantage of her. This is a modernist film of three friends who are very different; of two brothers who are very different; Siddhartha's brother is a true blue revolutionary, a Naxalite in the early seventies. Siddhartha imagines himself to be a Che Gue Vera of sorts but cannot totally plunge himself into the life of an underground political activist. At heart, he is middle-class, decidedly so but aspiring towards the

initiators of insurrection.

'*Pratidwandi*', while communicating the urban milieu of the seventies in the metropolis, does an effective job of subverting the narrative by the constant deviations that include flash backs, flash forwards and illusions. One cut is particularly interesting when the sister calls the brother to the terrace and we see a visual of a little sister calling her little brother; the time jump is startling and exquisitely cinematic and conveys the time worn dictum that our lives are composed of different strands of time.

This film has something of the flavour and fervour of the New Wave; if I were to be facetious, it was almost as if Ray (who has been generally critical of art being dwarfed by artifice) were doing a '*Sen*' in his own inimitable way. Mrinal Sen who was long Ray's contemporary filmmaker and, in a sense, a rival of sorts, became enamoured of formalistic devices that often peppered his films⁷.

Ray has been fond of improvisation, of using the hand held camera and rapid cutting in some of his '*urban quadrilogy*' films. The tour de force is the sequence in '*Pratidwandi*' wherein Siddhartha, in an outburst of frustration, (after being kept waiting in inhuman conditions) overturns the table where he was to be interviewed. He walks out and the camera, mimetically moves apposite to his dramatic departure, joining hands with the editing and creates a montage of rapidly changing shots of the metropolis scarred by posters and graffiti. The sequence becomes a trifle blurred as it merges into the beautiful countryside viewed from the perspective of a journey by train.

This may seem like a climax but it is not the end as Ray uses yet another cinematic device to conclude his narrative. This is in keeping with the tone and tenor of his script which often keeps the viewer guessing while subtly providing details and incidents that prevent the text from degenerating into melodramatic hyperbole⁸.

The end of '*Pratidwandi*' does justice to the

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prescription of the realist theorist, Siegfried Kracauer who was very fond of open endings.

Ray ends 'Pratidwandi' with a letter wherein, once again, there is a play of time and space. The letter is voiced even before it is written and the contents are shown before the writing; the film ends with the protagonist signing off, concluding a film with a distinctly elliptic narrative structure.

In 'Ghare Baire' (The home and the world-1984), it is an ambitious presentation, somewhat flawed but replete with passages of great aesthetic beauty. Based on the novel by Tagore, the text is composed using a polyphony of voices, a hydra-headed narrative perspective. The film shows the perspectives of Bimala, the modern woman, Sandip, the revolutionary for whom the end justifies the means and Nikhilesh, the landowner with a sense of justice and responsibility.

"I have come through the fire" declares the voice of Bimala and one feels that this background narration is as arresting and evocative as in the Resnais films of the early sixties⁹. The script evolves using familiar narrative techniques but the multiple voices contribute towards a shift from the simple, linear narrative.

'Ghare Baire' does not sustain the initial promise of its beginning, later lapsing into somewhat conventional story-telling but its stress on key moments like Bimala and Nikhilesh's difference of opinion, Bimala's singing lessons, her entry into the outer world with her husband and the signals of her infatuation with the Sandip persona – all merge art with artifice. This is a fairly linear narrative but by no means a simple, straightforward one.

Ray's last three films did not impress to the extent that his earlier films did but 'Agantuk' (The outsider - 1992) has elements of dramaturgy that makes a virtue of ambiguity. The suspicion with which the outsider is viewed by the family is communicated to the audience in a subtle manner and this gives an unexpected flavour to the narrative. The denouement is significant for it seems that the director has used a microscope to analyse

the urban middle class and shown it as unfeeling, self-centred and lacking in a generosity of spirit. Their realization of their own folly is the only redeeming feature that the director finds in the urban middle class of that time. As elsewhere, there is a distinct musical pattern in even these last films.

This quality of tunefulness is quite abstract; it is a product of Ray's meticulous organization. Right from the design of the sequence, there is a noticeable and unique pattern that is felt even in the editing and sound applications.

Consider the film, 'Charulata'. If one looks at the denouement, it is a longish sequence comprising the following:

The letter from Amal is shown on a small table, using a gently menacing crane shot that establishes the epistle as an index of foreboding ('coming events cast their shadows before'), forecasting Charu's volatile propinquity to Amal. Then, Bhupati's perusing of the letter and his innocent, unknowing remarks about Amal's plans and programmes are shown. Bhupati casually asks Charu to take a look at the letter. Then, he leaves to go outside.

Eventually, Charu goes to the letter and as she reads, she is overcome by a paroxysm of emotion and she breaks down screaming out her 'forbidden desire' for Amal. Suddenly Bhupati returns, unexpectedly, having forgotten something; and he is horrified at the revelation of Charu's love for Amal. Bhupati, in a situation of extreme dejection and shock, wanders about aimlessly in a phaeton¹⁰. When he returns, in a scene fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, Charu, with fear and guilt writ large on her countenance, gestures to him to come inside. The elderly domestic help waits with a lamp in his hands. Bhupati enters but Ray freezes the moment even before Charu's and Bhupati's hands can meet, thus symbolizing "the broken nest". Words are insufficient to express the aesthetic pattern of this resonant *mise-en-scène*.

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END NOTES:

1. Ray, in a few of his interviews, has himself made the comparison between the episodic recurrence of scenes in 'Kanchenjanga' and the Western classical musical structure known as the 'rondo' wherein a principal theme (or refrain) alternates with one or more contrasting themes.

2. Ray is inspired, albeit indirectly, by the same signals of decay and degradation that prompted Eliot to dub the propensities of 20th century Western Civilization as a "Wasteland" in the epic poem with the same rubric.

3. If Antonioni used architectonic metaphor to critique the alienation of European society in the '60s (in films like 'La Notte'-1962 and 'L'eclisse'-1963), Ray's resonant dramaturgy and decoupage served to underline the hollowness of urban middle class Bengalis, often possessed of a supercilious world view.

4. The tiles in 'Aranyer Din Ratri' use the technique of masking to convey the spirit of adventure.

5. The average Bengali young man loves his poetry, his Rabindrasangeet, is an avid fan of Mohun Bagan or East Bengal football club, enjoys his 'rosogolla' and is intent on watching intellectual theatre too, besides doing his job.

6. Here one has used a deliberately anachronistic allusion to Amitav Ghosh's 1995 novel, 'The Calcutta chromosome', an intriguing medical thriller with a fair share of mystery; the sense here is different: an attempt at humour with Calcutta (now Kolkata) being everyone's favourite whipping boy!

7. This is a reference to Mrinal Sen's proclivity for spiky syntax in his films of the seventies.

8. By making clear, at the outset, that Siddhartha had an outstation job waiting for him, Ray desists from unnecessary drama.

9. The opening lines of the background voice (Bimala) in 'Ghare Baire' reminds one of the voice over / dialogues

in 'Hiroshima Mon Amour' and 'Last Year at Marienbad'

10. The Phaeton, a horse drawn carriage popular in the post Victorian era in Calcutta, is doubly symbolic of British Colonialism and a sense of being transported to a nowhere land; this is exactly what the alienated Bhupati must have been feeling..



Sketch by Satyajit Ray

SUBHO SARKAR

Retirement being right around the corner, I knew I'd finally have time to dedicate to learning more about my passion, Creating Art.

This was a way to reinvent myself, to revitalize and live my life filled with colours rather in black & white of corporate life. Expressing myself with the help of my drawing has allowed me to capture my emotions and bring them to life via my different creations.

After completing almost 40 plus years in service in various sectors, I turned to Arts & Craft completely. With almost to, no formal education received in Art, apart from having the chance to meet various inspirational sources along the way, success was undefined.

Passing my initial years of schooling from Patha Bhavana, Shantiniketan, my first sense of arts & creation started in my young years under the guidance and influence of various eminent Indian Artists, like Shri. Paritosh Banerjee, Smt. Khoma Ghosh, Shri. Selim Munshi, Shri. Nandalal Basu, Legendary Shri. Ramkinkor Baij and many more. Post retirement my Daughter, son and my cousin, eminent artist Millie Basu Roy have been the greatest source of inspiration and motivation. Furthermore Padma Shri awardee Shri Biman Bihari Das, Smt. Uma Siddhanta and Shri. Dilip Banerjee have been highly influential and motivational in my new career path. Currently pursuing as a free-lance artist for the better half of the last two years, who is able to come up with a range of original ideas, theories & fascination through artistic mediums, using mix-media as the greatest art tool. With the ability to use different mediums such as clay, textiles, acrylic, oil, charcoal, wire work to create different composition and other forms of art for either sale or exhibition.

With nature, human anatomy and abstract, being the most widely used subjects, for most of my art creations. I seek inspiration for my art work from the nature surrounding us, trying to capture the marvels of the nature. Trying to find rhythm in our day to day Modern Chaos, I enjoy creating Abstract art with many different ways, with different levels of attention to colour, precision, gesture and recognizable or unrecognisable forms. Every one of the ideas giving insight into the abstract painting techniques employed. I believe that exploring the vast world of abstract painting offers an artist many unique tools of expression.

Mentioned as above, Acrylic, Oil, Charcoal, Sketching, Pen and mix media such as threads, saw dusts, aluminium dust, newspaper cutting, textile, sand etc., are often employed by me as my most used tools for creating my art work. Not being limited to only one medium, has helped me expand my horizon for continuously striving to find inspiration from unconventional techniques, to develop further in looking for details in bigger pictures. To look at various shapes and patterns rather than focusing on the actual objects.



GUPI GAAEN BAGA BAEEN
Subho Sarkar



ARANNER DIN RATRI

Subho Sarkar



NOTHING MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN MOTHERHOOD IN THE LAPS OF MOTHER NATURE
Subho Sarkar



THE SAINT
Subho Sarkar

BAPPADITYA ROY BISWAS

UNMOVED

Compartments rolled in between--
A freight train it was
Away n away n away n away you moved
As ages it took to pass
Once gone,
It was you that stayed put, I found
While face to face stood I,
Apart.

BAPPADITYA ROY BISWAS

REALITY

Auburn flames in hair
Brown tan on polished boots
Blue marble beads for eyes
Magenta curls meandering
From cigars of chocolate hues...
When I made her stand
Armed with colours such,
She stood dumb the whole goddamned day
At busy crossroads...

Someone in stealth
Usurped the wealth
Of zebra coloured rows.

SONG WITHOUT WORDS

Patte de Velours



‘You speak Russian so perfectly, without a trace of an accent, just like a real Russian. It is amazing!’ Tamara told Georgiana at the Russian Debutant’s Ball.

‘That’s exactly what your President Putin said’, Georgiana laughed.

As a Royal Lioness (by her horoscope) Georgiana Fitzsimmonds-Cavendish harboured no doubts and considered herself, without any false modesty, phenomenal. Indeed, there was one aspect that made her a true phenomenon. As an exceptionally gifted student in the Russian department of Leeds University she was sent on a student exchange scheme for two years to Voronezh to perfect her Russian. After that she spoke Russian without a trace of a foreign accent and knew the language inside out. As is often the case with all those who happen to spend time in Russia, she lost her heart to the country, treasured the most wonderful memories of her riotously amusing student days and never lost her connection with either the language or the country through all the dramatic changes it went through.

She and her husband, the Lord-lieutenant of one of the insignificant counties, were invited to the State Banquet at Buckingham Palace given for Putin. As a perfect speaker of Russian, she was put in the greeting line and surprised the President with her unexpectedly flawless Russian accent. It made a striking contrast to her imposing cleavage and the heavy and important ancestral tiara which she wore in a witty way not dissimilar to the rebellious Lady Antonia Frazer. Photos of the President sporting a ridiculously large white tie (he was still not sure of himself in those early days in power) virtually poking his nose into the bosom of the

flamboyant lioness in a low-cut formal dress, appeared in many glossy magazines.

It is not surprising that with all the right Russian and Society connections Georgiana was invited to be one of the guests of honour at the Russian Debutantes’ Ball and was asked to open the Ball with the Grand March. Her husband Adrian did not dance himself and was scarcely at home with frequent inspection trips to India where he supervised the funding of schools for disadvantaged tribal children set up by his charity. In his usual dry way, he urged Georgiana to brush up her dancing skills before such an important task. She was energetic and particularly good at all country pursuits, but dancing was not her strong point. Inflexible and rather clumsy in her movements, she was a fine example of what Nancy Mitford meant when she described the curtsy of one of her characters as ‘going down like a camel and getting up like a cow’. But she listened to Adrian with whom she enjoyed a friendly companionship after many married years together and went to a Scottish Reeling dance practice at St Columba’s Church, Knightsbridge.

It was a bad decision. The very young crowd was bursting with over-forceful enthusiasm but lacking in skills. It was a real stampede and while she was spun by her partner with great speed in one direction, the young man next to them was spinning his partner in the opposite direction, and the two heads collided with a resounding crack.

Georgiana suddenly realised what the expression ‘sparks flying in front of her eyes’ meant and crashed heavily on the floor badly knocking the side of her head, shoulder, elbow and wrist. She even thought she had lost consciousness for a split second and saw herself as if

SONG WITHOUT WORDS

from afar doing a somersault before hitting the ground, on the way down thinking 'what a performance!' People rushed to her rescue and at first it seemed to her in her state of shock that, apart from bruises, she had got off rather lightly. But when she was going to bed that night her head started to spin violently with a feeling of nausea which continued for some time before subsiding and she had the same unpleasant feelings each time she changed position from vertical to horizontal and back again.

Dagmar, Princess by marriage to one of the sons of a minor European royal family and her good friend and fellow guest of honour at the Debutantes' Ball, took her to the clinic of a chiropractor friend where the damage was assessed: an injured neck, a dislocated shoulder, a torn ligament in the elbow and Benign Post Traumatic Vertigo on a scale of 7 out of 10. All that from a reckless dance practice. She now had to attend the clinic several times a week for various repairs to her injured parts. She saw many youngsters in the traction section lying, sitting and standing in unimaginable positions and wondered what on earth they could have done to be injured like that.

The date of the Ball approached. Georgiana was not sure she would be in condition to go but Dagmar was a good support and persuaded her.

'It'll boost your morale to get dressed up and do your duty', she insisted and yes, it did help! Georgiana even managed to walk to the chords of the opening march. She spent the rest of the Ball, resplendent in her family tiara, in the place of honour at the top table receiving homage from the Debutantes. She spent most of the time with Tamara Alymova who, having very gracefully danced a slow reeling waltz with the other Debutantes, was now sitting next to Georgiana.

Tamara was a very young and very beautiful daughter of one of the chief Russian sponsors of the event. Russian classical literature, the pleasure and passion of Georgiana, was always at her fingertips, so to say, and the image of the exotic looking Zarina Of Shemakha from the Tale Of A Golden Cockerel by Pushkin came to her mind. Tall, effortlessly slender and elegant, Tamara had exquisite oriental features and a translucent alabaster skin, not without the help of

skilfully applied make-up. She also had slanted green eyes and luxurious long hair which she highlighted in every shade of gold. Genghis Khan's invasion of Russian Territories in the thirteenth century and the exiling of populations from the European parts of Russia to the Central Asian republics during the Soviet years of terror had sometimes produced startling results. Her parents were originally from one of these newly independent States and, judging from the photos Tamara had been showing to Georgiana, looked quite ordinary and traditionally shaped. To look at them, nothing indicated that they could produce such a refined and polished creature as Tamara, but things like that do happen very occasionally. From her early teens Tamara had been sent to a good English country boarding school. Her adoring mother wept when she learned of the spartan conditions there and commissioned a personal chamber-pot from the Meissen factory monogrammed in Swarovsky crystal. Of course, it was never used for the purpose its shape suggested. Tamara kept it as touching proof of her mother's love for her.

She survived school then graduated with a BA from Oxford University, having studied History of Art. In this she was so unlike many other daughters of suddenly newly rich parents from post-Soviet Russia. She had not wasted her education and anyone looking and listening to her refined and cultivated English, would doubtless echo the author of Zuleika Dobson and conclude that Beauty and Brains had met finally in at least one girl student on the banks of the Isis.

Both Tamara and Georgiana shared a liking of art of all kinds and their friendship continued after the Ball when they would meet occasionally for a delicious lunch or go to a charming exhibition or antiques fair.

One Saturday Georgiana invited Tamara to an open-air sculpture show in Holland Park. Tamara asked if she could bring an acquaintance, Georg, a former principal ballet dancer from Germany, who was a graduate of the Vaganova School of classical ballet in St Petersburg. He was now teaching ballet in London and counted among his pupils the daughter of a Greek shipping magnate, a friend and business associate of Tamara's father.

'I told him how amazing you are and how beautiful your Russian is', Tamara added.

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A boring and pedantic German, Georgiana thought to herself. Nevertheless, she graciously agreed to meet him. As she was approaching Holland Park, only five minutes late (which is quite permissible for a lady), she received several persistent phone calls from a German number. Here we go, she thought, a thorough bore, and of course she didn't answer but instead walked faster and was soon at the entrance. She saw a tall youthful looking man who was busily fiddling with his iPhone, the only one among all the others who could possibly answer the description of a ballet dancer.

'You must be Georg?'

'Yes,' he said and continued: 'But why in English?'

'Do you wish me to speak German to you? I was vaguely thinking of brushing it up.'

'No, not German, Russian of course', he continued suddenly in Russian. His voice in that language sounded pleasant and the accent was purely Muscovite and cultivated. Georgiana was always only too happy to speak Russian and to show off her perfect knowledge and intonation. She had even been slightly disappointed when at the Ball Tamara expressed her preference for speaking with her in English. 'Always, with pleasure', she agreed, 'but why Russian of all languages?'

'What other language can it be with my surname?'

'And what is your surname?'

'Bagration'.

'Oh, THE Bagration?' Immediately, the whole long run of Georgian Bagration Princes in the service of the Imperial Russian Court came to Georgiana's mind. Some had been very intimately connected with Imperial Grand Duchesses, one even in marriage.

'Just Bagration', said Georg simply, without a trace of pretence. Georgiana looked at him more closely. Georg was tall, slender, with a refined and elongated look, graceful movements, and elegant hands. Georgian men can be very handsome with elegantly defined features and not necessarily oily-looking, hairy and exaggeratedly Southern Mediterranean. Georg had a light skin, greyish eyes, lightish hair and looked, to Georgiana, rather Germanic or even Nordic.

Tamara appeared with the usual apologies for being late again and the three of them walked round the gardens.

They talked in Russian. Georg's choice of words and expressions took Georgiana aback. Clearly, she was a bit out of touch with colloquial modern Russian as she was with Tamara's affected drawling intonation, all too redolent of the 'glamur-major' type (as they are called in Russia) of gilded and worthless Russian youth. No wonder, Georgiana reflected, that Tamara preferred to speak her good English with her. She was two different people when she spoke English and Russian and now Georgiana much preferred the English version.

Language subtleties apart, the chief theme of their animated conversation was zodiac birth signs. Having grown up with the tempestuous combination of a Scorpio mother and an Aries father and being harmoniously married to a Capricorn, the Royal Lioness Georgiana believed in zodiac matches or mismatches. Dear Tamara was in Virgo quarters Georgiana knew little about. It was far more interesting with Georg who happened to be a Sagittarius (a great, fantastic fire sign, just like Georgiana!) but on the cusp with Scorpio! What a conflicting combination, she thought, knowing all too well about Scorpios from her dear Mama. Fire and water, light and darkness, unbounded energy, optimism and charm together with depression, suspicion, melancholy, not to mention all the other Scorpion dark features. I wonder how he copes with all this, she thought and asked Georg who immediately assured her that he was pure Sagittarius.

Later, when they went for tea, they were joined by Adrian and soon after the party dispersed. Tamara was in a rush to get to another engagement with two more squeezed in the same evening; Georg was in a hurry for his private class too. But they exchanged phone numbers and e-mail addresses and before leaving, Georg quickly registered Georgiana on WhatsApp.

'What's this What's-Up?' Georgiana asked. She remembered her twin sons coming back from an adolescent trip to Ibiza and bringing with them bad taste t-shirts, one of them called SEVEN-UP, depicting a line of seven fat dwarfish men with their attributes very much UP.

'Well,' explained Georg, 'it's an application which makes chat and exchange of photos and videos much quicker and easier.'

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‘Did you like my new friends?’, Georgiana asked Adrian whose wise opinions she trusted.

‘The young lady is very beautiful, and the man is very much taken by her’, he observed.

That was news to Georgiana, who thought Georg, who has already sent her a message saying how pleasant and interesting his new acquaintance was, was rather paying attention to her.

‘And what made you think so? I didn’t notice anything like that.’

‘Oh well, it was so obvious’, though it was not to the self-centred Georgiana.

Adrian soon set off for India on yet another inspection trip. Georgiana was left mainly to herself and to her injuries and a nasty bout of flu with a chest-splitting cough, while her domestic help was away on holiday. The heating and hot water systems also broke down during the coldest weekend. It was all too much. Then she began to receive frequent messages from Georg on WhatsApp. They wrote in Russian to each other and the whole thing baffled her.

It was a completely different way of communication from what she was used to. His messages had no proper address or ending. There were some extracts from the old video clips in Russian that made little sense and were neither interesting nor amusing. Is he a debil or what, she wondered, while writing her replies politely - Dear Georg etc. - ending ‘with best wishes, Georgiana’ and adding: ‘but why do you send me all these out-of-date clips? I’d rather you tell me about yourself, far more interesting!’

‘Dear/respected Georgiana’, Georg wrote, obviously making a great effort in Russian to match Georgiana’s demanding forms of address; ‘Will do, but sometime later. My profile is on Facebook. It is pleasant and interesting to chat to you and I can’t wait to see you again.’

That made Georgiana jump. She was feeling rather abandoned and absolutely miserable trying to fight all her misfortunes at once and in an icy apartment with no hot water. And now someone who was also thoroughly pleasant and interesting was eagerly anticipating meeting her again! Then Georg was calling her on the phone rather early in the morning demanding to know

if she had received the clips of his favourite TV series he had promised to send her. Her voice croaked; it was not easy to talk with a sore throat, so she did not talk for long. And yes, she had received the links. One of the links was to a famous gangster saga ‘Peaky Blinders’. Er... not quiet her cup of tea, but out of politeness she watched one part, in Russian. She was rather shocked by the crudeness of certain expressions.

The other series was Taboo, something about the living dead and was so dark and depressing particularly in her state that she did not venture beyond the first half hour. Still, she knew from her own experience that tastes differ and one always wishes to share the things that are dear to one with friends. She decided to answer with a joke: ‘strong stuff the Peaky Blinders and a good translation too, though some of the expressions are so crude that they made us girls blush. Taboo, so dark. I thought for a moment you were referring to the African film Mulaade (The Taboo) about FGM’. This was met with - disapproving, she could sense it - silence.

Out of her generosity of spirit she was also sending various clips of what interested her and might be of interest to Georg with some witty informative remarks, displaying the verbal pyrotechnics at which she had always been so good. But those messages were not even looked at by Georg let alone replied to. Georgiana could sense that the whole communication was going the wrong way. She could not understand why and with each lack of acknowledgement, let alone lack of reply, she became more and more puzzled.

Georgina had registered herself on Facebook but never used it, particularly after she was told by one of her friends that it was so brave of her to declare her age publicly.

‘My age! Why on earth would I do that?’

Then she realised it must be her sons with their wicked sense of humour who had put these figures in while helping her with the registration. She corrected it as soon as she had been told but it put her off the whole idea. The only photo that she had uploaded was of her in her ancestral tiara and the low cut formal dress that had so impressed President Putin. She never looked at other people’s comments or activities and never shared hers.

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If people wished to get in touch with or if she wished to get in touch with them, they could write to each other properly and privately, she thought.

But out of curiosity she checked Georg's profile. He had fantastic professional photos of himself in his photo gallery. He had over 2000 of so called 'friends', some of whom, to Georgiana's surprise were also known to her. But it is a small world, as everyone knows.

Georg was extremely active and had numerous and regular posts every day, or rather night. It seemed he hardly slept judging by the time they were posted.

It was a completely new world to Georgiana and something she couldn't quite understand. Why did people do it so incessantly and publicly? What was the obsession with sharing details of one's life with whomever bothered to look and all the time expecting 'likes' or comments? She discovered that the famous 'likes' could be bought. She also found out that it was usual to substitute for real words and emotions, various sizes and colours of hearts, which were readily provided alongside the 'likes'.

Very soon she could see that all his postings could be divided into distinct categories. There were scenes or comments from the ballet world; spectacular animal studies; dramatic atmospheric phenomena. At first, she thought that Georg took the photos himself and she admired his choice and skill with the camera. Then she realised they were all borrowed from a common pool just like the images from the animal world. To give him credit, all were chosen with good taste. Often, they were accompanied with 'inspirational notes' (as she later learnt they were called) and words of communal wisdom, again all borrowed from another common pool. There were jokes, funny pictures and short videos. Georgiana realised that she shared his sense of humour, sharp, at times risqué, but never overstepping the line of good taste.

And practically in every series of posts there would appear, as a personal signature, an image of a celestial archer in every possible angle and variation.

Once it was a naked young man with a sculptured body riding a horse and straining a bow. It was a very beautiful image and a chaste one, showing only the classical outlines of the body.



So when a particularly attractive photo of Georg appeared inviting comments from all his registered friends, Georgiana made an exception and wrote a comment for the first and last time.

All other comments were in the style of: Wow; Hi, good looking; Thumbs up. There were Likes, Smileys of all types and Hearts and flowers from some girls, including Tamara.

Georgiana thought that her message should be different and memorable.

"Young And Beautiful Was Wabun" she wrote in Russian, quoting a passage from the song of Hiawatha about the Eastern Wind bringing the morning light and shooting silver arrows to disperse darkness.

'Very appropriate for an Archer-Sagittarius', she thought, using Bunin's translation, whose version was as beautiful as it was accurate.

Together with her imposing Facebook image it certainly stood out from all the other messages. Later, she became rather embarrassed by this outpouring and wished she had never posted it, hoping at the same time

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that Georg would never see it. By his total neglect of her messages which he didn't even bother to open she was almost certain this was the case.

Georgiana questioned Tamara about all this. After all it was Tamara who had introduced them, and the very young Tamara was of course quite familiar with all aspects of social media.

Tamara admitted that she didn't know Georg all that well. She had only met him a couple of times at the house of one of Tamara's friends, the daughter of a ship owner to whom he was giving dance classes. Tamara was there using the wall-to-wall mirror of the private dance studio to try out possible costumes for a Bollywood style birthday dance to the music of her mother's favourite Bollywood romantic drama. It was going to be a surprise birthday present for her mother, which was to be celebrated on board a substantial yacht.

'He always rings me and offers to help me out with aspects of choreography and artistic expression'.

'Have you had a class with him?'

'Oh, no. I am afraid he has something else in mind and will try to take advantage'.

'I doubt very much if he is a true professional'.

Tamara was rather upset by Georg's behaviour towards Georgiana.

'I warned him that you are a high society English lady and would not accept the casual approach of WhatsApp'.

'I've already started to understand how it works', Georgiana smiled. More and more friends would connect and she had no problems or difficulties communicating casually and lightly, sans ceremony. The only other exception was Tamara with whom messages always took a more formal though affectionate form, starting with 'dearest' and finishing with 'much love'.

Tamara admitted that it was rather demanding and Georgiana reassured her, 'both of us are in the category of the superior women, La Femme Superieure, as Balzac who knew society women to perfection, called it. So it is our duty to uphold the highest standards'. Georgiana knew the way to Tamara's heart.

Georg's neglect of all her communications continued but occasionally and always out of the blue he would call her: always at a bad moment when she was in a public place or noisy airplanes would be flying overhead

and Georg would break into stories without beginnings or ends. His darker, suspicious, or petulant Scorpio side was always present then. In one such story he was never invited again to do a class after he had given a demonstration for free and everybody saw how much better he was than the other teachers. That Georgiana could well believe.

'Abortion before conception', she quipped and immediately sensed a surge of strong disapproval from Georg. In fact, she rather liked his chaste ways, so rare now in these days of total permissiveness.

And every time he would ask her about 'Tomochka'.

At first Georgiana didn't even understand whom he was talking about, but then it clicked that 'Tomochka' was an affectionate domestic form of Tamara. Not the sort of name Tamara would like to be known by, trying, as Georgiana could clearly see, to become as upper-class an English girl as possible.

'I thought you met Tamara often at the ship owner's house', she said.

'What ship owner?'

'But that's the father of your private student. Wasn't it there that you and Tamara met?'

'Is her father a ship owner? I didn't know. Still, it makes no difference to me who people are. What matters to me is what they are'.

Georgiana thoroughly approved of this attitude. Clearly one had it in one's blood after generations of nobility as his princely name indicated, as did Georgiana's and her husband's long line of impressive ancestors on both sides.

Georg was travelling all the time the length and breadth of Russia and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union as well as Europe and all over the world in fact, giving master classes and being a judge at numerous ballet competitions. He always wrote about himself in the third person informing everybody about his whereabouts and supplying a map.

That inevitably brought a torrent of comments, usually pleading in tone: That's where you are. We lost track of you. Hi, good looking, do get in touch when you land. Please, please, call, we haven't heard from you for ages. Etcetera etcetera.

And there was always an elusive reply: Gone already. In

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a different place now etc. etc.

A typical Sagittarius, always on the move, always playful and teasing, shooting arrows of attraction and desire and always uncatchable - Georgiana was succumbing to the romantic version of Georg she had invented herself. Adrian's dry wit would have sobered her up but he was away again on yet another of his trips.



From his reluctance to communicate with Georgiana there was no indication that 'he couldn't wait to see her again', words that had such an explosive effect on her.

Whenever she would offer to meet for tea or coffee during his telephone calls, his usual polite reply was that he was away or was going to be away.

But once he himself suggested that they should meet.

'Pity', Georgiana replied, 'I am going to a friend's birthday drinks party. But we can meet some other time. There is no hurry'.

'I'd prefer to strike the iron while it's hot', he said.

It was Georgiana's first outing to a party after that horrible cough and flu and she wasn't in her best form yet, still feeling rather shaky - not to mention the injuries, and the vertigo which was still there, though in a milder form.

At the party she made several rounds meeting all her known friends and all the other guests and then she wrote a message to Georg that they could meet after all and asked him to call her.

When Georg called straight back, she suggested that they meet at Knightsbridge station and then go to her flat in Cadogan Gardens.

Georg provoked the silliest devilish side of her: 'and you will become my prisoner there', she finished the conversation in Russian as usual. Thank God she bit her tongue at the right moment and stopped before adding 'The prisoner of the Caucasus', a recurring theme of poems, short stories and novellas by Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy.

'It smells like a dacha,' Georg announced with disarming simplicity as they entered her flat. God only knows what he meant by it. Then he looked around: 'It's like a museum here.' He was looking at the many paintings, portraits and engravings on the walls, the antique furniture, decorations and the carpets. His eyes were held by a late 18th century oil painting of rural Spanish dancing.

'Only Goya', Georgiana joked, 'One of the sketches for the Spanish Royal Tapestries,' she improvised impishly.

They were walking now through the dining room. The walls were also covered with paintings and engravings. One of them was an 18th century engraving of a voluptuous, classically naked young beauty who was combing her long wavy-blond tresses.

A ducal coronet was engraved at the bottom of the picture.

'A beauty from the Cavendish family, could be Georgiana herself', Georgiana was referring to her famously flamboyant and very unconventional namesake, the Duchess of Devonshire.

But Georg showed no interest or recognition of the allusion. His attention was caught instead by a decorative curio on the sideboard. It looked like an unusual dagger in a carved mahogany scabbard decorated with brass and with handles at both ends.

Adrian had brought it from the North of India on one of his travels.

'A carving knife from India', Georgiana said and tried to pull it apart with a flourish.

In her weak and still unstable state she lost her balance and before it ended in another disaster Georg was very quick to come to her rescue and steadied her with his strong and sure arms.

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‘Wouldn’t it be nice to lean on such a reliable friend who also happens to be an interesting and pleasant person’, an unrealistic thought flashed through her unbalanced mind and stubbornly stayed there.

Georg helped her with the tray and they finally settled in the drawing room over green tea.

Georgiana learnt with pleasure that Georg led a very clean life, neither drinking or smoking and condemning all sorts of drugs:

‘I saw so many of my friends succumbing and destroying their careers forever or even their lives’.

If only her sons had been reasonable like that! They confessed one day that they had tried every imaginable drug while in their ‘experimenting stage’ at Eton, apart from the hard ones, they emphasised, and she had chosen to believe them.

Gradually Georg was telling her a little about himself, showing pictures on his iPhone.

His father was also a principal classical ballet dancer and a very vigorous one, judging from the high jumps in the photos. Heroic and character parts came to Georgiana’s mind.

‘And that’s me when I was a child, and here in my youth’, Georg said with his customary modesty.

Georgiana saw with surprise a black haired, very handsome, sultry looking boy and suddenly realised that what she originally took for light hair was silvery grey.

When Georg told her about a terrible accident that had put a premature end to his dancing career, she understood that this alone could have caused the early greyness. He had been performing a complicated lift of his partner on one arm. Suddenly one of the extras carrying a tall spear as a prop lost his place in the line and stumbled into his path. In order to protect his partner Georg twisted in a different direction and tore the muscles in his shoulder and elbow and damaged his neck and back extensively.

‘Quite similar to mine’, Georgiana thought and even mentioned it but it seemed to fall on rather indifferent ears.

If only she could properly express to Georg her respect and admiration for his courage.

After all this he didn’t give up, was not swallowed by

drink sodden despair as so many other men from Russia would have been and managed to rebuild his career and life and was in high demand all over the world as a teacher and a judge.

But the devil was nudging her again and instead she said something silly, trying to be funny:

‘I am glad nobody with similar injuries and vertigo like mine goes on a romantic holiday to The Maldives.’ She thought the vulgarised location - the haunt favoured by footballers’ wives and aspiring celebrities – was, in itself, funny. ‘That would end any romance and would be a disaster!’ She added, over-egging the pudding. Georg’s eyes suddenly flashed at the mention of The Maldives.

She sensed the conversation was now beginning to go astray.

Georg noticed a rare edition of Lermontov’s poem *The Demon* in Russian with the famous illustrations in black and white by the Russian Art Deco artist, Michail Vrubel. Georgiana has been rereading it recently.

In the poem ‘a wistful Demon, the exiled spirit’ while ‘hovering over the sinful earth’ had noticed graceful Tamara, a beautiful Georgian princess, who was dancing on the flat roof of her Father’s house in preparation for her love match wedding. The Demon developed a demonic passion for the girl, arranged the assassination of her beloved young groom, seduced Tamara in her grief with poisonous words and killed her with his deadly kiss.



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A hopelessly romantic and improbable plot but what divine beauty in Lermontov's poetry! The book happened to be open on the page with the drawing of the beautiful Tamara in her coffin.



'Ah, the beautiful Georgian princess Tamara, just like Tomochka', Georg sighed deeply, suddenly abandoning his noble restraint.

'Tomochka?' Georgiana as usual couldn't make the connection at first.

'Yes, Tomochka. She is so young and so beautiful and so unlike all the other young Russian girls in her circle... and she is such a graceful dancer. Our country supplies the world with its best dancing material!' He said irrelevantly but with professional conviction. 'And I am trying to help her with her lines', Georgiana observed without any pleasure the sudden dreaminess that had entered his eyes and voice.

Apart from the shared name and the ability to dance gracefully, the very Georgian looking beauty with long raven hair braids in the book had very little in common with the high cheek-boned and slanted green eyed Tamara with her artificially curled and tinted golden hair.

Suddenly Georg was in a hurry to leave because he was catching a very late or very early flight to Venice from Stansted airport of all places. He mentioned that it was his first trip to Venice.

'I always travel by such flights', he said, 'it means that I have the whole day ahead of me when I arrive'.

The mere prospect of such travel made Georgiana shudder, but people's lives and the ways they live them are different, she thought.

'Try to take a ride in a gondola there, not one of those horrid touristy ones with plush seats and commercial singing but those that go across the Grand Canal. It is expensive but well worth it! The very first push of the pole is just like the first chords of Chopin's Barcarolle... Are you familiar with this piece?' Georg nodded politely but his thoughts were now clearly far away.

As Georgiana saw him to the door the devil nudged her again and she blew him a kiss across the hall. Georg's eyes lit up unkindly and his lips curved slightly in disapproval as the door closed behind him.

Nevertheless, Georgiana sent him a link to a painting of Gondoliers by Vittorio Carpaccio and asked him in a message how was Venice.

As usual the message was not even opened let alone answered.

Georgiana, a Royal lioness, had never had any doubts about anything let alone about herself, but now with Georg's obvious neglect, her self-assurance started to develop a serious dent.

Adrian was back briefly before his next trip to India.

Georgiana rather preferred that he went to India than that Mother India came to them. Pushpa Devi, a stout, plain, opinionated and very argumentative Bengali Brahmin, the Indian co-director of Adrian's charity, had once stayed with them and tried to establish her Brahmin ways of cooking and rules of purification in their elegant apartment. After that the kitchen and other bits had to be redecorated completely.

Adrian was observant and sharp.

'What's this deluge of drivel? This Georg is the only topic of conversation now. What's the reason? A man well into his forties who wears his greying hair long and in a ponytail with a baseball cap on top? Chases girls who are young enough to be his daughters? Hmm, some eternal student?'

'An eternal teacher, actually,' Georgiana quipped and then added in Georg's defence, 'All male principal ballet

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dancers from Russia wear their hair long like that.'

As for the rest, it was true that Georg's style of dress was certainly not that of an English gentleman.

'It's men like you who made me the way I am', she couldn't resist quoting Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen prefer Blondes*. Then she added: 'You are always away and I feel neglected and isolated particularly now after this accident and with all these treatments. I just want us to become friends and for him to keep me company. Nothing that would undermine our marital bliss, naturally', she reassured him, acidly. And as she was saying it, she was beginning to realise with reluctance that her wishes were highly unrealistic with Georg being away even more often than Adrian.

'How can you expect it from somebody you hardly know and who according to you is not keen even on this artificial 'virtual reality' friendship? If I were you, I'd leave this man alone. What gave you the idea he might be interested in being your friend in the first place?'

'According to every guide on the compatibility of zodiac signs, he is bound to be a good friend for me!'

'Darling you are completely mad! Are you in your right mind?'

A fiery lioness and a radiant archer united in the dazzling light of eternal friendship; once the image had flashed through her mind, how could Georgiana abandon such a tempting vision so easily? Her BPPV condition was indeed affecting her reason in a very strong and peculiar way.

She gave it further thought and began to understand that her chief mistake with Georg was that she had taken him initially for a Western man. Tamara hadn't mentioned he was from Russia, only that he studied ballet in Russia, and this had stuck in her mind and she was expecting a Western style of behaviour and politeness from him. Meanwhile, Georg was thoroughly Russian in his ways, attitudes and indeed everything.

Now she saw that the phrase in Russian 'can't wait to meet you again' that had triggered all this exaggerated interest on her part was simply a direct translation of 'look forward to seeing you soon'. A mere form of politeness in English, that in Russian acquired a meaning of serious intensity.

She decided not to write to Georg until he had at

least read her last message, an invitation to see a ballet film together with Tamara. Since he didn't, she too wrote nothing more.

Georgiana went with Tamara to a cinema in Richmond to see a performance of *Spartacus* by the Bolshoi Ballet on screen. It was superb and perfection itself. The young dancer in the role of *Spartacus* brought new dimensions to the character. In his interpretation, supernatural technique aside, *Spartacus* was refined and even lyrical.

'Just like Georg', Tamara observed, 'he is so handsome and elegant', she suddenly switched into her irritating oligarchic gilded-youth 'glamur-majur' Russian drawl. Even the pitch of her voice changed, acquiring some unpleasant whining tones.

'Georg calls me all the time. He is always inviting me to go to one place or another. He's been inviting me to join him in *The Maldives*', Tamara snorted at such a destination. 'And now he is offering his help to move my things to the new flat my parents have bought for me in *Knightsbridge*'.

'Congratulations', Georgiana smiled, 'we are neighbours now. Hope you accepted his offer?'

'Of cooorse not', Tamara continued drawling in Russian, 'hee doesn't have a title'.

'Bagration is a very old princely Georgian family', Georgiana said.

'Hee doesn't have a fortune', Tamara continued. 'Hee doesn't have an estate, hee doesn't have a yacht, hee doesn't have STATUS! Hee is just a dance teacher. My parents would never agree', she concluded suddenly and firmly.

While Georgiana was listening to all this babbling, an absurd image flashed through her mind. Georg was carrying with an elegant, balletic gesture the precious Meissen chamber pot with the Swarovski crystal monogram. He was cradling it as if it were a sacred chalice. But no... his status was not high enough even for this. This privilege was denied to someone of his position.

Georgiana thought that these first generation parvenues had absurd aspirations and ridiculous pretensions. She had no intention of being Tamara's governess. Let the girl find out things in her own time

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and through her own mistakes.

They kissed amicably and parted company. Tamara abhorred public transport and was whisked away by Uber. Georgiana went towards Richmond station. As she was going down the stairs, she saw right by the entrance gates a couple locked in a passionate embrace. In fact, it was a tall man who bent double over a petite girl, literally smothering her with kisses and caresses. The girl appeared to be tolerating it with cool indifference. Something in the man's appearance reminded her of Georg. Talk of the devil no, it can't be. Yes, it could be! She saw the same greying ponytail under the baseball cap. It did indeed turn out to be Georg. Such an ostentatious display in public matched Georgiana's ostentatious verbal pyrotechnics in her messages to Georg; and both called for a more modest restraint.

As she approached them, she greeted him with a polite 'Hello'. He 'woke up' and equally politely returned her greeting. Georgiana greeted the girl in the same polite way. The girl stared blankly at Georgiana under exaggerated false eye lashes. Her unnaturally pouting lips were the results of too much silicon.

'What an eventful evening', Georgiana thought when suddenly a man sat next to her on the train. It was Georg, all smiles and friendliness.

Without any questions from Georgiana, he explained eagerly and with pride that the girl was one of his best pupils. Georgiana now remembered the face: the girl was one of Georg's 'front row' friends on Facebook and she now also saw this face on Georg's iPhone screen saver.

'Linda Allegra is unique', Georg enthused, explaining that the girl came from a town near Manchester and had been sent at the age of eleven to study classical ballet in her town's Siberian twin city where she had learnt to speak Russian.

'She must speak it very well', Georgiana said.

'She is sometimes lost for words and expressions, but her accent is good', Georg assured her.

'Is she doing well? She must have had a very good classical training in Russia'.

'Our country still produces the best dancing material!' Georg declared proudly again and then asked: 'and how

is Tomochka?'

'You should have read my messages. Tamara and I have just parted. We were watching Spartacus together in the cinema. I invited you. And you could have come with your girl-friend'.

'I don't have a girl-friend,' said Georg.

Well! Thought Georgiana, what could be more natural for a teacher than to kiss and embrace passionately his best pupil?

At home Georgiana decided to check the profile of the 'non girl-friend' of Georg.

She gave it a cursory glance.

Linda Allegra Perrot; Classically trained dancer and classically trained jazz pub singer; Principal dancer of the touring company from the Kishinev (Moldova) State Ballet. Chief interest; men.

It rather grated with Georgiana: the declaration sounded a bit professional and for a different profession.

Georg had also listed women as his chief interest in his profile and Georgiana thought that perhaps it was his way to let it be known that he was not gay in his gay-dominated profession. Later, she noticed, he changed to Wind Surfing.

Apart from this interest, according to all the posts and photos Linda Allegra was interested only in herself and was entirely self-centred and talked at length about the minute details of her feelings and emotions at any given moment. She also saw herself as an example for the 'empowerment' of all other young women and an 'influencer', a setter of good taste and class.

'Linda Allegra was drinking Prosecco at the bar', she would announce this important event in the third person singular.

'Linda Allegra is selling her old dance shoes, anyone interested?' Ran the caption accompanying a photo of a drawer filled with rows of used dance shoes.

'A pair of torn jeans and leopard print stilettos. That's real taste!' Announced the caption to another photo.

On all the photos she was wearing stilettos and all her clothes were skimpy and she always posed in a provocative way. Strangely for a classically trained ballet dancer, her poses were 'in your face' and utterly graceless.

'Leave me alone' read another cryptic yet powerful post.

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'Why are you all after me? If I wanted your attention I would run on the street in my sexiest G-string and the shortest of skirts.' The hashtags to it were 'dark star', 'sexy ballerinas' and 'beautiful you'.

'Cheeky little me' was the introduction to another photo of Linda Allegra in a red, very open and low-cut dress and stilettos of course. She was contorted in such a way that her bottom stuck out. At this angle her face looked very common and the lower part with the excessively plumped-up lips looked like a snout.

'I never knew I'd dare to show my sexy little... dress!' The tongue in cheek text revealed.

She obviously considered herself very witty.

And then indeed came a photo of a tongue in a cheek or rather her tongue licking the exterior of her exaggeratedly pouting lips with the promise of something lubricious.

'Dirty Thirty approaching; who will be able to handle me?' (On a playful dream holiday in The Maldives!) Linda Allegra asked her viewers while sitting in a provocative pose in sexy red underwear - wearing high stilettos, of course.

'OMG, what's WRONG with you!?' Her loving, worried Mother, who was one of her chief followers, wrote in the Comments box.

To give Linda Allegra great credit, she was very fond of her parents and had many pictures of her Mum and Dad - a nice, very ordinary looking, stout middle aged provincial couple - also classically trained pub musicians, as Linda Allegra never forgot to mention with pride.

There were also some videos of Linda Allegra singing. Georgiana tried to listen to them. They nearly gave her a headache. All the compositions were a monotonous joyless wailing. In fact, everything in this profile was heavy and spread a thick joyless cloud of self-obsession and the dismal poverty of a very primitive mind.

How could such a patrician creature like Georg have THIS as his girl-friend?

Georgiana was inclined to believe him now.

As Georgiana was closing Facebook, some 'requests for friendship' came in. Linda Allegra was among them. In scrolling up and down the list, she may have clicked on Linda Allegra's request. She wasn't sure and forgot about

it altogether, not planning to return to this person.

Moreover, Georg called her soon.

As usual there were stories about this and that, without a beginning or end. In a voice on the point of trembling with feeling, he was telling her that he was trying to save a young ballet dancer from Bulgaria from the wicked gays in her ballet company.

She was just nineteen, spoke some Russian and Georg was helping her with tuition. He had invited her to come to London but was now called to be a judge at a series of ballet competitions being held in several states of the USA. The trip would last several months with some breaks in between and was too good an offer to refuse.

And then he asked Georgiana why she had stopped writing to him.

'I love to receive your messages. You are not offended that I don't reply immediately? I am just not used to it. But I am trying to do it your way'.

'And I am also learning to do it your way', said Georgiana.

And thus started the period of what she called 'A Song Without Words'.

They exchanged messages often and Georgiana always made hers deliberately laconic. And now Georg opened her messages very quickly, no matter where he was and despite different time zones. They shared jokes, sent each other amusing or interesting video clips. Georg turned out to be a gifted photographer after all and sent her spectacular panoramic photos of various locations.

'It is like a beautiful stage setting!' Georgiana admired them.

'Many years in classical ballet helps to develop good taste', Georg accepted her compliments modestly.

Not for everybody, Georgiana thought, remembering the trashy 'Cheeky Little Me'.

Once he sent her a long voice message. He told her in detail about the competitions, how he was well treated there by the organisers but complained sometimes that it was rather lonely in the evenings with nobody to talk to. Georgiana restrained herself and didn't offer the obvious - in her opinion - which was simply to get in touch with her whenever he felt like it. All in all she was content even with this 'virtual reality' friendship which

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was gradually and slowly developing. That's what she had hoped for from the very beginning.

On one occasion Georg wrote urgently asking her to help his ballerina friend from Bulgaria with accommodation in London. She had come on his invitation and he was stuck in the US. He apologised for being abrupt: 'It's an emergency and I am asking everyone'. Georgiana promised to ask around.

She had recovered from all her injuries and only her vertigo stubbornly refused to go. She could almost detect a greedy glint in the eyes of her physiotherapist who said that he was devising a programme of treatments for the following two years with regular sessions three times a week. Georgiana wanted to get back to normal of course, though this seemed extravagantly excessive to her.

And then one evening she received a message by e-mail that Linda Allegra had confirmed friendship on Facebook.

Out of curiosity Georgiana clicked on it.

'A lot has happened on Facebook' as the banner went. A lot had happened indeed!

Linda Allegra had changed her status. 'In relationship with Georg Bagration' it announced.

She changed her cover photographs: there were several with Georg and her frolicking on the beach. One was rather ridiculous: bodies interlaced, his without a head, and her head at a bad angle showing her snout.

'Love fiercely, love only with all your heart and once you found it, hold on to it no matter what' the caption read.

She certainly held on to hers: her long black nails were digging into Georg's shoulders as she was clinging on to him. Only in the first couple of cover photos was Georg smiling with satisfaction – like someone who has won a trophy. On all other photos his lips turned down and his eyes were lifeless. Linda Allegra's eyes were blanked as usual despite the carnivorous smile on her silicon enhanced pouting lips.

'Finally, after several years I am so happy having finally found my true love, the most handsome and the most beloved one. All I want is to share my newly found happiness with all of you, to be good, to be true to myself, not to be afraid to show my emotions and

above all to remain and to continue to be ME! Yet there are nasty people who started to write unpleasant things to me thinking they will go viral with them, so I am deleting them from my list'.

Georgiana couldn't sleep, she was tossing and turning and her vertigo was very much back.

She decided to do a thorough cross check and discovered that Georg had indeed been with Linda Allegra for a couple of years. Only he was very discreet, didn't announce anything and had uploaded only one short video 'My best pupil'. Georgiana had seen it before on Linda Allegra's profile: she was doing a vertical split but with her bottom to the camera, in tight black hot pants with frills that draw attention mainly to her crotch. It looked virtually obscene and in very cheap bad taste. Georg had photo-shopped it, bringing it some semblance of normality and added flames to her extended legs and arms whenever she would strike an attitude, adding a dramatic flair to the sequence.

Of course, Georgiana would not begrudge him his pleasures if that's what he liked. But why wouldn't he tell her about it himself? The dates showed that all the photos were taken during his current trip and when he was complaining that he had no-one to talk to in the evenings.

And another thing Georgiana couldn't understand: if the girl was declaring her newly found love now what exactly had she been doing over the last two years with this man?

It sounded like a declaration for a reason.

And the reason was eventually found.

'Look into my eyes, I am frightened but I am not afraid. I am not always strong or brave but I am feisty. I am struggling with all my emotions, I have so much to give. Be yourself above all, you are beautiful, you are wonderful, you are you!' Ran another caption under a photo of Linda Allegra in a forced, graceless pose wearing a skimpy top and with her eyes habitually blanked.

Apparently, Moldova's government didn't have the funds and had terminated the contracts for the Kishinev Touring group.

Oh well, at least she has her love and they are happily together, Georgiana thought.

Not so much.

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“Unbalanced!” Was the heading of another photo of Linda Allegra, not quite managing a high jump and then a long message followed:

“Are you ok!?!?!?” Something I have been asked a lot while warming up. Right now, I am gonna answer this question honestly. I am fine but fine is not ok or good! I’ve tried to stay strong and stay ‘ME’ but I’ve faced more than I had expected in this period and I pretended it doesn’t matter and I can deal with it. I’ve finally decided to come clean... I have been let down, hurt, heartbroken and left alone. I am a very understanding person and if anyone is going through something horrible I want you to know I am here, remain yourself, remain YOU, share your problems with me, I love you all’.

That was another exhibition of ‘verbal pyrotechnics’, Georgiana reflected - and modest restraint was, after all, she decided, the best remedy both for herself and the ‘cheeky little me’.

And the reason?

A new photo had appeared on Georg’s site with the laconic caption ‘My most favourite pupil’.

A very young girl was perched unsteadily in a classical attitude on Georg’s outstretched arm, looking very happy. And so did Georg with his eyes smiling again. Compared to her even Tamara in her early twenties looked grown up, and Linda Allegra, having passed her ‘dirty thirty’ and having entered her ‘naughty forty’

decade, looked haggard and without any trace of fresh

youthfulness.

A familiar pattern was emerging: young, younger, the youngest. And all speaking Russian to some extent.

The shimmering stardust had fallen from the celestial archer. Instead, there emerged a man approaching the dangerous middle years with an inclination for very young girls who, in his mind needed to be ‘helped out’.



It was like reading a cheap comic book with primitive, two-dimensional characters, Georgiana thought, finally turning to sleep. To her great surprise the shock therapy worked and she had no more symptoms of vertigo. Nor had she any when she woke up the next morning, refreshed and, at last, completely cured!

Well, all thanks to Georg in a way. Not to mention that he introduced her to WhatsApp which had opened a new world to her. And as she was checking her emails she found the link to a message from Linda Allegra in Messenger.

‘Hi, I am really sorry if this sounds rude, it isn’t supposed to. Do I know you? Have we met?’

So much for all these on-line friendships, Georgiana laughed, now feeling normal again. Enough of such

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friendships, enough of the comic books – and enough of the “Songs Without Words” she thought as she heard Adrian bashing out one of Mendelsohn’s Songs Without Words on the piano – his latest fad.



- p48. Stock image of Tiara
- p52. Dark Sagittarius by Nikola Vujadinovic.
- p54. Sun in Sagittarius by Steel-Eyes Deviant Art
- p55. The-Swan Princess, Mikhail Vrubel
- p56. Tamara in the coffin, illustration to the poem ‘Demon’ by Mikhail Lermontov, Mikhail Vrubel.
- p61. Flaming Lavatory Bowl by Ana Sorokina
Sagittarius by Eric Williams
- p62. Lioness with Crown by Deviant Art PHP Group

SATVRNVS.



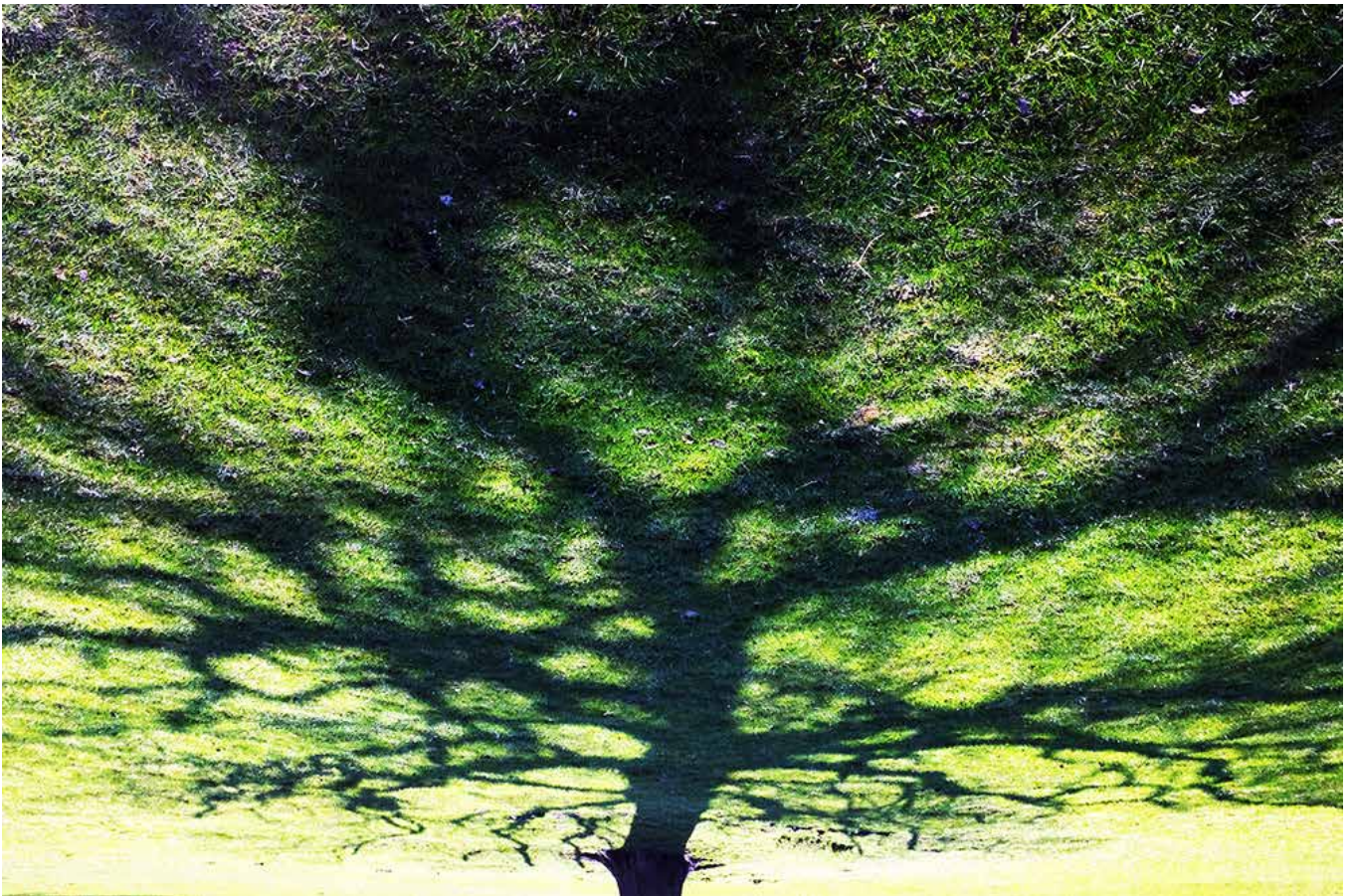
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DAVID GIBSON

David Gibson is a well known British street photographer whose work has been widely exhibited and published. He is the author of three books: *The Street Photographer's Manual* (2014), *100 Great Street Photographs* (2017) and *Street Photography: A History in 100 Iconic Images* (2019). *The Street Photographer's Manual* is a best-seller and has been translated into 8 languages. He is currently working on another street photography title that will be published next year.



David Gibson



David Gibson



David Gibson



David Gibson



David Gibson

FANTASY GIRL

by A. D. Harvey

She had told him she had dropped out of doing her A-levels, which put her at seventeen or eighteen years old. A couple of deft questions about her A-level syllabus – English, History and Psychology – confirmed that despite appearances she wasn't jail-bait. She spent most of their first full day together curled up on his sofa, reading with a childish absorbedness. Occasionally she would look up and ask a question about some matter of fact relating to the book she was reading, as if she was still at school and he was the teacher, except that as she asked her questions she gazed at him with big trusting eyes, as if unable to believe he would not know the answers, and there was no way she could ever have looked at a mere school teacher quite like that – at least not since she was eight – but she never asked him a single question about himself, or about what he was thinking, or what he expected of her. She accepted arrangements he made without query, ate what he put on the table without comment, and said please and thank you in all the right places, as if drilled in an academy for young ladies. When she had got up in the morning she had locked herself in the bathroom, calling 'Bathroom Free!' when she emerged, but seemed to take it as a matter of course that he came into the bedroom naked while she was still in her bra and panties.

They had found each other outside King's Cross Station. He had been on his way home from the British Library. She had been standing outside McDonald's, mostly ignored by the early evening crowd: armpit-height teenage boobs, light brown shoulder-length hair fixed behind her ears, a slightly pigeon-toed way of standing, with her bottom cocked out without seeming aware of it. 'Excuse me, could you spare fifty pee?' she said to him. His first response was: this is the most dangerous spot in all of Britain for a young girl to be begging. Then he said, 'I'll buy you a McDonald's if you like.'

'Would you?' She gave him the shy beginning of a delicious grin.

Later when she was more relaxed with him, her smile always had something shy at the beginning of it.

She had told him she had been in London twenty-four hours, had had her bag stolen with her money and change of clothes, had spent the previous night in a shop

doorway, too cold and too frightened to sleep. She hadn't eaten all day. After she had finished a McDonald's, he took her home, made her two grilled cheese sandwiches, gave her one of his shirts to use as a nightie. He showed her his double bed. 'You can either asleep here or on the sofa in the other room.'

'The bed looks more comfortable,' she said, with an amused sidelong look at him, as if she found it funny that he offered her a choice, but in a school-girlish way, completely without sexual promise. 'I've never slept in a double bed before.'

They talked a bit and about 8:30 p.m. she said she was really tired, not having slept the night before, and would he mind if she crashed out. By the time he went to bed himself an hour later – early for him, but he wasn't sure what to expect with her – she was fast asleep, on the far side of the bed, back turned, light brown hair a puddle on her pillow, with part of an ear and cheek just visible.

Next day she read, and they went for a walk in the park opposite his house (he wasn't sure what to make of the way she sniggered when she noticed two pigeons trying to copulate in the usual incompetent pigeon manner beside the path), and looked through his collection of postcards together. He had a huge collection of postcards from most of the art galleries in Europe, arranged not on art historian lines, though Art History was how he earned his living, but in order to tell little stories, Paolo and Francesca, Father Christmas preparing for Christmas present deliveries, Louise O'Murphy at the Court of Louis XV, Tolstoy's War and Peace in twenty scenes, a modern girl's adventures in the Big City, and so on, and they sat side by side at his work table with a CD playing, and when she reached across him to move a card that was on his side of the table she pressed against his shoulder and once, for a full minute, put her arm around his shoulder so she could reach across further with her left hand, and made no objection to his hand resting on her thigh. When he glanced sideways at her face next to his he thought she might be expecting to be kissed, but she looked sweetly intent on the postcards, and he didn't want in the world to hurt her, so he took his hand away from her leg.

At other times during the day, in the kitchen and

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during their walk in the park, if she brushed against him by accident she always apologized.

In the evening they talked about her A-Levels (she thought she might carry on with them at a college in London) and looked at his postcards again. About 9 p.m. she said she was still sleepy and went into the next room to get ready for bed. She came back, bare-legged, wearing the shirt she had borrowed, sleeves rolled up to the elbows, only three buttons fastened, and no sign of anything underneath. She stood beside him for a moment.

'Wake me up this time if I'm asleep when you come to bed,' she said, with a bright-eyed, earnest look, touching his shoulder briefly.

He put the postcards away, washed, cleaned his teeth thoroughly, found his always-remember-the-Scout-motto packet of condoms. He still wasn't quite sure what would happen, only that he didn't want her to go away and leave him, and if she was going to stay

She was lying on her tummy, book on her pillow, reading when he came into the bedroom, but put her book aside as soon as she saw him in the doorway and lifted the bed cover aside for him with a welcoming smile.

Their first kiss was a tad anti-climactic, not to say anti-septic: a bit as if they were afraid of each other.

'I was waiting for you to do this last night,' she whispered. 'Or at least this morning.'

'You should have said something.'

'You'd been so lovely to me I was afraid it wouldn't be quite polite to tell you there was something more you ought to do.'

She had rolled over on her back. With a feeling of incredulity he shifted over till he was more or less on top of her.

'Ooh, you're heavy,' she said teasingly, but her mouth did not turn away, opening slowly, as if after careful consideration, as his tongue pushed against her lips, and she made no objection when he undid a button of her borrowed shirt, then another. Then the third. Yes, no bra underneath. Her hand fluttered briefly at the back of his neck. He sat her up, gave her a double-handed both-boobs-together squeeze, and shyly peeled the shirt off her shoulders. She seemed to find this funny.

'Boys always want to know what girls' tits look like, don't they?' she remarked brightly.

But he found she had kept her panties on, and when he reached down to ease them off she stopped him.

'You've only known me twenty-four hours,' she said.

'Twenty-eight hours,' he corrected. All my life, in my dreams is what he wanted to say, but somehow didn't dare.

'It's only tonight.'

'You mean – tomorrow?' Was she planning on leaving next day?

'I probably would have done it with anybody last night, I was that desperate. But I still feel sort of tense and well, you'd know if I just let you get on with it and I didn't really enjoy it, wouldn't you? Perhaps you'd hold it against me. It'll be much better if we wait another day.'

'Sorry, I didn't think mean'

'You can feel me up a bit if you like, but not down there. Not till tomorrow. It will be better tomorrow, I promise.'

She looked perfectly natural bare-chested, possibly even arching her back a little as if unconsciously wanting her bosom to stick out a little more. She seemed even younger than when dressed, though practical and level-headed and in charge in a class monitor, vice-captain of the hockey XI kind of way, and he would have felt rather ashamed if her smile had not told him he had no need to be.

Her mouth opened under his when he kissed her again. She leaned back on both hands, shoulders raised towards her ears in a way that made her breasts droop invitingly, but he was afraid to touch them again.

'If you promise to behave I needn't put my shirt back on,' she said, lying down again, smiling up at him from her pillow.

Next day they read, went for walks, looked at his postcards again. In the evening she kept her right arm round his shoulder, reaching across him with her left, practically all the time they were looking at the postcards, though this time he did not put his hand on her thigh. It didn't seem necessary, or even appropriate. He felt tender and protective about her and, unexpectedly, somehow knew she felt the same about him. He knew it

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was absurd, but he felt on his honour with her. But all the time, refusing to stay at the back of his mind, was the thought that when they went to bed she was going to let him fuck her, and he found himself constantly looking at her, at the whiteness of her throat, which soon he would be kissing, at her mouth, at the twin convexities of her bosom, at her long-fingered hand with traces of varnish on the nails, which was now delicately holding postcards by their edges but which, God knows, might soon be grasping his engorged penis to guide it into her teenage quim.

At last it was time for bed. They undressed together, he almost overwhelmed with self-consciousness, she apparently no more embarrassed than if she was stripping off in front of other girls in the school changing room, but with a swift glance down at herself as if to check that her pubes were still in their usual place. Her kisses were more enthusiastic than the night before – not what one might call urgent exactly, there was always something calm and relaxed about her, but definitely wanting him to get on with it -- and her legs opened readily when he reached down between them. His erection seemed enormous. He would have to be very gentle with her. Then he remembered he had left his condoms on the mantelpiece of the long-since-blocked-off fireplace, and he had to get out of bed to retrieve them.

They weren't there.

He had put them ready on the mantelpiece the night before thinking – the night before, when they still hadn't even kissed for the first time – 'just in case.' But they weren't there any more.

He went into the next room to check the place where he usually kept them, in the cabinet above the free-standing bookcase in the corner. Of course they weren't there, because he had definitely taken them out and put them ready on the bedroom mantelpiece. He went back into the bedroom, checked beneath both their pillows, looked on the floor in case they had somehow fallen. She sat up to watch him, slim bare arms clasping bare knees, an expression of increasing amusement on her face.

'I can't find them,' he said desperately. 'I can't find the condoms.'

'Oh well, you can buy some tomorrow.' There was

something so wholesome and practical about her that the notion that he had been on the point of causing her to be carried away in a frenzy of sexual arousal seemed not a little ridiculous. 'You'd better come back to bed before you catch a cold. At least we can hold each other a little.'

She snuggled up to him when he got back into bed, even put both her arms around him, which she had never done before, and told him she really liked him. He kissed her breasts and her pubic hair (wirier than he had quite expected – and his kissing her there made her giggle) but he was afraid to do much more just in case things became too much for his self-control.

After breakfast next day he was on the point of going to the chemists' when she produced the packet of condoms from the back pocket of her jeans. She had hidden them the previous afternoon.

'Very funny,' he said. It was almost impossible to be angry with her, especially when she had that frank, delicious, comradely, complicit grin: but he was as angry as he could be. 'And I suppose tonight you are going to tell me it's your period.'

'Well, actually, it feels as if it's due about now. I was going to ask you to lend me something so I could buy some tampax.'

'But if you knew your period was due we didn't need condoms anyway.'

'It was you who wanted one,' she said. 'I knew you weren't going to do it without if you had, you know, an infection or something. I thought you were just being sensible, because they're always telling you to wear a condom when you go to bed with someone you don't know that well, just in case.'

'Yes, but why did you hide them?'

'I've never lived with a man before. Well, I was living with my mum and dad, wasn't I? This is a new kind of thing for me. It's not like pulling a boy at a friend's party and sneaking off to the parents' bedroom together, is it? I really want it to work.'

'But you should have trusted me.'

'I do trust you. I thought you knew that. It's – I don't trust myself. I feel I know you, even after only two days, but I don't think you really know me. And I still don't quite know how to tell you things that are

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important to me.'

During the next couple of days, though she complained of feeling a bit headachy and 'not quite ready for the marathon', she submitted equably to his kisses morning and evening, made no problems about dressing or undressing in front of him, washed her panties and sat around bare-arsed wearing only one of his pullovers while they dried, and once she had changed her overnight tampon, let him come into the shower with her. In the shower she responded to his attentions with cheerful aphrodisiac remarks like: 'I bet that tastes horrible' (when he kissed her tummy button), 'My tits do that when it's cold too' (when he made the pinky-russet tips of her breasts go hard by pinching them gently), 'I wish I was hard all over like you – not your willy, stupid, your arms and legs' (when he ran his hands over her velvety hockey XI muscles). When he asked if she minded that he took so long to soap her bottom, she said, 'It's O. K. when you do it, but if it was anyone else I'd feel embarrassed.' When they went for walks together she refused to hold his hand – 'It looks soppy and I hate it when one's palms get all sweaty together' – but tucked her arm inside his elbow companionably.

Each morning when he woke and looked across at the puddle of light brown hair and the half-concealed cheek and ear on the other pillow of his as yet unchristened bed, he wondered if he wasn't romanticizing her, romanticizing a relationship that had stalled at the outset – it would not be the first time this had happened to him – but then she would wake too, turn towards him, immediately aware of him and beginning to smile, and a slim white arm would snake out voluptuously from under the covers as if reaching out for him, so it was as if he had no choice but to lean towards her and kiss her passive lips, throat, breastbone, etc.

She began writing a letter to her mother: he kept telling her that her parents must be worried sick about her, and she didn't need to give a return address if she didn't want. She borrowed some paper and wrote diligently for half an hour, then said: 'I'll finish it tomorrow.'

'We can post it in Central London,' he said.

On the third morning she let him towel her dry after

their shower and told him, 'It'll be all right tonight. My period. It'll be over by tonight.' She gave him a radiant smile. 'I know you've got the hots for me.' Later, after breakfast she said, 'Lets get a couple of bottles of wine, you know, make it a party, celebrate.'

They went to an off-licence, bought a couple bottles of rioja since half a bottle each wasn't much of a hit.

Evening came.

'It's nice wine,' she said (evidently not an expert, for it wasn't particularly).

'It'll still be all right tomorrow if you leave some.'

But she liked it so much she drank the best part of both bottles and then crashed out, so that he had to carry her to bed. Undressing her, with her head lolling and her arms and legs limp and unco-operative, was surprisingly unerotic, notably less so than when she was laughing and splashing at him in the shower with her breasts jiggling up and down. Taking her bra off made him feel more like a mortician than a lover. He did consider having sex with her while she snored under him but it seemed all wrong, especially for the very first time he made love to her – it wouldn't have been a nice thing to do, and not at all what he wanted with her.

Having covered her up he stood beside the bed staring down at her. Even in a drunken slumber she had the essential characteristic of the kind of girl one falls in love with, that is, every time one saw her she looked prettier than the time before. Suddenly he felt tears in his eyes.

Blowing his nose he went into the next room. The letter she had been writing was folded into the copy of *The Great Gatsby* which she had been reading and had left at the end of the sofa. He glanced at it curiously, then realized it was written, not to her mother, but to a school friend. He sat down and began to read it from the beginning.

'Dear Katie,

'Well, here I am in London, and I've already scored a boyfriend. Bit older than me, and really into sex, and I must say I'm getting quite a taste for it too. Feels a bit strange after all those years of wondering what my thingummy was there for, and whether I would be any good at it. He says I am! Not that I feel so very different inside really. I'm much more conscious of down there,

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find I am washing it in the morning with much more interest and sometimes get a twinge there when I bend over or sit down because he's very vigorous (ha ha!) and I always have this feeling it's at the back of his mind too – but I'm still me, and he's still him, and it doesn't matter as much as you might have thought even though I suppose it is half the reason we like each other.'

He expected her to be hungover next morning, and use it as an excuse to put him off yet again, but she perked up after two cups of coffee at breakfast. He decided to confront her about the letter to her friend.

'You'd no right to look at that,' she said, colouring furiously.

'Well, let's pretend I did have a right, since you've been pretending and leading me on since you've been here.'

'But it was a letter to my friend. I probably wasn't going to send it anyway. It was like a short story.'

'Like your excuses. Just a story.'

'Well, I did have my period, you know I did because you saw the tampax that didn't flush. All right, I admit it, I've been silly. I never told you why I ran away from home. It was my father. He broke the lock on the bathroom door, and wouldn't repair it, and kept coming in while – I don't want to talk about it. It was horrid, and I'm sure my mother knew and didn't say anything. That's the reason I wanted to tell you that you mustn't rush me, but I don't know how to explain why not. I was afraid you'd get fed up with me if I slept with you, I mean had proper sex with you, and it turned out I wasn't any good, and you'd want me to leave. It wasn't that I didn't like you. I like you a lot.'

'Oh God, what are we going to do? It doesn't look as if It's going to work, you and me, does it?'

'But I do want it to work. More than anything. I've never met anyone I wanted to be with as much as I want to be with you. And you want it too, don't you?' O. K., let's go back to bed now and sort it out. I know it's going to be all right. Or let's have an early night tonight.'

'We were going to go shopping this morning. . . .Sort it out, that's not quite how we should be thinking about it. Let's wait till tonight.'

'I really like you. You do know that, don't you? And you're the most patient, understanding person ever. You

don't push and . . . well, lots of times I'd wished you would just ignore my excuses and get on with it.'

When he went into the bedroom that evening he found her already fast asleep on her side of the bed.

'So what did I expect?' he asked himself. He had a huge anticipatory erection, which made him feel even sillier.

Then she woke up.

'Gosh, it does look funny sticking out like that,' she said. 'Do you think you will get all of it inside me?'

'Yes,' he said, and two minutes later he did.

And once again an hour later, twice the following night, and again the following morning before they got up, and so on.

'I didn't realize people made love so often,' she said after a week.

'They do to begin with, while they're still getting to know each other.' He could have said he was making up for the time she had wasted, but refrained. 'You don't mind, do you?'

'Of course not, darling. Though I wouldn't mind a trip to IKEA for a bed that doesn't squeak.'

A few days later it was Guy Fawkes Night and they went to a fireworks display on Highbury Fields.

Each time a rocket went up she would watch it rising in its trajectory, lifting her face up till she had to crane her neck right back to keep it in view, and all the while going 'whooo-oooo' quite loudly, as if for the benefit of the people around them.

'Why do you keep going "whooo-oooo" like that?' he asked.

'We always did it back home,' she said, linking her arm with his.

Her whoooo-oooo reminded him of when they made love and the wha-wha-aaa noises she had been making recently, louder than seemed quite justified by the cautiously economic rising and falling movements of her body under him.

He noticed that they were being observed by a teenage girl standing about ten yards away amongst the other spectators with an older woman who was presumably her mother. The girl – black-haired, eye-linered black-eyed, Morgan Le Fay in a pony tail – was watching them as if trying to figure out what it was about him that got a

FANTASY GIRL

thirty-five-year-old like him a girlfriend about the same age as herself. Their gaze crossed and he grinned.

She smiled back.

'I can't see properly,' he said to the top of the mouse-brown head beside his shoulder. 'Let's move a bit sideways.'

The girl with her mother smiled again, a little more widely, as she saw them moving in tandem closer to where she stood.



Charles Dana Gibson

PAPIA GHOSHAL

Papia Ghoshal is an eminent Indian artist and poet, simultaneously based in Prague, London and Kolkata.

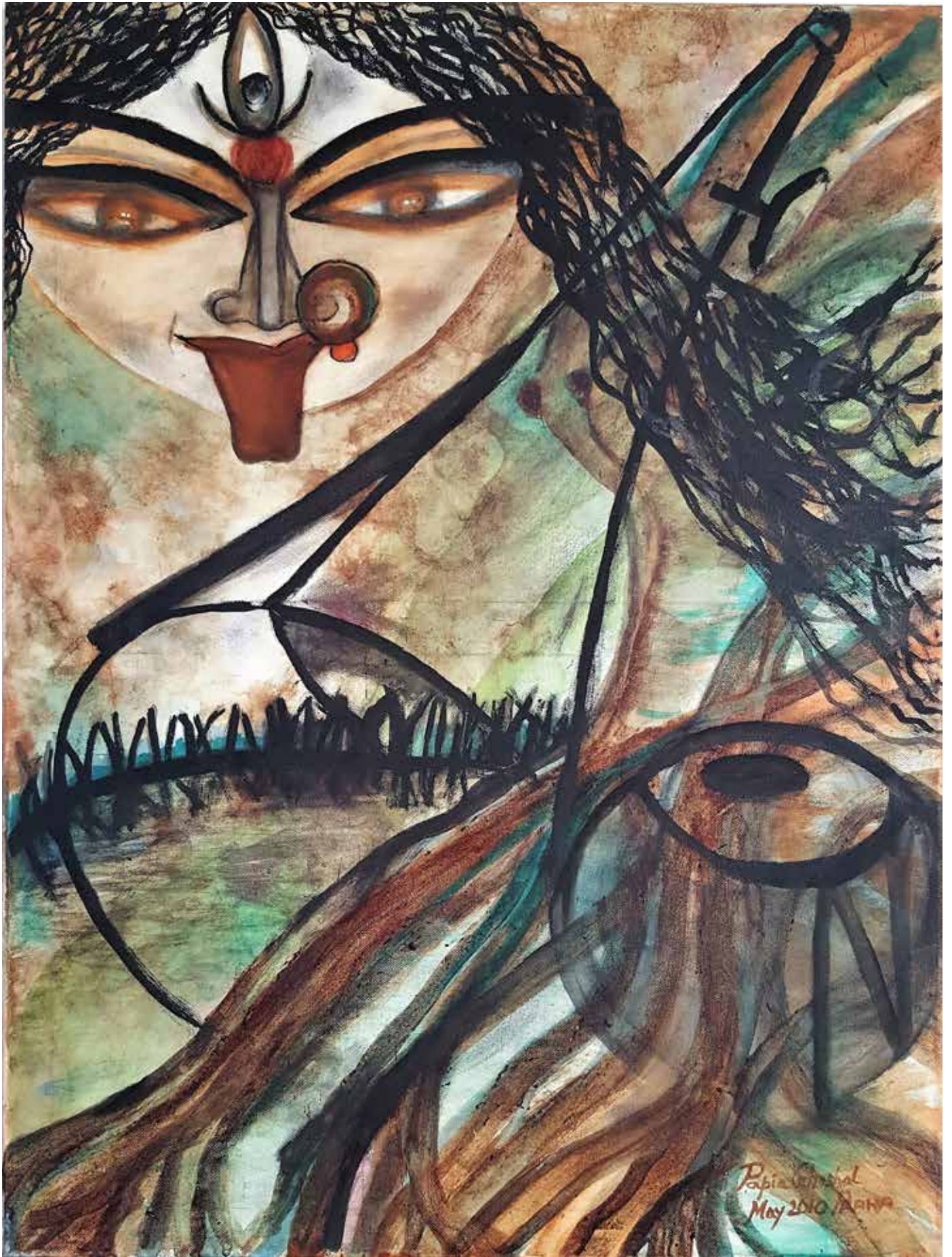
She is the winner of European Union of Fine Arts award, European Circle of Franz Kafka award, World Prize of Salvador Dalí award, Mother Teresa International Award and several national awards.

Ghoshal had exhibitions in various important museums and galleries in the Czech Republic, London, Germany, Mexico, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India.

The Czech TV produced a film on Tantra, where Papia is a protagonist and the film flows through the world of Papia's uniquely intriguing paintings.



WAITING HER TURN
Papia Ghoshal



BAISHNAVI KALI
Papia Ghoshal

PAPIA GHOSHAL

SCARLET CLOUDS

Scarlet clouds float in a scarlet driven sky
Smog of a residual dew faintly merges
to the silver lining shunya
Timid ladders of success bend a little,
surpassing
melancholic clouds
avoiding snake charmer's
flute a little,
ignoring
Corona fear

Meanwhile
All this while

Scarlet sparkled in blue somehow
Scarlet dews glittered somehow
in those eyes, seen through mirror
Scarlet dews glitter somehow
in those eyes, not seen through mirror



LONDON TUBE PHOTOS SUMMER 2021
Papia Ghoshal



LONDON TUBE PHOTOS SUMMER 2021
Papia Ghoshal



LONDON TUBE PHOTOS SUMMER 2021
Papia Ghoshal



TANTRA 1
Papia Ghoshal

JAMES AITCHISON

HOLMES AND I

Watching an episode of Sherlock Holmes
one evening in a summer thunderstorm
I heard-and-saw the heart-leap two-in-one:
a crashing whump and a flash of cobalt blue
as lightning struck the rooftop aerial.

Holmes, played by Jeremy Brett, died instantly,
killed by darting particles of light
and an electronic sizzling hiss,
a blizzard of white noise on the tv screen.

Off! The remote. Switch off! And the set. Switch off!

When intervals between the speeds of sound
and light grew longer, I thought it safe enough
to switch the television on again.

Holmes was sitting in an armchair:
his eyes were closed, his lips curved in a smile
and on a table beside the chair – a pipe,
empty syringe and rubber ligature.

The problem's solved and the craving's satisfied.
I know these states of mind but I don't know how
Holmes and I survived the lightning strike.

JAMES AITCHESON

RAIDING THE INARTICULATE

‘And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate’
(T. S. Eliot, ‘East Coker V’, Four Quartets)

The inarticulate is the intimately vast
prelinguistic simmering neural broth
of brain before it grew whorled enough to speak.

Without the simmering
we might never have chanced on the spoken word.
Without words
the species would be extinct or unborn.

The inarticulate is billions of neurons mute
until a microcalorimetric spark
fires the contingent networks of the word.

Every venture must be like a first,
going beyond the charted boundary
of my latest – the latest could be the last –
into an unknown that doesn’t exist
until I find it. And what I find
is what I alone, and you alone, create:
words to map the inarticulate.

JAMES AITCHISON

AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The unfastening of frontal consciousness
might be a circumstance,
and if happiness is this half-mind faculty
then it cannot be pursued.

Once it was music,
not music in the mind
but mind's metamorphosis in music's metaphors:
moon-pull tides and thermals of angels' breath.

Now it might follow the end of seasonal tasks,
repetitive, rhythmic practicalities
of wordless garden work.

And even before a task's complete
I sometimes overhear my illiterate brain
in a preternatural buoyancy
celebrate my mind's oblivion
in the hydrophonic yawning song of whales,
the hum of obedient bees in foxglove bells,
the snuffle-grunt of a truffle-hunting pig.

I make no explicit wish for happiness:
it happens, or not, only afterwards
when I get my mind back whole or nearly whole.



SELF ISOLATION
Marina Wright

AN OBSTACLE

By Daniil Harms, 1940

Pronin said:
“Your stockings are very beautiful” .
Irina Maser asked:
“You like my stockings?”
Pronin said:
“Oh, yes. Very much” , and he grabbed the stockings with his hand.
Irina asked:
“And why do you like my stockings?”
Pronin answered:
“They are very smooth” .
Irina raised her skirt and asked:
“And do you see how high they are?”
Pronin said:
“Oh, yes, yes.”
Irina said:
“But that’s where they end. That’s where the naked leg starts.”
“I say, what a leg!” Said Pronin.
“My legs are very fat” , said Irina, “But my hips are very wide” .
“Show me” , said Pronin.
“I can’t” , said Irina, “I don’t have my pants on” .
Pronin kneeled in front of her.
Irina asked:
“Why are you kneeling?”
Pronin kissed her leg just above the stocking, and answered:
“That’s why.”
Irina asked:
“Why are you raising my skirt even higher? Haven’t I told you that I’m not wearing any panties?”
But Pronin raised her skirt all the same and said:
“It’s all right. It’s all right.”
“What exactly do you mean, by ‘it’s all right?’” , asked Irina.
Then that moment, somebody knocked on the door.
Irina quickly pulled down her skirt and Pronin got up from the floor and moved to the window.
“Who is that?” , Irina asked through the closed door.
“Open up!” , answered a sharp voice.
Irina opened the door and a man in a black overcoat and high boots entered the room. He was followed by two military men of lower rank, who were carrying shotguns, and then a caretaker entered after them. The military men of lower rank stood by the door, and the man in the black overcoat came up to Irina

AN OBSTACLE

Mazer and asked:

“Your surname?”

“Mazer”, answered Irina.

“Your surname?”, the man in the black overcoat asked, addressing Pronin.

Pronin answered:

“My surname is Pronin”.

“Do you carry weapons?”, asked the man in a black overcoat.

“No”, said Pronin.

“Sit down over there”, said the man in the black over coat, pointing to a chair.

Pronin sat down.

“As for you”, the man in the black overcoat said to Irina, “You put your coat on. You’ll have to come for a ride with us.”

“What for?”, asked Irina.

The man in the black overcoat did not answer.

“I need to change”, protested Irina.

“No”, said the man in the black overcoat.

“But I need to put on something extra”, said Irina.

“No”, said the man in the black overcoat.

“And what about me? Shall I go with you?”, asked Pronin.

“Yes”, said the man in the black overcoat, “Get dressed”.

Pronin got up, took his coat and hat from the hanger, put them on and said:

“Well, I am ready”.

“Let’s go”, said the man in the black overcoat.

The two men of lower military rank and the caretaker stamped their feet.

Everyone moved to the corridor.

The man in a black overcoat locked the door of Irina’s room and sealed it with two muddy coloured seals.

“Out into the street”, he said.

Everyone left the flat, slamming the front door loudly.

AN OBSTACLE



Illustration by Bronislav Malakhovskii (1902 – 1937) – a Russian architect, artist and cartoonist, arrested in 1937 and executed in 1937 as a Polish spy.

Daniil Kharmis (1902 – 1942) was an early Soviet era Avant-gardist and absurdist poet, writer and dramatist. Arrested in 1941 for spreading “libellous and defeatist mood”, died of starvation in prison in 1942, during the siege of Leningrad.

RICHARD BAGGULEY

Born November 12th 1955, educated at Reed's school and 'The Arts University College at Bournemouth'. Earlier career as a travel photographer, went on to complete over 450 commissions in 7 countries as a mural artist (presently rated in the world's top 50 mural artists).

In 2002 completed a body of work on canvas of topical social commentary 'social realism' with resulting exhibitions, this period culminated in 2010 with a live crucifixion outside the Oxford street underground station. The image captured on camera circulated in the media internationally and the subsequent painting is on permanent loan to St. Lukes Church, Chelsea, London.

Richard continues to exhibit new work with his last show in July 2021 at the Brighton Festival, he spends much of the year traveling dividing his time between on site commissions and his studio in London.

Richard's work is in the hands of major collectors and has been featured in magazines, publications and books.



FALLEN ANGEL WITH PACHACUTI
Richard Bagguley



FALLEN ANGEL COVENT GARDEN
Richard Bagguley



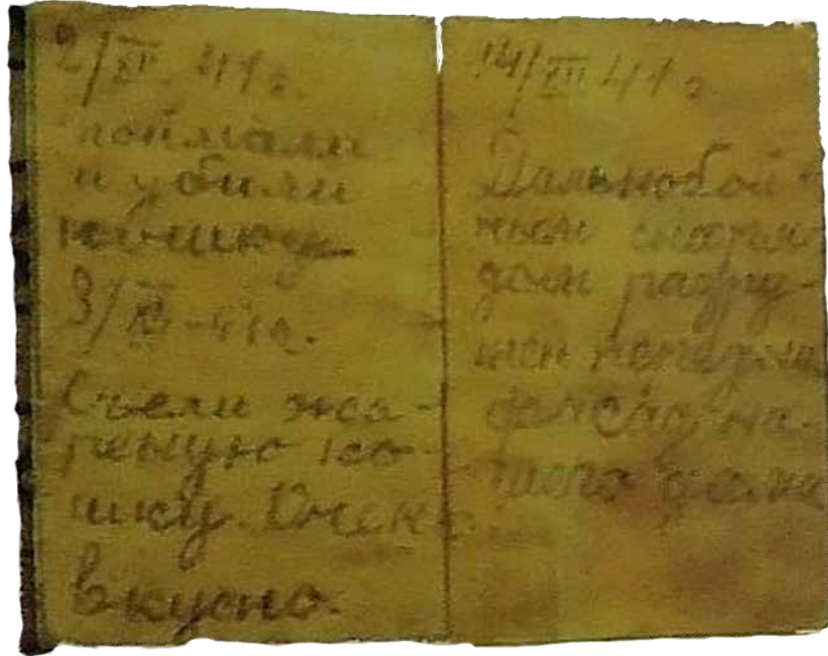
FALLEN ANGEL CONVENT CUSCO
Richard Bagguley



FALLEN ANGEL ALEPPO
Richard Bagguley

DIARY OF A YOUNG CHRONICLER

By Yury Birov



The Museum of the Defence of Leningrad has been reopened. So far, the display is rather modest. There is a tiny homemade, red-covered notebook under the glass.

There are words, pale with time and written with a pencil on the chequered pages that schools use. The handwriting is that of a child.

30/XI/41 High explosive bomb fell on the courtyard of the neighbouring house and broke one of our window panes.

2/XII A cat has been caught and killed.

3/XII Fried the cat and ate it. It was very tasty.

14/XII A long range projectile has destroyed the facade of the front part of our house.

I found this precious relic in the communal flat on Vassilievsky Ostrov where I lived, when I was sorting out an old wardrobe which had been left behind by the previous lodgers. A month later I happened to be in Kiev where Maria Nikolaevna, the woman who had occupied that room in the communal flat, now lived. I showed her what I had found.

She grew excited: "It is the diary of my son Valery; he was 10 years old then. I kept the notebook with his diary entries for 1941. And this little notebook was something like a draft."

The old lady showed me a lined schoolbook and some old photos. I read the lines of the young chronicler of the Siege of Leningrad, Valia Sukhov.

DIARY OF A YOUNG CHRONICLER

His severe, lapidary style strikes me.

Caught a cat again. Soup has been made for four days. But cats do not multiply during the siege. By the end of December Death was at the bedhead of the Sukhov family (this metaphor used by the child touches one's heart - author's note).

23/XII/41 Father can hardly walk. Mother is swaying. Our hopes are for January. In the evening I sat down to draw. And I forgot about everything. A week ago I started to learn German. We made soup out of wood glue and ate all the starch. At night I came up with this phrase: "bathing in gastric juice I have been recalling all the good meals". Father is ready to eat the dead bodies of those killed during the bombing. Mother refuses. It has been a month since we didn't have any solid food in our stomachs apart from 125 grams of the daily bread ration.

25/XII. Joyful piece of news - the bread norm has been increased by 75 grams. We'll eat three times a day now instead of two. There has been no electricity since 2/XII.

26/XII. Mother went to the market. 300 grams of bread was sold for 100 roubles, 0,5 litres of kerosene - for 40 roubles, a broken piece of a candle - for 10 roubles.

Mother walked around the market, shocked. The shops are completely empty.

28/XII. Procured some flower and meat. I say 'flower', but it is a ground cake to which rye flower has been added. Resembles cereal. Made porridge out of the flower. Resembles semolina porridge.

29/XII Mother traded candles, matches and cigarettes -125 roubles. Father has been lying in bed for a third day. He has completely lost his strength because of hunger.

31/XII. Mother sold 20 stearic candles and matches - 625 roubles for the lot. Father had bought these candles in 1923, it had cost 8 kopecs per candle then. No water for the third day running. We went to the neighbouring house.

And this is the end of the entries. Only a postscript by a different ink at the bottom of the page:

28/I/42 Father died.... and this ellipsis made a final end to the diary entries.

I persuaded Maria Nikolaevna to give me both the notebooks, and for me to make photocopies of them and the old photos that went with them. I told her that together with the siege diary of Tania Savicheva which is known to the whole world, the name of Valia Sukhov would also become known - the 10 year old boy who's grown up observation had been written down in a childish hand. Now Valery's diary together with the photos is among the museum's exhibits.

And what was the post-war fate of the boy who had lived during the siege of Leningrad? He survived, finished school with a high distinction medal and graduated from Leningrad University in 1953. He was allocated a job at

DIARY OF A YOUNG CHRONICLER

the Pulkovo Observatory of the Academy of Science of the USSR (a destination for the elite!). But after six years of fruitful work there was an accident. Maria Nikolaevna told me that in the Summer of 1959 Valery was testing on himself his own design of equipment for breathing under water (that was his latest interest). And one day his calculations went wrong....

“The staff of the Pulkovo Observatory have suffered a heavy loss,” so the official notice went, “the tragic death on October 14th at the age of 28 of one of the most talented of young astronomers, a junior researcher named Valery Borisovich Sukhov. To immortalise his memory an order had been issued to give his name to the electronic calculator which determines the average intervals for passing stars.”

That is how the name of Valery Sukhov linked the grown-up sufferings of a child during the Siege with deep space. Such is fate!

By Yury Birov, first published in the SMENA newspaper (St. Petersburg) on 28 January 1990 and reprinted here with permission.



LOVE IN THE PANDEMIC
Rupali Roy



DREAM
Farida Zaman

FARIDA ZAMAN - BLUE

By Martin Bradley

"I will be inspired only by the sensation that the season arouses in me: the icy purity of the sour blue sky will express the season just as well as the nuances of foliage."

Henri Matisse, 'Notes d'un peintre' originally in La Grande Revue Paris, 25 December 1908.

Doctor (Professor) Farida Zaman, Chairman of the Department of Drawing and Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, of the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, is one of Bangladesh's most significant artists. For well over three decades she has diligently reflected her homeland, her people and the complex interactions between them.

Farida Zaman has been honoured multiple times at home and abroad, including recent honours of Bangladesh's 'Ekushey Padak' (the second highest civilian award in Bangladesh) and the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy conferring on her the Sultan Swarna Padak (an annual award given by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on the birth anniversary of the legendary Bangladeshi artist SM Sultan). Farida Zaman continues to produce artworks that intrigue, delight and demonstrate the continuing inequality of the sexes in Bangladesh.

In exhibition catalogues, online, and in magazine and newspaper articles, much has already been written about Farida Zaman and her innovative artworks. She has both championed the under trodden, and the role of women in her society. Dr. Zaman has frequently exhibited with other women, thereby adding to a broad spectrum of works by women for Bangladesh society, and thereby extending our insight into those differing worlds. Here I have sought a fresh insight into the works of Dhaka artist Dr. (Professor) Farida Zaman, focussing upon her intense use of the colour blue, trying to connect the dots as it were.

Anyone familiar with Dr. (Professor) Farida Zaman's oeuvre, may come to realise that for this artist blue becomes revealed as an evocative azure, an

enthraling, beguiling blue, an amazingly rendered and poignantly placed colour which, as a catalyst for reflections, triggers our enlightenment.

For the knowledgeable, the enquirer, or the quester it may come as no surprise that blue, so familiar in Farida Zaman's works, was a great favourite too of that great Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore (Rabīndranāth Thākur). Tagore was a painter too, and produced somewhere in the region of 2,500 paintings and, it has been said, blue was his favourite colour. It is one which he poignantly expressed as '*rup*' (form), '*lavanya*' (loveliness), or '*ananda*' (joy), and a colour which had been introduced (through the purple/blue Petrea flower), into Tagore's place of learning, in Santiniketan, India.

That flower, planted by Tagore's friend W.W. Pearson, delighted Tagore's senses; for that grand master of words had a colour perception difficulty, perceiving no red hue in purple, but as a deep blue. "*Neel ronge aamar gabheer aanando*" (Deep is my joy in the blue colour) Tagore would often say. He must, therefore, have been delighted at seeing those dark blue flowers blooming all around his house (Konark) in Santiniketan, which still bloom there today. Farida Zaman may have seen those blooms before collecting her Ph. D. (1995) from that very Visva Bharati University, in Santiniketan, which Tagore had initiated back in December 1901.

An enquiry into the colour blue's entanglement with Farida Zaman would be remiss if we dismissed those shades of the stunning ultramarine (from the Latin Ultramarinus, literally beyond the seas) which sparked Yves Klein's 'International Klein Blue', following Klein's fascination with the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who had written "*First there is nothing, then deep nothing, and finally blue depth*".

We must also tilt our metaphorical, or art critical, hats to the lapis lazuli (Latin -lapis, stone, and Persian [*lājevard*], later Lazuli meaning blue), which was stealthily ground to make the glorious (ultramarine)

FARIDA ZAMAN - BLUE

blue of Giotto (Giotto di Bondone) and later of Titian. Lapis Lazuli has been mined in Afghanistan for over 6,000 years and its discovery had fuelled the use of that stunning, precious deep blue across Europe.

Between 1901 and 1904, the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso had painted his way through a melancholic Blue Period. This was, effectively, a period when he produced a number of mute, almost monochromatic, paintings in shades of blue and blue-green which he had begun after the death of his Catalan friend, the writer and artist, Carles Casagemas i Coll, in Paris, February 1901.

Those paintings, however, drew nothing from ultramarine, nor Lapis Lazuli, but were developed from mixtures of Prussian blue, Navy and Cobalt blue and, according to Picasso's biographer and friend Pierre Daix, the maestro Picasso had indicated that *"It was thinking about Casagemas that got me started painting in blue."*

In 2012, Farida Zaman participated in the Bangladesh women artists' association SHAKO exhibition, in tribute to Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period'. For that exhibition, Dr. (Professor) Farida Zaman tendered 'Sufia's Blue Heaven' alongside paintings from Kanak Chanpa Chakma, Naima Haque, Rokeya Sultana, Azadi Parvin, Afsana Sharmin, Kuhu Plamondon, Nasreen Begum, Fareha Zeba, Sulekha Choudhury, Rebeka Sultana Moly and Farzana Islam Milky. It was an exhibition of paintings inspired by Pablo Picasso's 'Blue period'. Of her involvement with the 'Picasso Workshop Art Camp' at Athena (in Uttar Badda, Dhaka, Bangladesh), Professor Zaman was quoted (by Fayza Haq, in Bangladesh's newspaper The Star), as saying *"I wanted to use the blue in the context of Bangladeshi women. I was forced to use them as a guide."*

At this point it would be easy to address a dialectic regarding Farida Zaman and that infamous Bengali blue, known world wide as Indigo blue. Dark Indigo blue is rendered from the species of the Indigofera

(tintoria) plant (an evergreen shrub native to regions such as India and Bangladesh), which produces what has become known as 'true indigo' (which the Greeks had named indikon, or from India), and which has become deeply enmeshed into the psyche of Bangladesh.

Indigo, was a blue so beloved of royalty and aristocracy that it was a main item of international trade from the 16th to the 19th century. Kathinka Sinha Kerkhoff (in her book 'Colonising Plants in Bihar 1760-1950', p122) has indicated that all was not well in the production of this colour, and that...

"Indigo cultivation had since long been a source of contention between the English planters and 'the natives'. The resistance in 1860 was referred to as 'the Indigo Disturbances' by contemporaries, and was later on described by scholars as the 'Blue Mutiny'".

The 'Blue Mutiny' was one of the first movements, in Bengal where the local peasantry had combined to rise up against the raising of rents and extra legal sanctions. This historical farmer's revolt of 1859-60 (known as *Neel Bidroho*) slipped into the creative imagination to become re-imagined in Dinabandhu Mitra's play, 'Nil Darpan' (or 'Mirror of Indigo', published in 1860, with the English translation being published as 'Nil Darpan', or 'The Indigo Planting Mirror', a drama translated from the Bengali by 'A Native' and published by C.H.Manuel, Calcutta Printing and Publishing Press, 1861).

Through lapis lazuli; through indigo; through the growing of Bangladesh flax and its delicate light blue flower; through the stunning blue of the Bay of Bengal, being the mirror of the sky, we can debate the predominance of blue within Farida Zaman's images of her motherland and that colour's influence over decades, on the artist's creative work.

Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal) is a 'riverine' country, with at least 700 rivers and tributaries seeping

FARIDA ZAMAN - BLUE

into its land. One long river bisects the country. It enters the country and is known as the Brahmaputra, easing its way out of India. That river flows south. Slowly it becomes the Jammna, then the Padma and eventually, as it draws towards the famous mangrove forest (Sunderban, said to be the largest in the world), it forms the Ganges Delta and eventually the Bay of Bengal. Due to the plethora of water seeping its way through the country, in autumn, misty mornings in Bangladesh become blue, following the masking blue of the evenings and having taken over from the luminous blue skies of Bangladesh's summer.

The audience gets a sense of this, within just a few seconds of film director Anwar Chowdhury's film documentary 'Joler Shilpamonjory' or 'Waterworks' (2006-2007) as we see a boat being propelled down Bangladesh's River Meghna.

Within Chowdhury's film, Farida Zaman returns to the land of her birth (Sachiakhali in the Chandpur district within the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh). We are shown that scene where the blueness of the sky reaches to touch its mirror in the sea. The difference between sky and sea are all but indistinguishable save for an essence of pinkness developing within what we recognise to be clouds. Two crafts come into view. The scene is still, cast over with blue. The blue eventually dissolves to reveal the artist (Farida Zaman) sitting in a fishing craft relaying her story. She is speaking of fisherfolk, of casting nets, of how those memories become painted onto canvases, or work with water on paper. The sky and the river are both blue, broken only by the boatman's shirt of pink and the sky gradually becoming roseate in its dawning. Skilfully the blue ebbs away to reveal Farida Zaman speaking "I am told that I was born in Chandpur". She gazes towards the changing colour of the horizon, as if reflecting on her past.

In the synopsis for the film 'Waterworks', are able to read how Farida Zaman "...describes how her childhood memories of boats, fishing nets, fishes, fishermen, water dots

and other subjects (are) reflected into her painting canvas." This text gives us an insight into the importance the concept of 'the motherland' has on this artist.

In 2010, Farida Zaman presented a predominantly blue acrylic painting centring on a young woman, dressed in an orange sari. The character has a bird in her hand and the painting is titled 'Sufia in Joy-1'. The exhibition is 'Rooted Creativity (2)', the second gala exhibition held at the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, in Dhaka. Interviewed by Fayza Haq, Dr. (Professor) Zaman explained, "*My pictures are spun around a girl called Sufia. I've brought in boats and water which play such an important part of our lives. Fishing nets are suggested then actually brought in.*"

In many of Farida Zaman's latter paintings, 'Sufia' is rendered in green, or orange, at times her black hair become blue, recalling Charles Baudelaire's poem 'Her Hair' (La Chevelure, 1857).

*Blue tresses, like a shadow-stretching tent,
You shed the blue of heavens round and far.
Along its downy fringes as I went
I reeled half-drunken to confuse the scent
Of oil of coconuts, with musk and tar.*

From Her Hair, Poems of Baudelaire (Roy Campbell trans, New York: Pantheon Books, 1952)

The name 'Sufia' is possibly Arabic in origin, and suggests a person who follows the Islamic spiritual religion Sufism (which had been introduced to Bengal in the 12th century, during the Buddhist Pala Empire). Someone called Sufia has a 'clean', or 'pure', heart.

The Sufi mystic saint Semnani (1280-1386), when reiterating the seven mystical veils (centres of personal progress from egoism to a divine centring), suggested that the second veil was 'blue light', which was an indication of the soul. He did not speak of an orange veil, but pointed to a 'red light' veil that

indicated heart and a 'yellow light', that of spirit. In the Sufi fable 'The Conference of Birds' also known as the 'Mantiq Ut-tair, by the twelfth century Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar', the ocean is asked why it is so blue. The response

" I am troubled because I am separated from my friend. Because of my insufficiency, I am not worthy of him, so I put on a garment of blue as a sign of the remorse I feel. In my distress the beaches of my lips are dried up, and because of the fire of my love I am in a turmoil. Could I find but a single drop of the celestial water of Kausar, I should be in possession of the gate of eternal life. Lacking this drop I shall die from desire with the thousand others who perish on the way."

The water filled 'riverine' land from which Farida Zaman hails; her ever closeness to the sea, water, and endless skies give some credence to the notion of her blue artworks stemming from her environment and her fond attachment to those enduring, hard working, female figures, like 'Sufia'. Those industrious women are the backbone of any society, Bangladesh included. The blue in Farida Zaman's paintings is not just emotive, but the by-product of practical observation. Her blue is historical (maybe a tad nostalgic too) as well as being societal and, at times, controversial in what continues to be a male dominated South Asian society.

Farida Zaman's 'Sufia' is seen in the artist's works as far back as 2006, (in a catalogue for her solo painting exhibition 'My Country, My Love', shown at the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, Dhaka). The character 'Sufia', the embodiment of the Bangladesh woman, is named in 'Sufia', 'Sufia's Dream' and 'Sufia with her Bird - 1' though, in essence 'Sufia' is all the female characters within that catalogue and many more throughout the artist's oeuvre, with or without blue.

Farida Zaman's 'Fish and Net' (2009) demonstrates the artist's skill in colour usage, with fish rendered in hues of yellow and orange/red against an ultramarine

background of water, and a threatening mass of dark blue/black spreading from above. Another 'Sufia with Bird' (2009) weaves various blues with green and dashes of red. The girl wears a white sari to match the white of the bird, while 'Rain' (2010, but included within her 2013 exhibition catalogue 'Bound to the Soil) sparkles with blue, both the deeper blue of the rain be-speckled water and the lighter blue of the rain itself. Of course the blueness is offset by flecks of yellow, some turning green, and just a hint of red giving the blue its blueness. In that same (2013) catalogue 'Marshy Land' 3 (2012) and 6 (2012), though in a more abstract form, render the blueness of water as it seeps into otherwise dry land.

From 2006, through to more current times, artist Farida Zaman has portrayed her central character, Sufia, from 'Midnight Dream' (2006), to 'Sufia with her Bird - 1' (2006), 'Sufia with Bird' (already mentioned, 2009) 'Peace' (2010), 'Love' (2010) and through to 'Sufia' in 2015. One non-Sufia painting 'My Beautiful Country' (2017), renders a mere glimpse of that artist's country in a splendid (predominantly blue) semi-abstract work. There are, of course, many other works where artist Farida Zaman delights in her use of blue. I have mentioned but a few from her oeuvre.

Red, green and gold are the official colours of the country of Bangladesh. They are the colours of its nationalism, the colours of the proud flag fought so courageously for. And yet the aforementioned blue has its place of mention too. Blue is the colour of indigo that Bangladesh people grew, fought and died for. Blue is the morning and the evening of that riverine country; the summer sky, the simple flax colour and of the Bangladesh artist Farida Zaman.

MILLIE BASU ROY

Millie Basu Roy is a professional UK artist and Art Teacher in London for the last 15 years. She graduated in Art from India and did her Masters in Painting from Central Martins College of Art in London. She has had successful exhibitions of her Art in UK India Bahrain & France and has taught Art at GCSE & A-levels.



CAPTIVITY
Millie Basu Roy



CAPTIVITY
Millie Basu Roy

CHRISSIE WESTGATE

Chrissie is an international award-winning photographer with many years experience. She specialises in street and informal portraiture, and also enjoys all aspects of this art form.

Chrissie is a regular visitor to India and her stunning portraits have become very collectable and are held in many private collections around the world.

Chrissie says “A photographic image can expose so many emotions and almost always transcends nations. Images are such a capable and powerful way of exposing situations of conflict and misery throughout the world and offer a compelling means of bringing about change.

The essence of being a people photographer is gratitude. I am constantly grateful for the opportunity to see and spend time with people and to make images that allow me to share what I have seen with others.

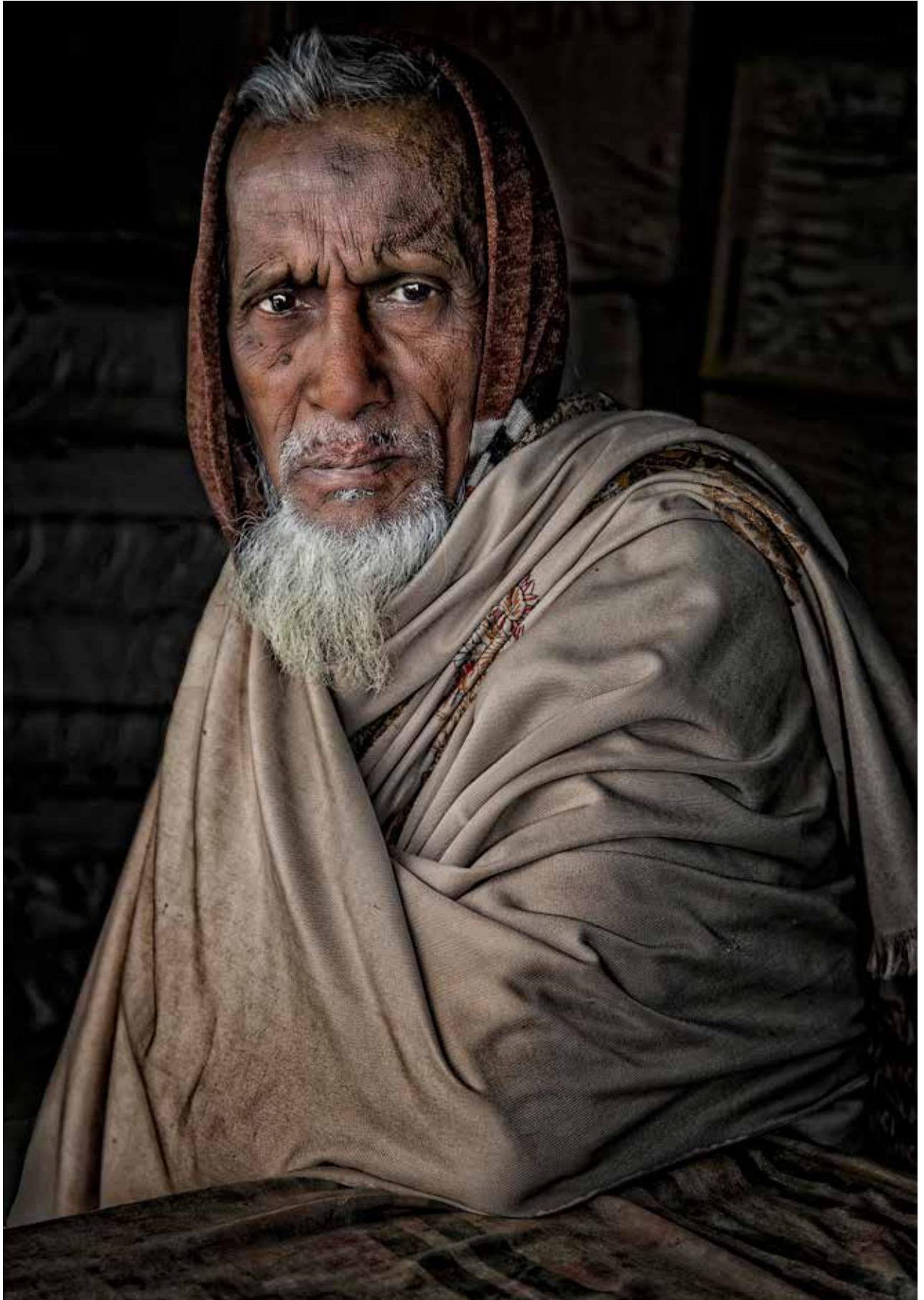
When I am working in a country such as India, I am not just a photographer, I am also a witness. I try to have a balanced view of people and to connect with them as human beings, rather than strangers worthy of my compassion. I look for what we have in common, not for that which makes us distant. I constantly hope that I just might take a picture that will make a difference.

I can immerse myself in all genres of photography, and see it as a privilege to be asked to photograph a wedding or take family photographs, knowing they will be treasured and stay with those families forever.

Landscape photography, particularly around my home on Mersea Island, can be enthralling. I find it difficult to describe that great 'inside thing' I get from creating an instant image that reflects how I felt at the moment I chose to press the shutter. However, if I had to find words, 'Harmony and 'Delight' would spring to mind. Harmony - for at the moment of capture I am utterly captivated and absorbed in my subject whatever it might be. Delight - as so many things delight me, but encapsulating a precious moment in time, such as the light dancing on the sea, or the sun setting is such a wonderful thing to be able to do.

I get a great feeling of satisfaction when people look into my images rather than just at them.”

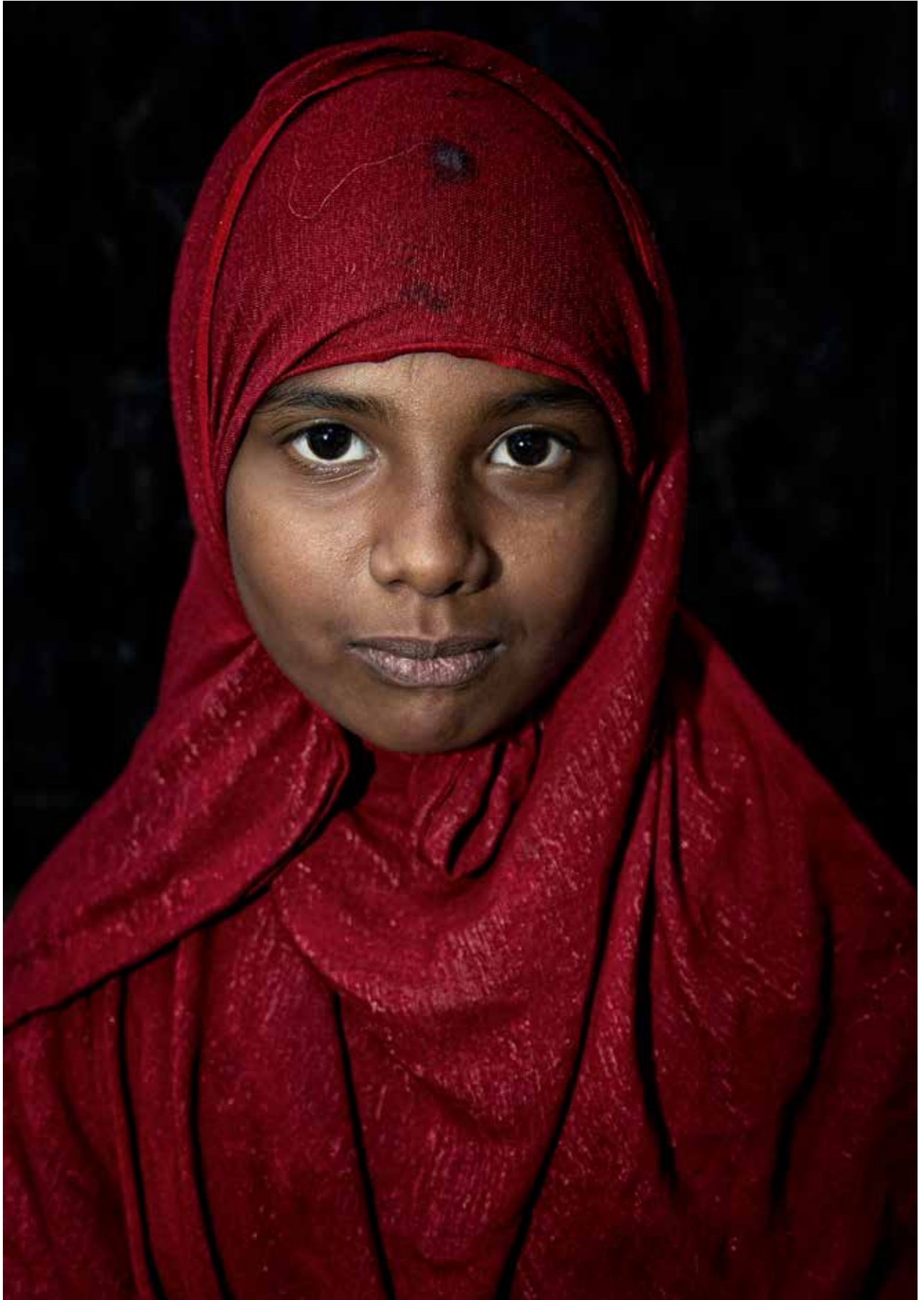
Chrissie's work has been displayed at The Victoria and Albert Museum, The Mall Gallery, The Menier Gallery, The Royal Albert Hall, The Greenwich Museum, Liverpool Street Station and many local galleries.



THE MAN IN THE WINDOW
Chrissie Westgate



WAIFS
Chrissie Westgate



AAISHI
Chrissie Westgate



MARKET MAN
Chrissie Westgate

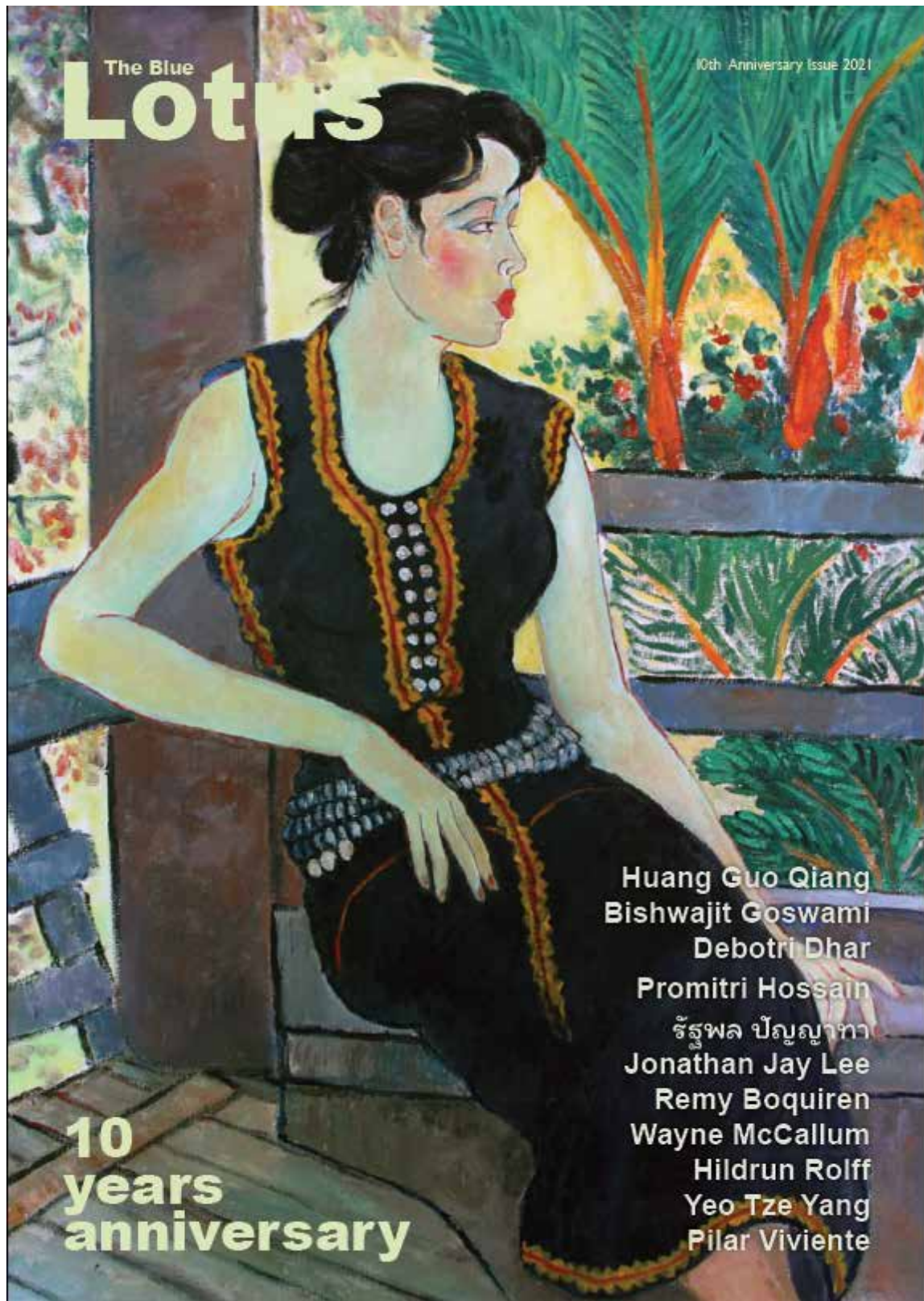


LADY OF BENGAL
Chrissie Westgate



THE COCKEREL SELLER
Chrissie Westgate

THE BLUE LOTUS MAGAZINE CELEBRATES TEN YEARS



The Blue Lotus magazine,
taking Modern and Contemporary Asian art and culture to the world, and bringing the world right back to Asia, this year (2021)
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https://issuu.com/martinabradley/docs/the_blue_lotus_magazine_10th_annive_1a03da97f923bb



WAITING HER TURN
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