ANOTHER TUNE IN ANOTHER ROOM
[Translation of short story “Anya GhaRey Anya Swar” by Akhtaruzzaman Elias]
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“Oh look at me, turn around, let my eyes take you in…”

On one of the sandbanks of the nearly-dry Padma River in winter, half-ripe berries were dropping at random. The words of the song that Pishima was humming mildly fell upon the thin layer of creamy sleep, and woke Pradeep up. Then he remembered that last night he could not sleep well. He had kept on tossing and turning for a long time till the early hours of the morning. Since he had slept the whole afternoon, it eluded him last night. He had also remained awake the night before. He had been chatting with Idris and whenever he felt sleepy, Idiris fed him with cups of tea at least three times. This morning he left Gulistan and after wandering here and there, Pradeep arrived at Narayangunj. Again, he loitered around Narayangunj for a while. By the time he took the launch and arrived here, it was eleven o’clock. He should have then wished and moved around the city for a while.

The city looked the same. As had been twelve or thirteen years ago, when he was around sixteen or seventeen, there was just one road, and that too remained the same. On the open spaces or just in front of the offices on either side of the road, there were dirty slums now. The dirty, nude children from these slums would run after the moving rickshaws carrying sacks of flour, pick up the spilled flour in their palms and devour them as fast as they could along with the snot from their noses. These sights could earlier be imagined to take place in big cities only. So now, will their one and only favourite city of Dhaka extend even beyond the Buriganga, Shitalakshya and Dhaleswari rivers?

Pradeep knew where Nanida’s godown was located, but when he arrived, Nanida was not there. Pradeep was feeling a bit hesitant – the employees would probably feel uncomfortable seeing a new face – but nothing of that sort happened. One employee just said, “Babu is not here.”

Pradeep had a leather bag on his shoulder. One could make out that it contained a few clothes, a toothbrush, a shaving razor, and one or two books. After his polite statement, “Babu is not here,” the man went back to his account ledgers once again. Just when Pradeep thought of going over to Nanida’s house, a rickshaw appeared in front of the godown. Two boys jumped out of it even before the rickshaw came to a complete halt. They were about eighteen or nineteen – no probably one was a little younger – the thin, faint line of moustache on one of them seemed as if he had forgotten to wipe his face after a drink. Everyone in the godown suddenly became all-attentive. The reserved account stopped calculating and stood up from his seat – “Come in, come in, and please sit down.”

“He’s not in?”

“Babu has just gone to the S.D.O’s office. He’ll be coming now. Please sit down.”

The young boy with the faint line of moustache replied, “What’s the point? Who knows when he’ll be back.’

“I’ll send someone to call Babu back. He had mentioned about your visit. Please sit down. Then he shouted in the typical Bangal dialect, “Napal, Napal” and sent Nepal to
the S.D.O’s office. While speaking to Nepal Chandra, he fished out the pack of Dunhill cigarettes from behind the cash-box and held it open for them. Both the boys had long, elaborately styled hairdo and equally elongated side-burns. It was difficult to locate the demarcating line between the zaparta moustache and the sideburns of one of the boys. Both wore bell-bottom pants; one of which was blue in colour with lots of pockets both in the front and at the back. He wore an embroidered high-collared kurta. The mustachioed boy wore a thick cotton shirt with flaps over the pockets that were studded with innumerable buttons, and maroon coloured synthetic trousers. In whatever manner they spoke, both these Bangal boys really knew how to dress! Pradeep observed both of them quite minutely. The employee glanced at Pradeep and said, “Sit down. Babu will be coming.”

The godown had a high wooden ceiling, surrounded by walls made of strong tin from which hung some wooden shelves. A small Ganesha idol sat on the shelf. A calendar of some indenting firm in Kolkata also had the picture of Ganesha on it. Another calendar from some local hardware firm sported the picture of Rabindranath Tagore. They had displayed a lot of pictures, but did they really know whose pictures they were? On another wall was a photograph of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, done up in an expensive frame. A bamboo fencing divided the room from the middle. On the other side there were stacks of spices—the aroma of which had made the air quite heavy. From time to time, a sweet, pungent breeze drifted in to scatter the heavy smell here.

Nanida arrived within fifteen minutes.
“Oh, Kamal bhai, you have come! I had gone to the S.D.O’s office for a little while. When did you arrive?”
Nanida did not even notice Pradeep.
“I was just saying that Nanida asked us to come and then disappeared.”
Nanida stirred up with protest at Kamal’s words.
“How could you say that? I know that you are very busy running around with the arrangement of the conference. How could I know for certain when you would be here?
Suddenly Nanida’s eyes fell upon Pradeep.
“Hey, you. When did you arrive?”
In the same breath he looked at the boys again and said, “Kamal, please have tea.”
Shoving a ten-rupee note into Nepal Chandra’s hand he continued in the same tone—“Get some rasamalai from Annapurna’s.”

After bathing at the tube well in the open sunshine, Pradeep had a grand lunch comprising of fried brinjals, pabda do-piyajji, tangra fish curry cooked with potatoes and brinjals, ilish—both fried and sautéed with mustard sauce, koi fish cooked with new potatoes, potato and cauliflower curry, and thick Radha moong daal. He could hardly move after a meal like that. Really, the Bangals still ate such a lot! Basking in the afternoon sun, Pradeep sat in the verandah and chatted with Boudi and soon started yawning endlessly. Boudi loved to hear stories of Kolkata. When the trouble began, everyone ran away to Kolkata, only Nanida went to Agartala. Boudi did not stop regretting this fact. Pishima came out to dry some lentil cakes in the sun and scolded Pradeep,
“Why are you sitting here yawning? Go to my room and lie down for a while.”

So he had lied down and woke up only after six-thirty in the evening.

After dinner he sat chatting with Nanida, who expressed resentment, “What business? How can one live here? As soon as the business prospers, they come hounding in for donations. Look at this small town – you can walk from one end to another in half an hour – but they go on having three to four conferences, seminars, meetings in a week. It’s just a ploy for collecting money, don’t you understand? Here comes some brother, someone’s father, someone’s friend – so what can be done? Just give them money.”

These people rule the roost in Kolkata also. But things are more blatant and open here – there is no secrecy at all. I’m pretty sure that within one generation the Bengalis living here will also learn to rob politely, kill people at random. Last night Idris too spoke of this ailment. He had gone to Kolkata during the trouble and had met Pradeep there. He spoke too much. Also, in spite of his stammer – his eyes would water trying to pronounce the ‘m’s, ‘b’s, ‘l’s, and ‘r’s -- he talked a lot. If he did not stammer, then probably by this time he would have spoken a few thousand words more.

“You didn’t do anything in India,” Boudi accused Nanida. “All our relatives have built houses and settled down there. Who will accept you?”

Pradeep lowered his eyes. They too were permanent residents of Kolkata.

“But can we leave just whenever we feel like?” Nanida replied with a loud yawn. “Can we do business in India? What will you eat there?”

An annoyed Boudi sat up and replied, “So, sit down here, eat and sleep. Don’t we have to get our daughter married off? We can’t even send her to college—how will you get her married?”

She looked at Pradeep and complained, “She had passed her matriculation before the trouble. Then your brother said, “No, I’ll not get her admitted in Pakistan. Let me send her to Kolkata. She can stay at didi’s house and attend college there. For nine months we stayed at Agartala, neither didi nor jamaibabu bothered – we could not see even anyone’s shadow. In the meantime Pakistan became Bangladesh. She came back and got admitted in a college here. But what happened? All the money went down the drain. The same boys who teased our daughter have to be appeased now with donations. Can she ever attend college here?”

Pradeep had already heard about the trouble that Nanida’s daughter faced in great details during the afternoon.

As Nanida’s yawns grew louder and louder, everybody went to bed. Pradeep was to sleep in the older part of the house adjoining a long verandah. There were three rooms there. One belonged to Pishima. The middle one was a store room, and the other one belonged to Amit – Nanida’s son who would be appearing for his intermediate exams this year. At present Amit had gone to Dhaka to play cricket. Pradeep was to sleep in Amit’s bed. The new wing of the house had Nanida, Boudi, their college-going but unable to attend, daughter Indira; their son Probir who had plucked twice in the eighth standard; a class-five student, Mandira; and their youngest daughter Meenakshi. The older wing of
the house had now become quite secluded once this new wing had been built. Pishima, now quite old, also lived in this section, a little away from everyone’s sight.

Boudi had spread a fresh sheet on the bed. A clean mosquito net had been hung too. Having slept the whole afternoon in this wintry month, Pradeep was feeling rather light-headed. The moonlight was accompanied by a cold wind. Did the moon shine even within the rooms in their “Shonar Bangla?” A waft of breeze blew in through the mosquito net. Pradeep’s throat had become parched at the soapy smell of the washed and sun-dried bedsheets. The window above the head was open. There was the verandah beneath it. The window facing the verandah in Pishima’s room was also open. He could make out that Pishima was awake. Baba had the habit of going to sleep in the winter months with the windows wide open. Did grandfather have that habit too? Otherwise how could both the brother and the sister adopt the same habit? Pishima was as stubborn as Baba. Baba did not leave the house and go away. He died of throat cancer but even then he always spoke loudly. Whenever he was alone in the house, he would sing kirtans in the evening in his frail voice. When the illness became too critical, Mejda came over, persuaded Pishima, and took Baba to Kolkata.

That had been a terrible time for Pradeep. Stay with Baba in the hospital for the whole night, call the nurse whenever he was scared, help Baba with the bed-pan – the days and nights had entwined themselves in a continuous momentum. There was even more trouble after Baba’s death. Pradeep was unable to understand the movement of blood relations – in whose favour or disfavour things ebbed or flowed. The memory of that tormenting emptiness engulfed Pradeep once again and he felt very thirsty. He got up, drank the glass of water kept covered on Amit’s table at one go, and went back to bed. As he just thrust himself upon the bed, the pillow moved a little. Near his shoulder, something sticking out from under the pillow made him uneasy. The thing remained there even as he snuggled under the quilt to sleep comfortably and kept on nudging his backbone once in a while. At first he thought that some kind of disease had formed within his body in the shape of a square-ish animal and that was moving about from one shoulder to another.

But the matter was not internal. Sitting up, Pradeep started to feel carefully under the pillow and the mattress till he discovered a thin book rolled up there. A faint light from outside came in over the pillow. Lying down again, he held up the book in front of his eyes and found the image of a woman done up in blue art-paper. On one hand she held up her huge braless pinkish breasts. The other hand picked up the petticoat. The string of the petticoat was broken, so one could see a large column of her thighs. But strangely enough, a strip of torn cloth hanging from her waist hid her genitals. The pink and green woman wore a yellow petticoat and the folds of the cloth were brown. Pradeep held up the book towards the light coming in from the window and read the title – “Juicy Palm fruit.” Below the title within brackets was a subheading written as “Najma Bhabi’s kernel of love.” The last page of the cover was white. The pin marks at the corner of each page signified that the book had been stapled together. Amit Kumar’s regular use had turned the pages rather dirty. In such a faint light one could not read what was written in the inside pages of the book. But there were three more pictures after every eight or ten
pages or so, and since they were in black and white, seemed a bit blurred. Each picture had couples having sex in awkward, very unnatural, and compromising positions. The light would have made things clearer. But anyway, Pradeep felt aroused. A shiver of excitement ran down his entire body. He decided to switch the light on and read through the book. The book should be properly used. He sat up on the bed to get down but instead of doing that, wrapped the quilt more closely over his body by mistake. As a result the energy to get down from the bed and light the lamp got lost. A small thin shaft of cold air chilled the bare portion of his neck, but his stomach, back, and thighs remained warm. This strange admixture made Pradeep feel sleepy again, but at the same time he desired to switch on the light and read up the pornographic stuff. After vacillating in this manner for some time, he laid down once again.

The sound of ripe berried plopping on the cold and silent sandbank of the Padma River woke him up. Hovering for some time between sleep and the unreality of the dream world, he finally got up to see the light on the verandah and heard Pishima humming one of her favourite songs – “Why do the delicate peaks of hairy reed mats hurt me?” While speaking to Pishima, Pradeep did not realize that her voice was so melodious. While singing another song, “There are sindoor stains everywhere, so I die of shame” Pishima did away with a lot of finer intonations but even then her message seemed to be conveyed correctly. “If Gokulchandra does not come to Brindaban, sakhi…” Even before one song was over, Pishima moved over to another one -- “My life is a waste, of no use, oh Gokulchandra, my life is a waste” – her voice rose and fell. Sometimes nothing could be heard. These high and low words fell upon Pradeep’s eyelids and suddenly he opened them wide and fresh. His body felt light – like a light pomelo shell floating along the waves of the river Padma. Unable to sustain this for long, Pradeep unlocked the door and went out to the verandah.

There was no more moonlight. The light from the bulb in the verandah looked weak. The mist covering the courtyard made one easily imagine the new complex of the house to be a ship, or a launch, or a huge whale. Pishima’s songs swam along like some unfamiliar fish, occasionally visible, enticing the spectator. Pradeep stood admiring it. “I will wander about the city of Mathura, going from house to house like a jogini…” Her song stopped suddenly and Pishima came out from her room.

“Pradeep, why are you standing in the verandah, son? Aren’t you feeling cold?” Pradeep kept on gazing at her without offering any reply.

“Come into my room,” Pishima said. The room smelt of incense sticks and camphor.

“Are you not sleepy? Why are you standing here all night? Are you feeling sad?”

“No, Pishima, I can’t sleep.”

“Why? Why can’t you sleep?”

“I slept too much in the afternoon.”

“When? I have seen how your father could sleep whenever he wanted to. Also, if he wanted to, he would get up from bed.” Then she added, “Won’t you stay for a few days? Or will you rush off to Kolkata tomorrow?”
“No, Pishima. I will leave the day after tomorrow. I’ll go to Agartala first and if
everything is OK there, then I’ll leave for Shilling a couple of days later. I’ll spend a few
more days in Dibrugarh and Gauhati and then go back to Kolkata.”
“You’re just spending your whole life traveling. Didn’t Nani just say that you had been to
Delhi and Agra a few days back?”

Pradeep actually roamed around a lot with the excuse of doing work. After Baba’s
death, Mejda worked hard to wind up the business here. Of course, Baba’s contractor’s
business could not be saved. The income from the other businesses – spice godowns,
fodder godowns, a cloth shop at Agartala, and some indenting jobs – helped Barda and
Mejda live comfortably with their families. Pradeep’s needs were also met from there.
Actually, no one ever asked him to travel from one end of the country to another. He just
felt uncomfortable staying in one place for a long time. Now it had come to such a state
that whenever he met some acquaintance, he would be asked, “So, Pradeep, when are you
leaving?” There was no need to go to Agartala in this trip. He himself had volunteered to
Mejda, “I think the accounts in Agartala are not very clear. I will go and check it
personally. And this time I’ll go via Bangladesh so that I get a chance to visit our
ancestral home.”

“Aren’t you hungry? Why didn’t you eat properly last night?” Pishima asked.
“No, I ate a lot.”
“Ate a lot?” Pishima scolded him. “Didn’t I see? You’re a strong young man, but you eat
like a bird. Don’t you feel hungry?”
She started to sing softly once again.
There was a small wooden altar on one side of the room on which sat the shalagramshila.
Pishima was so engrossed with it that she did not pay any attention towards Pradeep. But
if one listened to her humming carefully, one realized that she was actually not singing.
She was just stringing words at random either for Pradeep or as an excuse for something
else.
“Your Baba could eat such a lot at your age! Three seers of milk would be thickened to
one seer. Huge ‘sagar’ bananas would be brought from Rampal. Boudi always kept
mango jelly ready in her stock. He would eat his rice along with the mango jelly and
bananas squashed in the milk.”

In Pishima’s room, the scent of sandalwood played hide and seek with that of ripe
bananas and cucumber. These smells would come and go at random.
“Pradeep, want some puffed rice?”
Even before Pradeep’s reply, she continued, “Dada would eat a lot, so he could work very
hard. When Baba died, I was merely seven or eight years old. Dada became our father.
How he laboured in his business, paid off Baba’s debts, bought a godown at Kamalaghat,
released the land at Rampal, got didi and myself married! After didi’s death when brother
in law married again, Dada went and brought Sabita here. Why did he do that? Because
the step-mother would torture her. After Sabita completed her matriculation, he got her
married off. When fate decreed that I become a widow, he personally went and requested
me, “Sabitri, come along with your children to your own home. Your Radha-Krishna at
home is calling you, come along.”
Pishima was all in tears before she could complete her sentence. After controlling herself, she continued, “How can I tell you what Dada meant to us. He would look at me, look at his nephew and niece and shed tears. With him we would feel as comfortable as if we were living in our mother’s lap. When I became a widow, even he gave up eating fish. I requested him so many times but he did not listen.”

Pradeep kept swinging between Baba’s and Pishima’s lap throughout this long prosaic speech. This gentle rocking made the night go away. On the altar, the shalagramshila trembled under a mountain of memories; on the small dais, the Radha and Krishna idols made of eight alloys, looked at each other in delight. A naughty smile emanated from Krishna’s lips.

“Come, let’s get the puffed rice from that room.”
Pradeep did not hear Pishima’s call. He did not realize when she left the room. He got completely immersed in the calm and rich world of Radha and Krishna’s looks. In the process he banished the roof above his head, the walls on all sides and the floor below his feet. For some time, he stood entranced, as if a thin layer of dreams had engulfed his eyes like kohl upon newborn eyes.

“Pradeep!”
Pishima’s call brought him back to reality once again. He was startled. The walls, the ceiling, and the floor of the room fell back in place once again. Looking outside he saw Pishima standing on the verandah.

“Yes, Pishima?”
She was unlocking the room next door.
“What are you doing standing there alone in the room? Let me fry some puffed rice with ghee for you. Come sit and eat it.”
“Pishima, I am not hungry. All right, I’ll have some. Won’t you eat too?”
“Won’t I?”
Pishima turned the keys again, but the lock did not open.
Approaching her, Pradeep said, “Give me the key, Pishima. Let me try.”
“You?” Her eyes showed signs of disbelief. No, not disbelief really, but lack of conviction.
Baba was exactly like her. He would do a lot for everybody, but did not trust anyone.
“How will you do it?”
“Let me try.”
“All right, see if you can.”
Pishima handed over the key to Pradeep rather unwillingly. Baba would never have done that. While opening the lock of the storeroom, Pradeep stood close to Pishima. In the dim light, her white sari looked a sleepy, beige colour. A combined smell of incense sticks and cucumber emanated from her body. Her hair smelled of damp sandalwood.
When Pradeep opened the door easily, Pishima said, “So you could do it? Then with a smile she added, “Why can’t you do it? After all, Satya Roy’s son can’t do it?”
“Since we are on the subject, let me add some more,” she said while entering the room. Who had raised the subject?
“Whatever work Dada took up, he never stopped mid-way.”
As soon as the light was switched on, three or four rats scampered away. A few cockroaches changed their positions. The room smelt musty. Everything in it was grey in colour.

“Now, where did she keep the tin of puffed rice? This is her bad habit. She’ll take one thing but never keep it back in place,” Pishima kept on grumbling about her daughter-in-law and ultimately rescued the tin. She took a bottle of ghee in her hands and ordered Pradeep, “You bring the stove along. I’ll fry the stuff in my room.” Pradeep picked up the kerosene stove and Pishima the tin of puffed rice and ghee. Once out on the verandah, she said, “Lock the door.”

There was an aluminum wok in her room. As it heated up, the ghee began to splutter. “You understand, whenever Dada took up a job, he finished it.” Pishima still did not forget her story. Fetching the pot of sugar from a low shelf on the wall, she squatted on a small wooden stool and continued, “You know, once we had a well there. What cool and sweet water it had! Nani spoilt it while building the new wing of the house. Now the tubewell water tastes bitter.” Scolding her absent son, Pishima continued her tale.

“I had a pair of whale-headed bangles, each weighing over twenty three grams – you will never see such things now. So, it happened that one day, I had cleaned one of the bangles with tamarind and had gone to fetch water from the well. The bangle slipped from my hand and fell inside. I was a small child then, so I started to cry. I had a step mother too. If she complained to Baba, he might beat me. Dada had just come back from school. He ran towards the well with some rope to pick up the bangle. Scolding me he just said, “Don’t cry. Keep quiet.” By the time he came up, took his bath and his meal, it was nearly twilight.

As Pishima ladled it, the puffed rice gradually turned brown in colour. Pradeep was quiet, the shalagramshila was quiet. Even Radha and Krishna, both lost in themselves, were quiet. The framed picture of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa that was kept on a high shelf on the wall, also kept on watching Pishima’s activities quietly. A small, little grey mouse, sat close by and watched the world around him with his small beady eyes. The range of his eyes did not reach the walls or the floor. The mouse savoured the smell of the fried puffed rice – as if it had been freshly harvested from the mist-laden fields.

Pishima kept on singing, “If Gokulchandra does not come to Vrindaban, sakhi...” Like Ramakrishna Dev’s pet mouse, Pradeep too crossed one field after another. “If the colour of the puffed rice is like this, then you’ll know that it has been fried properly,” Pishima’s voice drifted from the other side of the field. “Your sister in law never does things properly. She works for the whole day, shouts at the servants, scolds the cook. When she fried the puffed rice for you, she burnt it.” Taking down a silver bowl from the shelf, Pishima poured the puffed rice in it and handed it over to Pradeep.

“Here you are, have it.”

“You won’t have some?”

“You eat.”

Pradeep was adamant. “No, you too have some.”
“Foolish boy! How can I have it? Do I have teeth any more? They have fallen off long ago.”
She sat watching Pradeep eat.

“Pradeep, tell me. What have you done to your health?” When he did not reply, she asked again, “How do you stay like an ascetic, Pradeep?” Pradeep gave her a disheveled look. Pishima started humming her songs once again. He stopped eating and kept on staring at her. She stood up and started moving around the idols of Radha and Krishna. He saw that Pishima left the idols behind and kept on watching the photograph of Ramkrishna Dev. Suddenly her face started to melt and began to drip. Did flesh turn into water? Will the water evaporate? The twin idols of Radha and Krishna looked here and there and like cheeky young men and women, escaped through the doorway. Where were they going? The shalagramshila flew away in the chariot of the altar without any hindrance. A neat flight. The Paramhansa shelved on the wall also left the room along with his pet mouse. In a huge, unknown vacuum, the body-less liquid Pishima spread out her smoky hair and was just melting. Pradeep kept on swallowing one after another. His throat was already parched after eating the puffed rice. Those dry swallows went down his throat and pierced his empty chest like thorns. He called out for his mother loudly, “Ma!”

Pishima was startled. “What’s the matter, Pradeep? Are you scared? What’s wrong?”

Pradeep came back to reality. The walls fell back in place over their brick foundation, the roof covered the walls again.
“Nothing, Pishima,” he replied.
The Radha-Krishna idols on the dais practice their enamoured looks once again. Ramakrishna Dev sat on his seat and looked for his pet mouse. Pishima also turned back to her normal self. The room came back to its original position, the floor in its own place.

Pishima soothed Pradeep’s face and neck very slowly. Pradeep just watched the salty stream of tears trickling down her fair, wrinkled face.
“You are very religious, Pradeep. Our grandfather had left the house along with some sadhus. He would sing songs of Lord Hari with the accompaniment of a mrindangam. He died in Puri with the Lord’s name still in his lips.” Saffron-coloured words emanated from Pishima’s lips, “You are religious! You are religious! What should I do with you?”
“No, Pishima, nothing has happened to me. Let me go back to bed.”
“Come, let me put you back to sleep.”
“No, Pishima. I had suddenly felt sleepy. So probably I was a bit scared.”
“Feeling sleepy? What did you see, Pradeep? Won’t you tell me?”

Pishima was too eager to know. Why was she so keen to know what Pradeep had seen? But Pradeep had seen nothing. What would he tell Pishima?

Upon reaching the door of Amit’s room, he said, “Pishima, you go back. Let me lie down. There’s not much time left for dawn. Please go.”
The mixed scent of sandalwood, cucumber, banana and camphor played in front of Pradeep’s nose for a moment and then diving into Pishima’s hair, went back with her.
It was Amit’s room once again. The bed had a freshly-washed mosquito net hanging from it’s posters. Once inside, the net formed four walls around Pradeep. That “Juicy Palm Fruit” or “Najma Bhabi’s kernel of love” was still next to the pillow. Pradeep moved a little, and once the book touched his shoulder he said, “Bastard, you’re still here?” But the book spoilt his mood once again. It would have been better if he took a piece of old newspaper from Amit’s table and masturbated on it. This would help him get rid of the book once and for all.

But it was impossible to get down from the bed now. The quilt lay huddled near his feet. Even the stupid cold was not affecting him properly. He slid his hand down his open pyjamas and his penis felt like a shriveled dead scorpion. He felt repulsive. What else could he do now except place his right hand over his head? He could not decide where to keep the left one. In the meantime, the lyrics of Pishima’s song, “Oh, mad man, control your feelings…” crept slowly towards this room.

Maybe dawn was approaching. If this song entered the room properly, it would once again unravel the whole world. This thought startled Pradeep and he sat up on the bed again. The window could be shut directly from the bed itself. That was good. Feeling happy because he did not have to get down, he fastened it. Pishima’s song hit the closed window pane and ran away along with its tail.

Relieved from all these troubles at night, Pradeep stretched himself on the bed once again. Since the window was shut, the room resembled a dark square. Within the four walls of the room was the mosquito net. There was a square-ish darkness within the net too. As he started breathing normally in his five feet four inches body, Pradeep gradually calmed down to sleep.

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Note:
There is a lot of difference in the way the Bengali language is spoken in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal. The dialect of the East Bengalis [or as they are locally known as Bangals] has different intonations that are extremely difficult to translate. The language in which Pishima (paternal aunt) speaks is totally colloquial. The suffix ‘da’, a shortened form of ‘dada’ is added to any elder brother’s name. Hence Nani is addressed as Nanida. Boudi, the sister in law, is the wife of any elder brother.

This translation was published in Bengal Partition Stories: The Unclosed Chapter. Ed. and introduction by Bashabi Fraser. London: Anthem Press, 2006.